

# Women in Fintech

## Veronika Lovett



Veronika is an accomplished leader within Financial Services with experience across banking, Fintech and alternative finance. Having co-founded a successful start-up and worked in c-suite positions across scaling businesses, she provides invaluable insights in building high-performing and collaborative teams, something she demonstrates a real passion and drive for.

### How did you start your career within FinTech?

Veronika started her early career for NatWest within Structured Finance. She had a solid career trajectory demonstrating clear linear progression within the bank. Her journey into Fintech was unplanned and ultimately a result of delivering structured debt products for entrepreneurial businesses across the UK. Seeing how passionate founders were about the businesses they were building really inspired her so when NatWest approached her to design, manage and co-lead the launch of their new end-to-end digital lending platform, she jumped at the opportunity.

### What is your experience of being a leader?

Leadership for Veronika means something different in a start-up environment than it does for an established business, and she describes how quickly you realise if leading (and working) within a start-up is for you or not. Working in a start up exposed her to a lot of different aspects of running a company where you juggle multiple responsibilities in a rapidly evolving environment and manage individuals that are also wearing a number of different hats. Managing individuals that are quickly being equipped with a broad range of skill sets massively improved her interpersonal and leadership skills.

During her roles at Esme and Aspinall, she found that leadership had a focus on not only managing individuals but really nurturing them to unlock their talent and potential. She believes that successful hiring is based on attitude and aptitude, and a successful leader within a start-up will create opportunities for individuals to develop a well-rounded skillset and exercise areas of passion to excel. Watching talent develop and thrive has been the most rewarding and humbling part of her career.

This is a comparison to structured finance, which typically has a much more linear progression path. Individuals would normally be required to have or acquire a particular range of skill sets and excel in certain behavioural traits, and therefore the leadership style and hiring process required can be quite different.

### What's been the biggest success in your career to date?

Veronika is extremely passionate about the teams she built at Esme and Aspinall. Her ethos is to create a team with no hierarchy where everybody is problem solving together. This open culture encourages and empowers everybody to contribute with ideas and solutions to solve all problems, both big and small.

When it comes to the hiring process, she is a big believer in hiring for the right attitude and right aptitude. As you would expect, for some roles, previous experience is either required or preferable, but ultimately attitude, willingness to dive into the deep end and ability to learn at pace is key. Her most successful interviews have been more open, round-table discussions where individuals can meet with various stakeholders and exercise their thought process around objectives and challenges. She has found this more successful in identifying culture and personality in comparison to rigid and structured competency questions.

# Women in Fintech

Veronika Lovett Continued



## What advice would you give to new female leaders?

Veronika promotes 4 key points to be coming a successful leader.

- Do not be afraid to take risks as you will let good opportunities pass you by
- Speak out for what you want. If you don't, people could make assumptions on what you want and or what appears to be working for you, which may not align to your personal ambitions and preferences
- Pivotality is a key skill, particularly within Fintech. You need to be able to rapidly adapt to change, be flexible and curious to ensure you not only are tapping into the market and customer needs, but also constantly learning and opening up to alternate opportunity avenues
- Be yourself. Authenticity allows relatability, but more importantly, adapting yourself to a certain mould or copying other people's style will become overwhelming, unenjoyable and prove to be unsustainable

## What initiatives have been used in the past to promote D&I within your organisations?

Veronika described the importance of understanding what D&I means for your organisation, at individual level and the collective. It is critical for conversations to start at the top where all leaders and managers actively champion the agenda and are held accountable to avoid the risk of it slipping down the priority agenda, or worst case becoming a buzz-word. One of the most notable points Veronika made is the importance for an approach that recognises all, appreciating that D&I is not just gender and race but needs to be embraced in its broadest sense, which means recognising and valuing aspects such as different educational backgrounds, experiences, upbringing, socio-economic statuses and neurodiversity. This really highlights the point that people experience and interact with the world around them in many different ways; there is not one "right" way of thinking, learning, and behaving. At Aspinall they empowered employees to contribute to this conversation and did a lot of work to understand how employees perceived D&I, what it meant to them and what they wanted it to look like practically.

An initiative that Veronika has found to be successful in multiple organisations, is the creation of a people forum(s) – a cross-functional team created to collect open feedback from colleagues about what matters to them and feed this back to ExCo and Board level to ensure that the businesses were continuously debating, monitoring, and improving culture across all angles. These often resulted in trial and development of multiple initiatives, that tackled a variety of areas from how talent was scouted, attracted, assessed, and nurtured. One example of the initiatives she has seen trialled is a bank holiday 'swapping' option, where employees are offered the choice to allocate bank holiday days as they wish, providing greater flexibility to observe and celebrate important days that were in line with the individuals' beliefs and preferences.

Another example for inclusion where Veronika has seen success, is mentorship programmes. Mentoring can provide opportunities for skill development, unlock and spotlight talent as well as understand and support removal of the challenges or barriers that may be present in the working environment. Mentoring can take multiple formats, such as reverse mentoring (less experienced or newcomers act as a mentor for more senior members in the group), more traditional career mentoring or 'buddy' systems. Irrespective of which formats are applied, the objectives must be clear, well understood and aligned to the D&I strategy and ethos of the business.

Veronika remains incredibly well connected to the individuals she has managed in the past, describing them more than ex-colleagues, but as friends. This accredits her success in fostering a family-feel culture within her start-ups with a focus on team building and a genuine interest in the development of employees.