



TALKING WITH



Amanda Young

Global Head of Responsible Investment
Aberdeen Standard Investments

Talking ESG podcasts and gin With Amanda Young, Global Head of Responsible Investment, Aberdeen Standard Investments and Richard Romer-Lee, Managing Director at Square Mile

October 2020 - 069

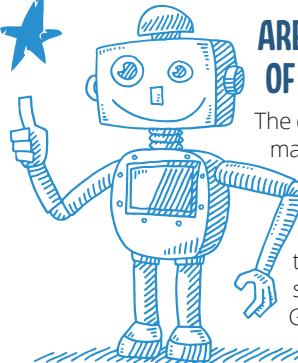
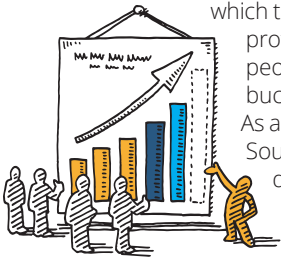


HOW DID YOU GET INTO THE INDUSTRY?

I started my career doing economic research on a trading floor in an investment bank. It was that or doing a PHD in neuropsychology. I came to the City as I was excited at the concept that a big chunk of the country's GDP was generated in just one square mile. I have always had a strong moral compass and it was obvious to me that some of society's social issues were not remotely on the radar. Purely by chance I came across CCLA – management to church and charity clients, which delivers specialist investment management to charities and not-for-profits. It was the first time I heard about corporate governance and investment with a set of moral objectives. All of a sudden, I became aware that investing could achieve positives beyond just returns.

WHY DO YOU FEEL SO STRONGLY ABOUT RESPONSIBLE INVESTING?

I grew up in South Africa and have a love for the environment and nature. My mother, a nurse, founded the hospice movement and I grew up watching families deal with bereavement – often being left in the car in townships as she looked after other people. My father was a doctor so both of my parents were helping others in a country in which the white and male dominated medical profession did not respect or understand that people need to die with dignity. My father bucked tradition to support his wife's career. As a child growing up in the 1980s in apartheid South Africa, I saw such poverty – it was quite something.



ARE ANY SECTORS AHEAD OF THE GAME?

The oil and gas industry has had to make significant changes. It was the first sector lambasted by non-governmental organisations. For example, when Shell planned to sink the Brent Spar oil storage facility, opposition led by Greenpeace prevented it.



Shell became the first company to produce a sustainability report. The higher risk industries have had to respond faster as environmental reporting, the measurement of KPIs and health and safety issues become even more prevalent and important. The risks are still the biggest in these industries though. They have to embrace questions around how they will survive if there is a shift away from fossil fuels.



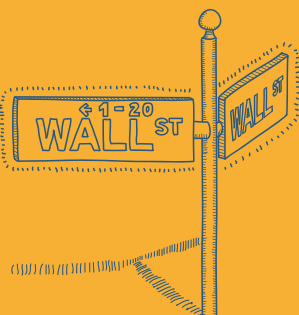
Companies in other sectors have embraced ESG and sustainability into their corporate culture, such as Unilever with the "living principles" which illustrates they have a strong purpose beyond purely returning money to shareholders. Companies have to work hard to instil such culture and practices in everything they do, but it is possible. They have to be brave enough to walk away from opportunities that are not in line with their purpose and beliefs.



HOW IS THE LANDSCAPE OF RESPONSIBLE INVESTING CHANGING?

We are witnessing a structural shift. For the last 30 years the focus has been on avoiding certain so-called 'evils'. Now there is a growing focus on what is not legally and morally right – business operations and risks – and we now have more and more people making decisions with this in mind.

There is every indication that entrepreneurs coming out of university – the business leaders of tomorrow – want to make money but not at the expense of others and by making a difference. There is an increasing acknowledgement that investing responsibly is financially viable. We are at a watershed where looking for the positives in investing becomes the norm. The power to do something good is real.





WHAT ABOUT THE FINANCIAL SERVICES SECTOR?

There are many businesses saying positive things but the proof will be in the pudding.

It does feel like the financial industry as a whole is still frightened to stand up and say when something is not right. One of my bugbears is that investors sometimes forget who they are investing on behalf of – the person on the street.

There are lots of good things developing in the industry, however. Initiatives such as Make my Money Matter which is calling for the trillions of pounds invested in our UK pensions to build a better world, and the Taskforce: Growing a culture of social impact investing which lead to the creation of the Impact Investing Institute. We are fortunate and honoured to be part of this, backed by a strong CEO who pushes ESG and sustainability across the business.



HOW CAN WE EVIDENCE, MEASURE AND PROMOTE IMPACT INVESTING?

Data is continually improving. For the last 20 years, the evidence has been around managing things. In the next 20 years it will be about evidencing the positive impacts as well as the risk mitigation.

It's our responsibility to help investors understand. The Impact Management Project has a framework to help investors manage their impact – acting to avoid harm. All companies do harm in some way, it's how they minimise it and mitigate the risks so the negative impact is as small as possible.

Through my podcasts I can raise awareness of those who are advocating making an impact. I interviewed, screenwriter Richard Curtis, who is actively promoting sustainable investing. I'm keen to do more, which can be uncomfortable in an industry which is not moving fast enough. I also worry that many see this as a money-making exercise rather than a moral imperative to do the right thing and am wary of the repercussions.



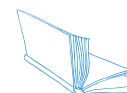
YOU HAVE BEEN VOTED IN THE TOP 100 MOST INFLUENTIAL WOMEN IN EUROPEAN FINANCE FOR THREE YEARS IN A ROW – WHAT DOES THAT MEAN TO YOU?

To say I was flattered was an understatement. I was astounded to get the third year. It is lovely to receive recognition of the work we have done outside of our day job, and also with the government and the task force to develop a culture of impact investing. If it can help progress the worth of what we stand for and are trying to do, then it's great.



WHAT'S YOUR VIEW OF WORKING IN A MALE-DOMINATED INDUSTRY?

My plea to male colleagues is to recognise unconscious biases. For example, if a woman gets angry in a meeting, they are often described as emotional, which is condescending and patronising. It still goes on. It's also not about who shouts the loudest. We are fortunate in that we have a supportive CEO and senior bosses who put people forward for what they are capable of, not their gender. I do get frustrated that many male counterparts have no idea what it is to be a single working mother. We have to manage a 10-hour working day, run the house, pets, home schooling and so on. It's a generational thing. The working environment is still harsher for women than men.



HOW DO YOU RELAX?

I love skiing with my son George. He's brilliant. Or going to the beach with him. I enjoy cooking – especially Puttanesca cooked really slowly and all of mum's puddings, she was amazing. I have a secret love of gin. There are so many I started a gin vlog, but alas it died as I did not have the time. My favourite is Pickerings made by the Summerhall Distillery which adapted to produce hand sanitizer to frontline workers.



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