

# COMMUNICATOR OF THE YEAR

## AMELIE BARRAU DE BACKER

(FEB 2018 – FEB 2019)

Regional PR Manager, Gensler, Thomas More Square, London

***"Amelie is a star performer. She brings a strategic mindset and an understanding of how to convey messages with impact to achieve business goals. But it's Amelie's positive energy and tenacity to get the job done - and do it well - that really set her apart."***

**Julie Green, UK Head of Corporate Communications, WSP**

### Key achievements to date:

- 2016 **Young Communicator of the Year** at the IBP Communications & PR Awards
- Finalist in the People Awards category at the 2017 WSP Awards for *"taking positive steps to encourage female role models within the business"*
- Implemented the first PR strategy at WSP which resulted in a **233% increase in national coverage** (January 2018 to January 2019); with 80% of national coverage achieved as a result of proactive pitching (previously 30%). Coverage included articles in TimeOut, BBC Breakfast, the Daily Mail, the Guardian, BBC Radio 4 & 5
- Led a **CEO** and Executive Committee strategic **positioning programme** which resulted in positive coverage in Metro, the Evening Standard, BBC, Sky News, Channel 5, the Telegraph
- Former member of the **Women in Leadership** programme at WSP. Advised women in Manchester, Exeter, Leeds and London on how to raise their profile externally
- In 2014, I led a successful campaign for a lobbying firm for French insurance company GALIAN, against a major governmental legislation led by former housing minister

Award-winning PR professional and "Diversity Champion" with six years' experience in the built environment. Previously UK PR Manager for Shard engineer WSP (Nov. 2017 – Jan. 2019), I currently manage PR across Europe for 6,000+ design firm Gensler. In just over two months at Gensler, I've secured coverage in the BBC, the Times and the Guardian.

As PR Manager at WSP, I was given the objective of **quantitatively** and **qualitatively** raising our profile in national media – in January 2018 only 3% of our overall coverage was in national media – as well as in major regional press in Manchester, Leeds and Birmingham, where we mostly featured in local trade media.

And I set myself on the mission of securing coverage in places where you wouldn't expect to find WSP (Time Out, Stylist). The consultancy was aiming to attract the future generation of engineers, and more specifically women, to tackle skills shortage in the industry.

I devised the first UK-wide PR strategy for our business, and put in place a CEO and Executive Committee strategic positioning programme to clearly define our in-house messaging based on our business objectives, media train our leadership team, and formulate the right media angles to help us secure features in high-profile media. This was no mean feat... as some were quite uncomfortable with speaking to the media and others could not perceive its benefit.

**1,070 words**

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One month after rolling-out our PR strategy I secured high-profile coverage - in the same week - for our CEO in Metro, our Head of Property in the Evening Standard, and I also was able to place two young female engineers on BBC Breakfast alongside Steph McGovern (<https://bit.ly/2Ub5QDC>). Coverage in the Evening Standard opened up a high-profile business opportunity for our Head of Property who “*didn't realise the impact that such articles could have on business development*”.

Having a clear PR strategy also enabled our PR agencies in Manchester, Leeds and Birmingham to secure high-profile articles for our leaders in regional media, which included an article for our Head of Environment in Manchester Evening News (<https://bit.ly/2rzyVbx>) and another piece featuring Environment Director David Symons in the Yorkshire Post (<https://bit.ly/2HM7a9s>).

This coverage, alongside a dedicated public affairs campaign, enabled us to secure a multi-million pound business opportunity (*confidential client*) as well as meetings with key stakeholders in the North. As a result of this campaign, we were also able to raise our profile with Andy Burnham who later opened our new Manchester office.

*“Amelie is an exceptional PR manager and has the rare combined talents of great strategic instincts and an eye for detail. She is able to devise and deliver long term plans, while always seeing how to turn any external event into an opportunity. With her, we were able to increase WSP's relevance, reach, and influence amongst key stakeholder audiences.”*

**Charles Malissard, Head of Public Affairs at WSP**

All this – combined with usual PR tactics of using thought leadership and blogging - resulted in a 233% increase in national coverage from February 2018 to January 2019 (**quantitative**); with 80% of national coverage achieved as a direct result of proactive pitching - meaning that coverage achieved included at least one of our key messages (**qualitative**)

But being a great communicator is not just about being a good strategist, storyteller, and being able to secure business for a brand. We also strive to make a difference in society – and I think that's why a lot of us have chosen this profession.

As a feminist, I will always try to put forward a woman in the media even if a man might be the most obvious choice. There's a clear lack of women in our industry, and too few are featured and quoted in the media. And we as PR professionals are partly to blame for this lack of representation.

I love my job; and especially being able to put others in the limelight and see their confidence grow. One of my best memories at WSP, was putting forward a really shy 16 year-old apprentice for a feature on apprenticeships in the Guardian (<https://bit.ly/2Uey2Vs>). After media training her she grew in confidence and gave a fantastic interview that got noticed by none other than Professor Brian Cox OBE.

He invited her to speak at one of his summer conferences in London where she gave a stellar speech in front of 200 students. My work encouraging women in the business was also clearly noticed, and I was delighted to have been nominated by a female colleague for a WSP award.

But what I'm certainly most proud of is having inspired my junior colleague to pursuing a career in PR. She's developed into an amazing PR professional in just a year at WSP and has gained the trust of senior professionals while securing fantastic coverage in nationals.

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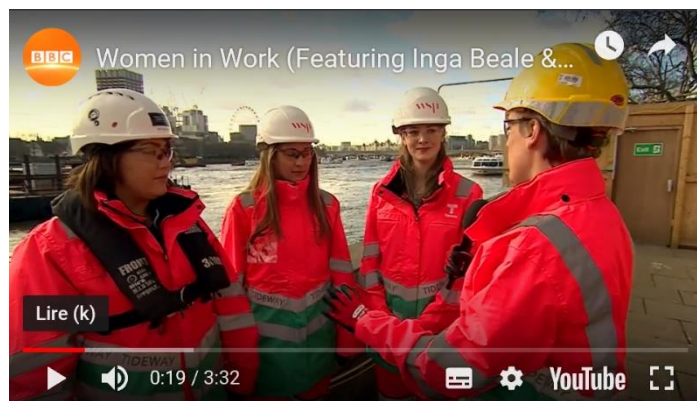
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I started working in January 2019 at Gensler – where I'm managing PR across Europe – and I'm looking forward to raising the profile of some of the incredible women we have within the firm from our Apprentice to our Regional Managing Principal.

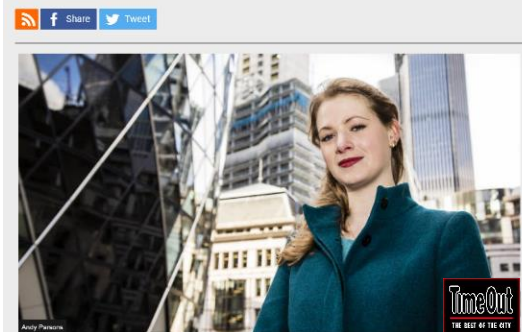
Image 1: WSP women in the media (Feb 2018 – Jan 2019)



WSP's Lois Medley with Brian Cox



### Things you only know if you build skyscrapers



#### ...according to Katherine Tobin, 26.

Building high means digging deep

'My company, WSP, is helping to build 22 Bishopsgate, which will be the tallest tower in the City of London when it's finished. But skyscrapers actually extend a long way below ground as well as above it. In this case, we're reusing foundations that go 50 metres deep. In the past, my colleagues have dug up Viking boats and skeletons during their work – and had to avoid hitting tube tunnels.'

Engineers would love to build even higher than they currently do

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Image 2: WSP leadership in the media (Feb 2018 – Jan 2019)



**M**ARK NAYSMITH is the Scottish CEO of the engineering firm behind London's iconic Shard. Based in the Edinburgh office of WSP, one of the world's leading engineering professional services consulting firms, he started as a graduate in 1988 and worked his way to the top. From Dalkeith, where he still lives, Mark is in charge of 7,150 staff. At 306m, the Shard is the tallest building in Western Europe and WSP

worked with the architect Renzo Piano, developer and the contractor on engineering design. The result is a glowering new landmark of the London skyline.

#### What did you want to be when you grew up?

A police officer. While studying at Dalkeith High School, I applied to police college and also to study civil engineering at Edinburgh Napier University. A letter from Napier University's admissions office



### Secrets of my success: Jane Richards, UK building chief at WSP

JANE RICHARDS | Thursday 8 February 2018 11:34 | 0 comments

## Evening Standard.

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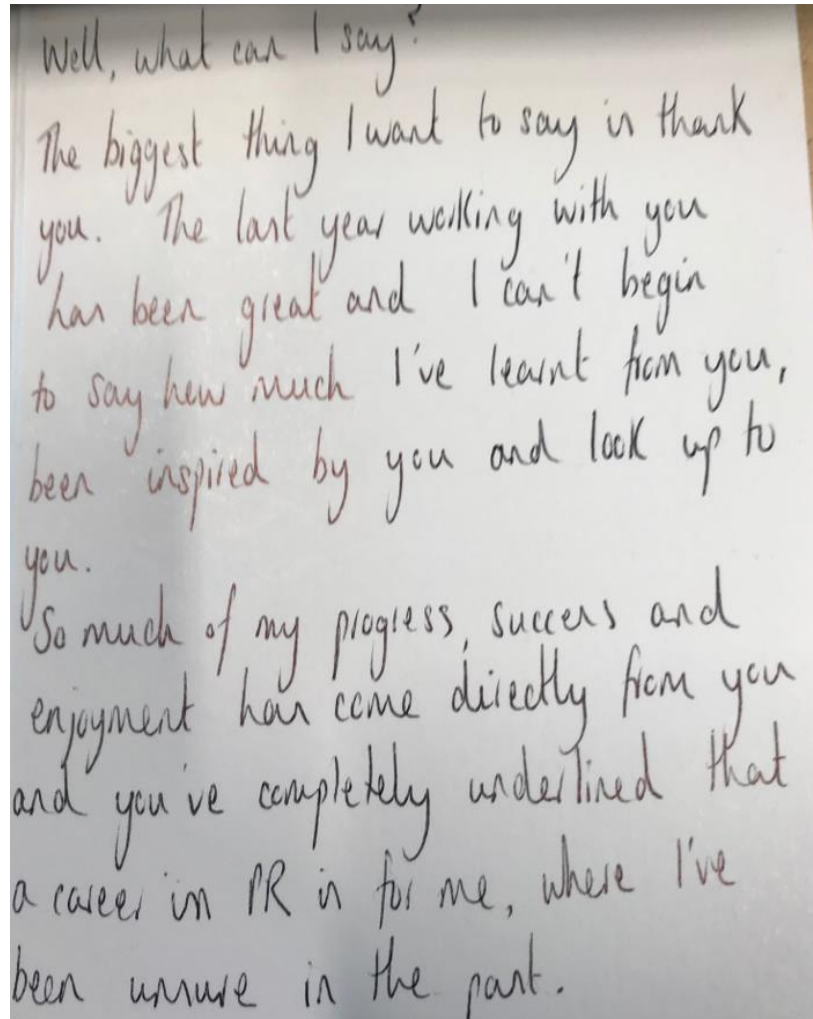
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Image 3: Inspiring others at WSP (not for publication, private letter)

A photograph of a handwritten letter on lined paper, enclosed in a red rectangular border. The handwriting is in cursive and brown ink. The text is as follows:

Well, what can I say?  
The biggest thing I want to say is thank  
you. The last year working with you  
has been great and I can't begin  
to say how much I've learnt from you,  
been inspired by you and look up to  
you.  
So much of my progress, success and  
enjoyment has come directly from you  
and you've completely underlined that  
a career in PR is for me, where I've  
been unsure in the past.

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