

# Pip White

Senior Vice President & GM Slack EMEA



## Pip White talks to Jane Wakefield about the power of authenticity, why businesses need to be more open about the menopause and why email is the cockroach of the internet.

Slack's general manager of EMEA, Pip White, has had a successful career in the tech industry working at HP, Salesforce and Google. As a leader in an industry not famed for getting the balance between men and women right, one of my first questions is about how she has found being female in a male-dominated industry.

"When I started my career at HP there were no equality programmes and there were no diversity programmes. I remember having an interview with a male manager and he said I'd never be a leader because I wasn't tough enough," she tells me. "That really annoyed me because I thought I'm not sure I agree with you. He discounted me and it was very flippant."

"But, perhaps tellingly, it was down to another man in the organisation to see her potential and suggest that she should go into leadership. She admits that without this push she "would still have not had the confidence or even thought it was possible". While many things have changed in the tech industry, imposter syndrome and lack of belief remains a key issue for women looking to take on key roles in both the tech industry and beyond, she thinks.

"I still have that imposter syndrome now and I'm very open about that. I still ask, 'can I do that role?' And is that too big? Or maybe I'm not the right person".

"I think one of the best things we can do is talk about that and ask why women who are aspiring to get into leadership roles or just progress in their chosen career are questioning this. I think it is quite normal when you're stretching your boundaries, pushing yourself out of your comfort zone". "And I think men feel this too. They just don't vocalise it, whereas women are more inclined to be open and talk about those challenges."

She also thinks that women have to work much harder to be given the same opportunities as men. "There is always that question mark around: will we have a baby and go on leave or will we be a carer for our parents or what will we do when we go through menopause? And these health events that happen to women, don't impact men in the same way. Men, unless they become ill, don't think what if?"

Pip has always bucked the trend though and she took on her first leadership role when she returned from maternity leave, after having her second son. And now, self-described as peri-menopausal, she is taking up the baton for another much misunderstood and little-talked about taboo.

"I talk openly about it. More women in the public domain are speaking about it now, but it is very much seen as a topic that we should all keep under wraps." She would love companies to be more open about its female staff who are facing the menopause and thinks the first step is "just being able to have that conversation and not feel like you are going to get judged or excluded from opportunities".

Technology wasn't Pip's first choice when she left school at 16. She admits that she just wanted to roll up her sleeves and work and

so she joined an ad agency, whilst putting herself through night school at the same time to achieve a degree in Business Studies from Manchester Metropolitan University. As she took on more tech-based clients, she saw potential in the tech industry and eventually got a job at HP where she worked for 14 years, before moving to Salesforce.



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"And it is for Salesforce that she maintains her highest praise when it comes to work culture. "They are very customer-centric and very values-based. And they invest a lot in our development. They want people to build a career so there is a lot of talent programmes".

"Salesforce definitely helped me understand the importance of values within an organisation - our founder, Marc Benioff, talks about the need for business to be the greatest platform for change - and when you work in an organisation which operates with that belief, it makes you feel connected to something bigger than just your work."

Pip also spent just over a year at Google, as Managing Director of Google Cloud. She moved back to Salesforce in 2021, taking up the role at Slack, which was bought by Salesforce in July of that same year. Slack is looking to shake up the way we communicate

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and Pip is pretty scathing about its main rival – email.

“Email is the cockroach of the internet and will always exist in some form, but fundamentally, it is broken. It is a 40-year-old technology that was really designed around the thinking that communication was personal, rather than about a team and how a group of people work together and as a result it is often a barrier to productivity.”

“I don’t use email unless I have to. I check my email probably once or twice a day. I do all of my work in Slack.” With Slack, customers such as Revolut and Jaguar Landrover are moving towards what she calls a digital HQ.

“In a hybrid work environment the only office every employee goes to each day is the digital one. It’s about taking a digital first approach to working with colleagues and partners and being more thoughtful in how we connect. So, recording a voice message or video in Slack and working on collaboration

platforms means we don’t have to spend 10 hours a day staring at each other in an office.”

When she does use email it is usually to check something relating to her personal life rather than work. Getting a good work/life balance is important to her. She admits that she has, in the past, spent too much time

in the office and not enough taking care of her own health.

Personal tragedy made her reassess her life when she lost her father in 2018 and her brother in 2019 both due to short

illnesses. “My brother died very soon after he was diagnosed, and my father died very suddenly - I had only been in Salesforce for 3 months when I lost Dad - it was a very difficult time for me and my family”.

Her brother had been a marathon runner and her father had also been a big golfer so, over the Christmas period in 2020, she realised she too needed to embrace a new health regime. “I was working and working and working and



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## ***Tell me something surprising about you?***

*Really, I don't think I'm very surprising. I've got really into CrossFit and powerlifting in the last year and we're building a house, which we are moving into in the New Year.*

## ***What is the most important lesson life has taught you?***

*That without your health, everything else is second place.*

## ***What would be your 3 tips to creating a successful business?***

- *Hire an A team - even if it takes longer. Getting the right people on your team will be key to your success and you need to kiss a few frogs along the way!*
- *Stay curious - there is no place in business for a fixed or closed mindset.*
- *Lead with authenticity. I still see so many leaders who are too scripted - it's totally disingenuous to the audience and I find it a real turn off.*



not doing any exercise or looking after myself so, after the Christmas holiday, I basically set out on this mission to look after myself and walk 10,000 steps religiously every day and to watch what I'm eating and drinking”.

“I have lost over 25Kg in a year. I don't drink really anymore, I am in the gym four times a week and walking my dogs every day and it's just completely transformed who I am and I don't ever want to go back to what I was 12 months ago.” This change has not only helped her personally, it has also transformed her management style.

“There are leaders who expect the 24/7 and then there are leaders who have been through

very, very difficult crises in their personal lives and know the importance of balance and I'm one of those. I wasn't before by the way. I perhaps was a 24/7 work work work person.”

“At Slack we're trying to remove the back to back video conferences and have thoughtful time to self-reflect or strategise with a customer, or think about long-term business plans.” She is pleased that more businesses are now having to consider how they want people to work.

“The pandemic has very much accelerated the art of what's possible in terms of flexibility and productivity,” she says. “I think there were many companies who were quite draconian and thought that if



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they don't see people working in front of them, they don't believe you are actually working."

For him, education The pandemic proved this theory wrong, she says, but admits we are still in the early days of working out what the new normal should look like.

"Every time I speak to a customer, they've got a different strategy. Some are trying to get their employees back permanently for five days a week and some have gone fully remote, shutting down all their offices and bringing people together in hotels or public spaces."

She divides her time between the Salesforce office in London and her home in Cheshire where she lives with her partner Dave, who she has been with since she was 19. Her preferred working week would be two or three days in the office and with customers and a couple working from home.

Despite her lingering imposter syndrome, Pip is determined to push herself. "I always

try to make sure any new opportunities I consider or take on are going to give me the opportunity to develop new skills or open up opportunities for me to work in areas that I haven't done before. Walking into a role which makes you feel uncomfortable and slightly out of your depth - you know you will be learning in that environment."

She admits that she doesn't really like working with people who don't think they need to "develop or progress themselves.

"I much prefer someone to turn up and say I don't know the answer or let me see or let me think about that rather than someone who is just reading off a script. That drives me mad". "And I think that people can see through this kind of behaviour. I think that leading with authenticity and showing vulnerability, builds a lot of respect and can break

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down barriers". "I am an authentic person and I find it very hard to be anything other than myself." She is also trying to pay things forward, which includes making herself available to other women in the industry, something that was sadly lacking when she started working in tech. "I did not have a single female leader when I was at HP apart from, ironically, our CEO who was like a million miles away from me and not someone that I could have picked up the phone to."

Now there are far more role models but that does not mean the equality and gender questions have been dealt with.

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