

Yikes! What's the best thing to do in that situation?

"The advice I give to people now is this: when you're talking about a pay rise or looking to raise concerns with your boss – always allocate time for it. Don't try to catch someone off-guard. Always book time into someone's diary – sit in their office and make it formal.

"The way men approach it is: 'I deserve this'. So, what you need to do is categorically and very assertively list what you've done and why you deserve what you're requesting. That then puts your boss in a situation where – if you've performed well – it's very difficult to say no."

(Photo: Rose & Willard)

I'm guessing you don't miss those long hours...

"Working a 14-hour day was standard. Sometimes it was a lot longer than that. So I made a point, by saying that nobody in my team would work longer than an eight-hour day, because I think it's very important to have a proper work-life balance. I want my staff to be able to go home, see their friends, have a full life and come in the next day without feeling as though they live to work."

You pay your interns. We love you!

"I'm not aware of any other fashion house that does, I think we're the only one. Despite being a start-up, you can and should pay your interns. If people are unhappy [because they're not getting paid], they won't want to be there, and it's reflected in their work.

"One of my ex-colleagues was working as a waitress. She qualified and wanted to work in the fashion industry, but she couldn't afford to do an unpaid internship. I said: 'I'm not going to give you an unpaid internship, you're going to get paid while you're here.'" She started off as an intern and proved herself very quickly. She became our product developer and eventually went to work for Boden."

So, why the hell can't the rest of the fashion industry do the same?

"Because they can get away with it. Because it's accepted as the norm."

"I feel that I need to protect these women in some respects"

Your models don't look like twigs – another unusual trait in the industry...

"We've got non-model models. These are aspirational, attractive women, who we feel our customers can relate to. They're not super-skinny. People in the industry have told us the models are too big. We made our samples as a size 10 and provided them for magazine fashion shoots. The people at the shoots said that size 10 was too big for the models they use. I said categorically that we don't make a size 6 – the only time I'll make a size 6 is if a customer requests it.

A photo shoot for Rose & Willard (Photo: Lorna Jane Newman)

"I was told to try professional models, so we had a few come in. None of them ate anything. We persisted in saying that they should eat, but they wouldn't. Then in the afternoon, one of the models became delirious and was talking nonsense, so we had to send her home. Then it transpired that these models were going for castings. They basically said that they couldn't eat because they had to be thin. It was devastating to hear someone say something like that.

"We've now decided that if we do go down the professional model route, we will have a clause in our contracts stating that any model with us for the day at a shoot will have to eat. And it has to be a meal, not just a slice of cucumber, and it has to be eaten in front of me. I feel that I need to protect these women in some respects."

What materials does the high-achieving, modern gal like to wear?

"Fish leather is one thing that we looked for specifically. We found this Icelandic supplier that sells byproducts from the food industry, meaning that those skins would normally be thrown away. There are also some promising situations in Switzerland, Germany and Japan, with material that you don't need to wash as frequently or can just be wiped down. If you think about the real life of a woman, she's getting on and off the tube, she's rushing between meetings, she's got all these things to do. So she needs fabric that will work with that.

"We found one potential producer who makes fabrics similar to material in sports kits, which actually takes away sweat, so you don't have to worry about things sticking to you. The producer is trying to make the fabric in a more environmentally friendly way."

I hear you have one of fashion's lowest carbon footprints, too...

"We try and source fabrics from places as close to us as possible. We'll go to Italy and to France, and we've got English fabrics, but we certainly never buy from India or China. We don't buy from places where we know there's either exploitation or lack of respect for the environment. And we want to keep our air mileage as short as possible. That's why we think we have fashion's lowest carbon footprint – because we design, produce and distribute from the UK."

Why all the drama about wearing things twice?

"I think it starts with celebrities. If a celebrity is seen wearing something twice, then she's wrongly seen as being 'caught out'. So we have a #WearItAgain hashtag – if you see me being interviewed on TV, I'm always wearing the same blue suit with fish leather. And then there's the suit I'm wearing right now. It's actually just a sample, made from leftover fabric, because 15 per cent of fabric is generally wasted for most brands during production. What we do is collect it all up and try to make something with it. It's all about walking your talk."

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