



Amy Webb is Head of Finance at Devon and Somerset Fire & Rescue Service. She qualified as an accountant through self-study working in both private and public sector roles before joining the Fire Service in 2013.

THE GLASS LIFT

Barely two years after Amy joined the Fire Service the team was hit with an unexpected crisis. The Head of Finance – Amy's boss – was taken ill and needed to step down. This is a significant role. Managing a team of seven and the £75 million budget for the service, it needs someone with considerable leadership skills.

Few people expected Amy to step up to this role at this stage, but she did. Acting up temporarily to begin with and a few months later permanently appointed into post. Immediately, **her inner imposter started making itself heard**. Was she up to it?

So it felt like fortunate timing when she was offered a place on the ELEVATE programme. Meeting the other women on the programme has resulted in a **strong support network**. Her ambition and strengths and self-doubts have been shared and recognised by others in similar situations. The imposter has been seen for what it is – the manifestation of normal apprehensions in the face of very real challenges.

Soon into the programme, Amy recognised that she'd been making life more stressful than it need be by trying to be something she wasn't. She was modelling herself on male leaders that made up most of the workforce in the Fire Service. She had been trying to find her authority in the same way that she saw the men around her doing.

**Perhaps there was another way, one that fitted more comfortably with her values and strengths**, a liberating thought sank in. 'It's ok to be me. It's ok to bring what I have – a more feminine and open approach – to the table. In fact, it's more than ok, it's effective management. It means we talk more, and issues are discussed before they become a problem. It doesn't make me a less effective leader, **it makes me more effective**.'

Recalling a recent time when a team member needed additional support through a period of stress and illness, Amy realised that her own more authentic, open approach was having significant benefits in creating the right culture in the team to enable the person to become well again. As a result, Amy has received feedback from the team and from other colleagues that people respect each other and there

is a **growing culture of trust and honesty**. This has enabled difficult conversations to be held when they need to be.

As Amy reflects, she's taken strength from others' feedback that they find her more open and unflinching approach refreshing and she remarks that 'it gets easier with practice'. ELEVATE has given her opportunity to reflect on that practice in very supportive and insightful ways.

It's also led her to step back and **take a more strategic view** of her role and to help others to do the same. The Fire Service is no different to many other organisations in facing enormous change and uncertainty. New approaches are necessary. None of this is easy, but Amy has found opportunity to ask big questions about what the Service is aiming for and why. She has an influential seat at the Leadership Team table and has a lot of involvement in briefing and listening to the Executive Board.

**All this takes courage**. And this is one area where Amy feels that the ELEVATE programme has contributed to more than any other. It has given her courage. Courage to be herself and to use her strengths in her role – even when they differ from the prevailing culture that she works in.

Colleagues have noticed. **Amy is now regarded as a powerful force in driving change** both within and outside of the organisation. She's recently been appointed to the Boards of two charities – the Exeter Drugs Project, and Women in the Fire Service (UK), in addition to increasing recognition within the Fire Service itself.

**She's found her true voice as a leader.**

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