

DfBB Women in Transport Podcast:

Rebecca Morris - Road Casualty Reduction, Marketing and PR Specialist

Anne-Marie:

Welcome to the Driving for Better Business podcast celebrating women working in transport, fleet management, and road safety. I'm delighted to have Rebecca Morris, road casualty reduction, marketing and PR specialist, with me today.

Rebecca, welcome to the Driving for Better Business podcast. I'm really pleased you're here with us today. Now, I've got fond memories of working with you in road safety partnerships, supporting them across the UK. And as well... remember visiting Moldova? To support the development of their road safety partnership? So we've got a bit of road safety history between us. You've been in road safety marketing and public relations for over 18 years – how did your career start?

Rebecca:

Hi – thanks so much for having me. It's great to see you Anne-Marie, it's been a long, long time and we do have a lot of history as you've said, in road casualty reduction. So yeah, I've been in road safety marketing and PR now for the best part of two decades. I was a journalist – that's how I started my career – and then I started working at the Derby Safety Camera Partnership, back in 2004, and that's where my road safety career began. And I've not looked back, and I don't intend to go anywhere else, because suddenly I had a real purpose. I was writing about something that's so important. And it's been quite a journey over the last two decades, it's changed a lot. So, yeah, it's great to be here!

Anne-Marie:

You're right, things have changed in road safety over those two decades so much. And when we first met, you were working for Road Safety Support – they provide a range of services to road safety professionals in the UK and abroad. It's a key means of support for road safety partnerships, so how vital was your communications role for the road safety professionals?

Rebecca:

Yeah, so, I actually still work with Road Safety Support as a consultant. I was employed by them for 16 years – a wonderful time, working with the company. A very useful, worthwhile operation that was set up when the safety camera partnerships had changed. They became road safety partnerships. The Department for Transport was no longer at the helm influencing things that were going on within the partnerships – the responsibility was handed over to those partnerships to go it alone really, and Road Safety Support was set up back then in 2007 to support them through that. So my role was really created with the company and yeah, until the end of last year I was an employee. But that amount of time speaks for itself really. It's a fantastic role to do, and supporting the partnerships with their day to day communications and casualty reduction marketing activities, and also of course promoting Road Safety Support, making sure we were known in the UK and overseas.

Anne-Marie:

Thanks. So, you've moved on now a little bit and you're now with RoadPeace. It's the national charity for road crash casualties and their families in the UK. And it's a really vital area of support – tell us a little bit about the organisation and your role there.

Rebecca:

Yeah, RoadPeace is a very special organisation. I've been aware obviously of RoadPeace for the whole time I've been in road safety because obviously you're aware of the charities that are out there, you're aware of these things. But it's only in the last few years that I've really appreciated what they do because I was fortunate, really, to begin supporting them, almost on a secondment basis. Road Safety Support very kindly donated my time as a marketing specialist to support the Andy Cox Challenge, as it was called back then, back in 2021 when this challenge was set up. It was a coming together of police forces, raising money, and raising awareness of road danger, and road harm. And it was raising money for RoadPeace. And now it's evolved, it's become the RoadPeace Challenge, it's a big part of my role. But it was then that I really discovered what RoadPeace does, and I met so many wonderful people who have so sadly been affected by road crashes, either as a victim themselves or as a family member.

And it's really humbling, because we all talk about road crashes every day as road safety professionals but to actually be with those people who you're talking about when you talk about those numbers and stats is really quite chilling. I always thought I appreciated it and I knew the real problem out there, but it wasn't until I began working with RoadPeace that I really understood, and had the realisation that my experience in marketing and communications could be used in something as important as telling the stories of those people who had been affected by road crashes. And hopefully helping to change behaviour out there; hopefully, to get some campaigns out there which will help people to think differently. To use the roads differently. And hopefully, everybody will

see it as their problem, and not just something the police should be sorting out. Or 'that's not my issue, I'm a good driver', or 'I'm a safe road user, I don't need to worry, it's the other people out there'. And I think if we all start to take responsibility, that can make a huge difference out there.

Anne-Marie:

That's a really important point you've mentioned. So, we often now talk about a shared responsibility, between those who design, build and manage the road networks, and also those who use them. We have a responsibility as road users to make sure that [???

06:30] human error – we're all guilty of getting things wrong, but we should go out with the thought in mind that we're not going to do any harm because we're going to do everything that we can to keep ourselves safe, and then keep others safe as well. The behaviour that we have on the roads is so important, and sometimes I think because people don't see the devastating impact of crashes, they don't realise how important their behaviour on the road actually is.

Rebecca:

No, and that's the point I think with my role at RoadPeace. It's a newly created role – Communications and Partnerships Lead – and it's engaging closely with stakeholders, police forces, local authorities and safer road partnerships, which is very close to my background, and I know a lot of people in that area. But it's putting that story across. Trying to get people to see in different ways.

There are lots of things we've done over the years to try and put across these messages. We've got so much more we need to do – we need to understand people more. That is what is missing, for me. There are some partnerships, local authorities, forces who are going above and beyond to do wonderful things to prevent road death and injury. But a lot of them are working within their very limited resources. What we need to do, in the UK, is a huge study into people's behaviour and thinking. We need to know what it is that really makes people do what they do. And we need to break them down into segments. We need to know who those groups of people are that we're targeting so we can design our marketing campaigns around specific types of road user based around what that road user thinks, and what works.

Because again, I really want to plough my efforts into raising awareness around the devastation, and letting people see just how road crashes, and the actions of people every day – they didn't mean to have a crash, they didn't mean to do this or that – but they did, and sadly this is happening, and 5 people are dying every day on our roads. And more than 60 are being seriously injured. And hundreds are being physically or mentally affected every day. Which is terrible, and that fact alone – we need to raise awareness of that. We need people to know that. Because I don't think people really

know the risks. It's become... we get in our cars, we get on our bikes. We have to go to school. We have to walk the kids to school. We have to get to work. We have to do this... we're so busy. We have to do everything, don't we? And we don't get in the car and think, we're about to drive a machine that's capable of killing someone. 'I must drive this carefully, because this machine could actually kill somebody'. We don't think like that.

So we need to know how to start getting people to think like that. We don't want to terrify people, we don't want people to think they shouldn't leave the house, of course there's got to be a balance. But at the moment, I don't think people realise the risks they and their families face every single day when they leave their homes.

Anne-Marie:

Yeah. It's really interesting – some years ago, I saw a piece of graffiti in a town centre, and it said, 'What you see depends on where you stand'. And if you've only ever been stopped by the police and given a ticket, or even a caution or warning – you'll see it from one perspective. But if you've been involved in a collision, or you've had family or friends who have been hurt or just had a damage-only collision, which can be just as scary or just as frightening, then you'll see it from a very different perspective. And from my own perspective, I had a life-threatening motorcycle crash. And that led me to working in road safety – because I didn't want anybody else to go through what I'd gone through.

The physically injuries healed, and I've learned to live with a certain amount of pain, one leg shorter than the other. I have difficulties walking occasionally. But I've got psychological scars – and managing mental health and wellbeing after a road crash is so important. How can we do that better?

Rebecca:

For me, I think the mental health – road safety link is huge, and it's not something I'd probably have thought too much about in the past even though I've had my own mental health struggles, I guess, in the past. But it's not something I was really aware of. But since I've been working with road victims more closely and bereaved families, it's really made me think of that.

So, I think it's two-fold. I think not only is it people like yourself, Annie – and I do remember that, we've talked about that over the years – I think it's that, it's obviously the person who has been involved in the collision, and who has hopefully lived to tell the tale like yourself. And it's easy to think – 'oh, well you were lucky, you survived, you're ok' – but what about that awful... the physical and mental scars that are left on that person, and that person's family. So I think that's the one side of it, and a very important side of it. And last year, we put out a news story based on some research by Professor Andrew Morris and Doctor Jo Barnes from Loughborough University. And they'd

researched the ripple effect of road crashes. And it's estimated around 500,000 people in the UK every year are affected by a road crash in one way or another, so physically or mentally. So either as the person that was involved in the crash, or their loved one that's either caring for that person who's been injured or caring for them because they've been mentally affected as a result of it. And actually, I don't think that even includes those victims, if you like, who are unaccounted for. Who maybe, maybe it was a very serious collision on a road, on a motorway, and it was witnessed and seen by lots of people who weren't actually involved in that collision - a child even, who has seen an awful sight that they will never be able to unsee. That's on top of those 500,000 people.

So really, when you think about the direct impact of a crash in terms of mental health, we have that side of it. But I think there's the other side of it too – how do the crashes occur in the first place? How many of us in the UK have mental health conditions? 1 in 4 people will experience a mental health problem of some kind every year in England – just England. That's the current stat on the MIND website. So if 1 in 4 of those people is a driver, how many of us are going out every day on the roads with a mental health issue? We're not going to leave that behind before we get in the car, or before we start walking down the street, or get on our bike. Are we distracted? Are we disassociated from the world in some way? Are we angry? Are we frustrated? We're going to take those things with us on the roads, and I think that's the worrying thing.

And we're all doing everything at 100 miles an hour – not necessarily in speeding terms but in our lives – things are so busy, and there's so much pressure on us in our lives these days to be here, be there, be everywhere... as parents, working parents, we've got to be at work, be at meetings, we've got to drop children off, pick children up, we've got to go to a club after school with our children. We've got to do everything, that's how we feel. And, I guess, women in particular will probably feel that. We're not going to leave all those worries and stresses and that anxiety behind us when we get in a car, or when we use the road. So I think, for me, there are two sides to the mental health link.

Anne-Marie:

Definitely. And I completely get the ripple effect. I didn't move home for nearly a year after my bike crash. I had to live with my parents because I couldn't walk, couldn't look after myself, so, those ripples go out far and wide. And we don't appreciate how they affect other people. And I firmly believe that we need a more holistic approach for those involved in road crashes to help them recover. We fix the physical and that's sort of business as usual. I had an open fracture of my femur, and there was no way they were going to leave that – that needed fixing. That was obvious. And that's good, we've got that nailed. But I had depression after my collision, and it wasn't really assessed at the time, after a traumatic event. So there was no understanding of what I might go on to suffer after the collision. And when I went to a doctor, they told me things like 'you just need to go and get some exercise'. And I thought, 'do you know what, I'd love to be able

to' – and exercise absolutely does help with things like depression. But when you're lying in bed and your mind is saying 'get out', but your body won't move because you have clinical depression and you physically can't get out of bed... that can be assessed much earlier to help us deal with the impacts of that. Dealing with mental health and wellbeing isn't mandatory after a traumatic event and I absolutely think it should be, as part and parcel of fixing the physical, as is anything else that we would do to deal with somebody's injuries.

Poor mental health can often affect the way we approach driving – sometimes in ways we don't realise. Driving is stressful... how do we make sure that we're fit to drive, and that our mental health is making us fit to drive?

Rebecca:

I think as a road user we just need to know more about what's expected of us, and we need to know how seriously the subject is taken by those we look to in authority, by the police, safer road partnerships, the fire service, the government... and I think, by enlarge, those people are working really hard to do that. But obviously, they can only do so much with working in the restraints they have and the resources that they have. And I think this is where, in an ideal world, we'd be spelling this out to people, that everybody has a responsibility, everybody should feel a sense of responsibility.

But unfortunately, people don't believe that they will be the cause of a collision. They think it's somebody else. And it's quite fascinating looking at the psychology of it. And I don't have that expertise, it's only things I've read, but certainly the term 'optimism bias' is used, and that means, basically, that as humans we're wired to think that things are more likely to go right for us than they are to go wrong. So we don't get in the car, or get out on the road and think, 'right, note to self, I'd better be really careful today because I might have a crash'. We're more likely to not think anything, actually, I think... we're more likely to be like, 'oh, I'll be alright, I'll be fine'. Nobody intended to have that crash. Nobody intended to be looking at their phone. Really, I mean, yeah, it's a conscious decision to, say, use your phone or drink and drive. They didn't mean to cause any harm, but they did. And so many people have. And sadly, so many people are continuing to every single day.

Another 5 people will die today on the roads in the UK. And tomorrow. And the next day. As a result of somebody who didn't think it would be them that would do that. Or just did not think, full stop. So I think our efforts need to be ploughed into understanding road users better and making them think. And of course, that's not an easy thing – we need to work with professionals, psychologists, road safety and transport psychologists who know a bit more than I do. We need to get that research done and we need to understand the situation.

Anne-Marie:

So, employers have a role to play in helping to make the roads safer with their staff who drive. And then also it extends to the health and safety of their staff. Where can employers, managers, and especially those who do manage drivers, find more advice and support to have conversations with their staff about their mental health and how it affects their driving, to make sure that we are addressing these issues?

Rebecca:

I mean I know about Driving for Better Business very well – so if I was signposting somebody who wanted to find out more, I would definitely suggest they obviously reach out, it would be a good start to reach out to yourselves. But I think, again, we need employers to appreciate the responsibility that they have as part of their corporate social responsibility. Their drivers are using the roads and if they have big fleets, I don't think it's okay just to think 'well, we pay taxes and we make sure our vehicles are in good order, and therefore it's all fine'. I think we need to, again this is a whole different campaign, reach out. And I know Driving for Better Business does an awful lot of work in this area. But I think it's great to really see with our own eyes that businesses are appreciating their responsibilities in this area and communicating regularly with their drivers and employees about it.

And then it becomes a collaboration, all of a sudden – we're all in this together, whoever we are. If we use the roads, we're all in it together, and pretty much everybody uses the road. So, whoever you are!

Anne-Marie:

Absolutely. And finally, if anybody has been involved in a collision, or is a family member or friend of somebody who has, where can they get the help and advice? What's the RoadPeace email address, where they could start just to talk to somebody about what they're feeling?

Rebecca:

Yeah, I would strongly urge anyone to reach out to RoadPeace, whenever it was – it could have been 20 years ago that they were involved or they had a family member that was involved, and they've probably always just had this underlying wonder about various things... there are so many people at RoadPeace who understand, people who have properly been in the same position that you have, either recently or a long time ago. And there are some wonderful people that are there to support you.

So, yeah, you can reach out – go to the RoadPeace website, I would suggest is probably the best starting point, which is www.RoadPeace.org. And that would be a great starting

point. You can find the means to reach out to people, you can call them, you can email them, and you can sign up to receive regular updates from RoadPeace which hopefully will be of comfort.

And I just need to mention, there is a RoadPeace Challenge, which I did touch upon earlier. But the RoadPeace Challenge 2023, bigger and better, it's going hopefully raise lots of money for RoadPeace who need to do what they do, as we've discussed, to support the many, many people that are affected by road crashes. But also, probably more importantly, it's going to raise awareness about road harm, and around the impact that it really does have, physically and mentally, on so many people. 500,000 people – at least – every year in the UK are affected in some way by a road crash, whether that's physically or mentally, whether that's a loved one or the victim themselves.

The RoadPeace Challenge will bring together police forces, local authorities, the fire service, safer roads partnerships, ambulance crews, doctors, consultants. We've launched now – the event takes place from the 15th May to the 21st May 2023. And we're basically asking anyone with any kind of interest in improving safety on our roads to come forward. We're taking a united stand against road harm, alongside road crash victims. We're bringing all those people together. We're looking for businesses who might want to support that challenge as sponsor – we've got packages to suit all budgets. And not only would you be supporting such an important event and supporting RoadPeace, but you'd also be demonstrating publicly that you have that commitment to reducing road deaths and injuries. Thank you!

Anne-Marie:

Thank you, Rebecca. It's been an absolute pleasure discussing this with you – a hidden subject that we need to be able to talk about, and know where to find support.

Thanks for joining us today – and if people want to know more about Driving for Better Business and the benefits to managing and reducing your road risk take a look at the website www.drivingforbetterbusiness.com