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Get To Know Our Guest

**JENNY
GARRETT**

Jenny Garrett OBE began life in social housing in North West London, with an early commitment that where you start should never limit where you arrive. Two decades on, she is ***the founder and CEO of Jenny Garrett Global, the award-winning leadership consultancy*** she started in 2006 and still leads. Her belief is simple: potential is everywhere, but opportunity is not, and the work of leadership is to close that gap. It is a promise borne out by results, with 35%+ of participants promoted during her programmes and 98% recommending them.

Jenny's work spans three connected pillars: Inclusive, Entrepreneurial and AI-Ready Leadership. She is the author of the bestselling "Rocking Your Role" and "Equality vs Equity," and, with her daughter Leah-Sunshine Garrett, co-author of AI for Equity (Emerald Publishing) and co-host of the podcast of the same name. She holds an OBE for services to entrepreneurship and women in business, and is a Companion of the Institute of Leadership and Management, its highest honour.

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- **DR. KG:** *Jenny, you're a very well known and beloved figure, but for the sake of the audiences who are listening to you for the first time, can you share a little bit about yourself and your journey in life so far?*
- **JENNY:** *My journey has always been ultimately about empowering people. As a result, I've not just created my business providing leadership development, but also created other opportunities such as a social enterprise called Rocking Your Teens that has taken three and a half thousand young people through our doors over the last 13 years. And also something called the Diverse Executive Coach Directory, where we have about 60 coaches who we promote so that people can know that there are choices out there to have coaches all over the world.*
- **DR. KG:** *Jenny, you started in marketing, then it's coaching, then leadership training, leadership programs, writing, work with teenagers, assembling a large diverse group of coaches specifically to address the lack of diversity that might be available to people. So many different and impressive accomplishments, work that is impactful and is needed in the world. But what is a red thread that ties all of it together for you?*
- **JENNY:** *I think it's two things. I think it's about fairness. I really care about fairness. And I really want everyone to have the same opportunity for success. So I think fairness is part of it. But also empowerment. It's not just making sure everyone has the same opportunity, but making sure everyone knows inside that they might be different, but equally as good as everyone else. I really want people to understand that your difference is powerful. We don't have to be the same as everyone else. And actually that difference is your uniqueness is what makes you really special. And it's finding the spaces in which you can really flourish. I think there's a saying, if you ask a fish to ride a bicycle, it will always be unsuccessful, you know? And it's about finding those spaces where actually, you know, put the fish in water, it's amazing. And finding those spaces for us all to flourish.*



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- **DR. KG:** Fairness, equity, inclusion, these values that shine through so powerfully in what you said just now. *What are those values rooted in? Where does that primal cry come from that you want to bring this to the world?*
- **JENNY:** *I come from a line of very strong women.* My grandmother, absolutely, my grandmother came to the UK and started a life for all of us with my grandfather, but she was definitely the strong matriarch. And then my mum, who was the first in our family to get a degree actually, you know, in this line, she studied in her thirties to become a school teacher. *And that very much empowered my brother and I and showed us what was possible. I feel like these women have had to fight hard for what they've been able to achieve and they've done it. But I guess I would love it to be easier for others. They've had to really recognize their own potential when other people didn't see it. And I want to be me and my company. I want to be that for others. I want to hold a mirror up to them and say, look, this is what I see and this is what is possible for you.*
- **JENNY:** *I think my grandmother, she had such a big heart. I think she absolutely showed me what's possible, even with very little. And then my mum sort of breaking boundaries and breaking barriers too. I would also say I have a daughter who's nearly 25. And there's definitely something about becoming a parent that made me want to step up. I suddenly saw myself as a role model. I knew that when she was looking at me she was seeing what was possible and that meant that I need to step out of my comfort zone so that she could too. So it's the women in my life that definitely create that line through that desire to make a difference.*

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- **DR. KG:** Accomplished people who fight hard and do amazing, miraculous things that challenge the notion of what is possible and what is appropriate for someone to achieve. I also find they usually have such a sense of power and vibrancy. There's often not at the same time also a space for softness. But in every interaction I've had and I've spoken with others, and they also attest to the same feeling I had. There is so much warmth and kindness in you that you shine on others. That's not a very common thing. It's quite rare. *Where does the softness, the kindness, and the warmth find space in so much achievement and ambition and boundary pushing?*
- **JENNY:** *What I know is, I think I'm quite clear on how I want to engage in the world. I think I'm quite clear. If the world was all about being hard and mean and cutthroat, that's not the journey that I want to take. I think I want to wake up in the morning and feel pleased with how I'm getting engaged. I don't want to walk away from someone thinking I've left them, you know, damaged or hurt in some way. That's not how I want to go in the world.*
- **JENNY:** *I think there's probably some faith based values around how I want to engage. But there's also, you know, maybe as well, something about what I get from that. Because the more warmth I give out, the more warmth I give back, get back. And I think that is the case in life.*
- **JENNY:** *I guess when my daughter was very little, I would say she was a little bit glass half empty, so a little bit sees the not the positive side of things. I remember saying to her one day, let's go out and catch smiles. Let's smile at people and see if we can get smiles back. We came home and I was like, look how many smiles we caught on our journey. And I think it's a similar thing. The more you smile, the more smiles you get back. You'll get the odd person who looks at you strangely and maybe it's just been having a bad day. But generally you get them back. I think for me is about put the warmth out and you get the warmth back as long as you're being genuine.*

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- **DR. KG:** The values that you're talking about, equity, fairness, inclusion, kindness and warmth, rooted in faith and spirituality, these are fundamentally values that was hard won ground maybe a decade back. More importantly, with AI, it just seems things are moving so fast and they're so complicated and so multilayered with so much synchronicity and connectedness that it's all lost the ground we have gained. *Knowing that you're working in this field actively now, how are you bringing in these values? The reason I started this podcast, Jenny, is because I wanted to speak with leaders like yourself who are showing that ethics and integrity is absolutely possible, especially because bringing those values in from the ground up, building that into the design instead of tacking it on top, especially in the AI world, is really important. How are you doing this work in the field of AI?*
- **JENNY:** I've been hearing so many stories about AI. AI is gonna take everyone's job, the robots are gonna take over, the world is a terrible place. And I just thought, I don't like this feeling. I don't like this feeling that I'm hearing so much fear and sort of anger and upset around. *Is there another story? Is there another perspective? And I spoke to my daughter about it and I said to her, could you do a bit of research for me? I said, could you do some research and just see if perhaps there are some positive stories some ways AI is creating fairness, some ways AI is helping people.*
- **JENNY:** She came back with this long list and I said to her, you know what, let's interview them, let's turn this into a podcast. And we have been over the last year interviewing people globally to understand how they're using AI to make a difference. *There's an organization called Ref-U-Aid that actually decided to create an AI algorithm based on the potential once you've received your certificate instead of your past track record. They have lent over three million pounds to people who were refugees and they have a 98.6 % payback rate. So that for me is such a positive use of AI using the algorithm to predict potential earnings and helping people who would be disadvantaged normally.*



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- **JENNY:** We've spoken to so many people, that's just one example of something that's being done. And we wanted to highlight these and really share, *there's so much we can do to create a more equitable society using AI, but we need to use it intentionally. And we need to really understand AI to be able to do that. Where is the data coming from? Understanding who needs to be involved in those decisions. Not just throwing AI in and saying, it's going to make things more efficient and more productive, but really thinking about the best use cases for AI so that we can use it to make a difference. What Leah and I, my daughter and I want to do is really encourage people to think differently and think about how they can, you know, some of the biggest problems that we've ever had, how we could use AI to solve them.*
- **DR. KG:** *Can you share a time when you navigated a similarly tricky situation and what did you learn from it? Because I love when leaders share these stories so all of us can learn from that.*
- **JENNY:** Actually someone I spoke to a little while back told me about this Good Samaritan story. It was some research that was done. And what they did was they, someone had to go to an interview. So they were going for an interview for a job. Someone was told, just get there when you can. Whenever you arrive, we'll be fine. Another was told, you are in a hurry, you've only got 10 minutes to get there. In both instances, they had someone collapse in front of them on the pavement. And the person who had all the time in the world stopped, they cared for them and made sure that they were all right. The person who was in a rush didn't stop. Now that doesn't mean they don't have strong values, that they don't care about people, but for them it was, I might not get the job if I don't get there on time. This is time sensitive. And so they let go of their morals and values for speed.

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- *And I think this is something that happens all the time. Exactly what you're talking about is that we're in a time sensitive, everyone's saying AI is moving so fast. We don't have much time. We need to be at the front of the queue. But I feel that it's actually a bit artificial because what are we rushing? If we don't know where we're going, what are we really rushing towards? And rushing to implement AI, a lot of organizations have spent a fortune and have not really got much to show for it or made some rash decisions. For me, it's all about slowing down. And I guess actually what's often happened for us when we have had to make tough decisions is that it's worked out fine for us because we've slowed down our thinking.*
- *JENNY: I'll give an example of a potential client who came to us. They said they wanted some development, particularly for staff from ethnically diverse backgrounds to help them reach their potential in their organization. For us, we provide long-term programs, eight-month programs. We include their line managers, we include sponsors, quite extensive programs that create organizational change. They're not just ticking a box. And they said to us, well, all we want is a few workshops.*
- *JENNY: What's going to happen for us is we're going to do some work with you in the way that you want and it won't make any difference. It won't aid our reputation and it won't help us feel good about ourselves because we want to know we've made an impact. I think the work we do is very intrinsically related to who we are and so actually if we don't feel that we've done our best to do a good job then we can't feel proud. And they were really shocked that we were willing to walk away from the work. You know, it was a significant amount of money, but we said we were and we were willing to not have it. But ultimately they did come back to us and said, actually, we'll work with you.*

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- *We always have those questions, do our values align with our clients? And if they don't, we're not going to chase the money because for us, it's about the impact.* But it's not easy decisions because we are a business and we do need to make money and we do need to pay salaries, but we're really clear on what we're willing to walk away from. *I think what that means is when clients do work with us, we're very much aligned. And so it delivers a better impact. And I think for the participants, they know that their organization is really committed, not just ticking a box as well.*
- **DR. KG:** To the leaders out there who are experiencing that time crunch, who are experiencing this tremendous pressure to just show results endlessly, to have the first mover advantage that you indicated before. *What is your advice to them, to the professionals and leaders out there on how to build the ethical, inspiring, inclusive cultures in the workplace, like the one you're creating, not only in your organization, but in the organizations that you're advising and consulting with?*
- **JENNY:** *People in many places are saying inclusion and EDI are dirty words. There are so many jobs that have been cut with those in the job title. And there really has been a push to divert our eyes, I would say, away from this topic. However, when I was researching for my last book, not the one I've just written, I read the work of Derek Bell and he said that, this is always shape shifting. It's a shape shifting nature. This was always gonna happen. The fact that over time, racism, sexism, any isms, they have, they've looked like one thing and then they've looked like something else and then they've looked like something else. And I think that we are just moving into another phase of understanding what this looks like.*
- **JENNY:** *If you see it as inevitable that it will continue to shape shift, I think that helps you not be so disheartened. This will always, was always coming and will always be coming. It just keeps moving. And as a result, we have to move and adapt with it.*

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- **JENNY:** *One of the things I like to think about is that the way I like to talk about it is if we can solve small things for groups of people who are in some way disadvantaged, we solve it for everyone. And I think this is what's been missing that people don't understand.*
- **JENNY:** *And so what I encourage you to do is find the small things that you might be tweaking for a particular group of people and help everyone see how they benefit. And I think this is the space that we are in. I think take heart, do small things because they do have a powerful knock on effect, but also talk about how they impact not just the group of people that you're helping, but everyone. And if you find one of those things in the next year, you've done amazing work. You know, don't have to do everything. Small things can create amazing ripples.*
- **DR. KG:** *Is there a quote, book, or advice that had a profound impact on you and your way of thinking and being that you'd like to share?*
- **JENNY:** *I came across this saying, no one is you and that is your power. I think everyone should recognise that just that is your power, you that you yourself just being here, the way you, you know, the way you communicate your knowledge, your experience, it might not be unique, but it is your power. And for me, that is something we all need to hold and recognize that we have power. Because when you know that you're powerful, you know, you can make a difference.*
- **DR. KG:** *As a coach yourself and someone who's working actively to make AI equitable, fair and safe everyone too, do you have a hot take on coaching and AI?*

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- **JENNY:** What I did was I actually signed up for an AI coaching tool, because I thought, let me just see what it has to offer. The first week, so every day you had to journal into it. And then at the end of the week, it kind of gives you a summary and gives you some feedback. And basically the first week it just said, you're amazing, Jenny, you're juggling so much, you're making all the right decisions and how amazing are you? And I thought, this is nice. The second week, not in the same words, but telling me how fabulous I was. The third week, again, telling me how amazing I was. *And then I realized this is just set up to tell me everything that I want to hear. What a coach does is a coach challenges you. A coach will not call you out in a negative way, but say, are you sure? Is this the truth of the situation? If you were looking at this from another perspective, how could this look? A coach gives you that extra piece that is so necessary to be a rounded person. And also the coach has much more context.*
- **JENNY:** What I can say is the tools at this point are telling you what you want to hear. That's never going to be the right thing. We sometimes need to hear what we don't like. We need to hear more. And also, don't understand your full context. So can't really give you that advice. So I think there's a lot of danger around that. There are some people trying to create better tools. And there might be some better tools out there, but ultimately it's never going to be a replacement for a real therapist, a real counselor, or a real friend. And I do see more and more people just wanting face-to-face in-person events because of that. Because we can trust what we see. If you meet me in an environment, you really know it's me.
- **JENNY:** AI is a great tool, but remember it's ones and zeros. That is what AI is. It's not a person, it's emulating and bringing together patterns of conversation through an algorithm. It's not a human being. The real people to talk to are humans, flawed, imperfect humans who don't always give you the best advice, but it's real.

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