

Computer Futures' Marc Powell asks the questions in this monthly quick-fire interview series with Senior Tech Leaders

10 Questions with MARIA INGOLD

CEO, mireality



1. What technology process or activity is the most important in creating superior user experiences to boost user/customer satisfaction?

Thinking – both deeply and broadly. Combining both blue-sky strategic vision and devil in the details. Like Elon Musk and Steve Jobs. Whenever I work with clients, we take a journey together. 1.) Where do they want to go? What's the big picture vision for both the company and their end customers? 2.) Where are they now? What are the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of what they're doing or considering? 3.) What does that market really look like? Both in terms of customers and competition? 4.) How do we get there? There are a number of ways to do this, but it generally embodies the Disney Model: Dreamer, Realist and Critic.

2. What are the most important principles when building high performance teams?

Integrity and honesty are the foundation upon which all things must be built. Endless curiosity and wonder and an unlimited imagination is what defines as children. As adults, curiosity becomes a desire to learn, wonder leads to passion and imagination drives innovation. Innovation is diversity of thought. And diversity leads to 3 things in a company: Better culture, more innovation and higher return on investment and equity.

3. How do you retain your employees?

I hire very good people – who have integrity and think both deeply and broadly. Then I work with them intensively for one to two months to bring them up to the highest calibre I can while passing on my relevant expertise. Then I set them free to make mistakes and do things the way their mind works best. I trust them. I talk with them. There is no failure, only feedback. And that feedback works both ways.

4. Tell us about a business challenge you recently solved through technology?

Nothing is ever solved purely by technology alone. It's always a mix of technology, strategy and people. One of my clients – a small island telco – had to fulfil a progressive dividend. It had already cut costs and was concerned it was losing its innovative edge. So, it wanted to introduce a quad-play content strategy. Content is almost never profitable, and especially not with a limited population size who can already get content in other ways. We used technology in two ways. One, as part of our market research, to understand how people already consumed video on their network. This gave our model more realistic numbers and data. The second part was finding the right technical and commercial solution for that market that delivered revenue and profit at minimal risk.

5. How do you stay up to date with technical trends?

I'm a global public speaker on technology and innovation, so I'm always doing research. I regularly meet new people at conferences or via personal introductions or hunt people down I find interesting and share thoughts. I'm a truth-seeker, so I keep digging until I find out what I need to know and like to evaluate it from multiple angles. My father is a rocket scientist, so he taught me how to think. He and I still talk through ideas.

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6. What is your greatest achievement in technology to date?

I've successfully deployed emerging visual technology for over 25 years. But my favourite achievement was as CTO of the Disney / Sony joint venture FilmFlex Movies, where I delivered one of the most successful video on demand movie services in Europe from launch – for under £1 million, which was unheard of – around 10 years ago, before almost anyone else had done it. We were profitable from year one, which is almost impossible. As for how I did that, hire me and I'll show you!

7. How will automation impact the job market?

Automation will replace activities with a clear pattern. Like Robot Lawyer LISA who creates Non-Disclosure Agreements (NDAs). Where we're safe for a while is how we think and innovate. But this is part of why I did my TEDx talk, "Innovating the Impossible". I want people to innovate not just vertically – which leads to evolution – and laterally – which leads to revolution, but also three-dimensionally – which leads to making the impossible happen – like getting to Mars.

8. What are your thoughts on the recent rise in cryptocurrencies?

It seems volatile and hackable. In today's news alone, \$3m worth of cryptocurrency has been stolen. It's been great for NVIDIA. They're well positioned right now. Their graphics processing units (GPUs) are ideal for games, Virtual Reality, Artificial Intelligence and mining cryptocurrency.

9. What advice would you give to someone in education looking to pursue a career in technology?

As I say in my TEDx talk, "Innovating the Impossible", learn everything about everything because your unconscious mind will use everything you've ever learned to make possible what your conscious mind thinks is impossible. STEAM not STEM. Harvey Mudd College in California is one of the fastest rising STEM colleges in the USA. It has over 50% women in Computer Science and Engineering. Its bachelors graduates also earn more than any other bachelors graduates in the USA. Why? Because they are required to do a third of their classes in core science, a third in their major and a third in humanities, social sciences and the arts. They're considered most valuable to industry because they have depth – and breadth – of expertise. I'm on the Industrial Advisory Board for the University of Essex because I want to get universities in the UK to allow the study of disparate topics. I studied Computer Science and Fine Art 30 years ago in the USA and I still can't do that here in the UK.

10. If you could give your 18 year old self some advice, what would you offer?

Always trust your instinct. It's almost 100% accurate. Follow your values – integrity, honesty, passion and fun. The only companies and people worth working for and with are those who have integrity and are honest. When you love what you do and it's fun, you can not only find joy and meaning in what you do, you can create the impossible.

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