

Suzanne Linton's Breakfast Meeting with Gordon Brown

19th May 2009

At the invite of Prime Minister Gordon Brown, Freestyle's MD Suzanne Linton visited 10 Downing Street on the morning of Tuesday 19th May for a Breakfast Briefing. The Prime Minister put out a call to leaders of small energetic businesses so he can hear directly what their views and ideas are and the impact of the current business environment. Here's what Suzanne had to say...



I've always wanted to get into a taxi in London and ask to be taken to an impressive address, but I didn't know that many people in London.....until today, when I got to say 'Number 10 please'.

The route from Marylebone to Downing Street takes in quite a few sites, The Ritz, Trafalgar Square, the National Gallery – and then you arrive at the wrought iron gates.

Having managed to get through the gates, the security checks, the bag search, I walked out of the security hut and the succession of policemen to find myself in the middle of the street, with no one to direct me where to go next.....a blonde moment! It took a few seconds for me to realise that the large back door with No. 10 on it was where I should head.

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After knocking on that famous black door we were directed through the hallways of No. 10. To answer some of the questions I was asked;

- Yes, it looked just like the Hugh Grant dance scene in Love Actually – and no Gordon didn't dance.
- No. 10 soap is actually blue pump action Carex – available in all good stores
- Yes, we did go up the staircase with all the past PM's pictures on the walls
- Breakfast was great, sausage and mustard, bacon or egg sandwiches eaten while standing & talking, which must have left quite a mess on the exquisite rug!

And so to business, I was one of 17 CEO's who sat 'cabinet style' around the table with Gordon and Baroness Shriti Vadera to talk about the concerns and experiences of SME's in the current economic environment.

The Prime Minister asked each of us what our current concerns were in our specific industries and how our recent experiences might reflect what was happening at Government level. Topics included, asking the government to have a more business and enterprise focussed tone of voice, the challenges of SME's selling to government departments, taxation breaks on carbon efficient construction, promoting UK business abroad to make the most of the weak pound and how we can better promote the strength of the Creative Industries.

In response to every point the Prime Minister gave a detailed response, demonstrating an incredible grasp of the intricacies of each issue, the initiatives the government had taken and the numbers involved. He also sought to link us up to the relevant minister - I can expect a meeting with Digital Britain chief Stephen Carter. Baroness Shriti Vadera (Business Minister) also showed a massive depth in her knowledge of all the subjects raised and was very articulate and involving in her summary of the meeting and the follow ups to be taken.

This was an opportunity for Gordon to hear directly from smaller, dynamic businesses and understand what is actually happening 'at the coal face' and the importance he attached to this was clear in that he didn't cancel or sidestep the meeting in the middle of the MP expenses debacle. The PM made special mention of this meeting later on that day in his daily press conference. This all on the same historic day that the Speaker of the House stood down.

The Cabinet meeting that followed our 'breakfast' was undoubtedly to discuss this very event and also meant that we didn't get to see the Cabinet Meeting Room – but we did get to experience the ranks of journalists outside No. 10 as we left!

Suzanne Linton

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