

Alison Dean (00:08):

This is The Breakthrough Podcast, an ongoing series where we interview game changing leaders in technology, business, government, and entertainment about their experiences and perspectives in life and leadership. Learn about their latest breakthroughs and hopefully inspire you to have some of your own. Welcome to The Breakthrough. I'm Alison Dean, and today we are talking with Avis Easteal, currently regional head of consumer at LUXASIA, which is the largest retail and e-com network in beauty and luxury in Asia Pacific. Avis sent me this quote from Ernest Hemingway. We know that person. "You make your own luck." Hi Avis.

Avis Easteal (00:52):

Hey Alison. How are you doing?

Alison Dean (00:53):

I'm very good. How are you?

Avis Easteal (00:55):

Yeah, pretty good.

Alison Dean (00:56):

Good. I want to know why did you choose that quote, "You make your own luck"?

Avis Easteal (01:00):

So I think when I was younger and I first heard it, I didn't know anything about Ernest Hemingway, but I do know that your actions make a difference to your life. So I'm not a great believer that luck makes a difference in life. I don't think people are born lucky or born unlucky, but I do think your actions make a difference to the outcome of things. So to me, it's about resilience, perseverance, doing the right things. And if you do the right things, you make your own luck and you succeed. So I think it's just a way of keeping myself focused on what I wanted to do. And then when I get to a point where something good happens, I can always go, "Yeah, I'm really lucky." But deep in my heart I go, "Yeah, I really worked for that one." And it just suits my little British ways of being humble at the end of it, but internally going, "Yeah, good job you."

Alison Dean (01:52):

I love that. All right, this is The Breakthrough. So I'm curious, what is the first breakthrough that you remember that set you on your career path?

Avis Easteal (02:02):

It's really weird. A lot of my career has been accidental. So my first breakthrough was I was living in a place called Croydon that's in South London and traveling to London for work. And I saw an advertisement for a job in the newspaper. Remember when that used to work? And it was for a job around the corner from my flat. And I thought, I want to work around the corner from my flat. I didn't really know what the job was for, but I applied for it and I got this job. And when I spoke to my soon to be boss afterwards, he said, "You were just supremely confident you could do this." Now, I thought this was hilarious because I really wasn't confident. I didn't really know what it was

until he told me enough about it in the interview. But I just figured, just talk to her about it, it's around the corner.

Avis Easteal (02:49):

So my first breakthrough really was luck because I applied for something and I got it. Now, getting it wasn't luck because obviously I'd managed to listen to the questions, answer them well, understand the job, make sure that I could prove that I had skills to do that. But that was my breakthrough. My breakthrough was seeing an ad around the corner from my flat. And because of that, I ended up in tech because I wasn't in tech before and I had a great tech career. And then that took me into business running and then into digital. So without that one ever of a company around the corner, I might not have ended up doing this. And I think that's a huge breakthrough.

Alison Dean (03:29):

Yeah. Isn't it interesting when we think back on what those tipping point moments are for us and how you just kind of wonder if I had gone any differently how the path could have changed?

Avis Easteal (03:40):

And it wasn't even tech at the time. It was an admin role, but the admin role took me into tech. So that's how it goes. I didn't even know tech existed at that point. I was very young and didn't know anything really.

Alison Dean (03:52):

I love that question, that has just been introduced for us this season. Do you have a morning routine and can you walk us through a typical day for yourself at LUXASIA?

Avis Easteal (04:02):

Yeah. I love mornings. Mornings are my time. Don't ask me to do things late. I am someone who really, half past 10, I need to be in bed. By the morning, I usually get up about six. If I've got something really important to do, I'll get up at five, and I'm at my most productive. So in the mornings, I check what's happened in the UK overnight because a lot can happen between us going to sleep and then the children going to sleep or me and my dad. So I always check in on the UK, see that news, see how everyone's doing. Then I check my schedule for the day because I always like to know where I'm going, what the order is.

Avis Easteal (04:42):

And the first thing I do is set my alarms because I live by my diary and I live by my alarm clock on my phone. So two minutes before every meeting, my alarm clock goes off. If I know it's a big meeting, then 15 minutes before, it goes off as well. I regiment myself. Now, that's not because I'm highly effective at organizing myself. It's because I'm terribly effective at organizing myself really. And I just get into the day and I love the day and I'm really present in the meetings or the people I'm talking to, and I will miss every single appointment if the alarms don't go off. So it's my way of keeping me on track for the day. That's a little bit of five minutes.

Avis Easteal (05:26):

And then a shower, I get into work, I try and get into work early. I love that first hour where no one's in and you can do the things you want to do. And then by the time people start turning up at nine

o'clock, whatever's scheduled gets done. That's my morning, most mornings, except for the weekends because my husband loves to sleep at the weekends. And so I will still be awake at seven because I do lay in till seven, and then I will read my book or have a look at Facebook or mess around on LinkedIn. So I do have different routines of weekends. But mainly I start my day by organizing my day because I know I'm incapable of doing it during the day because I'll be hugely distracted by all the wonderful things that are happening.

Alison Dean (06:07):

Okay. And then a typical day at LUXASIA, lots of meetings, what does it look like?

Avis Easteal (06:12):

So I'm a regional person, so I work with 15 different countries, and that means I spend a lot of time teaching, consulting, and helping our brands understand the marketing they're going to do. I also spend a lot of time working with my team to make sure they're growing their skills so that they can take over the day-to-day. And broadly, they do. They come back now and they check in on things that are unusual. So a lot of my day is making sure that people feel comfortable what they're doing, particularly because we've got lots of new people, particularly after COVID. New starters need nurturing. And at the moment, top of my mind is how do we train and nurture them to become the best they can be quickly?

Avis Easteal (06:55):

Then there's the strategic stuff. What are we going to do next? How are we going to achieve that? So yesterday I was working with my team, looking at online training course to make people brilliant digital marketers in three months. Maybe a bit keen, but we are going to go for it using our marketing platform at the moment. And I was teaching them how to project manage because if they don't understand how to project manage, they're never going to get that delivered on time. So a great example of yesterday is I was teaching my people how to boil an egg because if you learn how to boil an egg, you can understand critical paths, and if you can understand critical paths, you'll hit your deliveries. So that's the type of thing I find myself immersed in each day, delivering projects, helping people be the best they can do. And I really enjoy doing that.

Alison Dean (07:40):

Okay. You spent a number of years holding various positions at Experian. I think it's what ultimately moved you out of the UK and into APAC. So what was that decision making process for you, since that's a very significant move?

Avis Easteal (07:55):

We took that move very lightly. So we were in the UK and there was a period of time where there was just no summer in the UK for about six years. And my husband adores sun, he really needs sun. He's a sun bird. And he came home one day and he said, "We haven't seen summer." Summer was a Wednesday and you were at work. And he said, "Why don't you just put yourself on the mobility list and see where we end up?"

Alison Dean (08:20):

Oh my gosh.

Avis Easteal (08:20):

And I like, "Yeah, sure. That'll never work, but why not?" So I clicked the button. The next week I got a call from someone saying my future boss was in Singapore. Did I want to have a cup of coffee? So I met him for a cup of coffee. And eight weeks later, we moved. And the choice was to go to Australia or Singapore. But for me, it was always Singapore because my grandfather was stationed there after the war and my mum grew up there and my uncle was born there. So I grew up hearing about Singapore. I'd never been there, didn't care. Signed, we moved, we took our 12, 13 year old daughter with us at the time. She was a bit shell shocked by it. Left their oldest daughter just going to uni. And it was a fabulous move.

Avis Easteal (09:03):

And I think that kind of sums up my career. I don't have a plan. I don't look to the future. Something comes up and I go, do I want to do that or do I not want to do that? And that will then be the decision point. And that's how we run with our family. And I'd like that ability to take opportunities or to turn down opportunities. I wouldn't say it was easy. The first six months were pretty grim for my husband and my youngest daughter because they were the ones left at home while I was traveling the region like a mad woman. So I think they struggled, but I adored it. I consider it one of my best career moves. I didn't enjoy the job at all, I have to say, but I adored Asia. So I kept Asia and lost Experian, which was the right answer.

Alison Dean (09:45):

There you go. Yeah. Bye-bye Experian, but I'll stay in Singapore. What's the best time to go to Singapore, to visit Singapore? I'm thinking of myself, especially as a curly-haired person, I'm like, hmm, there's probably a time where I'd look like Diana Ross maybe in Singapore, maybe not. I don't know.

Avis Easteal (10:02):

That's all year.

Alison Dean (10:03):

Oh, all year.

Avis Easteal (10:04):

That's all year. So Singapore's very consistent. We go from 24 to 32, sometimes a bit higher, sorry, Celsius, I don't know what that is in Fahrenheit. I don't do Fahrenheit. And it's very humid all the time. So you can tell newbies because their hair responds to the humidity. I think the best time to come is Chinese New Year. Chinese New Year is that little bit cooler, sometimes we get a breeze, and it's Chinese New Year, which is fabulous. So this year it's towards the end of January. It's usually between January and February. And I think for people from the west, that is the perfect time to travel because the West is cold and horrible and that's when you need to be somewhere like Singapore.

Alison Dean (10:43):

That's awesome.

Avis Easteal (10:44):

But any time of year would be great. We've always got something going on. It's a fabulous city to visit.

Alison Dean (10:48):

It pleases me if I can ever send you a note to say, "I'm going to be in Singapore." That'll be a good note.

Avis Easteal (10:55):

It would be a good note. Yeah, you'd enjoy it. I guarantee you. It's a marvelous place.

Alison Dean (10:59):

Okay. I want to know, given your background, what does digital transformation mean to you? And specifically, I'm curious if that meaning shifts for the beauty and luxury industry at all.

Avis Easteal (11:14):

So I think it's quite funny, people talking about digital transformation because the world's digital, the world has transformed. So how can you not be digital in this current world? So for me, digital transformation at LUXASIA was taking it from an entirely offline business to an online business. So when we started the transformation in 2017, we had brilliant in-store experience, wonderful people, stunning brands, but online hadn't come along. And the transformation meant, from a consumer pacing point of view, 300 plus marketplaces. We had lots of marketplaces. We don't just have Amazon in Asia. So we have lots of contenders there. It meant digital marketing. And for me, digital marketing must be consumer relevant. It mustn't be what you want to send, it must be what the consumer meant. But it also meant, how about we pay our expenses by filling it in online and not putting a form in a tray. And how about we arrange for our purchase orders to go into a system with some sort of sign off, so people can't just send what they want to do, and then it gets paid and where things are. So digital transformation is about getting the tools you need to do what's needed. And it goes very wide for us. And I think it's really fun, because you can take a process and you can look at it and you can digitize it, or you can take a process and you can break it down and make it better and you can digitize it. And I've always thought the making better is a much better way of doing things.

Avis Easteal (12:46):

Because if you just digitize what you've got already, what you get is possibly a faster version of a really bad process. And I think what digitization gives you is the chance to challenge your business and your thinking and say, "Why are we doing this? This makes no sense whatsoever. Why don't we do it a different way?" So for me, that challenge, it's not the digitization, it's the transformation that matters. Digital's just the tools you use to do it. But it's great fun, I'd recommend it because it tends to be fast. It's not like building systems for banks, where you've got huge amount of compliance and you're looking at lending. That can be very slow, particularly in Asia. When you're digitizing things, you can take a more agile approach, you can deliver things as you go along, and you can get extra gains. And I like that.

Avis Easteal (13:35):

I think there's a place for waterfall, there's a place for agile, but digital really helps you do that. And the outcomes are really good. You stop wandering around the organization, wondering if anyone will ever be paid, for example. I had no idea how my first bill to a vendor got paid. I put it in a tray and something eventually happens. So I think it's a fun place to be. If you can think wide enough, it's a great place to be. If you like consistency and control and to keep things as they are, I would say digital is quite a difficult world for you.

Alison Dean (14:07):

Yeah. I think the fun thing too is when you can kind of see the macro-picture, but then you can also really hone in on the little details. Certain people on my team would say that I can break any system, I can find the flaws in any system. And so it's an interesting thing when you can really get the bird's-eye view and then really get the microscopic view of things, to I think really start to just associate in any aspect of your life where things can be improved. Because I noticed that now, now more than ever. I've used enough tools, I've implemented enough projects, so I don't know, then you start noticing that you're doing it in the kitchen or how can I make this better? I don't know.

Avis Easteal (14:48):

It does teach us. It goes back to boiling an egg really, doesn't it?

Alison Dean (14:51):

There you go.

Avis Easteal (14:52):

It teaches us to be creatures of logic, to understand the big picture, and to then work out all the steps in order. And I think that's a real skill and that does take you everywhere.

Alison Dean (15:03):

I totally agree. And I actually was, as you were saying, "Creature of logic." I was like, "That should be a T-shirt. I would wear that t-shirt." Creature of logic, I love that.

Avis Easteal (15:12):

Okay. New business opportunity.

Alison Dean (15:14):

That could be a luxury brand that we should create, Creatures of Logic. That could be big. Think about it.

Avis Easteal (15:22):

I like the name. I like the name.

Alison Dean (15:24):

Right.

Avis Easteal (15:25):

It would also make a great consulting firm as well.

Alison Dean (15:28):

Creatures of Logic.

Avis Easteal (15:30):

It has many, many purposes. Yeah.

Alison Dean (15:32):

I love it. Okay. So when I say what's the most memorable project that you've been part of, does the work that you've done at Luxasia first come to mind, or something else?

Avis Easteal (15:45):

No. The most memorable project for me was a project which I describe as my million pounds worth of training.

Alison Dean (15:52):

Okay.

Avis Easteal (15:53):

So I was working through Experian very early on, and I was a business analyst or business consultant, something like that. And I was working with a group of business people, and this was the point I decided to transition out of IT and into business, because of this million pounds worth of training. So we were trying to build an insurance aggregation site, very early on before insurance aggregation sites were built. And in retrospect, it was too much too soon and we had the wrong partners, but we had a good go at it. So it cost Experian a significant amount of money. And the million pounds is just me making a number for it, but a significant amount of money. And the only time on that project we ever made any money was when I closed it down, and I could charge the customers to do it. So to me, that was brilliant training because I was the IT person.

Avis Easteal (16:44):

But the challenge was, from a business point of view, it just wasn't viable. People weren't ready for it. Technically we could make this work and we did make this work, but we didn't have either the capability or the market wasn't ready. I'm still to this day, not sure whether it was them or us, but I think it was at least 50/50. It really made me understand that for every IT project we do, it's not about the IT project, it's about the outcome to the business.

Alison Dean (17:14):

100%.

Avis Easteal (17:15):

And when you're in IT and you start your career out, you get very tight about getting your deliverables done and all these things, and you've become very nerdy, which I liked. But really, you

have to take yourself out of the what can we do technically and immediately put yourself in the business issue and say, "Why are we doing this?" And that was the project that made me step over the line and into business, because then I realized I could never succeed if I was trying to fulfill business objectives that weren't going to work, so I had to understand those objectives. And that has been a brilliant, brilliant piece of training for my whole career.

Avis Easteal (17:54):

Sometimes you learn your best skills in failure, rather than in success. And this was a big failure for the company. It didn't cause any real hassle to them in the scheme of things, it was a drop in the ocean. But to me it's like a lot of money and we could have done it differently. And that's why I think it's really helped me understand. And that's how I ended up going into business and ended up in Singapore and I've ended up in Luxasia. It's always that why are we doing this? What are we trying to achieve? And yeah, that was my breakthrough really in thinking about how I was going to do things for the future.

Alison Dean (18:29):

I love that. Do you think that that was also your most difficult project, or is there another project that comes to mind as being the most difficult for you?

Avis Easteal (18:37):

Yeah, the most difficult one. Once again, this was Experian. I built a database which was every motor insurance policy in the United Kingdom to fight uninsured driving. And it wasn't difficult because of the tech. It was difficult because it had so many stakeholders. So it had every motor insurer in the UK, it had every police constabulary, and we had I think 52 of them at the time and they all had different systems. It had the Home Office, it had the Police National Computer team, who were determined that insurance worked in a totally different way to how it worked. And so the challenge there was actually getting to the point to make the project start. So we'd won the tender and then nobody could agree what it was, because nobody could agree anything because everybody had a different view. That was my most difficult project. Once again, I learned a lot about stakeholder management, steering committees, holding people to account, but also commercial protection of our organization.

Avis Easteal (19:39):

Because as you go through that, you realize that if you take too much on, you will end up making a loss on this project. So you have to hold lines, you have to be pragmatic and help, but you also have to make sure that you understand what the impacts of decisions are once you actually get to build it. So that was my most difficult one. All projects have moments where you put your heads in your hand and you're like, "Why did I even start this?" And then you always have moments where people are arguing, they're holding their position, and it's not me it's you. But that was the one that was the hardest, just because we had 200 over stakeholders and 300 over different views on how it was going to work or not work. And getting alignment just to agree what it was going to be, was tough.

Avis Easteal (20:24):

It was really worth it though. I can remember one day after we'd got it live, I got phoned up by this brilliant guy from Liverpool Police. And he found me up and he said, "Avis, I've got a problem." I'm like, "Oh, God, what's wrong? Is the system not working?" And he said, "No, I've impounded so

many cars, I've got nowhere to put any." I'm like, "I can't help you with that. We don't have an office in Liverpool. I give you our car park." So yeah, it delivered what it was supposed to do. But our CEO at the time, a guy called John Saunders, he looked at me and he went, "You will never deliver this project. You will never get them aligned." And I'm like, "I will get them aligned." It took me two and a half years.

Alison Dean (21:03):

Wow. When you're working with that money or across that many stakeholders, what's sort of the secret sauce to make it happen?

Avis Easteal (21:11):

Find the person that gets each organization in line. So there was a guy called Fred in the Home Office, who could tell the Police National Computer people, and the police stakeholders, because he'd come through the police network, that he could go back and go, "What did you just say to her? Like you just told her that insurance is on cars, it's not on cars. Stop with yourself. Just stop it. You're not helping." So find the people who can really make a difference, particularly when dealing with the then, Police National Computer people, never offer lunch. Because if you offer lunch, everybody comes in. Your 10-person meeting ends up as a 30-person victim. So find the people who can make the decisions and can override all the people. It took some time. We weren't allowed to access the Police National Computer, and I'd spent six months saying, "But I'm not accessing the Police National Computer. You're accessing ours. I'm not trying to see people's criminal records."

Avis Easteal (22:09):

And finally we got up to the highest dude in security, the police. And we went in and he said, "Right, what's the problem? You tell me." And I said, "Well, you're trying to access our system and we're trying to let you." And he said, "Well, where's that a problem?" And I went, "It isn't." And he went, "Why is it a problem?" And the other guys explained their view and he said, "That's not a problem. Let them in." And we got kicked out. Very funny. So yeah, find the people who can really make a decision because there's too many of them otherwise.

Alison Dean (22:37):

I fully agree with everything that you just said. Continuing our tradition of past guest questions. This week's breakthrough club question is from Felicia Alexander, she's the Chief Revenue Officer at Title Boxing Club and the co-founder of BoxUnion. She asks you, "I feel like much of life is learning what you do not want to do. So what has been your least favorite job and why?" Which you may have touched on a little bit already, but we can go deeper.

Avis Easteal (23:15):

Yes, sure. So my least favorite job was when I moved to Experian, Singapore. It's my most favorite job as well because it took me to Singapore, so it's a gray thing. So why is it my least favorite? I moved from digital back to banking. So digital is fast moving. At Christmas you make decisions based in a couple of hours, but your planning cycle is usually a week. So it's fast moving and it's easy and you can get results and you can respond based on those results and you can AB test. So it's a really interesting place to be. Keeps you on your toes, keep you working. And I came into Asia

and we started working with Asian banks. And banking is slow in the west, don't get me wrong, compared to digital. But banking is hyper fast compared to Asia. So projects that will take three months, would take-

Avis Easteal (24:03):

... compared to Asia. So projects that would take three months would take 18 months and you'd have a cast of 1000s. Yeah, I was in with one Singaporean bank and there were 20 people in the room and not one of them could make a decision or find someone who I could talk to who could make a decision. And this was basic things. This was just lending. It wasn't hard. So I really didn't enjoy the pace. And it was also quite a political organization. And this was the time where I really lost my values as well, because I was trying to be a delivery team in a environment where delivery was against sales. What I moved to was a position of defense. "Oh. You're not doing this," but actually I needed to move into a position of, "No, I won't be against you." But it was really hard when you kept taking an onslaught from everyone who was senior in the organization. " [inaudible 00:24:55]."

Avis Easteal (24:52):

And actually the problem was we [inaudible 00:24:58]. We couldn't understand how to price properly. We couldn't understand how long things would take. We weren't very good at holding scope. And we'd agree one thing and then we'd contract something else. So we just missed each other. And that caused problems in pricing, in delivery, in customer relationship. And I just couldn't navigate my way through that politics, because I'm not very good at politics. I mean, I'm just not good at it. I don't understand it. I don't know why you would bothered with it. And so I realized how naive I was at the end of that. And two years in, it was like, "No, I'm losing everything about myself. I'm losing the values I've been brought up with, and [inaudible 00:25:39] going away."

Avis Easteal (25:40):

I snuck into the dark side and I throw myself into this and become part of the problem. And I think I was already a bit part of the problem at that point. Or I step out of it. And after 20 years that stepping out was brilliant. And my husband often says to me, "Do you ever regret it?" And I'm like, "No, I don't ever regret it. I learned a lot," but that relief of leaving was worth it. If I was in another organization like that, I'd never stay two years. I'd give it six months and if I couldn't make significant change, I'd be out of there. But I ask this question in interview now, I really interview my future boss and understand what is it about and if there's any red flags, they said, "Oh, the previous delivery director left under this," and I should have heard that and gone, "But why?" And now I'm like, "What happened to the previous person? Where did they go? What was that like? What was great about? What would they say about this role in this organization?"

Avis Easteal (26:37):

So yeah, it was good training. It was a hideous experience. I'm really glad we did it because it got us to Asia, but no, really dumb career move. Really dumb career move. But there you go. The dumb things sometimes turn out in the best things, don't they?

Alison Dean (26:51):

Yeah, they do. Right. I mean, listen to everything that you just said. Perfect. What projects are especially interesting to you as you continue in your career?

Avis Easteal (27:02):

I love the ones where you join things together. I don't find delivering one thing that sits on its own particularly exciting because you can always deliver one thing that sits on its own. That's easy. I like the things where the joins happen, because the joins are where the complexity is. And I like doing that with teams of people who want to learn how to do this, with curious people. If you give me something like that, I really enjoy that type of project. If it's a project that's going to be just like, "Do this. It's going to go from here to there. It's going to be modestly smooth," I'm like, "Give it to someone else."

Avis Easteal (27:38):

If no one else can do it, I'll deliver it. It won't be a problem. I won't enjoy it, but I'll do it. But you want to give me to something to enjoy it? Let me see something big. Let me see something where I can take the concept a bit like you were saying earlier. You can find a issue in any system. I feel like I can sit down, I can break it, I can break anything.

Alison Dean (27:55):

I love that.

Avis Easteal (27:56):

But I can also follow anything through. So they're the types of projects that I like. I really like working on projects with people. I'm not a individual contributor. I'm a team person. I'm someone who always works with strengths of others. I know I'm not the best accountant. I'm not the best retail ops person. I know I'm not the best coder. I understand enough about their jobs to bring in them so they can bring the best. And I think that's what I like. I like being able to look at things like, "How can I make this better? How can I make it stronger?" Then I'm in. Straight away I'm like, "Okay. What are we trying to achieve here? Why are we trying to achieve it?"

Alison Dean (28:36):

That's awesome. All right. So speaking of breaking things, it's time to break on through to our quickfire round. So I'm going to ask you a set of questions. Just answer first thing that comes to mind. Hopefully, it's not too challenging. Here we go. Favorite makeup brand.

Avis Easteal (28:58):

Oh, it's not one of ours. It Chanel because my auntie used to wear it as a kid and it smells of childhood and happiness.

Alison Dean (29:06):

I love that. All right. What's your favorite luxury brand if it's not Chanel?

Avis Easteal (29:11):

I don't really do luxury.

Alison Dean (29:13):

Nothing. It's the one that we're going to create, the brand that we just created at the top of the show.

Avis Easteal (29:18):
Creatures of Logic.

Alison Dean (29:19):
Yeah. There you go.

Avis Easteal (29:19):
Creatures of Logic. That's my favorite one. It's brilliant brand. [inaudible 00:29:22] out what they do.

Alison Dean (29:24):
Okay. What's the best tip for humid climates?

Avis Easteal (29:30):
Just don't care that you're sweating.

Alison Dean (29:32):
There you go.

Avis Easteal (29:33):
You're going to be sweaty. Just don't care about it.

Alison Dean (29:35):
And you can look at it as it's a very healthy thing to sweat. So it's good for all of us, just detoxing all the time in a humid environment.

Avis Easteal (29:42):
Perfect. It's perfect. Just learn to love it.

Alison Dean (29:45):
Yeah. Okay. Your favorite food when you're in the UK?

Avis Easteal (29:49):
Oh. Indian food.

Alison Dean (29:51):
I agree.

Avis Easteal (29:52):

I love spicy food, preferably Burmese because I've got Burmese relatives and that also tastes of childhood.

Alison Dean (29:58):

Okay. Favorite food in APAC?

Avis Easteal (30:01):

So many. The thing I really miss when I go back to the West is chicken rice. I always miss chicken rice, which is a brilliant Asian dish. It's very plain, but the rice tastes of coconut and the chicken is succulent and it comes with a tiny piece of cucumber or maybe a piece of broccoli if you're lucky. And it's delicious with [inaudible 00:30:23] sauce.

Alison Dean (30:23):

I feel like that just made me hungry. Okay. Favorite place to travel?

Avis Easteal (30:27):

Anywhere. I love traveling anywhere. The place I'm going to next is Vietnam. The place I want to go is Japan. I haven't done South America. Anywhere I haven't been, anywhere with history, take me there, places I haven't been yet.

Alison Dean (30:41):

That's a good answer. Twitter, Instagram or TikTok?

Avis Easteal (30:45):

Oh, I do all of them for my business. Personally, I talk on Facebook to my friends because that's where they are. Also WhatsApp.

Alison Dean (30:54):

Okay. Favorite book?

Avis Easteal (30:56):

The World According to Garp by John Irving. I love early John Irving. Great American author, writes well. I read it regularly. I probably read it once a year. I really adore it.

Alison Dean (31:06):

Wow.

Avis Easteal (31:06):

And my husband always looks at me and he goes, "I know where you are in that book by how you look."

Alison Dean (31:12):

That's so funny. That's a sign of true romance right there. You can see it all.

Avis Easteal (31:16):

Yeah. He knows.

Alison Dean (31:17):

I like it. Last TV show that you binged.

Avis Easteal (31:20):

Oh. Well, it's not my binge. It's my husband's. So we're watching Poirot from the 1980s at the moment. He's a Belgian detective. It's very state. My husband's had a chest infection and so we can't cope with anything exciting at the moment. So we are now every night binge watching Agatha Christine nowadays.

Alison Dean (31:41):

It's great.

Avis Easteal (31:43):

The one I want to continue binging is Billions because we're halfway through, but he's not well enough yet. So we're doing Poirot.

Alison Dean (31:49):

That's good. Favorite movie?

Avis Easteal (31:51):

Oh, there's just so many. How can you choose a favorite?

Alison Dean (31:55):

You can choose two, three.

Avis Easteal (31:57):

You know what? The one that always brings a smile to my face is Strictly Ballroom, which is a mad Australian dancing movie, which is about life and it's about confronting your fears. So you must live your life every day. I also love Gone With the Wind. I love the book. And I saw that the first time in the cinema and it is just epic.

Alison Dean (32:17):

Yeah. Love that. Favorite holiday?

Avis Easteal (32:20):

With my family and with the extended family. So the last one we did was Sri Lanka, but the next one we do is Vietnam with my daughters and my husbands. And I shall look forward to the one after that with the family. It's always the next one for me. It's never going backwards. It's always looking at the next opportunity.

Alison Dean (32:37):

Okay. So in terms of Christmas, New Year's, Easter, those kinds of holidays, what's your favorite?

Avis Easteal (32:46):

Well, I love Christmas because I'm in retail and it's the most brilliant time of year, because we hockey stick up for revenue. I love Chinese New Year. I love Chinese New Year. And I love Deepavali as well. I think they're great festivals. So to me, they've taken over from the traditional West festivals.

Alison Dean (33:03):

That's great. And then because you're on a podcast, we need to know what your favorite podcast is.

Avis Easteal (33:07):

Whatever I'm listening to now. So I usually do something like this and then I just go and listen to all the Breakthrough Podcasts. So I tend to kind of collect things. I'm very much a collector. I collect books. I collect pictures. Collections to me are very important. So my next collection will be the Breakthrough Podcast. The one I've done before was the one I read through that I also love, and it's not a podcast, but it kind of is, Desert Island Discs on the BBC, because it's the ultimate original podcast and you hear so much about people. One about a criminologist the other day who found Stephen Lawrence's murderers and the way she did it was stunning. So podcasts are things that I consume in bulk. I find something and I listen to them, the same way I find a book and then I read them by that author. It's just a passion. So whatever collection I have collected. So my current favorite will be this one, because you are my next collection.

Alison Dean (34:07):

Well, I'm excited for feedback in that case. How is technology playing a role in the evolution of beauty and luxury brands? Where do you see things headed at this point, especially I think given the saturation of the market? There's so many brands. There's so many things emerging constantly. So what's next?

Avis Easteal (34:34):

So there's always that old-fashioned thing of finding the right product for the right person so it delights them. And that's the constant, whether there's technology or not. In Asia, we do a lot of livestreaming and I know it doesn't quite work the same way in the West. So livestreaming comes out of China originally. And then our marketplace is our equivalent of Amazon, [inaudible 00:34:56] Shopping, Tokopedia, Zalora, all those guys. They have got livestreaming channels. And you can livestream with influencers. Your trainers can do it. Your people could do it. Your customers could do it. And I really like that democracy in beauty, the fact that the customers become the voice of your channel, the fact they're influencers, and I mean the influencers who really give you their real opinion, not the ones who you just paid to say great things. Because I think that influencer culture where they tell everyone something's great but don't say they were paid for it, that's not how beauty should be or anything should be.

Avis Easteal (35:33):

So I love this idea. The video and involvement and being able to ask questions and get the information you want as part of that livestream is becoming part of every day. I love the fact that our staff are embracing it. Yeah. We built a social studio with makeup and with a lifestyle area, with a green screen, so we can run them ourselves. And I think that's a really interesting beauty trend. And you can do that as a very niche beauty trend, as a cult beauty-

Avis Easteal (36:03):

You can do that as a very niche beauty trend, as a cult beauty one, you can bring it to luxury, and the way you do it is different even though the tech is the same. So finding that right branding and that right message for your consumer just got that little bit harder because now you have to do it in life and you have to answer questions as you go along. But I also think that's in consumer's interest. So I really like that new way of doing things. But really beauty's beauty, it's about selling emotion and connection. I told you earlier, my favorite fragrance is the smell of childhood. Nobody else in the world probably thinks of Chanel number five in that way, or maybe they do, maybe their aunts smell of Chanel too. But that's not going to be the Chanel Christmas ever, is it?

Alison Dean (36:48):

No. But I would agree. It's like those little moments that you can reflect back on and it's what just brings you back. It just brings you back. I remember from my childhood hypnotic poison, I just remember smelling it and I just have fond memories of hypnotic poison. What can I say?

Avis Easteal (37:04):

Yeah. I used to have this fragrance when I was very young called Pretty Peach, and I think it was disgusting. Looking back on it. But I adored it at the time. Our first love, [inaudible 00:37:18].

Alison Dean (37:18):

It's funny to reflect back on the things when we were younger. How has your leadership style evolved through the years?

Avis Easteal (37:26):

So learning to be a leader is kind of tough because you don't know where you're going to be. But whatever worked out is where I stand as a person is I tend to try and be Switzerland. I try not to take sides. In fact, my children call me the voice of reason because they all argue, and I'm not really one for arguing. So as I'm like that inside, my leadership style tends to be how do I pull people together? How can I be neutral, but how can I bring people to alignment? And that's worked well. That also helps me, of course, look at other people and see how they need to be treated because how you work with people as individuals is very different to how you work with people with teams. And I know I need different things from my bosses in the same way my people or my extended teams need different things for me.

Avis Easteal (38:17):

So my leadership style started as very one trick pony. I'll try and be neutral. And now it's like, how do I bring you in? How do I stop you dominating? How do I see that you're scared of failure and help you through that? And that's where I've got some of my best feedback has been a manager, one of my LinkedIn recommendations, one of the brilliant women I used to work with, she just said

she felt so good in her role that she could do anything because I mean, she was just amazing who wouldn't use her skills. And when people go, you really made me feel like I could achieve it. I'm like, well, yeah, that was really worth going to work today. That was stunning. But you don't do that in one meeting. You kind of have to keep playing at this. So yeah, it evolves, and I'm sure it will evolve again. Sometimes I have to make myself less helpful and more demanding if the team need it. That's also okay.

Alison Dean (39:10):

What do you want your direct reports to remember you for?

Avis Eastal (39:14):

So I always think of my direct reports has always been mine. So I run the cheetah mail business and I still celebrate their success. So I want them to remember that I had their back and I still have their back, and I will still help them in their career. And I keep in contact with a lot of them. I'll give them their recommendations, I'll share their stuff if they need things. So I hope they will remember me as someone who cared for them and helped them in their career. And if I've achieved that, then yeah, that was a good career.

Alison Dean (39:45):

That's great. Outside of beauty luxury, are there any other future innovations that you're excited about? I mean, it could still be other stuff in I guess beauty and luxury too, but any other things on the innovation front?

Avis Eastal (39:58):

So I'm intrigued by the metaverse. I'm intrigued and kind of horrified by it spontaneously. I'm very intrigued what's going to happen to our social media platforms. And I'm even more intrigued and delighted by how the younger generations are starting to interact with them. So I see a lot of detoxing from social media. I see a lot of, I'm going to put my phone down, I'm not going to be a slave to it. And I like this revolution against it. It's about taking back control and not listening to the noise. So to me, I think the next tech innovation is about how we as humans stop engaging with it and stop listening to it. And that does worry me about the ones who are left there because they will be left in a real interesting, maybe not so great place. But I'm really interested to see how that evolves over time.

Avis Eastal (40:51):

Because in some ways, in some social media, we've lost humanity. There's a lot of it where we have great humanity and connection and care for people. But there's also this bit across the top of it where I'm just like, I don't think this is a nice place. And I don't think it adds to the world. It only detracts. And when you've got governments or individuals trying to influence people in ways that really are not best for society, that worries me. So my next big innovation I'm hoping is the fightback against this nonsense. Because I don't like it. And I think anyone of any intellect should really be thinking about this.

Alison Dean (41:31):

Back to the logic.

Avis Easteal (41:33):

Yeah, I mean, I'm not hopeful it's going to be a quick change. And if someone could maybe do that and solve the climate crisis along the way, that would be really good. Because we need to stop talking about this nonsense and start talking about the fact that there is seriously no planet B. And my daughter used that the other day. Come on guys, this nonsense. Just stop yourselves. Let's work at the things that matter.

Alison Dean (41:56):

I'm in agreement with you, Avis. We talked about an early breakthrough. Now I'm wondering if there's a recent breakthrough that you've had.

Avis Easteal (42:04):

Yeah, I think recently I've kind of decided, I was describing myself as a digital marketer for a while there. And I am. Don't get me wrong, I do digital marketing. I teach digital marketing. And then I was talking to my neighbor. It's amazing. We were just talking over dinner and she was talking about LinkedIn algorithms and she's in recruitment, and I'm always interested in how tech works. I'm always liking things, seeing what happens on Facebook. And I was just thinking about, okay, what do I do with the LinkedIn algorithm then? If that's how it works, is it really working for me? So I had to sort of sit back and think, what am I? What am I really? Am I a digital marketer? If I want to get another job, is that going to be in digital marketing? And then I had an epiphany and went, actually no, I'm a transformation person who could do tech, who could do data, and who could do marketing.

Avis Easteal (42:53):

And so sometimes the biggest breakthroughs are how you think about yourself because you think about everyone else who considers how they talk about themselves. You just talk, don't you? So yeah, my biggest breakthrough recently is going actually, yeah, I'm describing a bit of what I do, and actually what I do is transformation. It doesn't matter if I'm transforming tech or people or businesses or data or marketing or something else. I transformed things. And I was like, oh yeah, I feel kind of comfortable with that. That's what I do. Strange, isn't it? You do this for everyone else and then you forget about yourself.

Alison Dean (43:27):

Yeah. And you just did it for yourself. You just had a transformation of how you thought about things. That's amazing. Is there anything I didn't ask you that I should have?

Avis Easteal (43:36):

That's a really interesting question. So I think the thing I always like sharing with people is about how to decide whether you are happy at work. And I think deciding whether you are happy at work is a very transient thing. Because, I may turn up this morning and I'm happy to talk to you and I'm having a good morning, and I may go into work and today might suck. Yeah, life goes like that sometimes. But I don't mean, am I happy right this moment? I mean, genuinely, are you happy doing what you're doing? And does it really work for you? And that is not the same as are you good at what you are doing? Does it give you what you need to feel like that it's worth doing? And I don't think we often ask ourselves that. We ask ourselves, can I do it? Should I do it? How do I

do it? But we don't ask, does it bring me happiness? So I think the thing that we should ask people at work is this the thing that really brings you joy?

Avis Easteal (44:35):

And for some people, just bringing joy is going in, doing my job, earning a wage and going home to their family and having that life. We all have different versions of joy and happiness, but if you can ask yourself that question and genuinely say, yes, good job, you're in the right place. And if you even think about it and start rationalizing why you are happy, you're probably not happy at work and you need to think about why and what you need to change. Do you need to change some of that job or in doing all of that job? You're not bound to anyone. As an individual, your loyalty is because you choose to give it. You can also choose not to give it. So the question I think we should ask ourselves is, are you happy there? And if you're not, what are you're going to do about it?

Alison Dean (45:19):

This also sounds like another opportunity for Marie Condo. She can now assess joy in the workplace. That's the other-

Avis Easteal (45:27):

That's true. That's true. Yeah. I kind of glance over it that and I'm like, no, I'm all right. I'm fine. I don't mean to [inaudible 00:45:34]. If you need it, don't do it. Give your job joy. Me, I'm like, off you go. Nothing to do with me.

Alison Dean (45:40):

I think you gave us a lot of bumper sticker moments, so that's awesome. I thank you so much, Avis, for being on the Breakthrough. I hope you had fun.

Avis Easteal (45:49):

I did.

Alison Dean (45:50):

Good. Thank you for tuning into this episode of The Breakthrough. Be sure to subscribe on your favorite platform and follow us on Twitter and Instagram at Breakthrough Pod. I'm your host, Alison Dean. Until next time.