



# Amanda Brock: Dedicated to Drive Businesses with Open Source Technology



Amanda Brock | CEO | OpenUK

Amanda Brock is the CEO of OpenUK, a not-for-profit company which advocates for Open Technology being open-source software, opensource hardware and open data, “Open” in and for business communities across the UK.

Amanda was introduced to open source when she joined the company Canonical, which is based in London and one of the world’s biggest and best-known open-source companies. She realized that she belonged in the opensource community of users and businesspeople, and really engaged in the open source way of working and running organizations.

In an interview with Insights Success, Amanda Brock shared her view on impactful leadership, merits of open technology, and why OpenUK is the global leader in it.

Below are highlights of the interview:

### **What makes your organization a preferred choice of your clients over the competition?**

There is no competition to OpenUK as we are a unique organization. We are the UK industry body for Open Technology, and an advocacy organization. Open Technology is open-source software, open hardware and open data, and the first organization I am aware of looking across all three areas.

We work on three pillars: Community, Legal and Policy and Learning. This approach has the goal of developing UK leadership in these areas and we bring together the enormous community of people working in and around Open Technology in the UK. There are hundreds of thousands of these people, some working for UK companies and many more working with international organizations, that make up that Community. We kicked off 2021 with our very own Honours List, celebrating 100 of the UK's leaders <https://openuk.uk/aboutus/2021honourslist>. The UK is really a center of excellence in this space, and we should blow our own trumpet a bit more.

### **What is your idea of impactful leadership? What style of leadership do you personally prefer and have implemented at your company?**

Leadership is a big deal to me. To my mind, if you are brave enough to step forward, you take on a big obligation. If you are going to be a successful leader, people have to want to follow you.

That for me requires a mix of integrity and fun. OpenUK is largely a volunteer-driven organization, including the Leadership team. If things are tense or unnecessarily difficult, they are not going to keep on volunteering, so creating an environment that makes people want to participate is crucial. They have to feel that they are making a difference, and that their time is being well-spent.

I very much believe in trying to be authentic, to try to share the journey with others, and to ensure that the people who have done all the work get credit for their results. We offer our volunteers various training and personal development opportunities as part of the reward for their time and I think that giving back to people and supporting their journeys too is crucial.

### **Taking into consideration, the current pandemic, and its impact on global economies, how are you driving Open UK to sustain operations accordingly?**

We have existed as a company and not for profit organization since 2018. Last year, when I became CEO, was our first real year of generating revenue. The pandemic meant that we had to keep adapting and pivoting our activities to evolve in the new world we are all living in for the time being.

If you want people to engage online, you have to be creative and provide an experience. People are now tired of video calls alone and really having "zoom fatigue". At the same time, the barrier to engaging is much lower as you don't have the expense of travel and time away from home. We are increasingly looking at hybrid formats for events, so we can take the best of online meeting and more diverse audiences.

### **According to you, what essential traits should an entrepreneur possess to thrive in the present-day cutthroat business ecosystem?**

The world of open source is different. Rather than being about taking the entire pie and keeping it to yourself, opensource businesses aim to grow the pie so substantially that everyone benefits. By making technology easier and more ubiquitous to adopt globally, we all benefit, and each get our piece of pie.

### **What were the challenges you came across in your career as a business leader?**

I'm a 51-year-old Scottish woman who spent her first decade in a council estate (public housing) then had an assisted place (scholarship) to attend a private school. Unsurprisingly, I haven't always felt that I belonged in the environments I have worked in.

I experienced a level of sexism, much of which was institutional or unconscious. I'm pretty determined and I can be quite direct. While those character traits can be admired in men, those same qualities can be frowned upon in women. As we run up to International Women's Day on 8th March 2021, this inequality is something to consider.

### **What would be your advice to the upcoming entrepreneurs aspiring to enter the domain?**

Find the right people to give you advice. Try to understand the market you are going into, the competition and how to generate your revenue. However, don't feel that you have to do things the same way that everyone else has. If you have a new and disruptive way to operate in a specific market, try to understand why it has not been done already – you may find hidden barriers, or you may find that you can innovate in a staid sector. I think having the right advisors is critical – in 2021, it's a norm for businesses to seek an Advisory Board and hugely helpful.

### **What have you envisioned for your company's future, in terms of expansion, introduction of new services, and talent acquisition?**

We are being asked to support people in other countries who would like to replicate what we are doing with OpenUK in their countries. We will work with people in a number of countries including Kenya and Botswana as they start this journey later in the year.

Our focus is on building the organization in the UK and supporting our international reputation as the UK's technology leaders in Open. I hope we will increase our participation in international collaboration through 2021.

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