

3rd Edition

When Sparks Speak

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Claire Derelle

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Through our first three editions and countless exchanges with experts worldwide, one truth has become clear: AI is accessible to everyone. The present edition, once again, brings us a remarkable example of this. Our guest, Claire Derelle, did not begin her journey in tech. Her background lies in sales, yet, by nurturing her natural curiosity and maintaining an openness to new tools and ideas, she has not only entered the tech landscape but is actively shaping it.

What stands out about Claire Derelle is her commitment to using AI as a tool to enhance her work, not to replace the human touch. Her dedication to continuous learning, to exploring any subject that sparks her interest, serves as a powerful reminder that expertise is not confined to a single discipline. In a world where change is the only constant, the willingness to ask questions, to experiment, and to grow is what sets us apart.

Our shared vision at “When Sparks Speak” has always been to empower individuals to discover their unique path and voice and, most importantly, to bring that vision into the world. As you read, I encourage you to reflect on your own journey. What new tools or ideas might you explore? How can you, like our guest, turn curiosity into capability? The future belongs to those who dare to learn, adapt, and redefine what is possible. Join us on that adventure!

Elise



As we bring you the third edition of When Sparks Speak, I'm struck by the ways individual journeys illuminate the bigger story of women in technology. Each issue, we set out to highlight not only achievements, but also the resilience, creativity, and quiet courage that so often accompany them.

This edition features Claire Derelle, whose path into AI reminds us that the future doesn't wait – it demands our curiosity and courage. Claire's story resonates because it's not about having all the technical answers at the outset. It's about asking the right questions, learning voraciously, and finding your voice in spaces that may not always feel welcoming. Her perspective challenges the myth that you need to be “technical enough” to belong in tech. Instead, she shows that experimentation, mentorship, and reframing how we share our ideas can be just as transformative as lines of code.

At When Sparks Speak, our goal is to shine a light on these sparks – the moments when possibility meets persistence. We believe these stories matter because they remind us that technology is not only built with circuits and algorithms, but also with imagination, empathy, and determination.

I invite you to read this issue with openness to both the personal and professional lessons within. Whether you're navigating your own entry into AI, mentoring the next generation, or simply reflecting on your role in shaping technology, may Claire's journey inspire you to keep stretching the edges of what's possible.

Michael





When Sparks Speak: How did you get into the AI space originally?

Claire Derelle: I had twin babies in 2023. When I emerged from my mat leave, the AI revolution had already started. I felt massive FOMO and voraciously consumed information about AI to catch-up and eventually got hooked!

WSS: Did you face any obstacles getting into the space?

CD: The constant pace of breaking news in this field is hard to follow. I also felt I did not have the technical expertise to have meaningful conversations with the IT teams I work with.

Big Ideas

“I’m someone who’s drawn to ideas and people who stretch the edges of what’s possible.”



Getting Guidance

WSS: Where did you find help?

CD: I got support from my firm to join a class about AI fundamentals at Stanford University and it helped me understand the basics.



WSS: What is a mentorship moment that changed your career, and how did it shape your approach to leadership or problem solving?

CD: I was discussing with my mentor my discomfort in speaking up in meetings, explaining that I feared being perceived as self-promoting, loud and unauthentic. She helped me reframe my approach by focusing on WHY I should share my ideas, not HOW it will be perceived. Essentially it's to build trust with my audience; if people don't know what I think, they can't build trust or engage with me meaningfully.

WSS: What is the most valuable lesson you have learned from mentoring others, and how has it impacted your work?

CD: That it is not solving the problem that matters, it's what we learn along the way. In personal development, there is no destination. There is as much learning for me as a mentor as there is for the mentee!

WSS: What book, movie or podcast has significantly shaped your thinking?

CD: On AI, I listen to the AI Breakdown. On leadership, I listen to Diary of a CEO and The Entrepreneurs by Monocle.

“I am looking for elegant solutions to complex problems.”

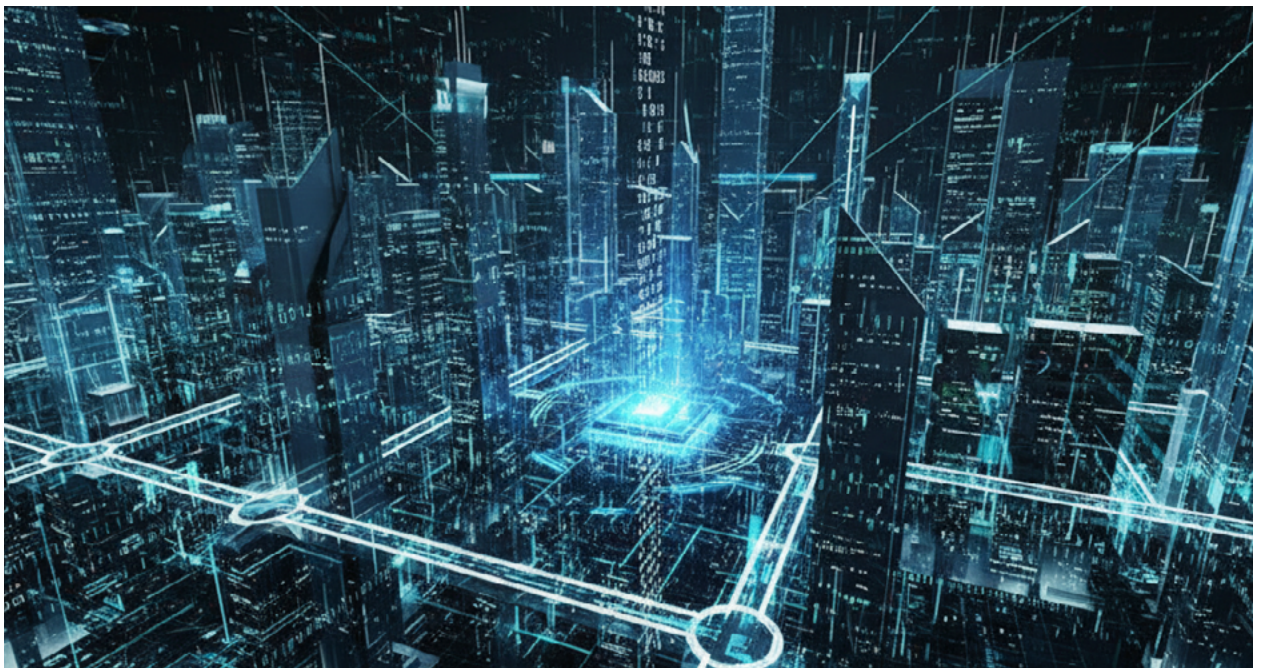
Thinking About Artificial Intelligence

WSS: What is a skill outside of tech that made you a better technical expert?

CD: I think there are many parallels between artistic creation and technological innovation. Both of my areas of interest feed each other in unexpected ways. My artistic practice taught me to embrace experimentation, apply critical thinking, and approach technology with the mindset that the work is never truly finished but always evolving.

WSS: Was there ever a time you felt like giving up? How did you push through? What kept you going?

CD: Moving to a new country, it was daunting to start building a network from scratch. I made a list of people to reach out to, one step at a time. At the end of the connection, I would ask if they could connect me with one other person in their network. The impact was exponential.





WSS: Let's talk more about Tech and AI on a general scale. If you had to describe AI with one metaphor, what would it be and why?

CD: When you light a candle in a dark room, it creates a circle of darkness. As the flame grows, so does the edge of darkness. The more I learn about AI, the more I realize how much there is yet to discover.

WSS: What do you consider the most significant ethical challenge AI faces right now, and how should we address it?

CD: I am concerned about the sycophantic quality of most LLMs, they always agree with you. You should always ask your chatbot to offer a different perspective or critique on your ideas.



WSS: In your opinion what is a currently underappreciated AI innovation or trend that should be getting more attention?

CD: I think one underappreciated trend is how AI is becoming an emotional support system. Beyond productivity or automation, people are turning to AI for connection and self-discovery, using it for things like companionship, neurodivergent translation, or creative healing. This very human need is reshaping AI's role in society, and I believe it deserves more attention.

Thinking Outside the Box

WSS: What is the biggest myth about AI currently that you wish to debunk?

CD: That you need to purchase a product or need “the best” LLM to achieve results. Big impact can be achieved from any open-source platform. Another myth is that you need extensive training to use AI. The beauty of this technology is that you can interact with it in natural language. If you can speak, you can prompt. Just try it, and you’ll learn as you go!



WSS: Could you share an experience where you had to make an unconventional decision, that went against popular opinion or current trends, on an AI project? How did you navigate that situation?

When I first introduced AI co-pilot tools to my team, I noticed an unusual gap: the utilization data showed most people were using it daily, but in meetings only a handful were willing to talk about their experience.

Many worried it might make them seem unprofessional or lazy. Instead of pushing harder, I took an unconventional approach: I shared usage stats transparently, celebrated top users, and openly demonstrated my own use cases.

Over time, this normalized the conversation, and more people felt comfortable speaking up. It's important for leaders to show that they encourage the use of AI and provide clear guidelines on what is permissible at work and what is not.



As we close this edition of When Sparks Speak, we want to thank you for joining us in celebrating the voices, journeys, and sparks that continue to shape the future of technology.

This issue highlights not just the breakthroughs happening in AI and beyond, but also the human stories behind them – stories of resilience, creativity, mentorship, and courage. Claire Derelle’s journey reminds us that innovation often begins with curiosity, and that every step – even the uncertain ones – carries value.

Our hope is that you leave these pages not only informed, but inspired to take part in conversations that matter: about inclusion, about ethics, and about the role each of us plays in making technology more human.

The sparks are everywhere. Sometimes they begin with a question, other times with a connection, or a new way of looking at a challenge. When they speak, we listen – and we invite you to keep listening, questioning, and contributing to this growing community.

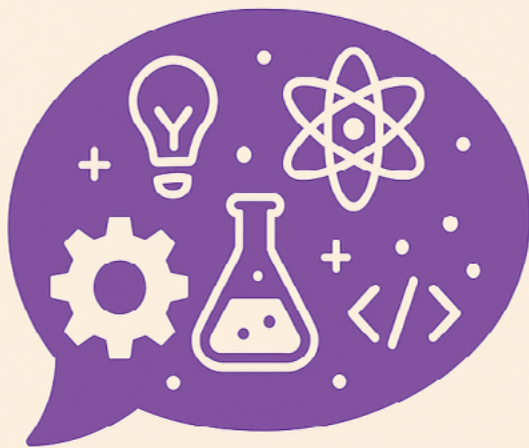
Thank you for being part of When Sparks Speak. We look forward to continuing the journey with you in our next issue.

– The Editors

Send us Sparks!

We’re always looking for stories that shine. If you know a woman in tech whose journey deserves to be featured in When Sparks Speak — whether she’s breaking barriers, mentoring others, or sparking change in unexpected ways — we’d love to hear from you. Send your nominations to whensparks-speak@proton.me and help us spotlight the voices that inspire.

THANKS



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