

Will You Be My Mentor? With Niamh Donoghue of Soundboard

SPEAKERS

Niamh Donoghue, Emily Merrell

Emily Merrell

Welcome to the six degree podcast, the podcast where we grill our guests about the things that make them tick and find out how human connection plays a role in their life. I'm your host, Emily Merrell. Hello, and welcome back to the sixth degree with Emily Merrell, the podcast where we grill our guests about the things that make them tick, and find out how human connection plays a role in their life. I'm your host, Emily. And today I'm so excited to have my friend all the way from Ireland Niamh Donoghue, CEO and founder of soundboard here with us today. Niamh, thank you so much for joining us.

Niamh Donoghue

Thanks. It's so good to be here. Thanks for inviting me along.

Emily Merrell

I am so happy to have you here. And I love that this podcast is now spanning internationally. So thanks for helping us with that. Before we dive into the fun stuff, let's talk about your name. Let's talk about the spelling of your name. I'm so lucky because I met you and I was introduced to you. And someone was like that's me. So I put you in my phone as an E v. But phonetically, or when you see your name written it is not spelled and e v. So can we talk about this for a sec?

Niamh Donoghue

Yeah, absolutely. It's always good to get that out in the open in the upfront and definitely had situations with past clients where we only ever emailed and about like two years into the relationship. They're like, wait, I've been saying your name wrong the whole time. So, yeah, so that's like 9am Yeah, I get called Nyan my like Nia Maha meme. I mean, you know, I used to when I was living in San Francisco, I would I wouldn't even bother saying is this Uber naive? I would just say this for name because it was mine. But yeah, so it's, it's an Irish name. And it actually means St. And when you put in Ireland, there's no the K or Z in the alphabet. So m h in combination, and it's pronounced v, so...

Emily Merrell

That's crazy. So when you grow up in Ireland, you don't learn I didn't even realize this, like the A to Z alphabet that we learned in the States.

Niamh Donoghue

Well, so we do because our first language that we're taught is English. So we actually do learn the English language. But we have we don't learn the alphabet and Irish but we actually have to do Irish from from junior infants from like five years old. And it's compulsory to have that is a subject right up

until you like leave school so I can speak fluent Irish Do not ask me to speak anything. I'm pretty rusty. I wish I wish that I could have I could have stayed fluent. But I mean, you just never get practicing it.

Emily Merrell

But who speaks I Irish?

I know. A lot like a lot of people speak it like my grandparents like their first both of like both sides of the family like the gret. My grandparents, their first language would have been Irish. So yeah, they would. A lot of people in Ireland like it's our native language. So people are very proud of their culture. And they like to keep it, keep it keep it alive. And there are a lot of areas that still speak it and like our signs are in Irish. So it's definitely, definitely a big part of our heritage that a lot of people are very proud of.

Emily Merrell

That's crazy. I hadn't I had no idea I was naive on my note. So that means so naive. I'm not doubting everything I think about I've never really thought of Irish as being its own language. I just thought it had an accent or that or whatnot. But I do so quick history thing. So in Spain, I know the the deletions or the people from the DCI speak. I forgot what it's called. Gosh, the Catalan No, no, that's the East East Side. from Galicia, which is closer to Ireland and I think came over from Ireland

Niamh Donoghue

or like oh, yeah, the Spanish Armada. God, I'm probably not the best painter. I wish I wish I was really good at Irish or at history. But yeah, it's a Gaelic language, which is, and there's French comes from I don't know why I don't know about Spain, but they're the French language and Scottish. There's Welsh and Irish obviously. And then there's another Gallic language. I can't quite remember what it is or which country it is, but, and they all come from the same remnants but then when Ireland got invaded by the British, we were forced to speak English and we were not there were there was the you know, they abolished Catholic religion. They tried they had there was like plantations of Protestant families like you know, put To the homes of Irish families where they were kicked out. So it was pretty, pretty aggressive time. Yeah. Which and you know, like, yeah, so anyway, there's there's lots of whole other whole other podcast,

Emily Merrell

This podcast is gonna be the history of Ireland. Yeah,

Niamh Donoghue

I know we need to rename it. I know what I was going to go on a whole spiel. And I was like, No, cuz you know what I'm gonna say something wrong and you've got this recorded.

Emily Merrell

We'll do a follow up or something.

Niamh Donoghue

We have to do part two, you have to, you have to get me to do my my research before history lessons. I love it.

Emily Merrell

Well, I'm so excited you're here. So speaking of, you know, cultures, and like, Ireland seems to be a really tight knit community, and seems to be a place where traditions are really passed down family to family. And I feel like there's certain stereotypes you can make about the Irish traditions or culture. Or so I grew up growing up in Ireland, how did this person growing up in Ireland make it to San Francisco? And how did you make, like, how did you motivate or inspire yourself to make that change? and cross love?

Niamh Donoghue

Yeah, so I mean, well, wow. So it's, you know, I grew up in a pretty small town in Ireland. And, as you say, like Irish culture is, it is very, very community based. And everyone looks out for each other. It's a very, just like a, I mean, there's, there's a lot of stereotypes around being Irish, and like the drinking and all that good stuff. But we also do our we're a very, very well known around the world for just like kindness, and like being a very welcoming nation. And I think you really feel that whenever you grew up here, but I grew up in a pretty small time. And, you know, from a very young age, I always saw I was really, really hungry to like, live in a city or, you know, it just felt like there was always some, something more to explore. And so as soon as I kind of got to university, he knew right away that I actually was like, Okay, I want to go away, I want to like be in a completely new environment. And I went to college in Scotland. And, but I remember, like the process of trying to decide what it was that I wanted to do, like, predict, almost like, I just find it really, really hard. And I remember it being positioned as like, okay, you're like, 15, you have to choose your subjects and like, based on whatever you decide, like, that's you you're on a track, you have to, you know, pick a path and kind of stick on it. And it you know, I remember at that stage as well like, thinking, right, well, I want to do something that's going to make me money, because I need to be like financially stable. And I remember like looking back on it, it's quite a lot to put on a 15 year old, right? It's so young

Emily Merrell

in the States, we have liked till about 19

Niamh Donoghue

Yeah, it's, it's kind of crazy. It's when you do your junior cert, you have to pick your subjects for the for the Leaving Cert. But anyway, we and we had careers, teachers, and you know, they were doing the best that they could with the information they had at the time. But we were very much steered to go towards like government jobs, or to go into something that, you know, was going to be stable. And for me, I personally was like, very creative. And I was, you know, I did I did arts and I remember bringing that to one of our teachers and just saying like, oh, like I really, I'm really, really wanting to do something. It's gonna allow me to be creative, but I was kind of met with this, like, well, artists never make any money and artists don't get jobs kind of attitude. And I think like for you know, a lot of people that they were maybe basing their information on that we didn't like, remember, this is all like pre like Internet, like we were so limited to what you actually have around you. Like you're like that's kind of like the, the that's where you pull your information right and and I think that was kind of the beginning of my

sort of the beginning of me thinking like wow, okay, you're so influenced by like your surroundings. So I remember thinking, right, okay, well, if that's what it's gonna be like, and so you're so influenced by your surroundings, what I want to do is kind of like just get out of here so I can like see other things and see what's possible. And I just always for some reason, had this pool to go to America and go to the US and I ended up working in an agency that so I went to college I did fashion communications so I thought right well I'll do fashion and you know, that's creative, but there was photography and graphic design and there was because it was communications I thought that that was well it's kind of businesses so like therefore I'm you know, killing two birds with one stone here. I'm like doing something business either from make money and also get into Tap into my creative side. And but again, I just remember getting there and feeling a bit lost and thinking, Well, what do I do next because I had interned at fashion houses they pay so low and, and a lot of the places that I had worked were quite toxic environments. And I just thought this is not for me. I was doing my dissertation on, and I was doing my dissertation on, like independent stores and shops. And I think again, it's all kind of comes back to like being from Ireland and loving this sort of like tight knit, like community based businesses. But I came across this brand everlane, which, you'll know, it's, it's based in San Francisco, and I became so obsessed with it, but basically what everything is, is like a, kind of like an ethical fashion brand, like you can trace all the materials and everything that they make right back to the where it was made, and manufactured. And also it will, or they have transparent price. And so I was like, that is so cool. Like I want to be wherever it is that they're creating things like this. And so I had started to do like an internship at this design agency and, or this digital agency, and I ended up seeing that they had an office in San Francisco, like a sister company in San Francisco. And I thought, right, well, I applied to a job at Aberdeen, and didn't they didn't even like respond to me, because, you know, it's not like the easiest thing to hire someone who's based out of the UK. But um, anyway, I ended up applying for this job at APR six, which was the sister agency and I got the job there purely because I just wanted to be near somewhere like Abilene where I thought, right, okay, at least if I can be around these kinds of businesses, then. And that would be that would be pretty cool.

Emily Merrell

That's such a cool journey. And I I love everlane, too, I definitely was obsessed with that related for, I meant that that sort of mind ready to go shopping there and buy some updates that I have. So thank you nice plug brought to you by everlane. I wish we'll have to, we'll have to call them out afterwards. But I love you're able to use that experience or that that research of a particular company as your north star in a way the United States is a big place and to be able to identify a place based on or locate a city that you want to go to based on a company is a cool bridge to get you here. So then now you you're in San Francisco, you're working for all these companies. You know, you've since left San Francisco and gone back to Ireland. And about a few months ago. Gosh, what was it like? Nine months ago now that you started soundboard?

Niamh Donoghue

Yes, yeah, we started it in, in June, or July,

Emily Merrell

okay, even less than then nine months ago. So this, you know, we're in the middle of a pandemic, and you're back in Ireland or back in the UK. And you're, you're still working full time? Why did you create a community like soundboard? And can you describe to us exactly what it is?

Niamh Donoghue

Yeah, so signboard is a platform to basically help people find mentorship. And, you know, the thing that makes our platform a little different is because we've almost like redefined what mentorship means to us. And the, you know, I'll kind of take a step back on why we why I created it in the first place. But it was because during my time in San Francisco, I was really lucky to meet some really amazing mentors. And I came back to LA, I lived in San Francisco for two years, and I got really into this idea of like, wow, like I've been, you know, I'm really sort of progressing in my career, because of the mentors that I have, and the advice that they gave me. And, you know, I became a lot more confident in the role that I was in, because of my mentors. And I started to sort of like, create this formula that worked really well for me, and to actually find mentors. And what ended up happening was one of the mentors that I had, she was building on her team. And she asked that she she asked me if I wanted to work for her. And, and I ended up taking the job. And what meant, that meant that I actually moved back to London. And so the role was, was based out of the UK and London. So I moved back. And, you know, this is two years since I originally moved over there, and I was talking, you know, you have the normal conversations like oh my God, why did you decide to come back like, and every single time I would have those conversations I would talk about, well, I had this mentor and we would you know, she she wanted to hire me. And so here I am, and you know, the conversation around mentorship would just start to naturally happen. And every single person that I would talk to, in some capacity would say, God, I'd love to have a mentor, like, how do you get one of those like, I really want to have one. Because I had sort of built up this formula for myself, I remember I just remember thinking like, oh, there needs to be an easier way for people to find mentors beyond just okay, sign up to a mentor program, but like actually build and develop the skills to sort of empower people to find their own mentors. And so then I kind of got my head, I talked to my cousin about it, and she kindly sort of helped me get things off the ground, like we sort of got our heads together. And you know, I really just bounced ideas off her the whole time. And ultimately, that's kind of how we came up with the name signboard. Um... this this idea of like an exchange of experience and finding ideas. And that's sort of how we, how we got started.

Emily Merrell

I love that I think that that question of how did you find a mentor? It's interesting that that was a common question that kept popping up. And I, I love that lesson, too, of like listening to these questions and seeing where they take you. And following those questions. And like, who would have thunk that, like a question would have led to, to creating your own company and start starting something completely from scratch. And what I love about soundboard too, is you know, like the six degrees, like how we do it six degrees, you do the curated matches, and like there's such a diverse variety of people's backgrounds that are represented within the organization. So, you know, let's talk a little bit more about mentorship in general, because it is, it is a hot topic, like how do you find a mentor? You know, we were talking earlier, how do you find a boyfriend is that like, that's hard, but so is finding a mentor. And in a way I feel like they, they kind of are complimentary to one another. Because you had there's like an asking and accordion involved. So I would love your your thoughts or any advice you have for someone who is just anxiously or excitedly looking for a mentor?

Niamh Donoghue

mentorship at the basic level, like mentorship is actually a very, very simple concept, right? A mentorship is a relationship and where you know, someone with more knowledge guide someone with less knowledge, right, which is super simple. And I actually think that we've really overcomplicated that over time, I think that we've created, you know, we put people on pedestals, which makes us really nervous to ask them for advice. And, you know, you don't want to be impeding on like crossing people's boundaries. And people just get really like nodded off and like they think about mentorship as a not everyone but they do think of mentorship as this like big scary thing. And it needs to be really formal. And you know, you have to speak to that person who's like 10 years more experienced than you and they have to be the full package. Like there's no point in me having a mentor unless they're exactly who I want to be, or they're on the trajectory that that I want to be on. And I think like that, for me is like sort of one of the main hurdles that people kind of that we need to get past and, and that sort of with signboard what we've done is, we basically bring in someone who's doing something really brilliant in the world, right? This is kind of like the definition of who our speaker is, it's someone who's doing something really brilliant, and which is essentially mentorship at scale. And then we have the curated matches, which is usually peer to peer or potentially with a person who is that sort of 10 years more experienced, right. And what we're trying to get people to see is actually that you first of all, never have to actually meet somebody in person, like even actually talk to a person for them to be a mentor. Like if you have someone that really inspires you like you can just study them, you know, the concept of mentorship was created pre internet, right? Like, we have so much information at our fingertips. And not only that, like, I get so much mentorship from the people that are at similar stages to me, like, there's peer to peer mentorship, and like that's becoming more of a conversation, which is really great. But yeah, I think we need to sort of like go back to basics and remember what it is like, No, you know, we don't need someone to be the full package in order for them to be a mentor for us. You just really need to have someone who has a little bit more knowledge and someone that you want to be like, like Who do you want to kind of like, emulate and if you're really nervous about asking that person, you should practice, practice run on your friends so that like it loses its power. And you just realized that actually there's something really nice about being curious, like if someone asks me, oh my god, I'm so curious on like, how you got started with the company like I would never be offended by that. Or you know, I think that's a really nice, flattering thing to do. You know, like, just act curious and ask people what their story is like. That's all that mentorship really is. And

Emily Merrell

I feel like so many people are so scared of the inconveniencing part of individuals and you said that earlier about like crossing back I love that idea of just being curious, but also not showing up empty handed to curiosity. Like I've had people pick my brain, and they're not like, I'm gonna buy you coffee or anything, but then I got like a \$10 Starbucks gift card afterwards for my time. And truthfully, that was like putting an extra deposit into my bank account, were like, sure this person can knock on my door again, and I'm going to always open it for them, because they've not that I want to say that they bought my love. But they also, even though it wasn't an extra monetary exchange, they they recognized my time was important and that it was valued. And they did something or they made a gesture to, to model that or to Yeah, to show that they kept

Niamh Donoghue

100%. And I think that's actually a really good thing to kind of call out. And, and, you know, you were asking me about, like the culture in Ireland, and you know, how it was growing up, like the formula that I started to create for what worked really well, for me was going, there was kind of three key pillars to it. And first was just being genuinely really curious. But every person that you meet, and that is every person, it's not the person who is like, you know, it's like, so impressive. It's everybody has a story to tell, and everybody has something that you can learn from so like approaching every relationship with that in mind, like what can I learn? What can I take away? What new perspective can I take away from this conversation? And so that was kind of the first one second thing being and just being as willing to actually give, as you are to receive, right? So again, I think this kind of goes back to like the Irish culture, the good thing is, by the way, when I keep saying this about Irish culture, it's all really learn up like, it's learnable, right? That's why I'm saying it. But it's going into anything with this intention to give more than you're actually going to try and get back. So for any mentorship or any relationship that I've had that successful, I've always, always given more. And but in the long run, like it's always pay, it's always, it's always paid off. And, you know, if you think about a mentorship is just another relationship, like, what friendship Do you have, where you're the one constantly asking for favors, like, you don't, nobody wants that. And it's the same with mentorship, like, you know, one of my early mentors, that I, you know, that really helped me get springboard off the ground this year. You know, I started volunteering at her events, because it just felt what she was doing was really cool. I ended up figuring out how to use Wix, so that I could build her website in order to just get access to like, help her and see what her process was. So remembering that these people probably do need help with something. So like, just ask, Hey, is there anything I could help you with? Like, always give something always, always and, and then just don't don't have any expectations on what you might get in return? Like, just enjoy the journey.

Emily Merrell

I love that. all the people who have asked me, like, Hey, can I help Rick, I volunteer I, from the point of view of them wanting something not that they want something from me, they want to learn something for me, I feel like then, as their mentor, I'm more obliged to like go to bat for them to find that next job. And really, to really curate them into the person that that dream person that I know every company wants to have. And everyone that has worked for me as an ambassador volunteer has ultimately landed in like a job that is better fit for them down the road. But they learn new skills through us. And so I love that suggestion like volunteering or if you don't have a skill, and you're interviewing, even, like finding like minded companies that are smaller than I mean, solopreneurs over here, always looking for an extra set of hands, and you're not going to be doing a disservice you're gonna be doing them a huge service. And then also you're building that goodwill for them to be those personal advocates for you in the future. So that's great. Can we also you know, one thing that I'm a business coach, I charge for, for, in a way for my mentorship because there was there I did reach a level of people were picking my brain and I could help them to a certain extent, but medically I can only take it so far. So that's why I started offering business coaching. But do you think like, hiring someone and mentorship are similar?

Niamh Donoghue

Yeah, absolutely. And so the other actually, I think this is maybe a good a good time to bring up the story that for anyone who's ever been to our events, or anyone who I've ever talked to about signboard

I always always tell the story which is the four minute mile and which is basically this story right where Roger Bannister and he was the first human being in the entire world to run a mile in four minutes. And prior to that, human beings just thought that this was possible. To run a mile in four minutes, as soon as he ran it, and people saw that he that it could be done. The following month after that there was like 30 people that actually ran the mile in four minutes, I could be getting those numbers wrong. But essentially, like the main message there is just that. All we need is someone to show us how it's done in order to think something's possible. So even so, and the reason that I tell that story is because I had gotten to a point where, right, I've had like, amazing mentors up until this year. And then I wanted to do, I wanted to find an easy way for people to find mentors, right. And I saw what you were doing at six degrees, and I loved the format of the event. So I was like, right? Well, I bet, like I could actually create a similar format for the like, for matching people with mentors. And actually, to be honest with you, Emily, you're my coach, right? You're my mentor, like, that's what I would consider as you being my mentor. And actually, at that point, I wanted someone to really, really just get so in the weeds with me, like, I didn't really have the capacity to also be trying to like, you know, make it an exchange, like, I just didn't have that. Unfortunately, you know, it's not an everybody's affordability to be able to actually pay for a coach like, luckily, I was able to save up some money, and I could afford to pay for it. And I will say that it was a huge part of the success of like signboard just having someone to just say, Show me exactly how you did something. And then I felt so much confidence that I could do it that for me is like really, really important. And, and I do think that there's different levels, different types of mentorship, like I do think that number one is use the internet, like, see what you can find really study people, there are the mentors, where you can actually volunteer, you can help with them, like you can, you can spend time with them. And you're not even really asking them questions. You're, you're helping them and you're learning through osmosis. You're seeing it to believe right. And then there's things where you've got projects, and you just need to really supercharge like what you're doing. And you want to actually get your get your head down, and you want someone to help you and show you every step of the way. And like that's why I think that's why I think coaching is something that you should consider like, absolutely. And don't shy away from it. And so yeah,

Emily Merrell

I love that. Yeah, I think that's, that's such a good way of putting it. And yeah, it's so fun to be able to help them also to be selfish, a little bit more selfish, too, when you're paying for it. You know, you don't have to worry about that given take aspect as much. We're like, I play the money cash money's, now be my person and help me.

Niamh Donoghue

Sometimes you need that, because especially if you're going through something that is completely new to you, like you do need to just, you do need to have someone who is going to be a bit of a cheerleader, and you've you know, you've set you've kind of like laid down what it exactly is that you need, and you have that person to sort of like help you help you see it through, and which i think that i think that I hadn't, you know, I probably I don't know if I would have really considered it only that I knew you and I had seen it and panic for other people. So I do think that that's like an important message that I would want to get out there is like there's no fear and they get a coach and if that person isn't the coach, just ask them hey, like, would you be willing to meet with me once a month, and here's exactly what I would want to do. And I will pay you for that time and I will pay you well because, you know, you spend so

much money like going out and traveling and all this good stuff. Like if you really want to actually evolve and change and grow like you kind of have to shift some of that to, to paying for coaching or you know, paying for people's time because you know, we're all busy. Everybody's got a lot going on.

Emily Merrell

I gotta love a pandemic lesson. I think that's a great one. All right. Well, switching gears Neve so you might know this about me a lot of people call me 20 questions because I am an organ Lee curious Exactly. I think very similar to I love figuring out just how what makes that person tick and who they are. So I'm not going to ask you 20 quick questions, but I've got very fast questions that I am going to ask you.

Niamh Donoghue

Okay, okay.

Emily Merrell

Are you ready?

Niamh Donoghue

for that? Great. Okay,

Emily Merrell

what are you watching right now?

Niamh Donoghue

I am watching the crown.

Emily Merrell

Okay, well, what book are you reading?

Niamh Donoghue

I am reading Ramit Sethi. I will teach you to be rich.

Emily Merrell

What is your favorite emoji on the phone?

Niamh Donoghue

Um, laughing face? crying? Crying laughing crying laughing

Emily Merrell

Okay, I love that. Your favorite meal

Niamh Donoghue

Um, Indian curry butter chicken. I love curries.

Emily Merrell

Yum. Tell us one fun Irish fact. I know you told us one earlier but another one. And

Niamh Donoghue

can my Irish fact be about the alphabet not having the letter?

Emily Merrell

That's very good, we can bring that full circle. And then lastly, if you could meet one person and have dinner with them dead or alive, who would it be?

Niamh Donoghue

And oh my god, the only person that's coming right now is Heath Ledger.

Emily Merrell

That's a great one. Yes. Wonderful. Well, Niamh, thank you so much for joining us today. What is next for soundboard? And how can we find out more information about upcoming events and what's happening.

Niamh Donoghue

Yeah, so I mean, we are doing a bit of a relaunch in January 2021. So the best way to kind of hear about our events are follow us on Instagram sign up via our website at [www dot signboard dot online](http://www.signboard.online). And, but we are Yeah, we're really excited. We've got a really good roster of speakers coming up next year. And anyone who's looking for moments of inspiration, you want to inspire and be inspired, you should come to our events. It's just a really like, amazing, amazing atmosphere.

Emily Merrell

And I completely agree, especially if you guys want some more Irish and Scottish and English accents in your life. To me, it's a nice change from everything that we're going to in the States.

Niamh Donoghue

Well, it's cool, it's good.

Emily Merrell

It's really fun. Good, peeps. Well, Neve, thank you so much for joining us today. And for listeners out there. If you liked today's episode, please make sure to share with a friend and give us a review on iTunes. That would be awesome. And thank you Niamh and we look forward to seeing you at a soundboard event in the future.

Niamh Donoghue

Take care. Awesome. Thanks so much for having me Emily. Thank you