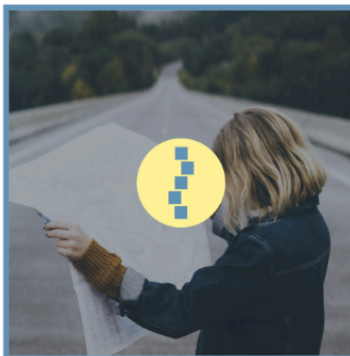




My Journey Back to Work

Transcript

Series 01 Episode 01

Part One: A Career That We Love...?

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TRANSCRIPT TEXT:

A Before I had my daughter, work was everything...

B You know, you haven't really got a clue, have you, when you're having a baby, what it actually means... <laugh> erm... to your life and the fact that you're not going to sleep again for a long time...

MUSIC - a guitar starts strumming with momentum and off we go

Presenter ■ How do parents really make the work life juggle work?

C I did think it would be a case I'd just sort of snap back into it, like, it would just... I'd just work exactly the same way as I'd worked before

■ I'm guessing you're here because the idea of going back to work after maternity or paternity leave is familiar. It's something you've been through, or you're about to go through, or you're interested to hear from people who have been through it more about what it might be like.

A I don't even know if you can teach someone what to look out for because it's gonna be so completely different and tied to your own personal life experiences...

■ It won't surprise you to hear my journey back to work has had its fair share of twists and turns. I started to wonder how parents do it. I started to ask the parents around me.

B Suddenly to be back in the workplace felt so... sort of... unreal...

C It is hugely demanding. Your brain changes effectively.

■ They told me they wish we talked about it more. They wished we talked about it more honestly. But let's face it, when do we find the time?

F It's a lot but then I have to step back and go, wow, I've achieved a lot, you know...

B I think as a parent you get a new drive. You know, if something isn't working, well let's just change it

■ As a new parent, podcasts were my little oasis of calm. A place to connect with the wider world right where we are. They fit in around whatever new parenthood brings, wherever, whenever, alongside whichever of the many new demands we happen to be dealing with in that moment. So an idea began to come together... - you can see where I'm going with this, can't you, because, well, here we are...

B That visibility at work. I knew I wanted to progress and try new things and challenge myself in the workplace and...

A I'm a Mum. And a very happy Mum. But ... what do I do? How much can I share? What is the right thing for my family? But also, what's the right thing for me creatively, erm, as a, and just as a human...?

■ Welcome to My Journey Back to Work. I'm very glad you're here.

MUSIC - Focus in, zoom in

■ I want to start by creating a picture in your mind. It's a picture of a tiny, everyday moment. One that will be very familiar. And the reasons why I want to zoom in on this moment will all become clear, so go with me on this for a moment, will you?

Because before we launch off to hear parent's answers to this question of 'how do you make the work life juggle work, first we need some background context.

We're about to take a trip through this journey of building a career, becoming a parent and returning to work, with the parents I speak to. And this picture that I want you to see comes at a pivotal turning point.

■ Episodes 1-4 take us through some of the milestones we might meet along the way.

In Episode 5 onwards after we arrive back at work, we hand the mic over to each of our parents to find out how this journey impacts what happens next for them. But we're getting ahead of ourselves...

■ Two last housekeeping notes before we dive in:

■ Firstly, as we're sharing parents' lived experiences, these may be triggering for you if they're close to your own. Please take care as you listen. This episode contains references to miscarriage towards the end. Please do what you need to do to stay safe and comfortable as we go along.

■ And secondly, in what we're about to hear we'll share a mixture of experiences and viewpoints. Again, because we're sharing parents' lived experiences, some may resonate. Some may not. If you'd like to share your experience to help to build a more accurate picture of what this journey is really all about right now, listen out for the website at the end of the episode to find out how you can get in touch because I'd love for you to do that and I'd love to hear your version of this story.

■ Okay, good. Ground rules aside, we have to start somewhere, so how about we do just that and dive in, shall we?

■ This picture I mentioned. Are we ready? Okay. Here we go... Let's dive in...

MUSIC - Early morning, energy building

■ It's morning. Breakfast time. The household is on the move. Golden yellow sunlight streams through the gaps around the curtains yet to be opened and picks out tiny dust particles floating in the air. A parent bustles around the kitchen, busy with breakfast, packing bags - remembering that they need to eat, too. Keys! Where are my keys? The seconds tick by. It's almost time. The morning news bubbles away in the background and the parent lovingly wipes the porridge off their little one's chin... And now press pause.

MUSIC PAUSE

■ Why am I stopping here? Well, because actually, I need to tell you something important about how we're going to explore this journey. We think it's a story we all know, right? But do we? How much do we really know about what it's like to be on the inside of this journey? And you know, the bit of it I'm really interested to look into to start off with, is the bit of it that's almost invisible. The bit that happens inside our own heads.

So where on earth do we start with that?

Well, this ordinary breakfast scene, believe it or not. Why? Because this everyday moment is our first day back. Our first day heading back into the workplace after parental leave.

■ It's a tiny moment in time, so 'everyday', we'd almost miss it if we didn't know where to look... but it has the potential to be pivotal. A sliding doors moment, if you like...

■ And it gives us a way in... to start to see the invisible layers of experiences bubbling underneath - how they influence our decisions around this time and shape what comes next...

■ But so we can see these invisible layers, first, we need to rewind the scene and go back to the beginning, and follow the journey that brought us here.

MUSIC FADES BACK IN - Early morning, energy building

■ So, let's take this picture of an everyday breakfast scene the morning we're about to go back to work for the first time as a parent, and wind the clock back. Wind it back to a time we've probably all forgotten: a time before children were on the scene... See. Told you(!) Let's go all the way back. Take away today's news, the adorable baby babble and replace them with a thumping headache, a large glass of water, a fizzy painkiller if you're that way inclined, and a work project that's due in at 10am that you're yet to finish because you were out last night - at networking drinks last night, on a date last night, getting home from a work trip last night, living life to the full independently last night...

F I knew who I was and I was happy with where I was at

B ...Uh, and I hadn't even sort of thought about children and families at that point.

■ Go back to that time... when it's just you and your job...

A I loved it. I loved feeling like this is what I'm supposed to be doing

■ This is where we start our story.

MUSIC - the drum beat rhythm of working lives in full swing

■ Come on, grab your coat, we've got a train to catch. You can tell me all about it on the way...

SFX - Train rushing past the station

B Well, I had started my career, so I'm a, I work in communications in, so I started my career in marketing communications, um, in the private sector in, in London

A So I started just doing like the booking forms and processing invoices and essentially worked my way up to be running the department, essentially creative director for the region

B And I worked with a lot of younger, younger-ish people in comms, lots of press officers and people who were sort of working with ministers and, and lots of, you know, uh, real sort of dedicated people working, you know, working hard and working long hours

A And I loved it. I loved it. I loved traveling, I loved speaking at conferences

E ...and it was kind of almost immediate. I think within a week we'd, I'd set up the business with, um, Company's House. And because there's just no setup, there's no setup cost whatsoever, really. We just couldn't, I got cracking and that was it.

F ... kind of, living independently... I dunno, I was really, really happy

A I had clients in Abu Dhabi and... it was a lot of travel.

F I'd been in my 20s so financially independent

E There was a real tidal wave of excitement about the industry and I just got totally swept along with it, which was ... lovely <laugh>.

■ It's fair to say we prioritise different things when it comes to our working lives

B My reason for working full stop is, uh, we can't not have me working

G I'd just chosen that job cause I happened to see an advert for it, really...It was just what I could do and kind of...

■ And what work means to each of us varies...

G ...yeah, it was circumstances really...

■ Income is obviously important...

B Can we make it work if I don't and we do the sums and can we pay the mortgage and can we have the summer holidays and all of that...?

■ But I'd like to pick up on something I hear when one parent tells me about starting their business:

E And it was really nice having, you know, been in two jobs up to that point that I wasn't, - didn't feel that strongly about, to kind of suddenly, it was really exciting.

■ ...the positive difference it can make when our work begins to line up with who we are and how we want to spend our lives.

E ...my lifestyle changed as well. Like, I wasn't sat down all day at a desk. I suddenly was on my feet all day, you know, traveling all over London. And it was, it was lovely. Like, I really enjoyed the lack of structure...

■ Alongside supporting our financial needs, it can bring fun:

F ...cause I loved it so much

■ And purpose:

C I realised it was something that I could bring a personal passion to, as well as my interest in psychology, and it started from there for me to develop my kind of real drive to turn that into more of a career than just an interest

■ And identity:

A And it gave me friends and it gave me interests. And I've got books throughout the house that are all related to that.

■ And for some it can be completely integral to our life story.

A I truly believe in making art accessible and that heritage in terms of the objects and, um, collections within these spaces belong to all of us. It belongs to all of us.
...And I really wanted to spend my life, my working life, breaking down that feeling of I don't belong there because I had that as a kid. My, my mum would take us to the National Gallery when my sister and I were tiny because it was free. Uh, cuz she's, you know, working class immigrant parents, anything free. Wonderful. So we'd jump on the bus, go to the National Gallery and spend so much time there. My sister was the one we all thought would be an artist. So she loved it. I was mostly bored. Um, and I would read, but I think I was mostly bored because I just thought, this has nothing to do with me. Nothing here is familiar. Who are these people? None of them look like me. Or like the stories that I was raised being told.
I don't see Anansi the Spider, I don't see anyone who looks like my nan. I don't, I don't understand. This is dumb <laugh>. I don't know what I've come here, um, to then grow up and for the National Gallery to be one of my absolute favourite clients to work with. Um, and knowing that I could be part of something that helps my daughter or her friends go into those spaces and they can pick up an audio guide or something and learn about how of course it matters to them. Of course, it's related to them. All of this stuff belongs to them. And it's, it's our job to tell the stories in a way that emotionally engages with everyone no matter what their educational background, no matter where their parents did or didn't come from. So, yeah, I, I feel very, very passionately about it. Um, and I, and I loved, I loved doing it and I, I was managing a team of people who did that...

■ And so how does this relate to our breakfast scene? Our parent getting ready to head out the door for their first commute? Well, when we see the years spent building a career that we love. A career and a life that is so interwoven with who we are as a person, it then opens up the question: what impact does it have when something comes along to significantly change how we work...?

B And I had just got married and we'd been, you know, planning to have a family and...

F we were, we were friends and then we became more and more like, we used to see each other once a week so it was...

E So it was a pretty swift decision.

■ And when I start to ask parents about their experience of this stage - this turning point of how children come to be on the scene - their matter-of-fact honesty somehow takes me by surprise...

A So yeah, then, then I met my husband and then I had a baby. Well, I had a miscarriage first...
(inaudible: VO I'm sorry)

A miscarriage first.. We weren't sure... Oh, thank you...

■ And I begin to grapple with how much is too much information when we share this story? It's still an open question for me at this stage. But we're exploring parents' stories in their own words and I know it's important to the people I've spoken to so far to be open and honest about our experiences, so to do them justice, it's also important that I share what they say with you in the same way that they share it with me...

A ...it was an early term loss, so they're not entirely sure exactly how old, or how far along we were. ...I think it may - somewhere between 7-10 weeks. Somewhere around that time...

■ And that's when it becomes clear just how many layers there are to this conversation. And how deep they go

A If nothing else it really... it showed me how much I wanted to be a Mum.

■ It opens up another journey within this story: our path to becoming expectant parents in the first place. And it's another layer of invisible experiences that we have to get to know if we really want to see the *full* picture of our parent standing in the middle of a breakfast scene, getting ready to go back to work for the first time.

A It really did, very clearly make it very very clear to both of us, actually we really do want to do this...

■ And we'll be picking up from here next time...

MUSIC - OUTRO carries us to the next episode

■ See you then

■ If you've been affected by any of the issues we've covered so far and need support, please contact your GP or search online for perinatal support services near you...

■ And as promised, if you'd like to find out more about how you can add your story to the project, please head to the website that's myjourneybacktowork.com to find out more

■ Thanks for being with us today.

That's all for now.

Coming up there'll be a short ad section to keep the podcast ticking over and I'll see you next time for more in episode 2.

■ See you next time ...

MUSIC PLAYS US OUT AND WE LEAD INTO THE SERIES TRAILER ONE MORE TIME:

A Before I had my daughter, work was everything...

B You know, you haven't really got a clue, have you, when you're having a baby, what it actually means... <laugh> erm... to your life and the fact that you're not going to sleep again for a long time...

Presenter: How do parents *really* make the work-life juggle work???

C I did think it would be a case I'd just sort of snap back into it, like, it would just... I'd just work exactly the same way as I'd worked before

An easy question to ask...

MUSIC begins - building, as if walking, running, uplifting, gaining momentum right through to a crescendo at the end

D I knew I wanted to take a year off... erm, but, of course, you know, with that comes, will they remember who I am? What's going to happen in the business er while I'm away?

Not so easy to answer:

B Suddenly to be back in the workplace just felt so... sort of... unreal...

I started to ask the parents around me...

E There was a real tidal wave of excitement about the industry and I just got totally swept along with it, which was lovely...

Even at a rough simplified estimate, hundreds of thousands of parents in the UK return to work after parental leave each year

C It is hugely demanding. Your brain changes, effectively.

... - that's a lot of first days back isn't it?

Parents' voices overlap, a chorus:

- E** I thought I'd be like my Mum and be back at work kind of 4 weeks post-partum, and...
- B** I think as a parent you sort of get a new drive, you know, if something isn't working, well let's just change it.
- D** Maternity cover...
- A** What does that look like? Does it have to look exactly as it looked before?
- D** ...work for me as a parent
- B** ...and it became a real, oh my goodness how are we going to do that?
- E** There's also that little niggle, is that going to be a problem for me?
- D** And I thought okay, how is this going to impact my job?
- B** Can we make it work
- C** Centuries and centuries of all women...
- D** ...where you still have to adapt in your work even, you know, 12 years on
- C** ...many have had babies in the past and survived...

So why is it then that this journey has the potential to feel like it's the first time?

A I'm a Mum and a very happy Mum. But... What do I do? How much can I share? What is the right thing for my family? But also, what's the right thing for me, creatively, and as, as a, just, just as a human?

F We were like, well, yeah, it happens to everyone... <laugh> you know... Don't think you're going to get away with it, because, you know, it's a relentless journey. Like...it's... it's chaotic in the most beautiful way but it is hard and it's relentless...

(in interview) Do you think there is any way to prepare for it? <laugh>

F <laugh> I'd be a millionaire if I knew that...!

C I just want people to talk about it more and more...

F ...If everyone was just a bit more real about it, maybe people would feel a bit more open and supported and, kind of, able to share their experiences a bit more...

E ...didn't really finish it on a high there <laugh>... - we all love our kids! There we go! That's a nice... <laugh>

Welcome to My Journey Back to Work.

B So I think that's all, really. It's been really nice talking to you...

Add your story at myjourneybacktowork.com

WHAT NEXT?

Add your story at www.myjourneybacktowork.com

Share with parents you know who might appreciate finding out more about the project.

Thank you!