



WORKING GIRLS NETWORK

What we talked about:

Stop Apologising and Make Working Life Work For You

For our final event of the year, we explored the ways in which women tend to over-apologise, and how this can hinder our careers. We also spoke about dealing with curve balls and how, when life throws something unexpected at you, you can make the steps to make working life work for you, rather than your career being a one-way street.

Many thanks to our lovely suite of speakers:

- Jo Hind & Alison Wilde (Birdsoup – women's leadership consultants)
- Sarah Ronan (Pregnant Then Screwed – flex for all champions)
- Calli Louis (Working Wonder – professional wellbeing coaches)

Never Miss Out:

Instagram - @working_girls_network
Facebook - @workinggirlsnetworking
Website - workinggirlsnetwork.co.uk

What we learned:

- ◇ Make yourself aware of how much you apologise. Women tend to do so more than men, and apologetic behaviour doesn't just have to be verbal - it extends to your body language (not taking up too much space) and behaviour (being a yes person).
- ◇ Using apologies as punctuation, for example in emails, lessens their affect and ultimately damages the impact of a genuine apology. Alternatives could be: 'thanks for flagging' or 'I would like to add'.
- ◇ Calculations show that portfolio careers are on the rise, with it becoming the norm to have 4-5 careers over a lifetime, so building resilience is extremely important so that you can handle the shifting landscape.
- ◇ Women go through more change than men (whether that's time off to have kids, the menopause or career changes) and it's important to be positive, reflective and adaptive.
- ◇ Find your 'resilience resources'. These include the personal: personality traits, skills, values, understanding of what you do/don't have, and the social: network, community and mentors. They offer support, inspiration, ideas, confidence, contacts and options.
- ◇ Surround yourself with a group of 'cheerleaders' who are on hand to support you.
- ◇ Generationally speaking, we are hard on ourselves, but knowing what you need and backing yourself to ask for it is half the battle...
- ◇ ...because flexi-time is like the Zara dress, says Sarah Ronan – it's everywhere – and it's absolutely not just a parental perk
- ◇ We just need to start normalising the way we think about it.



- ◇ You can make a formal request for flexi-time once every 12 months. If you feel comfortable sharing the reason for making the request, it usually strengthens your case.
- ◇ The reason for you wanting a change doesn't need to be dramatic or sad. Jo requested time off to train as a Pilates teacher and her workplace fully supported her – it was good PR!
- ◇ Almost a third of rejections are based on cost to the company, so pre-empt this in your letter. Remember that it makes financial sense to a company to retain talent, rather than hiring a replacement if they can't make things work.
- ◇ Could an informal agreement be a better solution? If you think your current situation may pass in a matter of weeks or months, you might not want to make a permanent change to your contract.
- ◇ A McKinzie study estimates that £148bn could be contributed to the economy by 2030 by people being able to benefit from systems like flexi-time.
- ◇ How many times have you put off a doctor's appointment for fear of missing work? We have to put ourselves at the top of our To-Do lists.
- ◇ Balance doesn't exist. The trope of a woman having it all is unhealthy and untrue – you need to be able to prioritise what's important.
- ◇ Sharing a personal problem at work isn't a sign of weakness, it helps your manager understand the situation and find a solution.
- ◇ Remember: it's OK to press pause, it's OK to not be manically trying to climb the career ladder, and it's OK to not even be aiming for the top of the ladder.

What can we do?

- ◇ Make a plan and write it down. Doing so will make you commit to it and make you accountable to yourself.
- ◇ If you'd like some advice when asking your employer for flexi-time, you can use the Pregnant Then Screwed helpline on 0161 222 9879
- ◇ Identify your strengths using the Via Character Survey at viacharacter.org/survey which was recommended by Jo and Alison – there's a free version or an upgrade for more in-depth results.
- ◇ If you feel that someone else's flexi-time agreement is negatively impacting you, frame it as affecting the team. This is most likely management failure and not the individual's.
- ◇ Finally, Working Wonder have generously offered free coaching to anyone on maternity leave or struggling with fertility, who attended the event. Get in contact with calli@workingwonder.co if you would like to know more.

Resources

- ◇ Head to acas.org.uk for lots of impartial workplace advice and helpful resources
- ◇ There are additional resources from our speakers – slides from Sarah and a goal-setting template from Alison and Jo included in the link.

