



Equality Talks Podcast - Transcript

Episode 1: WORK180 is Changing the Working World with Gemma Lloyd and Valeria Ignatieva

Equality Talks. Brought to you by Work 180. Where we discuss how to finally put an end to workplace discrimination. Let's talk about what it really takes to succeed, what people are doing to drive equality and what can still be done.

WORK180 is on a mission to empower every woman to choose a workplace where they can thrive. Co-founders Gemma Lloyd and Valeria Ignatieva started WORK180 after both experiencing discrimination in the workplace. They wanted to flip the job seeking model on its head, give power back to job seekers, and in the process are changing the world. In our debut episode of Equality Talks, I'm so excited to be speaking to both of them about their past and their dreams for the future. Welcome to both of you. I'm really excited to be talking today.

Valeria: We are excited to be here.

Samantha: So if we can start with you Gemma, can you tell us a little bit about your past and what brought you to co-found WORK180 with Valeria.

Gemma: Sure. I spent 10 years working in the tech sector, specifically in enterprise tech sales. I entered the workforce into that role when I was in my early twenties. And at the time of entering the employer that I was working for, most of my colleagues and my peers were middle aged men. And I thought this is just what work is like and kind of didn't really know any different. And certain things would happen like they would ask me to go and get their notes for them, they'll ask me to go and get their coffees for them. And like I said, that's kind of just what I thought work was like. And then I moved on from there and I got a job at this amazing software engineering company called Readify and it was gender balanced. The leadership team, my manager was a woman and my manager's manager was a woman and there was cultural diversity. And really for the first time I really felt like I belonged and felt like I had an equal opportunity.

Gemma: And I left there for a reason no one ever should - for more money - and found myself back in this boy's club. And I thought to myself, "Oh no, what have I done?" And then the inspiration hit around having a place where women could go and find employers who genuinely wanted them there and who would be committed to providing those equal opportunities. And that's how it all started in February 2015. I'll let Valeria tell her story, but Valeria and I knew each other from Females in Technology and Telecommunications where we both volunteered and I knew how amazing she was. And I originally

called her for some advice on this idea and Valeria was so excited by it. She said, "Can I just do it with you?" And I was like, "Ah, yes, you're amazing." And it all took off from there.

Samantha: And Valeria, do you want to share some of your story about what led you to be so excited about this idea when Gemma called you about it.

Valeria: Sure. So I'm actually reflected on this way after starting the business because my experience with the employer that like Gemma said, you think the employers are all the same especially when you're young, and my experience was many, many years ago before parental leave was introduced even by the government. So when I had my child, there was no paid parental leave, there was no flexible working, there was no breastfeeding rooms, even though I worked at a very, very large office. Back then I thought this is just how it is. Your career basically has to stop when you have a baby because there's no support around at all. And going back to work as a primary breadwinner was something that I had to do. Didn't have a choice and it was very, very difficult back then.

Gemma: And similar to Gemma's experience when I found employers down the track that were really flexible and were really supportive so even though I didn't need the parental leave anymore, just having that flexibility to care for my son who also had a disability that really helped support my family essentially. So I think when Gemma first called me about the idea, I was really excited because as Gemma mentioned, we were both volunteering for females in IT and telecommunications. And I could see that there was so many amazing companies that we spoke to as part of our role that were really supportive of women in tech and had all the amazing initiatives within the organizations and then also obviously speaking to women that were just like us, that were experiencing employers that were not so supportive.

Gemma: So because I was enjoying doing that volunteering work so much more so than my day job, I got really, really excited when Gemma shared her ideas because I think I didn't even connect it to my experience because it was so long ago at the time but I just thought, this is amazing. And now every time we have a employer change a policy or introduce something that is so close to my heart, it just ties everything in together. And it just amazing to also have a team that's just as passionate as changing people's lives because we didn't have that available to ourselves. So it's just, yeah, it's a dream come true for lack of being a cliché.

Samantha: We recently had an all team off site for a couple of days and you actually said something to that effect about how you have this amazing team surrounding you both that are really looking after your baby.

Valeria: That's what it feels like because it's something that we created that we grew, that we slaved over. As every parent out there knows it's so difficult to raise a child and Gemma now has a baby as well. So we now both have actual children and then we're also growing our baby who's about to turn five, which is where WORK180. So that's my kind of thought process there.

Samantha: Gemma, at that same offsite, you unveiled the new mission statement of WORK180. And I think you cried when you did that because he was so sort of emotional about just how right it feels. So can you tell us what is the new vision and why are you so excited?

Gemma: Yeah, well I cried actually because I saw some of the team members start crying when it was unveiled with joy themselves and that sent shivers down my spine. But obviously I do feel that way, but the new purpose is for WORK80 is to empower every woman to choose a workplace where they can thrive. And so just touching on a couple of points in that sentence, empowering every woman is a really important phrase because we literally mean every woman. And it's not just talking about gender equality. We recognize that diversity and inclusion extends far, far beyond that. And so it's looking at LGBTI, it's looking at in the UK, black Asian minority ethnic or Australia we refer to cultural and linguistic diversity for example, and age and lots of different initiatives that we focus on. And then choosing an employer, it really goes back to the fact that we've kind of done this flip and that's where WORK180 comes in.

Gemma: It's the 180 flip. So the power from employer to job seeker putting the information in the job seekers hands to be able to choose employers that really align with their values and their needs. And then thriving, not just about surviving in a workplace, but belonging and being successful and therefore thriving at work. And work is something that for most of us, it is where we spend the majority of our time. And so it's incredibly important to be happy, to enjoy your work, to feel like you're doing work with purpose, I feel and so I cried because doing something that helps people at work, I think has such a big impact. And particularly for myself as well I've never worked harder, but I've also never been happier because I'm doing work that I really care about.

Samantha: Yeah. Yeah. I love that. One of the interesting things I think is that the both of you, you've had an individual experience that sort of started, like sparked your interest in this area, but then your passion for both of you now goes well beyond just your individual experience. So it might be Valeria you could tell us a little bit about why you're so passionate about this in a much broader sense than just the fact that you yourself needed flexibility when you were at work.

Valeria: I think there's so many great businesses that start with that you're facing a challenge yourself and then trying to figure out how to solve it and then it turns into a much larger operation. And I am so excited about the possibilities because if we look at our progress so far, the transparency that we've introduced, so there's no place that you could previously go and actually see how much parental leave does this company have, do they have a breastfeeding room? Do they have coaching opportunities? Do they have targets for women in leadership or do they have targets for culturally and linguistically diverse individuals in leadership? How are they tracking? And the power of that transparency has resulted in so many incredible outcomes to the point where we're currently recording employer a change for policy every three weeks. And this is one or more policies so often it's more than one.

Valeria: And that is just incredible. When we first started, for example, in Australia, it was less than 5% of employers that would pay superannuation on unpaid parental leave. And now the last time we measured a few months ago, it was something closer to 30% so that's huge. And to see the spark start in the UK as well and soon to be in the US, it's literally we have the ability to change the workplaces across the world and gather data and then build on that and expand on that and the... We have so many ideas and ambitions that it's just incredibly exciting.

Samantha: That's actually one of the things that I find so exciting about the work that WORK180 is doing. Through driving policy change, we're actually starting to change the shape of whole industries because you end up with a market leader who makes a lot of changes and then in order for the other companies and their competitors to keep up, they're having to make changes as well. And that's one of

the things... You're creating total systemic change through what started as just trying to help the job seeker.

Valeria: That's right.

Samantha: Gemma I do have a question for you, which is, so we have the minimum standards in order for someone to become an endorsed employer. And in the early days when you had this idea and you were starting out, how hard was it to maintain the minimum standards whilst you're also trying to get a business off the ground? How did you balance that? And in fact as an ongoing thing, we're trying to bring new companies on board and have growth targets and how do you balance the growth of the business versus making sure that you're actually getting the minimum step policy standards from endorsed employers?

Gemma: It's a great question. In the early days we used to have our benchmark but the policies weren't transparent on our site. So it was probably even more important to have really, really strict kind of minimum benchmarks. And then now actually I'm probably wording that wrong. We do still have very strict minimum benchmarks but the benefit now is that everything is transparent. Even if an employer doesn't do well in a particular area, the job Seeker has access to that information. And one of the most important things about what WORK180 does is that every employer chose like for like information. I mean we've had employees come to us and say, "Oh, can we just hide the section on equal pay?" And no, no, no, no. You can't through that. Everybody shows likes alike. And from an employer perspective, you know what? It's okay if you're not perfect in that area because if you're transparent and you're honest, then job seekers know what they're walking into and work WORK180, sort of Valeria mentioned the step before around an employee and changing policies once every three weeks.

Gemma: We have a lot more influence when an employer is on board with us and when they're not. Because we have a team of dedicated inclusion strategists that provide guidance to employers, but we also provide market insights and competitive comparisons and things like that, which helps stay INHL, provide business cases back to the leaders to be able to make change on policies, et cetera. So I think the most important thing aside from the benchmarks is the transparency. In the early days. I'm really, really proud to say that Valeria and I never once kind of let all values or our morals slide to get a deal over the line. And even from an investment perspective, we had an investor say to us all, we'll give you \$1 million but they can't be any criteria or benchmark. And we thought about it because we were seriously struggling we self funded, it was really hard for a long time. But then we thought, you know what? No. That goes against what we believe in and let's just stick with it.

Samantha: That's so interesting. With that investor, what did they think the value was of removing that? I don't understand why they would think that would add value to your offering.

Gemma: Look they were a middle aged white male who didn't understand to be blunt about it. And the other thing they said is why don't you cater to everyone and not just focus on trying to support women who have this problem. And I'm like, "I think you're thinking of Seek, maybe you should just go buy some Seek shares".

Samantha: What about the men?

Gemma: What about the men? Yeah, it was sorry. But well, joking aside, like with what about the men. One of the things with all criterion what we're doing with employees as well is very, very focused on those gender neutral policies. I just did a tweet today around Anthony who's one of the WORK180 team members who's just had baby Tilly and I'm really proud that the amount we give to primary and secondary, we don't have primary and secondary, it's equal amounts regardless of gender. So it's really about equality, not just for women, but equality to men and flex and equality and such.

Samantha: Yeah, that's a really interesting point actually because there's a lot of discussion now about the fact that the very strong male breadwinner model in Australia means that it's almost always the women who take flexibility and take paid parental leave or unpaid parental leave. And it's much harder for men to get it. It's something like 2% of men in Australia take parental leave, which is really low number. And so it's addressing the fact that men want to participate in the home life is important part of it isn't it?

Valeria: That's exactly right. I was just thinking about the survey that we did initially to help determine the criteria and that was women voting on the most important benefits and policies. And the top three were really around parental leave, flexible working, equal pay and so on. But overarching was a really strong desire to see gender neutral policies. So essentially what that said to us was that women don't want special treatment, they just want equal treatment. So like Gemma mentioned, it's really important for us to highlight that. And even when I think about our own business, we were self funded and we had about 10 staff and at that point we decided to bring in our own paid parental leave. So it was six weeks for either gender and it's now eight weeks. And when we did that, we actually realized that if we can do that, then we should think about lifting the bar for the companies that we work with.

Valeria: So at that point we changed our criteria as well to encompass before small businesses under a hundred staff they weren't required to have a minimum paid parental leave. And now it's essentially any business over 10 staff must have a minimum of six weeks. So that's often I speak to other business leaders and they're talking about, "Oh, but how much is that going to cost and what impact is that going to have?" And I mean, besides it being the right thing to do the way I see it is do you really want your staff struggling or thinking about having financial challenges during the most exciting but also potentially difficult and challenging time of their life with a new baby. So that's not even taking into consideration all the cost savings that you would have as a result of having that employer employee being fully engaged and also saving in further recruitment costs and onboarding and training and loss of productivity and all that kind of stuff. So to us it was a no brainer and having that experience firsthand really helped us understand the landscape as well.

Samantha: Yeah, amazing. And one of the things you've talked about a couple of times as well as just the transparency across the site and we've recently introduced a feedback loop. So Gemma, can you tell us a little bit about the feedback loop and what it's doing and why it's so valuable?

Gemma: Yeah sure. So what the feed loop feedback loop is is every time a person applies for a job with WORK180 they can opt in to provide feedback on the interview experience. So what this means is that with, and it's all anonymized, I should actually say. But what this means is that employers are getting really, really good insights on what they're doing really well and then areas for improvement. And the reason why I think it's so critical is that, particularly for large companies as well, you've got really big recruitment teams and hiring managers and different processes and things like that.

Gemma: And you might be getting women through to application through to interview, but if they're not being treated in an unbiased way and if they're not, for example, one really simple piece of feedback that we've had through the feedback loop was that every person that interviewed this woman going for a UX position was Male. And I know for a fact that the organization she was applying to is actually really good and really diverse and inclusive and the women there love working there. But they didn't put their best foot forward in that particular case. And that doesn't leave a good impression on your candidate. Even if that candidate doesn't get the role, they are likely to tell their friends, "Oh, don't go for a job there. Everyone was a male." So this feedback is really, really helping employers. But in addition to that we're giving a voice to the candidates as well. We're listening to what their needs are and we're driving change and advocacy for them to make sure that they get fair recruitment processes.

Samantha: What's been your biggest surprise through that feedback loop process?

Gemma: That's a good question. To be honest. They've been a large variety of different types of feedback. I think I was a little surprised in some cases that some candidates didn't receive any acknowledgement of application or anything like that at all. And while still, I know that big organizations, for the most part they're very, very busy and you know, a lot on their plate. It surprises me because if that person isn't right for the job right now, they might be right for the job in two years. Or maybe they're not right for that particular role, but who knows the next role that might come up and they're right for.

Gemma: But you've got to treat people like people and you've got to treat them with respect and everybody deserves to get some acknowledgement of an application going through something as serious as a job process. But the really, really good thing is that we provide this feedback back to the employers and that's exactly what drives change. And you get a number of people saying, "This is why I didn't think it was a good experience." And that has a really positive flow on effect to make sure then that employees are doing the things that make candidates feel good even if they don't get the job.

Samantha: Yeah, definitely. Valeria you have a great story about a company that was using a recruiter as the middlemen, and got this kind of feedback. Can you share that story with us?

Valeria: Yes. I was just thinking that because... So taking a step back, some of the things that made us realize that we needed to create a solution to capture all the feedback in a more sophisticated manner because back in the early days, that feedback would come through to us, it could be a phone call, it could be an email or social media contact. And there was a lady once who contacted me and told me about an experience she had with one of our endorsed employers who were amazing at flexible working. They had senior leaders who had progressed their careers and juggled family. So we knew for a fact that there were truly walking and talking flexibility. It was a very big surprise when the lady told me that her request for flexible working, we've been sorry just to discuss, flexible working was shut down immediately.

Valeria: What happened was it was an external recruiter and with that woman's permission, I actually contacted the employee themselves who were really upset to hear that their reputation was being tarnished essentially by this person. So they ended up speaking to her and I believe that she was even working with them after that experience, which was great because she was very happy at the way that they dealt with the situation. I don't think the recruiters any longer employed by that company because that's a very, very damaging thing to do.

Valeria: I would encourage if there's any employees listening to make sure that not only checking your internal recruitment teams aware of your position on say flexible working or whatever it may be that's really important to highlight through the recruitment process. And if you are using external recruiters and that's even more so, it's critical that they are aware that they are not to shut down conversations about flexible working because in that particular case it really seemed like it's a lot easier to just find somebody who can come into the office be chained to the desk nine to five and that's it.

Valeria: There's no further conversations required. So I'm really excited about the feedback loop because it can be that early warning system for employers before they get the bad glass store review or before they realize that they're actually having a negative impact on even consumers. Because if you're a bank for example, and you're having all these people go through the process they might get really upset and think, "I'm going to go bank with another bank." And yeah. So I think it's really exciting because we can help people improve in the areas where they might not be aware of any issues happening.

Samantha: Yeah, definitely. It's interesting what you said about people might decide they're going to go and use a different bank and things. And in the three decades if I say most of the decisions around finances are made by men in a household. And even if women did make decisions, it was like around the white goods in the kitchen or whatever. Whereas now women have their own spending power, a really strong spending power, and have a huge portion of the global spend on things like what bank are they using, where are they getting their mortgage? Who's their insurer? And so those types of things do have a massive knock on effect now in a way they wouldn't have had 25 years ago.

Valeria: That's exactly right. And I've had a few conversations with employers and it's almost like it's a real realization all of a sudden because people are both a customer, consumer, a candidate, a potential partner, whatever it might look like. And like Gemma said, ultimately people need to be treated with respect and the feedback loops been really well received by employees as well I have one employee actually that contacts us on a weekly basis or even more often sometimes saying, "Has there been any feedback? Has there been..." They're dying to find out and improve because usually as an employer you're not like... They try to contact the people that have been unsuccessful, but more often than not, people are not really keen to continue the conversation. So for us it's that anonymous kind of way of providing that feedback so that they can have a look at maybe we need to do some more training and so on to maintain their often it's a wonderful, wonderful brand that is already there. So it just needs to be I guess relayed at every point of contact with recruitment being a huge one.

Samantha: Yeah. So one of the things I love about talking with you Valeria is that you just have so much knowledge in your mind and just so many stories about what's happening at the endorsed employers. And I was hoping you could share kind of one or two of your favorite success stories from endorsed employees and the impact that WORK180 has had there.

Valeria: Sure. So I guess one of the ones that come to mind because probably because it's so close to my experience all those years ago is there was a lady who, actually this was back before the feedback loop. So we would do things manually and often I'd pick up the phone and I'd call some of the candidates and just to chat to them about their experience. I was speaking to this lady and she said to me that, your website has given me the confidence to actually reject the job offer. And I was like, "What do you mean?" And she said, "I actually had a job offer on the table with a company that is not endorsed by WORK180. It seems like a good job but they were very, very adamant that there was no flexibility at all in this role. And she was in tech so that's totally should be able to be done flexibly.

Valeria: And she said she had a contract already in her inbox but they were saying that you must be in the office every single day. And she had a new baby as well. So she was really hoping to work one day a week from home. And she said to me "After I came across your website, I actually had the courage to reject that job offer, tell them thanks, but no thanks, had a look on your site, found a job and I actually have an interview tomorrow." And I was like, "Wow, that's fantastic. Where are you going to interview?" And she said it was with NAB and at that point I actually even got a little bit nervous thinking it's such a huge organization. What if she get somebody who might not be 100% on board or whatever it might look like, tried to contact them and actually didn't get to them in time, but I shouldn't have worried because the person who interviewed her was absolutely wonderful.

Valeria: She got the job. It is flexible. We actually have a case study about her success on our website. So to me that was so nice to know that somebody else who could potentially have had to settle for an employer that was not as flexible and also that employer has now lost the fantastic employees. So to me that was a huge success story and really, really close to my heart.

Samantha: Yeah, I love that one. And there's another one that we've talked about before, which is Catherine Lego Rock. Can you talk about that story too?

Valeria: Yeah, sure. So Catherine is such an inspiration. She works at Lego rock and she's got a very key role doing the safety inductions at one of their sites. And now Catherine has cerebral palsy, she's in a wheelchair and the adversity that she would have faced as you can imagine looking for other roles and trying to secure jobs it was really, really tough. So she was very, and she spoke to you as well, so feel free to jump in but she shared her story and it was so good that we had to publish two separate articles and the first one was all about her building resilience and sharing her tips with other job seekers who might be feeling a little bit discouraged in the job search.

Valeria: And the other one was all about her, mostly her manager Nick and also Connor who had really changed the work place for her in the sense, things like little things changing her starting time so she wouldn't be stuck in peak hour traffic in a taxi, in a wheelchair in Sydney traffic. So it's just so refreshing and we still stay in touch. We actually had Catherine join one of our events with She Loves Data a few months ago and she was on the panel and the inside she shared just for anyone listening as well, was amazing in the sense of people have all sorts of statements on their job ads such as looking for people of indigenous background and so on and courage them to apply.

Valeria: She would've loved to see more of those statements around encouraging people with disabilities to apply and asking them if there's any modifications that you may need to be made to the recruitment process. She also spoke about if you have kids and they come up to a person in a wheelchair, don't just shoo them away and say, "Don't talk to that person." Because I'd almost creates that us and them mentality at the very beginning and then translates to the workforce because she spoke about coming into an interview and people just staring at her with fear in their eyes.

Valeria: So there are obviously, there's so many great training organizations and resources that people can leverage to actually up skill the hiring managers so that if somebody does rock up to an interview in a wheelchair, you are actually equipped to treat them like a person like Gemma said. Her insights have been wonderful and will continue the campaign that we've got coming up as well which she is hopefully going to take part in because I think my son has cerebral palsy, so another topic close to my heart. But I think we need to highlight like Gemma said before that every woman, so women of different ages,

backgrounds and so on and so on. So that's another and she bought her first house as well through her career at Laner Rook, which is very, very exciting. And we're all super inspired by her.

Samantha: Yeah, yeah. She was a nice thing. You're right. I did do her staff profile stories and she'd been job hunting for a full time job for 10 years when she got the role at Langer Rogue. And she also said, "If we've cut people off at the beginning before we even hear what they have to say, like imagine the wealth of knowledge and information and ideas and diversity of thought that we're cutting out a workforce." Which I just love that idea as well.

Valeria: Yeah, she's so wonderful. Just speaking to her meeting her, just filled me with, I don't know how to describe it, but it was just, yeah, she's a superstar.

Samantha: So Gemma, you've had a lot of business and personal kind of milestones and successes in the last 12 months, and I was hoping you could talk about some of them.

Gemma: Yeah, I guess the biggest one was from a personal note, it's my little boy Charlie. He's seven months. He was born at the end of may and my timing was really terrible with, I don't know whether it was having Charlie or the other business initiative that I took on at the same time, but when I was nine months pregnant, actually literally on the day I went into labor, I closed around or agreed terms, finalize the negotiation for the terms of &2.2 Million dollars in capital for WORK180 and I was having a contraction whilst agreeing on the contract and my partner just he was just like so impressed and he was like, you are just crazy.

Gemma: But that was like a pretty exciting yet difficult time because anyone who's had a child and nine months, you kind of know just how incredibly exhausted you are all the time. And it was just tested me on every level that you can imagine. But the thing is because WORK180 allowed me to work flexibly and work from home, I was able to manage it and I was able to get the job done. And whilst managing being pregnant and even looking at say for instance that first trimester some women are really lucky and they don't have any morning sickness or anything like that. It wasn't the case to me.

Gemma: I did have sickness and all those sorts of things. But again, because of the flexible work and the remote working that I was able to have, it meant that I could work around the hours where I really knew I felt fine. It meant that I could sit at home and get my work done without having to... I just can't imagine like fast trimester pregnancy, you don't want to tell anyone you're pregnant because it's a higher risk time. Can you imagine going into work and being on a bus while you just feel like throwing up or you've got terrible sickness and it's just... I just want to just have so much respect for women that... The millions of women that do that and just feel so lucky and grateful to work for a company to like WORK180 where we get flexible working.

Valeria: I know Samantha you have a story about the sickness in the morning.

Samantha: Yeah, I just you had to tell it because when I was pregnant. I think I was about... I had really bad morning sickness as well and I was about four months pregnant, maybe not quiet and I was on the bus on the way home and I had to get off the bus and lie down on a park bench because I felt so to sick and call my, the ex, my then partner to come and get me from the bus stop because I couldn't get back on the bus to get home. And then he was having to drive me into work basically every day because I couldn't face public transport because I was feeling so sick. And I just remember thinking we discount

the impact of this on women's bodies so much because so many people do it. It's like everybody just goes, "Oh yeah, that's just pregnancy, whatever." But it actually is a huge toll on your body and really hard.

Gemma: Oh, Oh yeah. I just, it's so fresh in my mind that feelings. So I just feel terrible for you having to go through that.

Samantha: Yeah, it was pretty awful. So one of the things that allowed you to work right up until Charlie was born and then also come back to work so quickly after he was born is the fact that WORK180 is fully flexible. And so Gemma I was hoping you could talk a little bit about what fully flexible means, what the benefits are and then also some of the challenges that you might've seen at WORK180 implementing that.

Gemma: Yeah, fully flexible to us is pretty much trying to accommodate anybody's situation whilst obviously not dropping the ball when it comes to impact on their team or on the client. For example obviously we work from home and we work remotely, but also things like we accommodate compressed hours or part time, maybe two days a week or sometimes we're more than happy for people to work different hours. I know we've got one of our engineers and she prefers to work in the evening. So she's worked it out with the engineering team that she's going to start a little bit later. She has a two hour lunch break because she's really into her fitness at the moment, but she makes it all up later and it works for the team and then it obviously doesn't impact to any project deadlines or anything like that.

Gemma: As long as it works for everyone around them, it's fine with us. Some of the challenges I guess is aside, I mean there's the obvious ones that sometimes you may not make a great hiring choice and someone comes in who isn't that motivated and can't manage themselves and can't be trusted. But those types of people are very, very few and far between. So the vast majority of people do the right thing. And so in terms of other challenges around that, it's things like making sure that people feel connected and engaged and making sure that there's still social aspects to work when they are working from home and also relationship building as well. There's a lot of value when you see someone face to face and you have that one to one connection with them and it could potentially take longer for people to have that connection when they're not face to face together.

Gemma: So I think over time we've done a really, really good job particularly now I'm feeling really happy and I think the team feels really happy. And we do have a really good feedback culture as well that we've got the balance right of enabling that social interaction so whether it be via monthly lunches or dinners, we also hang out on Zoom and Slack, all of those sorts of things. So kind of combating those feelings of isolation. And we've had so many people start with us and then the feedback's been, "I thought I would be lonely, but this is the most connected I've ever felt with my employees, with my colleagues. Sorry."

Samantha: Yeah. One of the things you didn't say when you were describing full flexibility is that WORK180 doesn't actually have an office. So everybody works remotely and that's why there's the issue of having to make sure that people feel connected with each other via social things and lunches and online as well.

Gemma: Yeah, definitely. They will work from home. Yeah. Sorry. Go on.

Valeria: I was just going to say, somebody made a comment the other day, I think it was one of another member of the engineering team that the reason that the remote and flexibility works is because everybody's doing it whereas in lots of places people might have some people come in the office and then there's that one person that works flexibly and everyone's hating on that person because they want to do it as well. And they will not allow to or whatever it might look like. So I think having everyone in the same boat really helps because it's just the way that it is and we've been told as well from new starters that they found that the infrastructure available and everything's really equipped to do your job from anywhere. So I think that's a big factor in making this a success as well.

Gemma: Yeah, that's actually a conversation that I've had with someone else before as well, who she was working in a company where they had really good flexibility options, but plenty of people worked in office all the time. And so she said they have teleconferencing for meetings, but then what would happen is people who were in the office are like, "Oh well we'll just step into a meeting room." And people who were then using the teleconferencing options ended up kind of being left out of things and when able to participate in the same way and it was just not working quite as well. And so I think you're right there. The fact that everybody's remote means that everybody's used to how you catch up with people and everybody's kind of in the same book really.

Samantha: I wanted to ask you Valeria, you gave the NAB story where it's a really big company and so when the woman went to apply you're like, "Oh I hope they get someone good who really lives the values that they say they do." And I wondered with these big companies, because you know we might be working with a part of the company or an HR area or something like that and they agree with everything that WORK180 is doing and they believe in the policies that the company has in place around supporting women in the workplace. But then if you have a direct manager that doesn't believe in it, then there's very little you can really do. And so I wondered how you keep based on how you keep companies kind of accountable when they are really big and they can be so much variability across the whole organization.

Valeria: Yeah, that is exactly why the feedback loop is so crucial because as you said it's really all about your manager so down the track, because we have jobs advertised across all different business areas. As long as they meet the criteria, which 99.9% of cases all jobs do. So they're all eligible for the feedback loop and we can start to build a really big picture view of what's actually happening. And then you can probably imagine the kind of trends that we could be presenting. So for example, women of this background, they are coming into a company and they're finding that their flexibility requests are being accommodated, say 80% of them feel like it is what they envisioned at interview stage. It is actually playing out three months later because I'm not sure if we mentioned this as well, but the feedback loop continues after you get the job if you get the job.

Valeria: So that's really exciting because you can just imagine the trends that we could be showing and we can see who's improving, who might need a bit of extra help. And then it really helps companies pinpoint as well. Another example in this area is somebody before the feedback loop was implemented, contacted us and told us that they interviewed with a large organization that actually asked them what their current salary was. And they were really surprised because that CEO of that company just became an equal pay ambassador. They were always talking about the importance of pay equality and so on. So I got in touch again with their permission with somebody at that company and they were horrified to learn that that had happened because they just rolled out new training and they had taken it very seriously.

Valeria: They got in touch with the candidate again as the other company did and really appreciated the fact that we flagged it with them so that they can go and revisit the training or perhaps talk to the individual and say, you know, why did you ask that question? We don't ask that question anymore, obviously in a nice manner. Maybe they weren't aware or maybe they missed the training or whatever may look like. So we don't know what we don't know. And the role of the feedback loop is to help people understand where they could do better essentially if I could just sum it down to that one sentence in terms of employer impact.

Samantha: Yeah. Okay. I love that. Now one of the things you just said is that we don't ask people the question about their current salary anymore. So if someone's listening and they don't really understand the link between those two things, can you explain why we don't want people to ask what your current salary is now?

Valeria: Yeah sure and a lot of people do kind of they're not unaware of this until you talk about it. So maybe again, sharing a personal story where I was interviewing with a company that was offering me, it was slightly more money than my previous role. I was leaving my previous role because I was underpaid. So after I had gotten a job, my HR manager actually said to me, so you'd be happy with this because it's 20K more than what you were on before. Now it was very difficult for me to get a pay rise after that. Even though I had smashed all my KPIs and when I left, they had hired somebody else at around 50K more so it was clearly when the organization isn't on top of the equal pay initiatives and they are just going for the candidate that might be cheaper.

Valeria: It's not going to play out well. If you ask the question, the person truthfully answers what they were on because if they were being underpaid then they might think, "Oh, we're getting ourselves a really good deal over here." Another good example is we had a story from Zendesk where they had a recruiter who brought two people towards to a hiring manager in tech and said, "You should really hire the woman. She only wants 80K whereas the guy wants 100K." Now that manager at that point said, "I'm hiring a woman because she's the best person for the role and I'm paying her 100,000 because that's what the role pays." So he ended up right there and then whereas often people may go down a different direction and then women will continue to be underpaid and there's already a big enough pay gap that exists.

Valeria: So that question shouldn't be asked. It should be based on what the role is paid. And if you are a candidate you could talk about, "I've done my research. This is what I believe the role is worth." And so on and talk about their achievements and stay away from that question and answering it in a direct manner. We also have a blog on our website that talks about how you can address this when maybe we can put that link in the show notes.

Samantha: Yeah, definitely. I was just going to mention that actually. Because if I can put what you've said with your stories into kind of systemic language, essentially asking someone what their current salary is perpetuates the gender pay gap because if you're being paid less and then you go in and you're going to be paid less the new role, that keeps that gap intact.

Valeria: Exactly.

Samantha: But yeah, we can definitely link to the...work180.com So I'll link to the blog in the show notes, which will be on our website and you can find it then. So then I want to ask Gemma, this is kind of

our final question, Valeria you'll have a chance to ask answer this question as well. But Gemma, if you could go back about a decade and talk to young Gemma, about everything that was to come and all the challenges, but then also all the amazing highs that you've had over the last 10 years, what would you say to her, would you say to young Gemma?

Gemma: Oh gosh. Do you know it would probably... I'm laughing. And the reason why I'm laughing is because it's such a cliché kind of answer that I think a lot of women kind of tell themselves, but it's so true and that is just to really back yourself and don't be walked all over but at the same time just really have confidence in what you think is the right thing to do.

Gemma: I think one of the really great things about having the Valeria as a co-founder is I do feel really supported and really backed. And I think Valeria has given me a lot of confidence to be able to get better and better and better and back myself and all of those sorts of things. So thank you Vee.

Valeria: Ooh. Am going to start tearing up now.

Gemma: You are my cheer leader and it's just, it's been amazing to have you as a co-founder. Sorry to end the podcast on a cheesy like that. But-

Valeria: No, I love it. And vice versa I thought you were going to say it's because I'm older! I was thinking because lucky you went first I got a little bit of time to think but I was going to say something along the lines of, back then I was just clawing my way back into the corporate world after literally doing dishes for \$10 an hour. And cleaning jobs and things like that because I had lost all hope ever getting my mind active again. I think that what I would have needed to hear at that point in time that it's going to be okay. It's not always going to be like this. You're not going to be struggling as a single parent without a career anymore because I was in a corporate world, very, very young and very ambitious and very driven and if somebody to add to that, say you're going to meet this amazing co founder and you're going to get along like a house on fire, you're going to become best friends and then you're going to have this business that's going to help people that are in your situation what you're feeling right now.

Valeria: And I can't think of like a more rewarding career path or a dream come true as I said earlier and it's so amazing that we have met each other and started this business because it's very, very unusual to have two people that are so aligned. And I've never met anyone, and I say this all the time probably told you this already Sam, anyone that matches Gemma's work ethics and it's just incredible. So I would have told myself not to worry, not to stress. And you're going to have this amazing opportunity down the track and you're going to be happy as Vale.

Samantha: I really hope you enjoyed today's chat. If you can help us spread the word by giving us a review on iTunes, that helps even more people find Equality Talks. To find out more about our mission, check out current opportunities with WORK180 endorsed employers and to read and listen to more inspiring stories. Please head over to WORK180 See you next time!