



Equality Talks Podcast - Transcript

Episode 3: Bravery, resilience and single motherhood

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.

Samantha: Today's guest is Ife Akintoye She joined Mott MacDonald two and a half years ago to focus on recruitment, marketing and employer branding. She has a degree in creative design with marketing and a background in marketing events and office management. Ife is a single parent to an 11 year old who was born just two months before she graduated university. Her daughter is her biggest inspiration and the reason she continuously strives to better herself. In her spare time, Ife can be found researching and analyzing new social media trends, writing, running and exploring. Thank you so much for joining me today. I have a chat on equality talks.

Ife: Thank you for having me.

Samantha: I'm really excited to hear some of your story because you know, we don't hear a lot of really empowering stories about single mothers. I'm a single mother myself and so I'd love to hear a bit of your story about being in university, obviously you were pregnant at university, and knowing what was coming and how you kind of handled all that and managed this side of your career.

Ife: Sure. Yeah. I mean, I think I always say being pregnant in my final year of university was one of the hardest things I've had to do. It really just kind of prepped me for life. Yeah. I mean, I think it was very much go, go, go. I was constantly, if I wasn't in uni doing some kind of project, I was working my part time job as you do when you're in uni is trying to earn some extra cash. While I was driving back up to London because I was obviously studying outside of London to attend my midwife appointments or just in a lecture. So, yeah, it was a difficult time, but I mean, I don't regret any part of it. I made quite a big decision to not take out any extra time or get any extra help because I really wanted to strive for the end goal, which was graduating with my peers at the same time as them. I just didn't feel like I really needed any extra kind of special treatment really. And she was completely unplanned as well. So, it was definitely a big matter of making sure that all plans are in place before I started my final year. So yeah, big surprise. But you know, sometimes these things just make you stronger, I guess.

Samantha: Well, they do. And so I'm interested in what you said about not wanting any kind of special treatment. And I understand that sentiment, but pregnancy is really hard and so is doing a final year of university and working and all those things. So, what did you do to support yourself through that so could manage to do it all?

Ife: So, I think I've always been very hard on myself. In hindsight when I look back, I completely agree with you and I think I actually went through, it was quite a big thing that I went through. And I definitely deserved as much help as I could get but I've always been so hard on myself. And because she was unexpected, I kind of was like, "I don't want anyone to think of me as any less and think that I can't handle any of this. Or that because I'm pregnant, it means that I can't do just as much as they can do." So, it was almost like I wanted to prove myself.

Ife: But yeah, I agree. It is very, very difficult and I had lots of support from my family so I can't discredit them at all. I think that's a big part of how I managed to survive. My mom made sure I was very organized kind of during the summer before I started my final year. Yeah, I honestly sometimes I look back and I don't know really how I got through it, but I think just being super organized with everything, making sure I had people on the end of the phone if needs be. And I think because I was so busy, I almost didn't have the time to sit down and think, "Oh my God, I'm so tired." There was really no time to sit down and think. You just had to get on with it really.

Ife: And then obviously after I gave birth to her, I had to come back and do my exams and kind of finish stuff off. That was probably the most difficult time because obviously you're kind of breastfeeding and you're going through all the different emotions of parenting and you know, I was on my own and so I had all of those kinds of things to deal with in my head. So, yeah, that was probably the more difficult part for me.

Samantha: Like the time after she was born and you went back trying to do your exams and stuff?

Ife: Exactly. Yeah, exactly. So, once she was in the world, obviously I had this amazing new child, but I still had lots to do and I still had to kind of being single and being... I was almost graduating, no job and all of that to deal with. So, that was probably the hardest part of it, I think.

Samantha: Yeah. I mean those newborn days are really hard in any circumstance, but particularly when you feel that additional pressure of needing to get a job really quickly and being single. Because I was not single in the newborn phase, so I had support in that.

Ife: Okay. That's great.

Samantha: But yeah, that's a tough time. And so then you said that you needed to kind of get work quite quickly after she was born to get money coming in. Is that right?

Ife: Yeah. So, after she was born I was kind of, I believe stuck. I didn't really know what I wanted to do. I was very lucky obviously, I kind of moved back with my parents. I had the support of having a roof over my head, et cetera, et cetera. But you know, you kind of have to get your career launched really. I wanted to get out and work and I wanted to show her that actually this is how life works. You kind of work hard for what you want. There's no sitting around, you do what you have to do. But you know, I had graduated with a career. I had very little marketing experience because I hadn't really done a gap year or anything. Just kind of little internships but nothing huge. So, it was difficult at the time in those days. Well, back in a few years ago, just to get kind of an entry level marketing role without having the backup experience.

Ife: So, yeah, I kind of worked my way up in office management, which is what the kind of the opportunity I was having at the time. And I did really well. You know, I kind of got promotions and I kind of got to managerial level and everything and kind of realized that actually I wasn't very happy and had the opportunity to take some time out. Very, very lucky at the time. And yeah, and that's when I kind of applied for lots of entry level marketing roles. So, I kind of started over maybe a time when people were already well into their graduate roles. But it was something I had to deal with if I wanted to get where I wanted. And, yeah, I was lucky enough to be given an opportunity to get an entry level marketing role. I guess the rest is history.

Samantha: And that roll is what led you to Mott MacDonald?

Ife: Yes. Exactly. So, I was in my previous marketing role for a few years and it was amazing. I literally learned everything there was to learn about marketing. I traveled, met lots of different people. I'd kind of put together whole campaigns, I dealt with events. It was literally a bit of everything. And it was a global company just like Mott MacDonald but on a much smaller scale. And yeah, my boss at the time was really kind of adamant that she wanted me to just kind of really think about my future and learn different things. So, it was amazing. And then, yeah, once I was there for a few years, I knew I was ready for something more senior and just a new challenge because as you probably heard my story, I seem to like a challenge.

So, then I was given the opportunity to join Mott MacDonald, and I've been promoted since to more senior level here. And yeah, I've had a great time.

Samantha: Yeah. So, it sounds like you're doing some really interesting stuff at Mott MacDonald where they brought you in specifically to do recruitment marketing and employer branding. So, can you talk a bit about what you're doing there and how they kind of, because you said that they realized they needed somebody in that space and that's how you then got the opportunity. So, what was happening and what's happened since you've been there? What have you managed to change in your time?

Ife: So yeah, I mean I think recruitment marketing is kind of like a new buzzword at the moment. People are realizing that actually in order to attract the best people to your company, you need to market your company well. And you do need some experts within the marketing team to take care of that. You know, it's not enough to just kind of rely on recruiters to sell the role. So, Mott MacDonald was quite ahead of things I think because there aren't many companies at moment that have people within marketing that are dealing solely with the recruitment side and the career side and employer brand. So, Mott MacDonald realized actually, yeah we need that person and they hired me and now I actually have someone else that works with me so there's two of us and hopefully we will continue to expand.

Ife: So, since I've been here, I've kind of revamped the social media, the way we do social media. I've been involved in revamping the way we do our social media and our attraction. I've been involved in new fresh ideas and the way we should market ourselves. I kind of helped us move away from stock imagery when we're promoting any kind of careers related messages. Because obviously, if you're wanting to join a company, you want to see someone that is relatable to you, not a model from a stock library because that doesn't really tell you anything that's real about the company. I've just been involved in just kind of showing the real side of Mott MacDonald, almost the behind the scenes stuff that people want to know. It's not all about kind of the lovely polished stuff that we have on our website. People want to know what is it like? What will this company be like if I were to work there?

What kinds of things would I be involved in? What do people look like? What do they get up to day to day? What do they get up to kind of, you know, outside of the office?

Ife: And so I've been involved in kind of communicating those messages externally and just tons of stuff really. It's been really great fun just kind of putting together strategies as well. Making sure that we actually know why we're doing things. Just blogs, adverts, posters, all of the kind of standard marketing stuff as well. So, yeah, it has been a lot of fun. It's been very varied because obviously a completely new role. It's always going to be like that. But yeah, I've enjoyed it.

Samantha: That's quite an exciting period. Hey, when you're in a new row and you get the chance to kind of define how you do things and see what gets traction and really get to shape what it is you're doing. It's quite exciting.

Ife: Very. Yeah. I mean, a lot of it is trial and error. We don't really know sometimes how things will be received. But you know, we kind of just get on and do them. And also just really getting the employees involved. That's another thing that I've really been trying to push because our employees are the, one thing I learned about Mott MacDonald when I started that was quite unique was the fact that people genuinely love working here. And we just didn't seem to really be communicating that out at all before I started. And I just didn't understand why. I mean, why would we not show the fact that our employees are our biggest advocates? They love it here. And you know, they really get involved and they're passionate about the projects that they work on. And they're passionate about some of the charity work that they do as well, which we do a lot of charity work. They're passionate about hanging out with their colleagues after work as well.

Ife: And these are the things that I always felt that we needed to communicate. So, we've been putting a lot more of those kinds of stories out more. And our people are, yeah, they are really, I mean if you speak to anyone at Mott MacDonald, very passionate about, as I've said a few times about just being here. So, I think that's not something you see in many companies and we're kind of like, it sounds really cheesy, but I always say we're kind of like a family. We all kind of look out for each other and it's really nice. It's a nice atmosphere.

Samantha: That is really nice. And it's actually, you're right, it's not that common that people really are passionate advocates for the company that they work for. It's an amazing position to be in where they've built that in a really successful way.

Ife: Yeah, definitely. And I don't really know how it's come about that way. We've got people that have been here for so many years. Years and years and years and years. We've got people that have left the company and come back to Mott MacDonald. So yeah, it's a great thing to have built. It's just, like I said, just before I started, didn't seem to really be out there and I was just like, "We need to talk about this more." And people are so willing to come forward and tell their message. Once you kind of put the feelers out, people offer you their stories. And they say, "Oh, can I put something together about this?" Or, you know, "I've just done this and I've just filmed a video about it. Can you talk about that?" It's really, really good stuff. We've got people that are doing some amazing things and our projects are so varied. I think people think of a company like ours and they automatically think bridges and tunnels and yeah, that's a large part of what we do but we also do projects that are combating climate change and reducing inequality and things like that. So, we've got some really good stuff.

Samantha: Can you tell me about some of the projects that are working against climate change and to encourage equality?

Ife: Yeah, so I think there was one off the top of my head, it was a project that we did in Cumbria and it was of Storm Desmond in December, 2015. Lots of homes were flooded, the power cuts, water supplies were disrupted and things like that. And we had to work to find a new way to sort all of that out. So yeah, we were involved in the projects program and commercial management if I've gotten that correct. And yeah, so that was one of our great projects. We've got quite a bit about that on our website.

Ife: Inequality, one that springs to mind immediately if I can... I just wanted to make sure I get all the words correct. We have a project called the Calculus Project in the USA. And that was an education program. It was developed by our Cambridge education team. They're kind of a part of Mott MacDonald and it was involved in just changing the way high schools in Massachusetts, New York and Florida supported African American and Latino students from low income backgrounds to achieve success in maths. So, things like that, you know, we're heavily involved in. And those are the things that I am proud to talk about because actually we are really helping to make a difference to people around the world every day. So, yeah.

Samantha: Yeah. Amazing. It is amazing because like you say, they're actually doing a lot more than what we sort of associate with Mott MacDonald. It's really good. Yeah. I want to go back a little bit to what you said earlier. You were talking about how Mott MacDonald realized they really need to market themselves as a company, as an employer to get the best candidates. And so in your role, what are the things that you see people are really looking for? Like people who are job hunting, what are they concerned about? What are they engaging with when you try and tell them about the benefits of working with Mott MacDonald?

Ife: Well, I think that as a candidate looking for a job, we have become, I think where the candidates are now in a position where they have the opportunity to really be picky. Candidates are shopping around now. Gone are the days where it's a bit like all the candidates are really kind of begging to get a job with you. It's almost like we have to sell ourselves to them as much as they have to sell themselves to us. And they've got so many options, they've got many ways of research in different companies and things that they want. People are savvier now people are really big on things like technology. Just making sure that they've got the best technology to work with. People are really big on CSR and whether or not is a company they're going to work for a sustainable-

Samantha: What's CSR?

Ife: Sorry, CSR is corporate social responsibilities. They're kind of all of the charity work and things that people do in the background. Will they have the opportunity to get involved in things like that? We've noticed that people are really big on that.

Ife: People are also quite big on sustainability. You know, whether or not their company are interested in the subject of sustainability or pushing for sustainability and things like that. And yeah, I think that, like I said, people know what they want. They know that they can afford to shop around. And so we really have to make sure that we've got the whole experience packaged up for them.

Ife: And you know, there's so many ways that they can research different companies now. Everyone's on social media. Everyone has a Glassdoor page. And so yeah, I think those are the messages that we like to try and push out because you know, these are the things that we do every day. Our colleagues are involved in so many different things. You know, we have things like lunchtime literacy, which is where we have colleagues that go out at lunchtime to go and read to school children that are struggling nearby in one of the local schools. I've been involved in that myself. We have so many different things that we actually get up to. So, just telling people that actually you will have the opportunity to do these things if you come along and join us is kind of what I like to try and do. Just spread those messages, really.

Samantha: I also wanted to go back to one of the things you just sort of mentioned in passing when you were talking about the marketing that you're doing. And you said, "Oh, you know, it's trial and error. We don't really know what's going to work." And the reason why I liked that was because I think that, that actually applies to everything in life. So, we know that it applies to marketing. You try something to see if it works and you see what gets traction and where the trends are. But it's the same with life. Like you go for a new job and you don't know if it'll work out, but you just go for it and try and see what happens.

Ife: Yep, definitely.

Samantha: It's like a nice kind of low pressure way of looking at making decisions because all you know from this stage is that you don't know. And the best thing to do is try.

Ife: Yeah, definitely. And I think that obviously because recruitment marketing at Mott MacDonald was so new, we had to just try things, you know? And from there we get our stats and our statistics and our analytics. And from there we can record what people like, what works, what gets them more applications and from which parts of the world, et cetera, et cetera. And from there we kind of understand how are we going to, and that informs our future decisions and the things that we do going forward. So yeah, lots of it in the beginning was definitely, let's try something new. Let's do this, let's do that, let's see what response we'll get, et cetera. And you're right, I mean that's life. Risks have to be taken or you have to try new things. That's really the only way you'll learn really. And as human beings, I think that's something that we're constantly afraid of. We kind of want to do what we've always been doing because we know it will work or because it's easier, but sometimes you really have to step out of your comfort zone in order to get something better or to achieve something better.

Samantha: I absolutely agree. And I think that from discomfort very often comes growth.

Ife: Yes, definitely. I like that.

Samantha: So, you sent through a bit of answers to a few questions before we talked and you said in there that career change is never easy and you had a bit of a knock in confidence. And I think that this all kind of ties together quite well. So, can you talk about that a bit? Kind of the difficulty of career change and the loss of confidence that you had, but then how you managed to regain that confidence and what changed in time?

Ife: Yeah, it was really hard because obviously you can't help but compare yourself to people. That's just kind of what we do. Especially in the age of social media. It's easier to compare yourself. And you

know, I knew I wasn't happy in the role that I was doing before. I wanted to pursue what I'd studied because it was something I enjoyed and I knew that I was passionate about it. And so I did decide to change careers and I knew it was just difficult because obviously I kind of had to take pay cuts to start from scratch, entry level. I had to start at the bottom, but I was slightly older than maybe people that I'd graduated with and had gone straight into marketing. So, I was constantly comparing myself to those people.

Ife: And yeah, it was just a very difficult one for me. I really did have a big knock in confidence and also just because I just didn't know what I was doing. It was completely new. I mean I had the degree but I was working on the job for the first time. And you know, I had the knowledge, but really putting that knowledge to practice in real life is completely different. So with me, when I don't know how to do something, I really do struggle and it does knock my confidence because I like to kind of be good at what I'm doing. I like to perfect my skill. I'm not really big on kind of just climbing the ladder for the sake of it. I want to be good at it. I want to be good at what I'm doing and I'd rather kind of perfect my craft than climb the ladder. I've always said that.

Ife: So yeah, I think I dealt with that. I think it just took time. It took a lot of time. It took a lot of confidence building. So, I just kind of put myself in scenarios that were completely out of my comfort zone. Got out there and spoke to new people. Did things that I probably wouldn't normally do, but I threw myself into things and I think that's how I slowly started to gain confidence and slowly had people talking to me and about me and understanding that actually I was good at my job. And I suppose those little praises really help even more, because you're like, "Actually, yeah, I can do this. Other people have seen I can do this. I can do this."

Ife: But yeah, I think the biggest thing for me has always just been throwing myself into a situation that I would not be normally comfortable with because it's like learning things the hard way, but it's always been something that really helps me kind of get that confidence boost I need. So yeah, I think those are some of the ways I dealt with it. And always just remembering that actually I am the one main inspiration in my daughter's life. So, I've just got to get on and do it and just stop moaning about it really.

Samantha: We've mentioned that earlier in this chat already even and I wrote down you're really showing her what an empowered woman looks like. And it's interesting to hear you kind of reiterate that a couple of times where you want her to see you being successful and ambitious and doing things that scare you and that gives her then a guide to how she can go and live her life.

Ife: Yeah, 100% and I don't want her to think that everything is always going to work out. It's not always going to be rosy. You know, sometimes you might try things and you realize that doesn't work and that I shouldn't have done it that way but then you will learn something from it. So, I try not to hide real life issues from her. Not too much. We communicate very well with each other. We talk about things and I feel like she has kind of been shaped into a better person for it. She is slightly older and wiser than maybe her peers in her years, kind of in her year. She is still a child. She's got the best of both worlds. She knows actually. Yeah. She's a bit more mature than, she knows in real life things happen. But there are ways to overcome that. And I think that's why I'm still teaching myself to be honest. I guess that's a reason why I've decided that yeah, I've got to just get on with things sometimes. When I'm feeling at my lowest, when I'm like, "Actually I'm not sure I can do this." I think about her and I think actually I've got to do it because she is watching me all the time, so I have to do it.

Samantha: Yeah. Well, and you know what you're talking about really goes back to, there's a guy called Simon Sinek who has a Ted Talk called The Power of Why. And he really talks about the fact that we're most able to take real positive action while we understand why we're doing it. And understanding what that driving force is in all of us is really important to be able to actually harness any kind of passion that you might have. And so for you, you have a really strong why of being a provider and an inspiration to your daughter, which I think then makes you able to take steps that if you didn't have that kind of guiding light, it might be more difficult.

Ife: Yeah, definitely. I mean, yeah, completely. Like you said, I am like her number one provider as well. So, it's not like I've ever been able to sit back and be like, "Oh, I just can't be bothered." "Maybe I should just take some time out," or whatever. Like I don't have that luxury or the opportunity. So yeah, I think when I was a bit younger I used to just be like, "Oh God, life's so hard. And it's a difficult." As I've gotten older, I've really, really, really appreciate the fact that I've had her to spur me on because I didn't think I would have pushed myself as much. I probably wouldn't be where I am today if I'm honest. So yeah, it's been great and it's never easy. I've had moments where I've really, really struggled but that's life I guess. It's never warm and rosy is it?

Samantha: Well exactly. And it's kind of how you have resilience through those moments that define you as a person.

Ife: Definitely. Yes. I agree.

Samantha: And to go back as well, to some of the stuff that you were talking about with the way you built your confidence, is that I'm a big believer in exactly what you did, which is that confidence is built through action. And so you can theorize and plan and talk about how you might do something, but in reality it's where the rubber hits the road that you feel more confident because you take action, you get a result and like you said, other people see, "Oh, she can do that." And you're like, "Oh yeah, I can do that." And you get confidence through that positive feedback loop that really only starts when you actually take action.

Ife: Yes, definitely. Yeah. I'm also really big on positive feedback. I absolutely love it. When people kind of give me a good response, it just spurs me on even more. It really, really gets me going because I'm like, "Yeah, I want an even better response." I always say I'm always in competition with myself. I'm very competitive but with myself. So, I just want to kind of be the better if at every time. Sometimes I think, "Oh we shouldn't really worry what people think," and we shouldn't. But it is nice when people can see what a hard worker you are or the output that's coming from you and the good stuff that you're putting in. So, it really does help.

Samantha: Yeah, I'm the same actually. And I think it's important to recognize the things that help make you feel better about your work. So, like I got an email from my boss a little while ago about some work that I'd done where we got good client feedback. And I wrote back to him and said, "Thank you very much for passing this on. I thrive on positive feedback. Please continue to send it to me." And it really does make a big difference because I like getting the good feedback and so then I want to do another good job so a different client gives good feedback. And I think recognizing that and be able to articulate it actually helps other people give you what you need to succeed as well.

Ife: Yes, definitely. And I think that's why it's very important in bosses as well, for them to realize actually sometimes just a little bit of praise, it goes a long way. Even just going up to the people in your team and just saying, "Oh wow, I really like how that project worked out that you worked on, it was brilliant. I saw that email that you wrote. That was really well put together." Things like that. It really kind of makes your employee sit there and think, actually yeah, I am going to do a really good job today. So yeah, I completely agree with what you said. I mean your reaction is probably a perfect reason. It shows that people really thrive on it.

Samantha: So, I want to talk a bit about the way you balance everything. So, at WORK180 we talk a lot about, you know, we're removing the language of primary and secondary carer and it's about parental care and parental leave and trying to share the load at home to enable women to progress more in the workplace. That obviously you don't have that in the form of a partner. And so how do you balance things so that you feel like you are sort of putting enough into your career and fulfilling your ambitions and also supporting your daughter in the way that she needs to be supported? And also how does Mott MacDonald support that? What's their philosophy around carers and supporting carers?

Ife: Okay. Yeah, you are right. I don't have the second person at home so that has always been another challenge for me. I mean, I thrive on lists. I'm really old school, but I just love a good list. I love just putting everything on my list. Everything goes into my iPhone and everything gets ticked off. I've constantly got a reminder so that my daughter and I know exactly what's happening on which day and where we need to be, et cetera.

Ife: We kind of work as a partnership as well. So, I did have some times where it was a real struggle for me doing everything. And as she's gotten older I've had to teach her that actually there are things that you can do to help out as well. So yeah, I have learned to balance things. Lots of rushing around to make sure I get to certain things in time. You know, parents evening, back from a meeting, et cetera, et cetera. I just have to make sure that everything's planned super, really well, like within every single second is timed.

Ife: The unfortunate side to single parenting is sometimes single parenting without having, my daughter's father isn't actually in our lives at all. So, things like school plays and every school holiday, unfortunately I can't be there for everything because you know, there's only so many things that you can kind of juggle. So, she's learned to understand that I will be there most of the time as much as I can. So, it's not hiding things from her as well. Just explaining that you know, I am going to try my best, but there are times where I might not be able to be there. And just making sure that she understands actually she's still loved and I will always really make the effort but I do also have a job that I have to get to.

Ife: So, just being really open and honest with her. I mean I work within the big group marketing team at Mott MacDonald. So, obviously slightly different than kind of the engineering management and consultancy side of the company. But my boss has always been really great with understanding that I need flexibility. So, you know, if I have to leave slightly earlier to head to parents evening and make up the hours some other way, maybe work from home or whatever, then he's good with that. If I have to work from home at any time, I just have to make sure, you know, all I have to do is say, "These my plans for that day, I'm going to be working from home for half the day. I'm going to be doing this." And so on and so forth.

Ife: And you know, throughout the company, that tends to be reiterated. It's a real kind of open and honest team that we have. And since I started here I don't think I've ever had a problem with making sure I can get to things and juggling things. It's literally as long as I've got my laptop and good internet connection, I can always make it work. And yeah, it has eliminated a hell of a lot of stress. I think it makes a huge difference having an employee in a company that are able to support you in that. I went through a time actually when I needed to work from home twice a day, only for a few months, but I had problems with childcare. It was a huge stress for me because it was just an extra kind of thing that I had to try and sort out. And yeah, we kind of sat down. One thing I was really grateful to the HR team is that they were kind of, they sat me down and they were adamant they wanted to find a solution. And we all worked together and eventually we found the solution as to how it was going to work. And yeah, I got through those few months nicely and it was brilliant.

Ife: So, I think that if you join Mott MacDonald and you're ever unsure about the flexibility that your boss will offer, it's just have an open and honest conversation. And Mott MacDonald will always provide you with the means to work anywhere. And you know, from what I've seen, I've been here for will it be three years in January, and I can honestly say it's eliminated a lot of the stress at home just knowing that actually I won't have a problem if I have to work elsewhere or if I have to leave to go to a parents evening or school play or whatever. So yeah, it has been great.

Samantha: That does sound really great. Really supportive because that's beyond what I would say the average is in terms of supporting people with balancing the rest of their lives.

Ife: Yeah, definitely. I think so. And I think you're always a bit nervous, aren't you when you start at a company? You're like, "Oh will you look at me as kind of being a slacker or not pulling my weight if I ask to have this or have that?" But no, I think that flexible working, at the end of the day, we're all working hard. As long as you're able to do your work, you shouldn't be judged regardless of that. So yeah. I'm actually grateful that I've never been judged. I've always been a hard worker and I think that the company do know that and any way that they can help and support me in order to do that better, knowing that my home life and my circumstances. From what I've seen and from my experience, they'll always try their best to do that. So, I can't really praise that side of Mott MacDonald enough really.

Samantha: That's fantastic. Really, it's so good to hear that.

Ife: Yeah.

Samantha: So, I want to ask if you could go back to younger you doing university exams with a newborn, really unsure how the next decade was going to unfold, what would you say to younger Ife?

Ife: Oh my gosh, that's such a good question. One of the things I would say is stop and take note of your mental health. I think mental health, I'm really, really happy to see that it's kind of a big subject at the moment. People are just more open about it and honest about it. And I think at the time it wasn't really talked about. I mean, it wasn't that many years ago, but you know things have changed quite rapidly. But I think that I probably was going through a few problems I didn't quite acknowledge at the time when I was juggling everything. I mean, going through relationship problems and trying to get all your exams done and having a newborn baby and having to worry about your job and career. And just other things like just not having the confidence to get out there and things like that. I think there were a lot of problems in my head that I probably didn't deal with and I suppressed everything.

Ife: So, going back, I would say to younger Ife that you should think about it, deal with it, get some help if needs be, talk to people more because I just never really spoke about things. I kind of just put this guard up and I just kind of pushed through and then I just thought that's how you just get on with things. So, that's the biggest thing I'd say to myself.

Ife: I'd also say to myself that it will all work out. Things will work out okay for you. Don't worry about the hard moments and the difficulties, the financial challenges. It will shape itself eventually. So yeah, don't panic. Don't panic too much.

Samantha: I love that. Don't panic too much. A little bit is okay.

Ife: I was always so stuck on having this stereotype and I think that's another thing I'd tell my younger self. Stop being so worried about stereotypes. I was like, "Oh I'm going to be the single, young black female and everyone's going to stereotype me." They're not going to know that I've actually studied and I've got ambitions. They're just going to look at me because I've got a baby and that's what people think. And also just like you said, that single parent narrative that people unfortunately do stereotype. And I just didn't want that for myself. And I think that held me back a lot as well in my career because I was always worried that people were judging me. But I would just tell myself to just get on with it and just hold your head up high and don't think about what people think about you. I wish I would have said that as well.

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's endorsed employers. And to read and listen to more inspiring stories please head over to [Work180.co](<http://www.work180.co/>). That's Work180.co. See you next time.