

## The Full Stop Episode 60

### January 2024 with Sophie Hunter

Sophie Hunter(00:00:00) - You know, there has been incidences of blatant bullying. You know, just because of somebody's search and their status, when somebody comes into work to work and tells a colleague that you know, their childlessness makes them means that they're selfish, means they want cooperative and certain negative things about their personality. What other situation would that not be? Bullying. If you came into work and started telling somebody negative things, negative connotations about their personality because of their race, their sexuality, their gender. Can you imagine the quick response from an organization, the uproar? Um, unless you're in one of those toxic places which sadly also exists. But that is bullying. You know, when people decide to, to sit there and just say these sorts of things, I couldn't and I wouldn't go into work and just start telling somebody negative things. I think about them for any reason. So when somebody does that through due to your child that that is bullying, that is that that is actually treating somebody less favourably, that is that is making somebody feel a certain way.

Sophie Hunter(00:01:15) - and people think they've got the entitlements to say these things still, and they don't.

Sarah Lawrence (00:01:29) - Hello and welcome to the Full Stop Podcast, a childless community podcast with Michael Hughes, Berenice Smith and me, Sarah Lawrence. If you're new to this podcast, we're here to delve beneath the surface of the child's identity, to cover what's going on in the wider community, and to look at the topics that really affect us. Our goal is to help and support those of you out in the community by sharing the stories and the voices that make up our narrative, so that you two can begin to find yours. We also aim to inform and educate those who aren't members of our community, so that they can begin to understand support those people in their lives who are facing a life without children. In this episode, we're joined by Sophie Hunter from SC Hunter associates, a freelance human resources and EDI consultant, to discuss childlessness in the workplace. Sophie has a wealth of knowledge about this topic, and we wanted to ask her about the issues that impact many of us in the workplace or in self-employment.

Sarah Lawrence (00:02:24) - For us, this episode is one of the most practical and hopeful when it comes to a topic that can so often leave our community feeling overlooked or unseen when compared to our colleagues who are parents. This episode is well worth a listen if you're employed in any capacity and would like to know what you can do to start to get your needs met as a childless worker. So sit back, relax, and enjoy this episode all about how we can have a little more space, time, and consideration for the childless in the workplace.

Berenice (00:02:54) - Good morning, Sophie Hunter, and welcome to the Full Stop podcast.

Sophie Hunter(00:03:00) - Thanks for inviting me, it's amazing.

Berenice (00:03:03) - A lot. We had a good old natter. We were talking for ages at story House, which is where we met. Because you were the panelists, were you? Actually, you hosted the panel on workplace with myself, with Jody and Katie. And we said we must get an episode because there's so much that we were talking about there that we couldn't share in the short panel that we had at story House, but also what we were talking about in the bar as well.

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Berenice (00:03:31) - Um, before we be joined together to present for you to present the panel. So there's an awful lot, I think, going on at the moment. Do you want to just share a bit about what you do? Sophie, for our listeners who didn't go to story House and might not know you.

Sophie Hunter(00:03:46) - Yes, certainly. Um, so let's see. My name. My name is Sophie, and I have my own HR consultancy. Uh, but I also specialize in equality, diversity and inclusion. And that is primarily focused on the workforce, but it also focuses on certain organizations client base. So for example, it can be patient focused for the NHS or it can be student focused for a university. So it's an that side of things is all about access to services. My my interest in, in childlessness in the workplace is is twofold. One of it is my personal experience And some of it is you know, from it from an HR perspective and good practice.

Sophie Hunter(00:04:38) - and that the issues that come up around people who do have children and don't have children working together and their expectations. I worked in the NHS for the bulk of my career before I, before I set up on my own. And that was an incredibly interesting environment to work to, to see that the different experiences people had in the different expectations because you've got the the dynamics of shift work and hierarchy and all those, those things that come into play. So because my, my specialism is equality and diversity, that's, that's very much my, my baby that looks very, very different nowadays than how it looked when many years ago when I, when I first started working in that field. And I think it's summed up wonderfully in the childless events at story House where we, we named it the number one diversity issue that nobody's talking about. It's absolutely an issue where people they're not quite it's not quite in their comfort zone yet.

Sophie Hunter(00:05:47) - and it carries a lot of stigma, a lot of pain and sometimes a lot of shame. And that does actually affect people in how they go about their jobs, how they communicate with their colleagues. Um, so in this day and age as well with, with mental health and a focus on supporting staff and employees, we really need to be we picking up this agenda as an HR and EDI agenda to make sure that that people aren't being unfairly treated and that and discriminated against because of their child status.

Sarah Lawrence (00:06:22) - Oh, it's a huge issue, isn't it? I mean, I've talked to so many of my clients about this in various guises, but I think the one thing I take away from it is you said it's the number one diversity issue that no one's talking about. But I think for many childless people, there's a sense that you kind of have to, in essence, put yourself out there in order for that diversity issue to be seen. And there's a real that's a bit of a double edged sword in terms of I've got to I've got to tell people that I'm childless in order to bring that to the table.

Sarah Lawrence (00:06:58) - Are there any tips or anything that people could do to make it easier for themselves? Because it's such a big step, I think.

Sophie Hunter(00:07:05) - Definitely, definitely. And there's often quite, uh the reasons when people have, uh want to actually bring it up as an issue, want to bring it to the table. They don't because of sort of the examples like that I'm going to hopefully have opportunity to tell

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people about on, on the podcast is people already feel that discrimination. And they want to bring it to the table because they feel unfairly treated, but at the same time, they think, if I do bring it to the table, I'm opening myself up to all these questions about childlessness, about my own childlessness, about the circumstances and sometimes the reasons that are quite harrowing. You know, they can include people who are childless through circumstances such as previous addiction or I get your domestic violence.

Sophie Hunter(00:08:02) - So there can be really triggering questions that they maybe don't want to go into detail of. So I think it's, it's really for employers to step up first and not put that emphasis on the employee and to try and bring the issue of childlessness into their workplace culture themselves. By doing so, it's a little bit chicken and egg. So by doing so, then people can feel comfortable to bring it to the table. They can feel that, you know what? I can take this issue that's happening at the moment to my manager without fear that it's going to be seen as a less than important for somebody else. So I think it has to start with employers saying, do you know what? Let's acknowledge World Childless Week. Let's have a let's have an event for awareness. Let's let's acknowledge adoption Week. Let's acknowledge baby last week and start to have those conversations. If a workplace have a women's network then that's an ideal place to say, do you know what? Have you heard of this initiative? We really need to be considering how we treat people in in the workplace, whether they have with, with regards to fairness, whether they have children or not.

Sophie Hunter(00:09:17) - So that's where the key lies for me. The initiative has to come from the employers. What's your policy over flexible, flexible working. Does it favour people who have got children. Does that need to change? So there are lots of ways that employers can actually start to look at this themselves and make that make it an easier platform for people to step up and say, do you know what? This is happening to me and I need some support.

Berenice (00:09:46) - I certainly had that experience myself. Thank you, Sophie. But in places that I've worked in, I've had I've done inclusivity training myself. My experience was that the icon for caring was a child. Um, that didn't go down too well, but I was already kind of out because of the podcast and also being World Child this Week ambassador. But my first foray into kind of making it onto the agenda of the place that I was working in at the time was to share and put up World Sharpness Week posters, which Steph creates every year, and they are available to download.

Berenice (00:10:26) - and I could do that fairly kind of anonymously. I could kind of go into a stealth mode and put them onto Noticeboards just to get a conversation going, because they're very visual and very striking. You can't really miss them. I started to put resources down for the Full Stop as well. So there's bits and pieces that we've done that people can get from our website. They're quite easy ways to go in, also gender balance was another way, or gender equality was where I got some traction. They've been really supportive because it is sometimes women's networks can be a bit prenatal, then you had to sort of fix things. It's that thing where is I hate using this word in this context, but I can't think of another. Perhaps another one will come up during the podcast. But victim in that is the so-called victim. Um, again, you can see why I'm uncomfortable as a childless person. You have to educate other

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people, that is such a position of vulnerability when actually my experiences of training in this area and delivering the training, and you sit there delivering the training and this childlessness, this childlessness, it's not a protected characteristic, but this childlessness, because actually it encroaches on all of the other characteristics.

Berenice (00:11:47) - It's there because actually things like disability can be very closely related to childlessness, as we've done on the podcast. We've probably done a podcast episode, you've probably talked about it yourself, Sophie, about these different things within the protected characteristics that fall in closely related to childlessness. It's a very much a position of vulnerability for people. That can be really, really hard, which is why the work you're doing and the advice you're sharing and the resources you're sharing are really important, I think, to our listeners, because I know from my own personal experiences that it can feel. When I've done something like that, I always feel. Then everyone's watching me. It's drawing attention, maybe my name makes me stand out even more. But even so, it's still kind of putting yourself into a position of vulnerability to.

Sophie Hunter(00:12:39) - Yeah, definitely. And I think you talk there about it not being a protected characteristic in its own right, but it's it's so closely linked I'm always on the lookout.

Sophie Hunter(00:12:52) - There's not really case law that that is close enough to what we're talking about yet. But I think as this issue gets more and more into the workplace, maybe that case law will come. Maybe people become more aware of what's happening because it's quite often childlessness is motivated by disability, not necessarily that that disability made them infertile, but that they chose not to have children because of concerns for care you know, due to their own disability or that it may be age related where they decided not to have children because they got to a certain point in their lives and felt it was it was too old. And gender is a massive, massive issue and very much a an antagonist from this because there's still such a by saying to somebody, why didn't you have children by making that uncomfortable, by by judging them in that way. That is, is actually saying to women that everybody else has a right to tell you what to do with your body.

Sophie Hunter(00:13:53) - We've decided what you should do with your body. And we're in the 21st century now, and we're still battling that. We're still battling people making a decision about somebody else because of what they've done with their own body. And those are those are huge factors. And the things that these factors that are protected characteristics, I think people haven't maybe made the link yet that actually I was discriminated against because of my childlessness, but actually I don't have children because my disabilities are X, Y, z. And I didn't feel I could cope alone. And therefore I made that decision and my partner made that decision and, you know, marital status. You know, partner status is that so but now I'm being treated less than because of it. But that is a case. But no one's bringing these cases yet because the conversations and the links to the workplace maybe aren't quite throwing through for people to see what I mean. Um.

Berenice (00:14:56) - So do you think there's opportunity then, I mean, in terms of some empowerment there? So if there are cases and if people thinking, actually, this isn't quite right, you and I had a chat before

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we went on to the stage, and it was about something to do with I won't digress here with it, but a situation that applied to me and we had a conversation and you said, ah, no, that's not right.

Berenice (00:15:19) - Because and it strikes me that there's. There's a knowledge gap. I think we're all trying to battle with the kind of the feelings of childlessness and how that makes us feel. But actually, there seems to be like there's a legal. Part to this, or a more kind of a lawful part to this. You know, the systems are broken and that that needs more sharing because it feels like that we could be on the point of change. and maybe between all of the groups that there are, there's gateway women, there's the child is collective, there's us, there's lots of different groups out there that somewhere in all of those groups, there is perhaps an empowerment of force or within our membership cases that we can talk about that might get us to that point is that is am I being a bit too kind of militant? I know I might be.

Sophie Hunter(00:16:12) - No, not at all. And what, what could be helpful to people? Because if we're talking grassroots, where, where we as as, as childless women, as us, as people who are having these conversations and talking about them, if we see ourselves as going into the workplace to sort of race out at the grassroots level, then that doesn't mean that we can't at the same time try and get a sandwich approach from the employer down.

Sophie Hunter(00:16:42) - So I would be saying look at who might be your champion in the workplace. If you are looking to make change, you want to get the conversation going. Who are your directors that might be supportive? Is there an HR person you think might get it? Is there a needy lead in your organization? Is there a are there equality champions and people who, for example, might have a might be more clued up through their own personal experiences who might be willing to talk and have that conversation. So look at who can can sponsor you, who can, who can be your allies in the workplace, because that is it's so lonely to try and do it by yourself. It's it can make it. You know. It can really. We're so vulnerable when we try and do that because the rejection can really sting and unhappy. and you, you will come across barriers very frequently. You'll come across that pro natal ism. And some of it is about other people's comfort zones.

Sophie Hunter(00:17:48) - They're not comfortable talking about it, that they may be feeling guilty. There may be feel upset for you, but they don't know how to show that support. So colleagues took down the conversation just as quickly as family members and friends do. But if you can have a a sponsor, somebody to champion that and,t herefore they can start to get people involved, like your comms team or even if it's just sending an email around all their staff. You know, this week's World Childless Week. Um, so I do encourage people to look at X, Y, and Z so that and you know, that in itself is a really good way to get in. Don't feel you have to do it alone just because right now you're the only person in in your workplace thinking about childlessness. Think about who else might be able to come on this journey with you.

Berenice (00:18:43) - I think it's probably fair to say as well, that I think that probably the ambassadors were certainly worth checking stuff herself.

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Berenice (00:18:49) - But I know that when I was an ambassador with stuff that a couple of us went in and we talked to different people, so we would provide our services, and I think we would be happy with that as the podcast. and I know that Katy at MIST, who's been on the podcast, who does some brilliant training as well, and it's just very empathetic and that she's including everybody in that and takes them on the journey with them. It's like kind of magic. Um, but it really does. It takes it away from, from you as a person having to go in and going, okay, I'm the childless person doing this thing. You might have to initiate it, but there are ways of doing it without possibly being outrightly going, I'm childless. You don't have to do that. But certainly it's worth bringing Katie. and I think today's conversations too they are fantastic workshops just to give people a bit of a. A bit of an awareness really, because as you say to colleagues do, that is a very personal thing to share.

Berenice (00:19:51) - and it is a workplace and it depends perhaps on the environment of the workplace and how well you know people as well. I've worked with people for many, many years, so they've found something very personal about somebody and that can be emotive to them. That can be actually grief for them too. They didn't know that about you. and it's a big discovery. Um, Robert Nurden talks about this in his episode about how friends discovered that he hasn't had children and it wasn't by choice. and it alters perception of people. and to be aware of that, but also to be aware, I think we said this at the end of story House that not to be alone as well, that you're not alone in that journey to so get the support you need is really important.

Sophie Hunter(00:20:35) - Yeah, definitely. It's the support may come from places where you didn't expect it to as well. So there might be that in somebody in, in the workplace who's never had children and they're actually really glad of the conversation.

Sophie Hunter(00:20:55) - It's I mean, I myself, I had a conversation on the train with a colleague of mine many years ago and it was and she just said to me, oh, I would like to have children, but I didn't. And at the time I was, I was coping on my own with my own grief. Didn't know about story House, I didn't know about Childless Collective. But I remembered that conversation as brief as it was. And it's it stayed in my mind because we change the subject and start to talk about something else. But when I saw the story House event, I rang and asked her if she'd like to come with me to, to it. and, we both we both learned And it really was a founding moment in our friendship. And we're both still very much parts of Child Collective now. And it's been such a help to me and to her in our own grieving that the very the fact that that resource was there was what enabled us to talk to each other and talk to other women about childlessness, because we could start to reflect on the event.

Sophie Hunter(00:22:06) - Um.

Sarah Lawrence (00:22:08) - I love that. I think sometimes as well, isn't it? It is that chance conversation, isn't it? I remember having a similar. I hadn't long been told I was childless and I was really struggling with it, and I was still employed at the time. I remember just having a chance conversation with somebody I knew who didn't have kids. It was kind of like, and we didn't know, didn't know each other's stories, and we just happened to go out for lunch and just start talking about it. And as you say, it was tentative. We didn't go into details, but knowing that somebody else kind of was in that same position was so

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helpful for me, because every time something came up that triggered me in the office, I'd go and have a chat with Natalie and go, oh, hey, can we go out for a coffee? and it's nothing formal. It was just good to know that there was somebody else there that I could reach out to.

Berenice (00:22:55) - I've had the same experience, too.

Berenice (00:22:56) - I ended up being like a coffee buddy because I was quite out about it, but partly because one of the posters I put up had me down as a world child this week, ambassador in it and I was like, yeah, I'm doing that. And then set up my desk going, oh, crap, crap, crap. And actually through that, though, several people got in touch with me to say, me too. Um, not any I know more about now, but at the time it was quite empowering to do that because I thought, okay, I've helped somebody else, but I was out about it was part of and I and I got through. Not the worst of my grief, but I'd certainly it was at the time when I'd already met Michael. Possibly you, sir, I think too. So I had other people that I knew were out there. I've been to Fertility Fest. I'd done those things. But the power of kind of getting involved in the community and having a little bit of support behind you, it can actually make it feel a little less isolating because you can sense check and go, I'm feeling this and at the time I could check with somebody else.

Berenice (00:23:57) - But I also knew I was childless. What is one of the ambassadors or whether it was the staff or with Michael was somebody else. I could go out. I'm feeling this about this. And they were like, yeah, okay, that's fine. Yeah, I feel that too. So there's an alliance there. But also just in helping somebody else, someone else to go for a coffee with as well because as much as kind of we do these things like I've done Katie bought Katie's training into things. People don't always get it. They still do the baby shows in the office, right? Your desk and that. And it takes time. Um, and a bit of to get that working or to make some helpful suggestions and that kind of thing. It doesn't happen instantly. So to have a coffee buddy or someone to go out with is a it's just a really lovely thing. Just unless someone else is there on your side.

Berenice (00:24:43) - It's amazing to do that.

Sophie Hunter(00:24:46) - I found a really helpful, a really helpful element for me on my first ever story house I even attended back in 2019 when I was just learning what it was all about. I found that having a baby bingo conversation with somebody helped me so much. Um, so just to be able to reel off the things that people had said, which I just found insensitive And stupid to have another individual go. Yeah, that annoys me. Actually, it was, was massive because I felt like I was really I thought I always felt like if I, if I ever said that, actually, that's really upsetting. I just sound bitter and twisted and the value of having other people around me. Good. I get that. and it's annoying it's it was it was huge, huge part of healing for me. Um, so I'm so thankful for that.

Sophie Hunter(00:25:43) - Yeah.

Sarah Lawrence (00:25:44) - So I was wondering actually take the conversation in a slightly different direction. What are the success stories you've seen when you've been working with our different organizations? What sort of things do you see happening?

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Sophie Hunter(00:25:57) - I see people being more. So more willing. I find people emphasize less on whether or not someone's got children. I find that they don't just assume someone's got children. And I also find that that people are starting to say more and, well, I don't have children, but that's, um. You know, that's no reason why I should accept on fairness. So I find that people are starting to step up a little bit more. Um, so that seems to be more the childless by choice people at the moment. So whether they feel empowered in their decision and I know that they have their own discrimination to, to face, but I think that quite often they, they think, no, I've made this decision whether somebody's not by circumstances.

Sophie Hunter(00:26:55) - It's still quite painful to say out, out loud. Um, so I find that people who are childless by choice are really helpful in being that voice of reason to say, you know what? No, it's not okay. You know, you don't have to put up with this because they've been on a different journey And they've learnt lots of different things. So, so that is that I see growing more and more and people being feeling more able to actually say, well yes, but I haven't, I haven't had children because of and there was a story that I I was told that I wanted to, to really share about something about a, an NHS hospital and the thing about the NHS, so many examples. I don't want to pick on the NHS, but it's just because I've got my experience from there. And, I've also worked lots of jobs in catering and I worked in a bank for several years, and that was all shift work.

Sophie Hunter(00:28:00) - and, I remember a story about a doctor who, when was told he had to work Christmas Day because he didn't have any children when actually he'd worked the last two Christmas days. And so he said, no, I want Christmas at home with my wife. I've done my share of them. And they told him that he couldn't have that. And then then they when he said, is this just because I don't have any children? and they said, yes, quite blatantly, quite discriminative. And he said to them, well, actually me and my wife couldn't have any children. We desperately wanted children and it wasn't possible. So do you think it's now okay that not only does she not to get, she doesn't have the children with her on Christmas Day that she so desperately wanted. She actually has to spend it completely alone without her husband as well every year. Do you think that's right? And so that changed the perception of the manager who was making these decisions.

Sophie Hunter(00:29:08) - Um, that very, very powerful image as well. Very, very brave of him to say it's um it was really a game changer because he scrapped that rule after that, that people without children work Christmas that at that change because as well it opens the conversation for people might not want to work Christmas for other times. Um it might be a family member's last Christmas. So there's this there's this assumption that oh, we really need to give it to people who have children, but it might be somebody who's it's their parents. Last Christmas, it is, uh something that is unmissable for them. It's their last chance to see somebody before they emigrate. You know, people have their own reasons. And I think there's more openness now, which is clear with Christmas and big events of actually trying to be a bit fairer. But that was a huge you know, a huge turnaround for that manager.

Sophie Hunter(00:30:08) - But it takes somebody saying it takes somebody saying, look, this is my situation. This is what it's really like for me.



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And we shouldn't we need to get back to it. Not expecting not needing people to do that, actually taking the responsibilities organisations and as employers have, just being fair in the first place.

Sarah Lawrence (00:30:27) - I think you said it, Michael, we've got a comment in the in the chat that's left a speechless. But I think again, it's kind of that that sense of having to share that though, isn't it. It's kind of and I think. At that token, I think I sat there with that image is seared into my brain. But it takes enormous courage to be that vulnerable and hope. and in this instance, they did take it on board, but some people don't. And this example in the chat, I hope it's okay to share. I'm gonna do it anonymously. Um, but someone shared that actually they had a really tough time at work.

Sarah Lawrence (00:31:04) - Had a breakdown. Um, and I'll be there. I've done it as well. And when they returned to work, they shared about their sadness and what that was around, and then shared Jody's Ted talk to then have somebody in that group who they've been very vulnerable with, then share a scan, photograph a baby scan photograph. So it's kind of I guess lots of people are going to be sitting with that's an incredible story. But actually there's still that blocker in terms of I could be that vulnerable and I could be that brave and I could still have this insensitivity or this nihilism thrown back at me. And I guess that's the fear, isn't it, that we all sit with, isn't it? What happens if this doesn't land? Have you ever seen any of that at all? Do you ever work around those sorts of issues too?

Sophie Hunter(00:31:52) - Yes, yes, I've been, uh I've had personal experience of that. I've had, um. You know, people were saying about the scan there that that's quite horrific.

Sophie Hunter(00:32:06) - and the other individual is just not taking it on board at all. You know, they've just not understood. And so and certainly I've come across. That is in my own journey. And what I tend to find more is people try and end the conversation as quick as possible. You know, it's too awkward for them. I think people as well, when they have children and they start to think about it, I think they feel quite guilty. And I think they feel like they can't say. And I think they feel like they can't say the right thing. Um, but I have I have seen a blatant blockers as well. Um, so one example that that I do recall was a, an individual who was working over Covid. And so it was the early days of Covid when there was no. I know inoculation. It was those initial early months where everybody was quite scared and a lot of people were dying.

Sophie Hunter(00:33:14) - and so they said to this individual, she was working as a as a nurse. And so somebody said to her that she should put in the extra shifts because she didn't have a family. And which is just an appalling thing to say, because what they've actually said is your life is less important because you don't have a child. So when she actually said to them, well, actually I didn't have children because I have a disability that would make you know, it's that which would make caring for a child on my own incredibly difficult. and, actually, I do have a family. I have parents that are vulnerable. I have siblings that I would like to see but can't. But it's really hurtful to me that that you put that on the on my value. They just didn't agree. They just disagreed. They just said, no, I think you're wrong. and so they just stuck with their position of you should pick up these extra shares.

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Sophie Hunter(00:34:21) - and I think that is quite common where people don't engage in the reasons they don't think about it. They just they just stick with their original stance and, don't really hear or consider what's being said. And sometimes, sadly, I think it's about acknowledging that, that some people are selfish. And so that's another word that I know gets thrown at childless people a lot. Or actually a lot of people with children are just very, very selfish and they see only their own needs. And some of it is about accepting that as them, as a person. Not everybody will want to come on this journey with us. But there's enough that do you know, when I when I told friends of mine about the story House event, I I had a I had a couple of people come back And . Do you know what, Sophia? I've never. I've never thought about what it would have been like not to have had children because I had them.

Sophie Hunter(00:35:19) - And they've really wanted that conversation they've really been interested and keen. So some of it is, is a case of of acknowledging that sadly not. Some people won't care, some people will not be interested, but plenty of people will, regardless of whether they've had children or not. Plenty of people go, do you know what? Yeah, there is a right and wrong in this. And let's support the right thing.

Michael (00:35:44) - So if you I have a couple of things more than a couple of things. So I don't want to hijack this hijack this portion. But I want to reiterate. So I would imagine there'll be people listening to our audience, listening to this, thinking about, okay, what can I do? And I want to, uh really reiterate what you were talking about in terms of having the courage to step up. Sometimes it's really tough because I had a conversation with my sister in law. So she has two children, And she's very curious about what I get up to and what my, my wife gets up to in this, in our space.

Michael (00:36:25) - and she goes, oh, I don't get me wrong, she's a lovely woman. And she goes, oh, I, I, I met her. I met a woman who didn't have children the other day. It worked. Oh, okay. Oh that was that was interesting because it'd be very. How did you find that out? Just. Oh, well, she actually we're having a little talk. There was about four of us, and she told us. Oh, well, okay, obviously not me knowing how hard that would have been. So I said, what did you do? Oh, we changed the subject. And so I said, and I've used the username. I probably won't listen to this, so doesn't matter. I said, so hang on. Look. Look at this from a different perspective. You know, the struggle that Vicki and I have had. and so you know how tough it is. and this woman offered you this story about her.

Michael (00:37:23) - She offered you the. She opened the door to say, ask me more. She wanted to tell you something, and you shut the door. Now she. Of course, she was mortified, but yeah, I, I sometimes think that this is this is going to be a really hard, hard sell, if that makes sense. One of the things that I've been, I've had the privilege to do is represent us, along with some Australian colleagues. So Sarah Roberts, Judy Graham and Liz Campbell down here in Australia, we was able to give a talk to the Diversity Council of Australia. So Australia's peak diversity inclusion body. Which was fantastic. It was really, really great to be able to do that. And now I've recently got an email from them saying, oh, look how are you and the company you work for and how you going with this? How are they supporting you with, with being a childless man or represent you, the childless community.

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Michael (00:38:29) - and I haven't been back yet because that email is going to be nothing. Because as much as I've tried to engage people about it, it's a wasteland. I've got nothing to. I've got I've got no one to talk to about it because no one wants to listen. Uh, I can't find that that sponsor that you talked about. It's tough. So what advice have you got that we could perhaps use? Get out there. It reminds me of the conversation that we had with the Gail Miller when we asked her, do. Does the medical fraternity actually know or believe that childlessness is an issue? And so it's almost like, well, for me and what I've been exposed to that business is. Don't believe it is. It's not an issue. And so how do you how do you then as a, as an employee of that company, try and raise it without looking like the good time Grinch. Here's I've got a really good example. So I'm showing you all this calendar.

Michael (00:39:36) - So we get a magazine sent to us every quarter. And in this quarter was this where they had a competition for kids to color in safety signs for, for a Christmas competition, the calendar for next year. And now I'm thinking, how do how do I respond to that? How do I go to my HR department and respond to that anyway? So I'll shut up because I can see you got your hand up and I'll just ramble on all day.

Sophie Hunter(00:40:03) - Oh, Michael, can I, can I just I just check with you that I'm understanding this. Right. Was that competition for everybody who weren't theirs kids to do?

Michael (00:40:14) - Yes.

Sophie Hunter(00:40:15) - So that absolutely excluded everybody without children.

Michael (00:40:18) - Yes.

Sophie Hunter(00:40:20) - Okay. But that's the sort of thing that how that if that if your organization had had that that level of training which no one's had at the moment. But we aspire one day we'll, we'll get them that they may have rethought that that is quite devastating. Um, it would be very, very hard to, to have that conversation.

Sophie Hunter(00:40:45) - And so it may just be an email, not everything something you don't have to put yourself physically, verbally in front of somebody. Some of it may be an email to say, can I just make you aware that. And when you actually brought that out, it actually discriminated against everybody without children, those there are people in this organization who don't have children, they've got had issues with fertility, they've suffered baby loss. And that might be quite upsetting to them to be sidelined in this way. And you don't have to say, this is my personal experience. You can just say there are people within this organization who might feel you don't have to necessarily pinpoint it, And you may not get a response. You may not get a response that you particularly like, but you've opened the conversation. And so I completely either get what you're saying about not being able to find that sponsor, not being able to find that crack that way in.

Sophie Hunter(00:41:47) - But I think with childlessness as a, as a diversity issue, we've got a really understand accept where we're at. If you look at how when we start to talk about racism in the workplace, when we start to talk about sexuality in the workplace, when we start to talk about gender in the workplace, when people started to talk about coming

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out as trans in the workplace they encountered, or all these issues that you know, that we see now they encountered, I mean, you only have to look at the all lives Matter approach to, to see how people attempted to silence people without actually aggressively silencing them and pushing people aside. And I think it's about accepting the where it comes to childlessness. Uh, we will hopefully move quicker, but we're actually in a place where people are at in the workplace around racism and maybe like transgender sexuality 50 years ago. And that's where we're at today.

Sophie Hunter(00:42:49) - We're discussing childlessness. Now, the thing that we have that's that's favorable to us is we have resources that they never had. So we had things like you know, we've got the internet, we've got our community groups, we can reach a lot of people And we can talk to us to each other like we have and normally, we would never have met if it wasn't for the internet and it wasn't for technology. So we've got lots of ways of moving the message on quicker than people had in the past, both set. But sadly it's understanding that not everybody will want to hear what we say, but they will in the end because it will become unacceptable, just as all those other types of discrimination became unacceptable. We are where they were several years ago. And it's gonna be it's going to be a hard slog. You know, you will find support in the most unlikely places that you never thought possible.

Sophie Hunter(00:43:49) - and you'll find a closed door where you thought people would be really empathetic And caring. But it is about carrying on, just banging that drum saying, can we send this out World Childless Week and we send this in, send this out for infertility awareness. Just get people. Just put it on people's radar. People won't respond till they're comfortable. And it's going to take a while of sending things out and just. Raising when something's a bit inappropriate, a little bit unfair like that kids coloring calendar actually just put it on a putting it on their radar and you don't have to personalize it. You can say this might appear to some people who don't have children, this might be hurtful because and all you're doing is starting to put it on people's minds. And it's a case of moving forward and forward as a, as a, as ambassadors, as pioneers for this. And I'm accepting that this is going to take some time.

Michael (00:44:50) - Yeah.

Michael (00:44:50) - Thanks, Sophie. It's it I, I agree with you. I know it's hard, but yeah, unless we won't get change unless we start talking about it, getting it out there being visible, which I know is really, really hard for some of our community. But yeah, I guess the reality is that we must the.

Sophie Hunter(00:45:12) - Yes!

Sophie Hunter(00:45:14) - You know, there are ways in which we can try and get that that top down support suggesting for example, the childless training. And I'm thinking of where else it might fit. Um, I was asked to do a recently to do a training session for a company on baby loss. And so I again, for the first time, they have come back to me and said, can you actually steer it this time? and instead of f talking about just baby loss, can you also tell us a little bit about our legal And best practice obligations around infertility on how we support people who have failed in IVF.

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Sophie Hunter(00:46:03) - and even though that's a very small part of childlessness, that is that just goes to show that people starting to think a bit wider, they're starting to think a little bit out of the box. So think as well about things that this can be tagged onto. You know, it can be tacked on to things like conversations about sexism in the workplace, the gender pay gap the restrictions on women or sexist practices that we still put up with and, don't even recognize because they're so embedded within, within our communities, within our workplaces. Even so, it's thinking about actually this is relevant to this situation as well. So I'm going to mention it. Um, so and I'm going to say how people react.

Berenice (00:46:50) - Really important isn't it. I think to the I was going to just wanted to mention because I think it's an important thing that's popped up lately is not my network. And Samantha Jane Walsh appearing in the Daily Mail about her issues working in retail and working on Boxing Day and covering for parents and some of the pushback that she's got the same paper as it is often to do.

Berenice (00:47:16) - It's not one of my favourite reads, I have to say, if ever. But it's there. And it did the job and it got people talking, but it then went on to publish another article a few days later that just said, mothers like me should always be off at Christmas. And bear in mind, of course, this applies to men as well. It applies to everybody. It's not you know, obviously Sam's taken her point of view as a woman, but it also is, of course, affects childless men as well. And it became very them and us. And that's not. The point. Really the point that Sam was making is the systems are broken. It's not them in us. And certainly I think in in our comments, it's coming over in the chat that it can feel like it's an attack on. On pre-natal ism. And I suppose probably if we're all going to be completely honest, I suppose it probably is to a point, because let's be honest, we've all sat there with it for so long that it does feel sometimes.

Berenice (00:48:15) - Perhaps we are, And maybe we should, but it's also learning from each other. That's the kind of the podcast view, the full stop. You'll learn from each other and sharing. That can be really hard. You get a lot of kind of passive aggressiveness back, I think, from people that there might be that because we've expressed some vague kind of nugget of information around children that actually we are we're okay to talk about children. Yes. Oh come on. Yeah. You can't have them. But hey, here's mine. Um, it's just unbelievably shit. It's just fucking awful that people have to go through that experience. And it can really shut people down if people are shut down. And they do get that aggressiveness back. And I've certainly seen it after story House that people left story House feeling yay, empowered trying to do some activism got shut down, lost their confidence. What advice is there for people that are going, I'd like to do this.

Berenice (00:49:16) - I'm actually really shit scared because I know what's going to happen. What are some really good tips that we can give people who are thinking, It's January, I've come back from work, I work Boxing Day, I did this stuff. I had to put up with all this crap, And I'm in the workplace And actually, I really want to hand in my notice because I know I've been there in January and go, ah, crap stop this. Um, it's really hard. So what's some confidence? Where can we give people some confidence from this?

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Sophie Hunter(00:49:43) - I just wanted to when to say first that the article in the Daily Mail where the, the woman was saying moms like me should always give them Christmas. Um, it was a particularly cruel article. And one of the things I found when I, when I started to, to actually talk about childlessness is that a lot of, of parents actually didn't mind if they had to be in certain days.

Sophie Hunter(00:50:12) - Um, they were quite happy to come in between Christmas New Year, like, well, just haven't been voted on. But yeah, they often come in And it pitched such a them ignores you know. And the reality is that most people without children are happy to be helpful with shifts. And most people with children are happy to be helpful with shifts. and, sometimes when, when people get on this one issue, then then it can be it can be people can like the Daily Mail can pitch those extremes, the extreme personalities against each other. Yeah, yeah, yeah. and we're always trying to find a middle ground. This is what this is about. This is about equity. We don't we don't want everything our own way. We want to compromise and have good relationships, have friendships with people. You know, it's good to have good working relationships.

Sophie Hunter(00:51:07) - But one thing I say for people returning back and this takes us back to what I was saying earlier about understanding where we're at with certain companies, at certain organizations. Um, when you go back in January, you start to get that shut down or you feel like, I don't know how to approach the conversation to make the most of your peers join, join up with people from the childless community. Uh, we have a massive support network that a few years ago didn't even exist. So chat to your own childless collective group. and, when the most important thing is when you come home And you feel like you've just been shut down, no one cares about what you had to say, and you've had that really negative experience. Talk to another childless person. You know, keep those communications open. Don't sit and bottle it or look after your own well-being as well.

Sophie Hunter(00:52:08) - And so make your connections with your childless group and, even maybe we could look in the future at some sort of some sort of, maybe action listening group where people bring forward their ideas. Like, I tried this in the workplace. This is what happened. and but, yeah, it is hard. It's and it's going to be a tough journey for. So take your comfort in how far we've come with other rights regarding fairness. You know, look at look at where we are these days with regards to where we were 50 years ago, where we were ten years ago on many equality issues. And so, yeah, keep talking to your peers because we will get there. Um, so it's, uh it's important that we really support each other. And I suppose that the final thing I'd say on that if it feels too much one day to try and do, don't do it.

Sophie Hunter(00:53:06) - Do it another day. Look out. Look after your own well-being. You know you're not, um. None of us can change the world in one day, all on our own. And if that day does not feel like the day to do it, do it another day when you feel energized and prepared.

Berenice (00:53:24) - I think that's so important. That's really, good advice. I just wanted to flag that the Childless collective has a changemakers workplace Changemakers section and at the full stop online community has workplace pioneers where we're sharing advice and support as well. And I also wanted to bring in just briefly, because this is kind of like my big kind of like thing is also that all of this advice applies

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to business networks as well, because as much as I'd like to say it's great on the outside and that, yeah, freelancing and working for oneself is fabulous. There are pockets of that too. It's really hard sometimes.

Berenice (00:54:02) - You get a lot of groups that just shut down in July and August because they don't have they've got children and they've gone away on their, on their holidays. Um, and sometimes kids turn up in phone calls and zoom meetings and things like that. It's not that easy. They're two. and a lot of this advice can apply there. I think it's I've certainly sent emails to people that have run workplace um or sorry freelance networks and business networks and said, look, you're excluding people by having this particular theme topic or whatever. Can you just make sure that it's more inclusive? And here's some ideas. I haven't necessarily said that, although to be honest, they know that I am childless, but it's okay to do that too. It's all good advice for that because it's not always easy. And I'm running a business to and there is support out there. Certainly we welcome people in the full stop online community who are running their own business, as well as people employment to in their workplace pioneers group.

Berenice (00:54:56) - We're quite happy to do that.

Sarah Lawrence (00:54:58) - Yeah, I was going to say, actually, I remember when I was employed, there was some sometimes you can talk about networks. A lot of bigger corporations have networks. And I really like the advice from Sophie about piggybacking on other issues. Um, we had networks for grief. We had networks for working moms. Um, we also had some others around health. and actually, there was starting to be a conversation when I left around childlessness and the health group so that I thought that was really sound advice, actually. See if you can piggyback on something else just to start that conversation off, because, as you rightly say, childlessness, I think people sometimes just don't know what to do or say to us or how to behave. And again, the networking as well as a self-employed, oh goodness me, that's that is hard work sometimes when you just it can be relentless when you think you found a group and then, oh, it goes off in a conversation that you didn't expect.

Michael (00:56:00) - Oh yeah.

Berenice (00:56:00) - Yeah. It yeah. I've got a group I could recommend to you Sarah, that I've pre educated them. They know all about this because they've helped shape The Full Stop. But that was only by me putting myself out on the line and saying this is a thing. This is what I've been through. Well not all the murky details, but you know, go listen to the podcast and find out why I'm telling you about this, because, yeah, it's hard. But yeah. And also what I love about that and going out to other networks and piggybacking is, of course, you're educating the people because we can have conversations in our groups and we all know about childless. We know this and we can. And it's great therapy to share the stories, my goodness, and to have the rants and the tears that is so important. But going out and saying to working moms groups, to gender balanced groups and saying, hi, this is related to that.

Berenice (00:56:51) - You're educating people who might already be parents and going, okay, this is on your radar now. And that, I think is so important, but educate outwards where we can, which is why kind of where the full stop and we haven't gone full stop childlessness.

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Obviously we do talk about that. It's our topic. But people stumbled across this. They could learn something from us because. They will need to know, and why not know from people who are being brave enough to do that and have that lived experience, but also in a subtle way, is just saying certainly I've raised grief and grief workshops in the way that I've also talked about losing a pair as well, those sorts of things. You can just bring it in. Bereavement doesn't just apply to people, it applies to situations. It applies to obviously disenfranchised grief as well is a really good way to get that conversation going. and of course, I keep I'm sort of plugging the full stop a bit today, but there is always an episode pretty much for every awareness day as well.

Berenice (00:57:52) - So International Men's Day, of course, we talked about the experiences of childless men around that. So again next year, then there's a full stop podcast episode for that International Women's Day. It's International Women's Day, not International Mother's Day. It's for all women. and again, it's a good way of getting our stories across for that to another parts of the year, too. There's pretty much a podcast episode for every awareness day going. If that's something that's celebrated or honoured in workplaces, then have a around or ask us email list if you want to and we'll come up with one. We'll create one if we need to, but let's use the podcast. And our online community and other communities out there, and other resources and networks and groups for childlessness to get that message out there to piggyback that on if we can.

Sophie Hunter(00:58:40) - Yeah. I that's that sounds brilliant. I just wanted to I just wanted to highlight before we go, just saying about International Men's Day, what I'm really interested in in doing next year is looking at some research to see the workplace experience of men and how that differs from that of women, because we know that that more women are part time and childcare falls on women.

Sophie Hunter(00:59:08) - It tends to impact their careers. So with those and that tends to be the catalyst for these arguments about who's off and who's in work. And it'll be interesting to see how that differs with, with men who maybe their experience is different because they tend to, whether they have children or not, tend to not have those, those same arguments. Uh, however it's it will be it'll be interesting to see what actually does go on because we know that men have their own baby bingo. And the same really insensitive things get said to them. So yeah, I'm really looking forward to seeing next year how that differs between men and women in the workplace, what those experiences are. and, if we can offer some support to, to childless men who are facing that in their job roles.

Michael (01:00:05) - Well, Sophie, if you. Yeah, let me know because I can definitely put that into the Childless Men's Community Facebook page.

Michael (01:00:13) - And now, of course that's global. That's not just UK. And so you will get a, a very broad response in terms of demographic.

Sophie Hunter(01:00:24) - I think that'd be fantastic if I could send over my SurveyMonkey link And then, of course, I'll be inviting anybody who's willing to speak to me on a 1 to 1 in more depth as, as well. So people have the option, they can either complete the survey or they can speak to me 1 to 1, or they can do both.



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Berenice (01:00:45) - You can put it on the show notes as well.

Michael (01:00:47) - Yeah.

Berenice (01:00:48) - Yeah. Let's get that conversation going and build it up, because we're certainly really keen to make sure that that childlessness falls onto International Women's Day and International Men's Day as well. It's a really big thing. and we did really well with that this year, actually, with the of last year rather at the time of releasing the podcast, it would be next year.

Berenice (01:01:07) - Oh, is it time zones weren't enough of a complexity. Um, easy ways to confuse wariness. Yes. But yeah, we certainly did very well with that picking it up. And it certainly got some conversations going with International Men's Day in the UK. It was really good to get that on the International Men's Day globally as well. So yeah, let's do that. Let's get some let's get some action going. That's a really positive way to start the new year.

Michael (01:01:33) - Definitely.

Berenice (01:01:34) - Thank you. So that's fantastic.

Sarah Lawrence (01:01:37) - Thank you so much.

Michael (01:01:38) - Yeah.

Berenice (01:01:39) - Feel really hopeful now. Really hopeful going forward. It's there's a lot of pockets of exclusion. So many. But joining together and having support and actually knowing you're there Sophie is really important to because I didn't realize about some of the the illegalities of this and exclusions. It's a big topic. EIB is such a big and hot, short but very hot phrase that's really important to people. And using that to our advantage is incredible. And really powerful.

Berenice (01:02:15) - And I'm really hoping that between us, between all the other amazing people doing brilliant work in this community, the the leaders and the people that are there to support them, we can make this an exclusion. I feel like it can become a protected characteristic. I feel like it's within reach.

Sophie Hunter(01:02:33) - Yeah, absolutely. And if you think that the age discriminatingly became protected characteristic in, in 2009 you know, it's we May 10th years from now be watching childlessness go into that into that umbrella as well. You know, things can yeah, I think things could change. And I know that I absolutely share your hope. Fairness. I, I really do that. It's it could become a protected, protected characteristic. Um, it's an understood characteristic as well where people actually see that. Yeah. It should be protected characteristic because of and they understand a bit more. And I'm so, so appreciative of being invited onto the podcast.

Sophie Hunter(01:03:18) - Thank you so much. It's brilliant that this is, uh this has been talked about as a, as a staff welfare issue. Um, so it's been absolute pleasure to be, uh to be given the opportunity to come and come And speak with you all. And so and so just to say, just to say thank, you.

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Sarah Lawrence (01:03:39) - Know, well, thank you for coming on. It's been fascinating. We knew it would be. It's one of those hot topics, isn't it? That is kind of, I guess, a hardy perennial, because we've all experienced it and we still are. But I have everything crossed that we can start to get that protected social, political piece done so that we can all feel, actually, that we're not less than and that we can actually rock up and say, hey, this is me and I deserve the same protections as people who happen to be parents.

Sarah Lawrence (01:04:09) - So yeah, fingers crossed.

Michael (01:04:12) - Yes. Thanks. Sophie, I'm. I'm going to plagiarize some of your words that you use today for my response for the calendar. So thanks.

Sophie Hunter(01:04:19) - That's my pleasure.

Berenice (01:04:25) - Really good transcript, actually, when it's done. That's kind of my bit. There's some really good. I'm literally going to have a whole. Kind of, like, every day for absolutely ages. Some really good points in this for our social media, because there's so much empowerment here. And I think it's important to acknowledge as well that actually we wouldn't be able to do this if it wasn't for all the people that listen and engage with all the different communities out there, including the podcast and including our online community, because that gives us all strength that people speaking out gives us the tools and the evidence as well. So that really matters to you and to all the researchers out there who are doing brilliant stuff too. We've come a long way in ten years.

Berenice (01:05:07) - A hell of a long way. In fact, in 12 years, which is when I first started to use the word childlessness in relation to me, it has changed enormously. and that's incredible. So we've got this. We're there. We are. We are all guns blazing. We're fighting it. We're doing it.

Sophie Hunter(01:05:24) - I should have really brought this in earlier on. You know, there has been incidences of blatant bullying just because of somebody's childless status. When somebody comes into work to work and tells a colleague that you know, their childlessness makes them means that they're selfish, means they want cooperative and certain negative things about their personality. What other situation would that not be? Bullying. If you came into work and started telling somebody negative things, negative connotations about their personality because of their race, their sexuality, their gender, can you imagine the quick response from an organisation, the uproar unless you're in one of those toxic places which sadly also exist.

Sophie Hunter(01:06:11) - But that is bullying. You know, when people decide to sit there and, just say these sorts of things, I couldn't and I wouldn't go into work and just start telling somebody negative things. I think about them for any reason. So when somebody does that through due to your childlessness that is bullying, that is, that is actually treating somebody less favourably, that is, that is making somebody feel you know, a certain way. and people think they've got the entitlements to say these things still and, they don't.

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Berenice (01:06:49) - That can be raised, as with HR as an issue in the workplace.

Michael (01:06:53) - Yeah.

Berenice (01:06:54) - Being rules.

Sophie Hunter(01:06:55) - I actually had somebody say to me once over Christmas and it was it was incredibly hurtful. And they were one of their rants about how selfish I was because I didn't have children and they didn't know that I desperately wanted children. and because of that situation, I wasn't I wasn't forthcoming with the information.

Sophie Hunter(01:07:18) - I just didn't want to get into that conversation at all with them. and I remember saying that I didn't mind working Christmas Eve because I was going somewhere else on Christmas Day. I wasn't cooking or anything on the Christmas Day, so I didn't mind working Christmas Eve. Um, they said to me, well, yeah, how good can your Christmas actually be anyway? And you know that that is workplace bullying. And so at the time, I, I didn't see it as bullying. So I was happy to, to argue back with this individual. But now looking back, if I've been at a different time in my life, if I'd been at a time where I felt more sensitive or time I was vulnerable for any other reason that could have had a massive psychological effect on me. And so, and I think that that people still feel entitled to say these nasty things to somebody because they don't have children. Yes, absolutely.

Sophie Hunter(01:08:18) - Flag that, raise that as an HR issue. Um, apologies, I wish I brought that up earlier.

Sarah Lawrence (01:08:24) - So no no need to apologise. We we'll get in in there. Don't you worry. It's funny though, isn't it. Because I'm I, I was briefly employed this year very briefly. Um, decided it wasn't for me, but there were real. I was really struck by how I was managing a department. And when I joined, I did the induction. I told everyone what I did, and I told them about my childlessness, and I was really struck by if I was in a different place, I wouldn't have done it. But actually people came up to me after and said, oh, it's very brave. Uh, but actually two months in, all of that was forgotten about. So and there was there was a pregnancy announcement on e of my teams, and I used to sit with the team, and if she was talking about her pregnancy, even now, I struggle with it.

Sarah Lawrence (01:09:10) - So I just sort of turn away, not get involved in the conversation. But one of the comments that was made before I left was not really present and didn't really engage in the team. and I don't know if it was this particular instance, but I wondered actually, at the back of my mind, I wonder if it was to do with that, because actually, sometimes we have no choice but to shut down. We're not part of that conversation. It's painful. We've got nothing to really talk about. and I just it just rankled at the back of my mind, I think. I wonder if that's what they were referencing. So you're talking about this as sort of brought that up again, because I remember my boss telling me that and I said, well, have you got an example? and he wouldn't give me an example. and I wondered afterwards, hang on, if I join the dots, I wonder if it's about that, even though they know, because I'd done a presentation about what my other parts of my lives involved.

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Sarah Lawrence (01:10:07) - So it's kind of. Oh, aren't you brave? But then I'll. Oh it's forgotten.

Sophie Hunter(01:10:13) - Yeah. Isn't that interesting that it wouldn't give you an example because that in itself to say to somebody you weren't engaging and you weren't taking part, but I'm not going to tell you how it is just bollocks, isn't it? That is just absolute crap. and so how you know, that in itself would have so it is it's quite a bullying conversation. You've done something wrong. I'm not going to tell you what, but don't do it again. What, are you supposed to go with that? Um, And I think. Yeah, if he wouldn't tell you, it's almost as if, like, we've listened to you. Tell us about your childlessness. Now. Now, mask your emotions for the rest of your career. We've done the bit, we've done that the half hour of listening bit. And so now everything we do is okay because we've listened to that.

Berenice (01:11:00) - It's tokenism, isn't it? Yeah. And I think that's something that anyone who's listening to this, who is a parent who's done training and has forgotten, don't do tokenism. I like to think that because listening to us, if you're listening to us in Europe, that you are not tokenism, but it's really important to be aware of that and actually alliance building an alliance and being an ally to people who are childlessness means that being conscious of it as much as you can be you know, you will get it wrong because it happens. You know, people are human beings. We get it wrong, too. Um, because can we get angry and grief, too? And it is hard, but tokenism. Yeah, it's not enough to do that. And I put in the chat earlier that I had an incident where people have done the trainings and everything. and in a conversation last week over Christmas lunch, there was a talk about, oh, my child was born in this hospital, that hospital.

Berenice (01:11:55) - and I think, you bet you've done this. I know you did the training with me, with Katie, because you were there. And it's not malicious, it's just the forgotten that had a blip. But again, it was also going to go, look, actually this is inappropriate.

Sophie Hunter(01:12:10) - Is that that manager with yourself Sarah had a completely different opportunity that he rejected that, uh following that call, he could easily have picked up the phone and said look, I just wanted I know that you did the talk on childlessness. You know, you told your story. Uh, I noticed you looked a little bit upset on the call. I just want to check with you. Okay? Are you all right? And . and that would have been a that that is where the token that's genuine action, then And that could have been a totally different relationship with you then started with you as a as a staff member.

Sophie Hunter(01:12:50) - So that managerial training is uh, is is really it's, it's so vital maybe, maybe one day we'll get to target on leadership training. That's absolutely. Um.

Sarah Lawrence (01:13:04) - Well, I'll be honest, it was kind of it tapped in what? You said I left after. Yeah. I'm done. There was other stuff going on, by far. I'm done. But I think it's. I guess it's connecting the dots, isn't it? It's given people. You're right. They're not going to get it. Always get it right. We're not going to especially if we triggered. We're going to you know, we might go off my own way, but at least have the door open to have a conversation. And I just noticed that that's probably out of character for you. Thought I better check in,

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find out what was happening if you want to talk about it. You know where I am, even if you don't want to talk about it. Because you know about our sort of boundaries shift.

Sarah Lawrence (01:13:40) - Don't know. Sometimes you want to talk about it, other times we don't. But at least have the door open so you can have the opportunity.

Sophie Hunter(01:13:47) - Definitely, definitely better.

Berenice (01:13:48) - For staff retention. You just summed up a billion dollar reason as to why companies need to do this. Why? Why networks need to do this so they retain their members because it's staff retention. Because isn't it better that people are happy and engaged than it is to lose somebody and someone as talented as yourself? So it's not in the company's interest. Well, yes, you are talented. So it's pulling faces now. Um, but you know, you're, you're losing good stuff at the end of the day. Why do that for, for what? Amounts to some learning and some awareness.

Michael (01:14:23) - Just do it.

Berenice (01:14:24) - What's stopping you? What is stopping people engaging? Nothing really, apart from discomfort and anger over that. Because frankly, we've got over a hell of a lot to get where we are today to, you know.

Sarah Lawrence (01:14:36) - Thanks for listening. We hope you found our conversation with Sophie as useful and informative as we did. We'd love to hear from you if you found this topic interesting, or have been able to raise your own voice in the workplace as a result. If you'd like to find out more about our podcast, or you have a great idea for a topic we've not covered, or you just want to know more about, we'd love to hear from you. We want this podcast to have as many voices from across our community as possible. So if something's missing or you just want a deeper dive on it, just let us know. You can find us on Facebook, Instagram, X and LinkedIn. You can also become a member of a brand new online community, which is safe and inclusive space for anyone that's a member of the child's community. More details are available on our website at the Full Stop podcast. You can also sign up to our listeners list at the website, which keeps you up to date on what we're up to and if you'd like to.

Sarah Lawrence (01:15:27) - You can also donate to our work. As always, it's important for us to remind you you're not alone.

Michael (01:15:38) - Right on that. Yeah. I got.

Berenice (01:15:43) - Militant.

Michael (01:15:44) - I agree, I agree.

Sophie Hunter(01:15:47) - Managers have to have difficult conversations about all kinds of things. There's no reason why they can't learn to have a a conversation about this as well. There's other things. Is that how departments managers have conversations where they have to dismiss people where they're dealing with you know, sort of really, really distressing and horrendous situations. So we know that they've got the ability to

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handle difficult conversations. So this is just another difficult conversation that they've learned. It's part of being a leader.