



Equality Talks Podcast - Transcript

Episode 1: Naomi Simson on Passion, Purpose and Rebooting Australia

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.

Naomi Simpson hardly needs an introduction. She's an entrepreneur, a business leader, best-selling author, television presenter and a sought-after speaker. Following a rich corporate career, Naomi launched Red Balloon in 2001 and it's now the third largest experience marketplace of its type in the world. She was on four seasons of Channel 10's Shark Tank and is a passionate supporter of female founders. With more than 2.8 million LinkedIn followers, Naomi is Australia's most followed person on the business networking platform and she's a true business leader and influencer. Her book, *Live What You Love*, offers practical exercises to find your passion and purpose and is really changing lives. The conversation we had that you're about to listen to was really inspiring and personal and I hope you enjoy it.

Samantha Sutherland:

Thank you so much for joining me today. I'm really excited to talk to you for Equality Talks podcast.

Naomi Simson:

Thank you so much for having me.

Samantha Sutherland:

Now I originally know you from Red Balloon which you launched in 2001 and from the four seasons you spent on Shark Tank on Channel 10. But you actually have a really rich career that's not limited to those two endeavours. So can you start by telling us a bit about your career history and what you're really focusing on now.

Naomi Simson:

Well it's kind of funny that I'm working from home now because when I left corporate life I started working from home and one of the reasons that I left corporate life and I worked for IBM; I worked for Apple; I worked for KPMG. So I had a career as a marketer and I also worked for an airline called Ansett in their frequency program and customer loyalty.

Naomi Simson:

So I had this career, but when I had small kids, I actually only had one little one, I just wanted more flexibility and back last century, that literally wasn't possible. And your employer, if they wanted you

somewhere or on a plane, you just had to go. And I didn't have the support structures but I didn't want to give up my career so I left my corporate career to start my business from home and here I am 20 years later, still working from home.

Naomi Simson:

As it goes, it comes around. If I look at it, I've had lots of practice.

Samantha Sutherland:

And where are you focusing right now with your career?

Naomi Simson:

Well, it's changed this year. I now am working very closely with the Red Balloon team, particularly in building relationships and working with our corporate clients, because Red Balloon is a marketing company and we market on behalf of 2,000 small businesses throughout Australia and New Zealand. And we just deliver them customers and I'd always been a marketer and that was the premise. When I left my corporate career, I first of all started a freelance marketing company and there was one thing that I knew in designing these fabulous marketing programs that build brand, presence and storytelling and over a long period of time, actually small business just need customers. And it's how customers talk about them that'll make the difference in the long term and I knew that if I flipped the agency model, whereby I just deliver them customers and there's no cost to them unless I give them a customer that might resonate. And also I branded an industry.

Naomi Simson:

I say it in the sense of activity suppliers that are not just in the tourism space, but they might be in gourmet or spa category in a number of categories and we gave them a brand to unify them. And so we're a marketing company and we continue to do that, and in fact, if anything it's got harder for small businesses to stand out and get customers because we find that Google and Facebook are very expensive and one day you'll get a customer and next day you won't. And you're not quite sure what an algorithm has done or how you've been represented. I often jest, wouldn't it be nice if we just had the Yellow Pages and we could all just look it up again and know that if we paid for an ad that we were going to be seen.

Naomi Simson:

So I would argue that marketing is more challenging than ever for small businesses. So for 20 years, Red Balloon has been a conduit from corporate clients to these small businesses. And it's never been needed more than it is now in terms of how we support these small businesses as we bring them back online.

Samantha Sutherland:

Yeah, one of the things is that through the Big Red Group platforms, like the suite of platforms, you promote thousands of small businesses and you have talked about the sort of tourism multiplier impact from your work, so can you talk about how Red Balloon success is really linked to the success of these small businesses and why that relationship is so important to you?

Naomi Simson:

Well, it's so important to me because small business is the backbone of Australia. And it's difficult for corporations and big businesses to buy from small businesses through their procurement processes and so forth. So one way they can kind of get around it is many individuals might use their credit cards or a different sort of process when they want to buy from small businesses. And, in fact, the oldest public view of a marketplace that was a collection of different small businesses is Interflora. And they had a global network of florists and as we come out of this, that is what we need, more than anything, because people are going to buy local. But local doesn't mean that they're only buying in their neighbourhood. It's just they're like, I've got a cousin in Toowoomba. I want to send them a gift or I need to send them something. Do I really want to buy it from Amazon, a big American company. The money will go offshore and I don't know what will be left in Australia and also they're going to ship something from somewhere. I don't even know where their warehouse is.

Naomi Simson:

So people are making far more considered purchase decisions and they think that's a very interesting and important thing as we look at what consumer sentiment is going to be like. So therefore, if a small business is a member of a marketplace, I have a certain assurity and confidence as a purchaser. And whether that's a business purchasing or whether it's an individual. So really Red Balloon is the marketplace or the brand name that people know for experience gifts but within our group, we now have a number of different marketplaces supporting small businesses.

Naomi Simson:

So when I started, I was with one of our first suppliers was the hot air balloonists in the Hunter Valley. And that first year, they had one balloon and 900 customers. In 2019, they had 23,000 customers and 19 balloons. So because of the work we do with our 1,993, I checked before the podcast, 1,993 small businesses that we represent, we drive growth. And in talking to Matt from Balloon Aloft in the Hunter Valley, he goes yeah, well, it's not that they might spend \$100 with you, he said because you pass that onto us, but then when they come to us, they buy another ticket, they buy the photography, they buy the whatever. On average, people will buy maybe \$300 and more. Or they'll start going direct. In other words, we've introduced a customer to them. So that becomes our small clip of the ticket and they pay nothing to list with us. It becomes actually amortized over the total value of what that customer spends with them.

Naomi Simson:

But also, when they go to the Hunter Valley, they'll go to a winery, they'll stay in some accommodation, they'll go out for dinner. And that's probably, the research tells us, about another \$700. So for every \$100 dollars spent at Red Balloon, that ends up as a \$1,000 economic impact in regional and rural, not just regional and rural, but local Australian businesses. We're proudly home grown and we represent all these small businesses.

Samantha Sutherland:

Yeah. I think that is really amazing. That story of from one to 19 balloons and that increase in number of visitors and like you said, the knock-on effect is something that I think people don't necessarily think about.

Naomi Simson:

They don't necessarily know the scale. So last year, that's 2019 calendar year, we delivered 608,000 customers to our small business partners. That's a lot. And that represents \$85 million which is \$850 million worth of economic impact. And this year we were shooting for a billion, but now we're not. We don't know what the second half of the year is going to be like, but we're really encouraging corporates, particularly small businesses, to buy a voucher that is going to impact Australia and impact small businesses and have a direct economic impact. In other words, if you're going to spend a dollar, make sure it stays in Australia and make sure that it has the broader impact. And I'm particularly concerned and I've been in the public domain talking about the mental health of small business owners. Because it's tough and everybody's turning to them and they just need to know that they've got a business to come back to.

Naomi Simson:

So we're very grateful for JobKeepers, very grateful indeed, because that's for our small business partners. It means that they can stay in touch with the artisans and the talented, skilled people that they have within their group and also we represent forward bookings for them. So they know they can log onto our intranet and they can see the forward bookings in the system which also encourages them to say, right, what investment can I make in bringing back my business online. And we have a whole program of work that we've called Project Thor, which means that we can bring on geographies at different rates and different times, depending on how the states chose to open up.

Samantha Sutherland:

If we go back to when you said that you left corporate because you wanted more flexibility in your life, and we do know that Work 180 endorsed employers are offering a lot more flexibility, and companies even that aren't endorsed by Work 180 yet are offering much more flex. And also we're still seeing a lot more women leaving corporate jobs because of exactly what you've talked about, about wanting more flex.

Samantha Sutherland:

And you have said that you are particularly interested in supporting female founded businesses. Can you talk a bit about why that is and how it's evident in your work?

Naomi Simson:

Oh, you know, proving whether I've done it or not. Well I'm involved with a number of organizations including Heads Over Heels, who introduced us or Scale Investment who invest in female led founders and there's a number of ways that I support female founders. But I think what's more interesting and what has really come out of this is all people, not just women, but people are making the choice about where do I spend my most precious resource, which is time.

Naomi Simson:

And this working from home that we've now been doing for about ten weeks when we recorded this. Who knows how much longer it's got to go for, whether it might be a very long time, we don't know. But it's given people an opportunity to reflect on what is important to them. And I've spoken to a lot of people and a lot of women who said I didn't realize that I had rushing woman syndrome, which is that they are rushing to the next and the next and the next and not necessarily appreciating or spending the time to be truly present in whatever it is that they're doing, whether it be family, work, their parents or what have you.

Naomi Simson:

So I think that people will begin to make more choices about where they spend their time. I think this is a very great time in history that we've been able to demonstrate that we can still be productive even if we're not spending hours commuting to work. And I do know that, as a workplace, our business, Red Balloon and the Big Red Group, we are very much reinventing what work looks like from not necessarily the inputs but the outputs.

Naomi Simson:

I know many parents who are really appreciating the fact that they can be with their kids in their commute time, walk them to school, have sideway conversations, pick them up from school, have a kick of the footy in the local park and then when they all get home, they kind of do homework and get back to work. And these are very precious times. My kids have now left home. They bought themselves up nicely. They're now adults. And any parent will tell you. It goes quickly. So it is such a precious time to be with family and then if you begin to think, well, maybe if offices just never had meetings after three, meetings, that means people could do some deep work after three or deep work in the morning at that pre-drop off time so that then people can just choose when they do their deep work and maybe they'd do their deep work in the evenings so that they can play with their kids.

Naomi Simson:

So I think people are going to be far less willing to sit on the metal tube for an hour to get to work, wherever that is and whatever that metal tube looks like. We're far more aware. I was thinking as a child when there was a drought and we invented the half-flush toilet and we learned to turn the tap off when we were cleaning our teeth and there was, kind of these social norms that have slipped into our everyday way of life and there is no doubt that we would have new social norms that are the new way that we operate as a society. I read the figures that says that influenza in New South Wales in April, or was it May, it was 34 cases instead of 34,000 cases. So we're getting so many health benefits out of this. There's those who argue herd mentality and all of those sorts of things but we're getting productivity uplifts in different ways and that's one of those is that I'm healthier than I've ever been because I've now got time to walk and do sport, which is how I swapped my commute time.

Samantha Sutherland:

Yeah. I have never seen so many people out in the park in the afternoon as I am at the moment around my place. It's really amazing actually, some of those positive impacts that you've just talked about.

Naomi Simson:

And I think that therefore this notion of flexible work is not one of just parenting, it's definitely not one of gender. It's more the fact of how we shift the neuro-pathways of what work looks like. And I wrote a quote in a blog last week for those who follow me, on either my Instagram or LinkedIn, that work is something we do, not somewhere we go. And even that, as a notion, for many industries was completely unthinkable. And I think, therefore, that we can create a better society and what I would argue is a good life, an inclusive life, that is not based on anybody's gender, minority or anything else. It just means that it's the work that we look at, the outcomes.

Naomi Simson:

I am concerned though about how people feel connected and what they connect to and how do we build community when everybody is remote. How do we rally the troops to the cause of the purpose of

our toil when we might not be able to see each other. So we haven't solved all of these issues but we're definitely working on them and looking at different ways of working.

Samantha Sutherland:

Yeah. That point about how do we create community when everybody is working remotely. And I think that extends beyond just work communities but to our personal communities as well. You have this section on your website called the things I believe, which I really loved and one of them was about people need to connect more through shared experiences. And I wanted to ask you, how do you think people can curate that in their lives during the shutdown and as things slowly open back up and we don't know what that might look like, but it will certainly look different to how it did before.

Naomi Simson:

Yeah, look there's so many things that are going to change dramatically. But I've seen some just beautiful incidences of how families are connecting. So we have four kids. One lives in the US and the other three are in Victoria and I'm 1,000 kilometres away and now every Sunday morning, all of us get together on Zoom and have a laugh and talk about the week, which we did not do before this. And so therefore, there is ways that we are connecting, and we do the same with our parents. And so it's forced us to have a rhythm and say what's important to me and this is what I'm going to do. Well we play games. We do code names. We play all sorts of things, Bananagrams and we even bought out the old Yahtzee which we haven't played for years. We're all having a bit of a laugh about it, but shared experience is still possible virtually.

Naomi Simson:

You may have seen our Red Balloon at home experiences range and doing an online painting and sip class together where you get all the materials and everybody logs on and does it. And so, there are going to be ways that we do this, but I think also how we experience life may well change, given that 6.4 million Australians travelled overseas last year. That's not happening this year. That \$50 billion can stay in Australia. But I'm still curious to go to the places and see, but it was unsustainable for us to just keep getting on a plane and doing these things and going to these places. When I first started traveling as a young backpacker last century, when I went to Machu Picchu in South America, six people visited on the day. There were six people and I went on a local train and sat there all day with basically no-one else there in this incredible space. Whereas now, they're cutting it off at 20,000 people a day.

Naomi Simson:

When I first went to the Forbidden City in China, it was 1985 or 1986. Anyway, it was a long time ago, and China had only been open to the west for three years and it was 10 years after the cultural revolution. And I walked through the Forbidden City and it was completely overgrown with trees going through the buildings and grass growing on the roof tiles. I went back to China last year to the Forbidden City and they've cut off the number of visitors to 400,000 people a day and you have to line up. And you are lucky to get a ticket to get in there and kind of shuffle through what is now, almost been reconstructed to a Disneyland experience.

Naomi Simson:

So at some point, because we can travel... Venetians were unable to be in their own city. It was only ever tourists. So how are we going to really flip the model of having cultural experiences without impacting it. So I think there's some very interesting and long term questions that as leaders in our

community, we're going to really debate about. And now that our borders are closed, but I'm still really curious to understand something. So I think media virtual reality is going to play a bit part in how we experience different places with not necessarily getting on a plane. Because also those places can't cope with them. They physically can't cope.

Samantha Sutherland:

Yeah. That's fascinating, those numbers. I went to Machu Picchu in 2008 and they didn't have to close it each day for people to get in but at that stage the Inca Trail was closed, had a capped number of people every day. To be there with six people must have been a phenomenal experience.

Naomi Simson:

It was spiritual. And I'm pretty sure that nobody who went there last year had a spiritual experience.

Samantha Sutherland:

No. So actually the word spiritual actually takes me to another one of the things that you say you believe on your website which I really loved, was that a vivid experience of life is created by having passion, persistence, positivity and purpose. And I wondered how you bring those four Ps into your own life and how you help others do that.

Naomi Simson:

Well, are you setting me up to talk about my book? It's such an interesting thing because I wrote a book, *Live What You Love*, which is a best-seller and I wrote *Live What You Love* because I had four adults, or nearly adult teenagers making big decisions in their life, I don't know, about four years ago. But I was asked by LinkedIn and I write for LinkedIn as one of their influencers and they asked me what would I tell my younger self. You know, what advice would you give.

Naomi Simson:

And a blog post is usually about 600 words. Well at 6,000 words I thought I had a bit of a problem and I spoke to a publisher friend of mine. She said, look, why don't you just keep going and if you get to 70 or 80,000 words you've probably got a book there she said. So on I kept going and as I was talking to my kids, I was wanting to impart what I'd learned on this journey but give them exercises to get them to think. So it's not my life they want to emulate. I want all people to make powerful choices about where they give their talents and their most precious resource, which is their time.

Naomi Simson:

And so I wrote this book and the structure of the book is that it will start talking about passion. What is passion? And passion is a personal energy and it's what drives us and it is very personal. And also positivity and being able to see the good in things when actually the whole world is falling apart, but what does that mean? And you can hear in my conversation, I'm thinking about well how can we make it a better place? How can we make it more inclusive? How can we make it that we get to share incredible indigenous experiences without losing the indigenous culture in the meantime?

Naomi Simson:

So these are the questions. So I see positivity and so there's a whole bunch of exercises in there and language is a very important part of that. And then the book talks about persistence and how you've

really got to stick at something and this is not about being pigheaded. Because pigheaded is it's my way or the highway, I'm going this direction, versus persistence which is I want to achieve this, I want to go there, I want to understand this, and then listening and responding and adapting to take people with you on that journey.

Naomi Simson:

And then ultimately purpose is about what you give, not what you get. It's your purpose is about how you make the world a better place. It is about what you contribute. And when people understand that purpose is not their passion. Passion is personal. Purpose is always about others, and you generate this incredible sense of fulfillment when you give to others. And so I wrote this in this book, became a best seller, *Live What You Love*, but it was effectively my four guiding posts as I have created the life I've created for myself, my others, my communities and especially my fabulous experience suppliers.

Samantha Sutherland:

And of the four passion, persistence, positivity and purpose, is there one that you have found more of a challenge to meet that one or has that changed in different times of your life? Because no-one can be all cylinders firing all the time and so what's your experience of living them? Knowing what they are but then how you actually do it all the time?

Naomi Simson:

Yeah. So one of the things that I get the feedback on the book, they say, but I can't find my purpose. I can't find it. Well I didn't find my purpose until I was 44. And we shift the way people experience life and that is broad enough to encompass not only my commercial world which is Red Balloon and experiences, but also who I am as a leader, as a speaker, as a keynote, as a writer. That maybe because of this work or this conversation, I shift somebody else's experience of life and they see something that they didn't see before.

Naomi Simson:

So people say to me, they go I just can't find my purpose, I don't see what it is. And they might have it really quite confused with their passion. So purpose will come when you remain curious and asking questions and not looking for the answer. If you have the ability to observe yourself and your ability to observe your energy, it may well show up. And being able to reflect. And I think many of us, we're so busy being in action, we were not necessarily spending a moment to reflect on what did I learn today? What did I discover? What was the highlight?

Naomi Simson:

And just being able to look back on the bucket list we have done, rather than just looking to the one we want to do. And there's all sorts of insights in there so, yes, *Live What You Love*. I still get incredible feedback from that book because there's exercises in it to help people on that journey and, no, I don't stay on all the time. I've had some horrendously sad times and been very challenged by this lockdown and what's happening to my business, but I pick myself up and I say, well, it's just the way it is and if it's meant to be, it's up to me and who can I call today? Who can I influence today? How can I have an impact? And then I'll be okay.

Samantha Sutherland:

Yeah. I love what you said, too, actually, when you first were talking about purpose and you didn't figure out your purpose until you were 44. And I was thinking as you were talking, it sounds like taking action, taking lots of little steps and keeping moving forward is key to that, but then also what you added in about it's not just about taking action. It's about continually taking action and I actually think the one about persistence. Persistence and consistency, to me, in today's world, is a super-power. That's how people can really make change. Because we're so used to immediate gratification and not sticking to things-

Naomi Simson:

We live in a world of soundbites. So, I had the privilege of meeting Condoleezza Rice this year. This year, I can't believe it was in January. In the US, she was presenting at the PCMI Conference. And there was two things she said which was hilarious. Because she's Chancellor at Stanford University and she's actually always been an academic. And she said the young graduates often come and say, "I just want to work with purpose". And she says, "Yes, well maybe your purpose right now is to learn how to pay your rent and leave home".

Naomi Simson:

So your purpose doesn't necessarily have to be long and hard and changing the world. For a while there, for me, it was just about putting meals on the table and being able to earn an income from the things that I loved. And that can be your passion and purpose is also about doing great work. So I thought that that was good. Often we get into this notion of being lofty, when really it can be quite intimate and quite needy.

Naomi Simson:

And then the other thing that young people say is, "I want to lead our community and be a leader". And she says, "Yes, well to be a leader, you need to have experience and be qualified to be a leader, and therefore you need to do your time and have that depth of understanding and experience". And I think that that is a great insight as well. So in other words, so many people have read so many things and they go, "Ooh, I want that". Like I've had young people literally, straight out of uni go, "Naomi how do you know so much?" Well, it's called 35 years in business. "You're so clever. I never would have thought of that". Yeah, I guess so.

Naomi Simson:

I think there's a wonderful notion of being able to realize that 35 years in business does give me some level of gravitas, understanding, insight and just knowledge that only comes because every year I've invested in my education, learning, understanding and growing as an individual.

Samantha Sutherland:

Yeah. And I love what you said too about the purpose so maybe the purpose is just paying your rent and I think, too, one of the things is that purpose and where you're heading and the impact you want to have, it changes over time. So you start doing something and really all you know when you start doing that one thing is that that's not what you're going to be doing in 10 years' time. If you go back to starting Red Balloon at home in 2001, you never could have imagined that this is what you'd be doing now, in 2020.

Naomi Simson:

Exactly.

Samantha Sutherland:

But it evolves because you keep taking those persistent steps and keep checking in on those steps and what it meant and whether you're happy that you took that step and what it led you to.

Naomi Simson:

And you can learn so much even from the really, really bad times. The really bad managers and the bad leaders. You can learn just as much if you can get out of the emotion and be able to observe. I had great corporate experiences and I had terrible ones. And I learnt just as much from the terrible ones about how I didn't want to be and who I wanted to be as a manager and a leader. So I get it. So all experience is experience. It's what we learn from it that makes the difference of who we are.

Samantha Sutherland:

Yeah. Absolutely. Absolutely. And then one of the other things around saying you have really young people coming and saying I want to be a leader or people saying what's my purpose. I actually saw Elizabeth Gilbert speak recently who I just adore. And she asked what are you willing to give up to live the life you say you want. And I think that that's true of whatever people are saying. It doesn't need to be about being artistic. But if you say you want to be a leader, well what are you willing to do to become a leader? What are you willing to do to actually get there?

Naomi Simson:

It's so true. That investment and doing the work. You've just got to do the work which is the persistence piece. You've got to do the work.

Samantha Sutherland:

Yeah. So I want to ask you some more personal questions about raising children and building an empire. And you have four children who are grown up now, but they were all born through the period after you left corporate roles and were working for yourself-

Naomi Simson:

Just to clarify that, we're now a blended family. So I had two when I was starting the business and then I acquired another two which, for me, is a fabulous way of getting four kids.

Samantha Sutherland:

I love that too. Actually, one of my favourite podcasts is a Guilty Feminist. So I am a single parent. I share my son 50/50 with his father. And she said, I think the happiest parents that I know are the ones that are co-parents but they no longer live with the other parent. Because the child is there and they're like, oh my little squishy face, I'm so happy to see you. And then they're gone and you get to have a life and you get to go out and you get to date and then the child comes back and you're so happy to see them again. And that reframe for me was just so helpful. Because instead of it being like, oh, he doesn't have a nuclear family. It's like what he does have is two parents who are so happy to see him every time he's with us.

Naomi Simson:

Yeah. So true.

Samantha Sutherland:

Okay. So birthing two young children and then gaining two other children and you also, you mentioned the fact that a lot of women come to you and say I never even realized I had rushing women's syndrome. And how did you avoid that? Or did you get that kind of syndrome when you had young children and were trying to build an empire? How did you do all of that?

Naomi Simson:

I need to just be really clear. My life is not perfect and I was not the perfect parent and I'm not necessarily the perfect business leader either. But what I did know, and this was before, this was before the age of social media, digital phones and all the rest. But when I was with my kids, I was with my kids. I didn't work. So if it was only an hour, I would be on the floor playing the game with them and they still have never beaten me at Monopoly. I was never a parent who thought that they should let their kids win. And I used to walk my kids to school and as a business owner, I also made sure that if they wanted me at the sports day, I could be there. And I remember speaking to my son, just not that long ago, a few years ago, and I said, don't you remember I did reading in the classroom, I did tuck shop, I did this, that and the other thing. And he goes, "Nuh".

Samantha Sutherland:

That's so funny, one, they're so ungrateful but, two, yeah the things that we really tried-

Naomi Simson:

It's not that he's ungrateful. It's just it wasn't important to him. And I assumed it was. So we often do these things for yourself, not for what you think you're creating a great childhood for. So I wanted to know who his friends were. So I chose to do it, but not so that he would say, oh my mum was a good mum. So kids will take what they take and that's their view of the world. So I remember my daughter saying, "Mum, where's my school uniform". And I said, "Wherever you left it. I have no idea, and it's not my job to find it." And she might get really angry with me but she won't lose it again.

Naomi Simson:

So I guess there was a bit of that tough love but when it was with my kids, I was really with my kids and they remember that. They remember playing Monopoly. We still joke about it. I remember reading every night, we would sit together on the couch and read the Magic Faraway Tree because it was the thickest book that we knew and every night we'd just read one chapter and they looked forward to it. And I was truly present with them. So these are the things that they do remember versus the things that I remember about their childhood because I chose to participate in that way.

Samantha Sutherland:

Yeah. I love that. I love that reflection actually. And the fact that what's important to them and what's important to you aren't necessarily the same thing. And the things they remember. At the end of each day, so my son is six, at the end of each day, we do highs, lows and Gruffalos. So, Gruffalos is funny or weird or whatever. And I have obviously, like many parents, been feeling guilty about the amount of screen time he's had during this period, because you can't physically do all the home schooling work that he gets sent by the school and work in a job. It just is not possible. And seems to be watching TV a

lot. And almost every day, his high is watching TV. It's like, okay, well. I don't need to feel bad about him watching more TV than normal through this however many months period we're in. He loves it.

Naomi Simson:

That's great. Maybe he's going to be a TV producer. It's okay. I think the most important thing is, therefore, that we connect. And you know, I wanted to stay close to my son and it's very easy for a mum to not really get boys and vice versa because they're just going, "Why are you always filthy?" "Why are you always fighting something?" "Why are you..." Because that's not the world I grew up with and I had a sister. But I would sit and I have watched every Fast and Furious. I've watched every episode of what is now Grand Tour which was, isn't that awful that I can't even remember its name now. But I watched all of these car programs with my son because that was so I could be in his world. And I think it's very important, if television is the thing, is to watch the show, know who the characters are, talk about it. And so it can still be a place of connection, because that's something that's really interesting.

Naomi Simson:

I would watch kids' programs together and the saddest thing about having kids grown up is you don't get to go and see the Pixar movies-

Samantha Sutherland:

No excuse any more.

Naomi Simson:

No, but you know what I did do is with this one now, we got the Disney subscription and now we watch the Pixars, even though we're in all the different locations and then we talk about it. So there's still ways that we can connect through the things that we used to do and my kids just think I'm a big old dag but they love it, I'm sure. Maybe they don't. I don't know. Ask them. But they're very healthy. One's a farmer and one's a data scientist. And then the other boys, one's in health science and the other was working for Tesla and has recently emigrated to the US. So, they're all great.

Samantha Sutherland:

And it's funny actually because I'm sure they do probably think you're a dag because kids always think their mother's a dag and then everyone else in Australia. You have almost three million followers on LinkedIn who certainly do not think you are. But to your kids, you're still always just going to be their mum.

Naomi Simson:

Yeah. Exactly right. They're so gorgeous. They're lovely. All of them. They're fun.

Samantha Sutherland:

So I always close the podcast with this question which LinkedIn and your book beat me to, but I'll still ask you anyway. Which is, if you could go back in time and talk to young Naomi, what would you say to yourself about advice about what was to come and how everything that was going to unfold the way that it has?

Naomi Simson:

I would say there'll be another Christmas. And what I mean by that is everything was always urgent. I was always in hurry, a bit of this rushing women's syndrome which is why I said I don't know if I always had it sorted out. I definitely didn't. But I would start, because Red Balloon is a gifting business and Christmas is so important, by pretty much the 26th of January, Australia Day, I'm planning the next Christmas campaign. And push, push, pushing to make sure everything is ready for Christmas. So I guess, you know, which in some ways an 11 month strategy is too short and you need to think of a five year strategy in what you're moving towards.

Naomi Simson:

So a long term strategy is not a series of short term activities bunched together. I guess that's the one thing that I would know, knowing that I will live to the grand old age of 100, how will I pace myself. I don't actually have to get everything done now.

Samantha Sutherland:

I will finish it there, but before we finish, can I just ask, is there anything we haven't talked about that you expected to or want to before we finish our call.

Naomi Simson:

Well, I guess, whoever listens to this wherever they are in the world, is to consider small businesses are local businesses. I'm imploring people who work in big companies to find ways of supporting local and small businesses. And also if that means brand association and the reboot of Australia is going to be materially important to marketers and if any marketers want to talk to me about the Reboot Australia program that we're putting together, really happy to talk to them.

Samantha Sutherland:

I really hope you enjoyed today's chat. If you can help us spread the word by giving us your view on iTunes, that helps even more people find Equality Talks. To find out more about our mission, check out current opportunities with Work 180's endorsed employers and to read and listen to more inspiring stories, please head over to Work180.co. That's work 1-8-0 dot co. See you next time.