



Equality Talks Podcast - Transcript

Episode 10: True Flexibility, the Juggle and Boundaries

Vivienne Partridge has worked in advertising and marketing for 21 years. With a strong interest in continued education, she's obtained a master's degree and four other industry and post-grad certifications. She's a mother to two toddlers who are only 14 months apart, and in the little spare time around all of that, she races triathlons, runs, ocean swims, and recently became a volunteer with the New South Wales State Emergency Services in response to the Australian bushfires. I'm really excited to talk to you today Vivian, thank you so much for joining me.

Vivienne Partridge:

Me too, thank you.

Samantha Sutherland:

I was hoping you could tell me a little bit about your role at Optus. I know that you're the Associate Director for Strategy and Planning. I was hoping you could tell me a bit about that and what you do and what led you there?

Vivienne Partridge:

If I talk to what led me to where I am today, I kicked off my career actually, not even remotely what I'm doing today. I started off in advertising. My first role was doing media planning and buying for an advertising agency. Through the years that I was doing that, I took a move to the UK and in the UK, moved in secondment role from Ogilvy, which is the advertising agency that used to look after American Express. I took the comment into American Express, so it was really from that point on that I was doing client-side marketing.

Vivienne Partridge:

Then from marketing, took a bit of a journey in marketing to where I am today, which is in customer value management, which is a little bit of marketing and a little bit of, I guess, strategy in terms of how we look after our customers, how we manage those customers, and how we make sure that we're adding value back to our customer base, and really respect the fact that they're really core to our business. My role now is strategy and planning, which is what are those strategic initiatives, and how do we plan for the things that are going to have the best impact to our customer base?

Samantha Sutherland:

Okay. I have a question for you. I'm not an Optus customer, but I do have a mobile Phone like everybody else does. One of the things that I have found really infuriating is that I got offered a better deal from a different provider, and so I rang my provider and I said, "I'm a really long-standing customer, and I'm getting better offers from other people, and not you're not doing anything to retain me." Is that part of what you have to do as well? That type of, not the actual, obviously, dealing with the customer who's calling, but how you figure out how to do that in a positive way?

Vivienne Partridge:

Yeah, that's 100% right. The team that I'm in is called Customer Value Management, so that's actually, how do we ensure that the customers stay with us, love us, and be the number one most loved brand in Australia? Really, just make sure that we are offering the right propositions to the customers, and doing our best to make sure that ... It might not always be on price, but that we're actually adding the most value and being the most loved brand. Part of that is making sure that we keep our customers and make sure that those customers do love us.

Samantha Sutherland:

Yeah, interesting. When I read out a bit about you in the beginning, we talked a little bit about all your continued education. You have a lot of qualifications. Can you talk a bit about what some of them are, but then also this love of learning that you have?

Vivienne Partridge:

Yeah. I actually started off with an advanced diploma in advertising. As I said, my career started in advertising. Then through that, I've been really lucky, actually, along the way with great learning opportunities. Quickly after that, actually, while I was in my first job, I was working full-time and studied part-time to finish off my master's. I have a master's in Communications, and I did that part-time, so that took a few years actually. That was a great experience in itself. I really enjoyed that.

Vivienne Partridge:

Even then, along the way, and in particularly at Optus, have had some really good opportunities to get certifications, so industry certifications. Optus supported me in getting certified for marketing as well a certified scrum master as well. Then, I guess, just where I've seen opportunity. I think, at the time, when digital was really ramping-up, I looked to get certified in digital advertising as well. I've been really lucky and fortunate from that respect in terms of the opportunities that have opened up for me.

Samantha Sutherland:

Okay, yeah. Amazing. In some of the information that you sent me before we started chatting, I know that you moved to the UK to work in financial services. You've got an accent. I didn't ask where you're from. What's the story of the travel that you've done in your career and moving around the world?

Vivienne Partridge:

Actually, my accent isn't from my moving through my adult life. My accent's from when I was a child growing up. I went to American school growing up, but I am used to moving around a lot. From that, I think going to eight schools in my younger life, being a student through eight schools, I've then taken that into my adult life and loved moving around. I took an opportunity to move to the UK, and lived in the UK for five years. I just always had travel as a part of my life. In that regard, that's been a fantastic opportunity as well.

Samantha Sutherland:

I have a similar kind of thing, where I moved a lot as a kid. I don't know if I went to eight schools, but quite a lot in America and New Zealand. Then a similar kind of thing. I actually spoke to a friend about it a little while ago, about how growing up, moving around a lot, it does make you kind of nomadic as an adult. You have it just in your bones, don't you?

Vivienne Partridge:

Yeah, definitely, definitely. Although I think sometimes, it can work the flip side. I think maybe when people travel a lot as kids, I guess, it just manifests itself differently for different people. Some people then don't really want to travel in their adult life. I guess, it's different for different individuals.

Samantha Sutherland:

Yeah, they just might want a bit of stability after that.

Vivienne Partridge:

Yeah, that's right. For me, it definitely went the other way where I took that, definitely, into my adult life.

Samantha Sutherland:

You've worked in the UK. Have you worked anywhere else around the world? Or has most of the rest of your travel been just for holidays?

Vivienne Partridge:

Yeah, mostly for holidays. I had two work opportunities, one was in the Middle East in Bahrain, and one was in Singapore. Looking back, they would have been fantastic opportunities. I think, definitely down the track, would love to reopen the idea of working abroad, definitely. Something I'm really keen to do but, I guess, things such as family and things like life has its own journey. We'll see, we'll see.

Samantha Sutherland:

You turned down the Bahrain and Singapore opportunities?

Vivienne Partridge:

I did at the time, yeah. I guess, it was just I was quite settled in the UK. The job that I had in American Express, who I was working for at the time, were, and still are a fantastic company. At the time, it wasn't quite the right time to make the move. Have been really lucky in the opportunities that were given to me.

Samantha Sutherland:

Okay. Now, your kids are pretty young, right? They're toddlers still?

Vivienne Partridge:

They are. They're three and four now.

Samantha Sutherland:

Three and four. Okay. Tell me a little bit about that. I know they're 14 months apart, so you had parental leave twice in a row very quickly.

Vivienne Partridge:

Yeah.

Samantha Sutherland:

You were in the UK working when you got pregnant with your first child? Is that the-

Vivienne Partridge:

Yeah, so I was back in Sydney, back home. That was, I guess, one of the reasons I could have ended up living in the UK probably for a lot longer, but made the conscious decision that I did want to have a family, move back to Australia, and have the kind of ... We're a very lucky country in Australia. Have the lifestyle and the culture here for having my family. That was a huge part in returning home. I was in Sydney when I had my two babies.

Samantha Sutherland:

Okay. Did you actually take parental leave from a job, or you left the career force for a couple of years?

Vivienne Partridge:

I took parental leave, though at the time, I was working at Foxtel and took two sets or parental leave back-to-back. I actually had them so close together that I didn't return to work before going into the second set of parental leave at Foxtel.

Samantha Sutherland:

Oh, wow. Well, I suppose, because you're oldest one would have been five months old when you got pregnant.

Vivienne Partridge:

That's right, yeah.

Samantha Sutherland:

Which is so little. When that happened, planned or not, surely there was a moment when you were like, "Oh my god." What happened then? Tell me about this.

Vivienne Partridge:

I actually think that I was in a bit of ignorant bliss, I think. There's this funny story. There's a meme that comes up that I always laugh at, which there's if you have a really good first, you have a false sense of confidence for the second. That was definitely the case for me. I had a really easy-going first, and they say that that's when you have them back-to-back quickly, it's when your first is quite easy-going. Actually, I didn't have an, "Oh no" moment, really because I did have that total false sense of security, I think, from my first being very easy-going. Luckily, didn't have the panic, which I would now have.

Samantha Sutherland:

Having a second terror child.

Vivienne Partridge:

That's it, yeah.

Samantha Sutherland:

I think also, even if you have a good second child, the banking up of the sleep deprivation has to be a big part of why the second one is harder, even if you have a really easy first one.

Vivienne Partridge:

For me, I'm a typical case of where sleep deprivation really affected me, 100%. Both my babies, actually. Even though I say the first one was easy-going, that's not meant, as in he did not sleep well. Both of mine were up every two hours when they were babies, on the two hours through the night. Absolutely, 100%, the sleep deprivation is something that no one can explain to a mom-to-be in words really, like what affect that has, 100%.

Samantha Sutherland:

Yeah. How old was your youngest when you went back to work?

Vivienne Partridge:

I actually did some just kind of, I guess, temp work when she was seven months. I didn't really take on full-time permanent work. I went back into doing some consulting for a little bit when my youngest was seven months old, which was great because it was I could be a little bit more in control of the terms of going back to work, the hours, the commitment, so that worked quite well actually.

Samantha Sutherland:

Then, how old was she when you went back into more full-time work?

Vivienne Partridge:

She was one when I started in Optus, where I'm currently working. She was one by then.

Samantha Sutherland:

Okay. You started at Optus, and you had a one-year-old and two-year-old.

Vivienne Partridge:

Yes.

Samantha Sutherland:

Part-time. Is that right?

Vivienne Partridge:

I did. Optus were fantastic, and have always been really supportive. It was actually a job that was advertised full-time. I was very lucky that in terms of sitting in the interview, going through my personal circumstance of having the one and two-year-old, my two kids were very young at the time, that

flexibility just absolutely astounded me, really from the get-go. So impressed by, and even until today, that was over two years ago. Now, still impressed by, I think there's very few organizations that would be that flexible and that supportive, so very lucky.

Samantha Sutherland:

I have many questions about this. The role was advertised as full-time, and so in your head, were you thinking, "I'm going to go and get a full-time role"? Or, were you thinking, "I'm going to apply for full-time roles and see if I can get part-time"?

Vivienne Partridge:

No, absolutely, I had no expectation whatsoever. I went into it thinking, I had picked up the consultancy work part-time when my daughter was seven months, and thought, at some point, to be in the career that I'm in, I really had to get to a point where I had to accept the fact that I was really looking at full-time. For me, there are such few opportunities in the field that I'm in that I feel that there is genuine part-time positions. I was 100% acknowledging the fact that the role that I'd apply for would mean returning to work five days a week, yeah.

Samantha Sutherland:

Okay. Then, in the interview process, you talk about your circumstances, and then they just spontaneously offered for you to do part-time?

Vivienne Partridge:

Yeah, so the lady that interviewed me, she was a mum herself. We talked through the fact that I was the mum of a one and two-year-old. Yeah, Optus suggested a transition phase. What was amazing, the transition was actually meant to be a slow ramp-up from part-time to full-time, but Optus had been so supportive throughout really what was supposed to be a slow ramp-up has turned into a two and a half year ramp-up. Really, has been really, really supportive and flexible, I guess. Which has been amazing.

Samantha Sutherland:

Yeah, that is amazing. The ramp-up, so you're still part-time now?

Vivienne Partridge:

Yes, that's right. Yeah.

Samantha Sutherland:

What do you work now?

Vivienne Partridge:

Well, when I said "part-time," so I am three or four days in the office, and then available. I am available. When I say, "part-time," I'm available for five days, and working the five days. Then in terms of in the office, three to four days a week, so they've got immense flexibility on that part. Really, I have not come across an organization that has that level of flexibility. It really does astound me that I've been that fortunate.

Samantha Sutherland:

That is amazing.

Vivienne Partridge:

Yeah.

Samantha Sutherland:

You do three or four days in the office, and you just pick the days at the beginning of the week? Or you have a normal schedule that you-

Vivienne Partridge:

Yeah. Absolutely try and keep ... I mean, because I have a team, I still want to have that level of stability and reliability for the team of the days that I am in. Most recently, it's been really set days, so Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday. Then Friday, remote. I try and keep to that pretty ... That's been the case for the whole two years, is trying to keep the days for-

Samantha Sutherland:

Okay. You're mainly four days in the office, and then sometimes you'll do three and two from home?

Vivienne Partridge:

I've only just recently picked up the fourth day, so actually, it's been really a great gradual kind of increase. Really encouraging of moms returning to work. What I thought would be a really fast move from three days to five days has actually been, like I said, quite gradual. It's only been recently that I've picked up that extra fourth, and still with the flexibility that if I do need to do that day from home, it's the three days in the office. Really immensely supportive here.

Samantha Sutherland:

Okay. That fifth day, the Friday, you're available but it's not officially a work day?

Vivienne Partridge:

Yeah, I'm available. In my mind, that is a work day. It's just the flexibility of that remote working, yeah.

Samantha Sutherland:

In your own mind, it is a work day. Can I ask you a question, which might be a little bit challenging? Are you paid for full-time work?

Vivienne Partridge:

Yes, yeah.

Samantha Sutherland:

Okay, so you are paid for five days. That's why Friday, you think of it as a work day and you are available.

Vivienne Partridge:

That's exactly right, yeah.

Samantha Sutherland:

Because one of the things that I have ... I'm a working mother as well, and one of the things that I have become really aware of in the last few years is a thing, which has actually been called wage theft. I did not make that term up. It's essentially the idea that mainly women, largely it's mothers who are working part-time are given a full-time caseload, and they are paid part-time hours, and they're expected to do the full-time workload. They often do that by going home to pick their kids up on the days they don't have aftercare or whatever, but then working at nights and on weekends and stuff.

Samantha Sutherland:

When I heard it described as wage theft, I was like, oh, that's why I get so angry about it, because it is theft. You're not paying a full-time salary, but you're expecting a full-time workload, and expecting that people do it because they're grateful for the flexibility. I really think it should be much more like what you're describing, where you have real flexibility and you're paid for the full-time work that you're producing in your role.

Vivienne Partridge:

Yeah. I guess, in my view, in my experience, that wage theft doesn't just happen to working moms. I think about when even before I was a mum and I was working full-time, and wage theft even comes to full-time working men and women who do that. They have long hours where you are going home, working late nights, working weekends. I think that exists, regardless of whether you're a mum, a parent or not.

Samantha Sutherland:

You are absolutely right, because a lot of people work long hours. I have a friend who just described it, what I thought was really brilliantly, as the casual reaching into his personal life from work. Just the expectation that they own everything, all the time that they need from him.

New Speaker:

I had a period where I was working for a consultancy, and I had to do quite a bit of travel. I'm a single mum, and so every time I had to travel, I had to rely on my ex-husband, so my son's dad, to be flexible to take him so that he had somewhere to go so that I could travel for work. There was no acknowledgement of the fact that that was actually a real nuisance and a difficult thing in my life. It was just like, "Work days, off you go," that's the deal.

Vivienne Partridge:

Like I said, I think, I feel like in some ways, it's almost worse for people who are full-time workers without kids because at least with, I guess, a family, it seems to be just more socially acceptable to then say, "I'm drawing a line." Whereas, when I was working full-time before having kids, there was even more immense pressure, I think, really to work long hours. It's interesting. I think that exists for everyone to the extent that people allow it, I guess.

Samantha Sutherland:

That is interesting that that was your experience that you found before you had kids, that it was almost worse because of the expectation. Because I think one of the differences once you do have kids is that there's a huge domestic load that, in Australia, is largely borne by women.

Samantha Sutherland:

What we have then is this paradigm, which just doesn't exist before you have kids, where there's a full-time domestic load, and a full-time workload, and part-time payment for the full-time workload. That's also one of the reasons why people, potentially, put down their foot a little bit more once they have kids is because there's all this other stuff that has to get done that didn't have to get done previously.

Vivienne Partridge:

Yeah. In my household, I think I'm very lucky in terms of that domestic workload. My husband picks up a really equal fair share of that, so I would say I'm really lucky in that regard. I personally don't feel, in our family, that I suffer that, I guess, exponentially more than my partner does, but absolutely, I feel like that I'm in a very fortunate situation there where I think there's still, I guess, a social expectation that that does fall on the mom.

Samantha Sutherland:

Yeah, yeah. I think, Leigh Sales did research into it in her book, *The Wife Drought*, which is a bit dated, but the statistics actually haven't really changed since that time. It was something ridiculous like on average, 90% of the domestic work load gets done by women.

New Speaker:

That is changing, definitely that's changing, and I think one of the things that causes it to change is when companies have flexible options for men and women, and so men can leave work to assist with the domestic load. Because really, if only one person has enough flexibility to pick the kids up from school, well, then that parent has to pick the kids up from school. Whereas, if both of them can achieve that flexibility, then it can be shared in a different way.

Vivienne Partridge:

Yeah. I definitely can feel that there is a shift. Well, I personally feel that there is a shift that, even when I think 10 years ago, when I was working in the UK, working in Australia, even in that space of time, is a huge shift, I think, in terms of what the parental leave agreements were for moms versus dads. Even the fact that it's called parental leave and not maternity versus paternity, that's quite new as well. There is a huge shift that I see happening.

Samantha Sutherland:

Yeah. In fact, so WORK180 did a lot of research into what candidates want, like what job candidates want. One of the biggest things was actually a gender neutral policy. They don't want maternity leave, they want parental leave, and so that that can be shared. Most of, I'm not sure all, but many of our endorsed employers have parental leave policies that are equally available to men and to women, which I think is part of the big shift. Also, I think as expectation changes, then men are more able to speak up and say that they want to be part of the home life more than they used to be able to as well.

Samantha Sutherland:

I have a friend who actually was working for a big corporate and had a son. He ended up leaving that job and moving to a different company. He said to me, "You know, Sam. These big companies, they pay men to not see their children, and I don't want to do that."

Vivienne Partridge:

Yeah. My husband works in construction. He works in the construction industry. I'd say, actually, even though I say that I'm very fortunate, we split the domestic load quite evenly, for him to be in that industry in particular, he works as a civil engineer for a construction company. In that industry, in particular, to do that is quite a big deal still. For him to work in construction, predominately men, and they predominately have women who are doing that domestic load. For him to even be able to contribute the 50%, keeping that even, I have found that in that industry, it's still a really big deal.

Samantha Sutherland:

Yeah, yeah. That is interesting, isn't it? Because I suppose the typically male dominated industries have probably, or potentially had a bit less pressure from within them to change.

Vivienne Partridge:

Yeah, yeah.

Samantha Sutherland:

We are seeing too though at WORK180 that a lot of our endorsed employers are in non-traditional industries. As these bigger companies, like big engineering and mining companies, and things like that, are realizing that it is actually something that men want, and that they have to change the way that the conversation can be had so that men can change what they're doing as well.

Vivienne Partridge:

I think it's fantastic. My husband's workplace is really leading flexible working. Like I said, for that industry, I think that comes from the CEO, and it comes not just as a strapline. I think that, from what I've heard, that his company is really driving that, even in a typically male dominated industry. To hear that the CEO is really driving that culture in that industry, I think that just means there's no excuses anymore, really. There's no excuses for it, being so biased.

Samantha Sutherland:

Yeah, you're really right. There's no excuses anymore, are there? I think what you said about, when it's being driven by the CEO, that's when real change happens. We know that the change has to come from senior executives for there to be a difference, and so that's great that that's where it's actually coming from, not being driven from somewhere within HR, who just have less influence than the CEO.

Vivienne Partridge:

Yeah.

Samantha Sutherland:

One of the other things that you have told me about is that you are really into exercise, and running, and triathlons, and that what you see as the importance of the link between physical activity and mental health postpartum. Can you tell me a little bit about that?

Vivienne Partridge:

Yeah, absolutely. I actually ended up, because I had the two babies back-to-back, at the time when I was having my parental leave, or it was called maternity leave, my parental leave. I did stay active, but

actually, it was after I returned to work, the first year I returned to work, I stopped all activity altogether, so I did really notice, being on that parental leave, being able to still find a bit of a balance between physical activity and home life. Then, started work again after taking two years off, and then didn't maintain that for a full year.

Vivienne Partridge:

The full year of 2018, I did not put on a pair of running shoes once, didn't do one activity that whole year. At the time, obviously, trying to get back into the workforce. Also, I think I probably just didn't realize the impact that that was having on my mental health. It wasn't really until I got to the end of that year and realized, that's a full year of doing not one physical activity that whole year, the affect that had on my mental health, and really making a commitment to turn that around.

Vivienne Partridge:

It wasn't until I decided to turn it around and got back into it, it wasn't even until then that I realized, actually, what a negative impact it had on my mental health in that year. It's been quite a journey. Lucky that I have the flexibility and the support at home. The flexibility through work and the support at home to be able to get back into it now, because of the huge benefit that it's had on turning that mental health situation around.

Samantha Sutherland:

What were the differences that you noticed? How did you feel before, when you got to the end of that year and you suddenly went, "Oh, I haven't run for a year," and then six months later or 12 months later, how did you feel? What was the difference?

Vivienne Partridge:

It's pretty describable, which just makes me realize that humans are creatures of habit. When I was in the year in 2018, I wouldn't have been able to say that I felt any different. In think in terms of habit, if you stop doing things and you do it for long enough, that becomes habit. If you start doing things and you do that long enough, that becomes a habit. In 2018, I wouldn't have said to you, at the time, that it had any impact or that I felt any different. I wouldn't have even been able to say I felt different.

Vivienne Partridge:

It was only in 2019, last year, when I picked it back up, it was pretty immediate. It was horrible at first in terms of the physical pain of getting back into any physical activity. The physical pain was there, definitely for at least three months. It took a good three months before I felt remotely fit again. In terms of the mental health side, and the balance, and seeing that there does need to be better balance was immediate. Yeah, immediate.

Vivienne Partridge:

I think it is hard to look back and think, "How would I have approached it differently?" the year that I didn't do anything because at the time, when you're living and breathing it, working, doing the daycare drop-off, pick-up, holding down a full-time job, going home, cooking, cleaning. You don't really notice it when you're just going through the motions day-in, day-out, I guess.

Samantha Sutherland:

Well, that was actually going to be one of my questions. When you'd realized that you hadn't done it for a year, how did you start to fit it in? Not just generally, like the specifics of what time would you get up? How did you actually start to fit it into what's a very full schedule?

Vivienne Partridge:

I was actually really lucky. My best friend, she suggested doing some sort of challenge, and I think that really helped. The challenge that I picked at the time was very specific. It was that I wouldn't go great guns, because I didn't know how my diary would allow for that. It was literally just a challenge to pick up a 5K run every Saturday. It's called parkrun. It's a free 5K run held all around the world. It's free, and it's timed. It's an event where you turn up, and it's thousands of Australians do it every Saturday. It really just started with a commitment to myself that I would go every Saturday of 2019 and run that 5K every Saturday, and just start small.

Vivienne Partridge:

It was very specific, and I was very lucky that my best friend actually suggested that. Because I think sometimes, the hurdle to go from nothing to something, it can be small. Luck there was that it was something that was very specific, and something that I could plan out and get the support at home as well. It was predictable each week, and manageable. It wasn't like taking on a full, like F45 challenge for eight weeks, five days a week. It was easily achievable.

Samantha Sutherland:

Yeah. Did your friend do the running with you?

Vivienne Partridge:

She actually didn't. It's my turn now to challenge her, I think, to picking something like that up. I think it's time to return the favour.

Samantha Sutherland:

I mean, obviously, you're a runner too, there when you're like, "Yeah, it was just 5Ks and so I could do that, and that was a small hurdle." Because, to me, 5Ks is like the peak of months of training. I'm not a runner, I'm a swimmer. I go to the gym and stuff, but I hate running. For me, the 5K run would be too big a hurdle.

Samantha Sutherland:

She actually picked a challenge that really suited you, obviously, because you are a runner, to be able to pick that up easily. Then, one day a week. Then, when you were doing the Saturdays, did that then make you want to try and find time to add it in the rest of the week?

Vivienne Partridge:

Well, that's exactly what happens is, I guess, when you start small. Because my, I guess, mental ability to see how am I going to fit this in, at the time, going from nothing was really small, so just doing it the one day a week. I thought, "Okay, if I can manage this one day a week, that's great." Then that does turn into a, "Oh, this is how it feels. This makes me feel better. I really want to improve my fitness," and then that turns into two days. Then two days turns into three days. Then, I guess, your perception of what is like an average week does shift.

Vivienne Partridge:

The one huge thing about physical activity is your body can accommodate so much, it grows as much as you challenge it. It started off as one day. I honestly didn't think I would get past one or two days, but that's upwards of like five times a week-plus, five-plus times a week at the moment that I'll be doing some sort of training, so whether that's swimming, running, cycling. Yeah, so I think-

Samantha Sutherland:

How do you fit that in now?

Vivienne Partridge:

Well, like I said, I am very lucky at home and very lucky at work, really lucky. I think I could not do it without the support of my husband and, obviously, having a workplace that is respectful of a work-life balance. I fit it in through going early. I do get up really early. Yesterday morning, I think I was up at 5:30 in the morning. Then I will try and do something really quick in the evenings. Absolutely, between work and my husband, I really think it would be impossible otherwise really, so very lucky there.

Samantha Sutherland:

When you exercise in the evening, you'll come home and the kids will be in bed, and then you'll go for a run or something?

Vivienne Partridge:

Well, I'm really lucky in that Optus actually has an onsite gym, so it really is true that it would be impossible ... A pretty stressful day at work, it's quite nice because I can literally just go down to the ground floor, go on a treadmill and run for 30 minutes. Actually, by that time, 30 minutes is way easier to do here than it is to drive in peak hour home, put the kids to bed, go out, that's pitch black then. I think the great facilities here really make a huge difference for working parents. Yeah, really lucky.

Samantha Sutherland:

Okay. Can you tell me a little bit more about the support structures that you have around your life at the moment? Obviously, Optus is really flexible, and your husband is really supportive and has flexibility from work. What else is in place to help you manage it? Because just for example, if you said you finish your work day, and then you go down and run 5Ks, but someone has to be picking the kids up, and getting them home, and giving them dinner, and putting them to bed. How is that all happening in your life?

Vivienne Partridge:

Mostly, it is actually divided between my husband and myself during the work week. It took a while to get there, but we have a really balanced schedule now where my husband does training as well, so we really just take turns. We have family that help us immensely, but in terms of the working week itself, fitting in that training, both him fitting in training and me fitting in my training, it is about actually sticking to a mutual respect that we have to divide the time. We have to respect each other's time to have that time to commit to time out, and sharing that.

Samantha Sutherland:

Yeah. I really actually really agree with this. It also alludes to something you said earlier when we were talking about idea of wage theft. You said, "It happens to everyone," and then something like, "As much as you'll let it." I think that there's something to that around not just letting things happen to you. I had a friend, she's a runner as well. She had agreed with her husband that she would go out for a run two mornings a week, and then she would have one evening a week where he would make sure that he was the one who did the pick-up for the kids. I think that was it in the working week.

Samantha Sutherland:

Then in the end, she wasn't really getting to do those runs. She wasn't getting her time that they had agreed. I said, "Well, you need to do some fact finding." Like, "Is it that you're actually not getting the time? In which case, you need to discuss that with him. Or is it that it's you are getting it, but it's not enough, and it doesn't feel like it's enough time?" Then really, the only person who can take control of that is you. If you've got an agreement, and then it's not working, well, then it's up to you renegotiate the agreement.

Samantha Sutherland:

I think that when you have small kids, and a partner and a job, and they have a big job as well, it is a constant renegotiation of who's doing what and when and, "How do we both have our needs met? How do we both get to exercise, and see friends, and see each other, and see the kids, and do the work we want to do to get our career in the direction we want it to go?" There's a lot of negotiating there, isn't there?

Vivienne Partridge:

Oh, immensely. I think the first two years of having kids was just a negotiation. I think we've only really, I think, recently found that happy medium where one of us feels like ... It would be one of us would always feel like, "Am I getting that time?" It is just a constant kind of trying find that balance where one person isn't feeling like they're not getting the things that they want, and it has absolutely ...

Vivienne Partridge:

What the situation would have been with having our first baby changes completely with the second, what worked for the first, and you're always trying to adapt. I would say it's only been probably in the last year or so ... I mean, that's quite a while. Our eldest is four, so it's saying it's taken four years to feel like, at the moment, with full-time jobs, training, and being in a situation where we do feel like we've found that happy medium, but it is a constant state of flux, I guess.

Samantha Sutherland:

Yeah. You think you've found the state where things are working and then something changes. Things are always changing. At the moment, so you have a three and four-year-old. They must be at daycare together?

Vivienne Partridge:

That's right, yeah.

Samantha Sutherland:

Yeah. Then, when you have one who's at kindergarten and one who's at daycare, well, then that changes everything for a little while as well.

Vivienne Partridge:

Exactly, right. Yep, yep. That's exactly right. That means two drop-offs. We tried that. We tried that when Kala, our youngest, was really little. We didn't necessarily want her going straight into a big daycare with the sickness, and we did try the two drop-offs. Like you said, things always change.

Vivienne Partridge:

We tried that for a bit, and that didn't work, really, for us in terms of the amount of the peak hour traffic in Sydney. I feel for parents that have three kids in three different schools, or three different ... Really, Sydney, the structure does not support that with peak hour traffic at all. It will be interesting when our eldest goes to school, and we've still got daycare drop-off. That will change everything, so yeah, I guess, you're right.

Samantha Sutherland:

A good thing about having them so close together is that should only happen for a year at a time, and then they could be back in the same place again.

Vivienne Partridge:

Yeah, that's it, that's it. It's like, "Ooh, can I send Kala to school early?"

Samantha Sutherland:

"They're fine to be in the same year. She's very advanced."

Vivienne Partridge:

She is very advanced. In fact, I think she'll be quite gutted when she sees her brother toddling off in his school uniform. I'm actually expecting tears.

Samantha Sutherland:

Yeah, sure.

Vivienne Partridge:

She will very much want to go as well.

Samantha Sutherland:

She'll also get a chance to be the big kid in daycare. I think that they quite like that too.

Vivienne Partridge:

That's what I've heard. I have heard that, and I hope that's the case, but Kala, knowing my daughter, she does always like to be with the big kids. I'll have to work out drop-offs where, I almost think I need to drop Kala off first, and then do school because I think she'll see all the big kids in their uniforms and pretty much demand to get involved with that.

Samantha Sutherland:

What else do you do to support? There's a lot of negotiating and balance and stuff to try and get things working in your life. What are the other tips and tricks? If someone else is listening and they have toddlers, or maybe they've got a two-year-old and they're like, "How am I ever going to make it work?" What are the things that work for you to make life, and the balance, and getting to work and all that kind of stuff easier?

Vivienne Partridge:

I'm not one of those moms that has all these amazing tricks up my sleeve. I really just don't have any shortcuts in terms of, it is difficult. It's, for me, one of my close friends gave me great advice, which is that nothing's ever static, things are always changing. The situation that you're in today isn't going to be the situation that you're always going to be in. If it's kind of bad at the moment, it's not always going to be bad, or you're going to adapt and find a way to work around it.

Vivienne Partridge:

I don't have tricks or hacks or tips in terms of shortcuts that mean that I'm smashing life. It's just, it is adapting and trust that things change, and then I have to adapt with that change. I'd say in terms of a tip, it would just be adapting and just trying to make things work as best as they can. Everyone's different. I wouldn't say that I've got the magic trick, solution, unfortunately.

Samantha Sutherland:

Yeah. I think no one ever suggests that they do. I think one of the things that I think is helpful is we can learn from each other. One woman that I spoke to, she was the biggest life changing thing that she'd done when she had kids was freezing sandwiches for school. It changed her life, honestly, because she then just didn't have to spend as much time. It just helped get things organized. I think that sometimes, it is those really small things that other people might not have thought of that they're like, "Oh, yeah. That would be a good one to try."

Vivienne Partridge:

Yeah. We're very lucky at the moment that daycare does pretty much lunch. It is one of, I guess, the benefits of versus school is we're still yet to get to that stage of, "What do we do to prepare lunches?" Yeah, absolutely. When that time comes around, I will be looking for lunch tips, definitely.

Samantha Sutherland:

One of the ways I solved that is I feed the same thing almost every day. [crosstalk 00:40:56] You know what ... Sorry, go on.

Vivienne Partridge:

I was just going to say, actually, kids are so spoiled these days in daycare, I think they get a different lunch every day. I feel like that's setting me up for complete failure to prepare our kids' school lunches.

Samantha Sutherland:

Some of the daycare meals, it is like gourmet meals every day. Isn't it?

Vivienne Partridge:

It is. It's hot food, and they make sure that it's from different countries from around the world.

Samantha Sutherland:

Wow.

Vivienne Partridge:

They put little flags on which country that meal was from. I thought, "Jeez. You are not setting me up for success."

Samantha Sutherland:

"This is not helping. What about a dry vegemite sandwich."

Vivienne Partridge:

Yes, right.

Samantha Sutherland:

I can remember when I was a kid that my mum, she made sausage and mashed potato like every second night for what felt like 10 years. I left home as a 20-ish-year-old, and I didn't eat sausage and mashed potato after that because I was so sick of it. I went home for a meal one night, two years later, and mum said, "Oh, I've cooked sausage and mashed potato." I can still remember thinking, "Oh, I'm so sick of it." Then, "I've not had that for a long time." Then, I just had the same exact experience with my son, who I give Wheat-Bix every single morning, without even really realizing that's what I was doing. He said to me, "Mum, I'm so sick of Wheat-Bix."

Vivienne Partridge:

Yeah, you've destroyed Wheat-Bix now the rest of his adult life.

Samantha Sutherland:

Exactly. One of the questions that I like to close with is to ask, if you could go back in time, back a decade or 15 years and talk to young Vivian about what was to come, what you've experienced already, what to look out for, what would you say to her? What would you say to decade younger Vivian?

Vivienne Partridge:

Oh, jeez. I'd say from a personal point of view, I think at the time, it was really hard to move back from the UK. I had a great job over there, I was really settled. I think five years, I'd achieved ... I wondered whether even career-wise, personal-wise, would I stay there? Would I come home? It was a huge adjustment, and I think going back, because that was a, I guess, a stressful move in terms of was it the right decision. 100%, I would tell myself that that was the right decision.

Vivienne Partridge:

From a both, I guess, personal and career-wise, I think Australia, we're very lucky in this country in terms of the outdoor. I wouldn't be able to do the kind of training that I do, I think, in the UK climate, to be honest. To do the running, and swimming and the cycling, so from a personal point of view, and then even from a work point of view, I think it just was the right move for me at the time.

Vivienne Partridge:

Then, another bit of advice, I guess, I would give myself when I was younger was, at the time, I think it was still, there was a bit of a stigma attached to moving jobs and moving jobs frequently, or moving jobs outside of a linear career path. That's not to say it hindered me from ... I definitely moved around a lot, but with that came a bit of worry about how that would impact my career.

Vivienne Partridge:

I think, looking back, I would definitely give myself the advice that if I did, I took the opportunities as they came without staying in something particularly to stay in something purely for the point of building tenure. Probably, the advice I would be giving to myself is to not sweat that so much. I probably sweat that quite a lot at the time.

Samantha Sutherland:

Yeah, I love that. I think that's still, all that stuff is so applicable to anybody who's listening. The idea of really long tenure in an organization, I think that that is a thing of the past, largely. I also think that that's one reason why companies, why it's valuable to them to treat their employees the way, for example, Optus is treating you.

Samantha Sutherland:

Because that's how you hang onto people now. Not because of this kind of false sense of, "I should stay for a really long time to build up tenure," because I think now, with the changes in the working world and how long people are expected to work for and stuff, younger people are recognizing that there's not the same benefit to just staying with one company for 20 years, or whatever.

Vivienne Partridge:

Yeah. That's exactly right. That's a good thing that it's shifting away from thinking that.

Samantha Sutherland:

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