



## Episode two with Karen Mattison and Robert Carmichael

### Speaker Key:

FC	Fiona Cannon
KM	Karen Mattison
RC	Robert Carmichael
MA	Maggie Pagano

UF This podcast is supported by Lloyds Banking Group. Hello, and welcome to episode three of the *Agility Mindset podcast*. I'm Fiona Cannon, the Director of Responsible Business, Sustainability, and Inclusion at Lloyds Banking Group, and the Director of the Agile Future Forum. In this episode we'll meet Karen Mattison, joint CEO of Timewise, an organisation doing vital work to unlock the flexible job market.

We'll also speak to Rob Carmichael, who's the Relationship Director at Lloyds Banking Group, who after a three-year career break came back through its returnership programme. Rob himself was recognised as one of Timewise's power returners earlier this year.

So I'm joined today by Karen Mattison and Rob Carmichael. Karen is the Co-founder of Women Like Us and Timewise, championing flexible working, and also the co-founder of the Power 50 list which role models individuals working in a different way from the 9-5. So welcome Karen, first of all.

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The focus of today's podcast is on employees and the employee perspective, and obviously you've done a lot of research in this space, Karen. But before we get into that I wonder if you could just tell us a little bit about why you set up Timewise?

KM Yes, of course. I would say that I'm a kind of accidental flexible working expert. It certainly wasn't my career plan. But what happened to me was that I was on what I thought was a pretty good career track post-university, ten years of work experience, and then I just became completely stuck in the jobs market because I was working four days a week, and this is some time ago, around 14/15 years ago. I was working four days a week in a senior role.



I had a huge amount of responsibility for a team, for a PNL, for an organisation, but I'd outgrown the role. And so what I wanted was to find something that was flexible and four days a week but offered me some progression. And that's where I really just hit a complete brick wall because everywhere I looked I was told that what you want is impossible, you can't do a job with that kind of responsibility less than full time. So you've got three choices.

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Stop working and be a mum, which was my reason at the time for wanting to work flexibly, or stay where you are and be grateful you've got the four days, or do a more administrative role where there's an understanding that you can clock in and clock out as it were. And at first I think I did what lots of people who get stuck like that do, which was assume that I was the problem, and that I didn't fit into the world of work anymore. And that I had to take one of those options.

Then I looked into the market, the data, and really understood that actually there was a market failure. There was a huge number of people who were skilled and experienced who get stuck in a similar way. And I really wanted to see if we could do something about it, and I guess that's how Timewise was born.

FC      Fantastic. So out of frustration something amazing came out. So you've done a lot of research in this space as well, so how easy or otherwise is it now for people who want to work in a more agile way?

KM      In some ways so much has changed in the last ten years, it's been actually incredible to watch and be part of it, as obviously you have as well. And in other ways we still have a huge amount of work to do. So obviously when people have the legal right to request flexible working, and I would say it's becoming so much more normal for people to be openly working part time and flexibly, but I think we're still, in most places, stuck in a bit of a, what I would call a request-response perspective on flexible working.

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Which is I ask for it, for my personal needs, you, the business, know me, maybe want to keep me, offer me some flexibility. And then we sort of hope that it works. So it's a bit of a kind of fingers crossed and let's hope this works. So I don't think we've got really what I would call a systemic way of organising and designing jobs in a flexible and agile way, in the main.

And the other major block I think in the market, which we just haven't done enough of, is if you think about what happened to me about getting stuck when you want to progress your career, I think that's still the challenge. So when people look at the recruitment market, even though the vast majority of people either want to work flexibly or are already doing so, when we look at the



recruitment market we're still looking at less than 10% of quality vacancies that are openly advertised to flexible working.

FC I mean, it's quite shocking, isn't it really? So you're right, it's that sense that you... You use that word market failure, you just literally can't move around, can you? So it becomes very much about the individual rather than the organisation, and how do you systemically change organisations so that you can move around the market into different organisations as you go forward. But that, 10%, is a really shocking figure I think, isn't it?

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KM It's such a shocking figure, and also it explains so many other things like there is so much conversation now, thank goodness, about the gender pay gap, and I don't believe it's something inherently about being a woman that's causing the gender pay gap. In a sense it's mainly around what I would almost call a flexible progression gap. So it's the moment, it is, for the majority of people who are women, for people who want to progress their career but take the flexibility with them.

That's when it's almost like a game of musical chairs and they get stuck. And I think when you look at that 10% it's a shocking statistic.

FC No, absolutely, it really is. So you created the Power 50 list. In a sense that's trying to start to look at some of these issues and to highlight those individuals who are doing it in a different way.

KM So when we created the Power 50 in 2012, I wanted to tell the stories of people who were actually doing it, because when I went back to the time when I was that kind of candidate in the market, thinking, well who's me in ten years' time? Who's made it work? I couldn't find anybody. Then we did a bit of research into it and interviewed, and looked and found that actually there are 850,000 people in the UK who are higher tax bracket earning people who work part time.

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FC Wow.

KM And I was thinking, well where were they?

FC Yes.

KM So interviewed 300 of them and found out that a very common experience was people were doing it, they're working in senior levels part time, but they prefer to keep it under the radar because of all the negative association with being part time, not being ambitious, not wanting to progress, being on the mummy track, being passed over.



Which in a sense is fine for them, but actually not fine for those coming up behind them, because you really don't believe it's possible. So what I wanted to do with the power list is instead of having the apology before the terms 'part time' or 'flexible' or 'agile', I'm just part time, I'm only part time, what do you do if you put power in front of it?

So we started telling stories of people who had those roles, who could act as those fantastic role models for others. And it's really evolved over the last few years because we've had such incredible examples of people who are doing it in a different way. And I think it's also important to have men on the list, and to have people doing it for other reasons than having children.

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And they're making a business success of it. But then we also had a bit of a pushback which was, oh, it's all right for those people at the top because they've got their PAs and they can just push the work down while they go and do what they want to do on a Friday. What about all those people in the middle? So we've really evolved the list and brought in other categories of people who are ones to watch, and the kind of midlevel, people who are doing job shares, returning from work after a career break.

FC Yes.

KM People who founded their own businesses because they want to find some flexibility in how, where, and when they work.

FC So is your view then that things are changing in this space? Can you give us a couple of examples of your role models who are doing it in the way that you've described?

KM Yes, of course. I think things are changing fantastically, and when I speak to people who are in their 30s or 20s and wanting flexibility I feel really, really hopeful for them, and for my own kids as well. And I think what we have had though is an over-focus on why people do it, and not enough focus on how you make it work.

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FC Yes.

KM And I think that's the real opportunity now, and that's the work we're doing with businesses who are saying, okay, I get this, but how do I do it? How do I support my managers? How do I move away from this being something special for this one individual to being almost a team approach for it? And that's the really exciting bit. And part of that is telling stories like the power list. So people like



Katie McQuaid who's the director of Amazon Marketplace, doing four days a week.

People like Julia Reeves who's the business change programme director for Dixons Carphone. We had last year on the list two head teachers. Riaz Shah from EY who's a global talent partner. He did it because he wanted to set up a school and wanted the time to do it. Set up a new school in North London. I think they're showing us there is a different way, and we just have to keep telling those stories again and again.

FC I mean, it's interesting you say about people not wanting to say they're working flexibly. I mean, I have to say, I've done it myself. And on one level you're thinking, my original role doing diversity, that there would be no issue about me saying that I'm working in a flexible way. And on one level it's because I felt like as long as I was doing the work it doesn't actually matter. Do you know what I mean?

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How I work, as long as no one could say I wasn't working. I wasn't not getting the job done if you like. But I guess your point about role models is really important because unless people do talk about it and say, I am doing things in a different way, and it's okay, and you know, we don't just have to focus constantly on inputs, focus more on outputs, then I think, you know, if you just kind of go into this kind of complete circle, don't you, of this is the way it's always done, and nobody knows, and everything else.

So I think the power list is really important from that perspective, and I guess one of the things that I've learnt is you don't want to make people role models in, you know, just for doing things differently, but when it's so new it's important that people do say they're doing it differently and it can be done. And it doesn't have a negative impact on the business.

KM Absolutely. And I think the journey that we've been on and that Lloyds have been on, I think it's about reimagining work. I mean, at all levels. And I think the workforce has changed dramatically. And the workplace in many ways has caught up, and in some ways has still got more to do. I think it was designed and built, the Monday to Friday 9-5 was designed and built for a workforce or a family structure that most of us don't really recognise with one person at work doing all the working, the other one at home doing all the homing.

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Doesn't really matter. And I think that's not how most people live now. And so it's about adapting those structures. But the most important bit of it is it only works if it works for the business. And I think, that's certainly what I advise when people



talk to me about, 'how do I have this flexible working conversation with my employer?' The worst thing is to go and say, I want to work four days a week, fold your arms, sit back, and say, what are you going to do about it?

I would never recommend that to a friend or to someone who's asking my advice. I would say, imagine, how do you think that work can be done? Where would the work go that you're not going to do? Is there a development opportunity for someone else? So take the solution, don't just take the problem.

FC Yes. I mean, it's interesting, isn't it? I think nowadays particularly roles are so big that sometimes someone comes to you and says, I want to reduce to four days, as a line manager, you're kind of going, 'oh my god, you know, how am I going to manage that one day that's not being done?' And I think, as you said before about reimagining things, so okay, so it might be more looking at job shares as you've been looking at as well in terms of the work that you've been doing, because the roles are there.

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Do you know what I mean? They're big enough to be able to manage with, you know, have two people who cover the whole job. The work's not going to go away, but how you deliver it might be done in a slightly different way. So I think that's been my experience is, you know, trying to think more creatively around how do you deal with the issue, which is the work's still there, still needs to be done, but people want to do it in a different way.

KM Exactly. And I think we've all got an experience of kind of work bleeding into our lives and with less of a kind of cut-off between work and home, and I think the focus, you're absolutely right, the focus is about what work needs to be done and how do we design the role so that happens for the workforce that we've got.

FC So, Karen, we know how important agile working can be to individuals. So what's your sense on how important it is to, how valuable it is for business itself?

KM I think that the business case has really been made now for agile, flexible working. Whether it's because of reduction of real estate and cost or the talents that businesses need, and need to retain and progress, I think the business case is there. And I think that the opportunity now is to support businesses on how to make it work in practice, rather than to spend too much time focusing on proving something that I think has been really well proven over the last ten years.

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FC I mean, it's interesting, isn't it? Our experience with the Agile Future Forum is that people get the kind of why you need to do it on one level, but it's the how



you do it, is because in a sense you're trying to reengineer, you know, the whole organisation, aren't you? So it's the 'how' which is really important.

KM In some ways I see flexible working as where, when, and how much people work. And in some ways I think businesses have really got their heads around the where and the when. So working remotely, mixing around hours, late starts, early finishes. But the how much is the struggle. Because the reality is that there's so much data now telling us that for a variety of reasons people want to work less, and that is a real challenge.

And looking at how you make sure that the work is done, and that people, for whatever reason, are able to find the balance that they need in their lives, that keep them motivated and progressing in their organisations.

FC And is there something that, you know, if there's a line manager listening who's slightly wary about what the impact is going to be, what would your advice be to them?

KM I think in general I would say managing a flexible team is a new skill. And I think it's important that people feel that they can ask for support with that skill. And we do lots of work at Timewise on training line managers or making sure that they are equipped to manage a new and changing workforce. And obviously that involves being confident about managing by output rather than by, I can see you're sitting at your desk so you must be working.

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So I think that's a new skill, and I think it's really, really important that we don't just leave them alone. And the other thing is there's a nervousness about kind of saying the wrong thing. And in many ways the worst examples of flexible working arrangements going wrong that I've seen are when there hasn't been an honest conversation about the job between the individual and the manager.

So 'I'd like to work flexibly, you really like me, you want to keep me, let's say we'll agree three days or four days, we have a honeymoon of gratitude where we're all pleased, it seems to have worked.' But we actually haven't had an honest conversation about what's actually going to happen with the job.

So what you're doing is you're putting a problem for the manager a few months down the line. Or over-working that individual so they're effectively doing a full-time job is less time.

FC Less pay.

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KM Less pay and less time. And it just doesn't work. So I think, honest conversations. This isn't personal. This is a business challenge. But also a business opportunity. But we've got to help our managers. Because they're the ones who are squeezed and delivering.

FC Absolutely and reviewing as well. So if we do it one way for a while, it doesn't necessarily mean that that's the way it is forever, that you have the opportunity to review as well. So on both sides, in terms of what that means.

KM Absolutely. And I'm a great believer in pilots and trials and fundamentally about honest conversations.

FC Brilliant. So you talked earlier about the Power 50 list and having some men on there as well. And we're now joined by Rob Carmichael who is a Relationship Director at Lloyds Banking Group, responsible for supporting a portfolio of clients in manufacturing and industrial sector. Rob was recognised as a Power Returner by you in 2018. So welcome, Rob.

RC Thank you.

FC You were recognised, as I say, as a power returner after having taken time out of your career. Can you just tell us, to start with, why you decided to take time out of your work, and did you always work full time previous to that?

RC Yes. I had a 30-year full time career before I looked at a career break. I've been in the banking industry during that period in a number of roles, sectors, and different geographies. When I returned from my last offshore posting in Indonesia my wife was pregnant so I chose to take some time out to support her through her pregnancy. As she was very keen to resume her career as soon as possible I was then the primary carer for our first child. Which, I have to say, was the best job in the world.

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When my wife was pregnant with our second child we sort of discussed what the next steps would be in terms of managing that process.

FC So obviously you decided to return to work. What were the main reasons for you to return, and I guess one of the questions for me would be, did you have any concerns about the break and how that might affect your previously full-time kind of career progression?

RC Yes. So our second child was the prompt for us to look again at how we were managing the work/life balance for both of us, I think. And decided that it made more sense for us to share it a little bit more evenly. And I was very pleased to sort of return to the work environment. I think my main concern was a career gap. I'd had the best part of three years out from the industry and coupled with



my last posting that was six years out from the City where I'd been based previously.

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And there is that perception, I think, that, you know, you're only as good as your last deal or your last year. I sensed that potentially that could present a problem and might have some issues in terms of compromising on a position or entry point that I came back to. I think the other major concern I had, quite frankly, was my age. I was hitting 50 the year I came back and having a five at the front when you're talking about these kind of things was perhaps a bit of a psychological issue for me too.

FC I know your fears about being... With having a five in front of the number. How did you go about then, Rob, about returning? What were the kinds of things that you did to get yourself back into the workplace?

RC I did a bit of soft marketing I guess you'd call it, with my old peers and colleagues. Had some informal conversations with them and with some recruitment colleagues that I knew to get a feel for what the market might be like and just to explore the potential opportunities. So I followed the usual routes there.

And then, to be honest, my wife found a posting on a local mum's Facebook about the Returners programme which is where I discovered the opportunity through that. So ultimately the route that I followed.

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FC Interesting that it was on the mum's Facebook rather than anything else. I would think that gives us a steer for how we need to make sure that this is available to everybody, isn't it? So you came back on the Returners programme, and what pattern are you working now, and were there any challenges, Rob, that you faced when you came back?

RC The pattern I'm following at the moment is the one which I've had, once I rolled off the Returners programme, which is one non-working day per week that has generally been flexible in terms of days. I normally work from home on an informal basis one day a week as well. I have to say, the challenges have been surprisingly few. I was quite explicit from the get-go in terms of what working arrangements I was looking to pursue.

I think I'm very fortunate that my employer, you know, has embraced the concept of agile working. So that was an area in which we were able to work on together. I think perhaps more a point of clarification with the direct team and colleagues that I was working for just in terms of explaining how that was going to work. But



no significant challenges, I have to say. Perhaps being a bit of a, by now, 50-something dinosaur embracing IT developments, is always a challenge for me, I think.

And perhaps challenging myself not to be too hard on yourself when you're returning to an environment after a period out. I think you've got to back yourself and perhaps maintain your levels of confidence that you can deliver the job.

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FC Yes, well that confidence is always the issue, isn't it? For people coming back into the workplace. Although it always strikes me that actually you build that confidence back up really quite quickly once you're back in the workplace. But it sounds like, Karen was talking about the importance of having honest conversations, and it feels like that's kind of one of the things from your experience as well.

Being explicit, being clear, and having those honest conversations is really important up front, both with your line manager and also with your team by the sounds of it.

RC Yes, agreed. I mean, it may well have led to some opportunities passing me by, but it meant that the right opportunity presented itself and everyone was very clear as to what expectations were going forward.

FC Was there any surprise that it was a man that was asking, A, to come back on the Returners programme, and B, to be working in a flexible way. Were there any gender differences that you found through both the Returners programme and working differently?

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RC Well undoubtedly I was in the minority on the programme. That was something that I got used to, looking after my daughter, you know, there still is that imbalance, that's for sure. I think it may have caused a few surprises, but I think it's important to challenge those perceptions and the best way of doing that is by presenting an example that works. And I'm hoping that's what I'm doing.

FC Yes. And I guess that's the thing, isn't it? That the more we show it works and that it's not a big deal, the more men are likely to look at taking it on board as well. Because I guess until we get this being about men and women, you know, traditionally flexible work has been seen as a women's issue, hasn't it? To look after, particularly for childcare. So the more men we can get involved in this space the more it'll just become the norm, rather than something that women are doing, rather than men.



RC And I think also on that point, Fiona, it's probably worth highlighting that whilst men need to consider this, embrace this as well, I think it works both ways as well, that perhaps, you know, women need to understand... I think Karen mentioned the flexible progression gap. It's important for, you know, if you are in a partnership, that that can sometimes fall automatically to the woman, whereas that doesn't always have to be the case.

FC No, you're right. And also, again, I'm showing lots of personal experiences here, but I think for me, I think I would have, I guarded quite jealously the time with my children. I wasn't sure that I wanted to share it particularly with my partner. So I think there is a bit on both sides, isn't it, of changing expectations and the way we behave and who does what.

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You know, that ability to share more broadly as a partnership is really important. So I think there's change on both sides required, isn't there? As you say. Now Rob, clearly agile working's working for you, and for your family, but what do you see as the benefits to Lloyds for the way that you're working?

RC I think there are a number of benefits. I think motivation of staff and levels of goodwill are hugely enhanced by this kind of arrangement, I think. Retention, staff retention and continuity is a definite positive for any employer. The opportunities to reach an arrangement which maintains good people has to be a good thing. A collaborative workforce is certainly an outcome of this.

One of the things that I've stressed when I was talking to my wider team is the people development opportunity. When I'm not in the office, you know, members of my team can step up, get exposure to things that perhaps they wouldn't do. So there's an internal training and development opportunity which I think is important. It certainly encourages the embracing of technology. When you've got an agile working arrangement where you're in multiple geographies, multiple locations, it forces people to embrace the technological advancements that are there for us and for us to properly exploit.

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We touched on it earlier, concerning the bottom line impact; it's in terms of people and recruitment, it's in terms of property, that all has some positive developments. Greater efficiencies in terms of managing deadlines and time management, I think again it's a natural corollary of the agile working environment. So I think there's a lot of positives that can come out of this.

FC I asked Karen this question as well, I'll ask you too, Rob, which is really what advice would you give firstly to individuals who want to work in an agile way.



What have you learnt about how to approach this that would be useful advice for others?

RC Well, I think first of all research the role that you're undertaking or planning to undertake, and what the implications are of agile working so you can properly sell the concept, and stress that there's no negative impact, and potentially positive impacts as a result of the proposal. Manage your time. Time management's absolutely critical, and team management as well, so that your colleagues are comfortable with any arrangements that you put in place.

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I think it's absolutely essential to be flexible. While you will have your own requirements it's important to understand that you need to be flexible with workflows and client demands. And also be confident. There's no reason to think that you're going cap in hand with a request here. You're presenting a solution to a business problem here, it's something which if you are confident that you can deliver on any revised working arrangements, then that's nothing to be shy about.

FC I think that's right, isn't it? It is that idea that it is, you know, it's good for the business as well as good for employees. The way the world's changing and the way we work and live, if you can find that sweet spot between what works for the business and what works for an employee, then we're in a really good place to be competitive in the marketplace going forward. And what about line managers who might be a bit wary of agile working and worried that it'll impact their business, perhaps in a negative way? What would you say to them?

RC It's a natural position to take, and I think we've talked before about where we are in the evolution of this whole flexible working/agile working position. Don't make assumptions, is important. You know, reduced hours doesn't necessarily mean reduced commitment. If that's what people are exploring, absolutely the opposite. Do the research, find examples of good experiences and bad experiences, and understand why that happened. Get under the skin of what the rationale for any employee's request is.

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Why is it that they're specifically asking for this revised arrangement? Consider the benefits. You know, what are the benefits if the role's not filled, if that person has to leave. What would be the cost of recruitment, what are the development opportunities for others in a job share or flexible working arrangement? And, you know, the benefits of shared experiences along that piece.

I think the underlying one though, and I think it plays really to what we were talking about earlier, honest conversations, what's absolutely essential is trust.



You know, you have to know the individual, you have to know how they work, and how their proposed arrangements would potentially change that for the better or for the worse.

FC Yes. I think that's the thing that keeps coming out over and over again, isn't it? Is about having honest conversations. In a sense, doing the role of a line manager is to constantly have those kind of conversations on all sorts of things, and this is no different from that. And certainly your point about, kind of researching and sharing best practice and seeing what's going on, obviously we've luckily got for us, the Power 50 list which has a whole range of different role models that people can look at. And so making sure that that's as widespread as possible is really important.

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So Karen, if individuals, or indeed line managers, want to know about how to do it, is there anywhere that they can go for support and guidance?

KM Yes, on our job site, we have a job site called Timewise Jobs. So [www.timewisejobs.co.uk](http://www.timewisejobs.co.uk), as well as having only flexible, part time, or open to flexible roles on there, from a whole range of businesses, we also have lots of advice and support to individuals. Particularly around things like having the conversation about flexible working when it's not advertised as flexible. It's almost like a best friend's guide.

And we have lots of information, regardless of the reason you're asking. So hopefully plenty on there for you. For individuals sometimes when they're having that conversation with their employer they also want to bring examples of people in their own industry or role type who've done it. So on our other site, [www.timewise.co.uk](http://www.timewise.co.uk), you can see the backlists of all the inspiring stories from the Timewise Power 50 since 2012.

I know many people use those as examples of what's possible in those conversations. There's also a device for managers and businesses who want to make flexible or agile working a commercial success.

FC Great. So lots of support and guidance out there available for people to go and have a look at. Well, can I thank both you, Rob, and Karen, for your time and interesting comments today as we looked at this issue about flexible working and the employee perspective. Thank you both very much indeed.

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KM Thank you.

RC Thank you.



FC Maggie, it's extraordinary to think how few jobs there are advertised as agile, isn't it? Despite the growing need for agility amongst job seekers. I think the key takeout for me really from Karen's piece was really around the need for systemic change.

MA Yes, I think that's absolutely right. The figure that it's less than 10% was really quite shocking. What we need is for companies to understand the business case and really put it as a positive thing so that they're actually making a big thing of advertising to their potential workers.

FC Agreed. I think the more businesses understand that this is about being competitive, and that there is a real win for them, the better. And the more likely it is to achieve that systemic change. I think Rob's story is one that will resonate, isn't it, with many parents out there, and again, I think the thing for me in that, we've talked about this before. When you think about the length of people's working lives now, the idea that you could take a career break actually should become something, I think that's much more mainstream.

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Because there's no reason why you shouldn't take some time out and do whatever. Look after a child or re-educate or whatever it may be. The other thing for me, I think it's great to have a man being so vocal about this. Again, one of the issues as we know is that flexibility as it traditionally is known, is often seen as a women's issue. So great to have a man talking about it.

MA Yes, we need lots of men, and I thought it was very compelling the way he described it as, you know, the gap, and that you're only as good as your last deal.

FC So, in case you missed it, last time Maggie spoke with Dame Vivian Hunt at McKinsey about the business case for agile working, which is what we've just been talking about, and how it has a very measurable, very real impact on the bottom line. Next time, Maggie's speaking to Andy Myers who heads up the KPMG Tax Centre of Excellence in Glasgow. And Maggie travelled up there to meet some of the staff who are benefiting from the policies introduced in an office that really has been built from the ground up for agility.

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