

Bold(h)er

Opportunity from Disruption

Mona Malone:

I think it's important to think about the narrative you create for yourself around your career. Whether this means a break due to the pandemic, a break due to childcare responsibilities, a break due to eldercare responsibilities, or a break given a leave of absence for health. Or just simply taking a sabbatical and a bit of time to do other aspects of things that you love in your life. Having that narrative of why you did it, what it means, but also that personal growth and development continue. Whether you're necessarily working full-time or not.

Lisa Bragg:

That's Mona Malone, BMO's Chief Human Resources Officer and Head of People and Culture. Any typical career path is gone, and expectations as a leader, an employer, and an employee continues to shift. As we try to figure it out for ourselves and others, the answers aren't found in the old leadership books or on page 59 of the employee manual. People are looking to shake things up. They might want to grow, to move or they feel burned out.

Dr. Talia Varley:

When you think about things like burn out as being a driver for why someone wants to leave, I think organizations are really motivated right now to get underneath what could optimize wellness, what could optimize health for employees. But you also want to recognize that if people leave because of something like burn out, they might not actually get that greener pasture that they're looking for.

Lisa Bragg:

That's Dr. Talia Varley, Physician Lead for Advisory Services at Cleveland Clinic Canada. She's helping organizations to think about management and health.

Hi, I'm Lisa Bragg. Welcome to Bold(h)er stories of and for women who stand out, brought to you by BMO for Women.

Lisa Bragg:

We're talking a lot about disruption lately and yes, it's probably overused. But we're talking about it in our own lives, in our work, in our work environments, relationships. How does a leader, because we're all leaders here, how do we start to have these conversations with our staff as we move forward with this year? Mona, do you want to start?

Mona Malone:

Absolutely. I think you framed it well. Leadership is needed now more than ever, at times of disruption, at times of challenge. I think it is a real opportunity for leaders, but it's also taking it in

context of what we've experienced. Everyone's experienced things a little bit differently this year. Living through the pandemic, whether it's been isolation, whether it's been loss, whether it's been mental health challenges individually or with somebody they love. Whether it's that they really wish they could get back to the workplace full-time, whether it's that they're actually quite apprehensive about thinking about getting back to the workplace. And so I think, first, it's understanding the context that maybe everyone's experience has been slightly different. Then as a leader, making sure you're connecting and talking with your teams about what that return to workplace looks like. And it's different.

For us at Bank of Montreal, we have 16,000 of our workforce that's been working through the pandemic all the time in our branches serving our clients every day. For them, the return is no different than what they've been doing. But hopefully, as people get vaccinated, that it's going to mean less personal protection over time. For those that have been at home, it's a significant change. We're moving to more of a hybrid work environment, and so it means part of your time in the office, part of your time at home. And for some, they're really keen on embracing that. There are others who have some apprehension. I think as leaders, having candid conversations with your team, understanding from their standpoint what they're going through helps you both be empathetic but also help provide a sense of clarity of what the future could look like.

Dr. Talia Varley:

I love that, Mona, and completely agree. I think it's a challenging time where you want to acknowledge a lot of the present state, mental, physical, social health issues, professional challenges people might be facing. But at the same time, there's almost this hunger about what's next, and yet this lack of certainty around it as well. A bit of tension there around how do you have these forward thinking conversations at a time where sometimes people are very much in the moment and really bogged down by what might be challenging them that day or that week. And so sometimes having that sense of let's acknowledge a lot of the challenges that we are all facing right now, but important to parallel path here and how do we acknowledge that we will be working through both pieces together and navigating this uncertain environment into 2021, 2022.

There's a lot of decision-making and a sense of control that you can have within an individual team that might very much align to larger organization whereby there are larger policies. Let's say for financial institution or telecommunications company, et cetera. Ultimately, there's not always a lot that an individual might feel like they can control at the policy level. But to regain that sense of control at the team level I think will help people to feel really confident in what that return to workplace might look like, as well as have a sense of influence and tailoring in terms of their own individual experience.

Lisa Bragg:

We're seeing a lot of articles, a lot of chatter about people saying, I am ready for disruption and I'm going to really disrupt my career and leave where I'm going. There's a lot of predictions and a lot of talk about that right now. How do we talk about that where people are thinking, it's time for me to make a change. It's been so disruptive already. I'm going to make a change. How do you have it from that employer level and then also thinking about, yeah, employees do want to leave? Let's talk about it from the employer level first where a lot of people are talking about disrupting their careers. You don't want them to go.

Dr. Talia Varley:

Yeah, it's such a great point. I agree with you. There's a flurry of articles on this topic right now. Sometimes it's about a yearning of wanting to change or develop. Sometimes it's rooted in concepts like self-care. I think a popular article last week has been, *Quitting Has Become the Ultimate Form of Self-Care*. I think really drilling down to why is someone looking for that change and what's driving it. Because if it is really about professional growth or development, there might be ways to get that within your existing environment. And sometimes it's about having the right conversations at the right time and engaging the right stakeholders within your organization to talk about what those opportunities could look like. So whether it's an existing vertical growth trajectory or horizontal. Whether it's a new idea that you want to test out and become a bit of an intrapreneur rather as well, those are great options to explore.

Ultimately, if what might be driving you is something like burnout, important to address that in a similar fashion. Really get to the root of why you might be feeling like you're burnt out. From an employer perspective, you want everyone to stay and to thrive and to contribute and to grow as professionals and to be healthy while doing it as an individual, as well as part of a greater family and organization. When you think about things like burn out as being a driver for why someone wants to leave, I think organizations are really motivated right now to get underneath what could optimize wellness, what could optimize health for employees. But you also want to recognize that if people leave because of something like burn out, they might not actually get that greener pasture that they're looking for.

Transitioning out from organization actually comes with a high stress burden. There's a lot of stress around things like change. Whether it's the exit journey or whether it's the entry journey into an organization. Just helping people even make the right decision for themselves as individuals and empowering them with this information and this perspective can be really powerful.

Mona Malone:

I think the comments Talia that you've mentioned are fantastic. I think making sure that you're having the right career conversations, whether that's with a mentor inside or outside the organization is so important. Sometimes we feel stuck or that we need a growth opportunity. And understanding, okay, well, is it really an expansion of new role? Is it something new? Have I been doing what I've been doing long and I'm just looking to try new things? Or is it really that I need to leave my organization? Making sure, having concluded too early without knowing all of the options available to you is critical. Also recognizing, is it burnout or is it your inner voice that's actually telling you this? But you haven't actually had the conversation since you've concluded a bit in isolation. This is a really important point because when I think about many of the people that I mentor will something draw conclusions.

It may be after being on maternity or paternity leave where they feel like there isn't opportunity, but they've actually kind of gone really far in their minds without having enough tangible conversations in the organization. And so that sense of really making sure. We've been more isolated this year. We haven't had quite the same physical connections. And so making sure that you sought out mentors and the advice of a trusted mentor as you're making a career change is really important. Because I often see people that do a boomerang. They'll make a change and then they'll realize, you know what? It wasn't actually what I thought, or it wasn't what I hoped it would be. Making sure that you've been thoughtful by talking it out with people that you trust that bring a broader perspective.

Lisa Bragg:

Mona, are you hearing these conversations then with the people you mentor? Are you having those? Like, hey, I just have to leave. I just need to disrupt myself. Are you having those conversations now?

Mona Malone:

Less about just I have to leave, and more sense of when you think about the things of this year, career growth is something that's constant. That's not specific to this year. But what's happening this year is when you think about the GDP growth that's anticipated, the opening of the economy, what we're seeing in terms of employment numbers predicted for the next 12 months, there's going to be opportunity. And so making sure that all organizations are having effective career conversations so that you're keeping key talent, that you're giving them growth opportunities is really important in the year ahead. Then personally, the advice I always give to people is make sure you have trusted mentors. People that know you and people that are really just a little bit more advanced in their career that can bring the sense of perspective and wisdom and can really help you think through choices of your next steps in terms of when you decide to make a career change.

Within our organization, it's a large organization and there's a lot of opportunity to move across the organization. We are seeing people take on new assignments across the organization at rates that are a little bit higher right now because there's new roles that have been created. When you think about things around health and safety in banking, when you think about the focus on digital that we have, there's a lot of increased opportunity that's also come from the disruption that we've seen this year.

Lisa Bragg:

Because so often we tell ourselves these own stories because we can only see so far and we don't know what we don't know. That's why the mentors are really critical for our success and also showing us that extra path here. I know Talia, you took a different path and disrupted yourself a little bit. Why don't you tell us that story a bit?

Dr. Talia Varley:

Absolutely. I'm coming from a healthcare background. I'm a physician by training and very much was in the mindset of was going to carve out a path in medicine and that was going to be my long term career up until the time that you retire. That's a pretty common path within healthcare. However, I think as you go through your own career journey, you start to widen the aperture at different points and come up for air and really ask yourself, is this a type of impact I want to have? Is this what that career will look like? Is this what your personal mark will look like? Sometimes it can be a little bit jarring to ask those questions after you've already sort of set it off on a certain path. But I was willing to take that journey and have a dialogue with myself. To Mona's point, engage mentors and engage sponsors in terms of where that mental map was going.

I ultimately ended up realizing that the type of impact that I wanted to have over time was not only within the sphere of patient care, with one-on-one patient visits but much broader than that and much more of a population health level impact. It also meant going back to school and taking some real personal and professional risk to do so. I think what I learned from that journey is not everyone is going to understand what you need to do and that you need to be okay with that. Some people will be

supportive. Some people will be less so. Sometimes it is rooted in that lack of understanding potentially. But you really need to be comfortable forging your own path as long as that risk-benefit ratio sits really well with you. Ultimately, years down the line, when you look back retrospectively, a lot of things just start to make sense quite often. You might have some of these boomerang paths. You might have some that take you on a bit of a winding road.

Ultimately, you can end up in a place that's incredibly satisfying, very unique, carving out your own path overall. And one that I think if you look back, you sort of wonder how would I've been able to I think sustain that day-to-day in that career path having this additional growth and this additional value creation opportunity. All I need to say is that I think you need to really identify what works for you, what is the mark that you really want to leave, and be willing to forge a different path and know who is there to support you along the way so you can get there in a sustainable fashion as well.

Lisa Bragg:

Yeah, there definitely is when you look back. Only when you look back that there is a red thread that does connect it all when you do something different or go to a different career or take a different job on. There is a red thread to it. I think it's often when we go back to our core values that we say, that's why that attracted me there. Mona, your career path too hasn't been the straight and narrow that people always expect when you are at your level. Right to the top. You've had an interesting career path too. Do you want to tell us a little bit about that?

Mona Malone:

Yes. I think I couldn't agree more that I think the mosaic and lateral moves and the breath of a career path as you get older and you look back is actually hugely beneficial in terms of the growth that it's provided. I started my career at BMO at our Institute for Learning in Human Resources. Worked in a variety of areas. Then actually left BMO for a bit and worked at a joint venture that we created with Canada Post called epost. Started in HR but then went into marketing and led their marketing and product management team. That really helped build my business acumen. I was the spokesperson for the organization publicly, so it helped build my public speaking skills. Also, really my tech and data acumen in the areas of marketing and product management with a technology-based product. And, I saw a lot of parallels in the disciplines of human resource management and marketing.

Understanding segments, understanding motivation, understanding value propositions, and so it brought increased perspectives both to how I approach marketing and then when I moved back into human resources. I also, when I came back to BMO, spent time leading retail branches as a regional vice president in Toronto. For many, when I made that move, they said, what are you doing? Why are you doing that? For me, it was, if I wanted to be a senior leader in the organization, I knew BMO is a very customer-centric organization. And having the experience working directly with our end customers, leading sales teams was an experience I haven't had before. Really that opportunity to do that was important. It was also very scary because I had spent many of my career roles in an area that I knew well. All of a sudden I was in an area where I really didn't have the domain knowledge. Relying on other aspects around adding value became really important. And those moments when you, and Talia mentioned it best when she said, when you have a sense of humility is really important in your career. Sometimes moving yourself outside your comfort zone for different assignments is a fantastic way of doing that and creates an enormous amount of not just professional growth but really personal growth.

Lisa Bragg:

That's so great, because I think all of us, the three of us have had that where you're making a leap and people are like, what are you doing? Why would you get off that path? It seemed so obvious. But then having that own self-fortitude to know I can do this, I'm called to this for some reason, to go that way and having that self-trust that you need to make these sometimes bold moves.

Mona Malone:

Lisa, I just want to mention one other point. To me, mentors were really important in those times to reconfirm in my own thinking why it was important. I think also, there's been times... We have three children and they were born close together. And when my children were young and we were caring for my father-in-law that had Alzheimer's, I also took a step back to really say, look, what's on my plate right now? It was a lot. And deciding what do I want career-wise. I knew I wanted to stay in the game. I wanted to do work where I had high impact. And I wanted to do work I loved. So I made a choice to take a role that some people thought was a lesser role. There was a lot of reaction from those around me around why on earth would I do that. I did it because I could do the job really easily, like without a lot of stretch or effort. I loved it. I really love the work. And it created bandwidth for me to use that time on the other aspects of my life. One of the things I really coach people to think about is think about your life as a pie and all the aspects in it, and just determine where career fits at the point in time that you're at. And by having it take a different role at different points in time, it doesn't take you out of the long term opportunities. You just need to navigate it perhaps a little bit of a different way.

Dr. Talia Varley:

I love that, Mona. I'll jump in here as well because I think the point around looking at the personal and professional spheres and how those engage and how they might oscillate at different times across one another. I think to your point around if there are times where you need to look to explore roles that create a different type of sustainability depending on life stage, that's incredibly important. Similarly, if there's a point in time where you want to take on a more ambitious role where you need additional support. Really recognizing where that support might come from and having conversation with those within, again, the personal sphere. Whether you're in a relationship and you have a partner, or you have family members who are part of your household. Really understanding what is the type of support and potential leverage that they can give you at really critical times to help you to accelerate through different points in that career.

One other thought here around, it's easy to look back, I think years later around certain career moves that you might have made that tick and tie now but at the time felt quite uncertain and really reminds me of the importance of storytelling and having a personal narrative. Although, it's quite important to sometimes have some ambiguity and have some room to navigate your career into untold waters, at the end of the day, you want to still be able to tell that story. Because to Mona's point, as you engage with mentors, as hopefully those relationships develop into more sponsorship relationships and they introduce you to other mentors within that network. You need to be able to have a story that people can anchor to. And so when they talk about Mona or they talk about Talia, what is it that one or two lines that they think about you where they can think about opportunities that might align with what you're doing? How they can help to create that path with you and open up some interesting conversations that might lead to really unique paths? Sometimes just anchoring on that narrative, and

even if that direction changes and the rudder moves in different directions over time, always being grounded in that story and updating it can be really, really helpful.

Lisa Bragg:

It's what people can say about you when you're not in the room that can really help elevate you. You know, I have a spidey sense though that some of our listeners are going to say, you know what? I have had a mentor, I've outgrown her or him. How do I get a new mentor? Then how do I elevate to the sponsorship level? Two questions in one. How do I even get a new mentor for this fresh disruptive time that we're in? Any thoughts to that, Mona?

Mona Malone:

Yeah. First, I think about having six or seven mentors at any one point in time. I think about them for all aspects when I think about my life as a pie with various components. I mentioned, when my kids were young, I would have a mentor of a working mom with kids that were 10 years older than mine because they were able to help with that work-life challenge component that I was struggling with a fair bit. I have mentors in the discipline that I'm in. In human capital, in HR. Business mentors that are at the C-suite but in different areas. People within my organization. People that start in my organization. So it's not just one-on-one, but it's building those relationships with people that you can go to depending on the topic that you really are wrestling with at that point in time. And by having people that get to know you, that you're comfortable talking with in confidence, it gives you more go-to people. But I think not trying to have one mentor do everything or think about one mentor solving everything. Thinking about what you really want to get out of, like what matters to you more broadly in life.

It's the same way that if you're thinking about becoming more fit, having somebody that you really think has achieved what you're trying to achieve from fitness. In whatever area, if it's in tennis, if it's in yoga, if it's in CrossFit. It's sometimes helpful to hear their stories, to know how they're training, to network in, to what are they reading they find out about things. It's the way that I've approached things like cooking, painting. When I decided to take on a new hobby. It goes far beyond just what I think about in terms of being an effective leader in the organization. It's a growth mindset of thinking about as adults we learn through human exchange. Human exchange and dialogue. So how do you create a sense of those conversations in your life that can help you with your personal growth?

Dr. Talia Varley:

I think a sense of diversity in terms of mentors and sponsors. Whether it's people from other business lines, departments, other companies or industries. It's really about a variety of perspectives and viewpoints and experienced profiles where each mentor you want them to contribute something really unique in terms of their thinking and their insights. To Mona's point, there might be different reasons why you go to one mentor or the other. As you think about moving from this concept of mentorship to sponsorship, that can be a really challenging conversation to have and one that. I'm not sure everyone has or at least I haven't always felt too prepared to have. And sometimes it can feel a little bit inorganic to ask for something. We're quite used to grabbing coffee, getting to know people, asking them for advice. But when you ask someone to advocate for you, support you, that can sometimes feel a bit unfamiliar. Often, it can be helpful to use the relational account. I think Sheryl Sandberg said it best around thinking personally and acting communally. There's this sense of an I-

We strategy. You can really ask for what you want while signaling to the counterpart in the conversation that you're also taking on their perspective.

In the workplace, for example, if you think about sponsorship, sometimes it can be someone within your team or outside of your team. There's typically potentially something that's mutually beneficial across there. If it's your direct manager and they're going to sponsor you, often by them creating opportunities for you, you're also potentially taking on parts of their role so that they can carve out other things for other stuff or opportunities for their own careers. Sometimes thinking about how to make it more of a team-based approach to sponsorship. Or again, when you make an ask, sometimes you forget that it's actually quite interesting for someone else to be able to make that introduction or make an offer. That is a value to them in terms of expanding their network and showing the power of the people that they know in terms of making those types of introductions. I think just keeping in mind some of that relational account can help to take away from a sense of uncertainty or discomfort around making an ask.

Lisa Bragg:

So many leaders, we want to project that ideal worker image and not taking advantage of the policies and flexible work arrangements available. It was mentioned about taking paternity leave. A lot of people, a lot of men don't necessarily want to take a paternity leave even though it's available to them. So they send that image to their employees that it's not acceptable necessarily to take that off. Women often feel like they need to sneak out to tend to their children or do something like that. Men simply won't go. So how do we change the image of the ideal worker that is so ingrained in our culture? Mona, I'll throw that one over to you.

Mona Malone:

So first of all, I think this is an incredibly relevant question. We know women spend more time performing unpaid work such as childcare and housework compared to men, globally. It's 1.5% of men provide unpaid care in comparison to 21.7 for women. We know this is the case. And we know the pandemic has amplified this concern, this trend. First of all, I think all corporations should have some form of flexible work arrangement. And when you think about progressive practices around maternity, paternity, the definitions as they think about family and benefit plans, those are really important policy basics that I think are critical. The second is what you mentioned which is the social norms, what's happening inside an organization. Even if you have those policies, are they encouraged? And so the tone that leaders set. The encouragement with individuals.

Personally, I've worked at BMO part-time, full-time, taken three maternity leaves and two secondments. Talking about those publicly with our team is important. Having a variety of leaders across our organization. Through the last year, we held calls with parents on parenting. We've amplified communication about flexible work arrangements and personally coaching people through those situations and really helping them. Because in the moment, it can feel like you don't have options or you can feel quite overwhelmed. The opportunity for people to be able to create a path and think about what's possible, and hear from people that they see as important in the organization actually telling them that their careers isn't going to be damaged as a result.

I want to give a really tangible example. Our Head of Training Products in Capital Markets and our Group Head for Capital Markets instituted a new practice over the last year which included ensuring if any employee on paternity, maternity leave, when they came back, they got their clients that they had

before. Because they understood that one of the underlying root causes of a stalled career after that was that people came back to a blank sheet of paper and had to rebuild their clients. And so really understanding what the issues are that are getting in the way, of gender advancement, and of diversity advancement are critical. Basically, tackling those issues. That's what I'm seeing the late progressive leaders doing, and that is what will build an inclusive culture.

Dr. Talia Varley:

I think elevating this concept of health, women's health, men's health, some of the reasons are around burn out or challenges. Whether it's physical, mental, or social that might be some of the drivers around people who may be considering an exit. Addressing them head on is quite important. But beyond even just tackling health issues, I think having that narrative around why gender equity matters and why it is an unlocked corporate performance and growth. Being armed at around corporate performance and knowing that in the U.S., companies in the top quartile for gender diversity can be 50 and plus percent more likely to have return above the industry mean. In the UK, for every 10% increasing gender diversity on senior executive teams, the EBIT rises 3.5%. And on the talent side, when we think about employees, 67% of people consider diversity as an important factor when deciding on where to work. And particularly for the millennials segment, 83% of millennials are actively engaged when they believe that their organization fosters an inclusive culture versus 60% in an organization that doesn't.

I think that that's a real narrative that anyone can rally behind. Whether it's for personal reasons that you want to stay in an organization that really fosters diversity and inclusion and retains a lot of the phenomenal women talent or caregiver talent that might be at risk of being lost later this year or into early 2022 as we return to work, workplaces, rather. Ultimately, beyond the educational piece. To Mona's point, there's a huge element of role modeling here and top down enablers that allow people not just to know what the policies and resources are that are available to them, but institutionally create these enablers that aren't opt-in or opt-out but are just part of the ramp on or ramp off process for things like maternity or paternity leave.

Lisa Bragg:

Yeah, it's the modeling of the pieces because I think a lot of women were faced with the likeability conundrum where we're expected to be likable but we have to lead. We're now expected to be modest and show our flaws, but then we're supposed to keep going on this train. It's really hard for a lot of us to balance out how are we supposed to be vulnerable and show ourselves when the soft skills of emotional intelligence haven't been valued in the past and those concern that we go too far. Any thoughts to that, Mona?

Mona Malone:

I think, Lisa, that's such a good question because when you think about the type of the leaders being human, having empathy, being self-aware are so important to being a successful leader. Sometimes we can struggle with recognizing or admitting the things that are maybe getting in the way. Or the opposite where we're actually too self-critical on ourselves and not able to appreciate the amazing strengths that we bring to assignments. When I think about the women that I coach and mentor, I think both of those are things that we spend a lot of time talking about. Not letting the self-voice inside our heads be overly critical. Recognizing that all leaders have strengths and weaknesses. Being self-

aware is really important to be more effective, but not letting that narrative and that inner voice really erode sometimes your self-confidence.

Lisa Bragg:

There's concern that we might have a two-tiered system coming up with those who stay remote in the post-pandemic world and those who - they'll be seen as second class. How do we work to destigmatize telecommuting and flex time?

Dr. Talia Varley:

I think as we consider the flexible workplace and the hybrid model that we're really anticipating will become the dominant model into 2021 and 2022, it's important to remember that there are a lot of social cues that are being lost when you go into remote environment. When someone's on their phone call, or even if it's a video conference call, as soon as they hang up, you don't always get a sense of how they're really doing after that call. As soon as the call ends, are they in a great spot? Do you all of a sudden see that they feel that the call didn't quite go well? Are they really stressed? Like they feel like they've just had a lot on their plate and they're not quite sure where to turn to for help. There's a lot of those non-verbal cues that we're missing and sometimes difficult to understand how to help people within our team and how to be able to communicate how we're even doing day-to-day, hour-to-hour.

These things used to be quite organic and natural, but now it feels like sometimes it's a bit forced to be able to get that same information across. You have to be a lot more intentional. To that same point, unfortunately, depending on which role we're thinking about, sometimes your efficiency level can actually go down into a remote world. There's some roles that have actually become more productive where you can get a lot more done in a shorter period of time. But there are some jobs in which it's actually been the inverse. Sometimes people feel like they're working a lot harder to get a lot of the same things done, but that additional effort and work product isn't always being recognized in the most obvious ways.

A lot of these things can really weigh on our mental health but also on just how we feel in terms of our self-identity within the workplace and within the team environment, and the type of impact that we were having day-to-day and year-to-year. With that being said, I think recognizing that we're missing a lot of these cues and that we really do need to be more intentional. It's okay to be more direct and asking people for check-ins more often. While you don't want to bug people by asking them how they're doing every hour of the day, you do want to be a lot more thoughtful about having whether it's a text message, whether it's an email, whether it's a spontaneous phone call with people on your team just to ask them how they're doing. To that same point, as leaders within an organization, this has become a really unique time where outreach is very powerful. Having someone who is your manager's manager or a major leader of an organization, even if it is 5- 10minute check-in calls. Sometimes that kind of outreach can really help people to feel quite connected at time when it's quite easy to feel disconnected.

As we think about this hybrid environment, it's also important to try and level the playing field a little bit. So even if you have the option of going back to the workplace full-time, it might actually be quite interesting to give people and the team an opportunity to, whether it's a half day a week or full day a week or more, be able to engage in that same hybrid environment. Because not only it will let potentially give them additional sense of personal, professional balance, but it also helps them to

understand some of the challenges that might continue to come with that remote working environment and help them to better and more effectively engage with their peers.

Lisa Bragg:

What would you say to people who are concerned about having a pandemic gap here on their resume or LinkedIn?

Mona Malone:

I think it's important to think about the narrative you create for yourself around your career. Whether this means a break due to the pandemic, a break due to childcare responsibilities, a break due to eldercare responsibilities, or a break given a leave of absence for health. Or just simply taking a sabbatical and a bit of time to do other aspects of things that you love in your life. Having that narrative of why you did it, what it means, but also that personal growth and development continue. Whether you're necessarily working full-time or not. I know personally for me in my career, I've worked part-time, full-time, job shared, and taken two sabbaticals. And what was really important through all of that was understanding why I was doing what I was doing for what mattered to me at that point in my life. I had a great coach once that said, think of your life as a pie and think about the things that really matter to you as the slices of the pie. And annually, think about what do you want those slices to be. Career, maybe health, it might be time with family, it might be not-for-profit work that you're doing. Really self-assess, are you living the aspects of your pie that you really want each year?

For me, there were times when I've taken jobs that were huge stretch assignments that required way more of my discretionary energy and input. Then there were times when I took jobs that really I could do really easily. Some people looked at me and said like, why are you taking that job that's almost like you're taking a step backwards? But I did it because there were other things in my life going on. I had some care responsibilities for my father-in-law at the time. With my husband who was ill. My husband is an only child, and so we were the primary caregivers. I thought about my career in context of some of those other commitments that I had going. Again, I think it's being true to yourself knowing that you're making those choices and recognizing even if you're not 100% in a particular role, there's still some self-development. There's things that you can be reading. There's things that you can be developing if you have those breaks in your resume. That can still help you in terms of your personal growth.

Lisa Bragg:

On Bold(h)er, we always ask these three questions. What's the boldest thing you've ever done?

Mona Malone:

The boldest thing I ever did was take a sabbatical from work. Now looking back, it wasn't very bold. But at the time, it was a huge decision. I was really nervous about it. I spent a lot of time thinking about it. It's funny how something can feel very bold in the moment but when you look back, it isn't. Outside of career, it would be bungee jumping or anything that involves heights.

Lisa Bragg:

When do you wish you were bolder?

Mona Malone:

Almost every day. I do often wish that I would take more chances. Whether it's with my physical fitness routine, whether it's about the movies or books that I read. I do often think, am I being too conservative? Or am I being too typical in my views and interest?

Lisa Bragg:

What would you say to your 12-year-old self?

Mona Malone:

Take more chances. Push yourself outside of your comfort zone more often because that's when learning and growth happens.

Lisa Bragg:

Talia, what's the boldest thing you've ever done?

Dr. Talia Varley:

I think the boldest thing I've ever done has been rechanging my career trajectory from healthcare to more of business orientation. It was quite bold because it's a move that not many people in the healthcare industry do, but I have to have the conviction and the confidence to be able to take that next step. It takes some personal, professional risks, and really make that goal happen. That was with support from a lot of folks, but I think that sense of conviction is what really drives that boldness that I still think about to this day.

Lisa Bragg:

When do you wish you were bolder?

Dr. Talia Varley:

I wish I was bolder all of the time. It's always incredible to reflect on the day-to-day and the year-to-year, and it's easy to think could I have pushed harder there? Should I've been less risk-averse over here? To me, being bold is quality and a character trait. I think it's something you have to embed in your day-to-day and know how to turn the volume up and down on. That volume dial is always going to be related to context because that definitely matters. But sometimes you can go to the next, and sometimes you might want to tune it in a little bit differently.

Lisa Bragg:

What would you say to your 12-year-old self?

Dr. Talia Varley:

I would say take more risks. You are going to wonder about the missed opportunities much more than you'll ever worry about any failures.

Lisa Bragg:

I love that. That's such a lovely way to end. Thank you.

Lisa Bragg:

You've been listening to Bold(h)er, brought to you by BMO for Women.

Thank to Dr. Talia Varley, Physician Lead for Advisory Services at Cleveland Clinic Canada and Mona Malone, BMO's Chief Human Resources Officer and Head of People & Culture.

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