E7: Setting boundaries and standing up for your values with Australian researcher Dr Hannah Badland

**Hannah:** Picking up your question about the policies in place RMIT has quite flexible arrangements. You do by law, have one year maternity or parental leave in Australia, but you can negotiate two years if you wish. And my understanding is it's not frowned upon if you were to ask for that and within Australia, again, the legislation is, I think it's either 14 or 18 weeks paid parental leave at minimum wage, that the government provides. I can't remember which one it is. But RMIT, actually has a very generous policy where you get up to six months paid leave full salary, plus a three month return to work bonus if you return on your agreed upon date. So there are a lot of financial incentives. But it is, that is quite unique to the Australian environment, but probably not so unusual within a university environment, which is great because it allows people just a bit of flexibility. And I guess not that pressure, that may come through if you have only gotten minimum wage salary coming through for the first few weeks.

So then in terms of the structures around coming back to work they do offer, RMIT I think it's actually really inclusive and it really recognizes and supports diversity. So there's a lot of opportunities to return back to part-time work. There's lots of support for non traditional families which is really great. So they do offer in terms of systems to support you back to work these, I think they're called 'keep in touch days' and you're allowed up to 10 while you're on your parental leave break and they're paid days to come to let's say workshops or planning days, or you need to meet your manager. So you feel like, I guess you've got a handle on what's going on. And I think there's a great initiatives, but importantly, which I think is also very important is that you're not expected to do them. So they do respect that you are on leave and its your discretion if you'd like to participate in them. And if you don't that's fine like there's no one making you do them, so that's good.

And then RMIT is also now trialing a new program, which I was part of the working group and it's called reignite and it's to support people, who've come back from significant caring responsibilities back into a research career. So is aimed at academics who are research intensive and it provides there's various levels of support and we're rolling it out now, but it ranges from one-to-one coaching. So how to actually I guess plan the year how be strategic, etc. And then it moves right through to as between 20 and $50,000 still to be decided it's my understanding that factual seed funding to support research assistance to continue your work and help bring you back up to full productivity after being on a break for awhile. So my understanding is that it's open to everyone who had carers’ responsibility, but typically it's women who tend to apply for it and use it. So I think that's a really great way to support women, at least researchers, back into the workforce in a way that it supports what they need. Cause it could just be someone to help give some advice on how to be a bit more streamlined during the day or how to plan better or whatever it is. Or it might actually be a bit more physical resources to help us writing papers or submitting papers or whatever it might be. Yeah, so that's a really interesting one. That's just been rolled out now. So I think it will be in its pilot over the next year or so.

**Hannah:** Yeah, so I've got a really big interest in equity and I've got a really big interest and a huge belief in women being able to succeed. And you see it so many times where women particularly around the period of child-rearing, they just fall off , they just drop off a cliff pretty much. And in terms of their career progression, it just stalls. When you look at time and time again, internationally, nationally, locally, what is a whole bunch of men and senior jobs and a whole bunch of women remaining in that levels B and C possibly D, which is I guess from a research fellow through to senior research fellow, maybe associate professor, and it's just so systemic and it's such a problem. And anything I can do to help create a path that's not necessarily the path that every single guy has gone on. The one that actually values women, values their contribution to caring as well as their professional lives and also recognizing that women who are actually raising children or caring for people or whatever it might be, they actually bring their own set of really strong values, but also a much, I think you're actually much better in terms of working in a team.

They bring an empathy, they understand diversity. They have a set of soft skills which is typically undervalued, but really important negotiation, empowering people, bringing together diverse people, and getting them to function as a team, which are skills that in particular, when you're raising a family, you draw on those every single day to get out the door, but that's what you need to do. And I actually think I'm a much better researcher and much better leader and much better in a team environment after having children. Yeah. It sets your perspective that it develops all those other skills that aren't necessarily measurable on like a metric based system, a number of publications or research money or whatever, but in terms of actually being successful and people wanting to collaborate with you, bringing a team and building a team around you and actually being a really effective leader.

I think it's fantastic. It's really important. And just to your question about some of the committees, I sit on the women's research network steering committee also within the university. There's about 12 of us. The role of that is to basically advocate for women researchers within the university and sometimes outside it, but we did quite a significant piece of work around COVID-19 statement of impact on women researchers. And we, that ended up being presented to the executive. But just to sort of talk about what some of those issues that specifically for women that may affect other people as well, but in terms of child caring, homeschooling and just how something here and now whether its the pandemic, the here and now impact, but also how that alters the trajectory of people's careers. And disproportionately, it was again, a lot of evidence coming out, but disproportionately it was falling to women who were doing most of the homeschooling and then having to juggle their careers outside of the school hours and therefore they were missing out on research meetings and missing out on decision-making opportunities. They lost their visibility. We really wanted to capture that and let the executives know that in our perspective, at least once COVID stops, the impacts don't stop. And when we're looking at women's careers, that typically the trajectory could even flatten entirely how we can actually put systems in place that are fair and recognize that burden.

**Hannah:** I think so to a point and one thing that I think like bringing it all together, what it has made me do over the last five years, I think we now have been faced with the challenge of raising a family and trying to maintain a career is that I'm applying an equity lens over policies. So when something comes out, oh, I can't think of an example off the top of my head. Let's say just that promotions criteria being that the last three years and five years that I immediately now think about how that would disadvantage some groups over other groups or how privilege other groups, some groups over others. And that's something that I probably wasn't thinking about so much, maybe 10 years ago, because I hadn't really been faced with it. And now that I have it's that lived experience has really shaped my perspectives and understanding how you can advocate for others.

I make it clear the days that I don't work, so I worked four days a week. Outlook response that comes back to the people I don't work today. I'll get back to you when I'm back working. And I do tend to check maybe once or twice, particularly if I know that there's something time critical coming through. Yeah, that still happens, but I'll only do it twice a day and for normally a very short period of time. So I'm very firm on that. And I, and part of me well in fact all of me I think it's really important to actually show that these other ways of doing things because academia is so, people get themselves worked up into these knots and they wear it like a badge of honor that I worked all weekend and they, and other people endorse this oh, good on you.

No, that's not good on you. Either there's way too much work or your inefficient. And, or maybe it's a combination of both. I don't know, but it's not something that we should be saying that's a good thing. And I think it's a really big problem. And so when I, with my team and my students and other people have worked with my collaborators, I make it really clear that no, I'm not going to be turning something around working till midnight, three nights in a row. And most of the time when that happens is because someone's been unorganized and dropped something off to you last minute. And then particularly women, I find that they often then take on board that person's problem rather than going well no I'm sorry, I needed X amount of time. I actually, now can't look at it till whenever it might be. And that's often what I do. I'm a big believer in mentoring and helping people. And I really liked doing that, but if I'm helping some of them, the promotions application or structure a CV, or look through a grant whatever it is, I'll say to them, look, I can look at it on Friday between this time. If you can get it to me before hand. That's great. Otherwise, the next time I can look at it will be Thursday, the following week. So they're really clear on what the options are and I'll block it out in the diary. And I will deliver it as much as I can when I agree to, but it stops that sort of being taken by granted and that your time doesn't matter because your time does matter, it matters just as much as anyone else's.

**Jacqueline:** And you're being a role model to then your female mentees and maybe you didn't have those role models yourself. I had lots of mentees. And often the things that they came to me with were problems of inequality not being taken seriously by their male colleagues or being asked well what are you going to do if you have a second child? And of course, then their reaction was I'll work harder and it was just so devastating or that they were missing out on opportunities because they couldn't travel to conferences. One of the things I would say to my mentees was we may get to the table later, but when we get there we will bring so much more. And I think when I burned out and left, I lost my belief in that as well. And I think that is part of burnout is that you have this cynicism for what is possible. So tell me a little bit about that in terms of what are the issues that maybe your female mentees are dealing with and how do you manage them? Cause I think I could have done a better job of knowing what to do, like all the reading I'm doing now, I'm like, oh, I could've given them this statistics saying, yes, you shouldn't be getting asked this question or here's how to handle it.

**Hannah:** I think you've actually touched on a much bigger issue around the systems. And I think so RMIT, I'm just gonna return back to where I'm working at the moment. RMIT has a huge focus on diversity and inclusion. So it keeps winning national employee awards as being a place that really values all different types of people. It really welcomes them to the workplace. So if you were openly saying comments like that, at least and I'm talking from social sciences, but my understanding is that it does happen in STEM a lot more. You would be not hauled over the coals, but it would be called out as inappropriate behavior. Whereas some organizations, no one bats an eyelid that someone would say, what are you going to do now that you've got your second baby or whatever it might be. But I think how you actually manage it in terms of a seat at the table. I think we're at a bit of a crossroads with women, a lot of the senior woman, not all, but a lot of the senior women in academia have got there by playing, I call it the men's game, but it's often not having children.

Working very long hours and following the pathway that a guy follows cause like likes, like that's what I always say. And like supports like, so like advocates for like, until you actually get a system where diversity is actively encouraged and recognized, it's going to be quite hard to shape it because the senior people who may still be in that mindset of having the echo chamber and supporting themselves, supporting people who had the same views as then, it will be very hard to get in otherwise. Like some who comes in with maybe three or four children might have a disability might be of a different ethnicity who knows whatever it is. It can make them feel quite uncomfortable. So if you're in a working in organization that actively values diversity it measures on it. If it's not diverse, it gets called, it gets called to account. What does the promotions criteria who was getting promoted? Are they men, are they women? Are they indigenous people? Are they people with disabilities, if they're not these people, why aren't they these people, what are we doing? How are our systems failing? So you need to be having that continual check back to understand. And if it's not if it's not happening, how can they be held to account? What are the values that are going on? And I think to put it back on the woman, to change the system, I think because it's a really big weight to have on their shoulders.

So it and I always, I think as well, if you want to change the system, you've actually already got to be really good at what you do, which is it's this huge burden for women. They need to have credibility as researchers. They need to have the right soft skill sets to be able to advocate smartly, and then they also need to be able to really know what levers to push to respond to that diversity. And that's huge. You're coming back to work, all you want to do is just keep your head above water, but that's at this stage, that's what I think the change agents look like. But hopefully once they get in place to actually create these pathways for other people, with diverse circumstances to actually flourish and really succeed.

And when I think of my main tools, I've had some absolutely fantastic mentors through out the well throughout my whole career and they've been a mixture of men and women. But I was reflecting on this Jacqueline before we spoke and what they have all had and I guess that's why I've been drawn to them is actually they really value diversity and they bring quite a rich life experience to how they've got to where they are. They're all excellent researchers as well. So coming back to my point of, you need to be everything, but they, it's not all about work. It is actually they're human, they're real, they are not perfect, but they try to work through solutions. And that's why they're quite good because you're dealing with the challenge and how you're going to manage whatever it is. And they can actually draw on a really human experience and knowledge base to share with you rather than that just don't worry about it, don't care about the person, just go and deliver this. That's in my mind the old way of thinking.

And the more we actually, I think even take it away. Cause again, if we talk about the managers, we're still putting it back on the person. And depending on who your manager is, you might have most fabulous manager who offers you all these opportunities, but then equally you might get a manager who doesn't value you and your contribution at all, and then you're shut down. So I think, it needs to get moved into a system where these are the organizational values for these reasons, and everyone is expected to apply them whether or not you're manager, you're a junior member of staff, whatever it is. And therefore it takes away the onus on whether or not you hit the jackpot . And then it's not that person constantly advocating for actually I am allowed to do professional development or I am allowed to do have expected in my time to join a committee or whatever it is. It's, there's a framework there, you know what everyone's entitled to, and it's a lot more fair.

**Hannah:** If anyone's this likely to speak out on career progression that's typically women. Men are so much better, often better at negotiating things it's getting better, but typically. And so women are probably less likely to ask any way. And then if it's not being offered, and the manager has just, and it might be that it's unintentional. It's just that someone hasn't asked, so I hadn't offered and just understanding it that they, how they work together. But this is all slightly utopian too, because we've had huge protests at the start of this year around the way women are treated. A lot of it was based around sexual harassment. We went a lot deeper as well, just in terms of how women are being paid less than not as many senior positions, but sexually harassed at work places. It's not a safe place for them. And they were huge across Australia. And I don't really feel like that much has changed, but when you around the process, it was quite a conversation.

And just that pretty much every single woman was like, yep. I've got these experiences that not one single woman who I know has not been either sexually harassed felt that they'd been looked over, with the men being promoted above them. The opportunities haven't been equal, you get the snide comments, the one that you used before Jacqueline around oh, so you're going to have another baby. What man says that to another man, it just doesn't happen. And so I think we do have a long way to go in terms of that. What I was talking about before is I think that's the way forward. And I think RMIT, for example, is doing a good job in being very clear about what the values are and starting to get metrics and systems in place, but it's only fairly recent that's been happening. But there still is a lot of people who aren't actually quite on board with it yet. And we've got a lot of really angry women out there.

Boundary setting and being okay with it. So even if I understand a lot of people will be working, that is, as you were doing Jacqueline working every night, every weekend. It might freak them out too much to have like maybe no night or no, weekend work, but let's say, okay, Tuesdays and Thursdays or I don't know one day weekend or whatever, you chose, like whoever chooses based on how they feel comfortable, but go, I am not going to work. I'm not going to check my email. And just do it and verbalize it, tell people, make it really clear that is what I'm doing, with the view that's not your end point with the view that you're going to slowly transition into having some really firm boundaries.

And it's quite liberating. My hours I finished work a little bit earlier so I can pick the kids up and everyone knows my hours. So if they make meetings that go over, I just leave. And I never apologize because everyone's known my hours and there's been a choice made to make a meeting at that time for whatever reason. And that's it, but I've got commitments too. So I leave, I'll let them know that I'll be leaving. Yeah. It's common courtesy but I will never apologize for having to go. Find a boundary that you're comfortable with, but it's a bit of a stretch that you do want it to be a bit of a stretch target, and just give it a, give it a shot. See what happens. See if the world implodes probably won't. You probably won't get any less research papers, or any less research money, or whatever it is. And if anything, you might even end up being a little more balanced and a little bit more clearer in your thoughts.

So let's say if you are contributing to a committee or whatever it is just do an assessment in the committee that are you actually representing the views of the cohort? Yeah. Is it diverse? If it's not diverse how can we bring whoever it is that needs to be there. And I think that's always a really important starting point because if you are if the committee is in a position where it's helping to shape policy, you need to have that diversity because otherwise there's going to be unintended consequences where people may be privileged over others.

So that's a really nice, easy way to and quite a gentle ease in, in terms of thinking about changing the system, and another thing would be, being actually aware about what your organizational values are and then it's something to talk about. So you talk about with your staff, you talk about it at meetings, you make it clear that this is actually whatever it might be is really important. How do we make sure that comes through and conversations that staff feel valued in that way. And again, that sort of removes that a little bit more from the person and it moves a little bit more upstream to here's what the organization can offer you to support whatever thing it is. So it, for example, the reignite of women returning to work. So here's a, is a whole system that you can now access because this is aligned with the values of diversity and research excellence. So it'd be knowing what's available as well within the organization. And then how that matches up to I guess individual people so that they know that they can advocate for that. If the manager's not aware.

**Hannah:** It's everywhere it's so pervasive that once you do start calling it out or people start calling it out, that's when you start understanding. Yeah, it's everywhere. And even those comments know, you should be in the kitchen or whatever it is. I'm always like a deer in headlights. When someone say something like that, cause I'm so taken back. But then when it's essentially a really aggressive and undermining comment and then how do you come back from that? Cause often it's made in front of a lot of people and yeah, they think they're being funny. But it's not funny. And then it puts you in a really awkward situation of how you actually manage it to say that's not okay. Yeah. Is it that you call someone to account right in front of them or do you go back and have a one-on-one conversation about it?

And then again, it still comes back to you and how you manage it. And it's a really tricky thing and I don't think people are necessarily taught the skills around that. And all of a sudden, you probably eight out of the 10 times, I didn't, I did this, a statistic totally made up, but people just let it slide because it's too uncomfortable to have that confrontation and people don't know how to address it, despite the fact that its entirely inappropriate. But if you had that broader I guess agreement in your organization where that stuff just isn't tolerated.

**Jacqueline:** And I think you've got a really good point there about teaching people how to be upstanders. Cause that's really the call. I've been relistening to Kim's Scott's book, which is called Just Work and it's all about moving into being upstanders. And so she gives lots of reasons for why. But I think that's a really good point is. How do we do it? She provides examples of how you could, but I do agree those are the skills we need. There's a great organization called Hollaback who do training in bystander interventions in the workplace. Those are the skills to be able to be thinking about giving our kids, which is how do you stand up. And I remember that actually, this reminds me totally. I'll have to look back. This book has well I think the book was called wing man, but basically when there was a series of the rape cases in the US were really high. And so there was this researcher on the radio saying, asking our boys to stand up to their friends to prevent them doing something to a girl when they're drunk is too late, that's such a difficult situation to intervene in. If you haven't taught them along the way and given them the chance to practice, standing up to their friends and giving them these skills to say, here's how you do it. So that when the really hard situation comes. They don't fail because it's part of what they already learned to do. So I think that has I think that's something we could really think about is how do we train everyone to be upstanders, not bystanders.