

## Welcome to the Flourish Podcast Series

### The Importance of Planning for your Future Working Life and Career

Flourish provides support and development for women. A place to be inspired, to get advice, learn personally and professionally, find a community of like-minded and different people, raise awareness of an issue, find opportunities and, if you like, contribute to.

I'm Andrea O'Mahony and today I'll be talking with Yasmin Holmes and Jackie Andrews. We're three of the Co-Founders of Flourish. We'll be talking about why we believe it's important to regularly plan for our future working lives and careers, and we'll be sharing some hints and tips for you to use.

**A: So Yasmin, why is it important to spend time on planning your working life?**

Y: Well I guess the people who really progress in life; lots of research evidence shows that actually when we have a plan, and we have some goals, and they don't need to be big goals and they don't need to be very long-term. But when we have some idea of our direction we're much, much more likely to achieve it. So a plan is useful in as much as it helps us has some focus and some attention on where we want to go.

**A: What type of things do people need to consider when thinking about their future working lives?**

Y: I think that there are key stages regardless of what situation you're facing. So you might be someone who is returning to work. You might be someone who is making a career change. You might be someone who's just starting out. But the stages are:

First of all, being clear about what it is you want. And that might be from the perspective of:

- **What is it I'm good at? What can I bring?**
- **What is it I'm interested in? What kind of things do I want to do?**

So if you have the answers to those questions then that leads you onto your next section, which is:

- **Well where are those jobs?**
- **How do I get into them?**
- **What is it I need to do in order to build experience? Or**
- **Who is it I need to apply to? Or**
- **How do I need to apply?**

So depending on what it is there might be a number of different solutions.

Then there are the challenges you might find in terms of being able to enter the sectors that you're interested in. And you might have to get very creative about how you do that. So, if there is an abundance of jobs and you have all the right skills and qualities, then you'll apply and you'll get through. But often a challenge we face is around **how to get to the next stage – there's some kind of barrier in our way.**

And so actually, when we come to it with a creative problem-solving mindset, and we use a variety of tools and exercises to kind of find out what it is, err, we need to solve, then that can be really valuable and helpful.

So there are these different stages and, at each of these stages:

- **We might need support and help;**
- **We might need to go to resources;**
- **We might need to have conversations with people who can help us.**

And it's about really identifying:

- **Where is it I'm stuck? Or**
- **Where is it I want some more support and resource? and**
- **Who might be the best person or the best place to go to for that?**

So you could read things. You could do courses. You could talk to people. There are a whole range of ways that you can get over the barriers that might face you.

**A: So Jackie, for those people who are starting out in life or are early in their careers, and they're really not sure how to progress. What would you advise?**

J: I think initially it's about finding out:

- **What do you really enjoy?**
- **What are the things that you like doing?**
- **Do you like being with people?**
- **Do you prefer to be given tasks?**

Go and talk to friends, to family and find out what their jobs are like. What interests them? What can sort of spark in you some sign of 'that's what I'd like to be doing' before you start then going off to find out exactly how do I get there.

Y: I think work and career planning also can be a lot of fun. It doesn't have to be hard work. And when we spend a little time thinking about what we like to do, what we're good at. When we get advice and guidance from other people about when they see us at our best, then that can be really useful evidence for help us to think about what sort of ingredients do we want in our life.

J: Yeah, I think, having that idea of you like working with people. What does that actually mean? You know:

- Do you like sales?
- Do you like talking to people?
- Do you like doing things for them?

Finding out about yourself and what you enjoy and seeing how that actually translates into a job is probably the most successful way of just finding out what's out there and thinking what can I go and do.

**A:** So would you advise people to perhaps look at some temporary positions?

J: Yeah, I think that's always a good way to start. If you, if you really have no idea, trying out a few jobs through a temporary agency that actually can get you into different areas, is quite a useful way of finding out what you don't want and sometimes that's a real key thing ... is I really don't want to do this.

Y: I think there can be a lot of challenge these days with people feeling that the opportunities are limited, or that they've got to have particular kinds of experience to get into certain fields. And, my experience is that there are many different ways to get to doing what you want to do. The most important thing is to find the things that you enjoy and then you can start to see, well What are my different options for getting into those?

Asking people who know you can be really helpful in terms of establishing what it is other people think that you do really well at.

**A:** How would you recommend that they go about that?

Y: I think that there are some simple things that you can do:

So if you look back over your life so far and think about all of the people who know you, in the different contexts they know you. So it might be friends, it might be family, it might be teachers, it might be other people who know you in social settings, and you can send around a little email or a Facebook request, however you want to do it, and just ask them What are the three qualities that they think you have and see what responses you get, and what insights that gives you about yourself and where you might take your working life.

**A:** I suppose that could also lead on to, if they notice anything about you and the way that you interact with others or the way that they see a spark in you as well. They might actually see something that you haven't thought about?

Y: Absolutely. The ideal is to have conversations with people, but it can be really useful if you want to, errm, ask a large number of people to send out a note and see what happens. See what you get back.

**A:** And perhaps doing a little bit of voluntary work might be helpful, as well? We talked about temporary work, but actually doing some voluntary work and seeing how that goes might help.

J: I think sometimes there's a good way of thinking back over your skills that you have and thinking about what skills you might need for a position you want to go into, and then maybe doing some voluntary work that actually helps you develop some of those skills. Because often when you, you go for interviews and they ask you about things, they will ask about 'What have you done' that actually demonstrates this skill.

- How can you demonstrate it?
- What can you do to actually develop it?

**A: Thinking about probably the next stage in life and maybe having had a career break, or having had children, trying to get back into the workplace. What do you think is a good way to start thinking about that?**

J: People feel when they've had a break or going back into work, that they need to go back into the area they were before. But actually, you can take it as a real opportunity to try something completely new. And actually, thinking about it again, those skills, what you need and gaining the confidence to actually try something that you always wanted to do maybe, that this now allows you to, to have a go at.

**A: What challenges have you faced? Have there been any challenges?**

J: Yeah, when I had my son, I stopped work for a bit to have my son and carry on and I went back into University areas. That was not something I had ever done before, or ever thought about, but it gave me that breathing space to actually think about what did I really want to do and to try and channel my career in the direction that I wanted it to go.

And you may have to do more training. You may have to think about the things that you will need for those particular areas that you haven't already got. But, it's about that planning and that thinking forward of what you want to do.

Y: And I think for me, erm, and for women in general. This is partly why we set up this development for women, is that we often end up doing well, and we think it's by luck. Err, we've suddenly been fortunate, or somebody has helped us. And actually there is just so much that we have to offer.

So my own kind of personal story is that I left school and I didn't think that I was clever enough to do to University, so it was all about getting a job, and I did, and I worked in administration. And it was actually through, kind of my working experiences, that I came to realise that I had a lot to offer. For me it was all common sense, but I had a lot to offer. And, err, it wasn't so much that I was ambitious, and that I wanted a big job, or wanted lots of power or influence. It was just that I wanted to do things that were interesting. And I didn't want to be held back just because my educational level said, you know, there was a barrier there.

So I did eventually actually return to studying, erm, and that did open a lot of doors for me. That was really useful. But I think one of the things that actually is really important to remember is that, we don't need all of the answers straight away. That it's often through doing things and trying different things that you get to know what you do like and

what you don't like, and that can be very interesting. And it's actually having an ongoing process of thinking **'Well, this is my life. How do I want it to be?'** and really having a sense of your own control over your own destiny is really valuable and important. And I think then many things, in terms of challenges, can be overcome.

So in terms of ways in which you can approach the whole process of work planning, career planning, there are a number of tools and different approaches that you can take, but here are just a few ideas:

1. If your challenge is around really understanding what it is that you want to do. Then one of the ways that we can work on this is to create a bit of a timeline.

So taking a timeline from when you were a little girl and what your aspirations were at that point. And then working your way through the timeline of then to your life now. Just really looking at the time line and identifying key stages of change.

- **So it might have been change in your education life;**
- **It might have been change in your home life;**
- **You might have started to do some work; or**
- **Get involved in some activities.**

And just noticing What were the key moments that were really inspirational for you?

So it could have been, perhaps you were part of a club or a society, you went on an event, and it was a really great thing that you did. And just noticing **what was it about that, that was really positive?**

Thinking about:

- **What were your aspirations when you were a little girl?**
- **What did you say you wanted to do when you were 5, and 7, and 9, and 11?**
- **And if that has kind of gone away, then what can you connect to now that might re-inspire you about what you might think about doing?**

So that's one approach to sort of starting to generate **"Well where does my inspiration lie?"**

2. Another thing you can do is to create a picture. A vision of your future. And you could set a time sometime in the future. It could be a year, three years, 5 years hence. And just draw a picture. It doesn't matter if you can't draw very well, that's not the point. It's just drawing a picture of your whole life and how you would like it to be. And that can be really valuable in terms of helping to:

- **See the areas that are really clear;**
- **See the areas that might not be so clear; and**
- **See what comes out of that kind of exercise.**

**A:** And that might also include how people FEEL at that point. So perhaps writing down some feelings that are connected with that picture.

**Y:** Yeah, absolutely. Absolutely. You want to build a picture that's inspiring for you. And don't worry if it's not clear. Don't worry if there's actually lots of blank space in terms of:

- How you want to be living.
- Where you want to be living.
- What you want to be doing.
- What relationships you want in your life, as well.

There's something about being really holistic. When we think about work, work is part of life, so we need to look at the whole of life.

- What is it that you want the whole of your life to be like?
- And then what aspects of work are important to you about that?

And you can be very practical, so:

- What it is you need to earn?
- So being really clear about what are the practical constraints that you need to put in there. If you've got family, if you've got responsibilities – what are those needs?

They need to be in that picture as well.

- And then, what are the wants?
- What are the things that you desire or aspire for?

It can be really valuable to see, actually, can this come together in any kind of way.

Now you might find that when you've done that, that there are lots of gaps, or there's a sense of well. **How do I get from where I am now, to where I want to be?** And that's when it can be really valuable to start talking to people who might be able to help.

And then there's something about being really clear about your next steps and breaking those down into something that's manageable. So having a plan that gives you the opportunity to say:

- Well, what will I do towards this ambition or this goal or this change in the way I am working or living, that I can do easily? That I can do now?
- And what do I need to plan for and organise for?

One of the models that is really useful and you can find references to this on the internet very easily, is the GROW model, which helps you to look at the challenges that you're working through in a very practical way, and come up with some ideas and some activities that are going to help you move from where you are now, to where you want to be.

**A:** In summary then, what are the key points that people can take away from this?

**J:** Thinking about what inspires you? What motivates you? What you really would like to do with your life.

Thinking about the skills that you have.

- What works for you?
- What might you need to develop further in the future?
- And ways that you might do that?

**Y:** I think that there are a couple of things. One is that having a plan is much better than not having a plan. So spending just some time on this is going to be really valuable for you.

The other is that there may be things that you have no control over in your life. But there are many things that we can make decisions about. We can provide a direction for ourselves on. It's really worth focussing your attention on what you can do rather than what you can't do.

**A:** That just leaves me to say thank you to Yasmin and Jackie for your contribution to today's podcast.

If this podcast has inspired you to think a little bit about your working life, your career and how you might want to develop that, we'd love to hear from you.

You can find a copy of this podcast together with a range of tools and resources that may be helpful to you in this area by visiting [flourish.international/podcasts-and-resources](https://flourish.international/podcasts-and-resources).

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