

Episode 75

Emotion at Work in Joy, Justice and Pregnancy Discrimination

Lizzi Philokyprou

Hello and welcome to the Emotional at Work podcast, where we take a deep dive into the human condition. Our regular listeners will notice that there's something a little bit different about today's episode, that's because it's not being hosted by our regular host, Phil, the founder of Emotion at Work consulting, it's instead being hosted by me. I'm Lizzi and I am the marketing and community manager for Emotion at Work, and I am really excited to get on the air our guest today. A woman who has single handedly fought for justice for working with us everywhere in a workplace tribunal, which many newspapers, including the BBC, The Guardian and The Telegraph, have described as the David v. Goliath Moment. A former senior manager at Mitie, one of the UK's leading facilities management companies, our guest spoke out about the discrimination she faced from her former employer when pregnant, and went on to represent herself in the subsequent court case which ruled in her favour. Welcome to the podcast, Nicola Hinds. Hi, Nicola.

Nicola Hinds

Hi, Lizzi, thank you for having me.

Lizzi Philokyprou

Honestly, super excited to have you on today. How are you doing?

Nicola Hinds

I'm doing good, yeah, it's lovely weather this week, so a lot of sunshine to brighten up the days, but, yeah, I'm doing okay.

Lizzi Philokyprou

I'm really glad to hear that. So, as with all our podcast episodes, we start with an unexpected and yet innocuous question. And so today's question is, after a stressful day or a stressful week at work, what do you like to do to unwind?

Nicola Hinds

Well, if you'd have asked me that question four, five, six years ago, I would have said coming home and rigorously cleaning the house was my therapeutic, unwinding exercise. But most recently, I've got, sort of, a love for books, really. Not fiction or storytelling, but information. Obviously, having gone through a process that I have over the last couple of years, I've found a newfound love for just information. So I've become a bit of an information junkie.

Lizzi Philokyprou

Amazing. Are you reading any really cool books at the minute?

Nicola Hinds

Yes, I am reading, or I have read and still refer to, whilst supporting other ladies in a similar position to me, a brilliant book that I found helped massively during my time as a litigant in person, is the employment claims without a lawyer. So that's written by David Kirwan and it can be purchased on Amazon for a modest price of about 15 pounds. But this book was pretty much my bible and continues to be my bible.

Lizzi Philokyprou

Oh, bless you, wow. So that's kind of like your decompression time is reading and just learning as much as you can?

Nicola Hinds

It is, yeah.

Lizzi Philokyprou

Yeah, that's amazing to hear. What do I do to unwind? Probably walks, I think, especially as the weather gets nicer. That's been a main one for me. So, obviously, I'm sure a lot of our listeners will have heard of your name or heard of your court case in the mass of media coverage, which kicked off, maybe, I want to say, about a month ago, I don't know if that sounds about correct to you?

Nicola Hinds

Yeah, it was the beginning of April when the news media picked up on the case and the outcome.

Lizzi Philokyprou

Yeah. So I'm sure a lot of people will have heard of your story, but I'm really excited today to delve a bit deeper into it. And so to give, I guess, our listeners a bit of context and a bit more information, can you go right back to the beginning and let us know when did you first start to realise or notice that you were being treated unfairly by your employer?

Nicola Hinds

It's actually a difficult one to pinpoint because this treatment happened over a long period of time, there wasn't any one particular moment where I felt that I was being deliberately discriminated against. And I think it's important for the listeners to understand that discrimination isn't always obvious, there are elements of discrimination that can be done under pretence, it can be done covertly. It isn't always an obvious act of discrimination. So I suppose for me, what it was a realisation moment that I'd not had any prior history with struggling with my workload, or elements of my working relationships prior to falling pregnant in 2020. It kind of just felt like since falling pregnant, everything else was falling apart around me in my working environment. And there were just a number of incidences that I just couldn't get out of the back of my mind as to the unanswered question I had, why did that happen to me? It had never happened previously. It hadn't happened to any of my peers, but it happened to me, and it happened when I was pregnant. So, it was an

accumulation of things, and it was actually having conversations with my friends about some of the work struggles that I was having, and some of the feelings and the emotions that I was going through, when those kind of conversations turned into a bit of a question mark around, was I being treated fairly? Was I being treated right? And did my employer and my line managers have my health and well-being at the forefront of their mind during what was a very vulnerable time for me being pregnant, notwithstanding, we were in the middle of the pandemic as well. And once I'd found the headspace to think about what I'd gone through over this period of time did I realise, actually, that this isn't okay, what's been said to me previously was not okay. The inaction of my line managers around some of the struggles that I was raising and had a valid challenge about, the inaction that came after was not okay. And it just led me to, you know, to ask that one question, what was the change from two, three years ago as an employee that wasn't pregnant, suddenly to being an employee that is pregnant? And ultimately, the only answer I could come up with is that it was because I was pregnant. And that's when I first realised that there was something significant in the treatment that I'd received. Although I did suspect there was something not right each time something was happening, my gut was telling me there's something not quite right here, but I just couldn't put my finger on it. And it wasn't until a lot had happened that I realised I need to do something about this, because the way it's made me feel was horrendous, and I wouldn't want anybody else to go through that.

Lizzi Philokyprou

So it sounds like it was an accumulation of things and a lot of reflection, and it sounded like all the pieces suddenly fell into place. Can you tell us a bit about when these individual incidents were happening? First of all, were there any that really stuck in your mind? And secondly, how did you cope at the time?

Nicola Hinds

Yeah, so I'd say that they all stuck in my mind, evidently because I raised them as a claim in the tribunal. I suppose at the time when I was questioning the decisions that were being made or some of the incidents that had happened, I was led to believe that it was system errors. It was just the way that it was. It was a case of just accept it, move on. It was nothing personal. And I always did think, actually, this does feel personal. I've not had any prior issues and things that were happening to me just weren't happening to anybody else. So it did feel very personal. And I carried those thoughts over, and I suppose what those thoughts do is they bring about an element of fear. So you fear creating a bad environment around you. You don't want to be the one that speaks negatively, albeit you're affected in a negative way. So you do fear the adverse consequences. And I think a lot of it is there's a lack of understanding around like a clear complaints procedure when you're pregnant. You carry a belief that nothing will change, and you're stressed and you're tired, you know, you're pregnant. It adds to the workload. But a lot of it is about feeling guilty. You feel guilty for having the thoughts that you're having. Again, if you've always had a good working relationship with your peer group and with your line managers, and with the business as a whole, prior to this, you feel guilty for thinking that they could be responsible for certain things. But there's also the pressure in your personal life around financial costs, if you were to speak up and you were to be treated differently, it resulted in the loss of your income, your job, your career, your comfort blanket, coupled with a lack

of information about rights when pregnant in the workplace, all result in the fear factor. It literally is the fear.

Lizzi Philokyprou

Wow, yeah, just such a mix of emotions and different things that you're having to juggle throughout that period. I understand that you did at one point, rightly so, speak up and say to your manager, I think it was your manager that you were struggling with the workload that you were given. What was their reaction to that when you just said, look, I need a little bit of help here?

Nicola Hinds

Yeah. It was a combination of I was being bullied by a client who I was working closely with on a particular project. It was an important project. It was a multi-million pound project that was crucial to the continuation of the client contract, and that itself added pressure. And then obviously a hostile environment along with that pressure, at some point it's going to bubble over. I was used to just cracking on, getting the job done with very little fuss, but I'd become vulnerable and I'd started to fear the fear. I will keep using that word, it's the fear. So at one point, the environment around me had become so toxic, it had led to a series of panic attacks in late stages of pregnancy. I was around 30 weeks pregnant when I suffered from this quick succession of panic attacks. And I thought, at this point I'm just going to have to face that fear and have an open and honest frank conversation with my line manager to say, look, I'm not coping very well, for a number of reasons, there's a hostile relationship I'm having to face every day. There's an increase in workload in the late stages of pregnancy, when really I should have been focusing on making sure my successor had a robust handover to make sure things carried on as they should. So when I eventually raised these issues, first informally, I was told, that they'll be dealt with, we'll support you, don't worry about it. Although you're worrying about it. But unfortunately, nothing seemed to change, it just seemed to be lip service. There was no action, or there was certainly no action that I could see, and that resulted in any change that alleviated the pressure that I was under. So eventually I had to make it formal. So I emailed my line manager and another manager with a very raw, honest account of the pressure I was feeling at that time. And unfortunately, that email, which pretty much could have been taken from a page in my diary, was just not acted upon. It wasn't responded to, it wasn't acted upon. And I just felt, in that moment, completely insignificant. I felt completely worthless. I felt as if I was a massive inconvenience. I wasn't asking for a lot, I was just asking for a standard of care towards an exhausted employee about the environment that I was working in, the working conditions that I was working in, not as a pregnant mother or mother to be. In effect, I was an employee asking for my work environment to be changed in order to support my mental health and well-being.

Lizzi Philokyprou

Oh, my gosh. Yeah, it just sounds awful the things that you had to go through and the amount of pressure and stress, both physically and mentally, that must have put on you. Did it affect, I guess, your physical and mental well-being whilst being pregnant in those later stages? Were there any health complications that came because of that environment?

Nicola Hinds

It did, yeah. So ultimately, my baby stopped growing at 30 weeks for a period of two to three weeks, which coincided with the panic attacks that I was suffering from. So there was a very high chance that there was a link there between the work related stress and the effect it had on my baby. Certainly from my own mental health point of view, I had no prior history with mental health. I understood it as a line manager of people. I'd supported many employees that had expressed issues with work related stress or even personal issues that were affecting their work environment. And I understood it as a line manager, but when you're going through it yourself, sometimes you don't recognise that's what you're going through and that's what you're suffering from. I did think once I'd gone on to maternity leave and the work related stress and pressure wasn't there anymore, that my mental health would improve. And in fact, that's what happened, I thoroughly enjoyed the time that I got to spend with my baby, albeit under difficult circumstances to begin with, he was born early. And he had a couple of days in hospital, in the high dependency unit because of his jaundice. But once home, you're in that new baby bubble, you realise it was just a blip or you think it was just a blip. So, you get on with that moment in time which is being a new parent, you're on maternity leave, you're enjoying that time bonding with the baby, but then obviously work starts to creep back up because you're only on maternity for so long. You've got keeping touch days that you want to utilise to make sure that you're not falling behind from an information point of view. And obviously, you still want to feel part of a team, you don't want to be forgotten. Unfortunately, in my case, that's very much how I felt. Once I'd implemented the keeping in touch days, there was very little contact from my peer group, my line manager, the business as a whole. I would often log on and there'd be nobody there to interact with. I'd had no direction in terms of what I needed to be doing, what I needed to be looking at, and it just felt like I'd been completely forgotten about. So the build up to going back to work again, became full of fear. It was, okay, so if I've only been off for a short period of time and I've been forgotten already, what is my actual physical return to work going to look like? And you start to then go back over everything that happened before maternity leave and you start to question again, why did it happen? And why didn't your peer group and your line manager stop it from escalating to the point that it did? And again, you feel guilty for having those thoughts, you feel guilty for suggesting that there was ill intent. But then when you receive the confirmation, as I did through the employment tribunal, that there was some intent there. It does feel bittersweet. You've got the endorsement that you wasn't going crazy, these things were happening and they were wrong. But there's that sadness to it that it happened to you. I never thought I'd be one of the statistics, but unfortunately I am. And through this, I'd like to make sure that there's fewer women who end up being one of those statistics moving forward.

Lizzi Philokyprou

Definitely. I think I was going to ask, because this was the pregnancy with your second child, am I right?

Nicola Hinds

Yes.

Lizzi Philokyprou

So, was this experience, had you faced anything like this when you were pregnant with your first child? And did you know a lot about, I guess, pregnancy discrimination before this whole experience?

Nicola Hinds

So, no. So, my eldest is going to be 16 this year and my youngest is three, so there's a 12 year age gap there between the two of them. And 16 years ago, I think the world operated in a different way. I was still working in security 16 years ago. That effectively is my whole career, the security industry. So, I've always worked in that male dominated environment. And I think understanding pregnancy discrimination is really difficult. So, the only one thing that sticks out in my mind, from my first pregnancy, is that around about five/six months pregnant, somebody in my work environment asked me to lift up my top to show my bump. And whilst it made me feel uncomfortable, you know, I was in my early twenties back then, so whilst it made me feel uncomfortable and it felt a bit odd like that would be a question that gets asked, did I know in that instance that was a form of pregnancy discrimination because you'd never ask a man to lift their top up? No, I didn't. As a young 22 year old, no, I did not know that, that was pregnancy and discrimination. And actually the realisation of that being discrimination came about during this set of circumstances. When I thought back, you know, to what had happened to me 16 years ago, would that happen in today's society? Absolutely not, but it did 16 years ago and we weren't aware that would have been discrimination.

Lizzi Philokyprou

Do you think, obviously, because it sounds like it wasn't just the managers and your manager that participated in the discriminatory behaviour, it sounds like it was some of your peer group as well, and it obviously sounds like you were working in a very male dominated environment. Do you think that when you were treated in that way, do you think the people were acting in that way and saying the things that were said, do you think they understood that they were participating in pregnancy discrimination, or do you think it was just bias in their own minds that were leading them to say and do those things?

Nicola Hinds

I mean, it's very difficult to say what's going through somebody else's mind at the time. I think it's quite clear that there is a lot of unconscious bias in the workplace, and that can be from both males and females, and it can be directed towards pregnancy, disability or any other kinds of discrimination.

ADVERT

Throughout this episode, Nicola's been highlighting firsthand just how impactful the unconscious biases and often unacknowledged emotions that drive people's behaviours at work can really be. And that's where we come in. We are experts at placing emotions at the heart of the people, the processes and the places of work by educating managers, teams and individuals on how to properly

understand and regulate both their own and other people's emotions to create a workplace where everyone can truly thrive. If you fancy taking a look at how we could transform your workplace culture into one where people consistently feel safe, confident and optimistic, you can book in a completely free, no strings attached call with us today to discover how we are creating a better world of work for everyone. For now, we'll head back to the podcast.

Lizzi Philokyprou

I'd love to know from your perspective, obviously, someone that has been very high up in leadership and management, and someone who has faced pregnancy discrimination, what can employers do and what message can they give to their managers to break this unconscious bias that is still about in the workplace against pregnant women?

Nicola Hinds

Yeah, they need to invest in training. They need to make sure that training is adequate for the topic. And they also need to make sure that the managers they appoint into senior manager roles or even middle manager roles that have got responsibility for employees, you've got to make sure that their behaviours align with that. Because you can have all the training in the world, but if the person who is responsible for understanding that training and then putting it into effect on the shop floor, so to speak, doesn't have the correct behaviours, then that training isn't going to go far. If all they're interested in is results, is generating income, is, I don't know, impressing the clients, impressing the hierarchy, impressing the boss, then that's good for one aspect of the business, but it's not good for the people on the ground, the bread and butter, the people that are actually creating those results, creating that profit, and building the relationship with the clients and the powers that be. Whilst we are probably seen as the little people, businesses are nothing without us. So, treat us with respect, treat us in line with law, treat us in line with policy, don't pledge to be an inclusive employer and that you're going to eradicate this, that and the other, and you're not going to participate in any wrongdoing if all that's happening beneath three levels below is exactly that. So, make sure you get your people right, because it's your people that affect other people.

Lizzi Philokyprou

Definitely. But, yeah, I loved what you said about the importance of not just training, but behaviour change in the workplace, because I think often, training can sometimes be seen almost like a tick box exercise. And it's like once you're trained, you're done, you move on. But actually, it's like, does that training and those lessons show up in everyday life, everyday work, everyday management?

Nicola Hinds

Absolutely. If you've got a manager out there that's had a handful of grievances against him, that's not because he's a good manager and knows how to say no to people and get the job done, that's probably because he doesn't understand the emotional side of making decisions that involve other people. They may well be great at making decisions for the business, but they've also got to make decisions that affect other people.

Lizzi Philokprou

Definitely. It sounds like, obviously, this has been an awful experience for you and it sounds like it's ignited a real passion to advocate for other people that have experienced similar treatment or could experience similar treatment if or when they decide to have children. I understand that from this experience you've launched Pregnant Pickle Limited. Can you tell us a little bit more about that?

Nicola Hinds

Yeah, absolutely. I think how Pregnant Pickle came about was I'd clearly gone through a situation in my work environment, which ultimately ended my career. I had no choice but to constructively resign. It was so bad, I just could not continue in that environment anymore. And when I was trying to research for my own needs in relation to the employment tribunal, I realised that it was taking a lot of time and a lot of energy to find this information. And when I thought back to at what point would it have helped me during my journey with pregnancy in the workplace, if this information was readily available in one place? And I started speaking to my local community down at the midwife centre and the Maternity Voices Partnership, and realised that there was absolutely nothing included in the maternal side of being pregnant, it was all about your health, baby's health, but nothing about the work stresses or the work pressures that a pregnant woman may face. And there certainly wasn't anything about highlighting the most common forms of pregnancy discrimination. And whilst I don't believe that sits with the healthcare providers entirely, I do believe that there is a part to play in those questions being asked when you go in for your general checkups. They assess baby's health, they assess your health, but I do believe there should be questions around home and work environments. So, I started to think about how could I make sure that information is there and it's readily available. So, working with the maternity services local to me in Doncaster and with the support of the council, they funded a website for me, which I created, Pregnant Pickle. And it initially was just to help support the new and expectant parents in and around Doncaster, but I've had people contact me from further afield. I'm just pleased it can help anybody if they're looking for that information. But it's basically just a free online tool to offer resources, guidance, support for anyone who feels that they're going through discrimination or even if they're just having a difficult time at work whilst pregnant or returning to work following maternity leave. Just somewhere where they can ask a question and get given either an answer or directed to where they can find that answer. And there are other platforms out there, you know, offering similar services. And one platform that I used quite heavily throughout this whole process was the fantastic charity Pregnant Then Screwed. They were my inspiration around wanting to support my local community with support and my newfound knowledge of navigating an employment tribunal. I wanted to be able to hold their hand should they need to go through it, because I didn't have anyone to hold my hand. I, kind of, navigated this all myself, albeit I had a mentor from Pregnant Then Screwed, and she was absolutely fantastic, but not close enough, unfortunately, to meet face to face. So, it was all done over email, phone, WhatsApp, Voicenotes. But I would love to be able to support women or new parents in Doncaster, and actually physically be present for them, because it is a very emotionally draining process to put yourself through. It has its highs and it has its lows and just having somebody who's gone through it, put an arm around you and tell you it's all going to be okay, and you'll get there eventually, hopefully there's light at the end of the tunnel was really the inspiration around setting Pregnant Pickle up.

Lizzi Philokyprou

Wow, that is incredible. And I've been on the website myself, and the information and the tools there are just, I think, for someone who finds themselves in a similar situation will just be invaluable. I'd be interested to know, obviously you mentioned, that going through that process of representing yourself all the legal stuff that comes with that, the learning curve that you must have had to go on, what did that experience teach you?

Nicola Hinds

Well, first of all, I feel like I've missed out on a first in a law degree, I really should have took myself through that process at the same time. But just being able to take in this information and know that not only did it help me navigate the process and resulted in a successful tribunal claim for constructive dismissal and pregnancy and maternity discrimination, but knowing that having gone through it at the same time as learning it, it's now deep rooted in me enough to then feel confident in supporting others around me. And I'm currently mentoring a number of women that are at various stages of their employment tribunal claims. Some are due to have their hearings in the next few weeks. We've got some that are just starting the process with issuing an ET1. And I do that all in my spare time. I do that out of sheer compassion to want to support these women. And I know from my own experience that this process can be costly. And I don't just mean financially, I mean, on your time and on your emotions. So, I just want to make sure that I can help alleviate any of those pressures or some of those pressures as best as I can.

Lizzi Philokyprou

Definitely, I can't imagine what it was like because I'm imagining you were going through the prep for the case at the same time that you had like a very young, newborn child. What was it like juggling all of that?

Nicola Hinds

So, my little boy's three and a half now, and it wasn't until three months ago, four months ago, I don't even know what month we're on now, beginning of the year that I actually got the outcome, the result. So, it's been a very, very long process. And some cases may be different. My case obviously came about at the back end of COVID, it had an impact in the courts, there was a lot of backlogging cases being heard. And I think I was maybe at the end of that line, so it's, kind of, taken a little bit longer than what it probably normally would. But I learnt to deal with the two aspects separately. It was important that I was a mother to my young child, but it was also equally important to me that I sought justice in what was a career, which provided the roof over our heads. I needed to make sure that I conducted both roles equally. So, it was like mother by day, you know, legal novice, legal beagle by night. And again, the whole process has had its ups and downs. There were some very dark periods of time, when I constructively resigned. It affected us financially. I'd had a secure salary for 12 years, which I was the main breadwinner within the family. It paid the mortgage, it paid my mother-in-law's mortgage, because we could afford to, and to lose that, we lost complete financial stability. And it did result in a mortgage refusal when we came up to renew the following year. And it did affect my mental health to a point where I'd hit the depths of depression.

There were thoughts of suicide and there were decisions I was making that were completely irrational because of the state that I was in mentally at the time. And that was a very tough period for me. I'd lost my identity, I didn't know who I was anymore. I'd spent 12 years power dressing, getting up and going to the office and trying to be the best employee I could be. I was results driven, I operated at 100 miles an hour as did everybody else. But when you lose all that and you don't actually know what your identity is anymore, aside from being a mum and a wife, and a friend, and a family member, the one thing that I had that was mine that I'd created, that I was in control of, which was my career, I suddenly didn't have anymore, and I wasn't in control anymore. It's silly little things like, I didn't even know what my fashion sense was, because I just used to wear office attire. So, I'd get up and I'd go, how do I dress today? And there were some questionable dress choices knocking about in the first couple of months. You're trying to figure out who you are again. They talk about, and I don't mean to offend anybody with this comparison, but they talk about soldiers being in the Army, they've been in there for a long time, they could become conditioned into certain routines, and obviously there's an element of them struggling back out in civvy life. Now, to some degree it's pretty similar in terms of any job career that you've put your heart and soul into. You've missed birthday parties, you've missed Christmas plays, you've missed a lot in terms of your children's first walking, first words to give to your career. People find a passion for their career, and I had, it was my passion, I lived and breathed it. So, to lose it all, yeah, it was like I was grieving a huge part of my life. And I felt bitter for missing my eldest's first moments and those school plays. And it did, it put me in that deep depression. But surely over time, with the support of friends, family, and learning to accept some of the things that had happened, I was able to pull myself out of that deep depression. And I'm still struggling, I'm still processing a few bits as time moves on, and I probably will do for the next few years. But one good thing that came out of this situation,, that I like to call the silver lining of it all, is I met an absolutely incredible woman through Pregnant Pickle, setting up Pregnant Pickle as a social platform. And I ended up donating my kidney to this woman. And that process of donating the kidney, really, really helped come out the other end of that depression. So, it's often said I saved her life, but she really saved mine.

Lizzi Philokyprou

I'm literally, yeah, that stunned. That's incredible. Oh, my gosh, so many questions that I could ask. It sounds like you've refound and reclaimed your identity. How do you feel about yourself now? Is as much of you tied to your career as was before, or have you embraced new interests, new hobbies, new passions?

Nicola Hinds

I do. I miss my career. I miss despite the situation that was created around me and it was a terrible experience, but not everybody that I worked with was responsible for that terrible experience. So, I miss my career. I miss my old work buddies and just having that place away from home with people of similar mindsets, , got the same interests in terms of the working industry. I do miss it, but it makes me really nervous to want to go back into it, because it's had such a detrimental effect on my mental health and well-being. It makes me really nervous to put the trust for somebody to support my mental health and well-being, to put that trust back into them. So, in terms of, what I'm doing now is I am pretty passionate on using my experience to support other new and expectant mums with regards to discrimination. I'm also really passionate about being an advocate for living kidney

donation. So, I would say my newfound identity is to fight for the underdogs and keep fighting for the underdogs.

Lizzi Philokyprou

That's incredible to hear. Thinking about your activism and this passion for helping others and helping new and expectant mums, what advice would you give to any mum to be that, maybe they're in the early stages of pregnancy and they're thinking, okay, I'm really committed to my career, but I want to make sure that I can have an enjoyable pregnancy, that is everything that I want it to be. I get to spend that time with my baby et cetera. What advice would you give to them in terms of managing and working with their employer to make sure they have a good experience being pregnant at work?

Nicola Hinds

Absolutely. I think that one of the things that I've reflected back on is communication. You may be good at it, they may be good at it, you both may not be good at it, you might equally be bad at it, but find somebody who you are able to communicate with. It doesn't need to be your line manager. It doesn't need to be your immediate peer group. It doesn't need to be HR. Just somebody in the business that you can speak to and communicate with around things that you feel are affecting you, that are not okay. And more often than not, by speaking to somebody else, you accept that those things are not right. And the next stage or the next step would be to ask this person to help support you in resolving this or if they have any advice and guidance in helping you bring it to the attention of those that need to be aware of it. This is the thing that happens when you're pregnant, whether it's a career, whether it's a job, whether it's a part time job, whether it's just a Sunday weekend role, it doesn't matter how many hours you work, it doesn't matter what level you are within your career progression. When you become pregnant, you become internally vulnerable to your own emotions. And one of the things that you tend to do is go into the fight or flight mode. And as much as women will try and defend themselves and say, we're fierce mummies, we will fight to the ends of the earth, the reality is you actually go into flight mode because you want to protect the pregnancy, you want to protect the baby and everything around you, and you do lose your voice. Not for some women. Some women will cope with it absolutely fine and they will continue to speak up and say, no, that is not okay. But for the vast majority of women, regardless of your personality, your character, the behaviours you had before falling pregnant, they will become vulnerable, they will lose their voice, their confidence goes. So, find somebody within the work environment to just speak to about things. Sharing is caring at the end of the day. But also speak to your midwives. Now whilst they're there obviously to deal with the health and well-being of you and the baby, they will know what there is in the local environment in terms of support groups. I've had a number of referrals come through from the local midwives with expectant parents that have started to talk about work related stresses affecting pregnancy. So, I'm here, obviously, supporting residents of Doncaster. There may well be somebody like me out there supporting the residents of other towns, cities and communities. So, just ask the question and try not to suffer in silence. Read the grievance policy, read the maternity policy, read all the company procedures that support this period of time and use them to structure the conversation to say, hang on a minute, according to the policy, I should have had a risk assessment, it's not happened yet, can you tell me when it's going to happen? And unfortunately, in my own situation, a risk assessment didn't happen. And had it have happened, it would have picked

up and documented a lot of the stresses and pressures that I was going through. But unfortunately, despite expressing that these things hadn't happened, it continued to not happen. So, that's an employer who just doesn't care, not an employer who's just become too busy and forgot. So, ask the questions. Not every employer is deliberately going to discriminate against you. Unfortunately, there are a small number of employers that do from an unconscious or even conscious bias. But the vast majority are going to want to be supportive, they're going to want to make sure that you are okay. And if they didn't know about it, then to get that support and that action, talk about it, even if it's just with somebody outside of the department that you work with, just talk about it.

Lizzi Philokyprou

Definitely. And similarly, if, say, you are a colleague and you know there's someone in your workplace that is expecting, what can peers and colleagues do to support pregnant women in the workplace?

Nicola Hinds

Yeah, just be there. Just make sure you have time to accommodate a conversation. Pregnant women go through a lot. Anatomy wise giving birth is somewhat of a miracle. Pregnant women go through a lot and they try not to let it change the work environment, they try not to let the pregnancy itself be the issue at work. But unfortunately, not every pregnancy is the same. Some people will suffer quite heavily, some people will suffer a loss, some people will suffer detrimentally with their own health and wellbeing whilst carrying a child. And workplaces need to adapt. They need to accept that women get pregnant. They are going to want to start families and they are also going to want to still have a career, because it should never be a choice, it should be accepted. As fathers go off on paternity leave, albeit for a small period of time for most of them, but there is the shared parental leave now that needs to be promoted and businesses need to talk about it, they need to put it at the front of the maternity policy, not at the back. It shouldn't be hid away, as in, we hope you don't find this. Because actually, to support mothers in the work environment, you've equally got to support the fathers. So, I think businesses need to be a bit more open and honest, a bit more accepting and a bit more in the 20th century, as opposed to the archaic way of working decades ago. And colleagues just need to be there, they just need to be a listening ear. We don't ask for special treatment, we don't expect special treatment, we just expect to be treated as we should be.

Lizzi Philokyprou

Brilliant. Thank you so much, Nicola. I think, yeah, there's some fantastic pieces of advice and insight there. As we begin to wrap up, is there anything else you want to tell the listeners or say to the listeners?

Nicola Hinds

I just want to give empowerment, encouragement to parents out there that you can do this. Often I speak to parents that just say they've gone through a terrible time, they've lost their careers, they've lost their jobs, but they just haven't got a fight in them to bring the company to justice. And that's okay. That is okay. It's a very personal journey. You don't have to take action, but I hope you tell

everybody about them. I hope you name drop and tell absolutely everybody how terrible this company was to you. Because that's the problem. We have these companies who, as in my case, you know, Mitie in 2016, became one of the eight founding members to eradicate pregnancy discrimination in the workplace, here we are in 2024 and my case is hitting the headlines. So, from 2016 to 2024, what's happened? What have you actually done differently? Because whatever it is you pledged back then, certainly wasn't implemented and stopped it from happening to me. So, I just want women to know that it is okay not to take action, but it's okay to take action, you can do it. And there's people like me, there's people like Pregnant Then Screwed. There's an absolute fantastic company called Valla V-A-L-L-A, who pretty much can support and navigate you through the whole process, with templates of documents that you would pay hundreds of thousands of pounds for a solicitor to complete for you. And they were a huge resource to me in navigating this. We've got books galore, Amazon. There's other, obviously, outlets out there, but employment tribunal claims. Tactics and precedents. Yeah, there really is tactics and precedents being deployed in employment tribunals when you're acting as a litigant in person. The solicitors, the barristers, the respondents will try and use that to their advantage the fact that you're legally untrained. But there's literally little bibles out there that will forewarn you about what's going to happen, what's coming? Employment claims without a lawyer and do it yourself, right down to cross examination. How do you cross examine somebody in court? Google is a wonderful thing. If you've got a question, Google's got the answer, definitely.

Lizzi Philokyprou

Wow. I feel like you've just. You've set out like the D.I.Y personal litigation kit or something. That's incredible. And we will be putting the links to all the books you just shared. So, Pregnant Pickle. Pregnant then Screwed, any other websites or resources that you've mentioned in the show notes, so anyone that's thinking about taking their employer to court or is just interested in this subject, they can grab all the resources there. Yeah. Nicola, you've been a just amazing, amazing guest. Thank you so much for everything you shared. I understand that you've been through so much and then to share it, you're going to an extent be reliving it all. So thank you so much for everything. And I really wish you all the best. I think you're doing amazing work and I'm so happy to hear that you've refound and reclaimed your identity. Yeah, it's just incredible. So, yeah, thank you so, so much.

Nicola Hinds

Thank you for having me. I really appreciate the time. Thank you.