The women I work with are concerned about younger women who have had a professional career. Most of them are between the ages of 40 and 50 and need to be face to face. We’re noticing that, for creativity to flourish, not everyone can work remotely. But we’ve also realised over that period is that many people from diverse backgrounds with the knowledge, resources and support that they need to pursue careers in technology.

**JENNIFER:** Have you found any recurring themes that you’ve seen?

**CAMILLA:** We’ve been exploring the idea of women re-entering work, particularly those who left in the wake of the pandemic. Camilla, you work with those who are reinventing themselves as they move forward. There’s a real feeling of being put the past behind them and move forward. They’re so motivated to build a career, that they’ve all had some hard times. They’ve stepped out of it by choice, usually to raise a family, and have felt privileged to have been able to do so. But they’re emerging a decade later, thinking, “I used to be somebody, but I don’t have leverage any more.” They don’t know how to repackage their experience and make it credible to the outside world, despite being very smart women.

**SHAREENA:** In terms of building confidence, does it help to create a community around similar experiences? Is that something you’ve seen at the Luminary Bakery, Alice?

**ALICE:** It’s amazing seeing women forming close communities. They might not know what everyone else has been through but they’re aware that they’ve all had some hard times. They’re so motivated to build a career, put the past behind them and move forward. There’s a real feeling of being in it together.

**ADAPTING TO CHANGE**

**SHAREENA:** Workplaces have changed significantly over the past two years. Flexibility is growing but it doesn’t always deliver what individuals want and need. What are we learning?

**JENNIFER:** At Mastercard we realised over that period is that many of us can work remotely. But we’ve also noticed that, for creativity to flourish, we need to be face to face. We’re concerned about younger women who...
joined at the height of the pandemic, as it has become apparent that they don’t have the same networks as those who have had plenty of water-cooler moments at the office. We want them to feel as though they’re able to progress up the career ladder but worry that this has become harder. On the flipside, we have tried to be forward-thinking about flexibility. Employees can now spend four weeks a year working from anywhere in the world. It’s great for those who have parents living far away, for example, or those with caring responsibilities.

ANNA: Deloitte has managed to do something quite clever: on its website or those with caring responsibilities.

SHARLEA-JAYE: At The Intrapreneurs Club I’ve been meeting a lot of potential investors. One thing that we keep hearing is that they want to meet in person to better understand the venture. Online slide decks are all well and good but they can only take investors so far. They want to get a feel for who you are and you can only achieve that face to face.

NEW BEGINNINGS

SHAREENA: We've spoken about what employers can do to support women but what can be done at a policy level? Suneeal, at the London Progression Collaboration, you’re working with employers and government. What are the real impediments?

SUNEAL: Over the past two years we’ve created 1,000 new apprenticeships. About 56 per cent of the apprentices are female and 60 per cent are from underserved or under-represented communities. We’re enabling gender equality and inclusion in certain sectors, such as digital technology and construction, but we also want to support sectors like adult social care or early-years care, which are vital to London’s economy. That’s fundamental both for business and for anyone coming back into work. You need effective childcare or social care provision that isn’t prohibitively expensive and doesn’t impede individuals from taking a new job. We encourage the London Living Wage at £11.05 an hour and support small employers with putting unspent levy funds towards training.

SHAREENA: Again, the big societal building blocks are very important. Support at a government level in early years can pay off when it comes to the long-term economic prospects of women with caring commitments.

ANNA: I had a baby in Amsterdam, a maternity nurse who cares for who you are and you can only achieve that face to face.

SHAREENA: If I’m being honest, I would still like to be working for a company. I liked the structure and security. I knew other women like me who set up their own venture not as a choice but as a last-chance option.

RACH: There’s a terrible irony when it comes to women who decide to set up their own businesses. Of course, it’s incredibly empowering but many become founders because they can’t find a job with hours that work for them or they can’t get people to take them seriously after a career break. The obvious path seems to be to launch their own thing.

SHAREENA: So we have heard about the challenges of confidence and the ability to pivot, as well as the role of employers and policy in providing support and an enabling environment. Clearly this isn’t a problem that a single actor can solve. We look forward to continuing this conversation in the forthcoming instalments of the series.