



## **We Are Vodafone - Episode 1**

Transcript

### **HOST**

Cara McGoogan

### **GUESTS**

Annelies Valk, Precious Nkula

**Cara McGoogan:** Welcome to We Are Vodafone, a new podcast series where we'll bring together people from very different parts of the organisation to hear their opinions, theories, fears, passions and successes. Over the course of this series, we'll explore the subjects that matter most to you and how they impact on your life.

I'm Cara McGoogan, a journalist and podcaster. And in our first episode, we're going to delve into the world of working parents and the impact that gender equality has on juggling the balance between working and raising children. First, we're going to hear from Annelies Valk and Precious Nkula about this subject that's very close to both their hearts. So, I've got Precious and Annelies here with me. Precious is in South Africa. And Annelies, you're in London, is that right?

**Annelies Valk:** That's it. Yep.

**Cara McGoogan:** Do you want to start by introducing yourself to Precious and tell us a little bit about yourself?

**Annelies Valk:** Of course. Good morning, Precious and Cara. My name is Annelies Valk. I've been working at Vodafone for over eight years already, about eight and a half years. And I'm half Irish, half Dutch. And now I live in London, which is exactly in between both of my other homes. I actually started my career at Vodafone in the Netherlands, so in our Amsterdam office as a Discover graduate. And I've been in the Group team for about four years now. So, I moved to London four years ago to get with my then boyfriend, now fiancé. He was supposed to be my husband, but because of the pandemic, we cancelled three of our planned weddings.

**Cara McGoogan:** Oh, wow.

**Annelies Valk:** It was an interesting year, 2020, to say the least. But I'm now pregnant, so that's very exciting. And I'm looking forward to talking to you about that today.

**Cara McGoogan:** Congratulations.

**Annelies Valk:** Thank you. It's also great to meet you, Precious, today.

**Precious Nkula:** Well, nice meeting you. Firstly, I just want to say congratulations, for your pregnancy. And well congratulations to be in Vodafone for -

**Annelies Valk:** Thank you.



**Precious Nkula:** ... a long time. So just to introduce myself, my name is Precious Nkula. I am a wife of one and a mother of three. So working for Vodafone for about 19 years now. I joined Vodafone as a call centre agent. I've been at Vodafone for about 19 years already, but I've moved in different roles in Vodafone. So, my interest to be in Vodafone ... in my previous job I worked at Telkom, which is one of the telecoms in SA. I'm a specialist in Revenue Assurance in Vodafone Business Africa. I'm also the Chairperson of the Vodafone Women's Network Forum.

I'm very passionate about women empowerment, which is one of the reasons that made me to join the forum. Outside of work, I do participate in many charity events and organisations. So, that is me in a nutshell. Thanks.

**Cara McGoogan:** So, Annelies, you're pregnant and there's a lot of decisions that you'll be making in the run up to having your first child, who's a boy, am I right?

**Annelies Valk:** Yes, it's a boy [laughs].

**Cara McGoogan:** Oh, congrats. And Precious, obviously with three children that span quite a big age range, you've got a lot of experience in this. So, I thought it would be interesting for us to have a conversation about how you balance your work, Precious, and Annelies, how you're thinking of setting up your home and how you'll balance that with your partner.

**Precious Nkula:** Yes. Well, on my side, yes, three kids two teenagers and a four-year old son, I think how I balance my life, I really don't have you know, to say, "This is the rule," or "How you do it," but how I do it. And I know in my intro I said I've got many roles that I play, but I think my kids and my family, they come first. They my first priority. Sometimes you do drop the ball as a parent, because you find out there are events that you can't attend. But I think it is so okay.

**Cara McGoogan:** Yeah, it's important not to be too hard on yourself, isn't it? Annelies, from your perspective, how long do you and your fiancé plan to take for parental leave?

**Annelies Valk:** I'm going to be taking the full year that Vodafone's offering. So I'm very excited to see how that will be. And my husband has ... Or sorry, not my husband. I wish.

**Cara McGoogan:** [laughs]

**Annelies Valk:** No, he, he's still my fiancé. He, um-

**Cara McGoogan:** [laughs]

**Annelies Valk:** ... actually has six weeks at the beginning. And then he's very flexible to work from wherever. So I think he'll be also spending some more time, like, at home working and helping where he can over the course of the year.

**Cara McGoogan:** And do you still have family in the Netherlands and Ireland? Did, do you plan on doing a bit of traveling as well?

**Annelies Valk:** Yeah, so my parents actually live in Ireland. And my fiancé's parents live in the Netherlands. So, yes, I'm hoping that travel will be opening up a bit more, fingers crossed, and that I'll be able to spend some time on both sides of either sea to yeah, be with my family in Ireland as well as in the Netherlands for a bit.



**Cara McGoogan:** Do you have a very wide support network in London as well, or is that something that you're going to have to adapt to?

**Annelies Valk:** Yeah. I'm lucky to have lots of friends here in London who are very supportive as well and some actually are also pregnant or just have had kids. So definitely have a support network here in London as well. I also have some family here. But the most, I'd say, of my friends are all in Amsterdam. So I'm definitely looking also to spend some time over there. And yeah, maybe meet some new moms in the neighbourhood. Apparently, that's a thing that happens a lot. So, I'm looking forward to meeting new people and kind of seeing what this new life will be like. Yeah, so I'm excited.

**Precious Nkula:** So if I could just share a little bit story about with my first child when I was pregnant. I mean, I knew nothing, you know, maybe this can also assist you. You know, I knew nothing about pregnancy and that it was quite a challenge. But I must say that, that the parental that I got from Vodafone for about six months, that actually assisted me because I give birth through C-section.

So you know, you could understand the time it takes, you know, for, for the healing and all that. And I needed some, some guidance, you know, on how to deal with the things. And I think that six months for me, it was really a blessing for me. But how I balance my life I must say, I mean, my two girls now, they are old I mean, they can still do things. The only one that I think now still needs my attention, it's the younger one.

But what I do, I make sure, as I said, weekends are really family time. I will make sure that I take them out weekends, and then we spend time. But during the week, now that we are working from home, it's also giving me more time to be with my family as well, you know. I think the first month of lockdown, we were all locked inside during the pandemic, you know. It was really tough.

**Annelies Valk:** You know, when I think about it I think the pandemic obviously has a lot of negative impacts on family lives. Indeed, those stats that we see are very worrying. I think with a newborn you know, let's say my partner would be staying, working from home for a longer period of time, I actually kind of would see that maybe as a plus that he'd be around for a bit longer rather than traveling and working. So if that is the case, obviously we don't know how the next few months will unfold.

I think more broadly you know, things that might worry me around motherhood are, you know, there's a lot of talk and research also out there that kind of say, like, that gender inequality specifically occurs after the moment that people get kids. And whilst I've been very lucky throughout my career actually to not really have been faced with a lot of disadvantages of being a woman in the workplace. I've had great managers, both female and male, who've been very supportive of my journey. I do worry about, you know, maybe this is the moment where I'll start to feel [laughs] that everything is becoming a bit more unequal.

I'm particularly interested to see how that would manifest and where you know, how women experience motherhood in the sense of that they have less opportunities, for example, how that would unfold in my life. But I have good hopes for summer of 2021 [laughs].

**Cara McGoogan:** Yeah, fingers crossed [laughs]. Definitely. And how, how many months until you're due?



**Annelies Valk:** About three months. So, I'm in the last bit of it. Yeah, so it will be a spring baby, so I'm very excited. And yeah, let's see. Compared to Precious, I'm a total amateur. I have no idea [laughs] what I'm doing.

**Cara McGoogan:** [laughs]

**Annelies Valk:** So I'm very grateful for this chat on a Friday morning to get some inspiration around how to balance and plan.

**Cara McGoogan:** And so, three months to go. What sort of preparations have you been making with your partner?

**Annelies Valk:** I'm obviously also very thankful for the maternity leave that I'll be getting from Vodafone. So, I will be taking that. And he luckily also has lots of holidays that he can take, and his company's very flexible. So, he can work from wherever. So, we're quite flexible in that sense. I must say he's ... I'm very lucky that he's a very domestic and parental person for himself. So I think definitely we will really strive to have an equal balance in our relationship in carrying duties for the child.

And similar actually to Precious, I'm also very passionate about gender equality. And I find that actually one of the key ways we can achieve more gender equality is that there's more role models and there's better representation of what women can do in the world. So I definitely also intend to set a good example for my son to show what kind of roles women can take in life and therefore definitely also continue to pursue my career in a way that I did before. So I'm lucky that in my relationship, there's a lot of space for that as well.

**Precious Nkula:** I really am passionate about women empowerment, but I'm raising a son. As much as we are imparting girls and the women, I think we really need not to forget about the boys as well. So, when we have this conversation, we also need to bring a boy child in this conversation. So, raising a boy child for me, I'm very aware that I need to make sure that he grows up as a man that is very aware about his role as a man in society and not to be biased about the societal barriers that are there.

So, yeah, there are a lot of stories that I can tell [laughs] about my son, but one thing that comes to my mind, I think the other day we had to ... oh, we went for swimming. So, I just took one of the, you know, the towels from the girls, you know, with all the Barbies and all that.

**Cara McGoogan:** [laughs]

**Precious Nkula:** And he started telling me, "No, mommy, this one is not for boys. This one is for girls." And then and there, I realised that, "Okay, now he's starting to follow the trend of knowing that blues are for boys and that pinks are for girls." You know? One thing for sure, I'm raising my son knowing and understanding that he's just a normal human being. There's no boys or girls, you know. And we need to balance that gender equality in my household.

**Cara McGoogan:** Yeah, too right. So, did you make him take the Barbie towel for swimming?

**Precious Nkula:** So, yeah, because that was the only towel. For me, it was like-

**Cara McGoogan:** [laughs]



**Precious Nkula:...** "This is just a towel, boy. Whether it's pink or whether it's blue, it's just a towel." So, for me, I'm consciously, so, you know, obviously I bought the towels for the girls. Now I've got this son, and now already he says there's a difference between boys and girls. Yeah, but, it's just one of those things that you, as parents, you know, those are just the small things that you just need to be aware of.

**Cara McGoogan:** How do you think men can be supported in the workplace when they've got a family?

**Precious Nkula:** Working for companies like Vodafone where they can give men parental leave. Uh I must say I give credit to, to that decision. That's awesome. I mean if you think about it now, men, they also have an opportunity to raise their kids equally as women. You know we hear stories that women would be struggling to say, "I'm raising this kid alone." And I also feel that because men were never given the opportunity to be at home as well to be raising kids as well, they also felt, you know, maybe left out, you know.

Because I believe that men really want to be parents, you know, and raising their kids. These are men that we see that in today's world that they want to be there. They want to be part of raising their kids. So, for companies like Vodafone to come up with policies like this, this is giving an opportunity to now for families to raise their kids and an opportunity for kids to be with their parents. Then parents are raising kids together. It's equal parenting, you know. So I'm actually happy about the parental leave that was approved.

Annelies I've just got one question for you. How would you hope society will adopt in in the future to allow greater equality for parent, particularly in the workplace?

**Annelies Valk:** How I think or hope society will change you know, I do think that inequalities, let's say, are also a natural phenomenon, right, women carry the baby, women give birth to the baby and men don't. So, I don't live in a fantasy world to think that everything will be, like, 100% equal one day, because I think we're, we've been created in a different way. But that doesn't mean that there would be opportunities from, like, a policy point-of-view to work towards introducing measures that create more equality and make it a more fair level playing field that creates equal opportunities for both, which I think is something slightly different to pure equality.

So, things as Precious said, like the parental leave but also from a government point-of-view, you know, looking at the cost of childcare looking at policies that can be more systematically implemented in countries I think is an interesting area that I hope in the future we'll be more focused on. And in addition to more policies that you could implement to create more equality, I think culturally there's also, as I mentioned before, there's a lot of ingrained practices that, you know, I think a lot of moms, and I see my friends around me who are also new mums they have a lot of mom guilt, let's say, if they go back to work five days a week.

And you know, there's a lot of people talking about, like, "Oh, would you really work five days? Maybe you should work some less to be with your family. Why do you have kids if you send them to day care every day?" you know, mum-shaming. There, there's a lot of, I think, still stereotypes also in media but also in the way people look at mums that lead to the inequality that we experience because of the cultural patterns that are replayed generation after generation.

Obviously we're in a more equal place than maybe our moms or our grandmothers were, but I still think there's a lot of expectations from women in society that are placed less on dads, specifically



when it comes to work/life balance. And I hope in the coming decades that there will be a shift in that and also yeah, that it will be more accepted, let's say, for women to work whilst they also have a child and to balance that out more with the support in policies that are necessary.

**Cara McGoogan:** Thank you, Precious and Annelies, for your time and for joining. It's been great to have you both in conversation and to hear about your different experiences.

**Annelies Valk:** Thank you so much. It was lovely to meet you, Precious. And I might be in touch with you if I need some more advice over the coming years [laughs] if, if that's okay. but it's been really inspiring to hear your story.

**Precious Nkula:** Thank you so much, Annelies for, for, for this conversation I really enjoyed. And I'm hoping that you have a, a good and you enjoy your child. And this was a lovely conversation. I really enjoyed it. I mean, I've got three kids, and as I said, this is doable. The only thing that I can say to you, you just need to enjoy your child. And you don't have to feel guilty, you know, that your child is there. Just embrace the moment and just be with your kids.

So, thank you so much everyone for allowing us to have this conversation. I just wish we had the whole day so that we can really discuss and I can share, you know, my experience. And I'm definitely going to keep in touch. I will connect with you. So, all the best. And thank you so much to everyone that has arranged this broadcast. And I'm hoping that everyone that will be listening to this broadcast would really enjoy and would've learned something from us. Thank you.

**Cara McGoogan:** Thank you [laughs]. Thank you Precious.

We've heard from Precious and Annelies, but I thought it would be good to cast some questions further afield across the company. We asked, "What's one challenge you've encountered and overcome to find a balance between work and parenting?"

**Virginie:** Hi. My name is Virginie Lachat. I work in marketing in Vodafone Automotive. I'm an adoptive parent of a boy who is now 11 years old. So, we face some challenges working and raising a child. in my case my son needed extra care speech therapy, for instance. So the classes were happening during the day. I had to take him to the therapist and come back to my work later in the day.

That was possible in my job, so I'm really thankful for that. And it enabled me to just follow his progress and also manage my performance at work equally and having no impact on any of the two aspects of my work and my job as a parent as well. So that was how I found the right balance between both needs, which could seem conflicting ones.

**Kate Hibbert:** I'm Kate Hibbert. I work in the marketing activation team in UK business as tactical and change lead. So, for me, by far the biggest challenge that I've encountered in finding the balance between work and parenting is guilt, guilt everywhere. So, guilt is sending the kids to nursery while you go to work, guilt of going away for night with work. But equally on the other side of the fence, guilt of working part-time and not being able to attend big meetings when you're required and, you know, having to see to your little one when they're, they're ill.

I think one way I've kind of worked that, that through is just to try and be present wherever I am. So, if I'm at work, I'm at work and I give it 100%. If I'm at home, I'm at home and I give it 100%.



**Jovita D'Souza:** I'm Jovita D'Souza, and I'm a Senior Manager for Group Internal Communications with VOIS. I joined VOIS in November 2020, and I'm based in Mumbai, India. Letting go of the mother's guilt is something I have encountered time and again while finding balance between my work and parenting. For a perfectionist like me, it has also been a lesson in embracing imperfection. For all the perfectionists out there, it is key to remember that there is no one way to perfectly manage both work and life during these unprecedented times. So many of us are trying to get a 10 out of 10 with being an employee, parent, spouse, friend and more during this time, but it is only leading to more stress and exhaustion in our lives. Acknowledging my vulnerabilities, understanding that everyone is figuring this out and that imperfections only make you more human have been a huge challenge for me to overcome.

**Cara McGoogan:** Now for some more insight from Vodafone parents. This time we asked, "What would be your one tip for a new working parent?" Let's start with Kate.

**Kate Hibbert:** The one top tip for a new working parent would be just not to put too much pressure on yourself. It can be ... The whole thing can be just so overwhelming. I'll never forget that feeling of dropping my first daughter off at nursery. You know, my first day back at work, I was upset. She was upset. And, you know, I can remember driving away from nursery thinking, "How on earth is this gonna be my life now? How am I gonna do it? How am I gonna go to work and, and be a good mum as well?"

And then, you know, you get to work, you look around, you see all these other working parents. They've got everything in order and they're managing just fine. And you realise that, you know, it's just a progression. It becomes your new routine. Some days it seems impossible. Other days it goes really, really well. I think the key is just to take it slowly, day by day. Let it become your new routine. And you realise that, that you enjoy it and that your child enjoys it.

**Cara McGoogan:** Let's not forget dads. They're balancing their work and families too. Here's Paul from Vodafone Romania.

**Paul:** My top tip will be, remember what flight attendants are always telling us before the plane takes off, put your mask first, and after that do your kid's. For me, it means if you are well and take care of yourself, you can do well at home, at work and to the world.

**Cara McGoogan:** Finally, here's Jovita again.

**Jovita D'Souza:** Creating boundaries is so very important in today's new normal. So, prioritise and do not make a habit of entertaining calls or last minute work requests. Be confident that you are making the best choice for your whole family, including yourself, and your child will see that too.

**Cara McGoogan:** As we've heard in this episode, supporting working parents fairly and equally is critical to creating gender equality in the workplace and in wider society. This has been We Are Vodafone, a podcast series brought to you by Vodafone for Vodafone people.

We hope you found these personal stories and ideas informative. If you want to find out more, you'll see there are resources in the show notes to this episode.