



humans at work

## Pastries, seeking purpose and the power of boundaries, with Diane White

**Presenter:** Jules Harrison-Annear

**Guest:** Diane White

**Diane:** A lot of my work has focused on power and the way in which power is mediated, whether it's between two people at a citizen level, whether it's between the state and the person or whether it's between a corporate or another actor and the citizen. I think in the workplace context a lot of the work I've done has really drilled down to where boundaries are not well articulated, understood and eventually exploited. I try to have a really healthy boundary around my personal relationships in the work context versus outside of work.

**Jules:** Kia ora, welcome to Humans at Work. I'm Jules, your host. Thanks for joining me and our latest guest and thanks for taking some time in your day to indulge your curiosity about other people and their humanness. If your thirst is unquenched after this, check out [humansatwork.org](http://humansatwork.org). Let's begin.

Today I'm talking to Diane White. Rather than introduce Diane, I'm gonna ask her to introduce herself, tell us where she's sitting right now, what her current job is and what her favourite thing is to eat. Over to you, Di.

**Diane:** Thanks Jules, it's great to be having this chat with you today. I'm here in Melbourne on Wurundjeri land, lands of the people of the Kulin nation. I'm sitting in my office, it's my back shed which had been repurposed into a bit of an office. My current job, a director at EY in the Infrastructure Advisory Team, part of our Strategy and Transactions Practice. My favourite thing to eat is an easy one for me – I'm a big pastry lover, love all pastries but particularly a very buttery croissant is probably my favourite food.

**Jules:** We should so have breakfast. I love pastries, I would say pain au chocolat is my absolute go to, although I have recently discovered Argentinian pastries and there is a café locally that makes them so next time you're here, we will meet for breakfast.

**Diane:** I'll match you and next time you're in Melbourne, I've sampled many, many, many pastries, I have my favourites and, yes, I can take you on a small pastry tour of Melbourne. We have, what some year, someone voted as the best croissant in the world in Melbourne, but I would actually say they're very good but too much hype – I need something a bit more humble in my croissant.

**Jules:** Surely the best croissant in the world has got to be in Paris, or you know, some small town on the coast of France somewhere.

**Diane:** I think they were going for the shock factor when they chose Melbourne, but it has led to this particular pastry shop having these ridiculous lines and it's all very concrete and a couple of men standing in a box with some butter in the middle on display whilst they're making their croissants. It's a lot.

**Jules:** It sounds amazing. Would you say that your favourite ritual of the day involves pastry, or do you have something else that you like to do every day?

**Diane:** Oh, my gosh, if I could have pastry every day, yes, that would be ... I think at various times, unfortunately, I'm headed towards that but, no. Favourite ritual, I'm a very ritualistic person, I love rituals so most days I read in the morning, I love reading so getting to do that every morning is, I've found, a really great thing to start the day. Since working from home so much, it's being able to fit into that morning routine with a cup of tea.

I also run most days, not every day but most days. Again, a really important ritual to clear the head, whether it's in the morning or at night. The other ritual that me and my partner do a lot, every day just about, it's a thing on the New York Times app called Spelling Bee which we just love, which we do every day. I sound like I'm an ad for both Lune croissants and the Spelling Bee on New York Times!

**Jules:** I would imagine that the running every day – and I didn't know that about you, so I'm very impressed – counteracts the pastries almost every day as well, right?

**Diane:** Yeah, that should be how the math works but I think that the running every day is very much a clearing of head, not doing anything else ritual.

**Jules:** Do listen to podcasts or music or do you just reflect about your day and go over the arguments you could've had or should've had?

**Diane:** It's funny you ask that. Up until recently I often do run in the mornings and would listen to the ABC's Radio National in the mornings but I actually found, in the lead up to the election which has just occurred when this is being recorded, I just couldn't stomach the campaign fever of everything that was going on so I instead moved back to music which I don't think I'm really paying attention to. When I'm running, I often find I have a particular "thing" going around in my head that I work out and maybe sometimes it's one of those what I should've said things but usually it's a here's a thing I just need to think about for a bit.

**Jules:** Who makes up your family?

**Diane:** My family here in Melbourne is my partner, Kate and our cat Dante, he's very firmly part of the family. Back in New Zealand I have my Mum and my Dad and three siblings and a couple of nieces and nephew as well. Maybe being a migrant and moving to Australia I end up probably treating my chosen family as quite a big part of my life as well because you don't have that immediate family around so particular friends that have become like family over the last seven years would form part of that family fabric.

**Jules:** What order do you come in the four of you from a sibling perspective?

**Diane:** Can you guess?

**Jules:** No, I can't guess! I mean I could, I think I'd be wrong though.

**Diane:** I'm the youngest. Through and through youngest child, absolutely.

**Jules:** What were you like as a child? Did you like to read when you were a child?

**Diane:** I did although not particularly widely, I just loved to read The Babysitters Club and Sweet Valley High were my favourite books and read them a lot and sometimes over again because there's a limit to how many they can publish although there's many of them.

I was a very earnest child and probably still am quite an earnest person. Probably quite self-conscious...another way I'd put it is self-conscious about things that didn't really matter. One of the things that I managed to divorce the emotional weight from in recent years, because it felt like the biggest thing in the world when I was a child, was around the age of probably nine or 10 I identified that I was short-sighted, so I needed to get glasses. Shouldn't be a surprise, many, many people above me familywise all short sighted, needed glasses. I was just so mortified by that as a realisation, so I spent the next three years working out ways to avoid the broader

realisation from those around me that I also needed glasses and I am very, very short sighted. It's funny cos why was I so self-conscious about it? Part of it was I was at a small school, and I don't even know if there were many, if any other kids that wore glasses but, for whatever reason, I was so self-conscious that that was something that felt almost catastrophic.

**Jules:** Have you embraced the glasses and short sightedness now?

**Diane:** Yes and no. I wear contacts most of the time; I have glasses, I have lost my glasses if anyone's seen them, that would be great. When I was actually in New Zealand last, they didn't seem to come home with me and I haven't bothered yet to get new glasses. I love my glasses when I wear them but when you're really short sighted I think it takes a lot to get used to either wearing glasses or wearing contacts and either way, shifting back is a difficult task. Yes, embraced to some extent but clearly still something there.

**Jules:** I too became short sighted when I was about 11, I think, and I needed glasses to look at the (then) blackboard.

**Diane:** Yep, that was it.

**Jules:** Before whiteboards, and I wasn't self-conscious, I wouldn't say, but they were just very frustrating because it rained a lot and they would fog up and get wet. And I actually had laser eye surgery when I was 29 – revolutionised my entire life because I was so short sighted that when I was in the shower I would have to pick up the shampoo bottle and bring it towards me to see whether it was shampoo or conditioner. The minute I had the laser surgery, within three days I could drive without glasses, I suddenly discovered a whole new world. It sounds hyperbole to say that but actually being able to see without having to think, I need to put my glasses on, being able to wear sunglasses, being able to see first thing in the morning before having to put them on actually made a massive difference. I share your pain.

**Diane:** I should think about it. It's that thing where contacts get you halfway so you get the benefit of being able to, whether it's see in the shower or not get the fog up and things like that, you don't get the being able to wake up in the morning and be able to see though. That one is especially for laser eye surgery survivees I think.

**Jules:** Do you think you still have that self-consciousness about things, or do you think it's been beaten out of you, or you've grown out of it?

**Diane:** I think I do but it's funny the way it manifests and it's probably that thing where sometimes you need someone else to hold a bit of a mirror up to you to be able to see these things. My partner jokes sometimes that it's almost like I grew up in an environment, I was in a very small town, farming community, not at all worldly or cosmopolitan or neither of my parents studied at university although they're both really intelligent people. That kind of upbringing where I felt very aware of the fact that I didn't come from the educated class and that still carries through but in quite funny little ways, or so I'm told. The feeling the need to project an image of not being a country hick kind of thing which is interesting to interrogate that more as I get older. Self-conscious in different ways; I don't think I still have the same probably physical hang ups and things that you have as a child or a teenager. I'm very happy to have outgrown those.

**Jules:** What would you say somebody close to you – the three words that they would use to describe you now?

**Diane:** It's a funny one cos I find it hard, like most people, to think of how someone else would describe me. There's the head and the heart bit, I'm both a head person and a heart person, very intuitive so I feel things a lot but I'm also very driven by my intuition in a way that I sometimes have to check on myself a little bit. Third one, determined, just very determined that can definitely go towards stubbornness. I like to just plod along and get things done.

**Jules:** If I was to describe you, one of the words I would use would be glamorous. It's interesting, isn't it, if you think about how you were as a child in terms of your self-consciousness about things and the, I'm from a small country town. You live in a very glamorous city now – Melbourne known for its bright lights and its culture and always on, buzzy. Your projection of your image to me, as a former client and now we talk fairly regularly, you come across as glamorous as one of your words. It's interesting to see that it wasn't one of yours.

**Diane:** Hell, no, and so funny off the back of the way in which I...I guess the antithesis of glamour is the country hick. It's very funny that you've picked up on that. I genuinely love some of the things that represent that glamour thing, I love fashion, I love culture and whether it's shows or books or things like that. I didn't expect that!

**Jules:** Why did you decide to leave New Zealand and go to Melbourne? Is it the first place that you've lived and worked in as an adult or did you just land there after many travels?

**Diane:**

Somewhere in the middle, I suppose. Speaking of glamorous places, I lived in Stockholm and lived in Sweden for a little while back my early twenties, studied in Oxala and then I moved to Stockholm and worked there as a live-in nanny for a while. Then I went back to New Zealand, quite reluctantly, to finish my degrees which were both otherwise gonna fall by the wayside. Then worked, had no money so just tried to earn a bit of money so I could move overseas again. It was probably after a couple of years living in Auckland – after I graduated, I worked in Wellington for a little while then I moved to Auckland, and I really loved Auckland. Auckland was in a really great place when I was, still think it is, the old idea of Auckland back 15 years ago of being devoid of culture and soulless and all of that had well and truly passed and I loved living in Auckland.

I was working for Government, which is quite unusual, especially in that time, I think it's more common now but seven/eight years ago there wasn't a lot of the bureaucracy based in Auckland. I knew that I really enjoyed working for Government, but I knew I didn't wanna move back to Wellington. The main reasons for that were the weather, it's a silly thing but after living there for six/seven/eight years off and on, I think I was just tired of it and Auckland was so warm and glorious. I knew I wanted a new job; I'd been in my job for a couple of years, and I was ready for something else and I didn't really see many other opportunities in Auckland.

I really just opened up one day the Victoria jobs website, me and my partner at the time were coming over to Melbourne for a wedding of two of our close friends and I thought, I'll apply for this job. And then I got an interview and then we were here for the wedding so I had the interview in person then they called me the next day and offered me the job and I went, "Oh, God, what are we doing?" We hadn't even talked about it, we talked about it, but it was just, I'll apply for this job and we'll see what happens.

Then we decided to move here, it was going to be at most a year, to the point that I was also interviewing for a job in Auckland and was going to try and see if they could defer the offer by a year so we could come back, and I'll just spend a year here. This is what happens with Australia generally but particularly I think Melbourne, and as a New Zealander was a privilege, we moved here with no visas, no need for anything so it's just so easy to stay so here I am still.

**Jules:**

Do you think Australia is it for you or do you think you will move somewhere else, maybe move back to New Zealand?

**Diane:** It's one that I think anyone who's living overseas often contemplates, but particularly over the past couple of years with COVID. Had I been in a different country during COVID than Australia, where I actually was able to come back during the course of the pandemic and I felt close to home although far away, I didn't have the same experience that perhaps people living very afield had. If it wasn't for that I was living in Australia the last couple of years would've made me really think about moving back to New Zealand. Now that we feel a bit more through the pandemic and I can travel easily again, I feel like staying here for a while is the plan.

My dream is to be able to spend long periods of the year in New Zealand as well as here. I think that my work and the way that work is moving will only enable that kind of flexibility. For the time being staying here but with the view of spending a lot of time in New Zealand.

**Jules:** What would you say is the most memorable country that you've ever visited?

**Diane:** It's a few but absolutely my most and any memorable experience in travel is always that combination of the place and where you're at. The one that comes to mind is Turkey and the time I spent in Istanbul. It was the combination of an extraordinary city that just leaves me speechless. It's such an amazing city, it's big, there's so much about it, so much history, there's so much culture, there's everything happening all at once.

Also, where I was at the time, I'd been in Europe for three or four weeks and was coming through a hard time on a personal front and that holiday represented working through a whole lot of stuff for me and that period at the end when I was in Istanbul was where I felt like I had a bit of a breakthrough and I just had this extraordinary time. I just loved that city so much and I can't wait to go back again. I love travelling so much, I've had really lucky to travel to quite a few different places and each country I've been to I've generally found some connection with.

**Jules:** Where's the next place on your list?

**Diane:** I have so itchy feet, 'itchy footage' at the moment after not being able to travel for a couple of years. We just went to Vietnam for a couple of weeks which was just fantastic, I absolutely loved it, it was amazing to be able to travel again. I don't count New Zealand in my travel plans because it's a different kind of travel when you come home so we'll be coming back to New Zealand hopefully in the next month or two but, like I said, it's a bit different. Hopefully in end of August either Japan or Peru, so that's the

options at the moment but flights are not very friendly to South America at the moment, got lots of stops and not that many direct flights. Japan is still actually not even open to tourists so things will need to change there.

**Jules:** They sound like very different holidays.

**Diane:** Yeah, they are. My favourite holidays are usually a combination of food and nature and city. I've been to Tokyo before but not to other parts of Japan so that would be all of those. Peru, not long before COVID, I got my first real taste of South America and I've just been hanging out to go back since then so it's a bit of a different one but very nature focused still.

**Jules:** Sounds amazing, lots to look forward to. If only the flight would come available.

**Diane:** We're still really early days and as people start to travel more it's that supply and demand.

**Jules:** Thinking about work to earn the money to pay for the flights, was nannying your first paying job or had you done some work before then?

**Diane:** I've worked since I was relatively young. I did bits and bobs earning glorified pocket money, I suppose. My first real job was when I was about 14 working in hospitality in a café and I worked in the same café until I was about 19 in all my school holidays and things like that. Very much I feel like I grew up in hospitality and then started doing nannying when I was about 19 in university on the side which was wonderful for many reasons. Two families I nannied for in Wellington both remain close in my life to this day and really wonderful watching the children grow up. When I moved to Sweden, I didn't plan to spend time nannying there but I didn't wanna come back and I could do that without too many visa issues so that was a good fit.

**Jules:** What would you say are some lessons that you've learned from your early roles that you might still lean on in your current work?

**Diane:** Anyone who's worked in hospitality knows, I use those skills every day. Multi-tasking, there's no job that you multi-task in like a busy hospo job. You're thinking about what to do next, you're thinking about all the different people that need different things from you. It's an incredibly collaborative environment, you're relying on everyone else to do their role well but you're also supporting people constantly in those roles. You learn to be nice to people.



Hospitality both in terms of being nice to the customers but you also really understand how horrible it is when people are not nice to you, and you get a lot of that in hospitality. Trying to hold on to those lessons are really important as you go through your career. You will be frustrated at people and frustrated that things are outside your control and how you try and hold that is a lesson I've learnt but continue to learn.

**Jules:** In your current job, how relevant is the job title to the work that you actually do?

**Diane:** Our team has a constant existential crisis about what our team is called. We're called Infrastructure Advisory and that means many different things. It's relevant as an area, we do advise on infrastructure whether it's traditional hard infrastructure, transport infrastructure, bricks and mortar through to social infrastructure, often comes down to people and processes and systems. The work that we do broadly fits under that umbrella, but people don't always think of me as an infrastructure person although I think that's interesting in and of itself sometimes in terms of the way people perceive your skills and what you might be able to do and suited to do based on the skills and your gender and other things.

My job really, as you would know, is a lot of problem solving and sense making and that's what the day-to-day looks like, whether its big picture problem solving or middle, this particular issue, problem solving. That's the core of it.

**Jules:** When's the last time you moved jobs or organisations?

**Diane:** I've been at my current role for four and a half years now so it's been a little while, it's really crept up on me. Within the context of my role, I've got to do so many different roles and so many different things that you feel like you're constantly doing new jobs and doing new roles. It's been a little while now since I have moved into a new role.

**Jules:** Have you ever resigned on the spur of the moment?

**Diane:** No, I haven't. I've never done that. I've always tried to be quite careful about not getting to a point in a particular role where you need to leave in terms of feeling like you really need to get out, as opposed to I'm not learning now or I'm not growing or I'm not enjoying this and I should look to move on. I think that's the point you wanna be at. I've been lucky enough to be able to have a bit of a runway and find the next opportunity with every time I've made a major change.

**Jules:**

I have resigned, not on the spur of the moment but on a Sunday, night dreading the Monday morning. When I was younger, early in my career when I didn't wanna feel like a failure, so despite all of the weight of the work or the context or the hours or just being over that kind of work, I used to just keep going. I was brought up with that sense of you don't move jobs unless you've got a job, but the decision to look for another job would've been to admit defeat.

I did find myself, one memorable occasion, having the Sunday night blues and I just happened to take a call from my Mum that night who was overseas. And she must've had some sort of intuition because out of the blue, in the conversation, she said, "You know I'm very proud of you," and I just burst into floods of tears and decided right then and there that on Monday I was gonna go in and tender my resignation and that's exactly what I did.

Now as I'm older and wiser, my advice to people is always, it's good to go to something rather than run from something, because what you don't want is the memories of your previous role to be all about the ending which, in many cases, can be quite a grind, quite a negative experience. If you run to something, you're actually running from one positive experience, you made a really strong choice and you moved to another hopefully positive experience. Whereas if you get to the point where you're almost breaking and you're forced to do that, what you'll remember is that you felt like you were forced to do something.

**Diane:**

Absolutely. Probably once or twice felt like I've been in that category and what that has led to is probably moving to things that weren't quite right or the right thing to do and was lucky enough to find my way out of that. The one job that comes to mind, it was a bit like that. It was my big, not my big transition, it wasn't a massive transition, but I studied law and trained as a lawyer and then worked in what I would call law adjacent jobs for a few years, not as a practicing lawyer but doing legal work of some kind.

The job I moved over to Australia for was to work on this big class action that followed the Black Saturday Bushfires that happened back in 2009 and was going to be working with the judge who was writing the judgment and basically supporting writing that judgment. When I interviewed for the role, they were at the point where they'd realised or accepted that it wasn't going to settle cos usually a big class action almost inevitably settles prior the judgment. In this case, it had gone so far, got through 200 days in court, the longest civil trial in Victoria's history and it still hadn't settled.

I came onboard with this expectation of likely that it would run through and that we'd do this judgment, and it would be great to be part of that and within a month of starting the case settled. When a big case like that settles you literally just drop pens and everything stops and you throw everything out, basically.

I was still employed, I still had a job, but the judge got me to work on other judgments and it was during that I was like, I'm not actually very interested in the law, I don't actually like the practice of law, other people are far more excited about this than I am. I needed to find a job to go do because I was doing things that I was very much aware that I didn't really want to be doing.

I was very lucky cos it was a very supportive environment and everything, but I was not wanting to do that work, so I ran probably from it a bit and I was just lucky that the thing that I ran too led me down a really good path because it could've easily not been that case.

**Jules:** Do you think you're a cause person or an organisation person? Do you go to a job because of the kind of work you can do, because it has an end purpose, or because the organisation sounds really interesting and has some really good values, or is it a mixture?

**Diane:** I don't think I used to ever know there was a distinction, and I wish that I had known that so that I could be a bit more deliberate about it. I used to be hundred per cent cause, I just wanted to do meaningful, purposeful work that I felt really excited by. The transition I made when I came to EY was when I moved from being a cause person solely, to being an organisation and cause and who do I work with and looking at the people around me and that kind of thing.

I'd been working at the Human Rights Commission leading an enquiry into sex discrimination harassment in Police. That, to me, was my golden cause. Really passionate about Police culture, reform, change and gender and gender equity – great golden mix. That role was really great on some fronts, and I really enjoyed parts of it, but it was then that I realised that actually what's important to me in a job is so much more than that and moving from what was so much purpose work to something that on the face of it, didn't look as purpose driven, was something that I had to really grapple with.

And going back to the earlier point about self-conscious, being seen as a good person by virtue of my job title was really important to me. Moving to a big global company with a job title that would mean nothing to anyone, that was a really big growing experience and absolutely was the right one

and I'm so pleased that I did, but I think I had to let go of being a cause person in doing that.

**Jules:**

I think there's something about finding the niche where you feel that you can achieve the most good, and for everybody there'll be a different niche. I remember working in the not-for-profit sector, working and leading people who were working with clients who were very vulnerable, and realising that where I got most of my satisfaction from was not the day-to-day engagement with the clients, but actually from the engagement with actors across the system...so Social Services, housing agencies, the Police, central Government, that were setting all of the policies in place. And being able to work at that level and influence for a better outcome in the end, as opposed to dealing with people on a one-to-one basis where the amount of influence I had was really only down to my ability to show empathy and do what I could within the system.

It was quite a strong realisation for me because I was always of the opinion that how you treat people is gonna be the thing that makes the most difference. I was probably about 24/25 when I realised that the way to change the system is to work in the system, but that is not the same as working on the front line, for me.

I consciously took roles where I was actually a step away from the clients on the front line while still trying to retain that sense of really clear connection and that sense of outcome. You work through agencies or at a system level, at a national level or regional level, you have to have some trust that eventually it will actually make a difference for the individual, but you're not gonna be there to necessarily see it and implement it; you're a step away thinking slightly ahead.

**Diane:**

A hundred percent. For me, maybe even more and slightly cynical, is that it's also not just about the purpose of my work, that I'm allowed to want to have a good working environment that I enjoy on a day-to-day basis. And absolutely if you can get that in a purpose aligned role, that's fantastic. Being able to enjoy going to work each day and working with great people, and working in a culture that supports and inspires you in some way and is invested in you is really, really important, and that is okay to prioritise that above or equally to what is the purpose and impact of my work.

It's probably moving past that saviour complex and being well, actually I want to have a job that I enjoy and that I come to work each day and get to do good work. And regardless of what the purpose of that work is, if I'm doing work that I find really meaningful and like you, driving systems

throughout change, absolutely, but that doesn't need to be the only thing I focus in in what I want.

**Jules:** Do you have a best friend at work? Do you believe you need a best friend at work?

**Diane:** I don't on both fronts. I really like so many of my colleagues and I enjoy the company of so many of my colleagues, and some of my colleagues I do probably friend-like things with, but I also find it really important to have quite good boundaries in a workplace context.

A lot of my work has focused on power and the way in which power is mediated – whether it's between two people at a citizen level, whether it's between the state and the person or whether it's between a corporate and another actor and the citizen. All of that has made me think a lot about how you see and understand power, and you see and name power, rather than pretend that we live in societies that don't have power structures.

In the workplace context, a lot of the work I've done has really drilled down to where boundaries are not well articulated, understood and eventually exploited. I try to have a really healthy boundary around my personal relationships in the work context versus outside of work. I generally get it pretty good and it's hard when you're someone who naturally loves to engage with people and build positive relationships, but I can look at all of my relationships in a work context and they're not the same as the relationships I have in a personal context even though they're relationships I cherish, and I value and I enjoy so much.

**Jules:** That really resonates because I'm an open book type person, I don't believe in hiding who I am when I'm at work and I try and be the same person and have integrity in both arenas. I love finding out about people and having fun at work and having a joke, I don't like to take anything too seriously although the work is serious.

What that does is it translates into people's expectations that you actually want to spend a lot of time with all of your workmates. I love my family and my homelife and generally I keep them quite separate. I found, certainly when I had young children, the expectation that I would stay after work and have a drink, and I used to say, "I've spent eight hours with you and I really like all of you, but you know what, I would prefer to go home and see my babies. I just wanna go home and put my comfy slippers on and be at home with my family because you're not my family, you're my work people and I really value you but there are some boundaries there."

**Diane:** Absolutely. My experience has been that people are really receptive to that whether it's explicit or more implied. It's something that people think, if I like people I'm around and I enjoy spending time with them, I therefore have to have a friendship, as opposed to there being this other category of people at work that you really enjoy being around and spending time with. I think moving into an environment to where I came from – a very purpose orientated sector and spaces where your identity was so tied up in your work that, as a result, your whole life had to be tied up in your work and your friendships and your relationships.

I have some friendships from those jobs and that time that are still really important to me and I really value, but when I came to EY it was, to start with, a really nice and somewhat of a relief to be in a space where I felt like my relationships were so much more professional. And I started to build this sense of being able to have people who I work with who I really, really like and enjoy spending time with, but I don't need to treat them as the same as my friends and they don't need to be integrated into my social fabric outside of work in the same way.

**Jules:** I'm interested in that because I think it ties back to the concept of power as well. I wonder if you would reflect that potentially, that's also about you having more confidence in your own power, your own professional experience, and that people might value your advice and listen to what you say without their needing to necessarily like you.

**Diane:** That's a journey. I think I'm getting there; I'm definitely still grappling with what it means to be a people pleaser but very much getting better at accepting that people will not always like you. Even more so the next step in that journey is almost embracing, to some extent and trusting yourself, that there will be things that you do that do not please everyone and that's still the right thing to do.

That's a really hard experience, and it requires you to have good people around you who call you out on things, or who help you to come to good decisions, and that you can trust that if you ask them for their advice, you'll get a really honest response but that you don't just use the feedback that you receive as the barometer of whether or not something was the right decision.

I'm lucky I haven't had to make a lot of those decisions. Every day in my work I'm navigating this at a micro level when you're making decisions about, I think we should do it this way, I think we should do it that way. And being really conscious of, when do I hold to what I believe because I have

information or insights or expertise that ensures that that decision is the right decision? I can trust it. Versus, when do you say, actually, all of this noise that I'm hearing around it suggests that this is not the right decision and I need to rethink it.

**Jules:** Would you say that there is a link there between that sense of confidence and using your own power with gender and gender experience in the workplace?

**Diane:** Yeah, I think so. My experience of gender in the workplace, I've thought a lot about it and it's something that I find really interesting in that different spaces it's been more or less pronounced. I've actually, in recent years and this doesn't really answer your question but it's something that I have been thinking a lot about, is come to understand more the value of certain stereotypically coded masculine qualities as much as feminine qualities. Earlier on sometimes that narrative in the conversation around gender equity can become binary but also very overly simplistic, where it's like, woman is good, man is bad.

In recent years and working in an environment that often has a really interesting mix of the stereotypically masculine with the stereotypically feminine, I'm more and more starting to see the importance of bringing those different attributes. And gender equity in the workplace shouldn't be just about finding space for those feminine attributes, but also reflecting on what are the great attributes that might come from those more stereotypically masculine attributes.

**Jules:** I couldn't agree more actually. I remember a conversation with a male colleague, both of us were going through quite a tough time for very similar reasons, but he absolutely felt the pressure to retain a very calm, professional exterior and deny even, to me and himself, really, the impact that it was having on him as an individual.

Whereas he was incredibly sympathetic when I was ranting and upset in a safe space, and never once thought that I should deny my own feelings, yet he reflected back on himself and was actually denying his own feelings in that situation. In that situation I actually said to him, "Your feelings are just as valid as mine in this situation. You can feel that way, too, we have to work our way through it."

I completely agree, sometimes people will feel the pressure regardless of the reasons why, regardless of who they are, and that pressure comes from

a power dynamic that isn't wielded properly as opposed to stereotypical labelling or something that puts people into a box.

One of my favourite sayings is from Spiderman, "With great power comes great responsibility," and I would say that, as you progress through your career, you also have power that you have to wield quite sensitively and be conscious that you're not doing to others what may have been done to you, quite subconsciously in many situations.

**Diane:** A hundred percent. I think I'm seeing this and thinking about this more now, as I come to accept what I would call a generational gap. My colleagues like to tease me about the fact that I'm grappling with my increasing irrelevance in aging and no longer young, that there is something there.

I reflect back to my boarding school days, I went to boarding school and at boarding school there is a really unhealthy culture, as there are in many hierarchies, of people treating the Year 9s, as they were in New Zealand, terribly, and as you got more older you got treated less terribly until you were the one that was treating everyone terribly. That was the kind of culture, in very sanctioned ways as well, very like, you could get the Year 9s to do these tasks that were, frankly, a bit exploitative, whether it was cleaning or doing things like that.

I think about that in a workplace that you have to be really careful, and I've caught myself a few times where you feel that little bit inside you where you're like, I had to do it this way, and catching yourself on that a bit and thinking, what am I doing? Why do I think that? How can I challenge that so that I'm not trying to just replicate an experience that actually can be quite negative because I now have more power.

I think people are very uncomfortable about talking about power and that especially we talk about it in different ways, we talk about it in terms of gender, or we talk about it in terms of culture or race. But it all comes down to power and until you name it and find space to talk about it comfortably, it can loom over organisations and people and society.

**Jules:** If somebody asked you to mentor them, what would you draw on in terms of providing advice and support?

**Diane:** In terms of sources, it's everything. I caught up with a friend of mind in the weekend, a New Zealand friend, we accidentally talked for 2½ hours which was lovely. She had COVID so she wasn't going anywhere, and I went for a



walk, did some cleaning, all those kinds of things. It was a lovely chat. In that conversation her wisdom and her thinking on certain things informed the way that I would perhaps mentor someone on a certain topic or a certain issue in a work context.

I learn a lot from watching and observing and I have, in the context of my current work, people who I see as role models for various things. I don't have one person where I'm like, oh, that's the God, that's the person. It's more like, that person is amazing at this and then this person's amazing at that. So in mentoring someone, being able to draw from those different experiences and people and really identify what is it about this person that – the person you're mentoring – makes this lesson important. It's that tailoring of advice and consulting makes you good at that, you need to always be tailoring your advice.

**Jules:** If you could do any job in the world, you could just pick and choose anywhere, for any organisation, what would it be?

**Diane:** It goes a bit to what I was just saying I like to do in mentoring. I would love to own a bookshop, that's my ultimate dream but when we dig into that and my partner always points out, "You hate admin, who's gonna do your admin?" I'm like, "I'd have to outsource that." The actual day-to-day grind of running a bookshop may or may not be that enjoyable, although I genuinely think that I love the idea of creating spaces and also, I so much love books that that would be a wonderful thing to be able to pull together.

The thing I love about the bookshop idea is more that I love to recommend books to people and not based on, "Here's a book I loved, you'll love it," but, what does Jules, as a person, love and what's she interested in and what kind of book do I think she would like and then recommend books to people based on that. If I could do a job, it would be something like that.

Maybe books is one thing but maybe it's just more generally I love to connect people up to things and connect people up to things that will help them, or they will enjoy, and I get to do a lot of that in my job at the moment as well.

**Jules:** I think a bookshop that also sold pastries and you could go in and have a little conversation with you and you would say, "I think you'd really enjoy these books and here's a Danish pastry or a pain au chocolat and a cup of tea, go and enjoy." I think that sounds amazing.

**Diane:** I agree, although I would definitely need to outsource the pastry making. My endeavours to learn how to make pastries have been incredibly unsuccessful to date.

**Jules:** You are a champion cake maker, I understand.

**Diane:** I love a cake, but a cake and a pastry, I feel like a lot of distance, I've got a long way to go to get into the pastry game.

**Jules:** It's been great chatting today, time had flown by, I think our next conversation definitely involves food of some sort. I do wanna say thank you so much, very generous in your honesty and your stories that you shared so I really appreciate it and I'm sure everybody who listens to this podcast will as well.

**Diane:** Thanks, Jules, so nice and I wanna go through and ask all the same questions to you so maybe we'll do that with our food next time.

**Jules:** Sounds wonderful.

Thank you so much for listening and thanks, as always, to the generosity of our delightful guests. The stories of how others have faced up to their challenges can help give all of us courage to keep going with our own. For more great episodes, blogs, learning packages, go to the [humansatwork.org](https://humansatwork.org) website.

End.