

Let's GLINC Differently About Remote Work

Gerry Lewis:

Hi, everyone. Gerry Lewis here and welcome to another episode of GLINC Outside the Box. When the pandemic hit in March, the shift to remote work quickly became a defining feature of 2020. According to Stats Canada, the number of Canadians working remotely across all sectors jumped from 10%, initially reported in 2018, to 40% as of May 2020. Many companies have touted how not only have employees been surprisingly satisfied and productive while working from home, but in many cases, companies are actually seeing higher productivity from employees.

Gerry Lewis:

But at what cost? Flexible work boundaries often turn into work without boundaries and why we're wondering if we work from home or are we living at work? Looking ahead at a post-pandemic world, experts predict many workers will stay remote. More companies will shut down some of their office spaces. Some employees will go into an office two or three days a week, and there'll be more flexibility to working schedules. The office environment will change and a remote work is here to stay.

Gerry Lewis:

So if working remotely is here to stay, how do we regain back some semblance of work-life balance and unblur the lines that have been smudged or removed between work and home? Our objective today is to GLINC Outside the Box on remote work and answering the question, are we working from home or, are we really living at work?

Gerry Lewis:

Today, we'll have a conversation with my guest about how she has made a real effort for herself and her team to bring back much needed structure, to balance working from home, and to infuse a good dose of empathy when communicating and interacting with each other at work. So let me introduce our guest. She is Rawan El-Komos, senior director general of corporate services at the Public Prosecution Service of Canada. Rawan has almost 20 years experience in supervision and over 10 years experience in leading multidisciplinary teams.

Gerry Lewis:

She has participated in numerous panel discussions about authentic leadership, leading with empathy, and transitioning to leadership roles. She's also recently wrote an article at work about her personal resilience and mental health journey. Welcome, Rawan. It's amazing to have you here. Thanks for joining us.

Rawan El-Komos:

Thank you so much, Gerry. I'm so excited to be here, so thank you for having me. Before we get started with our discussion today, I just wanted to take the time to make sure the listeners are aware that although I work with Public Prosecution, I'm not representing them or the government of Canada. And I'm here in my personal capacity to share my personal opinions, insights, and sharing of best practices. Thanks, again, for having me.

Gerry Lewis:

Thank you. I'm less intimidated now that you're speaking from your own personal capacity, not as a Public Prosecution. I was a little bit nervous there, Rawan. Now that we got that off the table, let's begin

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our conversation. All right. In fact, the working from home versus living at work, it's something you said to me a couple of weeks ago when we first started talking about this podcast. I love the statement. I want you to tell me a little bit of what you mean by that statement.

Gerry Lewis:

It's somewhat obvious, but I'd love to get your perspective on what that statement means.

Rawan El-Komos:

Yeah, that's great. This is a statement I actually read in an article early on in the pandemic, and it resonated with me, right? And I'm still using it today. I think the reason it's stuck in my head is I remember having conversations with friends, family, and colleagues about what is it about this remote work posture now that feels so different than pre-pandemic. I felt it was important for me to unpack it so I could effectively lead my teams in this period of time.

Rawan El-Komos:

I kind of narrowed it down to four things that I think come to play together that gives us this feeling that we're living at work rather than working from home. The first one is really stating the obvious, right? The context within which we were operating was very different than anything we knew before. The whole world was fighting this global pandemic. At the same time, we were starting as a society to have really deep complex issues around things that we normally weren't having, particularly around systemic bias and discrimination.

Rawan El-Komos:

Two concrete examples I can give is the murder of George Floyd and the discussions then ensued, and then we saw an increase in discrimination and hate against the Asian community. Just the context within which we were operating as people, as employers, as society was just very different. The second part when I thought about it was we had no freedom of choice. In the past, when we worked from home, it was something that we would have a discussion with our boss about, and then we'd work from home.

Rawan El-Komos:

Now, all of a sudden, for good reason, we were being told to stay home for your safety, the safety of others, the safety of your community. Stay home. So whether we actually felt it or not, that psychological impact of no longer having the freedom to make a decision or a choice actually changes our perspective in terms of the remote work posture. The third thing, which is the thing I felt personally, is it really didn't feel like I was bringing work home. It actually felt like I was taking my family into the workplace.

Rawan El-Komos:

Under normal circumstances when I'd work from home, my husband would be at work. My son would be at school. I now found myself in a situation where all three of us were in the home at the same time. Where I'd normally set up on an ad hoc basis was no longer feasible, because my husband wanted to roam around the house, and my son needed a space to work and study. And so I found myself set up in the bedroom where I. And oh, by the way, they crashed every meeting I had. I think everybody at work knows Kamal and Anthony now.

Rawan El-Komos:

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So that has a very different dynamic. I mean, my family didn't come to business meetings and business calls in the past, but here they were, joining me in my work journey. So that kind of tipped it over as well. The last thing, and I think this is the most powerful one, is the fact that these natural transitions that we typically had from our work role to our personal role were no longer there. Usually when we work from home, we transitioned seamlessly into our other role and we don't even think about it.

Rawan El-Komos:

It could be going for dinner with friends, grabbing a drink with your partner, going to pick up your kid from school, or dropping your kid to an activity. Well, for the most part, for a long period of time, these things were taken away from us. There weren't these natural transitions from our working from home into our personal life to do other activities and the inability to do things outside of home just felt like we were in this constant loop of work, sleep, eat. Maybe you can go for a walk and a hike and a bike ride.

Rawan El-Komos:

But in essence, it really felt that her life was revolving around work. Hence, that feeling of living at work versus actually working from home.

Gerry Lewis:

That's incredible that you listed all four, because of what I was going to get into with how do we actually evolve into this situation? But those four reasons really gives us a great snapshot of how did we get here. And I think the one thing I took away, the biggest reason was it was imposed. This working from home, you had to stay home. I think that was probably the start of it. I love what you said about how do I distinguish between working from home and living at work is when you said it kind of feels like I'm bringing my family to work.

Gerry Lewis:

I think that right away painted a picture. And I remember back when I was in grade nine, and I'm sure you probably had it too at some point, when you're allowed to bring your grade nine child to work. There was a day that everyone was out to bring their child in grade nine to work, and we all know how nice, yet awkward that was. And so now I imagine to bring your grade nine to work day is now the entire year.

Rawan El-Komos:

Exactly.

Gerry Lewis:

And bring your family to work, right?

Rawan El-Komos:

Yes.

Gerry Lewis:

I also loved the fact that the distinguishing feature about living at work is that we've lost those transitions. We take it for granted. So even the drive home when I'm able to decompress, when I'm able to kind of filter through my day, that drive isn't there. I literally pushed down my laptop and I might

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already be in the kitchen. I don't even need to actually walk anywhere. I'm already there. That really has created, as you say, the living at work. We now know the situation.

Gerry Lewis:

I want to jump to another question then, because I talked a little bit about productivity earlier. I know it's like unpacking this large box. Everyone is saying we're more productive. But I'm wondering, are we only more productive because working longer hours? What's your thought on that?

Rawan El-Komos:

Yeah, that's a great question. The concept around productivity on its own is complex by nature, right? I really hope that when we're talking about productivity, that that includes multiple data sets, that includes things like mental health, employee satisfaction. Because if we're simply looking at increased output and results, but we're not taking those factors into consideration, then in essence, it's a short-lived productivity that's eventually going to crash and burn, right?

Rawan El-Komos:

Because we know that no mental health and well-being in the workplace, productivity will go down. So let's assume the stars are aligned and people are mentally safe and well and that they're productive and they have job satisfaction. I think in this current context, it is working longer hours. But for me, it's not just in the traditional sense of maybe someone's working 10 to 15 hours depending on the role they're playing. I think it's the way we're working on any given day.

Rawan El-Komos:

When we're typically in the workplace, whether you've got the workforce fully at work or hybrid model where some are working remotely and some in the office, there are what I call natural pauses. You see that I use the word natural a lot, it's because they happen without us feeling them, right? Going from one meeting to the next often required people going from one office to another or one boardroom to another. If you were having an offsite meeting, you had to actually block time to get there and block time to get back.

Rawan El-Komos:

Typically, if you're someone that's respectful of others in the meeting, you're not on your phone looking at your emails coming in as you're having a meeting with someone else. All of these things no longer exist. So now what we have is people sitting in front of their computer screens all day. They're seeing their emails come in just in time, issues are being brought to their attention just in time, and there's no natural transition from one meeting to the next. So yeah, people are working longer hours because they're working differently.

Rawan El-Komos:

But I think what we did at work in terms of needing these natural pauses and transitions were extremely important, because there were times where we actually collaborated and connected on the human level that's just not happening in a remote world. I can't actually see deep in your eyes when I'm talking to you behind the computer screen. I might think I'm able to read your nonverbal cues, but am I really reading them appropriately? So yeah, I'm sure that productivity has a lot to do with the way we're working and the longer hours we're working.

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Rawan El-Komos:

I'm not convinced personally that the situation is sustainable. The other thing I've observed, and this is in talking with friends and family, is there's a lot of internal dialogue around, should I take vacation leave? Typically, when I take time off, I travel, or I'm able to go see friends and family. But now with these restrictions, I can't go anywhere, or I can't see people. It just feels like it's a waste of my vacation time. So maybe I'll just wait until I can actually do something with it.

Rawan El-Komos:

So again, we're seeing people work more potentially than they normally would, which obviously will yield a higher productivity and higher output results.

Gerry Lewis:

I really liked the fact that when you said productivity, we need to look at all the datasets and not just the output. I'm pretty sure, even when I think about productivity in my own business, I am probably remiss in thinking about the entire dataset. I'm looking at outputs. I'm looking at how many things, how many deliverables we have, how many emails we can respond to, and I think it is the way we work that's creating this productivity, which I feel is one-sided. You answered my question in the sense that I think, yes, we're in higher productivity, we're getting more done.

Gerry Lewis:

But going back to what I said in the beginning, at what cost? I think that's really the question I like to begin to unpack with you. So many terms have come up because of COVID. There's all these new lingo, but two in particular I want to just kind of run by you. One is called the work-life integrators, and one is called the work-life segmenters. I like these two terms because I found their definitions quite interesting. So let me start with the first one, work-life integrators.

Gerry Lewis:

Work-life integrators are people who are able to transition fluidly from work to personal life and to work again. So in other words, they're your friends and family who talk shop all the time. There's no problem with them talking shop and then going to the movies. And then after the movies, they talk shop again, or they answer an email. It's so natural for them. They don't mind answering emails and chats after work. In fact, it's part of their habit. That's the integrators. Then the work-life segmenters are people who have defined work times.

Gerry Lewis:

Because of this sort of environment, they basically block themselves where when they stop working or whatever time that is, when they're done, they're done, and they tend to personal needs and errands and fitness, anything outside of those prescribed work hours. They really compartmentalize their work, their life. I know which one I am. I'm just curious what are your thoughts on these terms and which one is really, I don't know, I guess more beneficial in this environment, if I can even use that word? What are your thoughts on those terms?

Rawan El-Komos:

I think to start off, I would refer myself as a recovering workaholic, right? Those who know me will say I'm naturally an integrator. The other thing is, is I have a personal bias where I'm not super comfortable

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with words like segmentation, compartmentalization, because I really feel strongly that we're one human being that plays multiple roles and we kind of flow from one role to another. And just that thought process that we can be divided equally between the quadrants of our life is just, I think, an unreasonable expectation.

Rawan El-Komos:

I've always believed in work-life integration, but what I really like about those concepts is the fact that it's an opportunity for people to really self-reflect and dig deep to know what their preferred work style is. And there's no right or wrong here, right? When you ask the question about which one's beneficial, it really depends. It depends on you. It depends on your limits. It depends on your boundaries. It depends on your strengths, what your triggers are. When do you feel you're on point versus off-kilter?

Rawan El-Komos:

So that's what I really like about these concepts is that it's a reminder that the heart of everything is self-awareness. We actually need to self-reflect and really think deeply about when am I at my best, when do I perform best, when am I having the best interactions with people? And if you identify yourself as a segmenter who needs to... I know that I work eight to five, whatever your hours may be.

Rawan El-Komos:

And then when my work day is over, I'm fully present at home, then you need to make sure that you make decisions and choices and set up your day and your interactions accordingly, right? I think that's what I like about these concepts is that it forces us to really dig deep and think about what our preferred style is, and also take the time to understand other people's styles, right? So if you were a segmenter and you're around an integrator or vice versa, that also helps to give you perspective in terms of why people are working the way they're working.

Gerry Lewis:

Rawan, another great way to kind of help me understand those two particular terms, segmenter/integrator, in that it's not one or the other, it's a spectrum and where do we fit along the spectrum, and also using, I guess, the extremes of those spectrums to reflect on which ones I should probably dabble in a little bit more because I'm neglecting it. I'll give you an example. For me, I'm definitely an integrator for those who know me. I'm notorious for answering emails literally at all hours of the day.

Gerry Lewis:

I pride myself in that in a way, because I believe in the responsiveness to my clients. But one thing I learned was that it was beginning to get to me, and I'm learning from my team, who many of them are segmenters. So what I do now, for example, just this one thing that I learned, after dinner when I watched Netflix, which is my preference now in the evenings to unwind, I used to have the phone right on the coffee table while I'm watching Netflix. And what happens when an email comes in, it lights up, and what do I do?

Gerry Lewis:

Even if I don't pick up that email, my head is going, "I wonder who it is. Should I answer it? Maybe I should look at it. Oh, wait." So now what I do is that phone is nowhere. Once I start the Netflix, the phone is away from me. I don't even think about it. It is important to kind of begin to have those

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boundaries that I look at on both ends of the spectrum to figure it out. I wanted to ask you this question though, you've described a situation we're in. We know that we're in this living at work sort of scenario. We all realize that.

Gerry Lewis:

We talked about the reasons for that. We talked about how we should consider, are we integrators or segmenters, but we're all kind of living at work now. Everything's been blurred. I want to ask the question, who's to blame? I'm not talking about any one in particular, but how did all this happen? How did we get here so quickly when we're suddenly realizing, here's where we are? How did this happen?

Rawan El-Komos:

That's a great question. And maybe before I answer that, I want to go back to something you said, Gerry. Because when I refer to myself as a recovering workaholic, it's because it's true. As an integrator and just the way I operate, those who know me know I'm an ideator and then I'm action-oriented, right? So very fast paced, very high energy. It's easy for me to fall into the same traps as you are. Well, I can go all day and it's not a problem. I can easily integrate my life.

Rawan El-Komos:

But there was a culminating moment in my life where it became clear that even though I'm an integrator, I still needed to know what my limits and boundaries are. Because being an integrator doesn't mean you don't have breaking points. You do, so you still need to reflect on that and identify. I agree. Surrounding yourselves with segmenters as integrators is a great wakeup call and a reminder of the things we need to better integrate in our lives. Thank you for that reminder.

Rawan El-Komos:

In terms of who's to blame, listen, it's like the old adage when we talk about a story, there's always three sides to the story, right? There's yours, there's mine, and then there's the truth. It's the same here. I think there's multiple things that come together. I always tell people, it starts with you. We are all accountable for ourselves. We are the one making choices for ourselves. We make decisions for ourselves. When we allow others to make the decisions and choices for us, well, shame on us. That's where I start always is personal accountability.

Rawan El-Komos:

We all have a role to play. And then absolutely I would say that organizations and the cultures that they create are extremely critical and that's top-down. It permeates, right? So if you have a culture that encourages open communication, encourages empathetic leadership, encourages discussions around mental health and systemic bias and discrimination, well, that's a healthy workplace and it enables people to be courageous and to stand in their values and their preferred work style.

Rawan El-Komos:

And then there's leaders in their own respective roles that have a role to play as well. I would say from a work perspective, organizational perspective, those are the three key players that come together. First and foremost, yourself, the organization that large and the culture it's created, and then leaders within their respective teams.

Gerry Lewis:

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I liked what you said about it comes first to our own accountability. What is the decision we need to make? I think that's a really important part. I played on the word blame. I was tongue in cheek in terms about it because really there's no one to blame, but I think the accountability belongs to us. As they say, so now that we know that accountability belongs to us, it is also the environment as well. We know what the problem is. We've talked about it. The problem is that we're tending to be living at work.

Gerry Lewis:

So knowing the problem, as I say, is half the battle. If our work-life boundaries have blurred and our spouses and partners children are commenting on it, what can we start to do? Let's begin to look at what are the tactics, what are some of the things you've done as an individual and as a leader. What have you done? Let's start with individuals. What can we do as individuals to begin putting back a semblance of boundaries into our lives from your perspective?

Rawan El-Komos:

Great question. I think everything starts with self-reflection and self-awareness, right? You've heard me refer to it several times because I think this is a journey that as people, as a society, and particularly as leaders we really need to go through. I encourage everyone to kind of take a step back and really dig deep and start to learn more about yourself and understand what your strengths are, your areas of development, your triggers.

Rawan El-Komos:

When you feel an emotion deeply, all of these things help us understand when we're at our best, and then we can make decisions accordingly and interact with people accordingly in our personal and professional lives. So that would be the first thing I would start with. But in terms of real tactical things we can do on a day-to-day basis to strike that balance, one of the things I encourage my team to do is to schedule what I refer to, again, as natural pauses in the day.

Rawan El-Komos:

So where in the past we had transitioned times from meeting to meeting or, we'd go for coffee with a colleague or have a working lunch, given that those aren't naturally happening from the remote work posture, build it in and be intentional about it. And it's different for everybody. For some, it maybe blocking your lunch hour. For some, it may be blocking a chocolate time in the morning or in the afternoon. For others, it maybe blocking chunks of time between your meetings. But make sure you do that.

Rawan El-Komos:

Otherwise, you end up stuck in these meetings incessantly from the minute you wake up until the minute you decide your work day is over on that day. So build that in. No one else is going to do it for you. The other thing I say to people is alternate between video calls and phone calls. I don't know about you, but I was not used to seeing myself this much on screen all day. It's just not natural, right? Typically in a meeting, I'm looking at you. You're the one looking at me. Well, now I know how much I touch my hair and my face and how fidgety I am.

Rawan El-Komos:

And oh, I'm a Middle Eastern using my hands, it's quite something. These are things that I'm kind of seeing all day. Now, if you're using a platform where you can unpin yourself so you don't see yourself, I

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encourage you to do that. But also it's okay to alternate between video calls and phone calls. This is particularly important for people who are introverted by nature. They just need a moment, right? I have colleagues with whom I have many meetings during the week.

Rawan El-Komos:

We've come to an agreement that when it's just the two of us, it's just one-on-one, we do it by phone and then we can walk around the house. If it's nice, we walk outside. Still having the exact same business conversation, but just in a different way. So that's another simple thing we can do to break up our day. And then make time for the things that you love doing. That sounds so simple, but it really requires discipline and it requires intentionality. Figure out what it is for you. For everyone, it's different. I personally really love to cook and I love to read.

Rawan El-Komos:

I really try to make sure that I do both of those things every day at a minimum one. But if I can squeeze both of those things every day, great. And you know what? By being intentional about it, I actually have to make time for it, right? If I love cooking and I have to feed my husband and my son, well, at some point, I actually have to get off my work device and get in the kitchen and get supper going. Figure out what it is for you and build it into your day at a reasonable time when your day would normally end, or if you needed to break up your day, then that's okay as well.

Rawan El-Komos:

The other thing I tell people is it's easy to get trapped into, "Oh, I can do one more email, or, oh, this thing just came in. I can fix it. It's a quick fix," because we're here. And frankly, for the most part, we have nowhere else to go or nothing to do, right? So again, self-discipline and just really managing our time and our pace. For me, I have to be honest, it's an ongoing journey. I'm someone who's extremely high energy and fast-paced. I said that before. Very strong on the action orientation front.

Rawan El-Komos:

So I actually have to be very, very self-conscious and aware of how I'm pacing myself for me and for my teams, right? This thing can wait. Don't have to have this conversation now. This is not an emergency, right? So really just taking a step back, because eventually we're going to go back to a new normal, but we're not going to be glued in front of these tablets all day. So if we can start building in these habits now, it'll make our transition back to whatever the new normal looks like easier.

Rawan El-Komos:

The other thing I tell people is it's okay to prioritize yourself, right? Be aware of how you're feeling on any given day. I think a lot of people working from home sometimes have this internal dialogue of guilt of, I'm so blessed and fortunate to have a job and to be able to work from home, when I know many who are without a job and/or are frontline workers and essential workers and are fighting this battle for us. But it's okay if you have a bad day. It's okay if you're not feeling well. Prioritize yourself.

Rawan El-Komos:

And as a previous HR professional for many, many years, I would be remissed to not tell people, if you need help, seek it. It takes strength to ask for help. It's not a weakness.

Gerry Lewis:

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I think you probably mentioned five or six tactics, Rawan, and I think they're all very, very beneficial. The last one you said about that if you are needing of help and to go out, especially we're doing this still within the mental wellness month, I think this is such an important message that we carry out throughout the year. On a lighter note and in terms of looking at ourselves, I'm totally not used to that. I'm much better at it. But for me, it's not so much about fidgeting my hair or like that. For me is I can't believe I have such a shiny forehead all the time.

Gerry Lewis:

Seriously. How does my forehead get that shiny, oily all the time? Anyway, great answer. That was individual taxes. Can we jump very quickly into what we can do as leader? You run a large team. What can you do as a leader to help people kind of put back some of those boundaries?

Rawan El-Komos:

I narrowed them down to three things. Okay? The first one is about empathetic leadership, and it's really about being kind. It's about being compassionate. It's about being attentive. I think a lot of times people confuse these things with a leader being soft, and that's not the case at all, right? Because you can have a very, very difficult and constructive conversation and do it with kindness. You can take a difficult decision and implement it with heart and be compassionate. What being empathetic means is really understanding where your people are and meeting them there.

Rawan El-Komos:

This old school mentality that employees adapt to us as leaders is gone. If you want to bring out the best in your people, you actually have to meet them where they are, and then maybe you coach them and mentor them to whatever level you want them to go, but you have to first and foremost meet them where they are. So really listening to your people and connecting to whatever emotion that they're feeling. I don't know how many times I've heard during the pandemic people's reactions to... If someone says, "I'm having a really hard day today.

Rawan El-Komos:

My kids are driving me crazy," and then our immediate reaction is what I refer to as forced gratitude. I know, but aren't we so lucky we're working from home? Of course, that's true and we are blessed and we are fortunate. But at that moment in time, that's not the emotion that person is feeling. So to be an empathetic leader is to really understand how the person is feeling and connecting with that emotion and leading them accordingly. So that's the first thing. The second thing would be communication, right?

Rawan El-Komos:

I mean, oftentimes I see this corporate checklist exercises of communication. Here I'm talking about real communication, real dialogue, open, transparent, raw, and consistent, one where people can connect with right? And again, understand where your people are, what type of information they need, and the frequency of it. At the beginning of the pandemic, I communicated weekly with my staff, and then I scaled back to biweekly, monthly, and now it's at quarterly. It wasn't just to communicate. It was touching base.

Rawan El-Komos:

It was creating an environment of, "Hey, how are you feeling today?" I would share inspirational quotes. And it was also an opportunity to share key information that they needed to know about decisions we

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were making at work. And if I didn't have answers, I transparently said, "I know this is a question you all have. I don't have an answer for you. But as soon as I do, I will get back to you." So again, creating that space of open dialogue is super important. And last, and this for me is the most important, is leading by example.

Rawan El-Komos:

Employees will do what you do, not what you say. So if you're a leader who says, "I know how difficult it is. I'm here to support you," but then what they observe is you sending emails at all hours of the day. You're not actually adapting to what their needs are. You're not managing volume of work. You're not managing emotions. You seem to always be perfectly fine. And I'm not saying as leaders we should be complaining and crying and whining, but we're human and we have emotions as well. So modeling the behavior is extremely important.

Rawan El-Komos:

I do this intentionally. I do it authentically, but I do it intentionally. There was a period of time, not too long ago, a couple of weeks ago, where my son, he hit a wall. He's a social creature. Being at home was extremely difficult for him. And he's an only child. Being home alone with no other siblings was really starting to take a toll on him, and he was just having this emotional rollercoaster.

Rawan El-Komos:

I decided for that week that I was going to scale back my meetings to absolute minimum, so that if he needed me at any given time, I could be fully present for him as a mother. I emailed my boss, I emailed my staff, my leadership team, and I said, "Listen, I'm around this week, but I'm going to be scaling back my hours because Anthony needs me. And if anything changes and I need to take time off, I'll let you know. But just I'm here, but I'm keeping meetings to an absolute minimum."

Rawan El-Komos:

This now creates a safe space for them to know that if they have a day like that, they can do it for them and their teams. I can't emphasize enough the modeling the behavior and leading by example.

Gerry Lewis:

I'm just going to jump on the last one while it's still fresh in my head. I think as a leader, you could have done the exact same thing by just scaling back, but not let them know. No one would actually question that. No one would actually say, "Oh, why is Rawan?" It doesn't really matter. She has her reasons. But the fact that you were transparent about it, that is leading by example. I just wanted to recap. Empathy is number one, meet them where they are.

Gerry Lewis:

Two is communicate, having those open dialogues, whether it's weekly, monthly, quarterly, but making sure that the dialogue isn't always just about work. It's about, how are you doing? How are things going? How are you feeling? And the third part, as you just mentioned, is leading by example, which is absolutely key. All right. I want to move along. We have a couple of more questions for you.

Gerry Lewis:

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Rawan, as more and more people are getting their vaccination, then there's definitely talk about getting back more normal way of life and the real possibility of returning to work in some capacity. We're hearing that there's only really a small percentage of employees who want to go back to a pre-COVID type work arrangement. The majority are saying that they want to keep some elements of working remotely a permanent part of their lives. What are your own personal thoughts on this, and how do you think this is going to play out? Just curious.

Rawan El-Komos:

I think it's a little hard to know exactly how it's going to play out, and I think it's going to vary depending on the organization, the business, the type of work that people do, right? There's a lot of things that come into play here. I also think that there's a high level of emotions that are currently involved in the discussion, right? There's a lot of fear, a lot of anxiety, which may not be the case in a year or two. Having said that, I am convinced that we're not going back.

Rawan El-Komos:

This was too significant of a shift and of context for us to go back to the way things work. So whatever we're going towards is a new normal. And I think as organizations and employers particularly, what we have to do is really take a step back and think about what it is that our people need? What is it that our business objectives are? What have we learned from this pandemic? There are so many things that were accelerated and things that we learned, we can't unlearn it, right? We saw the digitization agenda just explode.

Rawan El-Komos:

The ability for a lot of organizations to pivot to remote work. These were things in many industries and organizations that they probably didn't even fathom pre-pandemic. We can't unlearn those. What things did we learn that we want to leverage and we want to continue with? What things do we wish we would have done better? I think we've come so far in the systemic bias and discrimination conversation, it can't end here. We still have so much further to go.

Rawan El-Komos:

How do we now go back into a hybrid world, whatever that looks like, taking into consideration things like access, gender-based analysis, equity diversity, and inclusion. I think there's a lot of conversations that still need to happen, but I do think that we're going back to something very different than what it was before.

Gerry Lewis:

I agree. I agree. I love your point about don't unlearn what we've learned. There are so many great lessons that we picked up in this very difficult period, and to kind of give that away is like what a waste. What a waste it would be. I want to close today's conversation with some what I call words of advice. It's really interesting that if there's anything that we learned from the pandemic is that, A, things can change in an instant. And second, we are far more adaptable than we give ourselves credit for.

Gerry Lewis:

And I guess that's a double-edged sword when we talk about the living at work phenomenon that we're in. We talked today about how do we deal with it from an individual basis? How do we deal with it as a leader? How do we help our team help ourselves refine some of those boundaries? I want to conclude

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with any words of advice you want to just kind of close with, Rawan, in terms of what are your parting thoughts that you want people to say, "You know what? I'm going to remember that." Any words of advice?

Rawan El-Komos:

Yeah, I think there's three things I'd like to leave with people. And you see, I always do three? It sticks in people's mind. The first one is really take the time to know yourself. It is super important, because it'll be better for you and it'll be better for everyone around you. The more yourself, the easier it is to actually connect with others. You can't connect with people if you're not connected to yourself. That's the first thing. The second thing is learn to be kind to yourself.

Rawan El-Komos:

In these periods of just angst and stress, it's easy for us to worry about so many other things and forget about ourselves in the process. But again, if you're not kind to yourself, how can you expect yourself to be truly compassionate to other people? So really, really exercise kindness. And then the third, I want to leave you with a quote that I really like, and it's from Buddha. And it's just a reminder that we do our best every single day, and it's not going to look the same every single day.

Rawan El-Komos:

Every morning we are born again. What we do today is what matters most.

Gerry Lewis:

Rawan, I thank you. That is a beautiful quote, and it's a great way to kind of end this conversation, because it is one of the things that we all had to learn in this sort of pandemic situation is really living day by day. Not really knowing when it was going to end, when are we going to see the light at the end of the tunnel. And I think that that ability to reflect daily is a powerful gift that we got. I want to thank you personally for sharing your insights with us today, spending your time with us today.

Gerry Lewis:

I also understand that today is your birthday, so happy birthday and wishing you many, many, many more years of joy and health ahead.

Rawan El-Komos:

Thank you so much, Gerry, and thank you for having me. It was a pleasure to be here today.

Gerry Lewis:

Thanks, again, everyone for listening. This is Gerry Lewis, and you just listened to another episode of GLINC Outside the Box. Join us again soon. Take care.