

# Off Mute Episode 3 - Lele

**Isabella:** [00:00:00] Welcome to Off Mute, a podcast about women in cybersecurity

**Sophie:** We're Sophie,

**Isabella:** Isabella

**Sam:** and Sam.

**Sophie:** Three cyber fast streamers just beginning our careers in the government security profession.

**Sam:** Join us as we hear from women across government about their careers so far, the challenges they've faced and the great achievements they've made.

**Sophie:** Hi everyone. Thanks for listening. I'm joined here today by Lele. So for those that don't know, Lele is actually my manager. Lele, please can you start off by explaining a bit about your current role?

**Lele:** Hi everyone. So yes, I'm Lele. I work in Home Office Cyber Security. My role is the Head of Governance, Risk and Compliance.

Just a little bit about my role, so if I talk about the governance part first, so the G part of it is around ensuring that there is good cyber security governance [00:01:00] in place within the home office. And this includes running a number of boards, forums, security working groups in the organisation, but also newly added to my team is the policy remit as well.

So ensuring that there are a stronger, robust set of cybersecurity policies within the home office and ensuring it's fully embedded within the organisation. The R side of it is the risk. Risk, and this is a big part of what I do, and in fact, I'm currently running a project in this area to try and develop a new cybersecurity risk framework, have that rolled out across the home office to make sure that we can capture, uh, and assess.

Cybersecurity risk effectively. And then we also be able to create the risk picture across the organisation so that management are able to make effective decisions, uh, around cybersecurity itself. So the C part of it is compliance. And that's to do with primarily audit. So it's looking at how we go [00:02:00] out, we

assess the policies, how well it's been adhered to, but at the same time also having a focus on key cybersecurity controls domains where we are concerned about and trying to go out and actually effectively assess.

How well a lot of these things are in place. So when I say controls, it's looking at, uh, different cyber security measures, and there could be things like looking at vulnerability management, looking how effective it's been implemented and operating within the organisation, and then coming out with a lot of recommendations or findings to try and improve a lot of these processes in the organisation itself.

**Sophie:** Thank you Lele. I think we always have that conversation about how each part of GRC doesn't function without the other, is a very intervened. So Lele, how long have you been in the role and what sort of changes have you seen since you began either in the industry or in the role itself?

**Lele:** So my current role, I'm relatively new to the role, so I've been in just over a year.

So I think it's, it's been interesting for me. Still very [00:03:00] much new to the role and new to senior management itself. So a lot of challenges there. But I have worked in what I would say is predominantly an ID industry for, for over 10 years now. I think I started off in technology risk consultancy and, and that was very much the beginning of, of what cybersecurity is at the moment.

It's. Started off around looking at technology risk in the context of business risk, I think cuz it was a, a new kind of business line in the organisation that I worked for. So it was it was all very emerging, uh, and new at the time. And I think since I've ended up moving to, to different, uh, roles, uh, it's kind of progressed from.

IT security, information security to now what we know is cybersecurity. So I think there has been quite a lot of changes and if we think about it in the last decade or so, it's, it's, it's quite rapid changes within, uh, a relatively short space of time. So, yeah, I think I've [00:04:00] seen it change quite different iterations of what people perceive as cybersecurity, and I'm not really sure people still have landed on an agreed definition of it, but yeah, I've worked across all those different areas, um, throughout my career.

**Sophie:** And what does a typical day look like for you, Lele?

**Lele:** It's an interesting question. I think a day in my role, predominantly, to be honest, it comprises of a, a series of meetings, which, to be honest, dominates my diary every single day. So there's, there's a lot of kind of being involved in different conversations and discussions around risk, compliance policy, et cetera.

But at the same time, It's also kind of understanding what we can do to improve all these different elements within the organisation itself. I think a lot of people, uh, probably think of the home office as one organisation. In my opinion. It's actually a combination of a lot of really small organisations.

There's a lot of diversity in the way it's set up, [00:05:00] it's structured. So when we are tackling a lot of these problems, trying to implement a lot of these processes, That I'm trying to do now. There's a lot of challenges in terms of understanding how it works in different parts of the home office, but then almost then trying to harmonise it and, and to be able to provide that consistent platform to be able to assess things, um, in the same way, but then churn out the analytics and useful information that people can use to make a decision across the organisation.

So there's, there's a lot of conversations, understanding how it works in different areas. At the same time, there's a lot of problem solving as opposed, there's a lot of things that happen, changes and, and problems and incidents, et cetera, although not directly involved, I think do end up being partially involved in those processes because it's.

I would argue that there's all different processes in the organisation is linked to a risk. It's difficult for you to try to pull away [00:06:00] from that. So then I always get involved in a lot of conversations in understanding, well, you know, what is the risk in this area? How are we going to try and manage it, et cetera.

So yes, it's, it's a lot of meetings, a lot of conversations, a lot of problem solving. But I think it, the variety of it. Keeps it interesting for me, so, so I do, although it does sound like a lot of meetings back-to-back, it is always around different things. Keeps me on my toes, but also makes it very interesting for all those involved.

**Sophie:** Yeah. I think we can all confirm that the home office is a little bit of a beast, but what inspired you to pursue a career in cybersecurity?

**Lele:** I don't think I always set off to want to work in cyber security. Cause like I mentioned, it was a very much a new field when I started working.

Interestingly, I actually started my career trying to train as an accountant, a bit of background into that.

I think I come from a, a family background where you, my parents had a really significant role in, in kind of shaping what I wanted to do. [00:07:00] So they were very much involved, and they were very much trying to push me into to one, um, kind of field. And I think they thought being an accountant was something that was reliable, professional.

Um, so they, they were trying to encourage me to do that. It's also partially because I, I, I was actually quite good at math in school and so I think it automatically in their head, if you're good at math, you're going to be an accountant. So I did actually end up spending, uh, first part of my career. Trying to, to train as one.

Interestingly, um, I joined a, um, a big audit slash consultancy firm. So there were opportunities in the organisation to move into, um, other areas. And I think there was an opportunity that came up around technology risk, and I thought that was really interesting. So I, I took the opportunity and moved. It was still part of a graduate program, but it was focused on technology risk.

So that's how I started in the field. I was quite lucky to work with quite a lot of really interesting [00:08:00] and, and really passionate individuals about the topic. They were very techy, and I think they inspired me to, to kinda learn more about it, about computers, about it, security, an area that they, they were quite passionate about.

So I think that kind of fuelled me into to kind of learning more about the topic. Understanding a bit more and, and kind of develop skills in that area. And I think, um, that then kind of helped me to move into other roles to do with IC security predominantly, um, to do with compliance actually, cuz I think my background is more or less it order.

I think I; I spent the majority of my career doing that. But I think that's helped me to build a really good general picture of it, uh, because I think I started off doing IT audit and looking at the IT landscape in all different types of organisations. So it gave me a good variety of how it's set up differently in different organisations.

But then there was always a really [00:09:00] small part of what I was doing that was to do with security. So looking at it and it general controls was what I used to do day to day. Um, and a small subset of that is looking at security.

They always used to, to make me, uh, really interested that it seems quite an important area, but was a really small part of looking at the overall IT picture.

And it was, um, always an area that seemed very technical as well. Which I think was one of the reasons why it deterred a lot of people from looking into it in a lot of depth. But when I moved into industry, I think there was a lot more focus around security. But I think one of the key moments that really inspired me was working with a, uh, penetration tester within our organisation.

So we recruited our own internal, uh, kind of penetration tester to help, um, improve the security in the area. And I worked. Quite closely with him. He is very much all in like technical, a very techy person. [00:10:00] He loves trying to break things and he is always trying to do that in the organisation, like working in alongside all the other things that he was doing.

And I think working with him really did inspire me because he showed me what he was capable of doing and how easily he could do things. He also thought about the ways that it could be prevented, um, and defended against it as well, because he was kind of always trying to break things, but at the same time, he was also trying to counteract anything that people put in place.

So, He spent a lot of time, um, doing that with me because he was almost trying to tell me, oh, well you could defend about it by doing all these things and then I'll just try and break it again. So it was very much working out ways that we could best improve security across the organisation. And because of all the techy things that he did, uh, and it opened my eyes up to, wow, these things are really interesting.

And the whole concept of constantly trying to, to kind of. of break something, attack something, and then at the same time, [00:11:00] working out ways that we can prevent it, defend it, I think was a really interesting concept for me and, and I found it quite inspiring. So yeah, I think I, I'm still in touch with that person and we, he very much was my mentor for that part of my career, and he taught me a lot about cybersecurity.

**Sophie:** So you've touched on your previous work career. You previously worked in the banking sector. What was that like compared to the public sector?

**Lele:** It's very different. A lot of people keep asking me, is it, is it better or worse? I don't think it is better or worse. I think it's just very different and. I think if you try and break it down into the key elements, I think the first thing is the whole organisational approach I is just completely different.

The bank is very much profit orientated, so everything is about cost. Everything is about reducing cost, increasing profit, et cetera. I think they're very good at doing that, and it's also different because they have, well, At the [00:12:00] time when I was at the bank, there was a lot more investment in cybersecurity.

Because it was recognised as something that was a key business concern. So they, they put a lot of emphasis and resources into the area, but everything was driven around looking at that resource cost and what benefits we get from it in comparison to the, the amount we're spending on it. It was very much driving the strategy that we're trying to put in place.

We're trying to increase. Cybersecurity, but within some resourcing constraints and, and what benefit does it deliver for the organisation overall, whereas in the public sector, I would say it, it, it's a little bit different in the sense that although there is value for money, there is a lot of focus on that.

I think there's, there's not that emphasis on profits and so a lot of the decisions that we make doesn't necessarily kind of consider what, you know, business can profits that could be made from there. What, what kind of benefits. That could be made [00:13:00] from, um, increasing income for the organisation. We don't really consider it that way.

So I think that whole approach is slightly different. And I think the way, in that case, the decisions that you make in around cybersecurity slightly different as well. Resourcing is also different because bank had a lot more. Um, funds that they could spend in that area. Whereas in the public sector, we know that we, we have to be a lot more careful in with the money that we're spending, and we probably don't have a, you know, such a big budget as they would in the banking sector.

So it does limit us in, does what we can do. So I guess we were working with some really challenging constraints in that sense. I think the other difference that's quite notable for me is, When I worked in the bank, we spent a lot of time working with regulators. There was a lot of regulatory requirements because it was a global bank I worked in, we had a really, they strong relationships with the regulators, but then they were quite closely [00:14:00] involved in, um, understanding the decisions that we were making, assessing them, challenging them, but they were also imposing a lot of internal controls that we needed to put in place.

To, to ensure they're happy with how we're operating, that we're, we're considering all the risks involved. There is a huge emphasis on, on risk across

the organization because all other reg regulators want that assurance that you're managing your risk, you're understanding your risk very well. I think in the financial sector there's a lot more emphasis around that.

In fact, I would say that that was one of the key differences. Working in the bank as well, we had massive risk teams. Risk was recognised as a responsibility for every single employee within the organisation. Everybody had a responsible, uh, responsibility towards it, and it was a key pillar in their strategy.

Uh, is managing their risk, understanding their risk. So there was a lot of focus in that area and there was a, uh, a lot of investment in terms of [00:15:00] increasing the risk culture throughout the organisation. Whereas in the public sector, I find there's lots of discussion around risk, but the maturity is relatively low in a lot of different areas.

I think it varies depending on where you are looking at, but overall, if I'm trying to generalise it, I would say it, it is comparably lower than in the banking sector where everything is, you can link everything back to the risk and everybody's working in whatever field, uh, in the bank would understand.

They are linked to, to the risk, um, that the organisation is exposed to. So that's a lot of part of what we are doing as well. I think there's a key part of, of our project in trying to uplift that kind of understanding of cybersecurity risk across the organisation and helping to, to organise whether it's IT personnel or general users in the organisation to understand.

Cyber securities and the risks involved there. I think that's, that's a key part of it where it's not as fully [00:16:00] embedded across the organisation. Um, certainly in the home office in comparison to previous organisations I've worked with. And the final point, apologies, I'm spending a lot of time talking about this cuz I think there is quite a lot of differences, um, is the people.

It's very, very different. People set up and people dynamic. I think it's quite noticeable for me because I think there's different types of people that are attracted to banking and I think there's different types of people that are attracted to the public sector. I think, um, because of that, there's a lot of the culture's completely different. And the people that I'm working with are also very different in the sense that I find there's a lot more diversity in the public sector. There's a lot more different people from different backgrounds. Uh, and there's, there's, there's quite extreme differences. I've got people who, who have worked in the civil service for years, 10 years plus, 20 years plus. And, but then

I've got people who are new into the public sector coming from different backgrounds as well. [00:17:00] Uh, I've had varying degrees of experience in the public sector, so it's quite, it's quite different. And their, and their view and their approach to, to the work that we do is also quite different.

Whereas actually what I find in the bank is there is still diversity, but I think in terms of people's skills, backgrounds, and experiences actually is, is a lot more, uh, similar. Uh, I do find a lot of people in that, uh, that I used to work with did come from a very similar background experiences. It, it then creates, I guess, less diversity in the whole workforce or certainly in the team that I was working with at the time.

So I think it's probably, yeah, they, they probably need to work on, um, that diversity element a bit more than, than in fact the public sector, which I think does have a good mix of different people from different areas and backgrounds. So, so I think yeah, that, that's particularly different. Which I think does make it diff uh, well, difficult for me when I first joined to, to understand how people operate because I think in that, when the people are so different as well, their approaches to [00:18:00] work, uh, the ways of working, uh, is also very different.

And I think it took me a bit of time to understand, um, how it works here and, and how I think people like to work here.

**Sophie:** Are there any key actions that you took in order to progress to senior leadership?

**Lele:** It's interesting. I think it's only because I'd never really set out in my career to kind of move up the ladder really quickly.

I am very much more focused on looking at problems, trying to solve problems, getting, and doing a lot of things and getting quite granular and detailed in the things that I do. And I enjoy doing that. It's when we look in that thing, I think you've heard me in in meetings where I can get into a lot of the weeds into the detail and, and that's a big part of what I enjoy doing.

And I think what I'm very conscious of quite early on in my career was that actually as you move up the ladder, You are actually more far, far removed from a lot of the weeds and a lot of the, the, the kind of fixing things and doing [00:19:00] things at the lower level. So I never really set out to, to kind of go, all right, I'm gonna get my way to the top really quickly.



I kind of progressively got there and I think it kind of happened a little, a little bit more organically because as of when my skills and experience kind of increased in the different roles that I was in, What motivated my move into different roles is actually to keep things interesting for me. I want to constantly learn things.

I want to do new things, uh, and I, I want to be constantly learning. So whenever I feel like I'm coming to a point in my role where I feel like, okay, I've exhausted it, I'm getting bored, that's when I kind of feel like, okay, I need to make a move. And that's what. Tends to motivate my moves into different roles that I'm in.

And I think moving into management kind of felt like a natural move for me at this point in time because I think I did kind of exhaust a little bit of what I was doing in my previous role because I spent a lot of [00:20:00] time building a lot of girls and experience in GRC or what? Predominantly around looking at audit IT audit, cybersecurity, audit.

And I think I've come to a point where there was more little, I could do to kind of make massive improvements or massive changes or, or to kind of learn a lot more about what I was doing. So I felt like I wanted to move onto learning about something else. And I think. One of the areas I've avoided a little bit, not avoided deliberately, but I think I've been focusing a lot more on the technical and the subject matter is looking at management, I suppose as well.

That is a different kind of skillset, and I felt like that was an area that I probably haven't been exposed to a lot. Hence why when the opportunity came up for my role. I thought I'd give it a go and it came. It kinda, it was kind of motivated from a lot of my own views about the way that I think we can do things differently and be able to organise and build a team differently.

I and I [00:21:00] felt like being in a senior management role gave me the mandate to be able to do a lot of the really fundamental changes, hence why I wanted to, to get into that role and put myself in a position where I, I can actually make some really big and concrete changes in the team that I was working in.

But it's also a little bit of self-development to kind of learn a bit more about what I can do, thinking more strategically, uh, managing things more effectively. So I think that that's what drove me to in that sort of role. So I wouldn't say I progressively kind of worked my way deliberately into a senior manager role.

I think it was just more for my own kind of self-development, which is why it's pushed me towards that role. And I think what's really helped me to get there. Is actually the build-up of my skills and experiences in the field that I was working in. It kind of felt like I could understand it a lot better so I could see where the problems were.

I think that's how I've kind of got there kind of organically, I suppose, rather than [00:22:00] deliberately kind of engineering my way up there. And I have to say it's, it's quite different to, to what I expected. And like I said, it's just a completely different set of skills. When you kind of reach that kind of senior management level, which I'm still learning.

It's interesting, but it, it is very different, I suppose, to somebody who is a subject matter expert in a certain area. Yeah.

**Sophie:** It's like you sensed our next question, Lele here. Next question is how do you continue to learn and develop in your role? What's the best way of doing so?

I

**Lele:** think it's really different at different parts of my career, and I think since I've moved into my current role, it has had to change quite a lot.

I think at the early parts of your career, I did a lot of learning on the job, learning from people I worked with. Also at the combination of doing a lot of training courses, professional training, et cetera. I spent a good part of, uh, my career kind of focusing on those elements of learning or those ways of learning.

And I [00:23:00] think now that I've moved into a more kind of more strategic role, I think it has changed a little bit because. It's not so much learning about, like I said, subject matter or, or professional development in, in the sense of, um, cybersecurity details and, and understanding a lot more of the technicality behind it.

It's having, it's almost taking a step back and thinking about the bigger picture. And that takes, uh, a different kind of learning to be able to understand, because I think it's very different for different organisation in terms of what that's their strategic approaches, what their objectives are. Uh, I think there's a lot of things that you could learn from being part of, uh, CD management conversations, understanding a lot more about their perspectives, but there's a lot more about developing, uh, kind of soft skills, I suppose that are not more technical skills,

but things about understanding how that fits into the wider organisation and how.

What you do [00:24:00] in your area can benefit the overall organisational picture. So it's talking to people a lot more. What I find has been most beneficial and going out and being able to share knowledges and experiences with other professionals I think has actually been really beneficial for me and it's have bringing together a lot of problems that.

We are aware of, but perhaps we haven't quite been able to even find the ultimate solution or be able to navigate our way to the solution has been a challenge for me and I think having a lot of discussions externally with other people has been helpful and there's a lot of forums now that you're able to do that, to be able to do that knowledge sharing with the wider industry.

I think that's actually been more beneficial than actually, say, for example, sitting a training course, which I've probably done a lot less of since I've come into my current role. But I think it, it's actually going out understanding a bit more, but also understanding the people side of things as well and understanding how you can manage people [00:25:00] effectively.

How you can actually bring the best out in people is something that I've put a bit more focus into understanding. A bit more.

**Sophie:** Yeah, definitely. I think at the start of your career it's important to do those sorts of courses and get those certifications as sort of your base knowledge. Then as you progress, it's from learning through other people.

So, Lele, what strengths do you think are important for women with senior management aspirations?

**Lele:** I Think there are a number of things that women can consider. I, I think it's difficult to say specific to women itself. Cause I think these things probably, uh, apply to anyone, I guess, who have senior.

Management aspiration, but I think one of the more challenging things for women is kind of trying to break that, that glass in terms of operating in, in a very male dominated environment. Because what I found was challenging in, in my career is working with a lot of kind of similar characters, I suppose, and backgrounds that were quite different to [00:26:00] mine and and trying to understand.

A little bit more, their points of views and what motivates them and also what influences them as well. I think women tend to be a bit better at kind of reading people, understanding people, and being able to communicate effectively with people as well. I think that's what I think in my experience anyway.

Women tend to be a bit stronger on, but then they don't tend to utilise it as well as, as men do not, so that men don't have similar qualities as well, but I think they're just are able to, to do it and use it more effectively. Whereas women, I think, have a lot of considerations. I think they see a lot of complexity in things.

And also in my case, um, speaking from my personal experience. It's also having that confidence as well. Women tend to be, or certainly from my perspective, I tend to, to kind of think twice all of the time and second guess a lot of the views that I may have. So when I'm in that kind of environment where I'm [00:27:00] trying to, to maybe present a view or maybe push forward an argument or, or something I do, I do have to kind of almost.

Kind of challenge it myself in my head first, and almost trying to, to criticise myself to try to work out what potential questions are happening before I would actually portray that. Whereas I find for other people, and particularly men, I think they're just more happy and more comfortable than being able to just.

Communicate what their thoughts and views are and, and try to, to kind of push their agenda a lot better. So I think those are, one of the things I've learned as part of being in the senior management team is, is kind of trying to portray your view better and being a lot more assertive, but also kind of confident in, in your perspective and points of view as well.

Which I had to work on a long time actually to, to try and try and do that better. Whereas I find, uh, in a lot of cases, certainly a lot of team members I work with, they're just, it just comes a lot more naturally to them. So, yeah, I think it's building that confidence and for [00:28:00] me, um, in my experience as well, is.

Being able to do that based on what I know and what I've done and learned and what I've seen in the past has been helpful for me. So I guess be trying a lot more things and exposing yourself into different types of scenarios and environments, I guess, gives you that confidence that you can kind of build upon to then be able to push your points of views.

So I think, yeah, trying a lot more things, experiencing a lot more things, having that, and then building your confidence that way is, is how I approached it.

**Sophie:** Yeah, truthfully, I recognise so much of myself and what you were saying there about having the confidence to do that. Now as a mother, how do you manage that sort of work life balance?

**Lele:** It's hard, I'll be honest. It's, it's a very hard job that I'm currently in. I personally think is, is quite high pressure, quite fast paced and uh, there's quite a lot of time commitment towards it. And because of the way that I feel quite passionate about my subject, I genuinely want to, to kind of. Build something, do something.

And I'm [00:29:00] investing a lot of time and effort thinking about it and, and trying to, to solve a number of problems that, that come my way. But then trying to balance that with also, to be honest with you, even more challenging problems that I have from, from my kids. So I have two kids, a boy, and a girl, and they both pose really difficult challenges for me at different point.

Of their lives. I think people always say they get older, and it gets easier. Personally, I, I don't think it does. I think it, the challenges just change from something that's a lot more basic, you know, keeping them alive, making sure they're fed, et cetera. Uh, and it moves to a lot more challenging difficulties in managing, you know, their, their more education, their, the way that they socially interact with other children and, and a lot more other different.

Uh, challenges that comes our way. For me, it's kind of trying to be very, very well organised. There's a diary that I have from work. There's a diary that my kids have each [00:30:00] have one respectively, and then mine, which to be honest with you, tends to be the one that gets deprioritised right at the bottom of the stack and making sure that the other diaries are maintained.

So I make sure that I allocate. Enough time to, to engage in all the activities that I need to do as a mother, which can be almost a job in itself. And then making sure there's a strict kind of boundaries in terms of when I do the, the home life and home issues and, and, uh, things to do with my children, and then things that I do at work as well.

Being disciplined to do that is hard because, like I said, quite passionate about what I do. So then I, I want to do a lot of things. But at the same time, um, fully understand that responsibilities at home are also really important to me. So being organised helps so that I can fit everything that I need to do in, but then also being disciplined and making sure that I do follow my plan and follow the diary.

And it's also very hard, but I think I'm getting better. I would like to say it's still, it's still a, I'm trying to [00:31:00] refine, but I think it is, it is all part of learning as well and I'm hoping it will get better in time, but still something I'm very much learning at the moment.

**Sophie:** Yeah, I mean, Lele, I've seen your work calendar, let alone all your multiple personal ones as well. Have you modelled your own leadership style or behaviour on a former leader of yours? And if so, what was the style of behaviour that you now.

**Lele:** Yes, there is one person at, actually, it should be quite early on in my career. So my first move away from tech risk consultancy was into industry and I was actually managed by a woman, and it was very insightful experience for me because, It was completely different to how I was managed by previous male managers in the past.

I think it's because she has been through a, uh, really interesting experience because of, she's older than me and, and she's been in it industry a longer, and so she's been operating pretty much her entire career in a very, very male dominated [00:32:00] environment. Remote where she is always the, the only woman that's there.

And, and also, she's trying to do a lot of things to, to, to kind of operate with all these, um, different individuals and who very, who were very differently to her, but also trying to, to put her a lot of views across. And she's, she's always had a challenge of, um, Of trying to do that and I think she shared a lot of experience with me and how she managed that, and I think that's inspired me quite a lot, helping me to understand how I can communicate a lot of my views and thoughts better.

But at the same time, what she also shared with me was a lot more empathy and understanding of the challenges that you have as a woman as well. I think from things like, you know, home life having, she has children of her own as well. I think she has a good understanding of what challenges women experience there.

But I think for me, one of the things is, so I was pregnant whilst she was my manager. And I think the challenges that you experienced through that process. I think for me as well, it was [00:33:00] particularly challenging cuz I had a number of health issues. It, it was really hard for me to kind of balance that and also manage my work at the same time.

But she was very supportive, very understanding, very open to discuss the challenges and the issues, which I'll be honest, I was eternally grateful for because it was a really difficult time in my life. But I felt she always understood of me and understood. What I was experiencing, and she's experienced similar things herself.

So I think it, it was easier for me to, to kind of open up and share it with her, whereas I'm not entirely sure it would've been similar with a male manager who perhaps wouldn't be as, I wouldn't say that they're not understanding, but I guess they wouldn't have had their own experience in that area. So I think it, it came to a point where I, you know, there were certain health.

Um, let's just say, uh, challenges during pregnancy, which is a little bit embarrassing, but I was very comfortable sharing that with her, be able to talk about it as she would be thinking about ways that I could manage it better and sharing [00:34:00] her experience as well. So I'm really grateful that she managed me during that period of time, but also prepare me for my return to work, which also was really, really challenging for me.

I think I experienced quite a lot of guilt, uh, when I was returning to the workplace after my pre pregnancy, but she. Fully understood that gave me a lot of support and gave me a lot of things that I needed to think about to make sure that I'm comfortable to return to the workplace. And also gave me a lot of flexibility as well to be able to manage that difficult time for me.

So I think she really inspired me and made me realise that actually you can, uh, be a mother and you can also be working, uh, a working mother, which is what she demonstrated, and I think for her. It was, especially her generation, it was, it was not as common. I think a lot of the friends and she had probably were not, uh, fully working mothers.

They were part-time working mothers. I think that was quite common as well, but not a full-time working mother, which is, [00:35:00] uh, well, certainly from my experience, very difficult. And she inspired me because she was able to do it very well. And manage both her, her home and work life very well. She was successful in her career and in fact, throughout the time I've known her, she's kind of progressed into to, uh, more senior roles and at the same time balancing that.

Home life as well. She's got two children, which I, I know very well and are now very much grownups and they're, they're very, very mature and, and sensible children and I always feel like that's inspired me to think, right. She's,

that's somebody that's able to do that. It's not easy. But she was always able to, to give me views and support for that and, and it made me think, okay, I can do it too.

**Sophie:** Yeah. She sounds great. What's the best professional advice you've ever received?

**Lele:** There's a, there's a couple I've got, I've got quite a lot of professional advice, some by the manager I previously spoke about as well from her. She always tried to encourage me to kind of come out of my comfort zone. Um, I was [00:36:00] always very good at like, looking at a complex problem, trying to work things out, doing a lot of calculations, trying to, to understand what, what potentially could be solutions.

But what I probably wasn't as good at was being able to, to kind of push that in a manner that would be involving, influencing a number of different stakeholders. And I think she, she kind of saw that in me quite early on in my career and she, she kind of mentioned that. I was like, there are ways that you can do this better.

And in fact, there's a ways of. Doing this more effectively so that the outcome will be beneficial for all those involved and actually it would be a better overall outcome as well. And she spent a lot of time encouraging me to do that. And, and even granular things like being able to attend certain meetings and be able to, to kind of portray my thoughts.

I tend to be the last person that kind of puts forward view because I'm very much a listener. I like to listen, absorb, and I think I process a lot of information and then I'll come out with [00:37:00] my end, uh, view or solution. Whereas I think in a lot of meetings with different kind of problem-solving situations I'm in, people would like to kind of throw a lot of views out there to kind of.

Work together to get towards the end point. And I think some, and what, one thing that she didn't mention to me that was worth concerning is, you know, there's, there's probably a journey that you need to take people on as part of understanding your thought process of how you got to that end solution, rather than kind of portraying something right at the very end so that they're not really sure how you've come up with that.

And I'm not really sure your thought process in coming up to that end point but taking them through that journey of how you are. Evolving something or how you're moving something towards that correct direction. So she gave me a lot of



advice about that, which I thought was really helpful because I think I did find at some point I think, oh, I know what the answer is, and I'll people just look at me as a blind play.

Oh, well, you know, how have you considered this? How, how have you got there? And so I think that's, that's been really helpful for me. So I [00:38:00] think taking myself out my comfort zone to be able to try these things and try and communicate differently, try to, to kind of adjust the way that I communicate to different people was really challenging for me.

I spent a lot of time learning about that, and she did coach lot on that. And so, I think that really helped me and I think through being able to, to kind of do that as well made me realise that actually when you do do that, you do learn something new, and you then develop yourself to then kind of move forward to another level.

So, So I do encourage people to kind of try different things, you know, that maybe they're not entirely comfortable with, but don't go crazy and like kind of jump into the deep end. Maybe take some small steps with some guidance perhaps to kind of take yourself outta that comfort zone and try something different.

I think that would be really helpful.

**Sophie:** Lele, we always like to wrap up the podcast with a recommendation. Can you recommend any books, TV programs, podcasts that you've been [00:39:00] listening to can be cybersecurity related or just something that you're simply enjoying?

**Lele:** So the recommendation I have, which is very personal to me, Is is something called, um, crying in H Mart. I dunno whether, um, anybody's heard of that book. I think it's written by Michelle Zauner. So it's a book about a, an American Korean, she's a musician, uh, and is a little bit of a memoir that she's written about her experiences. And the reason why I really like it is because a lot of the themes in her book really resonated with me.

I think we come from kind of like a, a kind of mixed heritage kind of background, and she shares a lot of experiences being the, the only Korean, um, person in an American. In school as she grew up and she talked a lot about the experiences there. She also talked about, um, quite in depth her experience with her mother, who is, [00:40:00] um, a, she had cancer.

And that's also an experience I share with her as well, because that's something I've been through, um, which I'll be honest, was really impactful in my life. Uh, different ways to her, but I think we both can resonate with how, how much has affected the way we are and shaped our personality and experience and our character as well.

So I can resonate with that quite deeply. So, yeah. Uh, that's my recommendation.

**Sophie:** Thank you for listening to Off Mute with a special thanks to today's guest, Lele. This episode was hosted by Sophie,

**Isabella:** produced by Isabella,

**Sam:** and written by Sam.