Episode 12: Learning to speak up about the small things with behavioral scientist Dr Gina Merchant

**Gina:** My name is Gina Merchant and I have two children. Ashton is almost five and a half and he is a boy and Elina is about two and a half and she is a girl. And my current role, in addition to being a mom and mother, all of those things is I am the associate director of customer experience for type two diabetes at Tandem Diabetes Care here in San Diego. So I'm in a marketing department.

**Jacqueline:** Great. And you were a behavior change specialist?

**Gina:** Yes. So I'm academically trained as behavioral scientist. And this is actually my very first time moving outside of a more traditional either medical affairs or product development role into more of a strategic marketing role.

**Jacqueline:** So Gina, please briefly describe your journey to where you are now. Obviously you and I met when I was a professor and you were a student and a postdoctoral fellow. So tell me more about your journey before that time, and since then.

**Gina:** It's funny looking back, it feels like it went very quickly, but then if I think more clearly it was a very slow, arduous decision-making process. I was a PhD student in the program that we were both a part of, and I finished my doctorate in public health, I think at the very end, it was like December of 2015 . I remember I was 16 weeks pregnant and I hadn't told everyone on my committee. I just told my advisor, and I wore a loose blouse.

And then, I stayed on to do a postdoc because I'd actually fallen in love with research while I was a student. Mentors such as yourself and the group that we were both a part of, it just seemed like a really great fit for my curiosity. I'd always loved teaching. So I stayed on as a postdoc in biomedical informatics and had a joint appointment . And I was there for a while and I had my son Ashton, and then went on leave. I remember coming back was traumatic. We can maybe get into the me pumping for the first time in an office that maybe wasn't hospitable to that.

And I just got to a position in my career where I was writing my K grant which is to transition yourself, hopefully if you get funded from a postdoc to a first-year professor. And my husband and I owned a home and he'd been really carrying the load for us, I think, as a partner financially, I just was staring down the salary trajectory and I got really nervous. I had a lot of student loans and obviously you can get, the competitive awards to get those paid for by the government. But I just had grown up in a paycheck to paycheck family with a lot of financial insecurity. And so that was a big motivator for me.

And then the other part was I was just, seeing left and right, people such as yourself, had left. And I was like, wow, these are people who I had admired. And I thought, they were working either parents or people that tried to live these balanced lives and it didn't look like it was working.

And yeah I made the decision to leave. And I had a very rough transition into a medical device company. And I say very rough, just because we're not trained at all, I think as scientists, from my understanding, my estimation. I take a lot of people interested in leaving, probably more than once a month, I take these interest interviews for lack of a better way of saying it from people who want to know what it's like. And it still seems to be the case that our academic institutions are just not equipping today's student body for a life outside of academia.

And that really hit me smack in the face from a cultural perspective. I had always assumed that evidence and data would lead conversations and decision making, especially in a business where you wanted to really spend those dollars appropriately. And that's just not how the world works. I transitioned from product development into medical affairs, hoping I could find my people cause I was an N of one and it just didn't get any better. I moved over to a startup really polar opposite, where I took a senior leadership role at a 50 person org that was growing like crazy. And scientifically, it was fantastic. I worked very closely with data science. I really loved like trying to implement a lot of what I'd been trained in, which was more like personalized intervention development. But the operations and the core culture of the company was a complete misalignment with my values. And I raised a lot of concerns and they weren't well-received and we parted ways after just six months.

So I got back into consulting, which I had done a little bit and I was able to find a connection with a woman who is an incredible leader, mother and we've got this opportunity at Tandem. She'd been working there for a few years. And so I started consulting for them and then really liked the people and decided, once they had this job, a full-time in house job opportunity that again, thinking of stability, financial security, my husband wanted to make a change that it would just be the best for me and our family. So that's where I am.

**Jacqueline:** Great. Thanks for that. It gives me an opportunity for so many questions. I suppose maybe one of the things I just want to mention out there is that there isn't a straight forward career plan. And I think so many of us, when we do go into something like academia, where we invest quite a lot of time in our education, it feels like it should just be like step to step and straight forward.

And I really don't think it is. And I think lots of people discover this once they become mothers. Mine was not straightforward. I started out in advertising and then went back in to academia and now, a mompreneur and trying out different types of businesses and things. So I think that's one thing for us all to understand is there isn't a straightforward path. And becoming a mum, definitely puts a new wrench in that. It's a different cog in our wheel, shall we say. It may be sends us off in a different direction.

You mentioned coming across this female leader, I'd like to just hear about what about her made her seem like a good female leader? I think that's what we need is role models and that's so important. So describe to me what it was about her style, that appeals to you.

**Gina:** I love this question. As soon as you started to ask it, I was like smiling and feeling warm and fuzzy inside. I think the initial attraction was really the more stereotypical presence when you first meet someone and you feel that attraction. And it's authentic. It's not oh, that person like is good looking or holds a position of power. And I want something a genuine, like a soul vibration of some kind. I and I'm not trying to be cheesy and saying that it was really a moment where cause I remember it very well actually. Like I can picture myself in the coffee shop. She just had a way that she carried herself that was very unapologetic . And it's interesting to talk about it now because I've become a huge Glennon Doyle fan. I am holding off on reading Untamed for the second time, because I just want to cherish it. I just love the way that she's opened up my eyes.

**Jacqueline:** Do you think if you read it again, it will take away from it because my experience in rereading the books is that I get something out of every time and actually I then go, wow, this book influenced me and I can see that it influenced me now and now I'm reading it again, I really, it was thank you to that book that I moved in a certain direction, and I hadn't even recognized it. Like in retrospect you see it again. So it's interesting that you mentioned a fear of reading it again, but I totally get what you mean. It was just an amazing book.

**Gina:** Yeah. I think it's because it's specialness almost feels sacred. I feel like there's like a responsibility when I open it up again that there's like an action that I have to take both internally and externally to the world. Which I think is part of her power. It's transcendent. So yeah, so Steph had that way about her that really just felt unapologetic and she's tall. She takes up space. And she immediately asked me about me, she didn't dive into what do I do? What do I want? It was more like, who are you? And then I think it got mentioned pretty early on in the conversation that she was a collegiate athlete and I was a collegiate athlete. And I find that when I meet mothers in particular, who are working professionals who are also athletes, I just feel like that's this trifecta for me.

Unfortunately there can be instances in the workforce where there's a competitiveness and I know this is cliche and people say this, but I have experienced it. Where women feel like they have to compete because there's not as many seats at the table. And so I'm always on guard. I tend to be a relationship person who jumps in feet first, I don't question. And I don't maybe have as many boundaries as I should. And then I can realize later oh gosh, I maybe shouldn't have been that way because that person isn't, being the best version of themselves or it's not as healthy for me, but Steph time and again, over the over years was just always this consistent life force. She held me in such high esteem and she just understood why I was making the decision I was making. And now here I am, we're colleagues. I'm not on her team, but I work with her and our friendship has only strengthened.

**Jacqueline:** That's great. And I agree, we need female role models. We need female mentors. And I get it, it is hard if there's only one place at the table. And I feel like I experienced that somewhat in academia. Dr. Williams in her book ' What works for moms at work', calls it out, definitely, as one of the behaviors that gets in women's way is the women's lack of support. So I'm so glad to hear that. So let's talk a little bit more about when you went back to work as a new mum, I certainly went through the same experience in terms of trying to pump and breastfeed there. And I was also in a similar situation as you when you were saying you were pregnant presenting your thesis, I was going for a job interview trying to hide my bump and feeling like it would be used against me as such or an excuse not to hire me. So I remember being ashamed about it. So yeah. Tell me a little bit more about that experience and as a new mother and what you think could have been better.

**Gina:** Yeah, it was really traumatic and it's, hearing you say that story, it seems like all moms and working moms have had at least one really negative experience and that just highlights like how much work there is to do. Pumping at work is very practical, like logistical, it's operational; there's timing, there's supplies, there's space. And so for me I had obviously was my first child. I'd never done breastfeeding before. I had never pumped before. And so there's a lot of vulnerability there and I remember feeling vulnerable and, I know we know each other pretty well, and I'm not one to usually like cower in a corner and not feel like how to ask for help. But I think, there's things like: are my breasts gonna explode in a meeting? Am I leaking? How do I get this milk cold as quickly as possible? Do I just put it in the refrigerator? Like I just had so many questions. And at that point I just come back from leave. So it's you're also like, oh, while you were gone, like there's new people in the office. And there had been a space dedicated, but it wasn't really fully dedicated. So it was like a wellness room. And I didn't really understand the policies when I first came back. I think California law requires based on the size of the institution or maybe for academic institutions in general, spaces from others to pump. But I didn't know any of that. No one had told me like where to find that information. I think it was a few months in before I like downloaded the app or got onto the website.

But I went to this wellness room and there was like a key. And you had to check it out from this desk, but the desk wasn't always staffed and I had to sign in and out, but people would sleep in the room.I would get messaging really directly, very crudely from this woman who managed the space. Hey, you have to share the space and no, you can't use it at this time. And it's, we don't staff the desk after four. And I was like what if I have a meeting? And your breasts are gonna explode. It's a very legitimate concern. And she just had zero empathy. And I actually got to a place one day where I'd forgotten my pants. And I had exercise that morning and I was carrying six bags. And so I was in my foot flops in my sweaty running shorts and she made me cry and I cried in front of her and I felt just terrible.

And so I actually had to go to the ombudsman. I didn't have to, but I chose to try to do a reporting because this woman she's making me feel this bad and I'm not one to usually cry to someone's face like that, then I'm sure she's going to harm other women who come back and have the same experience. So yeah, that was pretty traumatic. I started pumping elsewhere. I then moved over to that shared postdoc, like I mentioned, so I was cutting across campus more and there were some other more friendly spaces for me to use.

**Jacqueline:** Yeah. Yep. And I remember serving on the gender committee as part of the university and that was something they were doing very strongly, was trying to follow the policies of providing these lactation rooms and would always say there is provision. We've made the provision of the rooms that are available here. But when you are a busy academic running from meeting to meeting, you don't have time , to leave that building and run across campus somewhere. And yeah, the logistics of it was a nightmare and that whole space was uncomfortable. And generally didn't feel supportive of women. I used to pump in the toilets or in my office and just try and put something over the window. And, but again, I like, like you, there was something about the vulnerability that didn't lead me to push for it or something. I didn't know what it was. You just feel like you're an inconvenience, right?

**Gina:** Yeah. And I just wanted to pick up on what you just said about the planning. I got really frustrated when people would say we're meeting the requirements. And I would go to this one pumping room and it was in the engineering section of the campus. And there were these three women and we would all be in there at the same time. Let me tell you what it's like when there's three women who don't know each other who are all trying to relax, have let down. And then there's a fridge that is only going to hold so many bottles of milk. You have to clean your supplies. And then if I walk into another meeting on campus, does that meeting location have a refrigerator . You have to think about all these things, the planning doesn't begin and end with checking boxes on a state mandated spreadsheet, you have to really talk to those stakeholders who are the working moms and have a really comprehensive plan.

**Jacqueline:** I think you're absolutely right. And I love how you call that out because I agree the environments we provide are important, but they are also not the end. There always has to be this input from the users. And yeah, it's just part of our behavior change understanding, is the environment space is important, but it's just one element in this whole process. Yeah. The other thing I admire about you Gina is you are very principled and you looked how to report this to the ombudsman because you wanted other people not to go through this. And that resonates with me a lot in terms of having burnt out as a working mum. I don't want other working moms to have to go through that. But let's talk a little bit more about your experience of gender bias in the workplace and coming to someone like me and explaining what was going on. And then for me not to know what to do and not doing anything at the end of the day.

And I had the same situation with another student who I felt had been treated inappropriately by a faculty member, but they didn't want me to do anything. And I really didn't know how to handle that. And so I definitely own that. In terms of my lack of knowledge, but also the lack of training that I had received. And for me also just a whole lack of awareness. I definitely was on the receiving end of gender bias and didn't even know I was, because I just assumed it was my problem. So go ahead, tell us a little bit more about your experience and what you would have hoped for from the women around you.

**Gina:** Yeah, that's a tough one. Cause I think what I would have hoped for, maybe I'll start with the experience. I actually don't remember all of the little things that added up to culminate for me to go talk to you. And I think I talked to peers as well, a couple of peers who were in our group who are either finishing up their PhD or were post-docs. But I remember a couple of them. So the situation was someone who used to be a close friend and a colleague of mine who was a man who was senior to me, but not by many years. We shared space. We shared working space. You mentioned you think it's just you and I think that is such a persistent problem. I still feel that today where I'll get these like paper cut, I hate the word micro sexism. Like it's just sexism. Things will happen to us in our working day or at the grocery store or wherever. And we're like, oh, did I do something? What could I have done differently? And so I remember that there were like all these little things where I was asking myself like, oh, did I, was I too aggressive? Or did I step out of my lane? And then finally there was enough of these situations and I was paying attention, like trying to be as objective as possible. Okay, is this man trying to put me in a corner and assert his either intellectual authority, power authority or just dominance? And I think this issue of intention is really interesting because I've heard a lot of like people, when you talk to them about your experience, they're like he didn't mean to do that, or, oh, he just didn't know. And then it's as though, like that's supposed to just excuse the behavior. And I always think if I'm speeding on the highway and a cop pulls me over, I don't get to say I didn't know.

So yeah, so I do remember coming to you with my concerns. And I remember I had felt compelled to share it with someone senior, senior leadership relative to the position that I was in, because I did hope to have conversations at another level that it would be addressed. Because I knew that he was getting into mentoring roles and I was watching him just dominate conversations. And that was also his personality. But that could potentially affect this person's career trajectory, because if he's being put in a position of authority over a person who's trying to be groomed or trained, and then he has these issues with control, sexism then that person and the person particularly was also a woman, her growth and her maturation and all of these wonderful things that she's expecting to have happen are going to be stunted and maybe she's going to quit. And so that was my intent. And I remember feeling very uncomfortable in our shared space because we were physically very close together. And I do remember, I eventually shared with him directly my thoughts. I remember practicing it, and he just didn't get it. It was basically like, oh, that's all in my head. I don't know what I'm talking about.

And just to give an example of something I do remember. So one of the things that he did that was so such a micro paper cut as it were, was, there was a visiting scholar, I think, from China. And we were in a meeting and we were talking about different assessments to consider for a pilot study. And we were talking about social capital and the person, the man who is acting in this sexist manner consistently was trained as an epidemiologist. So an epidemiologist might have, good understanding of different psychosocial variables might have a working representation of social capital. But for me, like my master's is in psychology. My PhD is public health behavior. I specialized in measurement and my dissertation was literally on social network influence on health and social capital was one of my core constructs. He knew all of those things like. He had seen all the data, I'd managed everything. And in this meeting, the scholar from China directly looked at me and asked questions and he jumped in and answered for me. And when I tried to interject, he would escalate his voice. And it's so interesting. Cause yes my voice is always like this, it doesn't project. And I just remember just sitting there, like not knowing how to handle it because I was thinking of this poor guy, English was a second language. I was down the totem pole from a seniority perspective. I didn't want to make things uncomfortable, but at the same time it just was so wildly inappropriate and just rude. Like you don't answer for someone, number one. And number two, if that's your colleague , and you know that person and their body of work, that should never be something that you step into.

I think that I felt compelled again to escalate it for that principled reason, like you mentioned before to try to really protect future people. Those experiences did play into my ultimate decision. I've had tons of sexism in industry, but I think that type of intersection of like intellectual superiority and like the male ego in an academic environment felt very suffocating and offensive to me because I know how hard I worked and I know how smart and how dedicated I was to my craft and to feel like someone was trying to step on me in that way was just really hurtful.

**Jacqueline:** I appreciate that. And I think it's such a sadly perfect example of what we have so often, women being answered for, women being talked over, not being valued, not being heard. So I was really trying to think about this a little bit this week in preparation for this interview. What paralyzed me in that moment? And I think there were several things which is I had raised concerns along the way about that particular person and they had not been heard. So I think I felt a little powerless too, but I also felt like I was in a bit of a power struggle with that person in terms of we're both competing for space within the building. And I started to wonder if I just had personal resentments against him. So then I wasn't objective to be able to speak up for you because I, in my heart, I was wondering, am I doing this just because I think the guy's an asshole? And so I knew that I had this personal beef with him.

I had previously quite objectively thought about his promotion file and said that I didn't want to vote on it because I thought it was inappropriate. And I was being told to vote anyway. Only afterwards did I discover several other female faculty had said the same thing to our division chief. And we had all individually been told to vote and been ignored. Yeah. If we had all spoken to each other, collectively, we could have had a stand.

**Gina:** And I think it's worth pointing out at Jacqueline. The situation that we were in that environment. There was a male head who'd been in that group, leading it for a very long time. And I remember he wasn't receptive. I don't think I told him in full everything that was happening, but like every way I feel like we turned or could turn, there was a man in charge. And I think that's part of the problem.

**Jacqueline:** And again, my relationship with him was also strained. He had called me paranoid and belligerent because I said we can no longer have this conversation about space without someone from the department being there to represent my needs, because I didn't feel like I could represent my own needs. I knew space was a departmental policy issue. I had gone and found that out because I was having such problems with it. And I didn't want to be bullied into a situation without having somebody there to fight on my behalf. And that was the response I got paranoid and belligerent.

**Gina:** Isn't that interesting though, like here you are representing your needs and basically saying you don't feel psychologically safe.mAnd so we, women have been saying this for millennia and we used to be burned at the stake. We were witches like we're hysteria. And I just learned that word comes from uterus and it's like, why is our surfacing and speaking out on the things that we think are important labeled as belligerent and hysterical? Like we're speaking truth.

**Jacqueline:** And I think another situation that had happened around that time, and that kind of relates to the other story I said, which was, another student had been mistreated by a faculty member. So even before that situation, this faculty member had treated me and my family very poorly. We had to organized events. My husband and I had organized one and a senior male professor had organized another. He had hired outside caterers. His wife who was part of his research group had organized those. And this professor basically thanked them in this whole big speech, effusively, never thanked me and my husband who hosted it at our house, who cooked everything ourselves. My husband isn't part of the research. He took his whole Sunday to make this food. And I was so upset that he had not recognize my husband's efforts in this situation. So I had to give him that feedback. But I went into that conversation, even saying, I'm upset about how you treated my family and that, especially in relationship to how you treated this other male. And I said, I'm struggling with this project we're working on. I want to know what I can do to make this work, is there something I can do differently? Cause again, I put it on myself. And that was his answer. He goes you are very aggressive. And it was just like every, which way, I turned.

So I definitely believed that about myself. I know I'm outspoken and I'm passionate and I get it. And so I believed it about myself and I never even considered that a microaggression. I just was like, okay, I asked for feedback and I got it. But then when that professor then went and asked my student what she was going to do about the fact that she was having a second child and I was like, what? He asked you that? And she's yep. And I said, and what did you answer? And she goes, oh, I told him I would have to work harder. And I was like, that is not the answer. So she and I talked about it. But she didn't want me to then give that feedback to him. And to be honest, I didn't know how to, because I had got so upset trying to represent my needs and I just didn't. So that's what's so frustrating about this whole situation was I didn't know how to represent my needs. I didn't know how to represent the needs of the other women. And I own it, I failed. But I can see so easily how that happens. So again, if there's listeners out there and they're in that situation. I think for me reading, for example, Kim Scott's Just Work where she basically says, if you don't do anything, you are perpetuating the problem. And that's why I admire you for standing up for yourself and for others, because we have to start to do that, but again, what does it take?

**Gina:** You have to practice. I was just on an emerging leaders panel at work. So I was a panelist for this class of emerging leaders, and I talked about practicing conflict. So there's that book, Radical Candor. The principles are, no matter your circumstance, be honest and authentic in your feedback, because otherwise you're doing not just yourself a disservice, but the other person really. Once you practice giving that radical candor feedback in the moment, you'll get better at it. And so you just mentioned a minute ago that you quote unquote failed and I would say that's just one step on that ladder of you learning how to do better next time. Like it's part of the process.

**Jacqueline:** Right. Yes. I agree. And that you will have to keep practicing giving that feedback.

**Gina:** Yeah. Because it's going to happen again.

**Jacqueline:** Yeah. And interestingly, when I left, I decided to write about my experience to the head of department and I was so nervous about doing it. And I had also sought help about the space issue prior as well. And that's what they were double checking in that situation that there wasn't some problematic issue at hand that was beyond space. But I gave feedback to the head of department about this person. I felt so bad about doing it. And she was so grateful because she said, you're the third person this week. It really helps me understand what's going on. And so I never thought about it in that way. So that was very interesting. And also following on from the person that we know you struggled with. I asked others to intervene after you'd left cause things still was getting worse. And a male colleague said, I'll speak to him, I'll speak to him. But ultimately it's resulted in problems with teaching. So it is really important that we intervene on these things because what you thought would happen happened he then was inappropriate in a gender and racial context with students.

**Gina:** And that just trust I think just trusting yourself is so key. Just having that if your inner radar is like, something's wrong, then something probably is right. And I think it's also not to trust the male colleague to say, oh I'll talk to him, I'll get him to change. It's no this is serious.

**Jacqueline:** That's the thing. How do you make it? How do you just know that, that level of how serious it is? Because again, I think you're right in these paper cuts. Each of those doesn't feel like much, but there's a thousand of them and that's what happens to us. It's like exploding doormats. That's when one of my coaches said you do, you end up just taking it and then you explode. If you don't deal with the small things. And we even gave that feedback to our participants, actually, in one of our studies. We were teaching them how to improve doctor, patient communication. And we said, do it over the small things, practice questioning the doctor over small issues so that when it comes to a big health concern where you're a mess, because you're so emotional about it, you've already practiced really well in advance. That's one of the reasons we should do it if nothing else. Also, The Fight Gender Bias Cards from Lean In help you recognize bias and give you examples of what to say.

**Jacqueline:** Tell me a little bit about what you've done in your personal life to cope as a working mum. You're a behavior change specialist, what habits do you have to help you?

**Gina:** I mentioned earlier that I've always been, or that I was a collegiate athlete. So sports and exercise have always been a core part of my identity, which I'm very grateful for, because I think you get to, I'm turning 39 next week and you get, to this stage of your life. And if you don't have that relationship, I think with your body and the physical kind of part of you, then it, people take it up, but I think it can be hard. So for me That's always been an outlet, but it's, my relationship with exercise has changed dramatically since becoming a mom. After I had my first, I remember I used to be on a competitive running team. And I tried to come back into that and thinking that I would use running races as an outlet for myself time to do that. And it just didn't fit. I felt like it was contrived. Like I was compelling myself and it was difficult.

And so I actually ended up doing something that I never thought I would end up doing, which was drinking too much. It crept up on me slowly. It's really important. People have expectations of what problem drinking looks like. Yeah. I also was that person who would say, I come from a home with alcoholism. So my mom had active alcoholism my entire life. She has three years of consecutive sobriety today, but did not get sober or into her recovery until I was in my PhD program. So I'm very aware of what alcoholic drinking looks like. But for moms in particular, it's mommy wine time. Oh my gosh, you had such a long day. You work full time. Look at all these things you're juggling. And so I just became a nightly wine drinker and it wasn't serving me and I knew it, but it definitely took reading Glennon Doyle's book reading a book called This Naked Mind by Annie Grace, We are the luckiest by Laura McCowen. The point is that it's not really about the volume. Although I think daily drinking is obviously not a public health recommendation, but you look around you and everyone's doing it. But it's how does it make you feel? I wasn't getting up to go running in the morning, even though I'd already decided, I'm not going to train for races every weekend.

I'm going to still take care of myself. And I think I had lost touch with who I am. And this is also related to what I'm in now, which is recovery as an adult child of an alcoholic. So I started going to therapy and that has transformed my life more than I ever thought . I just didn't know what was on the other side, but becoming a mom was a huge trigger for me. A lot of complex PTSD memories have surfaced. And so , I had a choice I could say, okay, this is really hard, and this is very painful and I don't want to feel, so I'm just going to keep having wine every night. And we know that progression, usually happens with substance use. And I just knew, I never was going to do that. And I started to pick up new tools. I've always been an achiever. And I think that, for folks who are medically trained doctors or PhD trained doctors, you get into that and you're very competitive and you're very driven and all of these things, but the downside is that you often don't give yourself space to feel. And I could see that in order for me to be the best mother and to also mother myself, which if I can't mother myself, then I can't be the best mother I can be to my children. I was going to have to face my demons for lack of a better way of saying it.

I started going to therapy a year ago in October and I did four months of completely abstinent from alcohol and now I don't really drink but I say it's a long, slow breakup with wine. I've let it back in my life occasionally. And I'm okay with that. It's an interesting kind of thing. I'm very cognizant of when I'm reaching for it, that it's like I'm doing it because it's habitual and because I'm out to dinner and I just, my husband orders a drink and all of that.

**Jacqueline:** Thanks for sharing that. I think that is such an issue with moms and, I feel like I've been in that situation, my myself at times, just feeling like I needed it. I'm lucky now I'm 10 years older than you. And as I'm about to reach 50, my body does not like it. So I'm really glad because even though sometimes I go, God, I need a drink and think I want it mentally. My body goes, no, please don't put that in me because it just, even a glass just makes me sleep terribly. I get just the most awful hot rush, heart blood pressure feeling and racing, heart rate and things. So I'm so glad that my body is talking to me more than it ever did. And that was really part of my burnout was my body started interrupting me. I was, I couldn't breathe anymore. And so then my brain at last, caught on. So I'm loving this relationship that I've developed with my body as it's my monitor. I'm listening to it more and being more intuitive.

And I think the other piece you say about becoming a mother is triggering, I think totally. And I feel like I've read it now so many times. But when I was becoming a mother, I wasn't prepared for that. And I didn't have, a traumatic childhood, but it wasn't the most loving childhood and it just made me not want to be that parent that I had been parented and I didn't know how to do it differently. Cause that's all I had seen. And so I started really being hard on myself as a mother and not liking myself. That's like when I started to say, I don't like you at all. And that was the beginning of my breakdown. I didn't like who I was at work anymore either. So I think motherhood is triggering for that reason. And I'm glad you've benefited from therapy. I also started therapy because as I was having my burnout and break down and never sure quite what to call it, midlife crisis, I've learnt a lot about burnout now that I can actually look back and say, okay, that was burnout because institutional things that were affecting me as well as, my own expectations. But I started therapy and yeah, it was not something that I thought I would ever do or ever needed. But certainly found it helpful. But to be honest, what I have found more helpful, or maybe I just moved to a different phase. So this has been more helpful for me now is coaching. So I find that therapy is great for you to be able to understand where you came from and coaching takes you to where you want to go next, because they give you a lot of tools behavior change tools, that we use.

Mothering is hard and you do have to mother yourself. So I'm still not good at that. And sometimes my coaches say, can you just do it for your kids if you can't do it for yourself? And, I worry about what example I'm setting for my kids, not being able to like mother myself. But again, I know there's one whole coaching program that is literally with that title, Mothering Yourself. Cause when you haven't had a mother who demonstrated what mothering can be, or like the loving side of mothering, then I think it does impact how you mother yourself.

**Gina:** Yeah. And I think so for me, one of the things that I've been working on in therapy is excessive reliance on the self. So I'm an only child. So been independent in that regard my whole life, but just I can do it. I can do it. I used to have this phrase that I would say as an athlete, I wouldn't want to compete against me, which just tell you what kind of athlete I was. A defender, I played soccer. And so just very rough and tumble aggressive athlete. But in my PhD program and then I've had intermittent, I still struggle with it today, more frequently than I would like insomnia. And what I've discovered through therapy is, you can't trust your thoughts. When you're struggling in the middle of the night, you just can't because you're in and out of a light sleep state.

But I think for me, and this is where the personalization is so important is. I was abandoned so much as a child. And so I'm very paranoid if I feel like I can't trust myself, I don't trust other people, even though I've got all these warm, loving relationships. And so I will wake my husband up in the middle of the night. I'm like, just tell me it's going to be okay. Tell me it's going to be okay. And it's really important that I can heal that within myself so that I can equip my children with, Hey, when you're struggling, you don't have to go it alone. Like I am just here. I'm just here for you. You're going to wake up in the morning. I'm not going to be gone on a drunken escapade. I'm not going to be, passed out, hung over. Like we're going to have a consistency but also if you want to go play by herself in the room, you can do that. And then, Hey, I'll be making pancakes in the kitchen. And it's not to say it's all perfect and roses. Cause it's not. And you have to be careful, like you said, like being too hard on yourself with expectations.

But I think it's just like leaning into what I need in my day-to-day space and really cultivating that. The thing about a working mom that really bothers me is, there's this concept of selflessness and it's like Glennon Doyle is that's the biggest insult you could ever levy. And I agree. I don't want to be absent of self. So I'm not being selfish when I say I'm mothering myself. Doing any of that is actually the most loving and giving thing that I could ever do for my family. And we just need to change the conversation because it's just so misplaced and I still see it on posts on Instagram. She's so selfless and I'm like cringing.

**Jacqueline:** Right. And even an advert recently, it's to the supermom heroes or whatever, I'm like, no, don't make us supermom heroes. Don't make that the expectation. I think what Glennon Doyle said is don't be a martyr be a role model. Especially to our daughters. And that's what I think is you're role modeling self love. And wouldn't we want our kids to do that for themselves and have that for themselves? So yeah we definitely get judged at all levels. So anything else you want to share with me around any of your social activism, your thoughts about how to work on gender equity in the workplace or how to help working moms, from your behavioral perspective and, your always thoughtful approach?

**Gina:** Sure. I think a practical piece of advice from a workplace standpoint would be documentation. I've always cared about documentation from a data analysis perspective. And so whatever work line of work you're in taking that same approach to some of the interpersonal sides of your workplace. So maybe that's on an email thread. I did this actually just last week, to a senior woman, I said, can you reply to the email thread and just give your approval? Because unfortunately we often find ourselves in he said, she said situations. And I don't mean for egregious, although it would apply here too, but like harassment, sexual assault, racism, things like that. But those micro cuts are those like that's not how I remember the conversation.

So I'd say that's a practical piece of advice. I think from a social activism standpoint, I look at how much privilege I have as a white woman. And I always ask myself what can I do to do my part to unburden black women and women of color from having to do that activism and educational role. And so I try to read books. 'So you want to talk about race'. This is the one I'm reading right now. And then when I do have opportunities to have a platform, I try to elevate. So I'm very active on Twitter. I try to elevate the voices of other women, particularly black women to show that intersectionality. And then also to speak out, because I think just if you want to just say like you're against sexism, you have to actively be anti-sexist anti patriarchal. And I think we all hear that saying with racism, like you can't just say I'm not racist. You have to actively be anti-racist. So some people aren't as comfortable.

But I think finding where you are comfortable, like a great example, one-on-one conversations. So you'll have a family members or something, and they'll just say something that's like slightly off, like slightly sexist, slightly racist, whatever it is. And you don't have to confront their beliefs. You don't have to go off on a monologue. You can just say, I don't agree with you and that makes me feel really uncomfortable and let's just not talk about that. Because I think over time, if enough of us are out there doing that, that becomes part of the solution for change-making, 5, 10, 15, 20 generations from now.

**Jacqueline:** I think that's good advice. And I certainly know from like Whistleblower documenting was so important for her. It did feel like it was practical advice around how to document everything basically. And I'm interested to hear what you say about how as a white woman you can have a role and you sound like you've got to a good place with that. I'm still just starting that journey. I recently read The Memo by Minda Harts, which she wrote for Black women in workplaces and We live for the We. That's basically about a Black mother investigating how she should mother her daughter in this day and age. And it was really about not having the choice to rely on herself that, that wasn't possible. As a single mum, she had to have her help from her mom and her community. And also not really having a choice about whether she was an activist or not because Black mothers have to build communities, where their children can survive. So it's an imperative, it's part of their mothering to try and make those changes. Whereas I think as a white woman, we can choose to do that. And so that's where I'm trying to understand how I fit into that.

And then the most recent one The best of You with Tarana Burke and Brene Brown. And I just absolutely loved the stories in there. They were painful, they were honest, they were brave. And yeah, I really want to start to think about how do, cause I write about books, but I haven't yet written about the books that I've read by Black authors. So I'm going to hire a consultant to actually help me do that. To learn how to express my understanding and relationships to these stories in a way that is appropriate. So I'm looking forward to that journey.

**Gina:** Yeah. And I think just one thing I'd add is a good example is, we talked about being labeled aggressive and I'm always reminded that, as a white woman, just as a woman, we have to always, it's just in the back of our heads oh, you're a leader. You're actually being labeled bossy. You're assertive. Or you have an opinion that you should have and you should voice and you're aggressive. And then I think if I were a Black woman, not only would I be labeled aggressive, I could potentially be labeled dangerous or just like that angry black woman trope. And so I think, yeah, just recognizing that privilege. And people, I think don't like to talk about it. Cause then they're like, same thing with I'm not racist, it's not my fault that I was born white or whatever. And it's not your fault, but it's your responsibility.