E8: Creating reasonable operating expectations for the workday with management and motherhood needs expert Leslie Forde

**Leslie:** I'm Leslie Ford. I have two kids and I'm the founder of Mom's Hierarchy of Needs.

**Jacqueline:** Leslie, would you kindly tell us a little bit about your journey to where you are now?

**Leslie:** Absolutely. And it was a completely circuitous, unplanned journey to where I am now, which is often the case.

**Jacqueline:** Who has this straightforward one? Yeah, I was going to say why do we have this expectation of straight? I agree. I remember drawing out my journey for students in a career talk one time and I was like, bump, hump, down, round, side.

**Leslie:** Because we're not taught to think of our careers that way. And then post kids, particularly for women. The way career options change and the way your work trajectory changes is completely unplanned, right? And most people don't prepare you for that. And even if they tried to, you wouldn't believe it. So all for all those reasons, I think it becomes this interesting obstacle course. But I had started researching the intersection between stress, self care and growth for mothers.

After I burned out when my second child was born, I was completely unprepared for how it would feel. And right before I went on maternity leave, I had taken on a fairly large promotion. So I expanded from managing one team to managing two teams. And this happened while I was pregnant. And I was a little nervous about it, to be honest with you at the time. But I was assured, oh, everything's going to be fine. We have your back. It's going to be fine. Don't worry. Within a couple of weeks of coming back, my then manager had called me and said; your most senior person on your team, she's going into a different department. And by the way, we're not able to backfill her because we're trying to demonstrate profitability. Now, I also had some open requisitions at the time to hire more people. And he informed me that they had to be closed again because the company was trying to demonstrate profitability and within probably a few months of coming back, I have three different people, all completely random reasons have to go out on FMLA leave, unplanned, from one of my teams.

So suddenly, the job was different. I was in a different job. The company's strategies had changed. The requirements for my work had changed. My department had changed and I was short-staffed. So I found myself doing what I think a lot of us do, I was faced with this challenge I didn't expect. And I thought the answer was I guess I'll just work harder. And I would find myself, typing away at the keyboard, trying to put a pillow between myself and the co-sleeper to keep the glow of the computer from waking the baby. And I'd be working one in the morning, two in the morning, three in the morning. Both my children did not sleep through the night until they were 14 months old. So I was waking up in one hour increments. I was sleeping in one hour increments. I had a newborn and a toddler and just found myself depleted. I was exhausted. There were a lot of days where I would drive to the office. And I wouldn't remember how I got there and it was almost an hour away. And then there were days where I would get all the way to the office and I would realize I'd be rushing, racing through the parking garage, trying to get into the building, trying to get up to the nursing room. And then I'd realize when I got all the way up there that I'd left my breast pump at home and I would have to drive all the way back.

So it just became this unsustainable career situation and it was a job that I once absolutely loved doing important work with people that I enjoyed working with, but it became just not manageable for my life. So I left the job that I loved and downs shifted completely. Something I never expected that I would do. So I went from managing these two large departments to having one direct report. I negotiated a four day work week. I went to a much larger company and I took a huge pay cut to do all of that. With that kind of adjustment, it still took me over two years to really recover and restore myself after burning out.

So I had not predicted any of that. It was an interesting path. And through that kind of process, I wanted to understand what other mothers were doing. I felt like I must've missed a memo that went out all the working mothers out there. Was there a memo? Did I miss something? Did, was there a conversation that I neglected to have? It was just a casual conversation. I was, I ended up doing some advisory work for a mental health startup and the founder who's a dad said, why are moms so stressed? Because we were talking about moms and as a potential market for the product. And I said there's, Maslow's hierarchy of needs. And then there's mom's hierarchy of needs. And as soon as I said it, I felt it like it clicked for me. I got incredibly curious about what it would look like for other people. I drew it that on a little piece of paper, the first mom's hierarchy of needs.

And then I turned it into a PowerPoint and then 150 moms later after doing a quick survey, my first one for the site, I evolved it to what it looks like now. So I really was looking at this problem that I was having. And because research is in my roots, I started my career even pre resume as a market researcher. It's how I worked, I worked my way through high school and college that I solve problems that way. And that kind of began this process. Once I had the results from the study, I thought I need to share it with people who took the study. And so I guess I need a website and after I put the results up and created the website, I thought I, I want to share more and I want to learn more. And if I can figure this problem out for myself and help other mothers understand why making space for self care and growth is so elusive after having kids and why it's so hard, that would be very meaningful to me. And when I drew that first mom's hierarchy of needs, it looked very similar to how it looks now, but all of those foundational categories are at the bottom, our children's wellbeing and their milestones and their health, their education, their activities. And then the next level would be all the things that we're responsible for at home and our household roles. And then the next layer up would be our professional role or a volunteer role. And then everything way up to the tippy top, where self-care, emotional wellbeing, mental wellbeing, physical wellbeing, all of the things that we do to restore ourselves and reset ourselves live.

The reason that we never get up to the tippy top is because everything down to the bottom is never done. It's never ending. But think about it, right, Jacqueline, pre kids, so many of us conditioned ourselves to decide to care for ourselves or just to other than to go for that workout. Or I'm gonna call that friend, or I'm gonna take that PhD course, or I'm going to learn that language or whatever it is that you want to do.It's I'll do that when everything else, quote-unquote, is done and that, and pre kids that kind of works, right? Because you, you do have a certain amount of discretionary time available to you, but after kids, there is no discretionary time and the work is never done. And until I drew it and visualized it for myself, I hadn't realized I was trying to do the impossible and seeing that it was impossible that the things at the bottom were never done. And the only way that I would make time and make space for the activities at the top would be to make the time. Would be to carve it out. And that allowed me to give myself permission to be ruthless about my schedule and to be ruthless about making time for these activities that were really important to my health and my wellbeing and my fulfillment.

So I wanted to help others learn how to do that for themselves, because it's a very crushing blow when you realize that your life becomes geared toward being in service to everyone else. And, there is no space for yourself anymore. And we all love our families. And I love everything about being a mother. And I love everything about my children and being a mother, but it wasn't, it's not healthy. It's not good for them. It's not good for me. It's not good for my partner, if I'm depleted and exhausted and unable to care for myself. So that was the impetus and it led me to understand from other experts, I've interviewed now incredible mothers who are doing all the things that we're told that we can't do. And incredible experts who have examined every issue of this topic. And I've done a lot of research around all of the personal reasons why it's so hard. And by extension all of the systems reasons that it's hard, why the environments that we live in work in hadn't really been conducive to helping mothers in particular solve this problem.

And that's what led me to start this as a passion project, I guess just over five years ago. Cause my little one is in zoom kindergarten or wasn't zoom kindergarten this past year and now. As my full-time professional life, I'm working on the systems change piece of this by helping employers understand the needs of caregivers in the workforce and how to make the workplace friendly and conducive to caregivers. So that's the whole arc of landing in this particular point in my career.

**Jacqueline:** With that again, feeling like, nobody said how hard it was going to be as a mom. I remember mentors that were female mentors at the university saying, oh, I just wrote a few less papers when my kids were young and I'm thinking, okay, maybe you had them at a different career stage that allowed you to do that. So again, it was this feeling of this shouldn't be so hard. Am I making it hard? But I think it's really fascinating to that even those kind of small changes that you noticed in that first business that they had such a knock-on effect. And I think that's where you could imagine, companies just not realizing that these decisions they're making are totally changing the landscape for a working mom.

**Leslie:** Absolutely. Pre pandemic face time was always, I think the nemesis of, of the working mother, it was, Hey, like we don't see you at that breakfast meeting or we don't see you at that early morning keynote, or we don't see you at that drinks party after work, or we don't see you in the office at the, at 6:00 PM, it was this, it was like visibility equals work ethic. And there's so many reasons for it, but it's flawed in so many ways and not only hurts mothers, it hurts lots of other people who can't work in that way, but pre pandemic, that was the issue. And now what I've seen in my research is into the pandemic and that study, most organizations have just taken the old rules of work. They've taken this expectation of face time and visibility, and they've just poured it over to zoom. So people are now just spending all their time, all day long, and all evening long on meetings and zoom to prove and demonstrate their commitment and work ethic and they're completely burning out.

They're completely depleted when they actually have to produce deep work in the form of presentations or content or analysis, whatever the work is that they actually do. And they're trying to do it after their kids go to sleep and they're trying to do it in the wee hours of the morning, and they're trying to do it when they have less infrastructure, less support, less access to childcare than they've ever had before. So this broken system of work permeates how challenging it is for mothers to excel and succeed in their careers. But it also has locked a lot of people out of leadership and a lot of people out of having the kind of professional success that they're capable of. I feel very honored and inspired to change how that works in the world.

**Jacqueline:** So tell me a little bit more about that then how you came to frame your solutions because I love that you started with the research and trying to get a sense of what the problem is, but clearly you've also said, okay, now I can get to the solutions. And that's what I really want to be able to also focus on is what are the solutions out there? And once we know, because knowledge is not the answer, it's just the start. How do we actually move the needle? So tell me a bit about that process.

**Leslie:** Yeah, that's a great question. Process wise, like everything else so far, it's been really iterative. I had this vision, so when I developed the business as a passion project, I was just writing and sharing this research for other mothers to free themselves. And hopefully to avoid the kind of crushing burnout and really disastrous decline in self care that happened to me. I just wanted to, I just wanted to warn everybody like, oh my, do you have no idea what's coming. Please, there was a way out. So that was the intention at the beginning . When I thought I would turn it into a side business, the plan was really to use my research studies and create kind of a syndicated offering for brands that wanted to understand mothers. Because I think another part of the systems change is how we're portrayed in media, how we're portrayed in advertising.

And I'll give you an example of that. So this was right before the pandemic, because I was still going to the gym. I remember it was a rainy day, so I was running indoors and there was a commercial for a vacuum company. And I will tell you Jacqueline, every single person with a vacuum in their hand was a woman. Every single one. Now the spokesperson was a man. But everyone using the vacuum was a woman. It just like it infuriated me, but that is how we're portrayed. And not only is it insidious in terms of how we feel about ourselves and how the mom role is defined for us externally. It also creates this box, that's very hard to escape when trying to establish and manage your home and trying to share responsibilities with a partner, if you're partnered. All of those gendered expectations around who does what become incredibly limiting. So I thought, okay, let me shine light on the real experience and the real needs of mothers. So that brands and organizations who, who sell to us and who promote to us, do it in a more informed and thoughtful way and help solve the problem instead of create the problem.

So that was the original plan. But when the pandemic hit, I had just been laid off from my full-time job in February of 2020. It was never my plan to be a full-time entrepreneur. I thought, oh I'll have a side business. I would do this market research study and maybe run it a couple times a year. And it would be a supplement to my income, but after being laid off, suddenly I was faced with this dilemma. It's oh, wow. It's probably the worst time. Cause the pandemic hit a month later, so it's okay, so this is the worst time in the world to look for a new job. And we're in the middle of a global recession and pandemic that, hasn't happened in like a century.

And I guess I'm the CEO of Mom's Hierarchy of Needs now. So that was. Yeah, that was the realization. And as part of that, I thought let's launch this market research business. And I started talking to some old clients, some of my former colleagues who still work in market research and just gathering information on how I could make this information as actionable and useful as possible. And in the process of doing that, I was studying the pandemic and how it was affecting mothers. It was probably within the first 200, 300 responses. Now I now have over 2200 parents. Who've participated in this study and it's been running for over a year. So it's been really incredible to watch, but I launched it March 30th, 2020.

So in that first 200, 300 responses, I saw that mostly mothers, because overwhelmingly moms were telling me everything that they wished they could tell their leadership team, their boss, their HR Department. It was, why are we on so many zooms? Don't, they know my kids are at home and I have to feed them like, have they lost their minds? Or I really need a therapist. And I really need my company to find one for me, but I don't have one woman said, I need somebody who can take text messages. I don't have time to talk to anybody. People were just going on and off of legal and illegal substances to deal with all the stress. People were reeling from the rise in just divisiveness in the US, the rise in racism and how it was personally affecting them. There was a woman early in the study who said this is being called the China virus and now I don't feel safe to walk and now I am experiencing racism and I don't feel safe. And I don't feel that my family is safe. People were losing loved ones. There were pregnant moms in the study who were terrified of being separated from their babies at birth, unable to have their partners in the delivery room. So all of these things were happening, but the strong undercurrent was I need mental health care. I need childcare and I need flexibility at work. And so I got pretty excited and I thought, wow I don't know a lot about the world of HR, but if I could take this data and use it to change the workplace, the system that took me down, that would be incredible.

So I pivoted my research and I started talking to HR leaders, diversity and inclusion leaders and about a handful of parents who were part of employee resource groups and large companies. And I had about, it was close to 80 interviews and six weeks, so I just asked people, what would you call this? Would you buy this? What would you pay for it? How should I position it? Would you even use it? Do HR people even use research? So that was the conversation. As I was trying to figure out how to launch this product, how to make it a product that people would use and how to develop the business model for it. So when I launched in July, 2020. It was July 28th. In some ways I think it protected me from absorbing the gravity of the pandemic.

**Jacqueline:** Because I was wondering that just even hearing all that research, therapists need their own therapist and you're exposed to a lot of, yeah, grief.

**Leslie:** It was, and it still is even. I'm now in wave six of the study, every three months, I adjust some of the questions. So it's still, the results are still pouring in. But it's different now, people are in a different place, but there's still a lot of anxiety and depression and stress and uncertainty and it's affecting people's lives and really profound ways. But for me, because I was so focused on launching a successful business and pivoting from having been a full-time employee, my entire career to being a full-time entrepreneur. I wasn't that worried about the pandemic. It was in the backdrop. I was, we were locked down. We didn't go anywhere. I, my kids were in remote school and we actually kept them in remote school even after school reopened. So there was a lot of, there was a protocol associated with it. That changed how we lived, but I wasn't as worried about the pandemic as I was about getting the business launched and resetting my career under these extreme circumstances. So it consumed me and in some ways that was probably positive.

So now I would say that in the workplace, the recommendations look like, okay, you need a set of benefits that help caregivers. And that probably means if not curating, then certainly subsidizing ideally subsidizing paying for, and de-stigmatizing access to childcare and elder care support. And mental health care support. And the other two pillars, so there's really four pillars that I make recommendations to employers under and the other two are how to create psychological safety. And to do so in a way that permeates the culture and how to really create flexibility. And by really, I say that because a lot of employers think flexibility is allowing people to work from home because traditionally that's what flexibility meant. It's oh, you want flexibility? You can work from home one or two days a week, or you can work from home when you need to. But when a large part of the workforce started working at home in the pandemic it required more than just taking the old rules of. And putting them onto video, it really required a different way of making decisions, a different way of setting priorities, a different way of navigating key performance indicators and goals, and really a different way of looking at someone as an employee and looking at their life and their circumstances and how to integrate that with the needs of the workplace and doing so with more compassion and more, two-way communication than what most employers are used to.

So those are the types of conversations I have with employers now. And that either becomes a series of workshops and trainings for leaders and managers, so that they can create the cultural change and make the shifts. I'm like, do you really need so many meetings? Come on, tell me really. I'm like, do you really need all those meetings? And you don't, you absolutely don't. And do you need to send that email at nine or 10 o'clock? I guess what you don't. You can work at nine or 10 at night. I work at nine, 10 at night, most nights, but I don't send messages to people on my team. At that time I schedule send the message during the workday people are exhausted and because of the fear that they have about losing their jobs, losing their health care, losing their livelihood, in a global recession, like they're going to answer that email even when they don't want to, they're going to look at that email. It's going to come over on their device. They're going to say, oh, my boss just messaged me. I'm exhausted. I don't want to respond, but they'll respond anyway. And people will break themselves. To perform at work at the expense of their own health at the expense of their family's needs at the expense of their wellbeing.

And unfortunately what happens is in that process of people prioritizing these performative measures right of work. Cause they're not really a measurement of how productive you are. There are measurement of maybe how busy you are or how many hours you spend. And it doesn't allow people the kind of deep work time and mental space to do and think the innovative thoughts and to create the kind of work that is breakthrough for the organization. So I'm trying to show organizations that not only is it bad for your people, it's bad for you. You are not going to get great ideas and you are not going to get innovation out of exhausted, burned out people. By the way, burned out exhausted people are not going to stay with you. People will make these trade-offs and I've seen it throughout the pandemic study, but it really started peaking by November of last year. Like people were feeling like they were doing terribly at everything, especially moms. And in that, values, conflict place of feeling like I'm a terrible mother and a terrible, partner and a terrible worker and a terrible child to my aging parents and a terrible caregiver to myself, like something's going to give, right? No, one's going to stay in that place for long.

And so people started talking about in the study, like they're going to blow up their marriages in some cases, only 30% of my couples are doing well. Most married people are not, it's been very hard for married people. They want to blow up their marriage. They want to blow up their city and move in their city, leave their home, leave their career. People are like exhausted and fed up with the fact that things were never really working for them before all of this. And then not only were they not working before for women, particularly, they got so much worse that it's forcing this resetting. And a lot of that resetting will be healthy for people in the long run, but it's going to be incredibly tumultuous in the short run and employers are feeling it. They're seeing this wave of resignations and this wave of attrition. And I'm trying to explain to them, it's not just the pandemic people weren't happy before the pandemic working, mothers were miserable before the pandemic. And the way that we are conditioned to work and the culture of what works success looks like in most organizations isn't healthy or sustainable for people who want to be caregivers. Who want to even have a life, it's it's not it's not just caregivers, right? It's anyone who might even want to have a hobby. Most careers don't really fit with that. So it's really reinventing this entire, I think, way of viewing work and how the work gets done and twisting that so that it can actually serve people and serve organizations.

**Jacqueline:** Yeah. It really feels like we are at this moment in time when we can shift. There's enough momentum to make a shift. So tell me more about really making that shift. When you have the workshops with the leaders, what are either the aha moments for them or what are the tools you use? You can give somebody the idea, and again, I think just even like scheduling send, I remember doing that in my job. When I discovered it, I was like, oh, here's how I stopped, bugging my staff. What are the tools you'd give them to put this into practice? Because again, one of the things that I'm concerned about as a behavioral scientist and in the reading I do around unconscious bias training and that just the training and the knowledge of the bias, isn't changing behavior. So how do you really get these folks to take the steps, to change their goals, to be compassionate. Cause again I think these things are difficult. They're not easy to change.

**Leslie:** A hundred percent, they're incredibly difficult to change. When I'm working with an organization in a longer term engagement and they've actually made the commitment. Like, hey, we don't just want Leslie to come in and do a couple of workshops. I do a lot of workshops for employees also and for parents where I teach people how to find their way out of burnout because I've done it. And a lot of people will hire me because they're like, oh, you burned out. You survived burnout. Talk to my people about burnout, because I can see they're burning out. And I'll tell them, yeah, I can do that. I can teach people how not to burn out. I can teach people how to set boundaries and how to recover from burnout because I've done it. But if I drop them into a culture and an environment that is not responsive to allowing them to set healthy boundaries and not responsive to allowing them to work in the same way, then all the work that I do will not be effective. They will either revert back to the culture, the cultural norms that are rewarded or they will leave. It's one of the two. So it's a long answer to your question. On the employer side, it's really a series of starting with how are you handling meetings and how are you handling communication?

I had interviewed a woman. This was last year, Alexis Hassell. Burger's fantastic productivity consultant and I've shared a lot of her tips in addition to some that I've learned over my, more than 20 years of managing teams. But it's like, hey, not everybody has to work in the same way. Not all of the work has to be done synchronously. And I start with just telling employers that, flip, flip the paradigm from people being on call between the hours of whatever those hours are eight to six or nine to five or whatever your office norms are like instead of it being that people are captive and on-call, and can be available at a moment's notice during those windows. Assume that those people are doing other things and set us much smaller window for synchronous communication.

Let's figure out when you really do have to have meetings with people. And by the way, it should be less than what it is now and establish norms. Like I've had some organizations, for example, one company that I've worked with organization I've worked with for over eight months now for quite a while, since last I guess last September or August is when I started working with them. They carved out meeting free Friday afternoons and they've carved out longer breaks. So around almost all of the holidays of the past year, they've added two or three days so that. Because people were expressing, when I surveyed their employees, a lot of people were expressing that, you know what? I, it's all fine for my leadership to tell me to take care of myself, but if they're still sending me emails constantly and at night and on the weekends and my goals are the same. Then, how am I supposed to take care of myself? And if I take time off, then it means that I'm missing hundreds of emails that I then have to catch up with when I get back. They heard that from the study and started carving out, moving time off for the organization as a whole. So that people were all not feeling that they needed to respond to their teammates and to their colleagues, that they could really enjoy some longer breaks. They closed over the holidays. Between like Christmas and new years and they closed for that time. They'd never done that before. So that is one organization where we just really have worked together very effectively and they started just prioritizing breaks and prioritizing windows for deep work. I've had other organizations where we've really talked about benefits and policies.

I encourage, and this isn't always something that organizations will do. I've encouraged subsidies and I've encouraged organizations to create tiers for the subsidies. So it can be straight up subsidy for childcare and elder care, which I recommend to the extent that they can afford it. To make that as generous as possible, or to tear it in such a way that people with the lowest salaries receive the highest subsidy. And people who are, people who are in their C-suite and leadership ranks and do not need a subsidy you do not receive one, or they receive a very small one. And just removing some of the burden of the cost of childcare and elder care for caregivers. And for others, like I learned through a lot of the employee so when I run the study for employers where their employees, like I'm learning that even though the people in that organization have kept their jobs. Because of the recession, their partner might have been an essential worker who has had more disruption to their work or their partner was a small business owner who was deeply affected in terms of their income and they took an income hit. Probably about it's about on the employer side, not my national study of parents, but when I run this for employees where I'm running it across parents and non-parents, and it's almost 50-50 male and female. About 12% will say that they are, they want like fresh fruit delivered and they want food delivery and they want help paying for utilities bills, which are higher now that they're doing more work from home and mobile phone bills that are, so I see so about 12% of the open-ended responses are really about financial assistance and sometimes people will straight up ask for it, but mostly people ask for things like help with paying for meals, help with fresh fruit and it's convenience, but it's also helping them with financial hardships. So I encourage employers if they wanted to do something across the board, have a hardship subsidy, again, tiered in such a way that people with the lowest salaries received the most that addresses some of the added household expenses that people are incurring working from home. And I explain to employers when they pushed back on that, I'm like, listen, are you flying people all over the place right now? No, you're not. Are you paying for office lunches and office parties and office dinners? No, you're not. Like you have money that you have saved as a result of this situation. Let's move it where people need it. Life and remote policy is like coming up with some policies around team meetings and group meetings. And now as more organizations are starting to return to office, or whether it's hybrid, fully remote, encouraging that they take an equity lens to that return.

Like I had one client who said, my greatest fear is that all the people who returned to the office are white and not parents. And I'm like, yes, you should be concerned about that. So let's talk about that. Because we know that primary caregivers, particularly mothers are more likely to want the flexibility. And I explained to employers that everyone in my national study actually even my employer side, even all my employees studies no one wants to return to the office. Full-time like practically no one. There are some people in, again on the employer side, only where I have non-parents. There are some people who are early career, don't have children where work represented a great deal of socialization. And they've really suffered from feeling depressed, isolation, particularly for people who've moved like to a new city we're recently moving for the job. So a lot of people have struggled with the lack of socialization and if they are, again, if they don't have families, if they live alone, they are, they're more eager to return to the office because of just loneliness.

So there is that contingent. But I will say that parents and caregivers overwhelming want the flexibility of being able to work from home. They want to save time for the commute. They want to enjoy more family time. They want to have lunch with their family in the middle of the day. They want to be able to take a walk in the middle of the day, throw in a load of laundry in the middle of the day, but it provides so much possibility to make a demanding career fit in with care responsibilities of children in a household or even if you have elder care or adult care. There is a a workshop I gave to employees where a gentleman said, he had, he private messaged me and he said, I need some help with setting boundaries at work.

And I need some help with getting my, his wife had a chronic illness and he was a caregiver to his wife, and he was having difficulty navigating those conversations with his manager. And he didn't want to share what was going on in his life with his manager. And he also wanted his wife who was extremely ill to take better care of herself. So he was dealing with a really difficult situation. So I think sometimes employers forget, especially in the era of COVID that a lot of people are also caring for adults, right? It could be an adult, like a spouse. It could be a grandparent or a parent, but caregivers are more than just parents and frankly finding help, like senior care help it's a lot harder than finding daycare and childcare options. And that's already extremely hard. So helping employers understand that these are the circumstances that our employees are facing. And I've even recommended just maybe demystify your policies a bit, make it really clear what's covered by your EAP and that there is some mental health care support that people can receive and don't make them navigate through your intranet to find the phone number for the EAP or for the health plan so that they can find a therapist for themselves or a therapist for their kids. Put that front and center and remind them every week. If just say, oh, here's a few phone numbers that might be helpful for you. And by the way, here's what we cover. And if you're on a long wait list for a therapist, here's a couple of other resources that we have available that can help you.

I'm just putting that out there and repeating that these things are available to people when they're so overloaded and they're dealing with so much mental load and cognitive overload from all the changes from the pandemic. So those are the types of recommendations that I make for how the workplace can be more supportive and help people navigate. Another one that comes up quite a lot, I did a workshop about a month ago with a healthcare organization and they hired me because they knew people were burning out and a lot of people were quitting. They didn't know what they could do. And this meeting was just people on the leadership team who were in like the operational side of their organization. So I really encourage them to put the human hat on first, before the company hat. And as someone who's led a lot of teams and have I've managed a lot of people over the years, I've had employees who have had bipolar disorder and they've shared that with me. I've had employees, who've had to grieve the loss of loved ones. I've had employees who've had their own chronic health conditions or have had a spouse have a chronic health condition or a child have a chronic health condition. I've had people who have had high risk pregnancies and all for various reasons. And people have confided these things in me and they've needed flexibility and I've had to reorganize their work and reorganize their deliverables in different ways to accommodate for that. I encourage managers and leaders that start the one-on-one with, how are you doing? Don't jump into business. Like, how are you doing? And give people a safe space to express themselves. When I was a manager, I told people, hey, if you want to tell me what's going on maybe I can help. Or if you just want a sounding board, listen to people and then ask them, would you like to seek resources within the company? Would you like me to involve HR to see if you can get some added support or help? Sometimes people will say yes, please, thank you so much. Other times people will say, I'm not ready for that yet. I really just wanted you to know that this was going on in my life, but I'm not ready to involve HR. And then I would say, no problem. I'm here for you. I'm here for you. And let's keep having this, keep this conversation open for when you do need more support. So managers display, concern, and love and compassion for people in ways that do not cost anything, but have an incredible impact on people's mood.

**Jacqueline:** And that seems to be that that leg you mentioned of the psychological safety, because that's what I heard when you described the gentleman that didn't want his manager to know the situation. Yeah. You have to have that psychological safety first. And it actually, they do a lot of research and in healthcare, around teams with psychological safety and how the teams that don't have psychological safety report, less errors, but actually have more errors. And the teams that have psychological safety report, more errors, but objectively have less. They are not afraid to admit mistakes. So when you're looking at, as I say, within healthcare and real problems, we know that psychologically safe teams are the ones that do better in the end.

**Leslie:** Absolutely. And those four pillars that really surfaced from the research, psychological safety being the first, creating workplace flexibility, being the second and flexibility with a capital F being able to curate pay for and subsidized care benefits, childcare, and elder care, and then being able to curate subsidize and de-stigmatize mental health care, right? Those four pillars they came up in the data. They're all like widely, I think, known and accepted ways of supporting people and supporting people in the workplace. But doing it, to your point. Awareness is step one, but then actually taking that next step and implementing that in the culture and changing people's habits and teaching a manager, how to rewrite a performance review, how to re-write key performance indicators, how to handle sending things with schedule send and not sending emails at eight or nine or 10 o'clock at night, how to teach people to not schedule meetings during lunch, especially when they know that schools are closed and everyone has their children at home. How to teach people not to schedule meetings at eight o'clock in the morning when, two-thirds of the team have children under the age of 10. Like nobody wants to be in a meeting at eight o'clock in the morning, especially if they have kids. Allowing people to create these same practices. I have to really walk organizations through it. Because no one was trained to work in this way. And frankly people are not encouraged to deconstruct how work is communicated and assigned and valued and rewarded. People are often celebrated for certain types of measures and certain types of end results. But the how we get there is so subjective. That it requires some re tooling and retraining. Especially in light of something like a pandemic.

**Jacqueline:** And I can imagine the way you're describing it is I could imagine, somebody's schedule and you're basically just putting all these red zones in it. I think people just, they do forget when something's not a habit they forget. And so that's where you have to have systems in place. So again, you have this work schedule that says these are the only times that it's reasonable to do this and it, and that somehow that computer prevents them scheduling out of these times. Sometimes we have to do that. We have to just make things, the default and take people's choice away. But I even think over the years, the conversations that that I've had with mentors or managers, that they would have been totally ill-equipped to handle me if I was stressed or upset all these things. I totally understand how people have not had that experience. They haven't had to. But I can also hear in the way you're thinking of these solutions and the way you're taking companies through it, you can do it so well because you're a mom and you have been trained to do this. You've been trained to, as you say you have to throw everything out when you become a mum and just re structure life. And that's what you're trying to do. You're restructuring these companies' lives. So one, I can see why you're so well-equipped to do this, but it also makes me think about that. I think women will emerge stronger in these organizations because they already have many of the skills. But I still think we still have so many leaders who won't have these skills and thinking about how we change that.

**Leslie:** Absolutely well, and also I think they have the skills recognized and celebrated and to have leaders with these skills rewarded. As you and I share Amy Henderson's book in common and Amy Henderson in common, what's brilliant about that approach and really looking at some of these parenting skills as adaptive future forward leadership skills. Is to recognize that leaders need to be able to navigate the human condition. That is part of leadership. And when I meet leaders and organizations who think it's extra work or a bother, or they're frustrated by having to navigate people's bereavement leave or parental leave or people's FMLA leave or whatever the circumstances are that changed that worker's availability. It's you know what leadership is about, if you are working with people and you are not working with robots, leadership really is about understanding how to adjust performance criteria and how to adjust your goals and how to adjust what success means based on changing conditions, including the conditions on your team.

**Jacqueline:** And that, that is a challenge. And. Yeah, I think it, I think what you've done so well, and I appreciate that today is really define it. And clearly people need partners like you to help them solve it. But I think we're really getting clearer of what are the basics, what is the minimum that we need here, that minimum is changing. And, yeah, it also gives me hope in some ways too. Cause I remember reading this book about creativity and how that, the people that are creative are going to continue to lead or have a reemergence of an ability to lead cause often creative leaders aren't given opportunities. I think about that in, when I read about leadership and children, they given the leadership opportunities when they're in an organization or sport. And the biggest, brightest kids lead that not necessarily the creative ones. That we've lost those opportunity for creative leaders. But as we transition into a more automated world, the people we're going to need are the ones that understand emotions. Cause that's not something that can be done by a robot. And so these creative, emotionally intelligent people are going to be the ones who emerged as leaders. So I'm excited for that too. Cause I think it gives us hope as humans, that there are many things that that machines can't do. And that's so important that we develop those skills.

**Leslie:** Absolutely. I encourage everyone to think of themselves as creative. Regardless of the professional path they've taken and what work they do. One of the best things that I've done for my own productivity and ability to innovate has been to take this path of doing more personal writing and embedding that, right, cause that's really at the heart and at the foundation of mom's hierarchy of needs. Now I was always a writer, but all the writing that I was doing for most of the 20 plus years of my career has been strategic planning writing, and marketing writing, and business writing. Putting writing at the center of my business and publishing every week and taking a more, personal lens to the work that I'm doing. It allowed me to re-engage with myself as a creative person, think of myself as a creative person and realize that to deliver creatively, you need to protect mental space. You need to have time for deep work. That to do really high quality work as a writer or as a strategist, as a leader, you need to protect some of your mental space and you need to think about your work differently, right?

It's not the emails you send or the meetings you attend. It's the ideas that you come up with and your ability to bring those ideas to fruition. Some of that is on your own, but some of that is inspiring others and it takes a lot of energy to do that kind of creative thinking work. So people grind themselves down into dust, work around the clock, busy themselves with emails and meetings, and never have time to think a thought. And that actually doesn't allow you to achieve your excellence in any field. So every field is creative, every field, especially now with the way that the pandemic has changed any industry, right? Every field requires innovative future forward thinking. And to be able to do that, you have to liberate yourself from this very dated model of how work gets done.