

Jerry: Hey, Melissa. How are you? It's really, really great to see you again.

Melissa: Hi, Jerry. It's great to see you too.

Jerry: So, thank you for coming on the show. I really appreciate it. And, uh, um, why not before we get started, why don't you just take a moment and just introduce yourself? Tell us who you are, what you do, and where you are, and that sort of thing.

[00:00:30]

Melissa: Awesome. Yes. Um, so, my name is Melissa Pasquale. Um, I am the Chief Operating Officer at a Denver-based real tech company. Uh, we build software for the real estate industry. Um, and since joining nearly five years ago, the company has expanded and grown, um, to be about five times the size it was when I joined.

Jerry: Wow.

Melissa: So- Um, yeah. So, we've had a lot of really great growth, and we're getting ready to have another growth spurt here. So, uh, this is going to be an exciting year.
[00:01:00]

Jerry: Hmm. Hmm. Well, I appreciate that. And, and, you know, just so- so listeners know, we'll mention it now, we met in person, uh, at a recent bootcamp that we did for entrepreneurs who identify as women. And, uh, you know, from where I sit, it was a really powerful experience. I hope it was helpful for you as well.

[00:01:30]

Melissa: It was. (laughs) It was amazing. It was, um ... I went into it after being an avid listener of the podcast and really excited to see what it was all about. And, you know, have the opportunity to meet other women in similar positions. And, um, you know, it definitely, for me, was life-changing, and just everything I'd hoped that it would be. Um, so, I actually have, um, a- a-another virtual meeting with our bootcamp group tomorrow morning, so I'm really looking forward to reconnecting with all of those ladies.
[00:02:00]

Jerry: That's great. That's wonderful. I'm super excited to hear that. So, tell me what would be helpful to talk through today. I have some ideas and- and- and we've talked a little bit, but- but tell me what would be helpful.

Melissa: Yeah. So, um, as I mentioned, I have listened to your podcast forever. You know, I'm a big fan of sort of the startup culture and all of the amazing people who, um, produce these podcasts and write these books. And, um, I feel like the subject or
[00:02:30]

[00:03:00] the topic of being, um, a parent in a startup environment is, um, you know, is profoundly overlooked, um, in all of the things that are produced around startup and tech communities. So, um, you know, for me obviously being a mother of three kids, it's really, um, a challenge to balance being a- a mom, and then, trying to grow my career in- in a challenging industry.

Jerry: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Melissa: So ...

Jerry: So, it- it- it feels like it would be helpful to talk through some of those issues, is that right?

[00:03:30]

Melissa: Yeah. I think, um, you know, I- I myself experience a lot of- of guilt about not being around for my kids as much because I'm working and I'm traveling. Um, and just, um, feeling like, you know, can I effectively do both of these things, very important

[00:04:00] things, running a company as well as raising a family? And very often, you know, um, come up against each other and I have to make choices, and I- I guess I'm, you know, always worried that I'm going to fail at a one or the other (laughs). Um, I had somebody tell me one time that you can't be a mother and have a career. And that

[00:04:30] has always sort of sat in the back of my mind, and I am one of those people that, um, when somebody tells me I can't do something, I want to prove them wrong.

[00:05:00] Um, and so, I've, you know, gone full steam ahead into both of those things. And it's just sometimes really difficult because, you know, like I said, I- I feel that guilt and I feel like I'm going to fail, and I'm going to actually not be able to prove that person wrong. And, uh, so it's ... I- I've come a long way in many thanks to therapy and- and podcasts and- and my- my Reboot experience. Um, and I feel like

[00:05:30] mindfulness has created a huge part in allowing me to get to where I am. Um, but there's still, you know, always that underlying, you know, I have to keep my stable, um, persona in both worlds. And sometimes that can be really (laughs) difficult.

Jerry: Well, let's take a minute. Um, what are the names of your kids? And their ages?

Melissa: Stella is 11. Um, Peter is 9. And Leo is 7.

[00:06:00]

Jerry: Stella, Peter- Peter, and Leo. And you just smiled as soon as I asked you their names.

Melissa: Yeah.

Jerry: Um, you're like, "Uh oh. I know Jerry's gonna make me cry now." (laughs).

Melissa: Uh, I forgot to-

Jerry: But I- I-

Melissa: ... get some tissues.

Jerry: Yeah (laughs), you've- you've forgotten tissues. Looking around, "Where are my tissues?"

Melissa: Where are my tissues?

Jerry: I- you know, I always think it's important to just actually meeting folks and bringing them into the group and bringing them into the conversation. Um, you know, uh, my children who are adults, and I was saying to my therapist yesterday, that I wish there was a German compound word for your children who are adults 'cause there's no word for that, right?

Melissa: Right (laughs).

[00:07:00]

Jerry: Kids doesn't make sense, right? That's Sam, Emma and Michael. Um, when we name them, and we create space for them, it's a really powerful experience. Transpersonally, beyond just that experience of, you know, the picture on the wall and not- any- nobody on the podcast can see this, but I'm holding up a picture of me with my son, Sam. I'll put it closer. When he was a year old.

Melissa: Oh, I love it.

Jerry: He's 28.

Melissa: (laughs).

[00:07:30]

Jerry: Uh, and I had black hair.

Melissa: (laughs).

Jerry: Um, so, a few things in response. First, I want you to know that I hear you. And, um, I want to set aside for a moment, even though that there are gender-specific challenges associated with this, I want to set aside for a moment gender. And just note, um, that while our language sometimes and our focus tends to be things like you can't have- be a mother and have a career. This is one of the bifurcations. We don't say to men necessarily, "You can't be a father and have a career."

[00:08:00]

Melissa: Right.

[00:08:30]

Jerry: And I have found that the guilt is powerful and goes in many directions. And it is not the same for every person, but it goes in many directions. And I just want to acknowledge that without diving, you know, into- into that.

Melissa: Agreed. Definitely.

Jerry: But partially because in looking backward, I feel super fortunate. Uh, when I was in
[00:09:00] my 20s, I started working for a company called CMP Media. Charlie Michael Peter. Although, that's not what it was named after. We never knew what it was named after. And, uh, it was founded by a husband and wife, Gerry and Lilo Leeds. L-E-E-D-S. Um, Michael, their son, who was the CEO, um, when I was growing up there, uh, went to CU Boulder. And the Leeds School of Business is named for them.

Melissa: Hmm.

[00:09:30]

Jerry: Um, and Lilo was committed to having an equitable work environment. And so, uh, we were one of the employers to have a high quality on-site daycare center. And I was one of the first fathers to bring, uh, first Sam and then Sam and Emma, into, uh, a daycare. First- one of the first fathers to bring children to work with me. Um, and I am the better man for that experience.

[00:10:00]

Melissa: Hmm. That's amazing.

Jerry: Um-

Melissa: [crosstalk 00:10:05].

Jerry: So, and I- and I say that because this phenomena, you can't be a mother and have a career, uh, can feel as if it's only a present day phenomena. But it's in fact in something that has been troubling our culture for decades. Um, unfairly so. Um, and so, I just want to acknowledge all of that before I sort of dive in a little bit more deeply into the story.

[00:10:30]

Um, and while I wish that we could resolve the work-family parenting conflicts that you wisely and eloquently described as profoundly overlooked in all of the supporting literature in the startup community, I wish we could resolve that in a 45-50 minute podcast. We won't. Um ...

[00:11:00]

Melissa: But at least, we can start talking about it.

Jerry: Well, and I think that that's part of the issue is that, um, we- we need to talk about it. Um, because right now there is some child who's growing up with the message that you can't be a mother and have a career. Right now. And she is going to be hearing that for the next 20, 30, 40 years of her life. And he will be feeling that conflict. And they, in some capacity or another, will be carrying that same sense of guilt that you're carrying, and either processing it internally, excoriating themselves, or externalizing it and aggressively attacking someone else if we don't talk about this on a regular basis.

[00:11:30]

[00:12:00]

Melissa: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Jerry: Does this resonate with you, with it?

Melissa: Yeah. Definitely.

Jerry: So, tell me a story. Tell me what's it like for you with your Stella, Peter and Leo. And for some reason, I'm trying to make the connection. Leo feels like up in the sky constellation. Stella is clearly up in the sky (laughing). And Peter is just, I don't know ...

Melissa: Peter's the rock. Peter's the rock. Yeah, my, uh ...

Jerry: Founder. Yeah.

Melissa: He was, uh, named after his grandfather who's an incredible man. Um, and yes, Stella is definitely up in the sky (laughs). She's my- my shining star.

Jerry: Mm-hmm (affirmative). We got you (laughing). Got you. God damn, Jerry (laughing). Yeah.

[00:13:00]

Melissa: Um, she is a performer. She is dramatic as hell (laughs). And, uh, she's- she's going somewhere. Um, um, they all are. They're great kids. I'm so proud of them. And it breaks my heart, um, to not be there with them, um, every day after school to help them with their homework or chaperone them on a field trip. Uh, or be there to, you know, help them make their valentines, um, for the Valentine's Day party. Um, and, you know every time I go on a business trip, to have them stay, "You- you're leaving again?" Um, but I try really hard to be present with them when I am there, um, and have quality, uh, time over quantity time. But, you know, again that's really hard to do because I've always got work on my mind and my laptop in the next room, or my phone in my pocket.

[00:13:30]

[00:14:00]

And, uh, so being present when I am with them, uh, is something I try really hard to do. Um, and just try to connect with them and let them know just ... I- I know they know deep down how much I love them and that I'll always, always be there for them when they need me no matter what. Um, and that they come first, but at the same time, I have to go to work, and I have to provide for them, and I have to be strong, and I have to show them what it's like to be a strong woman in the business world. And I just have to know that someday when they are adult children, they will appreciate that and understand what I went through.

[00:14:30]

[00:15:00]

Jerry: So, what I'm hearing is that, um, and you said it well before when you said, "I'm- I sometimes I feel like I'm failing on both sides." Um, I remember writing a blog post years and years ago, um, really in response to a reporter's call. They called me up and I was rushing through some airport. He said, "You know, we want to get a story on work-life balance." And I said, "Work life balance is bullshit." (laughing) And, um, what I went on to explain is that, um, I actually don't like the term because it implies, like I said at the time, a kind of seesawing where if your, like your- you- like, the- the- that- that work is on one side and life is on the other, and that you're

[00:15:30]

[00:16:00] supposed to find this perfect spot for the teeter-totter where you're not tipping over into guilt one way or the other. And the problem with that as a metaphor is that leads us to never not feeling guilty. We just always feel at loss 'cause there's no perfect balance point.

Melissa: Mm-hmm (negative). And there's never enough time- there's never enough time for work. There's never enough time for kids and relaxation and sleep and exercise and ... (laughs). There's just never enough time for any of it, so how do you make yourself be okay with that?

[00:16:30]

Jerry: Mm-hmm (affirmative). Mm-hmm (affirmative). So, at the time, um, I rem- I- And it's probably sou- I- I wrote about taking a similar kind of question to one of my Buddhist teachers who, um, um, had a very thick accent. And he spat out at me, "Shit of the bull." Shit of the bull. "Out of your mouth shit of the bull is flowing." And I was like, "Okay, what the hell are you talking about?" And what he was saying (laughs), what he ended up saying was, "one-third, one-third, one-third," right? One-third for self, one-third for the other, one-third for work. And you- you know, at the camp I talked- I probably talked about one-third, one-third, one-third. But even that, problem with that is it creates this constant, like, um, juggling act. Or, you know, when I was a kid, I never- This actually wasn't on TV, but my father used to talk about, you know, the- the- this spinning plates.

[00:17:00]

[00:17:30]

Melissa: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Jerry: Guy who would do all these tricks and they would spin plates at the top of his stick. And- and they would move so quickly. And that's what it can feel like, is that I have to move, and move, and move, and move, move. And, um, you know, there's a lot to be said about parenting that is just parenting generally. I mean, again, I- I am not an expert. I'm just a parent. And by the way, there maybe some wisdom in that statement, right? What I have found is that even when you get the sp- like, the plates spinning right, you can still feel guilty.

[00:18:00]

Melissa: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Jerry: Does this make sense?

[00:18:30]
Melissa: Yeah.

Jerry: Because- because the guilt is actually, I suspect, sourced not so much in the activity. But in our relationship to our expectations of what we're supposed to be.

Melissa: Right.

Jerry: Does this make sense?

[00:19:00]

Melissa: Yes, because we care and we care about what other people think, including our children and our coworkers and our parents of how, you know-

Jerry: And- and- and to be clear, we're- we're not making shit up, right? Someone has actually said to you, "You can't be a mother and have a career," which means that there's something wrong with you for attempting that.

Melissa: Right.

Jerry: Especially with, as you say, "I cannot prove that statement wrong."

Melissa: Right. And so, then I feel guilty.

Jerry: You are set up to feel guilty.

[00:19:30]
Melissa: Right.

Jerry: And there is a complicitness in it. Remember this notion of: how am I complicit in creating the conditions of my life? There's a complicitness in that, in- in- in- in that we can all buy into the externalized sense of self by worrying about what this jerk had to say, right? You can't be a mother and have a career. W-well, guess what? There are plenty of people who do not have the economic choice, right? (laughs) And what are they? Not parents?

[00:20:00]

Melissa: (laughs).

Jerry: Bullshit.

Melissa: Maybe they're not good parents and great at their job (laughs).

[00:20:30]
Jerry: Right. And so, it devolves into holding oneself up against the set of standards that are nearly impossible.

Melissa: Right.

Jerry: There's a child psycho- psychologist who wrote in, I think, the '40s and '50s. Um, British psychologist, psychoanalyst, named D. W. Winnicott. And Winnicott did study some and really wrote eloquently about the fear, and he focused mostly on mothers, on the- on that mothers have of not being good. And he spoke of the need to be good enough. The good enough mother.

[00:21:00]

Melissa: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Jerry: And- and- and that, um, and this is something, I will admit, I still struggle with. Am I a good enough father? Um, have I been a good father? And it's easy to get caught

[00:21:30]

[00:22:00] up in your mistakes of your past and the choices that you made, you know? "Oh wait. I was on that airplane trip. I didn't go to that recital." Or "I stayed late one night and missed giving out Advil to lower her temperature." What I find in those moments is I tend to obliterate the- the- the phone calls I received at two o'clock in the morning from scared kids, or the, "Daddy, I'm scared. There's a monster under the bed." And tumbling into their room. I forget those sights.

Melissa: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Jerry: And you're nodding 'cause I think you recognize it.

[00:22:30] Melissa: Yeah. Because there's the hundred times that you're there, and you're doing amazing things to care for them. And then, there's the two times that you weren't, and those are the times that you beat yourself up about ...

Jerry: Right. You know, I-I- there's so much to say with regard to this and so many people have helped me along the way. So, I'm going to share some of the things that I- that helped me. One was something ... and a former therapist of mine when he used to say in the old time, "Get over it. You're going to screw up your kids." (laughs)

[00:23:00]

Melissa: As my standby, is they- they're gonna- they're gonna be screwed up no matter what I do, so pick one (laughs).

Jerry: Right. And- and- and- and the brilliance of that is it actually relates back to a Talmudic teaching, which is known as the "wisdom of the skinned knee." You know, anxious parenting tends to think that every skinned knee is a disaster. And, you know, to be fair, we are acculturated right now. I mean, watch. Um, did you ever ride your bike without a bike helmet when you were a kid?

[00:23:30]

Melissa: Every time.

Jerry: And do you let your children ride their bike without a bike helmet?

Melissa: Never.

Jerry: Never.

Melissa: Never.

Jerry: "Because I am a good parent."

Melissa: Yes (laughs).

Jerry: Right?

[00:24:00]

Melissa: Yes.

Jerry: Um, we didn't- They didn't even invent car seats when I was a baby, right? That's not to say that we shouldn't have our kids ride in car seats. I mean, statistics show, you know, we have saved millions of lives by buckling up, right? But there is this, [00:24:30] um, unanticipated effect, which is that, if for some reason my child skins their knee and hurts, 'cause that's really what it is, right? Every single twinge of pain, their loneliness, their disappointment, their failed grades, um, their broken hearts, their "I gave out a valentine to every kid in class, and I didn't get one from John," right? I [00:25:00] mean, Valentine's Day, right? They- they- like, every one of them can feel on the same level of failure in our part as a parent.

[00:25:30] And- and, uh, here- here's what I- I think is true. Th-th-the gift that is more precious than even our physical presence is the gift of language. It's to teach our children that it's okay to say, and this is going to be hard for you to hear, Melissa, "Mommy, I miss you" or "Mommy, I was mad at you that you didn't come to school."

[00:26:00] See, we're so afraid of their broken heart that we may unintentionally take away the best gift they have, the best skill they would have, to healing that skinned knee, which is to be able to say, "I hurt and I need and I desire and I wish and I want and I have a right to exist and I am not bad. And the fact that you have left me doesn't [00:26:30] mean I need to be afraid or worry that I'm not good enough." Does this make sense? [00:27:00]

Melissa: Mm-hmm (affirmative). Definitely.

Jerry: It's like, it- it- it's- it's a hard parenting skill, which I have- think I have learned. Someday I'll know for sure, and then, maybe I'll pass away (laughs) and my anxiety [00:27:30] about it will pass as well, right? But- but I- what I- what I hope ... And now that they are- they are adult and I have seen them demonstrate it, that when I inevitably disappoint and hurt, they can say, trusting that I will not run away, trusting that I will not collapse, trusting that I will not attack or defend, but I will be able to say to them, that they can say to me, "I hurt. You hurt me."

[00:28:00] Melissa: And that there is ... that I can't always fix that.

Jerry: And that you can't always fix that. If fixing means making it go away.

Melissa: Right.

Jerry: Right? What you can demonstrate ... Remember our term "warrior" from the [00:28:30] bootcamp. What you can demonstrate is a warrior stance of that, "Yes, I will take in your pain and I won't collapse into self-abdignation and- and- and self-flagellation, but I will hear that which I need to regret. And by doing so, model for you one half of a fierce conversation" that will stand them in good stead for the rest of their lives.

[00:29:00]

Melissa: Yeah. It's hard as a- as a parent to know that your children feeling hurt and pain is something that they have to learn. And you're teaching it to them, and helping them learn how to deal with it, when you just want to take it away and never let them feel that because it's- it's too hard.

[00:29:30]

Jerry: It's too hard for whom?

Melissa: (laughs) Yeah. It's-

Jerry: Too hard for us.

Melissa: Yeah. Yeah. 'Cause they are our babies. We don't want them to feel pain.

Jerry: Ever. And so, and- and so, we don't tip over to the other side where we get into this kind of crazy ass perverted view of Nietzsche, right? "That which does not kill me ..." We're not talking about that. What we're talking about is when the inevitable shows up, which is that you are not going to be there for every heartache of their life. You just simply will not be there for every moment of that. The question is what have you equipped them to do?

[00:30:00]

And so, here's a teaching that- that my former therapist used to give me. What is the purpose of peekaboo? Peekabo, I see you.

[00:30:30]

Melissa: To know that you're still there (laughs).

Jerry: I am still there.

Melissa: Yes.

Jerry: Or that mommy goes away and mommy comes back.

Melissa: Yes.

Jerry: Right? The way this cycle gets broken is when the parent can internalize the sense of being good enough, so that the child then says, "I don't have to worry that I'm not loved enough." And then, a magical thing happens. The child starts to contain themselves and self-soothes. "Oh. Mommy's coming back tomorrow. Where on the map did she go? She went to San Francisco. Mommy, how big was the plane?" "Hey honey, did you see that lady almost took a dog on the plane?" "Yeah, did you see the peacock last week?" Right? All of a sudden, it becomes a connecting point. Life itself becomes a connecting point.

[00:31:00]

[00:31:30]

Conversely, if you- if- if we can say to our children, "I wish I could have been there" or "I wish I could be there" and I'm s- "I'll be so excited to hear your whole story

[00:32:00] about what happened." Or "Grandpa will take a video and we'll- we'll eat cupcakes and we'll watch the video together."

Melissa: Yeah. Quality time (laughs).

Jerry: And- and- and this experience connected us in communications, so that the child-
[00:32:30] so the- Stella, Peter, and Leo can look at each other and say, "We got this. And oh, by the way, mom's kicking ass. I'm proud of this woman."

Melissa: Yeah.

Jerry: "And she's doing something that's meaningful for her, for us." Careful, not
[00:33:00] guilt-producing. "Oh, look at how hard that mommy works, so therefore I should be a better kid" and internalize that guilt. You see what I mean?

Melissa: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Jerry: Is this resonating?

Melissa: Yeah. Yeah. And I think I can, at their ages now, start to see some of that forming
[00:33:30] and them being there for each other if I'm not there, which is amazing and, like, the best thing I could possibly ask for as a parent. Um, so ...

Jerry: It's, um ... Let's go to the work environment for a moment if you will. If you- if you will. Um, what would you wish your colleagues understood about the balancing act that you feel?

Jerry: What would you wish the world knew about parents generally?

Melissa: Oh. Well, obviously, parents all know this. No matter if you have one child or seven,
[00:34:30] it is- it is a ha- it is the hardest job that there is. And I guess, what I- one of the things I struggle with is people who don't have children, like, seriously don't get it.

Jerry: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Melissa: They seriously have no idea how hard it is emotionally, how much energy takes,
[00:35:00] how much of a balancing act of those spinning plates, um, that it is. And, you know, there's- there's people obviously who don't have kids who get it, and- and they- they try and they understand. But I really just ... if you don't have kids, it's really hard to understand. And then, you know, to hear people complain about how busy they are or how difficult their lives are or how stressed out they are, um, when they
[00:35:30] don't even have a f- have children (laughs). Um, I sometimes get a little resentful about that.

Jerry: Mm-hmm (affirmative). Yeah, I can- I can hear the frustration. Um, and I appreciate that. I think it's, uh, one of the challenges for all of us, is to really understand the perspective from- from- from that other's point-of-view. And, um, it is possible that those who- who don't get it, as you say, perhaps don't get it for all sorts of reasons. Not the least of which might be because they don't have a child.

[00:36:00]

Melissa: Yeah.

[00:36:30]

Jerry: Uh, there are plenty of parents who, I think, would fall into the same category that you've just described (laughs). Um, regardless- regardless of their gender identity, there maybe two people in the same couplehood (laughs), one of whom gets it and one of whom don't, to use your language. Um, and I think that- that- that the challenge there is ...

[00:37:00] Well, to go back to your original observation about being something being profoundly overlooked. There is a pro- there is a profound opportunity for a dialogue. Not a monologue. "Let me tell you. You can't be a mother and have a career at the same time." That's a monologue. Conversely, "Let me tell you. You have no idea how hard it is." That could be a monologue as well. But I think that

[00:37:30] there is a deeper opportunity in all of this, which is what's the dialogue we're having, you know?

[00:38:00] You've listened enough to the podcast to know that I often will ask a question, like, "What kind of company do you want to build? Is it the kind of place where all people, whatever their social location, whatever their experience is in being in this thing called human, do they feel welcomed?" I have been in cultures that celebrate parenting. Work cultures that celebrate parenting. My old firm was- was consistently ranked one of the ten best places in the United States for- for- to work by Working Mother magazine, which of course is just a bizarre title for a magazine, but- For all sorts of reasons.

[00:38:30] But I think the question that we're all grappling with is: can we create humane work environments, such that, uh, people who have com- the ability to contribute, as you clearly have, to Engrain, right? Um, if you think about the trajectory of your career

[00:39:00] there, can you feel, uh, uh, supported in the inevitable stresses of balancing? In addition to the colleagues around you, so that they also feel. And so, then the question is, it becomes a shared workspace or shared work item, how do we create this space? And so, instead of, say, flex time, which is a brilliant invention. Um, uh,

[00:39:30] and shared jobs, which is another brilliant invention, which is one way in which parents can create space where their careers continue to be nourished and flourished, uh, while simultaneously balancing particular time demands. Those folks aren't made to feel either special or less than.

Melissa: Yes.

Jerry: Right?

Melissa: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Jerry: Just routine.

Melissa: Yup.

[00:40:00]

Jerry: Right? And so, you know, Jerry wears glasses. He doesn't need an accommodation for his glasses, but if his glasses are found around the office 'cause he always takes them off and can't find them when he takes them off, right? Well, then somebody finds them for him. That's all. It's like not a big deal.

[00:40:30] And so, Melissa needs to leave at three o'clock today because Leo is sick. Oh, okay. Or as I recall, going down to the- to the daycare center at lunch every day, which is what- what the standard operating procedure was. The parent was in the

[00:41:00] lunchroom. And that was just presumed. And so, meetings weren't scheduled between 11:45 and 1:15 because the- and the- In the entire company, it was just the culture. And yet, there were also times where, because I was the editor of the magazine, I had to review pages. So, Emma would come upstairs and she would usually be covered in spaghetti sauce, and I would have a nice, clean, white shirt that had spaghetti hand prints on my shoulders. And I wished to God I still had those shirts with spaghetti hand prints, spaghetti sauce hand prints on them. I'd frame them and put them on the wall.

Melissa: (laughs) Yeah.

Jerry: I mean, you know, I say this now and I recall these memories, and how fortunate I was that Lilo Leeds said ... basically called bullshit on our culture.

[00:41:30]

Melissa: Yeah.

Jerry: And made it safe to be a parent in the workplace.

Melissa: Mm-hmm (affirmative). Yeah. And I feel like at Engrain we've done a really good job of that because, um, you know, we really want to take care of our people, no

[00:42:00]

[00:42:30] matter what the accommodation is that they need. And, um, so we try really hard to do that. Um, but there are a lot of companies out there where that would not be acceptable. And you can't just leave at three o'clock if- if your child is sick. And I think those are the types of companies where that person probably has worked and participated and said you can't do both. Um, but I think luckily now, more and more, the companies are finding that balance, and are doing that. And trusting their employees to still get their work done and do what they need to do for their home lives.

Jerry: You know, I mean, yes. And in there- there's ... a- a- I won't bore people with statistic after statistic that shows that whatever we do to reduce stress in home life

[00:43:00]

[00:43:30] improves productivity. It is all true. We all know this. We're not really beating against, you know, that current, as much as we're beating the against the sort of underlying current, which is a kind of work ethos, which is that ... which still goes back to something that even those who aren't parents can feel, which is, "I'm not really working unless I'm panting," right? "Unless I'm really giving every ounce, unless I'm leaving it all on the field, unless I'm ... then somehow I'm less than." And we still, to this day, have debates, on Twitter, on Facebook, all over.

[00:44:00] Some- somebody in p- usually in a position of power and privilege makes a comment about work ethic, which is perhaps unconsciously, unintentionally obliterating and annihilating. And then, there's this the firestorm. And then, it passes. And that's what passes for dialogue. And so, you have the experience of- of this being profoundly overlooked because we come up against it, and then, we run back. We don't really say that the environment that in which it would be acceptable for you to hear "You can't be a mother and work at the same time" is the kind of environment that also says things like, uh, "You can't be authentically you and vulnerable, and have a career. You can't actually bring your full experience of being human and have a career. You can't actually celebrate the joys in life and acknowledge the pains of life, and have a career." And so, very quickly, we narrow it down to, "You can't actually be human and have a career." And what fucking utter nonsense.

[00:45:30] Melissa: Right. And it's because we worry about people judging us for all of those things. And judging and thinking that we're not doing a good job.

Jerry: It- the- the- the- the language for you, the opening language for you, may have been Winnicott's notion of "I'm not a good enough mother," but the reality is, the core message is, "I'm not a good enough person."

Melissa: Yeah (laughs). Yup. That's everything.

[00:46:00] Jerry: Right. And- and so, the only answer, the only retort to that, aside from "Fuck you" (laughs) is "My worthiness as a human being is not a reflection of the actions I take. My worthiness as a human being stems from my humanity. And when I act in alignment with that humanity, I tend to act for the greater good. But when that's challenged," and I'm leaving aside mentally ill people who might be sociopathic, "when that's challenged, I tend to operate in a self-optimizing negative way.

[00:46:30] Whereas if I can hold fast," and this is very Buddhist of me, so forgive me, "But if I can hold fast to the fact that I am profoundly good just for having been born, even though I make mistakes, even though I act in a mean way, even though I'm small at times, even though I'm greedy at times, even though I'm- I'm spiteful at times, if I can allow the fullness of that experience and hold onto my self-worth, in my

[00:47:00] experience the better na- a- nature of our angels ... the better angels of our nature come forth. And I stop acting like a jerk." And that's a common space that you and folks who don't have children can have.

[00:47:30]

[00:48:00]

Melissa: And I just wish everybody thought that way (laughs). And is- was told that they could be like that.

Jerry: Well, let's narrow it down and let's be sure that that's a lesson you give your children.

Melissa: Yeah.

Jerry: Because the world is not gonna get better until we inculcate this while the apples are still on the tree.

Melissa: Hmm.

[00:48:30]

Jerry: And the best way to model that for our children is can we give it to ourselves? Melissa, are you good enough just being human? You- your- your eyes revealed all when you- when I said, "I am worthy regardless of my actions." You're like, "Well, I don't know. That's a radical thought, dude." (laughing)

Melissa: Hmm. I have to think about that one little bit (laughs).

[00:49:00]

Jerry: That is not an excuse to murder, you know? (laughing) Plunder, you know? But- but it is an understanding that human beings are worthwhile. And if we can hold that, [00:49:30] maybe we can answer the- that voice in our head that says, "You can't be a parent and have a career at the same time."

Melissa: You know, I met, um, Cat at the bootcamp. Cat Hoke. And she and I got to- to talk a little bit and, uh, she dug in on me on forgiving myself and everything that, you [00:50:00] know, she talks about in- in her book. And I just listened to her interview with Tim, um, Tim Ferris. And, you know, it's just- it's so interesting how what she talks about with second chances and people who've committed crimes so closely relates to how I feel about having a career and children at the same time (laughs). And they're so ... yet, so different. So, I mean, but it all goes back to the same thing.

Jerry: Well, it- it all goes back to how we actually perceive ourselves.

[00:50:30]

Melissa: Yeah. Yeah.

Jerry: You know? And- and- and to Cat's words, you know, can you give yourself a second chance?

Melissa: Right. And- and just doing that, just it's just for yourself. It's all internal.

Jerry: Hmm. Hmm. Well, I hope that was helpful. And I didn't make you cry that much.

[00:51:00]

Melissa: Nope.

Jerry: No, look at that (laughing). Yeah. So, it was really a delight having you on the show and thank you for opening up this topic. And I think you're right. I think the more dialogue we can have around this, help- the more helpful it is for everybody.

Melissa: Yeah. Absolutely. Well, thank you very much for having me. Uh, it's really great to see you again.

Jerry: You too. You too.