

Ann: This was a stat that I found, and the question is, "What's the average time for women, out of the workforce to care for children or even another relative?" What's the average timeframe that they take out of the workforce? If you were to take a guess, how many years it is?

Ali: This is over the course of a career?

Heather: I would say like 18.

Ann: Well, it's between, 12 years.

Ann: 12 years. And then the follow up, I thought percentage was interesting, it's, "What percentage of women will be financially responsible for themselves or their families, at some point?"

Ann: And the answer, at least, they gave, was 99%.

Ann: And then the third was what percentage of women serve as their households, primary bread winner? And it's 40%.

Ann: Which I might have guessed, actually at this stage, it could be 50.

Ann: I just think those are very compelling, that some of us are not alone with some of these things we're tending to, but we don't always bring it forward in a mainstream conversation, of what we're working with, whether it's the care for another, time out of work, the lapse and what that feels like.

Heather: Mm-hmm (affirmative). Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Ali: Well, and then re-emerging right? Because it's putting the career on hold, putting you on hold, and then re-emerging...back into something.

Ann: That's right.

Ann: One of the phenomenons I used to notice, overtime was, I would have clients find me right when they were on the precipice of something huge, meaning, they'd want to schedule a session, having never met with me before, a week before they're about to deliver.

Ann: Or a week before they're about to get married.

Ann: And, I often thought, this is fascinating, because you think to yourself, how do they have the time to fit this in and what's this about? When they, you know, they're, they're almost off to another, uh... a whole nother horizon. And I realized there's this... Well, at times an anxiety, I'm going to lose myself in this next phase, or I might, uh, the ground beneath me is going to shift, and with all this uncertainty, I'd like to come to you, coach, to tell me, like, "Let's ground in something." You know, "Lets, lets talk career, or let's talk about, my setup at work, or..." and there's a certainty factor that's wanted, because there's so many unknowns.

Ann: I think there's something in there about identity meets life challenge that you're up against, or in a positive way, celebration and, um, but also just an unknown.

Heather: I feel like there's always this questions around timing, and when is it the right time to have a baby, and I, I've said to friends, like, "That's like trying to figure out when it's a convenient time to have tornado hit your house."

Heather: And I think (laughs) it gets... for me at least, harder with the second, because I knew a tornado was going to hit my house, and I kept thinking, "Okay, when do I feel prepared, and..." you know, I kept feeling further and further into the future. But I think, I think the other thing that I didn't know with my first child, that I expected more of my second is, I didn't know how I was going to change. I didn't know how I was going to feel like a completely different person a couple of months after I had a baby.

Heather: You know, I knew something was going to shift, and I couldn't even project into the future what I would want, or how I was going to be feeling. Um, there's just such a... It is such an identify shift. And, it's really hard to plan for that.

Ann: (laughing) Yeah, that's right, or if there's a part of you that loves to know, or have some control, you're seeking control right in the eleventh hour of entering into this new phase.

Heather: I think there's a parallel also to how, um, often when people are preparing to get married, they think less sometimes about the marriage and, and how, you know, some the frightening

implications of that, and i- it feels more comforting just to plan a wedding. To really throw oneself into the part that feels manageable.

Heather: When I was pregnant with my first child it felt so good to have this project and buy all the things, and do all the things, and get everything all ready and feel like I was prepared and not really, you know, again I didn't really know what to anticipate, because it was, just, I don't know, um, but it, it is, you know, I, I at least tended to focus more on the part that I could control, then the feeling that I was about to lose control.

Ali: I keep thinking of my friend who had twins, and we worked next to each other so, I was with her through her whole pregnancy.

Heather: Mm.

Ann: And and I asked her, you know, I was like, "What was it like?" Like, "What, what was labor like?" And she's like, "Well, you can see this point where your body just becomes an animal." (laughing) And so, when I hear you guys talk about like, loss of control, I'm like, "Yes it's in the process." Like that's just even, what the body goes through in...the bringing forth of, um, you know what you've been carrying for so long.

Ann: I'm so grateful that as women, we just talk more about all the parts.

Ali: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Ann: And we share the hacks, and we share the ugly, and we, we share the, "I don't know." I'm so grateful that I have the, call a friend, and, uh, and we're willing to sorta share, what worked, what didn't

Heather: Mm-hmm (affirmative). Yeah, I, I think t- that having a community of other mothers is so, is so helpful. And I, you know, when I... With my first child, um, I didn't have the experience of having that community of mothers around me. It was, it was incredibly lonely, and I- It just, It is a feeling of like, "Am I crazy? Am I cr..." Like, "Is it just this hard for me? Is there something I'm not doing?"

Ann: Mm.

Heather: That I should be doing, that makes this feel like, I'm pushing a bolder up, um, you know, (laughing) pushing a bolder up hill, every single day and starting it again the next morning. This second go round, I have really solid community of women, and people who've been mothers for a while and, and, um, really we've all dropped, collectively dropped this idea that this is glamorous, or Intstagramable or easy. (laughing)

Ann: Mm-hmm (affirmative). Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Heather: And, um, it is so validating, just to be able to text somebody and say, "God that was hard."(laughing)

Ann: You know, and to be... To feel seen by other people who can say, "I know how hard this is every day." How wonderful it is and, also how hard it is. And to have a safe place, to be able to say that, um, it's so validating. But to also say... h- have people say, "Yeah have you tried this?" Without judgment. Like, knowing that we're all just doing the best that we can. Um, has changed how it feels to be a mother, for me. Um, but it took a long time to have that.

Heather: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Ann: And to find that.

Heather: You know, actually, um, funny story about this. Ann, was my coach when I had my first baby. She was my executive coach, and, um, I was the first mother, uh, with a baby, at the company where I worked and it was so hard, and, uh, this is, you know, I, I had to... and I'm going to cry as I speak of this, you know, but, there was no, there was no place to pump milk, and I had to sit in the bathroom with my back barricaded, barricading the door.

Heather: And, it was so hard, and I would sit and cry. I would call Ann and cry to her and say, "This is so hard, I just don't think I can do it." And she said, "You have to do it, and you have to tell how hard it is, or it makes other women feel like it's impossible, when they experience it." You know, "If you make it look easy, if you make it look, um, if you make it look simple and you don't tell the story of how hard it is, then everyone else feels like it's just them, and they're alone in their struggle."

Ann: Mm.

Heather: And, it became really important to me to say, to say to my managers, to say to people who work with me, "It's really hard to be a mom with a kid. We really have to support people who have children because it's really, really difficult." Right? And, um, Ann that was so meaningful to me that you said that, because it, it is so easy to retreat. To be alone in it, to isolate, to want, to want to help maintain the illusion that, "This is simple."

Ann: Right.

Heather: Because we don't be- want to be the one who says, "It's really hard for me."

Ann: ... you know, what creeps up as you're in the bathroom stall, are all these emotions that are feelings of shame, like, "I have to have it all together." Right?

Ann: You know, and why would you have it all together, you're just, you're in the process of trying to figure out, "How long will I be in there, before I can... can I make that meeting that I agreed to on my phone?"

Ann: Or, "I need to freeze what I just pumped. Because if I don't then how many hours do I get again?"

Ann: But that, represents all of these crazy things we do, in the juggling act, right?

Heather: Yeah.

Heather: I try never to give advice about motherhood unless people ask me, because I, I hated getting unsolicited advice about it, uh, or commentary, uh, from people, but you know, the, the thing is, it, it's so hard, but I tell people like, "You'll figure it out. It comes together, you figure it out, it's really hard and it may feel like it's been scotch taped together, but it, it, it comes together and you make it (laughs) happen. And you do it because you have to." Right?

Ann: Mm-hmm (affirmative). Mm.

Heather: And, um, you know, I, I'd say on the flip side for me going through that, through that difficulty, motherhood has allowed me to access just reserves of strength and fortitude that I did not know that I had. It made me get so (laughs) much more

efficient at work, because before I had kids, I just... like I liked to work, I like to be at work lots of hours, it didn't bother me to be at work, and once I had, you know, an obligation to someone, in that way, like, I had to think about how to prioritize, how to delegate, how to get really smart about the time that I spent at work.

Heather:

I used to have a photographic memory that completely went out the window as soon as I got pregnant the first time, and I couldn't even remember what day it was and I had to get really disciplined, um, and found religion about having a productivity system, and writing everything down and automating that as much as possible. And, and so, you know, because you have to, it actually can force you to really dig deep and make improvements, and, and, um, that was my personal experience with it, because I had to. I was the primary breadwinner for my family, um, it wasn't an option to walk away from work. Um, and I didn't want to, and I had to figure out how to make it work.

Ann:

These are challenges again, I think about when we were talking earlier, it's like, "Look at how blessed we are to even have the struggle." When I'm sitting in front of clients, female clients and we're talking fertility, or we're talking about just life choices before they have a partner in the midst, and they don't want to lose their chance at a family.

Ann:

Like, we can back up and even get into, you know, again the, um, the core of like, what, what's so tough, and how we just have such a tough [fn 00:22:02] wrap.

Ann:

From my experience, I wasn't raised with the focal point being reproduce, it was more about, "Take care of yourself, try to get a good job, uh, don't rush into anything." But we missed the part that actually the eggs get old. (laughs) and, and if this is something you care about as a value, let's get smart on ideas or options there. So, the freezing of my eggs wasn't in... it wasn't as mainstream as I think it is now, in, in conversations I'm in with clients, and so I've tried to educate myself on the fertility story, the options, the financial costs. Because a lot of the start up founders, especially are, are trying to weigh, uh, "When and how, could I make this happen?" Given the constraints and given my time and financial limitations.

Heather: I have had those conversations and I think that there, there is a lot of fear, you know, understandably around what it's going to be like to go through that process.

Ann: What I see is, you know, clients will say to me, "You know, Ann, I want to pursue, continue to pursue building this company as a founder, but with the start up salary I'm on, I don't know how I'd ever be able to save for freezing, and I don't know even how I feel about that fully. My friends tell me it's time, but I don't have anybody in the midst, um, that I want to share a life with, so am I... is it the right thing to do?"

Ann: I think about a client who, you know, she also said to me, "I think I'm going to freeze my eggs. My friends have all done it." The thing that's hard for me is, I think I have to stay on the ground for a week to do it, as part of the process, and I, I don't see myself wanting to be in Manhattan for a week (laughs) because my travel and my work takes me..."

Heather: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Ann: So therein lies, like, she had the money but didn't want to have to like, well sit still for a week (laughs) to deal with something that's also painful. It's not like it's simple, right? To harvest. Um, and then there's as I mentioned the other questions of, um, you know, "where sh- where will my focus be right now, should it be on this, should I pull the trigger with this, or is, do I have time?" Um, and I'm, I'm just sensitive to what are big, big questions, and big, big costs.

Ann: It's tricky and unfair because I feel like as a gender, we're just equipped, we're built in a certain way, there's a window of time, and, um, you're dealt the hand, and you work with that hand as best as you can. But men of course don't have those windows and they don't have to force chose, and it's just not it. You know, it's not really a, it's not what they face as part the, the juggling act of career and life.

Ann: And we haven't even touched upon other reproductive, like, choices you have around a donor egg, or around a donor sperm. But there's... I, I don't know what you found Heather, with the benefits inside companies, I, I have some sense of places that, again, are very progressive around this topic, but most, for the most part, especially with our entrepreneurial community,

you're not going to get, you know, a health coverage on any of these numbers.

Heather: I think that's right.

Ann: I think some, yeah, some are recognizing it.

Ann: I still don't think we're there, like the conversation's way ahead, but the catch up is still happening with taking care of the family story, or you and your family costs. I even think just... maternity leave, right, still is this very, like, short span of time.

Ann: Someone reminded me though, that it was only a few years ago, that you got six weeks off. So, that if they say three months window is actually longer now, but when you look across the pond, of course it feels like a meager amount of time when other countries, you know, if you work for say the government in, uh, elsewhere, you would get almost a year, of your seat being preserved and ability to work, you know, be off work.

Heather: And, and the six weeks is really like a disability leave, essentially

Ann: Yeah.

Heather: Right, um, you know I had such different experiences with my children, because my, um, with my first I was in very early start up and, um, kind of patched together, was able to take a leave by patching together, um, the disability, mandatory disability of six weeks, and then buying against my vacation for the next year, took a three month leave and, um, came back and ramped up immediately, and even three months is a lot more generous than, than most women get, and I feel very, even lucky to have had that and it was so difficult, it was so difficult, like immediately coming back into that atmosphere and having to ramp up immediately and being the only mother and, um, with my second child, I took an extended leave, again, very lucky.

Heather: I took an extended leave and then ramped in very slowly and changed careers and, um, you know, I, I did not realize until I went through that process, how much healing I had to skip by packing it up and getting right back to work. I needed that (laughs) time, and, and I, I realize like, I don't know how I did it the first time. I don't know how I packed it all up and was right back in there, again, and there was a cost for me, it was really emotionally, physically difficult. And women do this all the time. We just sort of pack ourselves in, and we go.

Heather: I'll say that the interesting thing is, you know, for so many, for so many years I felt so much guilt, about the fact that with my first child I worked so much more. I traveled a lot, um, sometimes I schlepped her with me, sometimes I didn't, but there was always this question around, "Am I doing enough?" Like are th- you know, are we going to have an attachment, are we, you know all these sort of things, and, and so it's been so wonderful and validating to have a second child with whom I did have that time, and I am equally bonded with these, these two children.

Heather: We are bonded, and she was thriving and is still thriving.

Ann: Mm.

Heather: It's just an interesting to watch it because, I had a story um, about what I might be doing to my child by going back to work. You know, what I might be...

Ann: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Heather: ... um, subjecting her to or, how, you know, I felt like this is the right thing, and I had to it but also, was it going, going to cause harm to her, and it didn't (laughing)

Ann: Mm-hmm (affirmative)

Heather: It was a story that I had and, um, it's been so great to see over time how this has all played out, and she didn't suffer as a result of it.

Ann: You know, most kids learn to read, most kids end up walking, most of us, you know, it's like in the long term, we all kinda get there.

Ann: Because when you're close at the in, the, the mini crisis or this narrative as you said there Heather, that you're telling around, I'm abandoning my, my next of kin or, we won't have a connection or, she'll be in therapy due to this or...

Ann: ... um, is just in moments, uh, glimpse and, story. When ultimately, as you say, now you're, you have the data, um, to prove that actually you're as close, as you'd ever want to be and that didn't actually do any harm.

Ann: I love the shared stories, just in general. Which is, "Take this for what it's worth or, here's... Would you like to hear of my experience? It might help you with what you're looking at." The comments I find very unhelpful, they're, they're almost just like social cues of what we think we're supposed to say. But, I think most people say to me, especially with having a 3 month old right now, things like, "Oh, cherish it because, it goes so fast." And I wanna say, "Do you want to come live with me for 24 hours? (laughing) cause I- I live every second of that 24 hour. There's nothing fast, about being up all night."

Ann: I think what's more helpful is a nuanced exchange. Which is, you know, "It's just so hard, isn't it?"

Heather: Right.

Ann: Or, "I don't even know. I don't even think I have answers for you, but if you want to text me or call, I'm good at listening." Or, anything that's just again, "There's no perfect way of doing this."

Heather: This becomes important because, you know, how we talk about mothers, is how we talk about women. And (laughing) everyone knows so, um, I, I think, you know, it's funny because, I- I feel like there, there is story telling in lecturing to women, no matter what stage you're in. I feel like, before I was a mother, women who were mothers would sometimes say to me, you know, make this sort off implication, that maybe I was less womanly or, less wise than them because, I didn't have children like, "Oh you can't possibly understand." Or, almost an implication that you can't actualize as a human till you, you know, um, run this gauntlet.

Heather: And I don't believe that's true and I wanna say that as we're talking about this, that we don't, we don't believe this is the only way to be a full human. And then I feel like when I had one child, people with multiple children would say, "Well, you know, it's really easy to have one kid. Wait till you have a few and then, then it gets reAli hard. One kid's a breeze." And so, I feel like at each stage, I've had people in my life tell me some version of like, "Well, there's this, there's this other thing that's a lot harder, there's a lot... this other thing that you don't understand."

Heather: And it's just not true ,I think about this a lot, with parenting, and how difficult it is, it's like, "Why would you actually choose to do this?"

Heather: Why would you choose to do this?I think it's in many ways, parallel starting a company.

Ann: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Heather: I mean, why would you choose to do this? It's really difficult, it is not a lifestyle anyone would consciously choose. And you do it because, you're motivated by something but also because, there are rewards, they may not be in the short term but,there is something motivating you to want to do it, right? And you...

Ann: Yeah.

Heather: ... can see beyond, the pain of the present moment to, what could be in the future. Um, and I think a lot about, you know, what Pema Chodron says about, when we go through t- t- times of extreme difficulty, we annihilate all the parts of ourselves that are not real.

Ali: Mm.

Heather: And, the annihilation piece, sounds really scary. But, the flip side of that is what you're left with, is what feels real and authentic and, and I've... this has been my experience of motherhood, uh, really forcing me to peel away parts of me that are not mine to have. That I no longer want. Um, having to really dig down, and do some really deep work about, how I'm showing up every day and, you know, the work of being a parent is not to just talk about the thing, but to be the thing. If you want your children to learn how to experience joy, you, you, yourself have to show them what it looks like to experience joy.

Heather: You can't just talk about it, and it forces you, for me, it forces me to do the work of facing the places where I'm not actually living. The things that I'm trying to teach them to be. And to continually have to look at myself and, and dig deeper, work harder, sit in therapy, do the hard (laughs) work. Um, because it is a mirror constantly. Children are this amazing mirror, every time I think, I'll notice some problematic behavior,I can pretty much always tr- (laughing) track it back to me. I mean, there is

some input I've had, into this situation and there, there are moments where, there's behaviors I'm not conscious of.

Heather: And I have to really get conscious of them, or there's things I'm modeling. I, I have to really continually look and, and, it is exhausting but, I'm also grateful for the gift of that.

Ann: That's well said Heather. The child that puts this fierce mirror up in front of you...

Heather: Mm.

Ann: ... and, a- and looking at the things you said, "God I thought I was a patient person, now look at me, I'm storming out of the house because, I can't handle (laughing) this." Um, and, and I have to look at that, what's uh, there's no hiding from it anymore because you're in it. I'm older, I've read a lot about how you don't get happiness from having kids (laughing) and, and then having a real, uh, scary, exhausting, second where I, you know, I truly do wonder, "Was this a good idea?" And...

Ann: ... I've gotten a, you know, great responses from wise individuals who have said, um, "Yes, it's hard. I understand that feeling, thank you for sharing it." And the instant investment you've made, is in the long haul, just like you were drawing out the parallel to the, to building a business.

Heather: I think wha- part of what's so difficult in the early years, not, it's not, it the sleep, it's the physical demands of breastfeeding. But, it is also that, that when your children get older, there are more people who are participants in holding the frame for them. You know, I, like once my child got to school and there were other teachers helping her be a moral and ethical person, teaching her. When they're so young, you just feel this, I felt this burden of just... my husband and I are just holding this alone and just trying to figure out what the hell to do all the time (laughs) and so, you know, as time goes on and there's more community to share that, it gets so much... it gets lighter, it gets easier.

Heather: And, um, when they're so young it's just, it's, it's just very heavy. But it does pass.

Ann: That I would say is a helpful comment, and we talk about a helpful comment, not so helpful exchange, is others saying, um, "Trust me, it's never going to be as hard as it is in this, that very

moment you're in. It's still hard, it's a different hard. So hang in there."

Ann: There's a book called, *The Grief Club*, by Melody Beattie, the thesis of it is, you know, find your tribe of whatever your pain point is, and you'll feel less isolated.

Ann: And so, what I think is helpful is, whether it be the early stages, or the next cliff, as you were describing there Heather, of like development, maybe your kid is in the world more, but now you're thinking about other questions of how to mother them and how to manage a career. Or, maybe it's the empty nest like now, "I'm liberated and yet I have, um, I'm, I'm in the throes of understanding who I am without being so needed." Is like find an other who can just share the experience or notes about what they've learned or maybe their own emotions. So you feel less alone. And, I think that's profound. I just think it's like, find community, just find others, just as we always encourage to Reboot, it's like, find people to sit in circle with, to talk through your latest, uh, emotions around it all.

Heather: One of the most helpful books I read was called, uh, *The Milk Memos*, by, uh, Cate Colburn-Smith, and it was, it's a book that is, is a guide for new mothers, but it was based on the journals that were found in a lactation room at IBM. So all these women, who didn't, actually some of them didn't even know one another, um, they were all working in different areas, but they'd come in this room to pump milk and they'd write notes of encouragement or tips for one another, and I, I, love... I mean it was really great practical advice about pumping and, and all kinds of things, about going back to work, but I also just love the idea that it was this mind share of women who were with generosity, supporting one another. Even people that they didn't know.

Heather: Um, I thought it was just such a, a beautiful, a beautiful metaphor. And, I didn't have that, at the time. So, just reading that book I just sort of imagined like, uh, those were left for me. Um, and I, it was a really helpful one. That I liked a lot, but to your point. Just, this like, finding some, some sort of group of people with whom you could share and get support and who could say, "I see you, and I see how hard this is." I can think of a few things that I consider a worse feeling, then having something be really difficult and have to pretend it's not.

Heather: When you're holding it alone and you don't have anyone else who can share or even validate what you're experiencing, it is so isolating. And, you feel as though it's just, it's just you, like I'm just not doing this motherhood gig right.

Ann: I want to reference one book I think is very helpful called, *Here's the Plan*, it's by Alison Downey, and it's got in it lots of parts about the practical guide to like preparing for, uh, say motherhood, related to the message of communication, the time off, the decisions around nannies.

Ann: I was interviewed for the book a long time ago, and now I recommend it at times to clients to just think through, uh, "How important is it for me to mention this and when?"

Ann: So it's not just like when to tell your boss from the traditional corporate side of the house, but also if you're going to, um, have a baby that's called your start up. When do you do your planning around that with even a co-founder. Um, or get in front of investors, you know, "Are we that progressive now, that we say that they wouldn't judge us for being showing as we're doing our pitch for our Series B. Will I be judged?"

Heather: I don't know what the answer to all of this is, but I do know that the wave of women who are facing this questi- these questions now, are incredibly brave and I hope that in the future after, um, this group of women pushes the boundaries on this, that it becomes really normal. It's just acutely hard for people now, because no-one's been doi- it hasn't been done, right. These are new questions, and so, you know, I go back to this thing we said earlier, like if you, if you don't do it, who's going to do it?

Ali: Yeah.

Heather: If we don't start doing these things, how is it going to shift and to change? I feel like these, these sort of questions related to motherhood are at this moment, um, going to get easier later but they're very tough for people who are going through them now.

Heather: I think there are lots of things that companies can do to make this easier for women. I think, I think that, I mean there are study after study around, um, how important gender neutral parental leaves are. Because even if you have a generous parental leave policy, but women are still in the caretaker role,

they're the only ones who will be stepping out to take care of their families. There's no, there's still no equality there, right? When men will also step out, it, it neutralizes the playing field. I think it's important to promote pregnant women. I think it's really important to visibly promote pregnant women. I've seen this thing happen even prog- even in progressive places where it maybe is not even a promotion but people hold back juicier projects from pregnant people.

Heather:

Because they know they're not going to be around to see it through and it's... it is this way of forcing people to lean out early, um, and so yes it's not ideal to have to take a few months off from a project, but the alternative is forcing people to the sidelines months and months before they're even going to take a break. It's, it's, you know, it effectively hijacks their career for a couple of years.

Heather:

I love it when companies vi- like promote women who are visibly pregnant. I mean, it's such a statement of values when you do that. It's, it's incredibly powerful.

Ali:

I worked for a, a smaller startup, prior to Reboot, and I was in the ops chair, and so HR fell under my pile of things our accountant got pregnant and I had to fight to keep her. My boss the CEO who's oddly a woman was like, "She's not, she's not gonna stay, she's going to end up leaving." And, I'm looking at her going, "She can't leave. She needs this job. we need to make this work for her." I couldn't figure out why that impulse, to push her to the sidelines was there, and I was like, "This is such a crucial role of a company, why is this even a question?"

Ali:

My CEO at the time was, very progressive, and smart and all things feminist studies, and I think I was just shocked by the juxtaposition of that. It was a really hard conversation for me to be in, a really hard situation for me to be in because I fought so hard to keep her.

Ali:

At our boot camps since our very first boot camp the women ha- at least one woman that's come has been pregnant. And we find out usually on the last day.

Ann:

Mm.

Ali:

And of course nobody knows kind of going in and they rarely will put that on their application form, not that it's required. But it eventually just surfaces, and then this happened even at our

women's bootcamp. Um, when we had all women in the circle, and, it was always on the last day. Again where someone would say, "And I'm, and I'm pregnant." And this is like a thing. And, um, it's just such a shock, that it just resurfaces on day four or five, of a retreat when you're so close and intimate with people, that secret, that experience, is just so precious that it's just hard to say, um, to any audience. Whether it's an investor or your employer or a group of women who you've chosen to be with for five days.

Heather:

Well that speaks to how scary that reveal is.

Ali:

Really scary and the reveal always comes with tears. It always comes with tears. We had our first boot camp in Italy, we had a woman in the group who was pregnant and she was having a hard pregnancy, and it was like the second to last day, she, she really opened up in the circle and she just said, "I am so, um, I am so in love with this baby, I'm so in love with the fact that I'm pregnant, and I'm terrified that this is going to ruin my career." And she was like, this acclaimed, you know, entrepreneur in her country, and, she was devastated at the thought, that this beautiful thing, would just wipe out everything that she's accomplished in her career.

Ali:

And make things so hard for her. Like starting her next company, or getting investment, or, um, basically she would lose all credibility as an entrepreneur. And she was so distraught, and just sobbing in the circle. That reveal and that experience just... it can be so rattling. And yet it's, it's like this most amazing life giving precious thing, right, to be pregnant and to like... to do this, like to give birth and, and wow, so many tears and so much fear around how it's even going to be perceived. I mean, I'm sure we could unpack that with lineage and history and what not. But, that's just a threat that I really witnessed with women.

Ann:

Unless we have this big movement, big change or shift in the environments where we show up, where we call it work, where it's celebrated, and honored. Unless you have this very inviting, open, confidence stance around, "We can keep talking through this together and it doesn't mean you're, you know, we've eliminated your role." Um, it's still going to be something that you're going to hold back as real, or happening, because you're gonna want to play it safe for your reputations sake. Or, until you're sure what move you need to make.

Ann: There's a few glimmers of hope, and Heather you mentioned this I think about, there's I want to say a few founders, female founders, how have posted their ultra sounds on their twitter feed, even though they're in the midst of fund raising.

Ann: And, as a statement to say, "I'm going to claim this, I'm excited, oh, and yes we still are trying to close our Series A," Or what have you.

Heather: I think there's an important piece about mothers telling the story about how hard it is, but I think from a manager's perspective or leaders can support women in their organization, part of the answer is supporting whatever that woman needs, but also giving them the choices about what they want to take on and what they want to drop off of, without penalty, right?

Heather: And so, instead of, sort of, preemptively choosing for them, saying like, "What, what do you want right now, let's have a conversation about it, let's create a space where you can tell me what you do and don't want to do. If you don't feel up to it later, you can pass it back. But what, what is it that you want right now? How can, you know, what projects do you want to be involved in? What do you want to do?" And, you know, it's not perfect right? There's always a power dynamic, but as much as possible we want to create the space where women can drive on this when they're pregnant.

Ann: Yeah. To be included.

Ann: What a lot of women, I'm sure, are trying to figure out. Is the when and how to tell or communicate, and then not knowing what's on the other side, well they don't know what to say in response to, "What do you want to do?" Because they're not sure what they wanna do, they think they might still wanna be working perhaps but, who knows, once that baby's in your arms. So I like the idea, as you say Heather, that there's some models within the business that you can look to as examples of, it wasn't a devastating call because they sh- were in the board meeting even though they were nine months or they were promoted in the midst of their journey, or they were given benefits, even with this alternative choice that they had, about how they were going to conceive or adopt, or, um, we need more of that in the main stream.

Heather: Well, and when you tell someone that you're pregnant, you... Each person has their own story about motherhood and about pregnant women that you have to encounter. (laughs) right?

Ann: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Heather: And so, you have to tell this story, over and over and over again to all these different people who have all these, may have all these stories about what that means. About what your work output's going to be, how you're going to show up. They have all these stereotypes about that, and that's part of what's so difficult because you just can't anticipate what those reactions are going to be.

Ann: That's right. So you might hold back.

Ann: You never know who your audience is, and how they hold the whole, um, idea of what you're headed into.

Heather: Well, there's also the question, like, you know, um, pro- it feels like there's a statement that is, "Promise me nothing's going to change." Right?

Heather: "Promise me nothing's going to change." And if you make that promise you're lying (laughing)

Ann: (laughing) Yeah.

Ann: Does it feel like anything is left unsaid here,?

Ali: There was only one thought I had, was, what do we, what do we do for the folks that either can't conceive or find out they can't conceive right, and those who just chose not to. I can speak from that seat there's just one bit of wisdom that I have gleaned and I worked with a woman who, um, does Pelvicology or Pelvic Bowl Care, um, for a year. And, um, she works with a lot of women on fertility issues, I wasn't working with her on that issue. But she did say to me, in one session, she said, "Ali, have you, have you had a conversation with your eggs? Like are you all in agreement about what you want and what you're creating in this life?" And I looked at her, and I was like, "Well, that sounds shamanically crazy, I've never thought of that." (laughing)

Ann: (laughing)

Heather: (laughing)

Ali: But like, kind of like, right then and there you know, like, while her hands were all up in my pelvic bowl, I was like, "Okay, well let's have a conversation and see what the eggs have to say?" But, that, that's when I just kind of made the conscious, ultra-conscious choice, and conversation, you know, with the eggs and I was like, "All right, all right girls. We're not going to have kids.

Ali: We're going to have horses, and this is our commitment.

Ali: (laughing) this is our mi- our mission statement.

Ali: Well, I thought it was such a really... I mean way to be in, in sync with your body, it's just like, it's to consciously make the choice, like, We are okay, we don't need to bear children, but we are going to create something." You know, or, "What is this thing that we are agreeing to create in this lifetime, because-

Heather: I love that.

Ali: ... our creative center is very potent for anyone.

Ann: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Ali: With or without children.

Heather: That's right.

Ann: You could certainly have another whole discussion around women that make the choice, as you say, not to say Mother in the traditional way that we're talking about. Um, giving birth. And have this absolutely gorgeous full lives. That are meaningful and deep, and contri- contribute to society in all the ways that are important. And because, there is this assumption that we're all wired to reproduce and if not, there's something wrong, right? So, I think that, that is ridiculous. There is there's certainly, we could bring around to the table, a whole discussion around other choices that are conscious and real and magnificent.

Heather: Mm.

Ann: And, it's not just this one lane that makes sense like you said, there are some of us who have choices, and then there are some that do not. And, and yet have tried to, or want to, or don't want, that I think honoring all the conversations in a way that, like, nothing is strange. Or, um, that you're on the fringe. Because to me, the fringe is more the mainstream now. And, in the same way that we found a way to reproduce, and not necessarily have to be in our 20s to do it. And, um, we have alternative partners, and lifestyles of wanting to reproduce together, or use a surrogate, or adopt, or take on children that are in our family that need caring for.

Ann: Like, there's so many ways to build a world, um, and be a caregiver. So I, I think these are feelings I think we have obviously, as moms, in the workforce, with kids in the mix. But, we could, I think, overlay caregiving period, to this discussion.

Heather: All women are carrying so much what we were talking about here is it's hard if you say you're going to have a baby, it's hard if you decide you don't want to have baby or you can't have a baby, like there's just, like it (laughs) it's not easy for any of us in this area. Each path is fraught with its own form of difficulty, and again I say, "Aren't women incredible."

Ali: Yeah. Because we are.

Heather: Thank you. What a wonderful start to the day. I'm so grateful for you both.

Ann: Take care.

Ali: Bye.