

Jamie: Hi everyone. My name is Jamie Kim and I'm a coach at Reboot and creator of The Third, a group coaching experience for women. My inspiration to create The Third has come out of my many conversations with my friends and my clients, Taran and Bunny who are here with me today. Bunny and Taran are sisters, and co-founders of Blume, a DTC brand that wants to create the next generation of confident, tenacious and conscious women. Hey Bunny and Taran, do you want to say hi?

Bunny: Hello.

Taran: Hello.

Jamie: Well, before we dive into our conversation about being BIPoc women founders, I think it'd be nice for our listeners to know who we come from. All right. So I thought I would go first. So I come from my mom and dad. My mom's name is Jung-ok Kim and my dad's name is Sung Joon Kim. My father's family fled poverty in Korea and went to Tokyo, just following the deannexation of South Korea. They were forced to hide their Korean identity and conform to their Japanese identity as a way of survival. They really just didn't have a choice. My mother was born and raised in South Korea. She and my father were an arranged marriage. She was 19 when she moved over to Tokyo. And so there, she had to adapt to a Japanese way until they immigrated to Canada in the '70s. And then they both had to adapt once again.

Jamie: My mom was a waitress and a sales clerk and my father was an account man and store manager. But really when I think about them, I actually think about them more as being entrepreneurs. And to me, they lived a life like entrepreneurs. They took multiple risks many times over to create a new life and they always found a way to make it work. And I'm really proud to come from that. What about you two?

Taran: I'm Taran and I come from Parmjit and Perminder Ghatrora who come from Punjab, a state in Northern India. And my parents are also Bunny's parents as we're sisters the Susan co-founders. Like Jamie's parents, my parents are both immigrants and also entrepreneurs. They immigrated to Canada in their early 20s as newlyweds. And when I was growing up, I saw my father working two full-time jobs. And I remember waiting up till 1:00 AM sometimes at the top of the stairs for him to come home from work, because sometimes it was the only time in the day I saw him. But despite how hard they worked, they still did

everything they could to be there for us, to be amazing parents and to ensure that we received the education that they didn't.

Taran:

And so as an entrepreneur today, I draw from the strength of their teachings. And also from the wisdom of my grandparents who lived with me growing up, who also raised me. All of these people did not have formal educations, but they always worked hard and they were connected deeply to... I feel they were connected deeply to the world around them, the earth, and they taught me presence. Today, I'm also a co-founder of Blume and a big part of what led to creating Blume was finding out how many girls were actually missing school in India back home due to their period. Many girls are missing almost a quarter of their schooling, which led to dropping out early. The economic impact of that is insane. So just kind of thinking about the fact that that easily could have been me if my parents didn't immigrate. So that's become a really big part of our mission here at Blume.

Jamie:

Yeah. I would love to hear more. I didn't know that part of the origin story. That's really beautiful to think about how also your ancestry plays into the creation of Blume. Yeah, tell us more about Blume. How long has it been going and how did it all start?

Bunny:

Yeah. So we actually started working on the very first iteration of Blume in 2016. I was an accounting student, Taran was studying law and she had the idea for a monthly delivery service of organic pads and tampons. After we learned about the harmful ingredients in the mainstream products that we've been using for so long and the lack of access to better for you products in Canada, which is where we live. And around that same time as we were kind of diving into exploring this, I was diagnosed with PCOS, which is something that one in 10 women experience but at the time there wasn't a lot of education or resources for me to understand more about what that meant. And so we dove in headfirst into this idea of a monthly delivery of organic period products. We were students, we only had a few hundred dollars and credit cards.

Bunny:

And we did everything we could to learn about the stale FEM high industry and find a way to destruct it. And so in the early days, it was just the two of us. We were working part-time jobs in school at the time and just pretty much doing whatever we had to do to get organic period products to the houses of our customers. And so throughout this, we stayed as close to our customer as we possibly could. We learned as much about her as she was willing to share with us everything about why she

needed these products, what was hard for her currently, how the current options in the market failed her and also just about her personal life and who she was and where she came from and what she cared about. And so by learning what we could from this and many customers that we had, we actually used all of that information and launched the version of Blume that you see today.

Bunny: And the brand that exists today, Blume is to change the stat that 63% of girls and women feel their self-esteem plummet as they go through puberty. But of course, starting out we were creating something from nothing. We grew up in a suburban neighborhood right outside of Vancouver. We were packing boxes from our bedrooms and our basement for three years. And we continued to hold onto our part-time jobs for as long as we could so that we could fund the business with the little amount of extra cash that we had. And I think in some cases, the fact that we were so naive and that maybe we didn't necessarily come from a huge network of startup entrepreneurs or even resources, it often felt like a hurdle at the time, but in some ways I think we're grateful for that naivety. And it really allowed us to not feel overwhelmed by what was to come and instead just continue pushing forward in the excitement of what could possibly be.

Jamie: How many times have you told that story, the Blume story, do you feel like?

Bunny: We've told it a few times but this is the first time we've told it I think in relation to who we are and where we come from. And I think that matters a lot for Taran and I and our personal lives and what really drives us to keep the business going and the mission going and really ties it to something that is bigger than just the two of us.

Jamie: Thank you so much for sharing that. 2020 was a really hard year obviously, but you're a consumer brand. So you felt the blow of COVID-19 in a pretty specific way. Can you remember what that all felt like at the very beginning?

Bunny: So for me not only was this our first crisis as a startup or as a business owner, it was also, I think probably the biggest crisis that I've experienced in my own lifetime. I was too young to experience and really understand the effect that some previous crises had to our communities. And so not only was I experiencing COVID-19 as a young business owner, I was also experiencing it alongside of so many other young people who were trying to understand how to navigate a crisis and where

they fit into it and what that means for our futures. But I think the interesting thing is that we were well aware and COVID-19 was top of mind for us in January when our pre-Chinese new year production runs all got delayed and pushed out due to the pandemic hitting China first and their response, which was a total lockdown.

Bunny: And I think at that point, we were so unclear and uncertain about what a pandemic in China means for us in Canada and US, and just confused by the lack of communication and action that we felt like we were receiving. But I think... And Jamie, I'm sure you recall in the conversations we were having that it was just a flurry of what-ifs and questions of when is this going to be over, what should we be focusing on, what really matters right now and what does this mean for all of us and our futures. And I think that those thoughts were all-consuming for the first little while.

Jamie: And what was that like for the team? What was it like to connect and manage the emotions of the folks that are on your team and managing your own emotions during that time?

Taran: Yeah. So I was in San Francisco and New York for most of February, 2020 raising our Series A and I remember talking to the team over Zoom and making the decision to shift to work from home very early on and cutting my trip short to return back to Vancouver because of COVID. And this was in early March. So we had a signed term sheet for our Series A, but I knew at the time based on what Bunny just said kind of what we knew that I didn't want to allow myself to feel any relief yet as everything was so uncertain at that time. So when we kind of first started all shifting to work from home and the situation became more dire, at first, the adrenaline kicked in. So I think I was maybe a little bit even out of touch with my actual emotions and was maybe more so focused on action at that time.

Taran: And almost this motherly instinct kicked in about the business of taking an inventory of where are we at and how could this affect us and doing all this various scenario planning. Because like Bunny said, we had never actually encountered a crisis like this and there were words being thrown around like Black Swan event and unprecedented, I think we all heard that word like millions of times. So for me, I think top of mind, first was closing this deal. And we'd always had it ingrained in us that a deal is never done until the money is in the bank. So that really tied in to the team for me, because it was how are we going to take care of all these people and this business? So when it came to, I

think, the team's emotions, it was about communicating these unknowns to them as best as we could.

Taran: And weeks kind of felt like months, but it was weighing transparency versus shielding from bad news. And I think in the end in most cases, we really went with 100% transparency and then our plan for how to deal with each blow. And we did communicate on a daily basis with the team and we just felt this immense weight and responsibility for how to show up for them at the time. And I think in some ways, and Jamie you know this because you were working with us, that was to the detriment of maybe our own emotions. So in hindsight, that's something we could have done better on. But it was just what had to be done at the time with everything that was going on.

Jamie: So if you could go back and do it differently, what do you think you would have done differently?

Taran: So I was actually talking to Bunny about this earlier. I think knowing what we knew, I do think transparency was still the right direction to go because I think that allowed our team to really become closer together and just more tight-knit. So I would have definitely been just as transparent. I probably would have increased my coaching hours with you looking back truthfully. Bunny, what about you? What would you have done differently?

Bunny: I think one thing for sure would have been to zoom out a little bit more. I think the thing that maybe wasn't clear to me at the time is that this isn't for the short term by any means. And I know now looking back and even last March, it was kind of like, well, obviously this wouldn't be short-term, but I think the reality of how long-term this actually is and what the effects are going to be for years to come yet, maybe I didn't realize fully in March and April in just what direction our world is going and what that means. And so I think if I could go back looking at March, really just zooming out and being like, how can I prepare for the next two years not just the next six months. And we did that a little bit later on and we're doing that now going forward and really looking at the longer-term picture.

Bunny: But I think just at the time it was so unclear and uncertain and a lot of people were saying that we're going to be in lockdown only for a month and things will be okay by the summertime and all these things. And I think in some places around the world, that's true. They were able to go back to normal far quicker than North America was, but that wasn't our reality. And I think obviously none of us had a magic crystal ball to look

into, but I do wish that I had looked at things as more two or three years versus several months.

Jamie: Which is kind of where you are now, right? Yeah. I think talking a little bit about women were being disproportionately underfunded in 2020 feels like a good place to go. Even pre-COVID, only somewhere around 1% of funding went to BIPOC women founders. So you have a bit of firsthand experience that speaks to this, can you talk a little bit about that?

Taran: So I think for us like I said, that that deal was top of mind which looking back like I said, we had kind of approached it as the money's never in the bank until it's in the bank. And it's wired even if there's a term sheet signed. So in that instance, we had signed the term sheet with this investor just around the time that COVID was actually declared a global pandemic. And then we spent the next 30 days. So really the first 30 days of the pandemic on due diligence. And it was probably about 12 to 15 hours a day of putting together documentation, files, phone calls and on the 30th day of due diligence, this investor pulled out of the deal. And this was one of the most painful experiences that I've ever had as a founder. Not only because they pulled out of the Series A but also just as we talked about the state of the world. I think the great thing is we had so many wonderful people around us to support and we weren't completely shocked by this.

Taran: It was happening around us and we're not the only ones, it's just something that's not talked about enough. And so because we had already begun to really prioritize the team and community, we were able to come out of this in a really positive way, I would say. But to tie that back to your question, Jamie, and the big picture, women were disproportionately underfunded in 2020. And actually in 2020 funding numbers were really high. So it's not like VC funding declined in 2020 overall, it's just funding to women founders was pretty dismal in 2020. So one thing I'm really grateful for is that our existing investors are amazing and they were able to bridge us. Of course not the Series A that we had planned, but they were able to bridge us more round and we were kind of able to regain our footing. But yeah, I think from what we've seen of those stats so far, we could have done better overall for being in control.

Jamie: There's one thing that you had said to me once about being in that 1% kind of like a lottery ticket in a way, like Willy Wonka's ticket that you are in the 1% of just being recognized, being validated.

Bunny: Yeah. And I think with that, of course it just feel... We're so grateful for it because there are such amazing investors that we have, a part of Blume that are truly partners on this journey. But I think with that has come this immense responsibility that we'll make sure... It's kind of this immense responsibility that means I will always push to do my absolute best, not just for us, but because we know that pattern recognition is a real thing in VC funding and I want to be the reason or part of the reason, I mean, that more diverse founders get funded and that pattern recognition applies in a really positive way in the future because it is a huge responsibility. And I told you, Jamie, I've learned to shift my mindset from before I would really have this mindset that, wow, I'm so grateful that I'm even allowed in this room or I'm so grateful that this person will even talk to me.

Bunny: And I'm learning to like shift that mindset to I deserve to be in this room and I've worked just as hard as anybody else. And we have this amazing business that people are lucky to be a part of and that's taken work for sure. But yeah, I would say we don't take being a part of that 1% lightly. And I think overall for women, for female founders, it's about 4% of VC funding. So that's something that we put a lot of weight on and obviously want to see that number go up.

Jamie: I'm curious to know you said earlier you kind of came up positively out of what was one of the hardest things you had ever faced and you know we work together, so I know that's true. You really did come up positively. It continues to track in that direction. If you could kind of go back in time and see when that shift started to happen from being in crisis, devastation mode to seeing another path, do you remember what was happening there or what helped you or what stories were you telling yourself to find that new path and direction?

Bunny: Yeah. So I mean, tangibly as Taran mentioned, after we were able to close that small bridge round and even before that, we basically just sprang right into action to do what we needed to do to stay alive as a company and ensure that we were still around. And so we started cutting costs wherever we could. We made probably like 30 different variations of projections for all the situations and scenarios that we could imagine. We had to cut costs everywhere that wasn't bringing in an ROI. Unfortunately, it included some layoffs which were really, really tough to do. And again, something that Taran and I had to do for the first time. Taran and I also took salary cuts but we were able to lean on the people around us who are navigating the same problems alongside of us.

Bunny: And we were able to ask for help and guidance when we needed it. And so while it felt like we were guessing, and in some cases, I think we're still in that, we're still guessing, we're still redoing our projections regularly. We're still doing different scenario planning just to ensure that we're on track. And a lot of those things I think we'll be doing for a lot longer, but one thing that Taran and I knew for sure is that we wanted us to come out of this whenever that might be to really be able to look back and say that we did everything that we possibly could and everything that was in our power and everything that we needed to do to ensure that we would still be here as a company after this pandemic was over.

Bunny: And I think really the driving force in that is that we know that the world needs Blume and that our mission is necessary and probably more necessary after the year we've had in 2020. And so every single day we were just waking up with that being the thing that was really guiding us and keeping us going even in the hardest times.

Jamie: It really struck me when you said, and I felt that you meant it like the world needs Blume. Was that part of the story that helped you through the moments that felt really hard?

Taran: Yeah. And I love that question, Jamie, because I think the stories that we tell ourselves when we navigate hard times are the make or break for the how we get through these times. So I don't want to just say the positive story that we tell ourselves now because I think it's also helpful for people to hear maybe what the other narratives were when we were struggling. So in 2020, I talked to a lot of female founders and I think there were so many negative stories that we could focus on. Like what we just talked about about only 1% of funding going to women of color and just so much being broken in our current system. Like for me personally, I felt really jaded in 2020 when I saw all these female founders being removed from their positions in their company or doing things that led to their removal.

Taran: And I felt, wow, there's so few of us already. And I just was kind of angry about the ultra-critical eye I placed on them versus male founders and made me think, will the rest of us struggle to raise money now? But I think the new narrative after letting myself feel these feelings is let this be the fuel to break glass ceilings to know that we all have a place in this and the women before us paved the way for us to be here and for those who will come after us. And like we've talked about with new Jamie, we all have a role in this and it won't be a perfect linear path because growth never is. But for me, I really had to remind



myself that there are negatives to focus on, but I have to really just feel that feeling and move forward and not get stuck in it and remember that we are on our own journey and the truth is there isn't a playbook for what is happening right now.

Taran:

And like Bunny said, I want us to always be in a position to own our own destiny. So even though our Series A fell apart, it doesn't mean that Blume is falling apart. And so at the beginning I wondered if we had to then lower our expectations and our dreams for what Blume would be and the narrative changed and I decided, no, again, like Bunny said, the world needs Blume and Blume will still be a global company that raises girls' confidence and becomes a household name. So now the new challenge is how do we match our pre-2020 vision to our post-2020 world? And our new narrative is building sustainably and building to be around for many years to come and that feels right.

Jamie:

I have a curious question when I hear sustainable are you working through a system right now, maybe is the first question. And does that system allow or align with this idea of being long-term sustainable?

Taran:

For me, it goes back to the concept of there being a playbook and in the DTC world, people always talk about this playbook and usually, the playbook involves a lot of venture capital funding and pretty big net losses often. And I think for us, that was never really fully in line with how Bunny and I wanted to build the business, not the venture part, but the losing money or being severely unprofitable. So I think, building from a place that is just more sustainable and means that the business can be around longer, obviously it's not necessarily an easy thing to do when you're in a system where I think 43% of VC dollars right now go to Google and Facebook, which is mindblowing. But that's kind of the system that we're all playing within. So really for us, it's just simple going back to putting the consumer at the center of our thought process and really thinking about what our audience needs and that shift in the world that we want to see and kind of looking at it through that lens rather than focusing on growth at all costs.

Jamie:

That actually is a point that I think is a really great segue to something else I wanted to talk about, which is, it just sort of feels like women, especially BIPOC women, we're pretty accustomed to being in challenging situations because of the limitations that have been placed, speaking about the systems. And it feels like it's been like this forever. But somehow we're still here. I mean, we're better than here. We're even doing

better or more than okay despite those obstacles. And it's just makes me think about women, I think about the people I come from, all the forms of how people are marginalized and somehow still rising in the face of that adversity.

Jamie:

And something you were just saying just now about not following the playbook means you have to, I guess, create a new playbook or look from a different lens. But it is that resilience. It is that ingenuity. It is that creativity, that gumption to invent another way as a virtual of survival that listening to that story just really reminds me of how proud I am of that. And I just wonder if that feels true about your own experience, whether at Blume or otherwise.

Bunny:

I love that question. And I think the crazy thing is that maybe that's something that we all don't reflect on enough. I know definitely I don't. But like you said, BIPOC women or people of color or minorities, we keep going and we keep fighting because it's something that we have to do. And it's something that we get to do, even going back to what we were talking about where we come from and our parents and then being immigrants and showing up in a new country and building something from nothing and then communities being built out of that and new generations being formed. And I think that really comes down to the same question, which is that we don't always think about the mountain that's ahead of us that we're climbing. We just step up and we just start going and we figure it out along the way. And we find our communities and support each other in building and repairing and creating.

Bunny:

And I think that's what women or immigrant folks or marginalized people have done. And it's what we continue to do. And I think that when it feels like the world and all of its systems are against you, it's almost harder to sit in silence and allow other people to dictate what you can do and what you can't do and you feel this like fire inside of you that just pushes you to shout louder and to do everything you can to break down these systems. And often these systems are the same ones that have oppressed the generations before you.

Bunny:

And I think what's most amazing is that despite it happens in so many different ways, it's everything from being a mother of the first generation in a new country and raising your children to have everything that you didn't have or becoming a teacher and leading the next generation of students or being the first person in your family to get a college degree or organizing in your own community or going into politics or starting a business like all of these acts of fighting against the systems happen in so many

different ways for women or for BIPOC people or marginalized people. And I think it's just so incredible that it can't be stopped. It's just something that I think is ingrained in us.

Jamie:

It feels like maybe when you say that and you talk so much about community, I think about collective power. So you can have your personal power, you can have your role power, where are you positioned in something? What's your status? And in many ways when we as a woman or women of color, oftentimes if you look at it as a check box, some of those can't be checked, right? Like I don't really have the status. I don't really quite have the role. Okay. So what's leftover and then we talk about community building and there's this way that you can access power through collective power by not being on your own, right? Collective power as an idea is something that we are more when we come together, especially when we're directing ourselves towards a common goal.

Jamie:

It makes me think of some of the things that we have seen rising in the tide over the last year and more, the Women's March, Black Lives Matters, Fight Is For The Future. And then I also was thinking about your Instagram stories, I'm often talking and referring to the Farmer's March that is happening in India, what is going on in India with the Farmers March? Can you share with us a little bit about what you know?

Taran:

Yeah. Thank you Jamie, for asking this. First, I think the farmers in India, they're entrepreneurs. They work day in and day out to feed their family. And currently today, if people in Punjab and also across the country in India are protesting oppression from the Indian government in particular, the disenfranchising farm laws in India. And I think a lot of people have probably seen this in the news because it is what they're saying is the biggest protest in human history. And there's millions of people in Delhi, standing in solidarity. There are elders marching and leading the way, there is song and dance and food. But I think it is really important to talk about because it's happening right now. And to Jamie's point, we've seen what collective power can do and how it is broadening and how really the Black Lives Matter movement, I think has done this for so many of us.

Taran:

And it's really just brought in this awakening that I think so many people knew and they're like, oh, well, thank you all for joining us here in seeing this, seeing that this has been happening for years and years. And I think when I look at what's happening in India right now, one, I'm just so proud of these people for really speaking up against these bills. India is one of the biggest, or maybe the biggest democracy in the world and

they're losing that. And I don't want to get into too much of that right now because it would just be a whole nother podcast. But it's really important that people stand up for this. And I've seen a lot of people of color founders from various parts of India really also come together to help raise funds and awareness.

Taran: And so I think that really has shown me the collective power of not just feeling helpless when we see these things, but actually being able to come together to make a change. And this really reminds me of one of my favorite quotes, Jamie, by Martin Luther King and the quote is, "In real sense, all life is interrelated and all men are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny, whatever affects one directly affects all indirectly. I can never be what I ought to be until you are what you ought to be, and you can never be what you ought to be until I am what I ought to be."

Jamie: I really love that. It just feels like truth. I hold this hypothesis or belief that if we were able to come together and really kind of work through our challenges together in that kind of interconnected way, not only am I lifting myself up, but I'm witnessing my sister get lifted up and just by her being lifted up, I am lifted.

Jamie: I believe that being in that collective atmosphere, being in a place of that held specific commonality, and also the differences will elevate us all. I'm going to ask a pretty silly question, but why do we need more BIPOC women founders?

Bunny: I think just to start again in its simplest terms and speaking directly from experience as a consumer company for us, we need companies made by people who look like people who use the products. For a long time, there's been companies created by executives who have no real tie to the product and their whole driving force is the monetary gain behind creating this company and creating these products and often using the cheapest ingredients that they can in order to make the most amount of profits that's possible. But I think having companies made by people who use the products and in this case BIPOC women founders, we've time and time again, proven to not only provide shareholder value and build profitable companies, but also tie that product and that mission directly to something that is solving a problem for the people who are using these products.

Bunny: And often that market is extremely underserved. And often there's a lot of buying power in those markets and they're just overlooked and ignored. And I think startups and businesses

obviously exist to solve problems. That's why we do what we do. And there are problems that we all face. And yet, like we discussed, 99% of funding goes to people who aren't BIPOC women. And so therefore the owners of these companies and the founders of these companies who are creating products that are seemingly meant to serve the problems of people who look like us, there's definitely a gap there. And so I think in general, most of us, if not all of us want to have a world and live in a world where there's equality and to do so, that also means economic equality. And that means rising up and joining together with BIPOC women founders to create and become leaders and give them the support that they need so that other BIPOC women feel comfortable working in these spaces and have the same opportunities and we can really fill that economic gap and actually create change for the next generations.

Taran:

Yeah. I know Jamie when you asked this question you said it sounds like a silly question and in this conversation I'm realizing what a powerful question it is. And maybe the question is why do we need more BIPOC founders or more women founders? And I think maybe for the audience, this is one question to think about as well. Like as well as us thinking about it, I think it's just an important question for everyone to ask themselves. But for me, one thing that I've been thinking about is we've come so far. For my mom who's just one generation apart from me, she probably wouldn't have been allowed in many boardrooms if it were in India or where her family grew up. Actually, in Kenya, there're stories I've heard where there were certain roles women weren't actually allowed to take in businesses, and maybe they wouldn't have been encouraged to go for it like we are.

Taran:

And even in law school, I remember being told the attrition rate of women leaving the career and my first legal job, I didn't negotiate my pay when I was offered the role. And I'm really grateful to my boss who had then said to me, "Every man that comes in here and accepts the job negotiates his pay and you didn't. So I just want to give you the opportunity to do so and just also to tell you that from now in your career you should negotiate your salary." And that was a game-changer for me. And I'm still so grateful to that boss that I had. And now whenever anyone at Blume negotiates their salary, I'm really, really happy even though it's obviously tough from a boss perspective, but I'm genuinely happy about it.

Taran:

And so I think we need this for other founders in the ecosystem because women are starting businesses at really rapid rate and

they need to be resourced the same way other founders are resourced. And I think for investors, this comes down to also asking like, what are the questions I'm asking this founder? And are they the same questions that I'm asking a male founder and what are the assumptions that I'm making? And really just kind of all of us sticking into our own biases, because we all have those. And at the end of the day, you guys Bunny and Jamie you've already shared the business case for this. We all know that the numbers add up and 1% is just unacceptable and unexcusable.

Jamie:

Yeah. Thank you for providing some clarity around how could someone just even interrupt their thought, and ask something different. Because if there really is a four-point something trillion-dollar blind spot, and maybe you actually would like to tap into that, maybe you might be actually in your own way, what do I need to do to either interrupt my own thought or to add team members around me that don't have to interrupt their thought? They just get it. They don't ask themselves whether this is a fit or not. It is a fit because they understand. I'm going to just shift gears because I'd really love to take some time to also talk about feminine leadership. So the idea of feminine leadership. I'm curious to know, how would you describe feminine leadership?

Bunny:

I think for me, it's an honest way of leading. And feminine leadership, does it mean, I think the things that sometimes on the outside we would assume it to mean, which is you have to be really kind or emotional or soft and sorry for the lack of cliché term or a lack of better terms? But I think it means that there's more than one way to lead. And when I say an honest way of leading, it really comes down to allowing ourselves to be vulnerable and allowing ourselves to sit in that vulnerability. I think often when we think about business, it's tied to words like you're going to war or you have to do things in a transactional way and it's always what's in it for me and what am I getting out of this?

Bunny:

And in reality, business is just all about relationships. And in order to have strong relationships, we have to be vulnerable. We all know that and I think it's so much easier to lead from a place of not being vulnerable and to just tell yourself these stories that, oh, I had to do what I had to do and it's business so this is what it is. And sometimes there's a place for that, but I don't think that there's always a place for that. When I think of them in leadership, it means that there's also a place to leave from vulnerability and to have relationships that you feel you're actually being yourself in and to treat people the way that you

would want to treat them if you weren't in a business relationship with them that you were in maybe a friendship with them.

Bunny:

And I think that it's so scary to shift into leading from vulnerability because it's more uncertain and you're opening yourself up to, things that maybe you wouldn't open yourself up to if you were to lead in a more masculine way. But when I think of feminine leadership, the thing that stands out to me the most is really just choosing how I react to certain situations in a way that I feel good about and that will make me feel like I'm proud of my actions and what I did and that situation feels true and authentic to who I am.

Taran:

Yeah. I love what Bunny said and I agree with all of that. And I think the thing I would want to add is that... And Jamie, this is something that you mentioned as well, is that it's actually available to all of us and it's not just like something that women have. We all have masculine traits and we all have feminine traits. And there are a lot of times where I feel like I operate from maybe a more kind of masculine trait way in my leadership at times. And like Bunny said, there's kind of a time and a place for both. I think for me what I've had to learn is recognizing that the default model is maybe more masculine. And because like we just talked about, we weren't always in the workplace before or in the workforce in the kind of way that we are now, there isn't really a model.

Taran:

And so for me, it really comes down to when making business decisions or people decisions operating from a place of love and not fear. Because I think we've all heard this before as well we always have the choice to operate out of love or out of fear, the two dominant emotions, and either of those can rule us. And so I think to Bunny's point, just taking that extra minute to think about where we're operating from. And I kind of just want to say this and I think I want to say this because I don't think everyone thinks about it, but for women founders or women entrepreneurs or just women in the workplace, there's something that we all kind of deal with that I don't think maybe men don't necessarily do.

Taran:

And this is what I think can lead to a lot of women creating an armor at work and that's the fact that you might go into a VC meeting feeling really fierce and ready to pitch your business and then you walk into that meeting and the VC calls you sweetie, and that kind of just send all that confidence you've built up, it can just kind of not shatter it, but it's a bit deflating. And you could be called sweetie by your employees and that's

happened to me. You can be asked on a date by a potential employee. And so I think as a female founder, you have to build a lot of confidence to navigate this about us and to continue to operate out of love and not build an armor which in some cases, to be honest, it's easier to then just operate out of masculine leadership.

Taran: And I think it's happened to me and what one founder who gave us like a fireside chat in the early days of the business, she gave an analogy of salmon swimming upstream, and that the salmon being women in the workplace because the workplace itself was kind of created more so for men. And so as women, we're then swimming upstream in this environment, and that can be everything from the air conditioning being cranked up really high to the loudest voice in the room gets heard. And so I think we all just kind of have to learn to question where we're coming from. Are we operating on autopilot or are we operating thoughtfully?

Jamie: Two thoughts appeared as you were sharing. One was the whole salmon upstream thing, I was like, oh, was that true for me? I didn't even know that that was what was happening, right? It was kind of like isn't this just how it is. Just because there were no models, there wasn't like another... It's not like my mom was accelerating in her career or something that made me see what that could look like but I was doing my job. I was also being an executive and I think I just automatically excluded myself from the total experience of what that could be, of the total experience of holding that influence power any of those things that all I really was able to have was a modified version of that. And somehow I wasn't challenging that thought very rigorously. Is that relatable or does that make sense?

Taran: It makes so much sense because I remember in the early days of being an entrepreneur, when people would ask me about being a female entrepreneur, I would actually feel irritated because I was like, I'm just an entrepreneur and I didn't think I would recognize that. So yeah, that really resonates.

Jamie: Yeah. And it's almost I know exactly what you mean. I didn't want to be the woman in the room for the sake of being the woman in the room, but also in this space where I'm sitting with you two where I'm like, "Yeah, we are women of color in the world trying to do something." And it's something to shine on and come around.

Jamie: So feminine leadership, there's a lot of great qualities about it, right? I don't need to operate out of fear. Actually, I want to



create a prosperous world where there is enough for everyone because I believe that that's possible. So to me, when I even say that language, I feel better. I feel energy. I feel possibility. So there is some kind of promise here when you lean into this feeling of feminine leadership.

Jamie: And so I'm sure there are a lot of men who are listening, right? And maybe I hope there's a man listening or even a woman who's listening who's just never thought about that and just said, well, that sounds actually kind of nice, I would like some of that. As women who identify as being leaders who lead with feminine leadership, what would be a recommended first step to share with somebody who's like, "I think I would like some of this feminine leadership."

Taran: I think the first step to take is to give yourself permission and allow yourself to feel scared and vulnerable. I think anytime we're doing something new, we have to allow ourselves that but especially with feminine leadership because we're opening ourselves up in a way that maybe we haven't before to really just sit with yourself in that vulnerability and maybe that fear and get comfortable in that before taking the next step.

Jamie: Almost like feel, just feel. It's okay to feel something might be the first place to begin. Yeah. I really like that. It feels both so obvious and simple, but also incredibly scary for a person who doesn't do that.

Taran: And I will say like it doesn't come easy all the time. There are times where I often find myself being like, I agree I'd rather just react to this in my anger and my rage and just say the first thing that comes into my mind. And I think, like we said, maybe there's a time for that, but there's also times when I know that I have to lead from a place of vulnerability and that is so much harder for me to do. And I have to check in with myself and sit in that fear and vulnerability and build up the courage to do so.

Jamie: It feels like that there's more possibility for something different to be created if you allow yourself the space and time for feeling.

Jamie: So I really love how Blume calls self-care the new going out. Has the concept of self care changed for you?

Taran: I think for myself, definitely. If there's anything that I've realized is that self-care doesn't have to look a certain way but it's really the small acts of love and grace that we show ourselves

throughout the day, every day. So I think just thinking about how it's evolved for me, it's really coming back to that kind of concept of sustainability and what I need to be sustainable. And that is just small acts of kindness to myself throughout the day.

Jamie: The origins of self care come from the '50s. And I think they originally coined them as survival programs. And this came from the Black Panther Movement and then later the women's rights activist who took from what was created and said, "Okay. Well, we need to apply this here because we also aren't getting our basic rights and needs met." And learning about this made me think about how it feels like we might be in a renaissance of this. We might be in a renaissance of survival programs. To me, I'm translating it more in my mind as thrival programs, right? Like how do we thrive while we are in our own and various weights not having our basic needs met.

Jamie: And given the gap that exists in the funding ecosystem and the systematic issues that support that, it feels like BIPOC women founders who have it even harder still, it feels like there should be like a call to be more deliberate and creating like a version of a survival thrival program as an integrated part of life in order to do this hard work. And I was wondering about your thoughts on that I have an idea of what you think about that because of how you do what you do but you also have a pulse on a community that's around you. And I was wondering more about what are you seeing or not seeing around you in terms of other founders caring for themselves in this more kind of deliberate ways.

Taran: I think it's really important to honor the beginnings of where this term came from. And the interesting thing is that people are looking for self-care because in 2020, the searches for the term self care were actually at an all time high and Google showed that searches for self care surged in 2020. And as founders, I think the first and foremost thing to remember is that this is a marathon and not a sprint, but that can be really hard to remember because as founders, we always need to keep pushing ourselves and Arianna Huffington talks about this a lot, and it's always stuck with me that story she tells about collapsing and waking up in a pool of her own blood which is a pretty gory story. But just this culture of sleep deprivation and Elon Musk only sleeps five hours a day and has five companies. And all of this is just kind of ingrained in a lot of us founders. And for us, we've kind of tried to implement wellness check-ins in a small way with our team.

Taran: So daily, when we check in and we talk about the work we're doing, we also do a wellness check-in. So how's everyone feeling

out of 10 and a bit of a gratitude check-in and that can allow us to take an inventory of where people are at and when it comes to the founders around us, I think we see both, but I think like in the last year what I've seen a lot of is just founders putting a lot of demands on their body and in many cases just kind of feeling disconnected from their body until they're stopped in their tracks by an unfortunate health event. And it's more common than I think all of us like to admit, and again, not always talked about, and this can range from mental health to physical health, but I mean, Jamie, you're a coach. So I think you probably see a lot more of this than the rest of us. I'm curious to hear what your thoughts are on that.

Jamie: I mean, I think in general, when people are expecting that they should be and do everything all the time, creates illness. And for sure, I've seen examples of that. I think that there is really a price to be paid to be kind of operating in again, that old playbook, right? The playbook certainly never really included women and I don't think it really included this thing called the feminine.

Jamie: And so we've been operating at this hyper masculine state. And I do think that that's what's leading to some of the things that we're seeing and seeing it a lot in young founders. And these are the founders that I'm really excited about seeing be very healthy and being around for a really long time. And I guess that's what makes me feel passionate about this idea that we have to be really deliberate. We have to be smart and being smart and deliberate about this also means have your feelings, take a breath, take a breather, whatever is your version of caring for yourself, listen to your body and what does that need?

Jamie: So the last thing I wanted to talk about is just what is awesome about being a woman leader right now? I mean, we're talking on this really amazing day. It's Wednesday, January 20th, when we're recording this and we have a new... Well, we, even though it's not our country, it still feels like a we, I'll take this as a we, a new madam vice president who is half Southeast Asian and black.

Jamie: So what is awesome about being a woman leader today? And I really mean today, today, today as of recently because I feel like ever since I've come back in the new year and talking to my clients these are the sort of things I'm hearing. It feels like I'm a part of a tidal wave. Another client says, "I feel more powerful now and I don't know exactly why. It's like there's a growing

swell." What do you think is making it so great to be a woman leader right now?

Bunny:

It feels really good to be part of shaping the new world for lack of a better term, but to be part of the leadership that's going to create the next generation of leaders and to be part of the leadership that's going to change the staff that only 1% of venture funding goes to BiPOC women and to be part of the tribe of women that we've been lucky enough to get to know over our journey and to be teaching and growing and learning and supporting together. And it just feels like there's a lot of power and strength and inspiration in that. And knowing that makes the hard times a little easier. And it also makes me get out of bed every single morning knowing that my contribution is helping move in the right direction.

Jamie:

I get the sense from you or in general, it's like just feeling like you're part of something much larger, bigger than Blume, bigger than Taran, bigger than Bunny. What about for you, Taran?

Taran:

Yeah. I agree with that. I think there really is a tide turning and there's this quote that I've also been hearing a lot of during this pandemic of, "You should never let a good crisis go to waste." And I think that's a quote that's been around for a really long time in previous recessions, but I'm reinventing that quote for myself to look at this with new eyes and to look at this as an opportunity. And if I wasn't going to let this crisis go to waste, for me, what's exciting to me right now is how can I create a business that is a success both in my eyes and the lens that I'm looking at this through, but also in the eyes of the larger ecosystem that I want to really be a part of and contribute to. And what does that contribution look like? Because this generation of founders, both male and female founders, I think are redefining and rebranding what work is.

Taran:

It's really unfortunate to see how many women dropped out of the workforce in 2020, which is very contradictory to what I would think happened now that we are all remote and we can work from home. But I think just because so much of the household work, the brunt of that does fall on women, I think maybe a lot of households made that decision. I mean, I don't know what happened there, but I think because now our eyes are open to this new flexibility and we're at this ground zero of being able to create a new way of working, I think that we are able to then kind of take this opportunity and this crisis to reinvent that together. And the other thing I've been thinking a lot about is like, what is the biggest domino for Blume?

Taran: And so for me, and what I'm stoked about is that settling on the fact that the education and empowerment of women and girls is that domino for Blume, then that means that we're able to actually create more confident and tenacious women who can then go out and be in the world and do the things that they want to do. So I think that's what's really exciting to me as a female founder right now.

Jamie: And we're so glad that you're doing this work. Thank you. Thank you.

Bunny: Thanks Jamie.

Taran: Thanks Jamie.