

Women in Business and Technology

Transcript of Episode 028 - Becoming an unapologetic feminist mother with Chairman Mom CEO Sarah Lacy

Guests: SassyBlack, Sarah Lacy

Summary: Sonia and Colleen chat with SassyBlack, a singer, songwriter, and producer who composed a new set of songs for this show! Our hosts celebrate one year of podcasting with a live interview with the Founder of PandoMedia and Chairman Mom, Sarah Lacy. They wrap the show with recommendations on how to better support friends' careers. Please subscribe, rate, and share the episode.

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SARAH LACY: I spent a lot of my career achieving and going after things and I didn't want to throw all that away. And it was only after I had written for BusinessWeek and done cover stories and written two books and hosted a show and helped build TechCrunch and traveled the world and done all of these things that I felt like I could risk having a child.

SONIA DARA: Microsoft Ignite is a conference for IT implementers and influencers, enterprise developers and data professionals.

COLLEEN O'BRIEN: Attendees will get the latest insights and learn new skills from technology leaders shaping the future of cloud, data, business intelligence, teamwork and productivity.

SONIA DARA: The event will be held from September 24th through the 28th in Orlando, Florida. For more information and to register visit Microsoft.com/ignite.

VOICE: You are listening to the Women in Business and Technology Podcast from Microsoft. In each episode you will hear from women in amazing technology and business roles, as well as male allies who are helping make the industry more inclusive, and bringing you tips on how to build a successful career in a supportive community.

Welcome to Women in Business and Technology.

COLLEEN O'BRIEN: For our loyal listeners, you probably noticed that our music has changed. And we're going to talk a little bit more about that later in the episode. But for now, welcome to Episode 28 of Women in Business and Technology. I'm Colleen O'Brien.

SONIA DARA: And I'm Sonja Dara.

COLLEEN O'BRIEN: This is a very special episode for both of us! Because back in July we celebrated the one-year anniversary of this show. To mark the occasion, we had a conversation here on Microsoft's Redmond Campus with Silicon Valley entrepreneur Sarah Lacy.

SONIA DARA: So this was actually our first time doing a live recording in front of an audience of women at Microsoft. So we were really excited to host Sarah and we're thrilled to bring that interview to you.

COLLEEN O'BRIEN: But before we jump in with Sarah, in our Community Connect segment we have a conversation with SassyBlack, a self-proclaimed space-aged singer, songwriter, and producer from right here in Seattle. And, spoiler alert, if you liked that music, you're going to love this conversation, because she composed it.

SONIA DARA: And we'll wrap up the show with some commentary about a Fortune article titled How Friendship Holds Women Back in their Careers and What They Can Do About It.

COLLEEN O'BRIEN: We have a ton of great content today, so let's jump in.

When we started this podcast, we started looking more closely at the parts of our lives where we could be providing more opportunities to women, whether that has meant being more intentional about our spending, and supporting women-owned businesses --

SONIA DARA: Or saying yes to requests for career chats over coffee.

COLLEEN O'BRIEN: Exactly. And one opportunity that we've become very overtly aware of as we're listening back to our episodes is the music on this show. And as of this episode, the music that you'll hear will have been composed by SassyBlack.

SONIA DARA: We're really excited to feature her work, and to welcome her to the studio today.

Welcome, SassyBlack!

SASSYBLACK: Thank you. Hi.

SONIA DARA: Thanks for joining us. Can you tell our listeners a little bit more about yourself?

SASSYBLACK: Yeah. I'm a singer songwriter, producer and composer and multidimensional artist. I'll call myself, basically I have my hands in a lot of pots. I do a lot of different things as an artist. But I got my training in jazz vocals at Cornish College of the Arts in Seattle and I write for my senior recital. I just kept going, so I've been doing music professionally 15 years, so almost half of my life, and it's been spectacular. It's quite a roller-coaster ride.

COLLEEN O'BRIEN: So professionally for 15 years, but can you share how you got started in music?

SASSYBLACK: Yeah. One of the first things I did, originally I'm from Hawaii, and so I moved to Seattle with my family in '97 and that same year probably a couple of weeks into being here I wrote my first entire song. I'm primarily a writer first. So I wrote this whole thing, it had a chorus and a beginning and an intro and an outro and verses, all the different sections of a song. And just by seeing it I could sing the whole entire thing. I still know it to the day, but I'm not going to sing it right now. But it's a ten-year-old love song, nobody wants to hear that.

COLLEEN O'BRIEN: At ten years old I was writing love songs to like the ice cream man.

SONIA DARA: To my Barbie.

SASSYBLACK: There you go, I was probably writing this one to Tevin Campbell (ph), but I really enjoyed the process and I wanted to learn more about it. So before doing that I started taking acting classes and kind of getting into activism, which gave me a platform to strengthen my performance. And then when I was 12 I got into my first choir and then I just kind of kept moving.

Actually this is a really funny story that I kind of leave out of a lot of my interviews, because I kind of forget about it, but my dad casted me in one of my first acting opportunities, which was a show called Dig It. And it was really interesting because it was like an environmentalist show. So it was Bill Nye the Science Guy, but with like kids involved and things like that, and had music and probably had like a handful of episodes. But I got to be an extra in it and I think I had a line or something like that. So he really helped steer me in the direction of that. And both my parents have been very supportive of it. But that was kind of like when I got the acting bug and then it just continued on into music.

SONIA DARA: So in your opinion how does identity show up in your art and performance?

SASSYBLACK: I think it's impossible for it to not reside in my music. Music and acting and creating is a healing mechanism for me. So I instantly start to feel down if I don't spend time creating in some way. It doesn't have to be like every day, but probably like

every other day. It's kind of hard for me to move through the world without it. And it speaks a lot to who I am as a person and who I'm growing into being and kind of the struggles and things that I deal with being a black career woman, and then the things that I know have helped heal me I want to also project into the world.

COLLEEN O'BRIEN: Sassy you shared your pride story as part of a partnership with Microsoft back in June. What motivated you to work with this company to share your story?

SASSYBLACK: Before I had like any cool clothes or anything like that I've always had computers. My grandfather worked at IBM. My older brother also works in tech. So I have like kind of a comfort zone in tech. And then, Seattle is a really special unique place where it has like these homegrown businesses that are internationally known. So it's kind of like I'm rooting for the home team but it's like everybody knows what it is.

So one of the first ways I got introduced to Microsoft was at the King County Library System when I was on a panel with someone from Microsoft and we just hit it off and we just had like amazing conversations. And you all were interested in my story, which is very rare, and it's really rare to find a company or a corporation that can just meet you and be like, hey, let's keep talking and seeing how we can support you in all these different ways. And like a year later, because that was I think like July or June of last year, so many things have come up. And it started a lot of different conversations and helped propel me in my career most definitely.

SONIA DARA: That's awesome. Homegrown companies have to support homegrown talent.

So, Sassy, on our show we create a lot of content about greater equity in the tech and business worlds, but broad inclusion is really the goal. What does greater inclusion in the music industry look like?

SASSYBLACK: To me it is like true understanding. Like I like to say my message is love and then I refer to this obscure Michael Jackson Suzuki commercial from the '80s where he says, he's on a Suzuki like little scooter, and he's like, my message is love, and it's the weirdest thing ever. But I love it and I reference it, so maybe people will want to research it.

But anyway, my message is love. And so I think that understanding is what will make it easier for folks to see things with an equitable lens. I think that's understanding of self, because it always starts with us, and then being able to understand and have compassion for other people's stories and make space for folks. I think that's like the hardest thing, because when we have issues and things that we're not dealing with in ourselves, then it's harder to have conversations with other folks or be open to having space for them or hearing their story, and things like that. So I think that's really

necessary in the music industry. And I see it changing and shifting all the time. I think it's also being open to having the conversation and then not thinking that it's just one conversation. It's something that you have to live.

And I sit on a couple of different boards and one of these members from the music commission, his name is Puck (ph), and he says we have to live it every day. And I totally agree, because it's true. We have to live it every single day.

You can't be like cool sunglasses. You're like, cool, I'm equitable right now. And then you take it off. Anyway, the sun is gone or I'm not outside anymore. I don't have to be equitable. It's something you have to live and condition yourself through. It's like it is learning a language, you know, and I think we have to think that way in order to really make the change that we want to see.

SASSYBLACK: Yeah, these are not checkbox topics. They require a real commitment to learning and being vulnerable and sharing. But it's hopeful that maybe the music industry is getting a bit more inclusive.

COLLEEN O'BRIEN: So, Sassy, where can our listeners find you on the Internet?

SASSYBLACK: The best place for me is Band Camp. So it's SassyBlack.Bandcamp.com. It is like one of the best music sellers in the world and they make like millions and billions of dollars for independent artists, which is crucial and necessary. So, that's going to be the best place to find my music and me, or on social media. My Instagram is the best one. I'm really whack at Twitter. And my Facebook is just like a replica of my Instagram. So it's just SassyBlackCat, S-a-s-s-y-b-l-a-c-k-c-a-t.

COLLEEN O'BRIEN: SassyBlack, we are so proud to feature your music on the show. Thank you so much for putting the work in.

SASSYBLACK: Thank you. Thanks for having me.

COLLEEN O'BRIEN: Thanks for joining us.

SASSYBLACK: Yeah.

COLLEEN O'BRIEN: And now onto the interview.

SONIA DARA: Thank you, Rocky.

Welcome everyone I am Sonia Dara and I'm on the Surface product marketing team.

COLLEEN O'BRIEN: And I'm Colleen O'Brien. I'm a business manager on the Azure Engineering Team.

SONIA DARA: And we're the hosts of Microsoft's Women in Business and Technology Podcast. So many of you might know, but today is actually our one-year anniversary. We launched this one year ago. We're very excited. And we're thrilled to be celebrating with all of you here, very familiar faces. Thank you for joining.

So, many of you have listened to the show. Some of you have actually helped produce the show lent your voice. And many of you have shared the show, as well, with colleagues and friends. We really, really appreciate all the support you've given. Some might not know this, but this is a total side hustle for me and Colleen. This is not part of our day job. So, all the support means a lot to us, and a special thanks to Elle Nasfany (ph). Where is she? She is the one who actually created all the little fliers with the quotes, which we really appreciate. And, yeah, we really appreciate you celebrating our one-year with us.

COLLEEN O'BRIEN: Yes, thank you, too, Rocky and women at Microsoft. And on a personal note I am celebrating my seven-year anniversary at Microsoft today. So I'm thrilled to be doing that with all of you today.

(Applause.)

SONIA DARA: A quick note on the format of our programming, we will be inviting open questions. So if you have a question please get ready to call one of our mike runners at that time. And we will have a book signing immediately following the presentation just outside for the first 100 people. So keep that in mind.

So without further ado, we're thrilled to welcome to the stage the founder and CEO of Pando and Chairman Mom, Sarah Lacy. Let's give her a round of applause.

(Applause.)

SARAH LACY: Thank you for having me.

SONIA DARA: Thanks for joining.

SARAH LACY: This is amazing that you guys just do all of this in addition to your day jobs.

SONIA DARA: Yeah, it's casual. So we'll take it a few steps back before we got into your adventure. We'll take it to your LinkedIn bio. You describe yourself as an unapologetic feminist mother and supporter of women. What prompted your dedication to the cause of gender equity?

SARAH LACY: It was really becoming a mother. You know, I'm very sort of that classic Generation X feminist, where I spent the first 15 years or so of my career and adult life, particularly as a white woman, being the right kind of woman and being a cool girl and being someone who didn't make waves, and being someone who could easily fit and feel comfortable in rooms being the only woman and you know, kind of thinking that feminism was something that people had fought for a long time ago, that yes, there were times I'd had creepy experiences and I knew I made less money, but overall I was doing just fine. I had sort of Sheryl Sandberg-wise leaned in and hacked the system and it was fine and I was comfortable with men and it wasn't really a problem.

You know, it's a really common story of women in my generation. Gen X is kind of the lost generation of feminists. And it's only really once you hit about 35 and you really -- you have the power and confidence of having been in the professional world for 15 years and it starts to become obvious that you don't have a lot of the other things. It starts to become really clear what's been happening to you.

And then if you have children, well, you know, we all know that 60 percent of women face maternal bias. Your career can get sidelined. We live in one of the only countries on Earth that doesn't offer paid leave. I mean that's where you really face some of the most overt sexism that we have in our society, because a lot of people don't believe it's sexism. Half of this country, nearly half, about 40 percent, believes it's bad for society if women work. Like that is a ton of judgment that gets put on you, frankly, even before you have children just when you're engaged, you look like you might have children. I mean maternal bias hits women who don't even choose to have children.

So I think for me that age of 35 and hitting that point and then becoming a mother was a big part of it. But the other thing for me and really what prompted me to write this book, and then what prompted me to start Chairman Mom and dramatically change my career and what I felt like was my mission in life was really how motherhood changed me and didn't change me.

I mean I had been told for my entire life that like the second I had children I would essentially become a different person, that I would essentially become like lobotomized and I would never sleep again and it would be a disaster and like I just would never be able to focus and I also like the scarier part is that people will tell you you just won't care about anything else anymore. And it sounded terrifying to me.

I mean I had spent a lot of my career achieving and going after things and I didn't want to throw all that away. And it was only after I had written for Business Week and done cover stories and written two books and hosted a host and helped build TechCrunch and traveled the world and done all of these things that I felt like I could risk having a child.

And I was someone, as you can tell from the opening, who took crazy risks. I've never been a risk-adverse person. But to me the idea of having a child felt like the biggest risk

I'd ever taken, because everyone in American culture told me that it risked me. And I felt like I had to have a full career before having a child, because everyone was telling me I wouldn't have one after. And what was astounding to me was that it was all complete bull.

After having a child I became more ambitious. I became more focused. I became better at my job in every way. I became a better manager. I became much quicker and better at creative problem solving. You know, my work had to matter in a way that it hadn't before. I became more courageous, more willing to stand up for bullies and fight for what I believed in. I became so much better in every way and my net worth increased and my brand increased and everything on every metric. And it was like how did I so believe this lie? Why is this lie so pervasive? And, you know, that was what kept leading me back to the patriarchy. And I think that was really when I saw the full like need and fight for women.

Some of this is global, but some of this is America. I detail in the book I went and traveled to Iceland and China as just two examples where there aren't mommy wars. There isn't this inflamed idea of you have to be devoted to your child 100 percent to be a good mother or you have to be devoted to your boss 100 percent to be a good employee. Like this tug-of-war that just tears at American women, it doesn't exist in a lot of other countries. And this is one of the reasons that we are one of the only countries that doesn't offer paid leave, because if half of your population doesn't want women to work that's the time you try to drive them out of the workforce.

And I just before living that juxtaposition of how this country wanted me to feel about motherhood and what actually happened, I felt like a super hero. I felt like I could shoot webs out of my palms. I'd be in like really intense meetings with all these dudes in Silicon Valley and they'd be trying to like posture and act so much cooler than me. And there's -- for all my fronting, there are ways I probably would have been intimidated by that pre-kids, maybe. I was just like I've given birth twice, have you? I'm physically and emotionally stronger than you and we all know it. So, I don't know, I felt it was terrifying that I almost never had children, because I almost never believed that.

And for me like I mean no disrespect at all if women choose not to have children. I had an amazing, fulfilling life before children. I think I still would have had an amazing fulfilling life. But, oh my god, that would have been like Spiderman not being bit by the spider.

SONIA DARA: I feel like I don't even have to ask you other questions. That's was just great. So, later on in your book, after your prologue, you open up with some reflections on how your mother lived her life and how that impacted your approach to family and career. Can you share more about that?

SARAH LACY: My mother grew up in Jacksonville, Florida, and was the daughter of the city's big Southern Baptist minister. So she certainly had a lot of baggage and expectation about who she should have been. My mother was also gorgeous. She looked like Sophia Loren. But she was also brilliant. And she just always had this strong, almost matter of fact, like yes, obviously I'm gorgeous, but that's the least interesting part of me.

And all of these men always wanted to marry her and wanted to make her this Southern housewife. And she was just never interested in that. And she met my dad, who was this kind of Mississippi-born, gangly philosophy student and the first kid in his family to go to even high school, much less get a Ph.D. And his brother was a rocket scientist. So it's like they are literally two parents who had not finished school, I mean like that's what the American dream used to be in those days, which is amazing.

But anyway, they met. They appreciated each other's minds. They fell in love. They literally got engaged on their second date and had five children. And my mom didn't work. I was the youngest of five. She didn't work until I was in kindergarten, which I still find so weird, like what did you do, because she's so driven as an academic and as a thinker and her achievement had always been so important to her. But she told me once that she felt like she needed to do things perfectly and she couldn't be a perfect teacher and a perfect mother.

And I think that was one of those little seeds that burrowed in my head for all those years I thought this was so untenable. So what she did was she had children first. She started teaching when I was in kindergarten. She actually taught at the private school I went to. We drove to school every day together for 13 years and were really close and it was super-powerful for me to be able to have her as a teacher and see her command this room and see my mother do something that she was the best person in the world at that had nothing to do with me.

But at the same time I sort of thought I was inverting what she had one, because she had had her family first and then her career and I was thinking, well, I'll just do my career first and then if it's completely over I'll have, you know, my family later on. And it's just my mom was such an amazing role model and such a strong woman, but even she had sort of said this tossed away thing that sort of grew tendrils and weeds in my head.

So I think about that a lot as I'm obviously a mother now and I want to make sure that I'm like presenting to my kids and not like unintentionally throwing something like that in there.

SONIA DARA: So back when you went on maternity leave in 2011 you founded Pando.com, a web publication that offers tech news and commentary with a focus on Silicon Valley startups. In your book you state, quote, the irony is if I'd known I was going to start a company I would have never gotten pregnant. But, without Eli, your

son, I may have never had the courage and conviction that my working hours needed to matter so greatly. Can you take us back to that decision? I think you touched a little bit upon it. But, why was Eli the deciding factor there?

SARAH LACY: Well, there was sort of a housekeeping reason that Eli was the deciding factor, which was I was supposed to take over as the Editor in Chief of TechCrunch. And when I went into labor TechCrunch kind of exploded. Michael Arrington got kicked out of the company. We'd been acquired by AOL a year earlier and had been kind of quiet. But then it just -- everything exploded at that moment and while I was in labor Arianna Huffington gave my job to someone else.

So, for one thing I needed a new job after I got out of the hospital. But, you know, look, they rapidly sort of realized this had been a mistake. They would not actually give me my job. But they offered to give me any other job and pay me whatever I wanted and it would have been the easy thing for me to do and certainly the lucrative and the secure thing for me to do. But, you know, it was this conviction of, no, like I am Eli's role model, like I am his everything. And every action I do means so much more now that this little baby is going to be looking at me.

And it was like how can I tell -- how can I look him in the face every day and know that I went back to a company that did that? Do I want him to think that's how he should stand up to bullies? Do I want him to think that's how women should be treated? I mean it was such a clear decision. While from the outside you might think, oh, with a new baby you want a secure, easy job that's paying you a lot of money. But that felt like such a betrayal to him. And so it was really clear what I needed to do.

And it was funny; people had tried to encourage me to start a company before. I'd been in Silicon Valley for 20 years. I knew a lot of people. In the first era of blogs, when D and GigaOm, and Venture Beat and all those guys were starting up people had tried to encourage me to raise money and, you know, I had a lot of reasons why I didn't. But I think a lot of it was I didn't have the confidence to. That's kind of the truth of it, for all of my bluster and fronting and all of that.

But, you know, once I had Eli like that just all changed and I literally on maternity leave did not have a nanny, did not have any family with me. It was just kind of me and Eli. And I took Eli and we went down to Sand Hill Road and Eli and I together raised \$2.5 million from like the biggest billionaires in Silicon Valley. And they were all like had never had a baby in a pitch before. And you can tell a lot about VCs by what they do when a baby is in the room.

So like some would like kind of like put a terms sheet on his like little car seat and walk away. And then some would like pick him up and be like throwing him in the air, not even listening to my pitch.

SONIA DARA: How did you get in touch with Marc Andreessen and other investors like Greylock and Founder's Fund prior?

SARAH LACY: Well, I had been in the Valley for 20 years, so I just had known people for a really long time. And, you know, frankly I've had a lot of up and down relationships with most powerful people in the Valley. I mean if anyone has followed anything I've written, I mean, I'm sort of a professional punch in the face to power. So, you know, a lot of people had very mixed feelings about me, but they respected me and I think there's a lot of studies that show that unconscious bias falls away if you're a known quantity.

So like there's for real bias in Silicon Valley and in every industry, but a lot of what keeps people out is also just unconscious bias. Like if no one knew me and I went in with a baby, they wouldn't want to hear what I had to say. But, when you are a known quantity a lot of that falls away.

So like to me not only would I have not been able to start the company without having the confidence of having had Eli, I could not have had the luxury that men do of being a 20-year-old coming into Silicon Valley and raising money and starting a company. It required 20 years of me building a network and building respect, sort of painstakingly brick-by-brick. And when I raised money for Pando like it's a journalism company. It was an investigative long-form journalism company like no one thought this was going to be a billion-dollar exit.

But the reason people funded it was TechCrunch was kind of in this period of explosion after being acquired and everyone felt there needed to be a journalism voice in Silicon Valley that understood the Valley and that knew what was going on, but would also really hold it accountable and kind of be what the Washington Post was in the Nixon era of, you know, insiders who are deeply connected, but were really unafraid to punch even their investors in the face.

And I think that they respected that I was the person who could do that. And I did. And a lot of them regret funding us as a result. We have cost people billions and billions of dollars.

SONIA DARA: So it seems like there is some significant transition and transformation from cool dude, Sarah Lacy, watching a baseball game at a dive bar, to feminist warrior Sarah Lacy. How did your encounters with and understanding of sexism inform your change?

SARAH LACY: I mean I talked about this a little bit earlier just like this sort of like, oh my god, I spent 15 years being lied to and just peeling away and peeling away like what does culture do to young women. And it's like there's the obvious things that forces in the patriarchy will do to you. But there's also the conditioning and what you do to

yourself. You know, and there's so much that we talk about in terms of, well, women are just bad negotiators, or women don't take as much risk.

And I heard this amazing talk by this philosopher who is writing this book about misogyny and distilling the difference between sexism and misogyny. And she made a point of, all of this money is going into academic research to try to figure out what of this difference between men and women that we observe in business is genetic and where does it come from? And she was like, you know, it's all wasted money because we don't have a control. We don't have any society where women and men have not drawn every single breath in a patriarchy. And what was so striking to me, the more I started to like peel everything away and just become fascinated with this great lie and why I believed it and why it was so untrue, it was like the biggest tool of the patriarchy is what we do to ourselves.

And it's not just what women do to other women, which we certainly see in a lot of environments, but it's what you do to yourself. I mean, maternal guilt, shame, all of these things. That's the patriarchy's voice in your head. And it's kind of like the end of the Sixth Sense, once you start to see it you see it everywhere. And so it's like it all suddenly makes sense.

And looking back on my life, I think a lot of women had this experience the last year where we had the whole MeToo movement. You start looking back and you're like how much horrible stuff happened to me that I normalized at the time to keep moving? And I just think that once that initial sort of like Handmaid's Tale blinders were ripped off with the expectation of motherhood and the reality, I just kept sort of peeling this back and peeling this back and peeling this back.

And the big ah-ha for me was like really understanding the difference between hostile sexism and benevolent sexism. And there's like probably the densest chapter of the book is the book on benevolent sexism, but it is literally every single woman I know when they got this book, they all called or texted me at Chapter 3. It is like the chapter where you're just like, oh my god, because it's like so many women don't understand, it's easy to see when you're the victim of hostile sexism. Most women don't understand when they've spent a career being the victim of benevolent sexism.

And benevolent sexism is basically when you're rewarded for being the right kind of woman, and then you're sort of turned into a tool without your knowing to continue to propagate the system. And that was absolutely the first 15 years of my career, and I really had no idea at the time. And, look, I still like baseball and dive bars, even though I don't really have time for either anymore after having kids. So it's less about any one of those things. I don't think I was trying to put on a mantle of something.

I think I liked a lot of those things and I think I was comfortable with men, but that was why I excelled, and that was why I achieved. And because those things came easily for

me and I was rewarded for being the right type of woman who could -- I'm embarrassed to say this now, go to a strip club with a bunch of colleagues and be cool about it. That was propagating a bad system for other women.

SONIA DARA: Okay, so moving forward, earlier just this year you launched Chairman Mom, a subscription-based platform where bad ass working women, like everyone in this room, can help each other solve the hardest problems they face. Can you tell us a little bit more about the origin story of Chairman Mom?

SARAH LACY: Yeah, again, I just felt like kept like peeling these things away, and it was like the book started because, first of all, Pando had about \$400 million in legal threats that constantly people were always trying to put us out of business. I had threats against my family. We had billions and billions and billions in market cap trying to put us out of business for several years. So it was a pretty hard battle. And when we had a legal threat, I would not get paid because I would be indemnifying our reporters. And so it was a pretty horrible few years.

And so one of the biggest reasons I wrote this book was I didn't want to lose my kids' home, because I was then divorced and had no child support. So it was like a practical matter. But it was also because I wanted to do the research to figure out if other women also had the experience, if there's research that supported this like weird dynamic, this discrepancy between what motherhood was supposed to be and my experience of motherhood.

And the more I got into the book and the more I was reading research and the more I was talking to people for the book and interviewing people and kept just hearing that a lot of people had this experience and there was a lot of data that I could up. And why didn't anyone talk about it. And talking to younger women who would say, I've never heard anyone talk this way about motherhood. Like, are you sure? And I would be like, yes. And there are all these other women who feel this way, and there's all this data that backs this up. And I just kept feeling like this was a bigger and bigger thing.

And then in the last year I started doing dinners in my house where I started just like getting together, I had a list of about 100 women who were founders and VCs in Silicon Valley and once a month I would have a dinner and the first 14 people who RSVP'd got to come. And it was like just being in my dining room where it was sort of this safe and judgment free zone and a single table conversation and there was just this totally trusted space to not have to front and to really talk about what was happening in a time like last year where the women's movement had really changed everything, where people were really starting to reconsider what they had put up with and what they thought was just paying their dues and what that had done to them.

It was changing people's careers. People were coming forward and calling things out they never had before. People felt like they had the support behind them. And it was

like every month witnessing the impact of that. And it was like women -- I still do the dinners. Women show up at about 6:30 and sometimes don't leave until 4 in the morning. And it was just this intense, intense thing.

I just thought of that old Gloria Steinem quote that every social justice movement starts with small groups of people getting together and talking and sharing experience. And the research that I'd found in my book, there's a chapter on how the patriarchy dismantles powerful women, and it's done in a way that it feels and seems very individual to you or very individual to whoever it's happening to. But it is a set standard playbook, and why it's effective is because it feels about you but it's not.

And the more you can get together with other women and talk about these things, these things that are made to feel like they're all about us, we start to realize they're not. And this was what was so powerful, again, about the MeToo movement last year, you think of how many women were carrying around the shame of somehow, I brought this on me, maybe I didn't dress well. And it was like, oh, no, he is just a predator and there's something wrong with him and by not speaking up I gave him cover. It's like you have those moments.

And I just felt like increasingly I wanted to do two things, as the world around me was getting worse, both at a macro level but also at a Silicon Valley level, I was sick of exposing it every day. Six years of writing about all the horrible things the bro economy was doing in Silicon Valley really took a toll on my soul. And I was sick of living in that every day, frankly. I've got to do something that's actually like making the world better, not just exposing what's awful about it.

And then I felt seeing this group of 100 women who within three minutes would RSVP to come to my dinner and not leave my house, it was like this is powerful, and how do we scale that online, because it hadn't been scaled so far.

SONIA DARA: Speaking of statistics, in the book there is one that we wanted to call out, it was from What Works for Women at Work by Joan C. Williams. And the statistic was, 60 percent of women face maternal bias or the maternal wall at work. You talked about this a little earlier. In other words, women are disliked when they're not seen as nurturing mothers and therefore given fewer opportunities. So what can we do to combat maternal bias?

SARAH LACY: Well, so there's a lot of things. It sounds like Microsoft offers people a lot of resources, which is great. But everyone who works at a big company, and someone was just saying this outside earlier, it depends on what manager you have. It really becomes a local issue and there's really only so much a big corporation can really do. People have to address it locally.

And I think anyone who has had a child knows that period of coming back to work is a really, really vulnerable time no matter how amazing you feel, no matter how good your delivery or your pregnancy or your experience was, and I think the most important thing is for other women to just be advocates for those women. I mean and frankly men. I mean I think men have to acknowledge that there is a real thing where men get the fatherhood bonus and women get the motherhood penalty.

Research I cite in the book from Amy Cuddy, the social psychologist, the one about power posing, she looks at the quadrants in terms of the two things that make great leaders, being competent or incompetent, and being warm or not. So being loved and feared and what made great leaders. And people can be in different quadrants. So if you're a career woman the cold competent quadrant means people think you're good at your job, you have a value, but they don't really like you being there. They kind of envy you. They kind of begrudge you. They kind of think somehow there's something wrong with you. And then when you have a baby, without changing anything, just the mere act of having a baby, you get moved in people's minds to the warm incompetent quadrant. So you gain warmth but you lose competence. And so it's really kind of a tradeoff.

For me this was a benefit because I owned my company, I didn't work for anyone. So I didn't have to fight battles internally. But I gained warmth, which was amazing. So I had for 15 years of my career constant abuse and trolling online all really negative and sexual and creepy, and when I became a mother that almost all disappeared. And it was amazing to watch. People had other ways of attacking me, but overnight people no longer thought I was this cold obnoxious, they suddenly thought I was this like warm nurturing person. They may have thought I was incompetent, but I didn't care because I worked for myself. So for me that actually was a good flip. But for a lot of women that's a hard thing to come back, because you're not prepared for that. You think you're the same person. You're not prepared for that.

Whereas men, when men become fathers, they go into the golden quadrant of warm competent, which almost no other group is in. If a man leaves work to take his daughter to a baseball game, he's seen as a great dad and a great worker. If a woman leaves to take her child to the emergency room, she is seen as disloyal to her boss. And I think the more men who understand that the more they can -- they just have to acknowledge it is a different playing field. And this is hard-wired in us. This is not like a good or bad thing, this is hard-wired.

Think for those of you in the room, and I wouldn't even ask you to nod or raise your hand, because it's a horrible thing to admit to, but I would absolutely cop to it. Think of how many of you before you had children were in workplace and how you judged mothers who would have to leave at 5:00 o'clock. Think of how the workplace pitted you against each other. This just happens. And I think the more we can all step back and acknowledge the programming and the bias that's at play there and help advocate for one another, because with the policies that exist in this country it is a hard road for a

woman to come back from maternity leave and be making that adjustment and fight all of those battles on her own.

So just fighting for other women, arming yourselves with data, making sure that the men in your organizations understand the data and the reality behind what women are dealing with when they come back into the workforce simply after having had a baby, even how they're judged and viewed by other people. And I think knowing that data and understanding those realities, it also helps you. And it helps you know that it's temporary. You think when you're in that newborn phase that newborn phase is going to last forever, and it really doesn't.

There's another study in this book that shows that when women became mothers, when they had young children their productivity would dip by about 15 percent, which is frankly pretty superhuman if you've ever had to like feed and nurse a child in these early years. But their productivity would dip by about 15 percent in those early years, but after that those women would be the most productive members of the workforce and would remain that way the rest of their career. And the more children they had they would get a bump in productivity each time.

So there's all of these benefits you're going to have the rest of your career for as hard as it is then. Think of it like you're spending time getting an MBA in the evenings and you may not be super-productive at work but then you're going to have these tools that will make you so much better at your job the rest of your career.

And, again, just kind of having some of this stuff to arm you so that when you see or experience either people attacking you with that bias or other women, you have a way of calling it out, because to me one of the biggest weapons we have when you're dealing with an industry like technology is everyone wants you to believe that they are data driven. Now the reality is, they're not. They're driven by pattern recognition. They're not driven by data. If they were driven by data we would have equality in the workforce, because there's been study after study after study showing that it would make companies more money, that it would make them better places to work, all of these benefits. It doesn't happen. They're not driven by data. But if you hit them with a space of data, they have a really hard time defending the bias they were just doing in that moment.

SONIA DARA: So we have about five to ten minutes for questions from the audience. We have three people with mics. So I think we're taking a question right here from 2.

QUESTION: Sorry to be so gung-ho, but something that you said earlier in your talk really resonated with me. So I'm Brigianier Roberts (ph), I work on the Azure CAT team. And just a little context setting, I'm 37 and a fairly recent mom myself, so my eyes are open to a lot of this. And I'm right on the cusp between GenX and Millennial. I'm technical millennial. But I have really found it to ring true that women right around my

age are in that sweet spot of believing that feminism is not as important as all these loud people on Twitter and the kind of new wave of feminism, and that sort of being in that play by one of the guys cool girl handbook is their success point.

And I've seen that extend to a lot of internalized misogyny against other women, particularly who don't fall into that category of being the right type of women who have femininity markers that maybe those women have learned to kind of not be comfortable with because it doesn't help them chill with the guys, or also women who have children if these women happen to not sort of make that life choice.

And I'm wondering if you have any advice, besides shoving Chapter 3 of your book down everybody's throats, what's an effective way to sort of plant a seed that might undo some of that internalized misogyny and start to open the eyes of women that you know could be allies to sort of recognizing this pattern everywhere if you just got the right hook and had the right discussion, if you're not really in a position to have them at a dinner in your dining room?

SARAH LACY: Well, I mean I think having your own dinner in a dining room is like the most powerful thing you can do. It sounds crazy, because it sounds like such a simple thing, but to me -- we have all kinds of generations of women who come to this dinner, and there's women in their 60s and there's women in their early 20s, and one of the most powerful things that happened was at one dinner a girl who was in her early 20s, junior level at a venture firm, very much in that cool girl stage in the middle of the first dinner just started crying. And I was like what is going on? And she was like, I feel like my whole life I've had to have this armor on and it's destabilizing to me to suddenly be in a room where I don't need that.

And I think in my early 20s, if I had had a group like that and I had had a room like that to regularly be in and I had seen these powerful women who were at their peak of their career and also moms and it was fine, and seen all these other women who were investing in other women and supporting other women, and hearing these stories of horrible things happening that were happening to me and hearing other people be shocked and saying that wasn't okay, I think that would have shaken me out of a lot of it. I think that would have given me the space and the permission and just feeling like people had my back to even face some of it.

And so I think probably the worst thing you can do is actually shove Chapter 3 down their throats. But the best thing that you can do is just like put them in rooms of just women, because I think it's when you fall into these careers where you're in only rooms of men that you fall into that. And like every time I talk to people like I always encourage people to like start a monthly dinner thing, because it's shockingly easy. Like I've never cooked. You can get takeout. You can have people bring things. It doesn't have to be expensive. It doesn't have to be time consuming.

My house is generally not clean at all. I think the nicest thing you can do for a working mother is invite her over and have your house be messy. It's just making them as like flawed and messy and like I'm in total chaos, but everyone come into my home, where we're all going to have this thing together. It is the easiest and most powerful thing you can do to change your life, but also change the lives of 20 women that you know.

SONIA DARA: We have time for one more question, unfortunately.

We've got mic number two.

QUESTION: Hi, I'm Jasheen (ph) and I'm someone who actually really loves hosting dinner parties. So you've got me thinking on what I might be doing this summer.

Girlfriends, keep your eyes peeled for texts from me.

I had a question on once you started to embrace this like, oh my gosh, I have been doing this whole cool girl thing. I want to start calling X, Y, Z things out. What did that look and feel like for you, both internally? Did you have a lot of fear calling out your male colleagues on that and then when you did have the courage to call them out on certain things like what were those conversations like and just how did you do it?

SARAH LACY: Yeah, well I was really lucky that my job as a journalist is generally calling people out. So I was very -- and I had called out a lot of people for other things, like as a journalist, like building a horrible business, or fraud, or something like that. And so I think I was used to calling out powerful people when I felt like it was justified and it needed to be said. And I was lucky in that I had a job where that was part of doing a good job.

Now, that still doesn't make it easy, because open up any newspaper or blog and you'll see a ton of journalists who don't call anyone out, even though it's their job. I mean it's really hard and like my family and I have paid a very, very high price for how much I call people out. But it was sort of part of my job and part of my training as a journalist. So that certainly made it better.

But I think you just have to like -- you just have to know that you're going to lose a lot of people you thought were friends. You lose a lot of friends and that can be really hard and it's not hard, because you're losing friends, it's hard because people aren't the people you thought they were. And it's hard, because of how people think it. And once you really go down this road people who you thought were better people you just -- you can tell by their reactions to things, whether it's things you're doing or things other people are saying, like it's just like you have to constantly be crossing people off the I thought this was a good person list.

But there's also a lot of clarity in that. And there's a lot of things that are really good about it. And I will say, I mean we talked earlier about why I was able to raise money, and certainly I've just sort of done it again with Chairman Mom. You know, I was never someone, for better or worse, even when I was growing up as a girl in the South I was never someone who could really keep my mouth shut or pretend that something was okay when it wasn't okay or pretend to be okay with something that I wasn't okay with.

And I've just always been someone who -- I didn't have a poker face at all. And I was going to be very outspoken about what I thought about things. And I think there's a lot of women who feel like we have to beat that out of ourselves in order to succeed in the world. And I think there were a lot of people who wanted to tell me that I couldn't succeed in the world if I was going to be that way.

And the reason that I raised \$4 million to start Pando was because I wasn't that way. You know, the reason that Chairman Mom had an over-subscribed seed round was because I spent six years standing up for what was right and calling out the most powerful people on Earth and never caving and never letting them bully me. So I think as hard as it is, while it may at times on a micro-level feel career limiting, I think it's actually really career making if you can be that person and you can stand up for people and you can fight those fights, because there are a ton of people in the world who look at that and they see strength and resilience and that's kind of ultimately what everyone wants to fund. And that's what everyone wants to hire.

And the people who don't want to fund you or hire you never would have if you had kept your mouth shut. And so you may as well be as loud as possible.

SONIA DARA: Awesome. Thank you, Sarah.

COLLEEN O'BRIEN: Community connect, get involved and stay connected

In this Cutting-Edge segment we're discussing an article by Mallun Yen that was published on August 1st on Fortune.com, titled How Friendship Holds Women Back in Their Careers and What they Can Do About it. The author, a former Cisco Vice president and a current entrepreneur, discusses the false dichotomy that exists amongst women between personal relationships and the transactionality of business.

SONIA DARA: Yen interviewed several women on this topic, and I just want to share a few quotes here. Quote: women told me that when they asked a friend for business, they feared it would damage their personal relationships, took rejection personally, and became gun-shy about making another pitch.

COLLEEN O'BRIEN: And that same aversion to mixing business and friendship exists on the other side of the business pitch as well. Quote: Women who received an ask from a friend said they didn't expect their friends to hit them up for business, and when they

did it sometimes caused an unspoken tension that dampened their enthusiasm for the relationship.

SONIA DARA: Organizational psychologist Ronald Riggio explains the gender discrepancy here. Quote: Men's friendships are often based on shared activities, so poker or golfing buddies, and are more transactional, end quote. That makes asking for business less outside of the norm.

COLLEEN O'BRIEN: Yen has four recommendations for how women can overcome this mutual exclusion and support one another emotionally and financially. Number one; ask how you can help every time you meet with a woman socially or professionally.

SONIA DARA: Two, recommend friends to friends. Promote each other as experts, leaders, and business resources.

COLLEEN O'BRIEN: Three, seek women out. Don't wait to be approached. When you have a business need seek out women and ask them to come in and pitch.

SONIA DARA: And lastly, number four, take the meeting and play matchmaker. Whenever you receive a reasonably good ask, take the meeting and figure out how you can help via your network even if you don't have a pressing need.

COLLEEN O'BRIEN: As someone who has many friends who are brilliant in business I can't wait to put some of these recommendations into action and start making deals.

So, we're about a month past our official birthday, but it feels pretty celebratory to bring Sarah's interview to the masses. Happy anniversary Sonia!

SONIA DARA: Happy anniversary, Colleen.

COLLEEN O'BRIEN: I'm so glad that we got some great new music from SassyBlack to mark the occasion, as well.

SONIA DARA: And thanks to you our listeners for tuning into another episode. Please remember to rate, review and share our show on Apple podcasts, or wherever fine podcasts can be found.

COLLEEN O'BRIEN: And if you have any feedback or questions you can e-mail us at WiBT@Microsoft.com or tweet us at [#MicrosoftWomen](https://twitter.com/MicrosoftWomen).

SONIA DARA: Your mission for this episode, if you choose to accept it, is to apply to the M12 Female Founders Competition or to encourage an entrepreneurial woman in your life to do so. M12, which is Microsoft's venture fund, is collaborating with EQT Ventures and SVB Financial to accelerate funding for top women-led startups, focused on

enterprise technology solutions. The two winners of the competition will share the \$4 million in venture funding, as well as access to technology resources, mentoring, and more. Applications will be accepted through September 30, so get going. For more information about the Female Founders Competition, visit M12.VC.

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