

Grace Bonney: 00:12 Hi, and welcome to Good Company. A podcast where we take an honest look at the world of creative business. I'm your host, Grace Bonney.

Last month we hit the road to celebrate the brand new issue of Good Company magazine. In honor of issue number two, the fearless issue, we hosted a live panel discussion with local entrepreneurs to talk about issues like fear, failure, comparison, self-care, and the dreaded imposter syndrome. Because we know not everyone can attend live events, we recorded all four of our tour stops to air here on the Good Company Podcast.

Today we're traveling back in time to San Francisco where I spoke with four talented women. I spoke with Baker, Reem Aseal of Remes, California, Educator and Community Organizer, Shakirah Simley, Author, Esme' Weijun Wang, and Artist, Wendy Chen. Here is why I loved this conversation so much. We got to talk about some of the most uncomfortable topics in honest and empowering ways. Ways that connected us to each other, to the audience in person, and hopefully with all of you listening, too.

We talked about money and being okay with wanting more. Building confidence through constant learning and how to handle breaking down without going to pieces. If you've ever had a rough day, a rough month, or even a rough year in life or work that left you questioning how to move forward and where to look for support, this is the episode for you. Each of these brave women share their stories of growing community, how to create space and support for each other, and how to evolve that community to include people of all ages who can offer such a wide range of advice and wisdom.

Thanks so much for Books, Inc and San Francisco for hosting this event. To Ally [Mish 00:01:55] for her help recording and to everyone who came out to support this conversation. Let's start the show.

How does fear manifest for you in a daily basis? How do you feel that in your body? Esme', let's start with you.

Esme': 02:18 Well, an interesting question that I was asking you right before the event was kind of the differences between fear, anxiety, nervousness and all of these things because something that I've been thinking a lot lately is how PTSD manifests in my life. I was diagnosed in 2014, and I think that anxiety, panic disorder all kinds of things related to those kinds of anxiety disorders are

pretty common and the more people I talk to the more I realize that these are really common things.

While I think of PTSD as something that I deal with daily along with other mental health challenges, I tend to think of it more as like a fear-based thing, and a terror-based thing and not so much an anxiety disorder, which is what it is. That's one of the first things that comes to mind, especially in this current political climate.

I think things that are related to PTSD are coming up all the time. Sexual assaults, racism, sexism, homophobia, all kinds of stuff.

Grace Bonney: 03:21

Reem, what about you?

Reem: 03:22

That totally resonates with me, I think as someone who's battled mental health issues pretty much all my life. I try to like remember back, I would see these videos of me when I was a little kid and I would do these shows and I was happy go lucky and I was like, "I want to find that little kid." I think the external circumstances around us are such that they do trigger these deeply imbedded internal things that are cumulative and I think for me when I think about fear I almost treat it like it's a way that I survived for this long. I think some of those mechanisms to protect myself from things I'm afraid of don't serve me now as an adult, but they did serve me as a child growing up.

I feel it for me there's like the fight or flight. I think I tend to go, I don't know if this is flight. It's more like internal ...

Grace Bonney: 04:16

Freeze?

Reem: 04:18

Yeah, freeze, paralysis. I feel it in my throat. I can't talk, I can't speak, like aching in my chest. For a lot of women I think kind of going to that appeasing. I just want to make everyone happy and I want to make everything all right right now. Right at this moment everything, to fix everything is sort of where I go.

Grace Bonney: 04:37

Shakirah, what about you?

Shakirah: 04:40

Both of your responses really resonate with me, so thank you for sharing and being really vulnerable. I would say for me there's also always the baseline feelings around racism or around sexism. Like at home tonight, will my little brother get home tonight? Will I have to deal with someone making some sort of judgment or discrimination against me? That's kind of

like your baseline everyday fear. I think that folks of color, queer folks, folks from our immigrant community deal with every single day.

On top of that, I think I'm just neurotic, so, I'm also from New York and, or maybe I'm just like highly anxious. I don't know. I think one thing that I also struggle with is imposter syndrome, so fearing that someone knows I'm not supposed to be there. Even though I have tons of experience and worked really hard in my field that somehow I don't belong and that someone is going to find out. I also freeze and get afraid.

I've had to really rely on my inner fire a lot and trust myself to kind of fight back, that voice. I also rely on my chosen family and my family to help combat some of those feelings and feeling like an imposter, sometimes.

Grace Bonney: 05:58

I'm so glad you mentioned chosen family. I think that that's a big factor. I think as a queer person, a chosen family is a big part of my life and I think that for a lot of us those chosen families are what keep us sane, or keep us stable, or something close to those concepts.

I want to talk a little bit about those support systems and how we find them and what they look like. One of the things I get asked the most is sure, it's great, we all know we should have a support system but how do you actually build one? How do you build one that really shows up for you?

Wendy, what does your support system look like and how long did it take you to build that around yourself?

Wendy: 06:34

In times like this where there is so much good reasons to be fearful, I kind of get lost and dive in and get comfort from the art that I make. A lot of what I do is tie knots and I've been doing it for five years now. What I realize is that knots are a common language that are spoken all over the road. Sailors in China, and Korea, and Norway, and through history, as well. It's a common vernacular and I find that that's the most comforting thing in times of fear is actually making connections with a salty sailor from the 1940s whose book is my favorite book and now we speak the same language.

Kind of like connecting with ad hoc communities in a way, right? That you make yourself via Instagram and all the different ways that we do it and through history is I find very comforting. I don't know if that's too cerebral an answer, but I find it very

comforting knowing that I speak this language that has been spoken throughout history and it's a language I've chosen.

Grace Bonney: 07:27 Reem, what about you? How does that work for you in terms of support systems and do you have that kind of dual online and offline?

Reem: 07:34 I mean I think it was an adjustment for me when I started to become a little bit more of a public figure because I am definitely the type that if I'm going to be in a conversation, I'm going to give it my all. It's going to be everything. Everything or nothing. It's really hard when people want to connect to you and you don't have the time to connect to them and you know, you want to build and there's not enough time to build.

That was really hard because I think in sort of my public figure I became isolated. For me, oddly enough, I hit rock bottom to get my support systems. I mean, it's just real. I feel like in the times of my life when I sort of hit rock bottom was where I was the most vulnerable where people were like can we interject? We care about you as a person. That's when I built my strongest support systems that have really carried me through all the tough times.

Grace Bonney: 08:26 Esme', what about you?

Esme': 08:28 We were talking about chosen support systems or chosen family and that made me think a lot about the different kinds of support systems I've had throughout my life. There's the concept of your birth family, or your blood family that you grew up with, which is essentially almost an immutable object. You have people that you grew up with, but for me, the idea of having these chosen support systems means that over the last five to 10 years or throughout my life I've had many different support systems, depending on the situation.

For example, the day of the Cavanaugh hearings I had a bunch of women come over to my home that are my friends and we all ate cheese and charcuterie and talked about what had happened that day. In 2013, or early 2014, I had a 10 month long psychotic episode and that was a very different support system of people who volunteered to come and sit with me and stay with me on various different days through like a care calendar.

I think I've been lucky enough to bond with many different kinds of support systems throughout my life, depending on who was

there and what we all needed from each other. When I became really sick with late stage Lyme disease in 2013-2014, I became much less able to leave the house or to interact with people face-to-face. Then the Internet became much more important to me in terms of making connections while lying in bed and talking to people on Instagram or Twitter.

That was when I really became involved in social media. Yeah, I think I've been privileged enough to have a lot of different kinds of support systems depending on the situation and depending on the kinds of people who reached out to me and to whom I reached out to, as well.

Grace Bonney: 10:27

Shak, how have you built your community around yourself?

Shakirah: 10:29

I definitely agree that it's multiple types of communities based on I think identity, place, time and profession. I think me having a support system of black women has always been my main back bone and seeing myself and that is very intergenerational. If anyone is listening I think making sure that you connect with folks across different age groups is extremely important from folks who are younger than you to who are older than you.

I used to be a part of a black women's group and we had someone in their 20s, 30s, 40s, 50s, 60s and 70s. The richness of that conversation and wisdom shared was so restorative. I really miss that space. Of course for me and my politic has always been through food. Food is such an easy and accessible way to connect with someone. Everyone has this basic metabolic action that they have to feed every single day literally. Everybody eats. That's what I always say, everybody eats.

That's been my way to either have a difficult conversation, or bring folks to the table, or have political conversation, or organize people in their communities has always been around food. Even if I can't engage with folks as much as I would like, I'm like I'm going to feed you. You're going to feel nourished and you can move forward and feel energized.

Now, my community is changing. I'm working in politics now. That's a very interesting community. I'm learning my way around that community, but I think the fact that I have such a strong connection to folks here in the city, my neighbors, my friends, [inaudible 00:12:13] family, my food community, my black woman community, and intimate and personal relationships I feel like I have a strong backbone.

There are so many people that make me. Like me being able to sit in front of you is because so many people invested in me and believe in me and continue to do so. I feel like I can't let them down in some weird way and I feel restored in that way, so that's how I see my community. Even though I'm in a new community that is very transactional, but I feel like I have support.

Grace Bonney: 12:48 For those of you on the panel, how many of you have a community of support that include people who are outside of the field that you worked in?

Reem: 12:55 For me, I moved to the Bay area in 2003, so this is the closest to home that I've ever felt. I really owe that to the, ironically it was the war breaking out and the US invading Iraq and all these places where my family is from that brought me community. Across generations, across cultures, like that sort of understanding intersectionality. It wasn't just Arab communities, it was black and brown communities, it was career communities. We were all under attack from the same forces. There was something comforting in that because on the East Coast I felt so isolated and I didn't have that community.

Sort of in that struggle and in that fight is where I built my community. It's still very much, even though my profession is as like, I wear so many hats. I'm still an organizer. The media always paints me as this like organizer turned Chef. It's like no, you don't just turn that part of yourself off, you know? I'm always organizing. My political homebase is right across the way at the Arab Resource and Organizing Center. It's with Arab community here in the Bay area trying to empower themselves.

I feel like I have a role to play as a woman in the public creating a platform for the voices of my community. It's really exciting to sort of use that platform to build wider and deeper. It's funny, I've been organizing in the Arab communities and I was like where are they? Because you know, because of gentrification people have been pushed out and were like sparsed. We're not as concentrated as we used to be, but put a bakery in the community and people come. I'm like this is what we should have done 10 years ago, you know? Then you can actually organize and engage with folks.

Wendy: 14:45 I am, I feel like I am one of those elder people. I'm 51. I'm on my third life now, so one of the things that I've learned is that no matter, I just see all of us as playing roles. Hopefully we've chosen those roles, we've chosen wisely and we're thriving and

fucking loving it in whatever that role is. Whether it's politics or food, or in my case, now, art, or in my past the music industry. There are the content makers, there are the artists the people who are making it, but there are other equally key roles that people inhabit.

The people who publish magazines and write about and think about the art that's being made. Then there are the Gallerist who want to present it and evangelize it for the world. You know, my previous two careers were as curators in the music industry and in the tech industry. Curating other people's work and loving it and having that feel like a really natural role. Because now I am the content maker and I make art it's made it even more clear to me that we all have different roles to play no matter what that [inaudible 00:15:44] is.

Esme': 15:46 Yeah, and I also feel that the different ways in which we might identify will also determine the communities that we feel most strongly aligned to in any given moment. I might go to a conference and be doing primary panels about disability and chronic illness and so that will be the way in which I feel most closely identified. The people that I'm talking to at that conference might be other disabled people or people living with chronic illness.

But, at the same time, I might go to a conference or some other event or just be talking within a group of writers and I'm most closely aligned there as a writer. That's how people see me or look at me. Or, we could be women of color who are also writers, who also have disabilities. There are all kinds of these overlapping groups. The communities with which I closely identify, it's constantly shifting and changing depending on where I am and what conversations I'm having.

Grace Bonney: 16:46 Can each of you share a time when something did not work out the way that you were hoping it did but that you learned something really valuable from that. Wendy, have you ever had anything?

Wendy: 16:55 I feel like for me the last five years since I made a big career change have been about so many different fears coming up. Honestly, I kind of feel like I've tackled them all. I'm sort of unafraid to tackle them and I see fear as challenges to be overcome or to, yeah, to tackle or problems to be solved. My entire life I've had a horrible fear of public speaking and I didn't know what that was about. Then, two years ago, when I was

making a knot everyday for a year I was asked to speak at a design conference like 300 people. Terrified.

I forced myself to say yes and it was horrible leading up to it. I mean, I was crying, I pulled all nighters, I thought about quitting. It was really not a great experience. Then I went and did it and I realized that it's not scary to talk about yourself. I realized that what my fear with public speaking was that I would be an imposter and that someone would point out like, "You said that wrong," or, "That's not true," or, "That's factually incorrect."

But when you're talking about yourself you can't say anything wrong because all you have to do is tell the truth and so you're not going to say something incorrect. Frankly, no one else can point out to you that you've said something incorrect because you know yourself better than anyone else. That really was kind of a huge growth moment for me because now it doesn't freak me out anymore and I can do it and I like it.

Shakirah:

18:16

To follow up from that, I think the times in which I've had to really rely on my intuition despite some of the negativity and toxicity around me were those really watershed moments. The fight that I got into with my mother when I told her I was moving to California to work in food and to start a jam company and had just graduated from this Ivy League school and she was like, "Are you fucking kidding me?" Right? "We put all this into you and you're going to go do what?"

I was like I need to go there because I need to understand how food systems work so I can change them. If we're going to talk about food we're going to talk about race, we're going to talk about gender, we're going to talk about economy, we're going to talk about labor. This prissy, woo, woo, white organic BS is like really not working for me. I might be that person to put myself out there, but like I need to do that. Now she's proud. It's hard to please my mom.

I would also say, I also had a similar watershed moment this year where I felt like I've done as much as I can within the food system and to model what can be different. Now I'm like I need to take this information and training and organizing to politics. I need to set myself up in a way in which I may be the only person making these sort of intersections where no one is talking about food and agriculture in city hall. No one is talking about how that impacts housing, transportation, labor and the

economy but I can start doing that and making those connections for people.

You know, sometimes that comes with a lot of blow back from your chosen family or your family family. It comes from a lot of like you know, you're too good for this or I can't believe you're doing that. Why go to college if you're just going to do that? There's a lot of, I mean, I feel like I have enough self doubt but I feel like those watershed moments have been I've had to just really rely on the intuition and that gut feeling like I'm going to be in the right place, I'm going to bust my ass to get there and you have to trust that you're going to do that.

Sometimes, you know, I mean, the most right thing to do is not the most popular but I feel like things work out the way they're supposed to and I feel really grateful that I've been able to have those experiences and those watershed moments.

Esme':

20:26

Listening to what Shakirah was just saying about the watershed moments made me think about something regarding fear which is that at least for me, having overcome a fear or gone through a period of fear does not necessarily mean that I'm so much more. It doesn't mean that the next time I encounter a different fear or a stronger fear, it doesn't mean that I will get there and go, "Oh yeah, this is fine because I encountered this other fear."

When I was trying to publish my first book and all of my close writer friends had published their books since they had gotten these six figure deals very quickly. I kind of thought like oh, well we're all in the same community and the same thing is going to happen to me. Well, my first novel was rejected 41 times and that was the point where I reached a point of fear where I was like, "Okay, well maybe I will never publish a book and I've done all of this for nothing and this is never going to happen."

It turned out okay. In the end, I published that book. It got some acclaim and I moved on with my life but then I got really sick and I didn't know what was wrong with me. I had trouble walking to the bathroom. I sometimes couldn't lift my arms. Nobody knew what was wrong with me. That was another point of fear. I feel like often life is just a series of, you know, obstacles as you were saying. Just because I got through that fear regarding my career didn't necessarily mean that dealing with this health fear I was so much stronger or so much braver.

Although, then I had to face this other fear of once I figured out what was wrong with me medically I had to figure out okay, well

now I'm going to write a second book. How am I going to write a second book if I can't sit at my laptop for like seven hours at a time and write this book? Then I had to figure out a way okay, so I wrote most of my second book, which is coming out in February, lying in bed tapping on my iPhone or my iPad. I have this piece of art on my wall that says, "I am not afraid. I was born to do this."

That quote is cited as something Joan of Arc said, but who really knows, right? I like that saying because it reminds me that I like to be able to think that everything I come across, or everything that I face in my life that brings about an enormous sense of terror or fear in me is something that I was built to be able to face. Who knows if that's actually true, right? But, as I continue moving along in my life and encountering these obstacles and encountering more things to be afraid of that's something that I try to remind myself.

Reem: 22:56 Yeah, I think, I'm trying to think of all these watershed moments and they're always failures that lead to success. I think one turning point for me was I was in my second semester of college. 9/11 had just happened. My parents had just gotten a divorce and I was always the rock in my family. That was a huge pinnacle for me. I was going to this like, not quite Ivy League school, but it was like the crazy school where all the Ivy Leaguers didn't get into so it was even worse, right? Because they were trying to prove themselves.

It was just so hard. It was like a child of immigrants who already put so much pressure on myself to be the rock of the, I was the eldest child, there was all this pressure on me. I was committed to social justice. I had an affinity for social justice from a very young age. I wanted to be a Diplomat and I went to this school where they were teaching you about to be a Diplomat is basically to make sure that the US has control over the world.

They're feeding me this stuff. All of these things, I basically like stopped eating. I couldn't eat. I couldn't swallow. I loss 30 pounds in less than three months. I was deteriorating. I remember the moment where I was like I can not do this. I will die if I go back to that school. I basically dropped out. It's what led me here and led me to a different path and to learn more things about myself.

Oh, I'm an experiential learner. I was so studious, but it was only because I wanted to prove myself to my parents. When things start to unravel then you learn a lot of things about yourself. It

takes some of the pressure off because you're allowed to be because you're a hot mess, anyways. I think for me, I always thing about that especially now as a business owner.

This first year of Reems, for anyone who knows, Reems is kind of infamous. We've been in the news being attacked by right wing forces who have accused me of being a terrorist and a terrorist supporter. It was crazy. It's hard enough starting a business. Some days we didn't know if we were going to survive. The cash flow was really ... Everyday I'm like looking at the numbers like, "I don't think I can do this. Somebody just take me away from all of this."

I think I have to channel back that time that I failed at going to school and say like if this is a failure it's going to lead me to something else. Knowing that failure is an option helps me sort of open my possibilities.

Grace Bonney: 25:32 For each of you I would just kind of love to know if there are small ways that you get through those moments. I always think of them as kind of rituals. What are the ways that you self-soothe, or self-care, or remind yourself that this is something that you can get through? Are there little small things that you do on a daily basis?

Wendy: 25:48 For me, one of the fears that I have, or I should say one of the challenges that I'm very aware of is that I don't ever want to repeat myself. I value originality, I value evolution and my work continuing to evolve. I don't want to be one of those artists that makes the same thing over and over again and there are some of those. For me, when I started getting a lot of orders for the products I was making it started feeling really samey, samey, so I gave myself a project.

The way that I did it is I was super organized about it and I said I'm going to learn one new knot everyday for a year. That was the only part of my day that was reliably new and unknown for me. I had this palpable sense that I was learning something new and stepping into the unknown but in a good way not with fear. I was keeping fear at bay by going into the place where I'm comfortable, which is learning mode and beginners mind.

The rest of the day I would be fulfilling orders and doing things that were pretty predictable, and that's not a value of mine, doing things that are predictable. I just got really organized about it and gave myself a project.

Shakirah: 26:51 One thing that I've learned about myself is that I need to allow myself to feel what I'm feeling. I feel like as women fem identified people we're socialized to not be angry, or placate, or make yourself more palatable to be acceptable to people. In some ways, that doesn't allow you to kind of sit in your shit and deal with it. You just kind of let it simmer and that's killing us. That sits in our hearts, it sits in our bellies and that's so toxic.

One thing I've been trying to do if I'm angry, I'm not going to direct that towards anyone but I'm just going to let myself feel that way and be like that's okay. You're feelings are legitimized and let it move through you so you can keep it moving. Just allowing myself that space. Or, if I'm feeling really sad like maybe I just like wrap myself up in my duvet cover like little Shak burrito and I'm just like, you know, eating popcorn and crying over this awful Netflix rom com, right? I can do that and that doesn't make me a bad organizer or a bad activist because I'm in Shak burrito time.

That helps me kind of sharpen my saw and get ready to face all the challenges that I know will be down the road. I think ritual can be restorative but it also can be just giving yourself space to feel how you're feeling and letting it move through you so you can do what you need to do to keep going.

Reem: 28:25 I really love that. I think that I am still learning how to put ritual in my life to kind of breathe through the moments. My bakery is right across from the eyebrow threading place, so like literally a walk over, so whenever things get really frustrating I'm like I'll be back and then I go and get my eyebrows threaded and some foot reflexology.

Whenever I find a moment it's like oh, okay, take care of yourself, Reem. I try to invest in that but I don't do it often enough.

Esme': 29:01 I find that ritual and routine are actually really important to me so I tend to do the same things every morning and I have this whole morning routine, and these morning rituals and I have my morning prayers of gratitude and then these wishes and intentions and I draw tarot cards on all of these things.

I think something that really helps me in terms of things that I do everyday is as someone who is living with a lot of different kinds of mental health challenges it really helps me to keep records of what I do everyday. Otherwise, it's very easy for time to slip away from me and to feel like I haven't done anything

that day. When I say I don't feel like I've done anything that day it doesn't necessarily mean that I ... I mean, today was not a very "I didn't achieve that much or I wasn't that productive."

I mean, even just not knowing wow, four hours just went by. What even happened? I have these lists that I make. I try to do them everyday, but they're called things I did today lists. It really helps me to just see like I fed the dog and then I brushed my teeth and then I made some oatmeal. Looking at these lists as the day goes on really helps to ground me in what exactly has happened as time has gone by. I find it very frightening to not know how my days slip away from me.

- Grace Bonney: 30:31 Each of you could go back and talk to yourself like 10-15 years ago and tell yourself something to bolster yourself through where you are now, what would you tell yourself?
- Wendy: 30:41 I would tell myself that it's okay to make creativity the center of your life. I was very used to supporting and evangelizing and loving other people's creativity, and I always felt like I wasn't allowed to do that for myself. Finally I had to give myself permission to do it because nobody was giving me permission to do it. You know, your family is never going to be like, "Become an artist, why don't you. Quit your job." No one is going to say that.
- If I had known earlier that I was allowed to do this and that maybe I'd be good at it and happy doing it, I might have started earlier. That's not to say I regret any of my previous lives.
- Shakirah: 31:14 I would tell my younger self you don't have to be super woman. It's okay to go to pieces without falling apart and allow for that bit of messiness because there is often a gem or value in that. I would also say like you don't have to attach your worthiness to another person and you don't have to attach your worthiness based on your output. I think we live in a capitalist society which puts a certain value on certain types of bodies and the productiveness of those bodies. We internalize that. That also turns into, it impacts our mental health, it impacts our ability to navigate and survive.
- I think that I have room. I don't have to, like I said, attach my value to anyone else in order to be worthy. It's okay to have that mess.
- Reem: 32:07 I would say you're not responsible for everybody's happiness. You're an awesome person, but it's not that deep. Your calling is

not to save the world. You know? I was like I need to have a calling. I would say trust your gut. I think that there are so many times in my life where I didn't listen to myself. Your true authentic self knows what's right, and don't forget that.

- Esme': 32:33 I would tell myself you are tougher than you think you are. You can survive more than you think you can.
- Grace Bonney: 32:42 What is a quality of yourself that you're really proud of that you've learned through these tough times? Wendy, let's start with you.
- Wendy: 32:49 I'm really confident. I've just lived long enough to have had enough good experiences taking risks that have turned out okay. I'm really confident. It's kind of amazing to actually be on stage and say that and not sound like I'm being a totally vain bitch. Yeah, I am. I'm really confident. I'm just very confident of my aesthetic and what these hands can do.
- Shakirah: 33:11 I would say I have a lot of grit, and I think sometimes that's unbecoming of women in fem identified people, but I'm like yes. I want to get in there. I'm going to get dirty and you're going to accept this and that's what's going to be. I really appreciate that. Things don't become smooth unless there's friction. I might be that little grain of sand, but we're going to move shit through. We're going to get things done and I think that grittiness is really, really important.
- I love seeing that quality in other people. I think I get along with people like that. I also love seeing that quality in young people who are just willing to get in there and get down and dirty. I would say I'm proud of.
- Reem: 33:57 I would say my empathy. I definitely feed off of, there are those moments in history where it's like I feel the energy of everybody in this room. That gives me the strength and the resilience to do what I'm going when things are hard. I feel like any time that I'm doubting myself being able to hear an elder or a young person or to have that epiphany, that transformation of other people transforms me. It's like a very dialectic process, and I feel like that is how I've survived for all these years.
- Esme': 34:29 You know, my mom has told me for a very long time that you know, despite all of the accomplishments that I've achieved the thing that she's most proud of me for is that I have a kind heart. That's something that I treasure in myself. I also, to go along with that, I'm proud of how I'm able to encourage other people

and to support other people. I think those are some of the things that I'm proudest of.

Grace Bonney: 34:58 I want to open it up to the audience. I would love to know what questions you have? What topics you'd like to talk about?

Amanda: 35:05 Hi, my name is Amanda. I actually have a two part question. The first part being I have a lot of anxiety and fear, weird deep rooted fears over the Internet and talking to strangers over the Internet, but having recently started my own creative business that relies really heavily on Instagram, just wondering if you guys have any sort of advice on navigating that space where it feels safe.

The second half of my question is I was born and raised in a predominantly white community here in the United States, but actually my dad is an immigrant. I'm actually half Samoan, but I spent a lot of my life sort of navigating in this weird, floating in this space where nobody was like me, I don't know anyone like me. But having recently sort of ventured into my Instagram with my business a lot of my art content is cultural and so I've sort of found this community online. I'm wondering if you guys have any sort of stories, if you have anything similar or like advice for navigating that space connecting culturally to a support system not face-to-face.

Esme': 36:09 Actually, I grew up in a predominantly white town. There were very, very few people of color at all where I grew up. Instead of the Internet because, I mean I used Prodigy when I was younger I still remember my ID was TMSD50B. There wasn't even the app prodigy.com yet. The Internet kind of existed when I was growing up, but actually the way I formed community, a queer community, a community of color was actually through zines. This isn't directly speaking to the Internet question but I think it's connected. Even before the world wide web became really common, people have always found ways to connect to people in their community outside of the person next door, or they have for a long time.

I remember getting 30 to 40 pieces of mail per day and getting these zines in the mail, getting mixed tapes and learning about Riot Girl and feminism. I think that that was something that really helped me to develop into the person I am today. In terms of advice, or something that I would say in terms of getting started or forming that community, I didn't immediately jump into connecting with 30-40 people everyday through the

mail or even in social media when that started happening or the bulletin board on Prodigy.

I think just taking one step at a time, or you can tell yourself I'm going to comment on three people's posts today. Making small steps, I think that can be really helpful. You don't necessarily have to feel like you have to take it all on at once, or at least that's something that I found helpful.

Shakirah: 38:02

I want to add, I think when it comes to community on the Internet, especially social media, the best conversations don't have to happen on the public facing end of social media. The most meaningful interactions I've had on social media have happened on DM and not in public. I think a lot of people reach out to me who've come out later in life because that was my story who want to talk about that but not in a comment forum. They want to have that conversation in private.

I would say in terms of building community and doing that on social media be open to having those conversations privately. They don't have to be something that people see, and like, and tag, and comment on. Sometimes those meaningful things will be somebody that just sends a private message and that doesn't have to be a public transaction.

Anastasia: 38:46

Yeah, hi, I'm Anastasia. I was just thinking about what is my greatest fears and I have to say, if I want to be honest, it's money and earning a living and trying to survive. I'm always thinking, part of me never wants to be in a position where I am not the sole bread winner in my life. I'm always trying to strike a balance between making my money and also doing whatever it is that I'm trying to build on the side, whatever my side hustle is.

I just have this fear of running out, of having to depend on someone else. I think a lot of women have that fear. I guess I'd love to hear about how do you work through that fear, if you also share that fear and what your relationship to money is and how you think about it.

Reem: 39:43

Yeah, I had this like very irrational fear for many years. I probably still have it in the back of my mind somewhere, that's why I'm so crazy in all the hustles that I do. That I was going to be homeless and living on the streets. All the time. I would lose sleep over it. It was kind of ridiculous and irrational, I mean, even though I'm on my own and I was, I've been on my own since I left home at 18. I have a family. I have a chosen family

and family that would like, it was very irrational. I'm like where does that come from?

Then I saw this billboard, I think it was a political cartoon that was like capitalism makes you sick. I was like oh, it's a system bigger than me that's why I feel that sort of obsession with ... I never made a lot of money. I was always sort of living on the edge and I've been just fine. When I left my job in 2010 if you looked at me on my paper it was like this girl is trying to make less and less money every year.

I left my dreams because the nonprofit world was not paying me enough, or the 75-80 hours a week I was giving them. I was going to leave that and be my own boss and here I am. I realized sort of in that because I started to do what I loved it didn't matter as much so I didn't think about it as much. When I was in the rat race it was much more prevalent. It is a very deep one. I think it's deeply imbedded with my mom, too.

She was in a bad marriage from day one and she never had enough money to leave her marriage and she always talked about it. I grew up hearing that. "One day I'm going to leave, but I don't have enough money." I don't know if that comes from that but that sort of having to depend on someone else.

Wendy:

41:32

I'm totally unapologetic about wanting to make a lot of money and I just want to say that because I think women are sometimes afraid to say that in front of people, too. I'm totally unapologetic about that. I want to make a lot of money. That's not to say I want to be coldbloodedly capitalistic about it. To be a capitalist is to make money without regard to anything else. You'll do it before the money, and that's not what I do.

Now, when I think about I'm lucky enough to have lots of opportunities for different types of work now in the art world and so the way that I choose them is I will absolutely say, "Wow, I could make x number for this, and x number for this," and I'll choose the one where I can make more money and have more impact, but also say something meaningful in the work. The saying something meaningful in the work part is totally nonnegotiable. That's always there.

I try to be really practical about this is going to take one hour and it'll take this long and this will take me a week, but I'll make this much and it'll pay my studio rent for a year. Of course I'm going to choose the other one. I feel like I'm getting into the weeds a little bit, but I just wanted to say it's okay to want to

make money. Especially, we live in San Francisco, the most expensive city in the country.

One of my first goals in the first few years was I want to make enough money to make a San Francisco living. I want to make a living, but I want to make an okay San Francisco living where I can pay the rent and go out to eat once in a while. I just want to say it's okay to want that.

Grace Bonney: 42:51

I have a practical answer and an emotional answer to that question. I think practically the most important thing to do with money, and also add the third issue of Good Company is called The Money Issue and we are talking about money and it's very uncomfortable and people really didn't want to talk about it and I had to, a lot of people backed out of stories and I had to push them back into. It's an important thing that I think women in particular need to talk more about.

Practically walk out what the worst ending thing could be. I think financially I've always supported myself. I've always been the person who did that. I currently am not. It is really uncomfortable and I think emotionally the only thing I can do is talk about that and be open about it and say, "I'm really uncomfortable that I'm not paying, like I'm not contributing to the mortgage this month. That I'm not the one who's paying for groceries. That's very uncomfortable."

There's no solution to that. I don't think there is. I think you just have to be honest about it and talk about it and trust like if you're in a relationship with somebody, trust that that person will listen to that and be okay with that and sometimes it just feels weird. I think practically just talk about it. Just have honest conversations. I think walk that out. Okay, if I don't make money this month what does that look like? If I don't make money this year, what does that look like?

Have a practical solution. Walk that out. Write it down. It's not so scary when you put it on paper. It really isn't. I've walked through multiple different things I could do or where I could work to try to contribute financially in a way that I feel comfortable with and that makes me feel a lot more comfortable. Talk it out. It's not so scary and then write it down.

Esme': 44:24

I was on a panel recently with a bunch of other writers and something they were talking about made me think about something a friend of mine had said when I was expressing this anxiety and this fear to them, which was we're not going to let

that happen to you. We wouldn't let that happen to you. That's something about community. I know that my friends ...

Something that the other people were talking about on the panel. The panel was I won something called the Whiting Award this year. We all got, who got the Whiting we got \$50,000. One of the questions that we got on the panel was, "What did you do with the money when you got it?" I think maybe they were hoping that we'd say, "We bought 500 bottles of I don't know, champagne or something."

Something a lot of the people on the panel said was that they gave money back to their friends and their community. They gave \$100 to their friend to pay off a parking ticket. They gave another \$100 to some other friend to contribute to their rent because those people had helped them. I think that was something I've been thinking a lot about.

It's not just this one-to-one romantic relationship dependency, even though our culture kind of creates that idea. There is also community, which is really quite lovely, as well.

Grace Bonney:

45:45

Thank you so much for listening to today's show. You can listen and download Good Company anywhere podcasts are available. Issue number two of Good Company magazine, The Fearless issue, is out and on stands now. You can visit us at [welcometogoodcompany.com](http://welcometogoodcompany.com), or [goodcompanyzine.com](http://goodcompanyzine.com), that's goodcompany z-i-n-e on Instagram to pick up an issue or learn more about the show.

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