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Laura Cox Kaplan:

Ready to add a big dose of positivity and empowered perspective to your day? You've come to the right place. Welcome to She Said/She Said Podcast. I'm Laura Cox Kaplan. Here, we tackle everything from imposter syndrome and confidence building to the best advice on how to lead yourself through life pivots, including the ones that knock you flat. For the past three years, I've talked to hundreds of experts about their stories. Here, you'll find their actionable advice and lessons as well as my own tools that you can put to use in your own life. Stick around. I think you'll find this investment in you well worth it.

Hey friend, welcome.

This week, we're digging into some key building blocks for developing risk tolerance, problem solving capability, and agility -- essentially some of the key attributes of successful entrepreneurs.

My guest is Margot Machol Bisnow. Margot set out to understand how some of the most successful and creative entrepreneurs of this generation were raised. Was there something different about the way Wojcicki sisters grew up, or what about the founder of TOMS shoes Blake Mycoskie, or movie director Jon Chu. Margot talked to all of them, and many others. A diverse group of women and men who are literally changing the world.

Margot's research led her to publish "Raising an Entrepreneur: 10 Rules for Nurturing Risk Takers, problem solvers, and change makers". The book was originally released in 2016, but has been expanded and updated for re-release in the fall of 2021. I've included a link to Margot's author page on Amazon and you will be able to pre-order the book in July. She's joining us today to share what she learned.

By way of background, Margot spent much of her early career in government. She served on the Federal Trade Commission. Before that, she served as chief of staff to President Ronald Reagan's Council of Economic Advisers. It was only after Margot's two sons were essentially grown that she became inspired to understand how we can do a better job of cultivating entrepreneurship -- in our children and in ourselves.

So much of my conversation with Margot will resonate with you. Whether you are a Mom looking to instill these important risk-taking and agility qualities in your kids, or whether you're looking to grow them in yourself -- or maybe both -- I think you'll find some great take aways in today's episode.

Here's my conversation with Margot Machol Bisnow....

Margot, welcome to She Said/She Said.

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Margot Bisnow:

Thanks. Good to be here.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

You've written this fabulous book entitled Raising an Entrepreneur: 10 Rules for Nurturing Risk Takers, Problem Solvers, and Change Makers. Boy, we need more of that. Talk about what originally inspired this book.

Margot Bisnow:

My oldest son, Elliott, started Summit, which is conferences of young entrepreneurs. This was in 2008, and I go to all these events and meet all these fabulous young people who had created some incredible company or nonprofit. I was just so curious how they turned out the way they did, and so I asked all of them like, "What made you the way you are, so willing to take on risks, so willing to work so hard to achieve your dream?" They all said the same thing to me. They all said, "I had a mom who believed in me. I had a mom who told me I could accomplish anything I put my mind to and work at really hard, and that just gave me the courage to persist." I was so struck by this, and I used to talk about it all the time to my kids. They said, "Well, you have to write a book." I said, "I'm not going to write a book." They said, "No, you have to write a book." "I'm not going to write a book," and how they talked to me into writing a book.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

You are not a career author.

Margot Bisnow:

No, this is it.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

This literally was just one of those ideas that fell on your lap. Talk a little bit about what you were doing at the time. You'd gone to this conference, but what were you doing professionally at the time?

Margot Bisnow:

Yeah. I mean, I've lived in Washington, D.C. I've spent most of my career in the government, mostly doing international economic development. In 2008, for those eight years, 2000... Yeah, 2008 to 2016, I guess. I was running, editing, publishing a publication for my husband's company called The Scene, which was a daily online report of the goings-on in Washington.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

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Yeah.

Margot Bisnow:

I mean, I've done writing. I edited the Economic Report of the President, you know?

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Yeah.

Margot Bisnow:

That kind of thing, but I mean, I just... I'd never written anything myself longer than a page.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

It's fair to say this was a pretty big pivot for you.

Margot Bisnow:

Yeah.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Let's talk about as you began to have these conversations. So you have the idea to write a book or your children say to you, "Hey, Mom. You really need to write a book. You can't stop talking about this. So write a book." So you set about to interview the parents, moms in particular, but sometimes dads, of these highly successful individuals. Talk about how you started, and then what surprised you as you engaged in these conversations?

Margot Bisnow:

I mean, actually, how I started it was really funny because I said to my son, "I'm just not going to write a book, and have it just sit in my desk, and not get published. I just won't write a book, unless I have an agent and a book contract," thinking that would shut him up, right? So he introduced me to an agent who said, "We had to write a proposal, and I wrote a proposal, and it got bought by McGraw Hill Business."

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Amazing.

Margot Bisnow:

I was so excited, and I started to interview, and I'll answer that part of the question. Then, I was about halfway through, and the person who had bought it moved to a non-posing startup, and it got picked upstairs to the boss. I sent him what I had so far, and he wrote back and said, "There's a lot of great stuff in here, but if you could put all this stuff about moms in one chapter

at the end or better yet, in appendix." So I said, "I'm actually never going to talk to him again because he doesn't want the book I'm writing and I'm not writing the book he wants."

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Yeah.

Margot Bisnow:

So I said to my agent, "Just get me my rights back." So I got my rights back. I still had to pay the agent the money he would have gotten, and then my agent said, "Nobody walks away from a book deal these days, so we're done." So at this point, I was pretty much done with the book, and I did exactly what I'd said I never wanted, which is a book, and no agent, and no publishing deal.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

So interesting. So I want to back up for a second before you continue to tell this part of the story because that's so fascinating. It's a really hard thing, as you've just articulated, to walk away from your publisher and ultimately, your agent. You felt that strongly about your particular approach, the approach that you wanted and ultimately did take in this book. Why did you feel so strongly about that?

Margot Bisnow:

Because I wanted to write a book about raising kids, about raising kids who became entrepreneurs. I didn't feel qualified to write a book about how to be an entrepreneur. I was not an entrepreneur, and I didn't feel I had the skillset to do that. So I just wasn't going to pretend to be somebody I wasn't and write a book that wasn't in my wheelhouse.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Yeah. Why do you think they were pushing you in that direction when you had a really clear vision both in your...

Margot Bisnow:

McGraw Hill Business is like a 50-year-old guy without kids, and it just wasn't his thing. The woman who bought it, she got it, and he was, "I just didn't get it." I got another agent, and I got a book publishing deal, and I got the follow-up. So first, yes, you're correct. I started out just thinking I would interview the moms, and I did like that for about 20. Then, I thought, "Gee, I wonder if I interviewed the entrepreneurs if I'll get the same story or a different story." I realized I got the same stories, but they were more colorful because the moms, especially the more high-profile entrepreneurs, were very protective and careful. So then, I just decided I'd interview the entrepreneurs about how they were raised because in a way, that may be more relevant, what they took from it, rather than what the parents thought they were putting into it.

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Laura Cox Kaplan:

Yeah.

Margot Bisnow:

So there's about 20 where I interviewed both. But then after that, I just did it with the entrepreneurs.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Yeah. Fascinating, and you're talking about some very, very high-profile entrepreneurs, and this was... To set the stage for our listeners, you wrote this book a few years ago, but a number of these people, if not all of them, are still highly successful entrepreneurs. In fact, some of them have actually gone on to other entrepreneurial enterprises, I believe. So maybe give us an example of some of the people that you were talking to.

Margot Bisnow:

Yeah, and just as a side note. Yeah, so I wrote... The book came out five years ago, and I decided recently to update it. So I've added 12 new people, and I've gone back to the original 60 and asked them to make sure I got it right what they're doing today. Very few of them are doing exactly the same thing. It's very interesting. Many of them have become more famous. Some of them are on hiatus. Some of them are taking time off. Some of them have just moved. I'm happy to give you some examples. But also, I just want to say one thing about you said I interviewed high-profile people. It was really important to me not just to interview the billionaires because those are just White boys, and I wanted to interview a really diverse group of people.

Also, let's face it. Nobody's kid is going to grow up and be Elon Musk, or Bill Gates, or Mark Zuckerberg. It's just not going to happen, but you can be an entrepreneur, which means you can start something. You can have your own company, your own nonprofit, your own cause. You can have a few people working for you, and you can have a really good life living your passion. So it was really important to me to show the kind of range of entrepreneurs that people can be, and also... So my book is 50% men, 50% women, the entrepreneurs, and I think it's 25%, 30% people of color. So I wanted just a hugely diverse group of people. I just didn't want the billionaires because I just think that's much more relevant to parents.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Yeah. Yeah. Well, and also, it's only one measure of success. I mean, it is a measure that we typically look at if a person has reached the point of making a billion dollars, they would, by most estimations, be considered successful, but there are other measurements of success, and I think that's at least part of what you're getting at. There are other ways to measure that. Quality of life is a really big one.

Margot Bisnow:

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Right. Of course. I mean, and I feel like if you're following your passion and your dreams, whether you have three employees or 30,000 employees, you're happier than if you're in a job that you don't like.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Yeah. You ultimately landed on 10 common traits or maybe rules, if you will, for parents. Let's dig into some of those and talk about maybe a couple that were the biggest surprises to you.

Margot Bisnow:

I guess the biggest surprise was that everyone of these kids when they were kids had a passion outside of school. Every single one of them, and I've come to believe that having that passion is what... It's going to be the driving focus that's going to make you an entrepreneur because if you have a passion that you've chosen, that you work really hard in, that you get really good at, you're going to get confidence. You're going to learn risk-taking. You're going to fix it when it doesn't work. You're going to try new ways to make it better. You're going to learn resilience. You're going to learn every trait you need to become entrepreneurial. It doesn't mean you'll become an entrepreneur, but it's just so much more likely that you will than if you're just this kid grinding away, giving the teacher the answers they want.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Because it really shows that creativity and the ability to use that age-old term, "Think outside the box."

Margot Bisnow:

Right.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Really expand your thinking.

Margot Bisnow:

So for me, an entrepreneur is anyone who starts something. It's a for-profit company. It's a nonprofit. It's an artist. It's an activist. So the artists, their passion, that's what they're doing today. Jon Chu was making movies from fourth grade. Benny Blanco was writing music from seventh grade or something. So many of the entrepreneurs, their passion was something completely different that they're doing absolutely nothing with today, and a huge number of them, their passion was sports.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

This is true for both, the men and the women?

Margot Bisnow:

Absolutely, and it was like, "Oh, by the way, did you play sports?" "Oh, yes. I was the National Equestrian champion." "Oh, yes. I played soccer at Cornell." "Oh, yes," and on, and on, and on, and on. I almost wanted to say like you had to play sports, but of course, you don't because some people, their passion was running for student government, and some people, their passion was entering sales competitions, and some people, their passion was chess or whatever. Something different, but so many of them, their passion was sports.

Actually, my oldest son, his passion was tennis. The place he trained, JTCC, outside of Washington. He was actually the first person they honored, the first alumni they honored, and it wasn't for what he did as a tennis player. It's for what he did not as a tennis player, and he said, "Everything I am today is because of tennis. I wasn't that interested in school. I didn't work that hard. Tennis is where I learned grit, and focus, and hard work, and determination."

The guy that runs it, as a consequence... Now, he tells parents like, "Yes, your kid will get a tennis scholarship to college, but don't worry that your kid is spending five hours a day, seven days a week playing tennis and that that's not going to help them in life. It will help them in life because we get them all the skills they need to succeed." I just think that's such an important message for parents to hear that this thing they're doing that they think their kids are wasting their time, it's not wasting their time. It's giving them skills and abilities that are going to help them get to the next level.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

One of the things that I hear you saying, and correct me if I'm getting this wrong, but it's sports because it's providing the opportunity to learn to compete, to learn to win and lose.

Margot Bisnow:

Yeah.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

So whether it's sports in terms of athletics, whether it's tennis, or track, or basketball, or something like that, or other types of competitions.

Margot Bisnow:

Right.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Did you see that same... Really, the through line was this idea of learning to compete, and win and lose. Is that...

Margot Bisnow:

Absolutely, learn to compete, learn to win, learn to lose, learn to regroup when you lose, and to figure out a different strategy. To have somebody not your parents who's coaching you and

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saying, "I'm not playing this week. We didn't work hard enough," you have to figure out why you lost, and you have to stop blaming anyone but yourself.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Such an important message. One of the ideas that you talk about that I really love is this idea of showing kids that they're part of something bigger. I would love for you to dig into that a little bit and explain what you mean by that.

Margot Bisnow:

It actually surprised me how important faith was to so many of these kids. In many cases, it was organized religion, and in many cases, it wasn't. It was just a sense of faith, and a sense of a higher being, and a sense that you're here on earth for a purpose that's significantly greater than making money. None of the people I talked to said money was a goal. They all wanted to make something that made the world a little better, and some of them, their faith was astounding to me how... like that they consider it one of the most important parts of their being.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Really interesting. Because adversity, not surprisingly, our ability to embrace adversity made this list of the top 10, and we think about the world that we're living in today and the challenges that we and our children are facing, maybe talk a little bit about that piece, that idea of embracing adversity in the context of what we're dealing with right now.

Margot Bisnow:

First, let me say that that's something that really surprised me, how many of these kids have gone through significant adversity. I think 10% of them lost a parent before they were out of college.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Wow.

Margot Bisnow:

I mean, that's huge. I barely know anybody who's lost a parent before they were out of college. Others, their parents got divorced. Their parents lost all their money. Their parents lost their jobs. I mean, so many of them, their parents had significant illness. Their parents were really sick for a lot of the time they were growing up. They were had a... They had a significant illness. They were hurt. They were... had issues. They say it's not like what happens to you, but it's how you deal with it. As you say like now with the pandemic and so much stress going on in so many people's lives, I just think it's so important this whole concept of resilience, and bouncing back, and having it make you stronger.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Maybe talk a little bit about the concept of confidence building. It's a big one on this podcast, and we talk about it a lot. While my audience, which I'm very... always very, very grateful for, is made up of largely women. We get a few men who listen, but largely, women. Confidence is a big one, and learning how to not only build confidence and understand where it comes from, but also, to boost it when you can run low of your confidence. Talk a little bit about what you learned related to confidence, and I realized that this is not necessarily gender-specific, even though, as I said before, we are talking to women primarily about women. But maybe talk a little bit about what you learned related to confidence.

Margot Bisnow:

It's back to what we're talking about before about learning to compete, which is part of it. I think if you learn to compete and you get really, really good at something that you've chosen, you develop confidence because you know you're really good at it. I think the other part of that is having your parents appreciate how good you are at that and not be haranguing you for not being as good at something else. So neither of our kids were fantastic students. My husband and I are both... We were both very academic. I mean, he is Phi Beta Kappa at Stanford and blah, blah, blah. My dad was a professor. I mean, we both grew up just thinking grades were everything.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Right.

Margot Bisnow:

Then, we realized we had these two kids that just... that's not what gave them... made their hearts sing. That's not what excited them. I mean, they did what they had to do. They turned their homework in. They went to school. My younger son graduated from college. My oldest son made it through two and a half years, but it wasn't the thing that made them happy. Elliott, his joy came from tennis, and Austin, his joy came from writing music. We let them know how proud we were of them for their success in those areas, and how hard they worked in those areas, and how their hard work was translating into success. We were just so proud of them, and I think... So part of confidence is knowing you've gotten good, and part of confidence is your parents not saying to you, "Okay. Write music later. Get back to your history or whatever." Like, "Okay. I don't care if you're writing that little movie. Make sure you'd get an A in all your classes." So it's just letting your kids know how proud you are of the thing that makes them happy.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Yeah. It can be so difficult I think as a parent to shift in to that mode of what your own expectations are or what your own talents are, and when your children veer from that as they most often will. More often than not, I think children veer, and they find their own path, which

is an amazing thing. But as a parent, as you're learning on the job, if you will, how do you do that? How do you keep from allowing your own pre-conceived notions based on your own experience and your own expectations of your kids? How do you keep that from coloring that experience?

Margot Bisnow:

Yeah. I mean, I can tell you my own personal situation with both of the kids. So as I said, my dad was a professional. I was very academic. I'm embarrassed to say, but I mean, I grew up thinking like, "If your brain worked like mine, then you are smart. If your brain didn't work like mine, you weren't quite as smart." I didn't really appreciate that there were different kinds of brains, and I had my epiphany with my younger son. I think it was exam week 10th grade, and I walked into the family room. He was playing the piano, and I said, "Austin, stop playing the piano and go study." He said, "I'll never forget, 'I have a new song in my head. I have to play it, so I can visualize it, so I can write it down when exams are over.'"

It was like, "Oh my god, our brains are actually nothing alike." I just had this epiphany like, "I've never had a new song in my head. If I did, I couldn't play it. If I played, I wouldn't visualize it. If I visualized it, I couldn't write it down." It's just like, "He has a gift, and his brain is nothing like mine, and I have to recognize this. I have to recognize it if he comes home with a C in biology, and I have to recognize it when he writes an exquisite song." It was just like a light bulb going off.

With my oldest son, Elliott, who told us that, and I told you, my dad was a professor. I grew up in University Town, and he announced after two and a half years that he was dropping out of college to work with my husband on his new company. I mean, it never occurred to me that it was a possibility that I have a child who didn't finish college. It never crossed my mind. My husband and I both have advanced degrees, and I just felt like, "What you did?"

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Right.

Margot Bisnow:

I was so horrified, and I said, "Uh, okay. You can take one semester off," and then it was a second, and then it was a third. It turned out a year and a half later, a month before he would have graduated, having spent a year and a half in school, not studying, a course that he wasn't interested in, but that he was required to take, is when he invited the first 18 people, the first 18 group of young entrepreneurs to go skiing with him in Utah, and it was 2008. It was the spring of 2008. It was the first time these young entrepreneurs had ever gathered together, and that's what led to him starting Summit.

So if he stayed in school another year and a half, and not done this for three years, the moment would have passed him by. Somebody else would have done it. He wouldn't have been the first, and this whole incredible chapter of his life never would have happened. So I learned a lesson, and I think all parents have to learn this. The world is different from what it was like

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when we grew up. We grew up, it was all very straightforward. You got good grades in all your subjects. You got into the best college you could. You got good grades in all your subjects. You got into the best graduate school you could. You got a good job, you kept your job, and that was that. That's not life anymore, and parents have to understand this. The world is completely different.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Right.

Margot Bisnow:

You don't need to go to college. You don't need to finish college. You don't need to be good in all your subjects, and there's different opportunities, and if I can just share one story. I was giving a book talk at Summit, and a man came up to me afterwards, and he said, "Can I talk to you?" He said, "My son is in college, and he started this little widget company in his dorm room, and I think it's a stupid idea, but he just announced he's dropping out of college and moving home to work on his widget company. I'm so upset. I haven't talked to him in three weeks."

I called over this guy who I knew had made I think gazillion dollars and I knew had dropped out in college. I said, "Craig, I want you to tell this man. I'm going to give you an example of two kids. You tell me which one you want to hire. Kid number one started a widget company in college, dropped out of school to work on it, worked on it really hard for a year and a half, finally decided it wasn't going to make it, but he's got all this interest now and wants to try to get a job at a bigger company and see what he doesn't know. Kid number two stayed in college, wasn't motivated or inspired by anything particular, graduated in the middle of the class, but now he's graduated. Which kid do you want to hire?" Craig said, "Obviously, the first kid, and the other 150 successful entrepreneurs in this room all would hire that first kid also." The dad was like, "Wow. Okay. Thanks."

Laura Cox Kaplan:

It's like a lightning bolt. It really is very crystallizing.

Margot Bisnow:

Right.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

One of the moms that you interviewed was Esther...

Margot Bisnow:

Wojcicki.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

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She's an amazing person.

Margot Bisnow:

She's amazing.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

She's also written a book I think a little bit more...

Margot Bisnow:

After mine.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

After yours. Yes. I've read her book as well, which is fantastic, but talk a little bit about her. Two of her daughters. She has three daughters. Two of them are two of Silicon Valley's most innovative companies. One is at 23andMe, and the other is at YouTube.

Margot Bisnow:

One is head of YouTube, and one started 23andMe. Yes.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

So talk a little bit about what you learned from Esther.

Margot Bisnow:

Yeah. She's fabulous. I adore her, and she, by the way, started the country's largest high school journalism program, which has hundreds of kids in it now. She told me that the kids, the first week they come in, and she says, "Okay. For your... this year in high school, you have to start something in journalism. It can be anything you want. It can be a newspaper or articles about sports. It can be a radio show about theater. It can be a TV show about politics. I mean, you decide what you're interested in."

She said, "Some of these kids like nobody has ever said anything like that to them before, and they sit here for a week like paralyzed with indecision before they were like, 'Oh, wow. I get to decide.'" She's very empowering. She believes in trusting people to make their decision. She believes in letting people figure out what they got wrong and clean it up, and she believes in respect and kindness. It's really interesting because... I mean, I interviewed her for my book, and I think she thought, "Wait a minute. If someone's going to write a book about raising kids, it obviously should be me."

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Both books are fabulous.

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Margot Bisnow:

She has a great book, and they're very different because hers is completely her personal experience.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Yeah. Right.

Margot Bisnow:

But I read it also, of course. The thing I like about it is we don't disagree with either of us on anything. We are 100% in alignment on everything. She emphasizes some things more, and I said hers is the story of her family and her experience as a teacher. She got California Teacher of the Year. She's really remarkable, but we basically agree on everything, letting kids... trusting them, respecting them, teaching them to compete and to make their own decisions.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Yeah. Maybe talk a little bit about the fact that many people are not blessed to grow up with parents who have automatically embraced these 10 or many of these 10 principles. Yet, they still can go on to amazing success, but maybe talk a little bit about other instances that you've seen in the program that Esther is running where she's cultivating students who may or may not have had the blessing of great parents who really believed in them, but maybe having the input of others outside of your parents or your caregivers who provide that kind of support and nurturing, and really belief that you can do something. Maybe talk about those examples as well.

Margot Bisnow:

Yeah. So, I mean, I say that you have to have your mom's and your parents' support. Most of them did, not all of them. Elizabeth Gore, who's a great entrepreneur, it was her grandmother. Eric LaFleur, it was a teacher. Amanda Judge, it was a step-father. It just have to be someone, someone along the way that says, "Hey, you can do it, and I know if you put your mind to it, you're going to succeed." I used to say a lot of the parents were not initially enthusiastic about their children's choices. Jon Chu has become more famous since I interviewed him.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Right.

Margot Bisnow:

He's the nicest guy you'll ever meet and did a book event for me when my book first came out. He's just so great, and I'm so excited for... I mean, for people who don't know, it's Crazy Rich Asians.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Right.

Margot Bisnow:

He's got a [inaudible 00:32:06]. Lin-Manuel Miranda will be In the Heights coming up I think in June. He grew up in Palo Alto. His parents were immigrants, and they had this Chinese restaurant, Chef Chu's. There were five of them, five kids, and the parents never wanted the kids to work in the restaurant. They were just like, "Be so grateful you're in the United States where anything is possible." They wanted them to work hard with all their subjects, and be good students, and go on and become doctors or lawyers, whatever.

Jon, from fourth grade on, he was just making movies. That's all he loved. It was his passion. He is in high school, and he was working, and his parent... He talked to his teachers into letting him turn in videos instead of essays often, and so just like my son talked to his teachers into letting him submit a song instead of an essay. So he was in bed. He was working on his laptop on a little video, and his mom came in and said, "Put that stuff away and get a good night sleep so you can study in the morning. This is ridiculous. You're wasting your time." He burst into tears, and he said, "This is what I love. You can't make me stop. This is what I want to do for my life." His mom left, and she picked him up the next day at school, and she'd gone to the library, and she got 10 books on filmmaking. She said, "If you want to do this, be the best."

Laura Cox Kaplan:

I love that. What an amazing story. That's really, really awesome.

Margot Bisnow:

I know, and then he said like... He went to USC Film School, and he did this short film, which changed his life because he got an agent come at... Shortly before the film, his mom said, "So what are you serving?" He's like, "Huh?" She said, "What are you serving?" He's like, "Uh." So his whole family drove down. They went to Costco. They got champagne and finger foods. His whole family served all the guests at his... the presentation of his USC video.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

That's awesome.

Margot Bisnow:

I know.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

The cultural aspects of some of these experiences too. In some families, where it's really... there's a really conservative viewpoint about what your child will do.

Margot Bisnow:

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Yeah.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

In part, it's cultural. Not necessarily, but it can be. There can be a particular expectation of a child's path. You didn't necessarily find that to be an overwhelming factor as it related to the people that you talked to?

Margot Bisnow:

No, not really. I mean, a lot of the parents, initially, they were horrified, and a lot of the times, it's because they didn't understand what their child was doing. But I think most of these parents, when they realize how happy their kids were doing it, they came along. I say to people, "Everyone of these entrepreneurs had generally a parent, usually a mom, but somebody who believed in them." Everyone says, "Oh, come on, Margot. Every parent believes in their child." I'm like, "No. Every parent loves their child."

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Right.

Margot Bisnow:

Every parent wants their child to be successful and happy, but most parents believe that their children have to take a certain path to be successful and happy. Sometimes it's a really big gulp. It's like, "Really? You want to do that?" Another one of my favorite stories is Paige Mycoskie, who started Aviator Nation. Her brother, Blake, started Toms Shoes. Paige did the normal thing and graduate from college, and got a job, and was like on the path she was supposed to be on. For her birthday, each of her grandparents gave her \$100, and she took the \$200, and bought a sewing machine. She said to her mom, "I'm quitting my job. I'm moving back to Texas, and I'm going to start sewing. I'm going to make clothes," and she started Aviator Nation.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

That's amazing. One of the other things that I think surprised you and I think would surprise some of our listeners is the fact that the majority, the majority of these parents work full-time. Not just work full-time, but had, in many cases, very consuming jobs.

Margot Bisnow:

Yeah.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

So talk a little bit about that. Did that piece surprise you?

Margot Bisnow:

Actually, it surprised me a little how many of these parents did work full-time. Esther Wojcicki is a good example. All these parents said to me, it's like, "By the time our kids got home, they've figured it out." One of the funniest stories for me has been Michael [Stahlman 00:36:46], who became a film producer for 12 years, won a bunch of awards, and now got something called The [Saw 00:36:53] Agency. He's a big political activist and very successful, and he had parents who just worked nonstop. He was 14, and all he wanted to do was theater, and he wrote to 80 different theater companies. He lived in Westchester outside New York City.

He wrote to 80 different theater companies, and Blue Man Group, who's also in my book, said, "Yeah, you can come here and intern with us." He said to his parents, "I have this opportunity to intern," and his parents said, "I'm sorry. We're just too busy. We can't drive you back and forth to Manhattan every day." They had friends with an apartment that they weren't using during the week, and they let him live in it. He said, "I can't say that every kid at 14 should be allowed to live alone in Manhattan." He said, "But my parents trusted me, and I honored their trust."

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Wow, that's pretty amazing.

Margot Bisnow:

Pretty amazing.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Okay. We've talked a lot about how to think about this from the standpoint of parenting and caregiving, but let's talk about managing ourselves. For those who are not parents or maybe don't have any plans to become parents, what about advice for adults, maybe young adults who are about to chart their career? What advice do you have for them in terms of some of these skills and ways of thinking about developing these skills of learning to teach yourself to embrace risk, and to embrace that curiosity, and to learn better problem-solving skills? How do you teach yourself if you were somebody who was not raised with a parent, or caregiver, or a great mentor who helped you see this pathway and really believed in you? If you're not one of those people, what can you do to help give yourself those skills, learn those things?

Margot Bisnow:

One thing that would be really important would be to be sure you're in a company or an organization that appreciates that kind of stuff. If you're in a company that doesn't, you should probably leave. You want to be in a company, or an organization, a nonprofit, whatever, a school, a library, a government agency, wherever you're working. I'm using company as a [inaudible 00:39:05] that wants you to think outside the box, that doesn't punish you for taking thoughtful risks, even if they don't, on occasion, work out. I mean, not stupid risks, but thoughtful risks. I mean, I think it's really important to be in a place that values that, and then to find somebody there that you trust and admire that will give you honest feedback.

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Laura Cox Kaplan:

Yeah. I had Beth Comstock, who was the former...

Margot Bisnow:

Yeah. I know who's [crosstalk 00:39:40].

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Yeah, chief marketing officer at GE, who wrote that great book, *Imagine It Forward*, and had her on about two years ago on the podcast.

Margot Bisnow:

Yeah. Yeah, she's great.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

I thought some of her advice was so interesting as it relates to that corporate mindset, but specifically related to failure and literally giving her team permission slips to fail, knowing that if they weren't failing, it meant that they weren't challenging themselves in a way that really would pay off with this great innovation. So I thought her approach was such an interesting way of thinking about that because that's part of what you're talking about, right, being willing to... and having the space that you need and the safety net, I guess, which is what she was providing, so that your employees, your people feel comfortable thinking outside the box.

Margot Bisnow:

Right.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Right? Pushing those boundaries.

Margot Bisnow:

Right, and this is a whole new way for me to think. As I said, I spent most of my career in the government, and that's not how you think in the government. Nobody ever wants to fail. They want to set their goals low enough that they can succeed. You know?

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Margot Bisnow:

They never want... There's just no reward for failure, and I've just been so impressed with all these young entrepreneurs because that's just not the way they think. I just think it's so much

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healthier to have big goals and to know you might not always succeed, but to... I mean, trust me. Elon Musk isn't changing the world because he's setting safe goals, you know?

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Right.

Margot Bisnow:

That's the other thing. I mean, this whole entrepreneurial mindset, which I really want to stress. It's not just about starting a company. It's about taking this mindset wherever you were and thinking big, thinking outside the box, thinking how you can make this organization better or a new organization within the organization that's better, willing to take on risk, willing to do whatever it takes to make it succeed, and willing to adjust, and change, and modify, and just to move this idea forward, and to keep pushing the goal posts. I mentioned Elizabeth Gore before. I mean, she worked at United Nations. Not the most unfamiliar place, but she started this thing called Nothing But Nets for malaria bed nets. So she started this whole program within the United Nations. Then, she started another program called Girl Up, where they were working with girls in developing countries.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Sure.

Margot Bisnow:

So, I mean, those are great things. It's not being an entrepreneur, but it's going to an organization and thinking, "What can I do here to make this better? Is there something in this organization that really excites me that I can just grab on to and take it to the next level?"

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Yeah, and those examples that you just gave of Elizabeth Gore is so interesting because she was in government in a manner of speaking.

Margot Bisnow:

Right.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

So thinking about the ways in which just because most people don't do it doesn't mean there aren't opportunities potentially to think beyond what is the traditional or the way that it's always been done, including in more "conservative" areas like government or areas that are a little more resistant to change. A lot more resistant to change, I should say.

Margot Bisnow:

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Or Esther Wojcicki.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Right.

Margot Bisnow:

Saying, "You know what? We need to have a high school journalism program. I'm going to start it, and I'm going to tell kids they can do any kind of journalism they want," and fighting with the teachers, and fighting with the school board, and just pushing it, and pushing it, and pushing it until she's California Teacher of the Year.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Yeah, yeah. Maybe talk a little bit about how you have changed and evolved as a result of this work that you've done. Everyone who writes a book... and I say this because I talk to a lot of authors and authors that are really diverse. Everybody changes in some respect after they've written a book. Their understanding of the concept that they're writing about gets deeper, but it also sometimes can result in other big shifts in your life. Anything changes that have come about as a result of this book and this work?

Margot Bisnow:

I started out, I wrote down what I thought the 10 rules were, and basically, nobody followed any of them.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

I love that.

Margot Bisnow:

I mean, my rule was like you always eat family dinner together every night. People would say like, "What time is dinner?" I'd say, "When the last person walks in the door. Sometimes it's 6:00 PM. Sometimes it's 8:30 PM. That's what we did." There were two out of 70 families that did that. Travel. That was my thing. We always have to go on interesting family trips every year. Partly, just know that there's other ways of doing things, and partly, because it binds you as a family. Half the people, most of the people didn't do the family trip.

So I just had no idea if I'd find anything interesting. I mean, what was extraordinary to me was... Well, it was 60. Now, it's 70. Half men, half women. Completely diverse. I mean, every race, every religion, every socioeconomic background. From one child to seven children, parents who stayed married, parents who were divorced, blended families, step-siblings, adopted siblings, small towns, big cities, born in the US, born overseas, immigrant parents, parents who were doctors, parents who didn't graduate from college. I mean, who didn't go to college. I mean, every possible, and what... The thing that just amazed me, has gotten me so excited about is they all basically raised their kids the same way. I mean, I...

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Laura Cox Kaplan:

That's mind-blowing.

Margot Bisnow:

That's mind-blowing.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Yeah.

Margot Bisnow:

That's why I say like I got in, I started, and I was like, "Oh, what am I going to find? I'm not going to find anything." Yes, it's stunning. It's stunning, and I just added these 12 new people, and it... Same thing. I mean, totally diverse backgrounds, skillsets, everything. Yeah, they were all basically raised the same, and that's... So I'm passionate about this now because I just feel like, like that guy who came up to me after that talk at Summit. I just think a lot of parents don't get it, and they're beating their heads against the wall. Their kids are depressed. Their kids are miserable. They're spending \$200,000 to send their kid to college. Their kids don't want to be there, and they're not motivated. It's just heartbreaking, and I want parents to say like there's a different way.

One of the moms said... She was a high school guidance counselor, and she said the parents would come in the... kids in a year, and she'd say, "What are your kid's passion [inaudible 00:46:48]?" She'd say, "Gee, I don't really know," and she would just think like, "Okay. Deep breath. Try not to say anything bad." It's not like you have to have a passion when you're seven. It's not like you have to have a passion when you're 10. But at some point, like I really have come to believe, every child comes out with some gift, and our job as parents is to help them recognize that, and to nurture that, and to support that, and to reward that, and to help them develop that to the greatest ability that they can.

Yes, it could morph over time. My son doesn't do anything with tennis anymore. I mean, so many of these kids, it was this passion at this age, and then this passion, and then to this passion, and then to this passion. It doesn't matter. What matters is that these kids have a passion and the parents encourage it. The kids are so happy that they're doing something that they love, and the parents are proud of them that they're doing something that they love. That was true with every single one of these parents, but some of the parents, it was a harder sell than with other parents. Some of the parents, it was a really hard sell. But once they got it, they were just on board, and I just think it's the most important thing. I just want to tell everybody.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

I love that. Margot, thank you so much.

Margot Bisnow:

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My pleasure.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Friend, thanks so much for joining us. I'd love to know what you thought about today's conversation. How have you thought about the idea of pursuing your passion and encouraging your children if you have them to do the same? How did Margot's findings strike you? Did you have any surprises? I'd really love to know what you thought. I've included a link to Margot's book, and remember, she's publishing an expanded edition this fall, which should be available for pre-order in July of 2021.

As always, I'd love to know what you thought about this or any of our She Said/She Said Podcast episodes. It's a huge, huge gift to me when you all reach out with your feedback and your perspective, and to tell me which parts of these conversations resonated with you. I also love your suggestions for other guests that we should have on She Said/She Said Podcast. So be sure to reach out to me.

You can contact me via the contact link on the website at shesaidshesaidpodcast.com. You can also contact me via the various social media platforms: Instagram, Facebook, LinkedIn. I'm Laura Cox Kaplan on all of those. So please reach out. Let me know what you're thinking, what's working for you, and what questions or problems you're struggling with. I'd really, really love to hear. Until next time. I hope that you found this little investment in you well worth it. Take care of yourself. I'll see you next week.