

Laura Cox Kaplan ([00:00:06](#)):

Building influence is something anyone can learn. It's an investment you can make in yourself and it can hold the keys to achieving your dreams and having the life and impact you want to have. I'm Laura Cox Kaplan. I've learned a lot over three decades about building and sustaining influence and how using it and using it effectively can make a big, big difference in your life and career. Here on She Said, she said podcast, we're digging into the different dimensions that help us build and sustain influence. If you thought being an influencer was just for social media, think again. Whether you're starting a business, raising money for a cause, negotiating a promotion, running your household, or trying to connect with those who don't share your views, understanding and using the different dimensions of influence will increase your chances of success. Whatever your goals may be, listening to She Said, she Said Podcast is a smart, efficient investment you can make in you.

Laura Cox Kaplan ([00:01:11](#)):

I'm really glad you're here and I'm excited we're on this journey together. Hey friend, welcome to this bonus Encore episode of She Said, she Said Podcast. This is episode 225. As I get ready to take a little break with my family over the holidays, something that I hope you're able to do as well. I was thinking back on this incredible year that's passed 2022 and also all of the amazing plans that I have in the works for you in 2023. One exciting collaboration that we will be continuing this coming up year is with the Southern cie. This will be our second official collaboration with this incredible group and she said, she said, podcast will once again serve as the official podcast sponsor for the Southern Seas 2023 Summit. That summit is coming up FeBURUary 1st through FeBURUary 3rd, 2023 in Beautiful Sea Island, Georgia. If you are a creative founder or entrepreneur and you're looking for a group and a network of supportive fellow founders, trust me, friend, this is the place for you.

Laura Cox Kaplan ([00:02:33](#)):

It is such a special conference and it's unlike any that you've probably ever attended. I absolutely love it. You can learn more about the summit at the link that I've included in the show notes for this episode, episode 225. You can also message me on social media, on Instagram, LinkedIn, or Facebook. I'm at Laura Cox Kaplan and I'm happy to answer questions there and share a bit more with you on those platforms. But today's conversation is with the founder of clothing company BURU, the fabulous Morgan Hutchinson. Now, Morgan and I recorded this conversation just after last year's Southern Sea Summit in 2022. I loved so many dimensions of this conversation and I thought it was a great one for an encore for a few reasons. First, I am a big fan of Morgan's Designs. As you may know, if you follow me on Instagram, her approach to limited runs, sustainable production, and the fact that the vast majority of her designs are made in the US along with the incredible fabrics that she uses and just the amazing designs.

Laura Cox Kaplan ([00:03:49](#)):

For all of those reasons, I love being a customer and I also love being able to support her brand. I also had so much fun hosting her here in DC in November. She rolled up in the BURU bus, which she talks about in our conversation along with her husband and business partner, Brett Hutchinson, and I loved introducing her to so many friends and podcast listeners that are here in the DC metro area. And of course we had a great time playing in the clothes and giving holiday wardrobes a little refresh. But while

I love the clothes, the reason why this conversation is important is because it illustrates the value of building trust with your customer and how that can convey whether you're selling party skirts like Morgan or widgets or professional services or just focusing on building your personal brand. It's an important, and I think often overlooked component of building and sustaining influence in your life and career, and it's a big component of this conversation with Morgan.

Laura Cox Kaplan ([00:04:57](#)):

Now, before we jump in, I wanna share just a few more details about her. She is the mother of three young children and her path into motherhood actually provided her with the initial inspiration for the BURU brand. In fact, breastfeeding specifically inspired the name along with the initial designs, but she's continued to evolve the brand as her life and her motherhood journey have evolved. Now, I'm certainly grateful for that because I am well past the breastfeeding stage myself, and I know many of you probably are. As well, Morgan focuses on establishing a high level of trust with her customer. You see that in her marketing efforts, especially on Instagram and with her blog, and I think you really feel that in today's conversation there is also a level of vulnerability that she shares with her customer and that she shares with me and ultimately with you as you listen.

Laura Cox Kaplan ([00:05:59](#)):

Now in today's conversation, we talk about what creating that level of trust with her customer looks like from her perspective. We talk about how her past entrepreneurship efforts, including with a previous company that she founded call Passport Panties, and how that informed the way that she and Brett created BURU. We talk about the considerations for funding her business and why the choice that she and her husband made to Bootstrap has been an important factor for actually balancing family work in life. Now, friend, I think this is a really fascinating part of this conversation, and if you're trying to build a business Morgan's, you will not wanna miss that. One of the most important elements though of today's conversation focuses on mental health and specifically Morgan's struggle with bipolar disorder. She is incredibly candid in our conversation and it further underscores how she builds that level of trust with her customer and also how strongly she feels about sharing her story, both to give others hope as she talks about in the conversation, but also to change the stigma associated with mental illness. It's such an important part of her journey and I think you'll really appreciate her candor and her vulnerability. Friend. Here is my encore conversation with BURU founder Morgan Hutchinson. Morgan, welcome to She Said, she said.

Morgan Hutchinson, founder BURU ([00:07:34](#)):

Well, thank you. I am so honored and thrilled to be here and chat with you today.

Laura Cox Kaplan ([00:07:41](#)):

Well, I'm so delighted to have you. Let's start the conversation by talking about BURU.

Morgan Hutchinson, founder BURU ([00:07:49](#)):

So BURU is a, we're a women's clothing brand. We're based in downtown Los Angeles. The inspiration behind our company, and you'll hear in this chat we're going to, we've had several evolutions, but the inspiration of it was me, myself becoming a mother. I was 32 when I had our first, I'm a mom of three, now a ranging from two to nine in their ages, and when I first had Olive, she's our oldest. I realized how quickly my fashion needs shifted, but also how quickly I felt left behind in the fashion world. It seemed overnight that shopping in person was harder. Obviously I had giant strollers, and with your first, you carry way too much equipment, you know, really only need a diaper and a pack of wipes, and you can, you dunno that your first time around. And I also realized no one had talked about the needs of breastfeeding in particular.

Morgan Hutchinson, founder BURU ([00:08:51](#)):

So we were living in China for eight months of my pregnancy with all of, we moved back to the United States just before she was born. So the name BURU actually means to breastfeed and Mandarin. Now we are big believers in supporting moms no matter how they feed their children. And actually we have a lot of customers who are not mothers at all, right? But the inspo was my journey into motherhood and new needs that I found. And so when we first started, the concept was to create a marketplace actually for mothers to feel that we were curating collections of fashion and accessories that worked in their lives. So easy access to nurse washable, elastic waste pockets. And we did that by carrying other ready-to-wear brands from designers we all know and love. And through a few years of that, we sort of learned that it was just more challenging. Wholesale was becoming more challenging. We'd expanded into about 40 different brands. We were struggling to keep up with chasing sales. Some of the dresses that started at 300 were all of a sudden, 6 95, 7 95. And we realized pretty quickly that element of it was an issue. The other element was my husband, who's also my business partner, shared that our gross profit margin was 10% <laugh>, which we've never had a business with product that's

Laura Cox Kaplan ([00:10:24](#)):

Terrible, it's not really sustainable, is

Morgan Hutchinson, founder BURU ([00:10:26](#)):

It not sustainable at all? In fact, just basically a giant slope down into failure. And with that we realized we needed to make a shift, but we knew we were onto something because we were gaining a following of women who really wanted to see how I was styling things and see how I was living my life as me while also being a mom.

Laura Cox Kaplan ([00:10:50](#)):

Yeah. Take us a little bit deeper into the journey of evolving the company from a marketplace into a brand where you are the primary or exclusive designer at this point, right? Yes. You're the you're primary designer. Yes,

Morgan Hutchinson, founder BURU ([00:11:06](#)):

100%. And I often refer to myself as an accidental designer. I was an interior design major, so I've always loved design and textiles. I'm still very textile driven. But when he told me that number and we realized, okay, we have something here. How do we make it a sustainable business? That's when we decided we needed to be a brand. Because what we had discovered was even though we had these amazing pieces from Love Check Fancy and Rachel Comey and Ula Johnson, we couldn't brand ourselves and Shop Bop was always going to have a friends and family sale <laugh> to price us out. So we decided let's design a 12 piece capsule and see if people will buy BURU. Let's find that white space of a price point. We really felt like we were missing that a hundred to \$300 range where you feel special, but it's still exclusive and attainable.

Morgan Hutchinson, founder BURU ([00:12:04](#)):

And so while I was pregnant with number two Schaffer, he's our middle, I designed 12 piece capsule and we gathered an amazing group of women in Charleston and we did this fun photo shoot and a playground and with children all around and it was super successful. And we sold out and we said, okay, this is it. How do we get from this teeny point A to the next B? And for us, that was to pack up and move our family. We were actually living in Salt Lake City at the time. We had gone there for an opportunity for my husband, which was not a fit, and we packed up, moved to Los Angeles, started increasing the designs, the collection, and then eventually we've built a factory here. So we are now 50% domestic production in our own factory and 50% still overseas at a small factory in southern China. It's family owned and amazing, and we've been there several times. So we really do care how it's made, but we do like to continue to offer two different price points for our amazing customers.

Laura Cox Kaplan ([00:13:16](#)):

Yeah. Well your brand is so interesting to me because when I first became familiar with it, which is not that long ago, maybe six months or so ago and I've ordered a number of different pieces. Now, these are pieces that maybe were designed for a nursing mom, one in particular, it was very funny. I bought the black turtleneck dress, which is so cute, and it has a, it's long and it has a ruffle at the bottom and you can wear it belted or you can wear it loose. But I <laugh> as I was pulling it out and for the first time I was like, well, there's zippers on both sides. And I'm like up the back. So it zips up the back and there's zippers on both sides. I'm like, what the hell are all these zippers?

Morgan Hutchinson, founder BURU ([00:14:00](#)):

And

Laura Cox Kaplan ([00:14:00](#)):

It occurred to me that I was probably not the demographic. However, it's a great looking dress and it's very forgiving and you can wear it with lots of different things. And so it's sort of a long-winded story to illustrate the fact that your designs work for women of all ages,

Morgan Hutchinson, founder BURU ([00:14:20](#)):

All ages, all phases of life. And I'm always telling people that we're a fashion first function surprise, which obviously that was very true in your case. But I find that I wanna design, I wanna wear pieces that I love. And having nursed three children collectively and been pregnant collectively for seven years of my life, I do feel I have a lot of firsthand experience that I'll never forget, even as I age out of some of these needs, I find that there are so many beautiful styles that actually work for your body as a mom, but don't work for all the phases. Some of our best customers are second time moms actually, because they know the drill, they know exactly what they need, but they don't wanna look like they're in maternity clothes or nursing clothes. That was the whole issue for me, and really we're not maternity, I'd say one of our biggest struggles when I say that I design for moms is that the people immediately think maternity. And I know you're a mother, think how short the maternity phase is compared to motherhood lasts, right? Forever. And our bodies continue to change. I mean, this is a very honest thing. I'm going to admit I'm 40, about to be 42, and I'm starting, I don't know what it's called per

Laura Cox Kaplan ([00:15:39](#)):

I'm going to perimenopause. Oh yes, yes. Oh honey, you go. Yeah.

Morgan Hutchinson, founder BURU ([00:15:43](#)):

And I mean, I don't know if this is okay to share on this course, but I know it's, of course it's listeners. But I mean my cycles are coming much faster and I'm hot all the time and I just was not prepared for that to happen. I've been doing a lot of reading about it, but I think we do a lot of cottons, we do a lot of pieces. You can layer and take off lightweight jackets. And so I'm finding that even though I have finally phase out of the nursing phase, all of these styles are working for me in new phases of life and motherhood that I'm going through. And that was the intention all along was to offer generational dressing and to buy investment pieces, things that are in your closet and work for you throughout this journey of motherhood and womanhood.

Laura Cox Kaplan ([00:16:29](#)):

One of the things that I think surprises me the most about the brand is the fact that the fabrics are amazing. They really are amazing. And yet the price point for the most part is pretty low. And you do have different price points, but for the most part it's very reasonable, very pocketbook friendly, and yet the fabrics are really, really outstanding. And so it's kind of an amazing balance that you've struck here and doing limited quantities of things. So for those listening who may be looking for something interesting that you see on Instagram, you better hurry because <laugh> miss your opportunity. Yes. Maybe talk a little bit about the philosophy behind having a limited run of pieces.

Morgan Hutchinson, founder BURU ([00:17:15](#)):

So for our domestic production that we do in our factory, we do a lot of repeat silhouettes in different textiles. As I mentioned earlier, I think my interiors background made me so textile driven, but when one of the main reasons that we wanted to start the factory here was to create more responsible manufacturing. So we don't use the word sustainable because it's a pretty loose word and it's not actually that well defined to be honest. So we say responsible because we use dead stock fabrics. So those are existing fabrics for our domestic production. So we're not using more energy to create more

fabric. We're finding things that have been ultimately left behind by designers and in some cases are truly vintage fabrics. They've reached an age period where you could call them that. And because of that strategy, so not only is it responsible in terms of the environment and just trying to help the fashion cycle, which is rough, as we all know with fast fashion and the amount of returns that just get dumped in dumpsters and from those fast fashion companies.

Morgan Hutchinson, founder BURU ([00:18:26](#)):

So it's responsible, but also because it's dead stock, you can buy them at a better price. So what a designer once paid for that fabric to have it custom made for them or a company, we can now buy that at a fraction of the price, which allows us to offer these beautiful tailored shirt dresses in incredible fabrics at half the price that you might see something similar. And also, we are direct to consumer. The only wholesale accounts that we do are when we do an exclusive for someone we don't want you to ever see the same guru piece on our site, as you would see say on the sill or the avenue. We have some new partners coming up because that was one of the things that we thought was so broken when we were a marketplace ourselves, was that competition and it works for other people.

Morgan Hutchinson, founder BURU ([00:19:15](#)):

It would obviously, as I mentioned earlier, we couldn't find a way to make it work, so we shifted gears, but that's how we keep that price down are really those two things. And then additionally having the factory ourselves. So we've eliminated the middleman there. We don't have a contract manufacturer that's also taking a markup on it. It is truly, there are full-time employees and so that eliminates charge up. We can charge exactly for their time versus it being charged for their time and then doubled so that the owner of the factory makes even more. So. Yeah, that's another way.

Laura Cox Kaplan ([00:19:58](#)):

And this is a business that you and your husband have largely bootstrapped, correct?

Morgan Hutchinson, founder BURU ([00:20:02](#)):

100% bootstrapped. We've not taken outside money. We own it 51% me, 49% him. So it is female majority that we're also female really heavy in female employees though our head of production is a man. And also our cutter and sample makers I'm sorry, pattern maker men, but the rest of the team other than Brett is female.

Laura Cox Kaplan ([00:20:32](#)):

Awesome. I love that. I absolutely love that. Maybe talk a bit about, just quickly why you made that determination, why that was important for you guys to bootstrap versus going out and getting private funding.

Morgan Hutchinson, founder BURU ([00:20:44](#)):

Absolutely. So I think my husband actually comes from private equity, was spent his career in finance, which is very helpful. And I just wanna sidebar for any female starting their own business. I'm not a

dummy when it comes to business, but it is not my expertise. I think it's one reason, just one of the reasons we're a great team, but you have to find somebody who can do that for you and guide you because it is every bit as important as your idea, your talents. They are literally hand in hand. And just wanna make sure I get that in there <laugh>, because he has been the reason that we could bootstrap. He's so creative with how we use our money, which buckets it goes into, and how we scramble and make all of that work at times when, you know, have huge inventory buys. I was texting with a friend this morning who has a business and it's a little younger than ours.

Morgan Hutchinson, founder BURU ([00:21:43](#)):

She's doing so amazing. But she was asking me some questions and I just mentioned that we, because our domestic production is through payroll and our overseas production is cash payment, we cannot use any credit for our inventory. And she just responded with, oh my god, this terrifying <laugh>. And it really can be because they're huge swings, so you have to be prepared. And he was, we've bootstrapped, we do not come from money. I know that's a weird thing to say, but I think in fashion, if you do a lot of digging, you'll find some of these brands come. There's a lot of trust funds, which is amazing and great. I just say it to be an encouragement to someone who may doesn't have a trust fund that it can be done, but you have to be scrappy. I mean, we still do a ton of our own photo shoots.

Morgan Hutchinson, founder BURU ([00:22:37](#)):

We're very hands on. We outsource when we absolutely have to. And we are slow to hire. We push that limit a lot. At the Southern Sea, someone said, so who's your social media director? And I really found myself almost being embarrassed to say we don't have one, which I think actually is bizarre at our size and it's something that we're working on. But for us, the production side has so been the focus and getting the product perfect that, I guess what I'm saying is when you bootstrap, you can't do everything at once and you have to set those expectations for yourself that it could be slower, but in the end you have control of not just your business but of your life. And that was so important for us. We want our kids to be with us, we want our kids to be involved. And if you're answering to investors who want you to grow a hundred x in a five days <laugh> because they want their payout, some of those things are really impossible and we get this one life.

Morgan Hutchinson, founder BURU ([00:23:46](#)):

And so for us, the bootstrapping was for that very reason. Now, there have been some really hard days and tears and there's lots of stress and we feel the weight of the world on our shoulders a lot. But you would if it was an investor's money also. So the way I look at that is that pressure is there, but when you just answer to each other and to your family, it opens up your life to really be your own. And that is sustainable to me. One of my favorite quotes is that entrepreneurs don't fail. They quit or give up. And I think if I was answering to investors all the time, and if so much of our life was spent showing them financials and all of those things, I think I would burn out. I just know myself well enough. So

Laura Cox Kaplan ([00:24:42](#)):

I love that. Yeah, I love that perspective. I think it's so, you're so honest in the way that you talk about that, and I think it's really important for people to understand that piece of your story and that piece of

your journey. There were so many questions that I had that popped into my head but first I love for you to talk about where that scrappiness comes from. Where does that instinct to take risk, even if it's hard, and even if you're crying and even if you have to curl up in a ball occasionally to just get through it, where does that appetite for risk come from for you, do you think?

Morgan Hutchinson, founder BURU ([00:25:20](#)):

It's so interesting you asked this and my mom and I have talked about it because she is incredibly risk adverse. And so the scrappiness, I do attribute some to growing up in a really small town where resources were slim pickings and you had to be creative and resourceful to get things done. Where

Laura Cox Kaplan ([00:25:42](#)):

Did you grow up, Morgan?

Morgan Hutchinson, founder BURU ([00:25:43](#)):

I grew up in Murray, Kentucky. There is a university there. I didn't go to school there, but it's a neat town, but it is in the middle of nowhere. It's two hours away from an airport. It's not on an interstate. It was an hour just to where there would've been a mall. Nothing. I can actually imagine shopping in a mall lately, but I mean when I was little, that was a big deal.

Laura Cox Kaplan ([00:26:08](#)):

And I grew up in a very similar, very similar environment, probably even smaller than where you grew up. I grew up in a place called Rising Star, which is in Texas, but it was also an hour from the mall, 30 minutes from the Walmart or the big grocery store, all those sorts of things. So

Morgan Hutchinson, founder BURU ([00:26:25](#)):

That yes, that is store

Laura Cox Kaplan ([00:26:27](#)):

That

Morgan Hutchinson, founder BURU ([00:26:27](#)):

Is even smaller. So I think that that helped to make me scrappy, you know, just couldn't go and grab things. And also growing up makes you a little <laugh> that helps develop some scrappy skills. I think the risk really comes in to play if I'm just being 100% honest in the moments in my life when people expected very little of me, now I'm not going to speak to my mother. She always encouraged, pushed, and was amazing in giving me that confidence to just spread my wings and fly. Though I think she wishes that we still lived in Murray <laugh> with our kids. But I think I had male math teachers who said to my mom, I don't know why she signed up for honors math. She should just be a cute cheerleader or, and those things, as silly as they sound when you're being told that in the seventh and eighth grade, they stick with you.

Morgan Hutchinson, founder BURU ([00:27:31](#)):

And I am very much a person who just in my course says, oh, I'll show you buddy. Watch me ace calculus. Even though I didn't really want to, it was more of in spite of you, I'll do this. I love that. And I think there's always been a little bit of that in me, and I think some of that small town girl wanting to see if you could keep up with city kids and experience life differently than what you had seen and just wanting more for myself, really wanting to go out there and do it. My mom tells stories about me asking, I always ask for custom business supplies for Christmas, like letterhead, <laugh> stamps with the date. I mean, what a weird, she would just go to the local office supply store and order me all this weird stuff. I wanted files. And so I think some of that I think is just innate in you. I've just wanted a business and it took me a while in my twenties I had a lingerie company with my two best friends, which was primarily wholesale driven, direct to consumer was just being discussed at the tail end of our experience. And I mean think business ownership and entrepreneurialism has just always been at my core.

Laura Cox Kaplan ([00:28:57](#)):

I love that L Let's talk a little bit about, you're talking about your earlier business, which was called passport panties, right? Maybe talk a bit about how that came to be and also how the experience has informed in some respects your experience at BURU.

Morgan Hutchinson, founder BURU ([00:29:16](#)):

Oh my goodness, 100%. I think that you should, whatever your experience is in life, be jotting down all the things, whether you're in paper, you're making mental notes. What I learned with Passport panties has in I think has made BURU possible. It's helped us to grow and know when those see those roadblocks ahead of time. Passport panties on a cocktail napkin at the Carlisle Hotel, which is interesting cuz I also met my husband at the Carlisle and our baby is named Carlisle <laugh>. So special place for me. But with my two best friends, like I said, who also grew up across the street from me and Mary Kentucky who are very scrappy and amazing and they live in Houston now. They're identical twins and have an incredible company called BTA Boom that I'll send you to later please, because it's incredible and you'll be a huge fan as well.

Morgan Hutchinson, founder BURU ([00:30:12](#)):

But we were in our twenties living in New York, and I guess I'm going to bring up my period again, which is not something I talk about on a daily basis, but that day we had been shopping in soho and I got my period, there used to be no bathrooms down there. You had to go and buy a Coke from someone to let them use the bathroom. And I thought, gosh, I wish I would just had a spare pair of panties. I would've gone into a dressing room while I was trying on and freshened up. And so we created these little travel kits that were beautiful panties packaged in Chic Bow, croc passport covers, and they had a little telled in there so you could freshen up your luggage, got lost, something to keep in your purse for girls on the go. And we had early write-ups in Women's Wear Daily, which helped get us into Henry Bindals and Bergdorfs and Neiman Marcus eventually.

Morgan Hutchinson, founder BURU ([00:31:10](#)):

And it was, like I said, completely wholesale. We dressed as vintage flight attendants. The sizes were window middle and aisle colors were beverages you would be served in first class, very marketing heavy, marketing driven, such a fun product. And then ultimately like I said, it was this wholesale market when 2008 hit and the financial crisis was happening in those stores were struggling, we saw the foot traffic at these markets go from jammed to crickets. We knew we needed to make a shift and we started making a shift into Shapewear, which I'll say to this day, some of the prettiest shape where I've ever seen. But our manufacturing partner who was based in Thailand and actually bought 25% of the company, really was struggling with the financial crisis as well. He was feeling so many of his brands, their orders had gone down and he just lost a little bit of traction, a little bit of faith in us when we were saying we had a purchase order from qvc, which would've changed the game.

Morgan Hutchinson, founder BURU ([00:32:20](#)):

And they ask for this in it's amazing when you work with qvc, what goes into it and what's required of you after the purchase order. And he couldn't get all the samples done that they wanted. They have to be production quality samples and we missed our deadline and you get one shot and that's it. And there were lots of tears over that. And to this day, none of us can watch that movie about Joy who created the hangers. I was just thinking about that. You're like, oh my gosh, we were so close. But that wasn't supposed to be our path for some reason. And so what I learned from that specific takeaways for Guru was I don't want to sell Guru wholesale, at least not in the traditional way. Like I said, we've had some really amazing partnerships doing exclusives, and we're in the process of trying to buy a building down here to grow the factory three to four times.

Morgan Hutchinson, founder BURU ([00:33:13](#)):

And my fingers are crossed. I know this is a podcast and you can't see me. But if that goes through, then we just have so many opportunities to do more exclusive collaborations with people and sort of shift the wholesale gear. But the other thing I learned goes back to that investment piece and what we thought was the perfect marriage of having our production associated with us in terms of owning 25% of us that they would have our best interest in mind actually ended up shutting us down because he had the control. We weren't just saying, no, give us our goods right now. We're a customer. He felt he had say in it. And that's so interesting. So those things that sound so good on paper are probably the ones that you need to spend the most time considering and making sure they're right for you.

Morgan Hutchinson, founder BURU ([00:34:08](#)):

And I know in the end it was what was right for my life and for the girls life. I know we're not girls anymore, but I'll forever call them <laugh> girls because we met when we were three years old. But I think that those are probably the two biggest takeaways. And then that investment part kind of leans on this as well, is the control aspect of it. So right now, as I mentioned that we're 50% our own factory, 50% imported for BURU, the 50% that is in control has saved us during Covid. I know it's contributed to our growth and it's because of the control. We brought everything in house. And if you've never produced clothing, I don't know that that actually means much, but I'll break it down in maybe three sentences. When you produce overseas, it's a one stop shop. You give them your tech packs, your designs, the fabric, they handle it, they handle the cutting, the grading.

Morgan Hutchinson, founder BURU ([00:35:11](#)):

The grading is when you go from size to size. When you produce domestically, traditionally it is all different people. You select your fabrics, that's one step. You create the design, you have a pattern maker who's separate from the person who grades it, who's separate from the person who does the markers, which is what's given to a cutter to lay out like giant paper doll patterns kind of you can imagine that. So your cutter is separate and then your cut and then your sewing is separate. So imagine the organization that takes and how many people you're relying on to hit your deadlines. Well, when you bring all of that and you have your pattern maker, your greater your cutter, all the things I just mentioned, when that's all in one, you can say, okay, we just sold these dresses for a presale. This is our top priority. This is what has got, here's the deadline, it's gotta get out the door. And we know that it can because no one other company can come in and jump in front of us who's making 15,000 or something where we're making not 15,000. But

Laura Cox Kaplan ([00:36:22](#)):

That's so fascinating.

Morgan Hutchinson, founder BURU ([00:36:24](#)):

So

Laura Cox Kaplan ([00:36:24](#)):

I that's

Morgan Hutchinson, founder BURU ([00:36:25](#)):

Fascinating. I wanna make sure that applies to other people's business, but just I think we live in such an outsourced world right now, which is exactly what some businesses need, but being able to evaluate that in your own business, do you need to outsource everything or what can you control? What can you bring and maybe bring in in-house people to help you with it, but you might find that the control is more valuable than the flip side of that convenience of outsourcing, I guess. Yeah.

Laura Cox Kaplan ([00:36:56](#)):

Oh my gosh, that's so interesting. I really never thought about it like that. And I suspect a lot of people listening probably haven't either. One of the things I'd love for you to talk about as you, I think mentioned earlier in the conversation, the southern coterie, this conversation is part of our collaborative series with the Southern Sea, and so I'm really happy to have a chance to talk to you. We've talked to a number of incredibly talented business founders and business owners that are part of this amazing this amazing community. The theme for the Southern Sea this year has been blooming growing and evolving. And one of the questions that I had for you, as you talk about passport panties and now you talk about BURU and the original inspiration for both of those businesses really came from what you were experiencing in your own life. You were young and in your twenties when you created passport panties and you were a new mom when you created BURU. Maybe talk about how you think about the brand evolving and where you think it's likely to go as you continue to evolve in your personal journey.

Morgan Hutchinson, founder BURU ([00:38:11](#)):

100%. So like I said, I believe once a mom, always a mom. So I know I'm going to be, obviously the goal is to get older. The alternative is not something that I

Laura Cox Kaplan ([00:38:24](#)):

God, really? Yeah,

Morgan Hutchinson, founder BURU ([00:38:25](#)):

<laugh>. Right. But it's funny you asked that because I was just thinking about it the other day because I used to joke, when my knees get saggy, I'm not going to be in these photos anymore. So anyway, we were looking back through pictures in Mexico and I was like, I think my time is coming and oh, stop. I'm really, I'm not serious about that, especially now because I've realized, well that's absolutely ridiculous, Morgan. And just a stupid thought to begin with. But it's just been a joke. But it has me thinking at what point does this shift, at what point is a new 30 year old mom looking at me and not realizing these clothes could be for her. But I think the attitude of motherhood and dressing is for me is wear what you want when you want, and BURU will be there to support you. And we're going to make it washable for whatever phase you're in, whether that is the spit up phase or the sweating hot flash phase.

Morgan Hutchinson, founder BURU ([00:39:27](#)):

And I'm going to be just talking about it and when it becomes my memories, I'll be talking about it. But at that point, there will be so many other faces of this brand. I'm still the face of the brand and still the customer, our core customer, to be honest, because I did have kiddos so spread out and so much later, my baby is the age of a lot of our newest customers first, but that still keeps me in their world. And so I can speak to it and when I finally feel like maybe I can't, then I'll just be speaking to the next phase of our customer and we'll have someone who's speaking more to that. And a lot of the reasons that we do these collaborations is for that very reason. And finding who we collaborate with is filling those holes, if you will, of what I don't represent to our customers.

Laura Cox Kaplan ([00:40:27](#)):

Interesting. Yeah, I love

Morgan Hutchinson, founder BURU ([00:40:29](#)):

That. That can be older than me, obviously younger than me is helpful. Different size than me, different skin color than me. And those are really, I love the collaborations because I find them fun and I love working with other women and helping their ideas to come to life as well. But for me it's showing our customers different people in the clothes. And I think that will be our evolution as we grow.

Laura Cox Kaplan ([00:41:00](#)):

Yeah, it's very integrated too, into your social media marketing, which I guess every great brand is doing and presumably trying to do it really well. You do an incredible job of telling that brand story and really bringing it to life. But maybe talk about how you approach social media and your marketing and the

collaboration piece with these other brands or these other influencers. Maybe talk a little bit about how that works and your mindset behind it. You already said you're looking for people that look different than you that maybe represent different aspects of the brand, but maybe give us a little more about that, that people might have some takeaways.

Morgan Hutchinson, founder BURU ([00:41:42](#)):

Of course. So I go with social media and I think this word is overused. Maybe I should have gotten a thesaurus and come up with a different one. But it is very authentic for us. And I've been asked before, how do you make it so authentic? How do you become authentic? And I always laugh a little bit inside when I get that question, cuz I think, oh, you're so far from it if you're asking me that <laugh>. But

Laura Cox Kaplan ([00:42:09](#)):

Right.

Morgan Hutchinson, founder BURU ([00:42:09](#)):

This is the best example that I can really give. We definitely have photo shoots where we use professional photographers and we know that there's a balance between the number of selfies you post and sort of these aspirational images. So those are two very extremes. I'd say the bulk of what we do falls right in the middle. And the pictures we take, not just for launches but just everyday life are taken in real moments. So for example, we were just on our spring break trip, I actually wear our cotton teagan skirts as coverups over our bathing suits. So on the way to the pool with all three kids running down, there's 150 stairs to the pool at quick small, this amazing place. So 150 steps later, Brett was just behind me and was like, oh, let's just snap some going down. Put your bag down cuz it looks, it didn't match.

Morgan Hutchinson, founder BURU ([00:43:06](#)):

But other than that, the picture was 100% authentic and taken on the way to the pool. Love that five minutes spent just pausing. And so it's real. And I'd like to think that our customers and our followers feel that and see it. I mean, of course you have to take some that are planned when you have launches, but even those, our kids are usually standing right there with me. If they wanna be in the picture, great. They're not forced. Usually you'll see. That's why there's only one in the picture and not all three, two of them have declined.

Laura Cox Kaplan ([00:43:40](#)):

Just wait until they get to be teenagers. Yeah, it's a whole,

Morgan Hutchinson, founder BURU ([00:43:43](#)):

Yeah, you never know is going to be grabbed by aum, but they are their real photos. And so I think that our brand's story is told because it's my life and I know it's the life of so many of our customers. I try to encourage our moms get in the picture. I have so few pictures with my mom or of her in general. And so I do try to encourage that. And I think if you like your outfit, you might be more willing to take your picture.

Laura Cox Kaplan ([00:44:14](#)):

Yeah, I I'm sure that there are a lot of women who are listening who are wondering how the heck they can teach their husband to take a decent photograph, myself included.

Morgan Hutchinson, founder BURU ([00:44:23](#)):

Well, I tell you what,

Laura Cox Kaplan ([00:44:25](#)):

My husband very

Morgan Hutchinson, founder BURU ([00:44:26](#)):

Good, Brett is very good and has had lots of experience now, but there is a great app called Tap Go writing it down like T I C T A P G O. And it is really easy editing, cropping and I mean, nothing major but enough where you can take a photo that was maybe an eight and turn it into a 10 or a six, turn it into an eight, just depending, but it, our social media is real. And that's when we see a lot of engagement is when they're the most real. To be honest. A selfie is still going to get more likes than a pretty picture. And when I mean pretty picture, I mean more out in the life, <laugh> with a pretty background. So I think that realness is what speaks to our customer specifically.

Laura Cox Kaplan ([00:45:24](#)):

Yeah, I love that. I love that. I would love Morgan talking about being authentic, a really important part of your story and one that you and I just for the benefit of the listeners who are listening, just so you know that I'm not springing this on Morgan a part of Morgan's story is her struggle with mental health and she speaks very openly about this topic. And because May is mental health awareness month, we talked about in advance the fact that Morgan had these struggles and that she was willing to talk to us about that on the podcast today. So I am really grateful that you're willing to talk about that, share a bit of your journey with us, Morgan.

Morgan Hutchinson, founder BURU ([00:46:08](#)):

Of course when I was 27, I was diagnosed with bipolar, was lots of misdiagnosis and figuring out what was really going on with me,

Laura Cox Kaplan ([00:46:22](#)):

What was happening at the time,

Morgan Hutchinson, founder BURU ([00:46:24](#)):

A lot huge swings, so big lows lots of suicidal thoughts, which is something I still deal with on a weekly basis. And it took me a long time to realize that that was not normal. I just assumed that everyone was doing that and now I am aware they're not. And then mania. And if you're not familiar with bipolar, the manic portion of it on the outside seems fantastic. You have tons of energy, you're accomplishing so

much. A lot of the times you're more social or at least this is my experience, obviously. Mm-hmm. Different for everyone. But for me in particular, my family, I think in a manic phase, wouldn't think anything was wrong with me, but it's actually when I would be the most detrimental to myself and the most likely to act on those suicidal thoughts. And so I had at 28, I was admitted into a mental institution and after a suicide attempt and spent a week in a regular hospital, hospital and then was released into a mental institution, which was one of the most eye-opening experiences of my life and amazing growth and understanding of how serious my disease was and how I would very likely live with it for the rest of my life, but that it could be managed.

Morgan Hutchinson, founder BURU ([00:47:51](#)):

And I think another thing a lot of people don't know is that you can actually have remission periods. I'm putting that in quotes for some reason, but remission periods of it. And that can be great and also really scary because it can sneak back up on you.

Morgan Hutchinson, founder BURU ([00:48:08](#)):

I have to take medicine every day. I'm sure I will forever it. It's not always the same. There are definitely times when your body's changing. It's been very challenging after the pregnancies, usually during the pregnancies and nursing, I'm okay. And then when that ends, it's a whole new round of medicine and experimenting. But overall, I'm a very high functioning bipolar person. I have an incredible support of my family and friends who check in on me. And Brett is so understanding and constantly helpful and aware. And that makes it possible. If you're struggling, if anyone listening is struggling with it, your support system is every bit as important as your meds. And that can also be your doctor and making sure that they're good and checking in on you. But I think the reason I talk about it openly is because I function and making sure that if someone gets that diagnosis, they don't spiral into a hole of, oh my gosh, life is over.

Morgan Hutchinson, founder BURU ([00:49:19](#)):

Because in fact, for me, getting the diagnosis was a revelation. It was, okay, I am not, I'm not making this up. I am, this is real. And we can find ways to manage it. And I've done so much cognitive therapy training, which is every bit as helpful as the medicine. And it's something I deal with. Just like someone with diabetes, I always say it's kind of diabetes of the brain. It shouldn't be taboo. And I think the more we talk about it, the less taboo it is, the more people will get help, they'll get help faster because they won't feel like there's a stigma against them.

Laura Cox Kaplan ([00:50:02](#)):

So, right. So I'm so grateful. I mean, you're such an inspiration on so many levels. The fact that you're willing to talk about your journey and your struggles in such an authentic way so that you can help other people and also make sure that they know they're not alone if they're struggling with these things. I will include some resources in the show notes for this episode as well, for anyone who may be listening who may be struggling as well. But thank you for sharing that because it's such an important message, not just during mental health Awareness month, but always. So thank you for that. Oh, of course. Morgan, I'd love for you to talk about what influence means to you as that's a big theme for this podcast. Building

and sustaining influence is really key to getting whatever you want out of your life. What does this topic of influence mean to you?

Morgan Hutchinson, founder BURU ([00:51:00](#)):

So I love this question. To me, in my life, I think influence sort of goes hand in hand with trust. If I'm personally influenced by someone, it's because I trust their opinion, their values. So for me, if I've gained any influence doing this, I think it's because I have been honest. And you ask about our marketing earlier, our marketing has been very real. I never wanna pitch something to a mom and try to sell her a garment that I wouldn't wear in my daily life. And so I think when they see me walking the walk, not just talking the talk actually wearing a ball skirt to the grocery store, if that's what I wanna wear that day, or if I'm going somewhere at night, I don't have time to fiddle with changing, then I became a trustworthy source to them. They believed what I was telling them.

Morgan Hutchinson, founder BURU ([00:51:56](#)):

And I think that that's where your influence starts. And so then if you're a trustworthy person, then when you ask for things that you want probably have proven influence, you probably have numbers you can share or whatever it is that you're asking for the stats to sort of back up why you think you're worthy of getting what you're asking for. But I think you also are more likable if you've been honest with people and you are sharing real things going on in your life, then you are believable and you can influence them in a positive way. I, I'll speak to something that has nothing to do with Guru or the clothes, but as we were posting pictures from our vacation, the dms were just flooding in, is this kid friendly? I'm going to do a whole recap on the place, but I was thinking I, it's a lot easier to answer those questions honestly. When you're out there taking your three kids to a place that, by the way, I don't think is very kid friendly, I was great. I mean, if you wanna take 150 stairs to the pool with your two-year olds, and for you,

Laura Cox Kaplan ([00:53:11](#)):

It was beautiful. It was a beautiful setting.

Morgan Hutchinson, founder BURU ([00:53:14](#)):

We had an absolute ball. And we tend to take our kids to not so kid-friendly places, and we take them in our guru bus all summer long. And I think that over the years people have seen me do those things. And so I've gained a spot, a teeny tiny spot in their lives as being someone that they could look to for not just fashion advice, but like, oh, okay, how did you do that with your three kids? And so it's a full circle story. So if you want influence, then you gotta live it. You have to. You have to be doing it. I always find it interesting when I see people selling you something that they don't own or didn't try. Isn't that an interesting thought? So how does that play out? How does that feel real? So everything that, I don't wear anything that's not BURU. And I always get tickled on Instagram when I see like, oh, where are your shoes from? I didn't design, but I don't design our accessories. I source them so that we can be a one-stop shop for people. But I'm always like, oh, it's BURU because I don't wear anything else. Because to me, that is being the most representative of our brand that I can possibly be and the most honest and therefore hopefully influential, I suppose.

Laura Cox Kaplan ([00:54:39](#)):

I love that. And it applies whether you're selling clothing or widgets or podcasts. I mean, it doesn't make any difference. It's a message that applies no matter what. I cannot stop this interview until you talk about the BURU bus <laugh> because we haven't talked about that. And I know a little bit about the BURU bus, but just really quickly, what is that?

Morgan Hutchinson, founder BURU ([00:55:07](#)):

Okay, so as I mentioned before, Brett comes from private equity, but it was actually in the car industry. When we moved over to Beijing, it was with a group of investors to buy car dealerships in Northern China. So I say that because it was truly his idea to buy our first sprinter van. So they're the big, long, tall sprinter vans is what they are. And we call them the BURU bus because I love alliteration. And so they're not school buses or anything.

Laura Cox Kaplan ([00:55:37](#)):

Is it more like a Winnebago? It's more like a,

Morgan Hutchinson, founder BURU ([00:55:40](#)):

It's a, so on the inside they look like stores. They have hardwood floors and beautiful loose sight racks, and they're really bright, white and shiny. And we bought the first one because we went and did a popup in Birmingham and we rented a U-Haul. And when we got there, of course all the racks had fallen over and there were clothes everywhere. And though we sold a lot of things, Brett said, okay, nope, <laugh> not doing that exact plan again. And so he reached out to a buddy who is the largest seller of sprinters in the country, and we got our first one. We now have four as a family a little bit differently to accommodate the three kids has a smaller store section, larger human section, but for the most part, the other three, which are based in Tampa. So it covers all Florida and little lower south one in Nashville that covers the Southeast and one in Austin, Texas, which covers Texas, Oklahoma.

Morgan Hutchinson, founder BURU ([00:56:35](#)):

And they pop up they'll pop in stores, they pop up in homes for private shopping parties. And it is truly our way to a grassroots efforts to be where our customer wants us to be and to let her touch and feel and try on and shop with her friends if she wants. There's no charge to have the BURU bus at your house. It's our way of getting out there in the world as a direct to consumer brand so that we're not just digital, that we are also hands on and we get to meet our customers. And I learn, when I do the pop-ups, when I'm there myself, I learn more watching five women try on and I think, oh, that zipper's not in the right place. Or, oh, that needs an inch through the boobs especially cause I have no boobs anymore. I'm like, oops, <laugh>, I wasn't accommodating.

Morgan Hutchinson, founder BURU ([00:57:21](#)):

We're nice tatas. I was culminating for sad little flat ones. And it's one of my favorite parts about the business. It's definitely a different approach but it allows us to partner with so many other female owned businesses, whether it be stores or other brands. We pop up so often with Menon Gavigan, we have this

She Said/She Said Podcast With Laura Cox Kaplan

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really fun one with Swan Beauty coming up in Lexington and we're about to pop to Charleston Charlotte with Hatch the maternity line based out of New York. So the buses have been just that personal touch for Beru and really helped us grow.

Laura Cox Kaplan ([00:58:01](#)):

Morgan, I mean, what a treat and what a joy to spend time with you today. I know folks listening are really going to love this conversation, and I am so grateful to have the time with you and that you shared so authentically your story. You are amazing. You are really an inspiration. I really appreciate

Morgan Hutchinson, founder BURU ([00:58:18](#)):

It. Well, that also implies to you, I love how you're just featuring and empowering and lifting women up. I think it's so incredible and I'm so honored to be among the incredible women you've had on your podcast already.

Laura Cox Kaplan ([00:58:31](#)):

Thank you. Really appreciate it. Friend. Thanks so much for joining me today for this conversation with the amazing Morgan Hutchinson. I'd love to know what you thought about Morgan's perspective around trust and the connection that she makes with influence. I really, really loved that dimension of all of this, and I thought that her focus on trust also underscored so much of what we talk about in this conversation as it relates to connecting with our customer, being vulnerable, sharing parts of our journeys that are really personal, how that can really help build that level of trust and connection with your customer, with your listener, with your follower, with your client, whatever the case may be. I'd love to know what you thought, and as always, I hope you found this investment of your time well worthwhile. I'd love to hear from you, so please send me some feedback. You can reach me via the contact link that I've included in the show notes for this episode. You can also leave a review on iTunes or wherever you're listening to this podcast. I would be really, really grateful. I love hearing from you and I'm so glad to have you here on this journey with me. In the meantime, you take care. Have a great week and I'll talk to you again soon.

Laura Cox Kaplan ([00:59:55](#)):

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