**Navigating Motherhood & Entrepreneurship | S4 EP104**

What we're going to be doing today is we're going to be looking at a very, very different topic, not the topic of parenting, but the topic of entrepreneurship and particularly women in entrepreneurship. What are some of the strategies or things you do to support women and parenting in your business? And you see it happening all the time that our parenting journey gives us massive insights into the pain points and then also we're attracted to entrepreneurship because of the flexibility. What would you advise women who are interested in entrepreneurship or who are starting a business in terms of what they could do, you know, your kind of essentials for success? I think most moms find this is that you want to own your own time and have flexibility and you don't want to go back and work for somebody.

You don't want to work long hours because you want to be able to drop everything and run and get your little one if they're sick from nursery school or attend the ballet recitals without having to ask somebody if you can do it, you know. And so I think that is part of what makes entrepreneurship so attractive. Welcome to Sense by Meg Fora, the podcast that's brought to you by ParentSense, the app that takes guesswork out of parenting.

If you're a new parent, then you are in good company. Your host Meg Fora is a well-known OT, infant specialist and the author of eight parenting books. Each week we're going to spend time with new moms and dads just like you to chat about the week's wins, the challenges and the questions of the moment.

Subscribe to the podcast, download the ParentSense app and catch Maker every week to make the most of that first year of your little one's life. And now meet your host. Welcome back, moms and dads.

I am Meg Fora and this is Sense by Meg Fora. And I am just delighted that you have joined me here today as you do each week. And today is a very, very different podcast and very different theme.

So usually we talk about parenting issues and sometimes I have an expert who joins me and sometimes a mom is the expert and she comes with a whole lot of questions to me. And sometimes we have Tove Gant as our host to ask me questions about parenting. But this week is completely different.

The only things that are common is that I'm on and that Tove is going to be our host. And so we're going to welcome her. And what we're going to be doing today is we're going to be looking at a very, very different topic, not the topic of parenting, but the topic of entrepreneurship and particularly women in entrepreneurship.

So Tove, I am super excited that you're here today with me. You are an entrepreneur who I respect immensely having owned your own business. You have walked the walk, you talk the talk and you've been right at the rock face.

And today you are going to be sharing the journey with me and having a look at a few questions posed to me about my entrepreneurship journey. So welcome, Tove. Thanks for having me, and absolutely love this topic.

I think it's a topic that becomes so relevant in so many women's lives, particularly after they have children and they find that the kind of traditional workforce just doesn't support their parenting journey or the parent that they want to be. And so I've seen in our community, particularly the questions coming through from moms around, you know, how do I start my own business? What opportunities are out there? And so I think this is such an important topic to unpack. And as two moms that have done it and are on the journey, you with a hell of a lot more experience, I think we need to, yeah, I think we need to unpack a little bit.

And so I think the founding place is always, you know, when you look at starting a business, I guess, why, what inspired you to start, you know, baby sense, parent sense, play sense, your kind of journey as a whole? Yeah, well, you know, interestingly, today, I didn't grow up in an entrepreneurial family, which I know you did. I mean, your mom started Mad Dogs, which back in the day was just an institution, a clothing institution. So you had always grown up in an entrepreneurial home.

I didn't. And so, and it certainly wasn't part of my plan to be an entrepreneur. The answer as to why I went down the journey was that after I wrote Baby Sense, and it became a bestseller, I wanted some flexibility.

And to be honest, I wanted to be able to earn money when I wasn't working. So when you're an occupational therapist, when you go on holiday, you earn naught because you are billing for hours. Yeah, just like any professional lawyers, doctors, and so on.

And I wanted to have some sort of income going on while I was with my kids while I was away. And that was actually why we started Baby Sense. So Baby Sense, we started as a parenting brand or baby brand of soft products.

They were called Baby Softs. That means that they're mainly made out of fabric, things like swaddling blankets, carriers, duty blankies. And we called it Baby Sense based on the fact that the Baby Sense book had become a bestseller.

So that was really, I almost stumbled into entrepreneurship from that perspective. And then I guess that I was bitten by the bug. And so when I sold Baby Sense in 2014, and I'm no longer involved there at all, it kind of became almost ingrained in me to bring solutions to moms and to do it in my own time.

And that was how we started PlaySense. And then more recently, ParentsSense, the app company. And did you find kind of pivotal turning moments with your parents once you had your children? Did that impact your journey on the kind of entrepreneurship or in the entrepreneurship space? Yeah, definitely.

I mean, and I think most moms find this is that you want to own your own time and have flexibility. And you don't want to go back and work for somebody. You don't want to work long hours because you want to be able to drop everything and run and get your little one if they're sick from nursery school or attend the ballet recitals without having to ask somebody if you can do it, you know? And so I think that is part of what makes entrepreneurship so attractive.

Obviously, there was another facet, and that was that becoming a parent really honed my skills and my insights into the parenting problem, you know, kind of what we all face. The pain point. Yeah.

The pain point. And so I really wanted to solve that pain point. And, you know, it's so interesting to have a couple of weeks ago, we had on a swimming teacher and Jo Wilson, and she spoke about Aquasensory, which is her business.

And she said the same thing happened to her. She didn't want to work for somebody else. She'd taken a little bunch of swimming lessons, had never been a swimming teacher before, and then kind of pivoted her whole career into being a swimming teacher.

And you see it happening all the time that our parenting journey gives us massive insights into the pain points. And then also, we attracted to entrepreneurship because of the flexibility. And I mean, I think I think we've painted a very rosy picture of the entrepreneurial journey, right? Doing what you love and also very, very fabulous.

So I'm going to now spin it on the other side and say, I guess, what have your biggest challenges been in the space? Because, you know, you've had several businesses, some that you've still got, some that you've exited, you know, along that journey, what have your biggest, you know, your pain points been? Yeah, so I guess you could divide pain points into two pieces. One is inherent entrepreneurship pain points, which if you were a man, woman, mother, not, and not a mother, career woman, you would have that bucket of pain points. And I'll talk about those.

And then you have the pain points of the juggle is real, like the juggle of managing little ones. And I suppose that you would actually experience if you were running your own business. And also if you're working in corporate, because the juggle is real when you're working full stop.

So let's start there. I mean, one of the biggest pain points is the juggle. And, you know, it's so interesting.

I'm starting a business, particularly if it's a brand. In other words, it's something that has to face the customer. You started Foxbox, and that was customer facing.

So that was a brand. Baby Sense was a brand, Play Sense is a brand, Parent Sense is a brand. That I've always said a brand takes on a life of its own.

It's like another human being. It is exactly like another child. And, and so you really have like this enormously demanding monster that is demanding from you just like your children are.

And the reality is that you then have kind of four demands, maybe five, you've got the demand of your partner, your husband and their needs. You've got the very loud and noisy and probably the most noisy demanding demands coming from your children. You've got some social demands, and then you've got your business demand.

And then you also actually do have some needs yourself, but I mean, some way, some way down there. Yeah, I mean, I don't know where it is. Yes, apparently you do.

And so, I mean, the reality is that you have all these demands and something has to drop, some ball has to drop. And that's the reality of being an entrepreneur is that in that juggle, a ball drops and it pretty much drops every day. It's just which ball drops.

And on the days when it's you, you might just feel a little bit frazzled. On the day that it's your partner, you might end up having extra fights. On the day that it's your children, like you forget to pick them up from school because you were so deep in an Excel spreadsheet or something.

The mom guilt is just completely overwhelming. And on the day it's your business, it's like the shit could really hit the fan if you let that ball drop because your business can fall over. So, you know, it's almost like every day you're trying to decide which is okay or which is the least needy on the day.

And resistance, right? Exactly. And it's so hard. And, you know, I think that probably goes for moms.

I know moms who work in corporate will also feel it. And, you know, sometimes I get quite irritated with this emancipation of women and this feminist movement where, you know, women can have everything. You can be the career woman, you can be the mom.

Of course, the mom demands never go away. So every demand that you had in the 1930s, you've still got in the 2030s, you know, coming up. And it's just that you manage them all because you're expected to.

And so I just think that in some respects, society and ourselves are a little unfair because it is really, really tough to run a business, you know, and I do sometimes think that, you know, and it's an interesting debate because every mom in their own situation thinks that they have got it toughest. Like the moms who are at home, I mean, and look, I wouldn't want to be that because I've always loved to work, but their journey is really hard because they are dealing with whining kids all day, not having adult conversation, not feeling fulfilled in their career. And the mom who's in corporate is jumping in, you know, to the whims of some other person.

And the person who's in entrepreneurship is dropping balls all over the place, you know? So it's, I think that those are some of the massive challenges. And so entrepreneurship, as romantic as it does sound, is not romantic. It really is hard.

And then the other pain points, which are more the pain points that are inherent in any entrepreneurship business, those things, I mean, people have to understand when they go into entrepreneurship, like that is horrifically terrifying. Like how long is my runway? Am I going to run out of money? Can I pay my staff bills at the end of the month? What happens when that shipment doesn't arrive from the East in time for the orders that I've got? What happens when one of my retailers, like when I was in Baby Sense, goes under and I'm the last person in the line to get paid? You know, we at one point in Baby Sense, we had nine months worth of capital tied up in stock because we'd have stock and materials coming out of China. And we had a very large retailer whose name I won't mention in South Africa, gives the suppliers 90 day terms.

That means that there's 90 days of your cash tied up with that big retailer. And so that's three months plus the six months of the fabric on the ocean and getting manufactured. You've got nine months worth of cash tied up in a business.

And Philip and I bonded the house to do that with Baby Sense. And, you know, so I think there are things that are utterly terrifying that maybe if I'd known all along, maybe I wouldn't have chosen this entrepreneurship journey. And I mean, that's an interesting piece that you share, because one thing you've highlighted there, which I think gets very underspoken about in the entrepreneur space, is that risk, that appetite for risk.

I think people talk about the kind of flexibility and the glamour and the being your own boss. But in order to really embrace the journey, you have to have a degree of appetite for risk, right? You're risking all day, whether you're tying your money up, whether it's with your staff, whether it's, you know, as you said, time away. There's always these elements of risk.

So do you think, you know, something in your life, in your journey made you super resilient or keen for the risk? Do you think it's like you've just been bitten by the bug and you sold out once and now you want to keep throwing it on black or like, what is the, what's the like the niggle that keeps you risk hungry? Yeah. So I've never been terribly risk adverse. So I am fine with risk.

And I've always been like that. And I find some excitement in risk as well. So I think you do have to have an appetite for risk.

And that is amplified significantly by my husband's resilience for risk. Like he can, he can really take on more risk than I'm even aware of. I mean, like with Baby Sense, I promise you, I did not know that we'd bonded the house.

Like, you know, I didn't understand the level of risk we were at. I think he completely understood it. I didn't fully understand it.

So that partnership, right? The fact that you had him supporting you to that degree, that you weren't even fully aware of that probably is a great, you know, like it's why your journey has gotten where it's gotten, right? You two work very, very closely together. Yeah. And he's, and he has always been my biggest champion.

And when I don't, when I don't want to take on risk, he's actually been pushing me towards risk. So even when I do get slightly risk averse, you know, he still pushes me in the direction. So I think, I think there's a certain amount of resilience, a certain amount of appetite for risk that is needed.

I think, you know, yeah. I mean, if I didn't have an appetite for risk, I wouldn't do it. And what's interesting is that entrepreneurship is just such a roller coaster and you get somewhat addicted to the highs, like when things are going well and you know, you've got a big, big, big corporate that's pursuing you or somebody reaches out with it, with a good deal.

And it's like, it gives you a buzz. Of course, that's completely met by the bottoms of the roller coaster, which is, oh my gosh, how am I going to meet, you know, pay the bills this month and, you know, all the other things that are going on. Yeah.

And I mean, I think one of the things that I, I mean, I've seen working with you and I've had in my business and I know all the mom friends that I have that are in the entrepreneurial space do it, is that, that juggle that you spoke about, especially that kind of working after hours, working late at night because you're picking up and your work never ends, right? You don't leave the office and come home and go, okay, I'm switching off now. You know, if I didn't deliver it at six o'clock, I'm home. It's just, you know, it's yours.

So if it's not done, no one's picking it up. It's not you. Exactly.

Exactly. You know, you're sitting with that kind of pressure as well. Yeah.

And I think, you know, I mean, you, you highlight something very interesting there. I mean, it is that kind of, it's the flexibility comes as a double-edged sword. So the one side of the flexibility is that, you know, you, you can, and, and I do, and you do drop everything to go and fetch the kids or be there at a, you know, at a swimming lesson or, you know, take them for their moms and tots group or their camber club group or whatever, you know, so, so you, you've got that wonderful flexibility, but what it means is, is that 11 o'clock, one o'clock in the morning, four o'clock in the morning, whatever time it is, you're behind your computer and, you know, ticking all the boxes that you didn't do at two o'clock in the afternoon.

So what's really interesting though, is that that's also a factor of being a mom to young children. And I'm in a slightly different phase of life now. So when I started BabySense, I was actually pregnant with my third.

And so I had BabySense plus three children under seven years old, like literally four children. And I was working every single night until about one o'clock in the morning. And then Ems would usually wake up at about five in the morning.

And so my day was like four hours of sleep and I just, I just got by on it. I just had to survive because otherwise the kids would have suffered or the business would have suffered. I mean, at the time, when I look back, I think probably our marriage suffered, but because Philip was so committed to the business, it didn't pull us apart.

We just did it together. Now my life is super different. My kids are grown up.

I mean, I've still got one in school, but the others are out of school already. And the reality is, and I'm also a 5am-er because I get a good night's sleep. So I'm up at 5am, I turn on my computer at five and I can work from five until 6.30 in the evening, you know, so a good, you know, a good 13 hours of work without looking up.

I mean, if I'm working from home without even standing up, and then I actually do close my computer at night. And then I have dinner with the family, which I've always done. And then I can actually not go back to work.

So I have got a lot more balance now. But in the early days of running a business, I was very much like you are Terve, because I see how you, you know, the hours that you work and they're stupid hours. But I know that it's because you've stolen some time from work in order to do the stuff that is a priority with your kids.

Absolutely. And I think that's the double-edged sword as well, when it is your own business, right? You feel like it's not like you can drop that ball, you literally can't. So you, although you're stealing those out, you have to get them back.

And I guess in this space, I mean, I know I've seen working with you how crucial mentorship has been on your journey, which has been very unique to me. I've never seen that before. And it's been wonderful to watch you and learn through your journey and your kind of mentorship piece.

Can you unpack that a little bit? Yeah, so I look, I'm very, always have been very open to criticism and to input. In fact, I love it. I thrive on it.

So I go and seek out input. And I've had a few people along my journey who've really helped me. I mean, in the early days of Baby Sense, and this is going back to, gosh, before 2010, I had two men in particular that were amazing.

The one actually at the time was the FD of Woolworths. I think it was, I think it was true, Woolworths, yeah. And he was just incredible.

And I used to sit with him and some of the truths that he told me, I just wish I'd listened to, because I didn't listen to all of them. He said to me, you've got to pick, in terms of Baby Sense, you've got to pick one revenue model. You can't be absolutely everything, the, you know, the events, the, the, the manufacturer, the distributor, the retailer, because we were doing everything.

We kind of owned our full channel and it was, you know, I wish I'd listened to him. So he was amazing. My second incredible mentor was a guy called Hayden Hedenreich, who actually became a partner in my business in Baby Sense.

He and I were partners in the international business. And he was the first person to sit down and actually teach me how to read a balance sheet and income statement. Because if you can believe it, I didn't know how to do that kind of five years into my business.

So, you know, he was an incredible mentor. And more recently, I've had a lot more women. And so, you know, I've had women who've been on my board and women who have been in, in similar businesses that I've sought out.

And then also, of course, my board of directors now on the ParentSense business are just incredible. And some of them I really do tap into. And some of my investors, I mean, I had a wonderful week this week in Joburg where I went and met some of my investors and really picked their brains.

So I think mentorship's important. And I do try to give it back as well. So, you know, when people do seek me out and say, look, can you just help me look at my business or whatever, then I often will do that as well.

And you've kind of touched on something, which is the female entrepreneurship piece and that impactful piece. And, you know, we're seeing that grow more and more. I think COVID definitely had an impact on that.

And now moms working from home, the balance, you know, it's become all very muddied and very messy. What are some of the strategies or things you do to support women and parenting in your business or businesses? This episode is brought to us by ParentSense, the all-in-one baby and parenting app that helps you make the most of your baby's first year. Don't you wish someone would just tell you everything you need to know about caring for your baby? When to feed them, how to wean them, and why they won't sleep? ParentSense app is like having a baby expert on your phone guiding you to parent with confidence.

Get a flexible routine, daily tips, and advice personalized for you and your little one. Download ParentSense app now from your app store and take the guesswork out of parenting. What are some of the strategies or things you do to support women and parenting in your business or businesses? So women in entrepreneurship is just an absolutely critical focus, should be a critical focus for, you know, for business in general and for funds to invest in.

There's so many interesting stats that get thrown out there. I think I read one this morning that only 2.4% of investment actually goes into women-founded businesses, into female-founded businesses, which is an absolute travesty. And another thing that I've read before is that when investment is given to women, it has the most impact on other people's lives because of how they channel that money and how they use that investment.

And, you know, there's just so many reasons to invest in women and sadly people don't. So, you know, I think women in business, it is challenging to raise money. It's challenging.

And, you know, I think it's an interesting thing. I think there's a, there's something in some women or maybe most women that makes them slightly less attractive for investors. And that might be their absolute, almost honesty and, you know, kind of transparency.

And you walked a journey with me last year where we went right down to the final line of actually getting quite a nice sizable investment and we lost it at the bitter end. And one of the reasons why we lost it is that I just went completely starting to give the incoming investors a worst case scenario, because, you know, I wanted to make sure that they were, they were coming into this business eyes wide open. You know, whereas if I was a little bit more brazen, which I think men often are in business, it would have been, listen, I'm going to shoot the lights out here and you're investing in a business that is way undervalued, you know, and, you know, and paint the big picture.

Whereas as a woman, we just, I just don't think we do that in the same way. So, you know, women are not necessarily, I mean, it's just a different way to do business. But, you know, supporting women in business is important.

The other part of supporting women in business for me is actually that we have an almost a hundred percent female team. And I always get such a delight when I'm sitting in my tech meetings and we're busy developing the Verticom web app at the moment, and which probably will almost be launched by the time this podcast goes out. And when I sit in my tech meetings, barring two people, it's all women and the developers are women as well.

And my co-founder is a woman in tech and the woman who developed our WhatsApp, our AYA chatbot WhatsApp is the most remarkable woman, Bertha. And so I'm surrounded by these frigging unbelievable women, you know, and the women who run my business and our marketing department. So I, so for me, it's not just, I mean, it is something that's deeply seated inside of me to surround myself by powerful women and to also then give them the freedom, because you give them the freedom, they'll give you way more than their chunk of flesh.

Yeah, I couldn't agree with you more. I think if you give parents, moms, particularly that space to allow themselves to be mom and to work, which is actually keeping most of the women we see, it allows them to keep a portion of themselves, right, intact. They love their work because it makes them feel like them, hang on to some kind of resemblance of what their life was pre-children.

If you give mom that, I think you, you know, you have her for life. And I think that that's an unbelievable thing. And then Meg, if we start looking to wrap up, what, what do you, what would you advise women who are interested in entrepreneurship or who are starting a business in terms of, of what they could do, you know, your, your kind of essentials for success? So first of all, you've got to have a very good and intact support system and you've got to have a hundred percent buy-in from that support system.

So you've got to have, whether it's a nanny or a mom or a mom-in-law and certainly your partner have to be fully invested in what you're doing. I think, because however hard you think it's going to be, it's going to be a hundred times harder. So you know, you need somebody who's fully on your side.

If your partner's kind of on the fence and they're saying, well, you know, I'd prefer you to be an at-home mom or I'd prefer you to just have a regular, you know, mornings only job or something. And then you're going to go into entrepreneurship. You're going to be swimming upstream and it'll be too difficult.

So I definitely think that you need to make sure you've got the support. The second thing is, is I do think you need to develop boundaries and you know, and those boundaries have, you know, you can sketch them out and I have always done that. So my boundaries were that in the mornings I would, I was always working.

So when the other moms were doing the lifts to the art museums, I wasn't always able to do that. I was a working mom, but in the afternoons, my business came second because I always did my kids' lifts. That was my thing.

And then, you know, and at the moment when I finished work at six o'clock in the evening, I've got a boundary around actually being with my family then because I've already worked 13 hours and I know I need respect. So I think boundaries help. And then also I had day boundaries.

Like I used, and I still do, like Fridays, at one point in my life, Fridays, I never worked on a Friday. I just did household admin so that, you know, the household didn't fall over. So that was like a really strict boundary.

I worked a four-hour week and then Fridays was, you know, all the other stuff that the household needed. So yeah, I think, I think boundaries are important, support is important. And then I do think you have to understand it's going to be, whatever you think, however hard you think it's going to be, it's going to be a lot harder.

And you know, I don't know that if I look at the financial success that I've had across selling baby scents and then across currently my salary from the two businesses, I don't think the transaction has worked in my favor. I actually think that I've probably lost money over the time. I think if, if, if I'd renovated a house, I probably would have made more money.

My mom always says that to me. She's like, just renovate a house. So, so I mean, I don't think that I've had that success, but you know, you touched on something just now that there's other reasons that we do what we do.

Like, you know, I, I love, I love my career because it has given me meaning. It's given me a piece of me that has, that stands separate from my children, that I am successful in my right outside of my children. And that's something that was important to me.

And number, number one, number two, the delight of being surrounded by women who are, who I'm, I'm giving the freedom to do the same things I'm doing, which is have flexibility. That like just gives me a zing. I love that.

And then of course, the impact of everything that I've ever done in the lives of moms. And I really have very high empathy for moms because I found becoming a mom the first time really hard. And so if I can make a mom's journey a little easier, like that's what it's all about.

So that impact piece also gives me a lot of meaning. So, you know, I think you've got to, you almost need to look at, um, the full package when you go into entrepreneurship, like maybe you're not going to make that much money, but on the other side, there's other value transactions. So you've got to weigh up that value transaction.

And then on the flip side, we have the cost because there is a cost with your kids. There's no doubt. And there is definitely a cost with your marriage too.

There will, there there's, you know, it's a, it's a transaction. So you've got to weigh it all up. It's a good way of looking at like an ROI pros and cons.

This is what you get, but then it comes at this. It's a really good way of thinking about it. And Megan, in terms of your future goals and aspirations for the business.

Yeah. So, um, we have, I still have two businesses. So PlaySense, um, which is the Play Group program.

Um, you know, in my mind that one will keep going on and on and we'll just grow very gently and organically and just really meet mom's needs where they are and little one's needs and teachers needs. So that's just a really more of a feel good business at the moment. I don't think there's massive plans for me to exit there, although we've got some quite nice discussions on the go at the moment with some Play Groups that we might start to actually run for them.

So, so, so that's, that's more holding onto and a little bit of legacy at the moment and not necessarily an exit in the next, in the close foreseeable future. And then with ParentSense, ParentSense is a massively scalable business. We've got four digital products.

Um, we've got two native apps, the ParentSense iOS app, the ParentSense Android.