

Episode Title: Finding Connection in Your Own Community

Guests: Jenny Ketchepaw and Jennifer Abbott-Aston

Episode Link: <https://grownasswoman.guide/episode161>

Jenny Ketchepaw: How do we take what we have here and blow that up a little bit, and include more people, and get more people excited? I think we've just found that women want a space to be their most authentic selves and be celebrated for that.

Like, I can tell Jen at any point, like, I got a promotion or this is what happened to me, and I don't have to feel bad about that. And, I think that a lot of women feel bad about sharing that or feel like, 'how am I going to be seen?' I just get to show up and be me and be loved for me, be celebrated for me; faults in all. [laughs]

Jackie MacDougall: Let me ask you this. How involved in your local community are you? Do you attend events, maybe volunteer for a local nonprofit? Do you have regular ladies' nights playing Bunco or Cards Against Humanity? Don't judge. Jenny Ketchepaw and Jennifer Abbott-Aston met through a mutual friend who thought they'd hit it off - and they certainly did.

They formed a friendship that's supportive, empowering, and often vulnerable. Like many of us, they could have kept that friendship to themselves, but Jenny and Jen knew they had something special and wanted to empower other women to also experience a deep connection.

In this episode, you'll hear their story from friendship to community leadership, and how they're bringing women together in their own neighborhood — and all around the world.

I'm Jackie MacDougall, and this is The Grown-Ass Woman's Guide.

ADVERTISEMENT

More and more women are joining book clubs these days as a way to share ideas and connect with other women. But what about a pod club for women who love to discuss podcasts? Cool, right? Enter The Grown-Ass Woman's Guide Pod Squad, a free monthly virtual event where we can chat about all things The Grown-Ass Woman's Guide. Bring questions, comments, topic ideas, and strong opinions on recent episodes. Some months, we'll include a special guest from the podcast. It's totally free to join. Visit grownasswoman.guide/episode161 to RSVP. Space is limited. Be a part of the Pod Squad. I would love to see you there.

Jackie MacDougall: Jenny Ketchepaw serves as VP of Talent Engagement for a financial institution. A certified Gallup Strengths Coach, she is one of the most locally engaged involved people I've ever known. She is a positive force who believes in being proactive, forming lasting relationships, and making an impact where you serve.

And, Jenny loves to travel and spending time with her hubby and two young kids. Living right around the corner, Jennifer Abbott-Aston grew up in Toronto, Canada before moving to the LA area where she worked as a merchandise executive at USC.

When she leaned out of the workforce to raise her three boys, Jen stayed active by volunteering in roles of PTA President, Vice President, Parliamentarian; served as Treasurer for Arcadia Child Health Council, Little League T-ball Coordinator, Canteen Coordinator and she served as the Fundraising Officer on the Meadows Foundation Board.

In 2016, Jennifer made the move to re-enter the workforce and eventually made the crucial decision to join full-time the company she co-founded; Human Element Company, a staffing and HR agency.

As you can tell, both Jenny and Jen have full lives filled with work and family responsibilities. And, while they have their own unique stories, they share a passion for uplifting women and supporting each other to be the absolute best versions of ourselves. And, that was their mission when they took their new friendship and created an expansive experience for themselves and others.

Jennifer Abbott-Aston: The first thing we ever did together was a Lean In Circle in Santa Clarita.

Jackie MacDougall: A Lean In Circle is a circle of women connected to the Lean In Organization where women support other women through their personal and professional goals, challenges, and lives.

Jennifer Abbott-Aston: Jenny had read the book a long time ago. I had just read the book and was listening to a bunch of Sheryl Sandberg's podcasts. And, we thought about, what would it look like to have a circle in this valley, a Lean In Circle? And, Sheryl has a whole Lean In website where you can start your own circles. It's really, really easy. And, we wanted it to be people from all, women from all different walks.

You know, we didn't want to have friends, necessarily, in this group. We didn't want it to be just a catch up with friends. So, we started that Lean In group. And, that now is starting to grow into more circles, hopefully, in the next, you know, couple of months; we're starting to do that. That was our first, our first, first undertaking together was starting a Lean In circle.

Jenny Ketchepaw: It was life-changing. And, I can say that for all nine women in the circle. And, it really did happen that I read the book so long ago, but it changed something inside of me when I read that book. And, then when Jen was like, 'there's these things called circles and there's this whole like international component,' I had no idea. And, it was like, how do we do this?

And, the fact that these nine women are so close now, they didn't necessarily, some of them didn't even know each other. And, it is the most raw, the most vulnerable you get to show up and again, warts and all, be exactly who you are and be uplifted share, celebrate. And also, it's so hard to encapsulate everything that we do in our circle.

But it's like, if you got work stuff, we get to talk about that. If you have celebrations, we get to talk about that. Sometimes we have a program, we just finish the four agreements, we've done all different things. And, it's just, it's a really great-- It's a really great space. It's one of my favorite, favorite nights; and I know all other eight women feel the same.

Jackie MacDougall: And so, what was the motivation, is that what you expected when you started that lean in circle? Were you looking to network, were you looking to like for business, like what was the point?

Jenny Ketchepaw: It was definitely personal. And, it was definitely like taking our conversations and, how do we include more people? But there was a lot of talk recently about women, and you know, how women rise-- There's a great book about that, how women rise and how we celebrate each other and how we empower each other.

So, we thought there would be, you know, some content. I don't think in a million years we ever thought we would get like heart-to-heart in some of the stuff that has come up, and how we've been there for each other. It has wildly exceeded our expectations.

Jennifer Abbott-Aston: And, it really came from feeding our souls as women empowering each other, sharing our wins, sharing our losses, learning, you know, lots of lessons. And, each woman takes a month and leads either a lesson, or if something's come up in the world, we did, you know, Afghanistan.

And, we did the history of women in Afghanistan when-- Every lesson has been, whatever that leader chooses is, what they can do. And, you can go on the website, the Lean In website, and just grab lessons, or you can read a book like we've done. We talked about women rising, and it feeds our soul, but that kind of got into the next venture that Jenny and I started is that, that really wasn't--

Lean In is very emotional to a lot of us, but from that, we were like, oh, these lessons are really good. And, we really wanted to educate, and that really wasn't necessarily the platform of nine people to educate. So, that kind of got into, WEWIL, which is Women Empowering Women in Leadership.

Jackie MacDougall: WEWIL, Women Empowering Women in Leadership is a workshop series bringing fantastic content to women leaders so they can thrive in their professional careers.

Jennifer Abbott-Aston: And, that more is education tools for women that they wouldn't necessarily get in professional development at work. And, that was like-- That's kind of where it came out of Lean In. We were like, 'oh, there's so much that we need to share and learn. Should we do this in, you know, a workshop setting or form setting,' and then COVID hit.

Jackie MacDougall: Mm-Hmm.

Jennifer Abbott-Aston: So, we decided move it all online. And, we have reached, I think we've got - Jenny, you could correct my numbers - two or 300 women that are on our mailing list that have attended workshops. And so, that was really the tools, you know, the education. So, all of these things have come out of, out of, you know, feeding your soul or what do we need, and just empowering women.

Certainly, in this community was the idea whether their souls needed some empowering or whether their tool boxes for work needed empowering, but it was evident to Jenny and I, that it's not really readily available; and especially for women who don't have huge circles of friends.

Jackie MacDougall: So, you started WEWIL, you were going to do this in person, and then suddenly you're doing it on Zoom. How does it look different from what you, sort of, planned?

Jenny Ketchepaw: Kind of better, because we envisioned like all coming to this space and then when we put it online, we got people from all across the nation, and then we got someone from Italy once, and it was so neat. Like, I got to talk to somebody at, I think Vanderbilt University that kind of does what I do for work, and it was so neat.

Like I never would've been connected with that person, and that was really cool. And, I think we were so worried. I mean, everybody went on Zoom, but it really lent itself for what we were doing just for an hour to 90 minutes, to connect with women that you don't know.

And again, the synergy and the underlying principle is that you got to show up and be our true authentic selves. And again, the congratulations,

the cheerleading for each other, the celebrating while we're getting really great content for next to nothing, you know, we charge \$15 and the organization keeps none of it. It all gets donated to local nonprofits that empower women.

Jackie MacDougall: Yeah. The first WEWIL I ever attended was one that you ran, Jenny, about Strengths Finder. And, I'm actually going to link in the show notes because you did an episode of this podcast about strengths as well.

Jenny Ketchepaw: My first podcast. [laughs]

Jackie MacDougall: One of my-- Actually, one of my most popular episodes, I think Strengths Finder is a tool that not as many people know about when I talk to people about it, but it's really, really powerful. So, I'll definitely link to that episode.

Jenny Ketchepaw: Oh, that's awesome.

Jackie MacDougall: But you, for 90 minutes, taught us how to lean into our strengths. And, I remember sharing some of that with my husband, and he went and got his strengths. It's a really powerful tool, and you're so good at delivering the information with enthusiasm and excitement and you clearly love the tool. And, then I was able to--

I was honored to do a workshop, to run a workshop for WEWIL, and then attend one since, for International Women's Day. And then, I'm lucky enough that you asked me to be a part of it. And so, I'm really excited to be a part of WEWIL. So, why don't you share, even though I could, I want to hear it from you, what a woman would expect on the next workshop?

Jenny Ketchepaw: Friday, May 13th. And, I'm really excited because my boss is leading it. And, I feel like throughout our career, again, we find people that lift us up, and we find people that maybe hold us back a little

bit. And, I am so lucky to work for a woman that believes in empowering other women; and that the more she can help us, the more we all help each other.

She talks about her mom, and how her mom was a really strong woman and guided her. But I get, she didn't mention this when we were kind of talking in WEWIL, but I've seen the next generation of that. Her daughter, Ellie, is getting ready to go to college.

And, her daughter is one of the most empowered women, and she supports her mom. And so, I'm hoping she's going to talk about that generational effect as well, but it's really amazing to hear the stories about her daughter.

And so, my boss just really believes that your authentic self, like if you can be your true self, there's nothing better and how we empower each other and how we support each other. And, you know, there have been, unfortunately, there have been times in my career where women didn't support each other, and that just hurts everybody.

Jackie MacDougall: Yeah.

Jenny Ketchepaw: And, the more that we find women that support each other and are there for each other, I mean, man, that's how we change business. That's how we change our future. That's how it's better for my daughter in the future. So, I'm really excited. She's the director of HR for the bank that I work at. And, I'm just really excited to hear from her.

Jackie MacDougall: Yeah. And, I will definitely link in the show notes to get a ticket for that so others can join us for that. I have to ask though, I hear a lot from women who, you know, really try to get out there, try to connect with other women, try to work in places that might empower women; and you hear a lot of stories.

And so, I'm a big believer in attracting what you want, and being what you want to attract. But how do the two of you do it? I mean, as far as like your Lean In Circle, WEWIL, the women that are involved are incredible, from the attendees to the women who put it together.

You know, your work, having this boss, there is a sense of luck sometimes to some of it. But, how do you-- Do you purposely intentionally attract women who empower other women, and how?

Jennifer Abbott-Aston: I don't think it's purposely at all. I think it's very organic. And, I think that the biggest thing with leading these groups is that we weren't necessarily the only ones who've picked the people to join the groups. You know, it's like Jenny was saying, I think it was Lean In, I probably knew four out of nine of the women. In WEWIL as well, it's--

I mean, Jackie, we didn't even know each other. Oh, we did meet, excuse me, one time before WEWIL happened. I think it's not purposely-- I think you just attract it. And, Jenny talks about positivity a lot. And, I think that when you're a positive person, like she is; she can attract positivity.

And, sometimes the negativity doesn't even have light to shine. And, maybe that's the same with us in this empowerment is that we really have a goal, and that's to connect women and lift them up.

And, if you don't want to connect with women, you don't want to lift them up; you're probably not going to want to hang out with me. So, I think it's all really, really organic. You know, it's just-- And, it could be luck or it really could be that it just is meant to be, and you attract, and you are attracted to those who are similar, but so, so different.

And, fundamentally where our core values are, we're usually all on the same page. And, that makes it really easy and lovely and all meetings-- And, you know, there's not, you've sat, you've both sat in some of these meetings now, and there's not really a lot of back and forth. Everybody is always, 'oh my gosh, that's such a great idea.' 'Yeah, let's do that instead.'

Yeah. So, I don't think there's the purpose behind it at all. I think it just happens, which is the magical part for me, and also with Lean In, and WEWIL. And, there's another networking piece that I'm doing right now as well for women. And, it's all happened so easily and beautifully; and all of it's morphed into even bigger than we could have ever imagined.

Jenny Ketchepaw: Yeah. I would agree with that. I mean, it really-- It's been magic, right? It's been magic, but I think inadvertently, we're purposeful. Does that make sense?

Jennifer Abbott-Aston: Yes.

Jenny Ketchepaw: I think that we have these goals and this heart and these values. And so, I do think that we kind of put that out there. I love what Jen said, because my positivity means a great deal to me. And so, there's not a lot of space for the negativity.

Like you don't have a space in my world, if you're going to always bring me the negative and you don't want my positive side. Like, you can bring me the negative, and I will help you. But if you just want to bring the negative and just sit in that, that's not going to go over so well. [laughs]

Jackie MacDougall: Right. Right.

Jenny Ketchepaw: And so, it's been exciting. It's been exciting-- I feel too, for me personally, the older I've gotten, I mean, now, you know, I've been a mom for 11 years. My head space is different in terms of who I want to hang out with, what my *Why* is. And so, I think I put that out there more and that's probably why Jen and I were so attracted to each other, and why it happened so fast and so cool. And like, again, like, we can't—

Like, right now, it's really hard to like, not talk over her, because I'm used to like having a glass of wine. I'm laughing. If she did show up here in person, it would've been like, oh. We wouldn't even looked at you, Jackie, talking and--

Jackie MacDougall: You wouldn't know I was here.

[laughter]

Jackie MacDougall: What would you say about those who talk about toxic positivity? You know, one of the things I see about you is that you don't

sweep things under the rug in a positive fashion. So, speak to that a little bit.

Jenny Ketchepaw: That's a great question because we make assumptions all the time. Although we shouldn't, because that's from *The Four Agreements*, great book. We make assumptions about other people all the time. And so, a lot of times when someone shows up really positive, they get the, they make the assumption that it's fake or it's not real.

For me, it's very, very genuine, but I also had to recognize in myself that like a blind spot is when you come to me with a problem, I'm very quick to see the positive in it. I heard this line once; it was called Radical Acceptance.

And, it's like, when something bad is happening, you radically accept it, it allows you to process and move on rather than sitting in it. Now, sometimes you like to sit in it, but there's not a lot that happens in the sitting in it.

And so, kind of gives positivity a bad name because I'm quick to help. I'm quick to find the positive in a situation. Mine is always genuine. And so, there have been tremendous moments in my life that have sucked any strength, any-- You know, whether we're talking about positivity or anything else, it's about being real. And so, my positivity is real. It doesn't mean I'm happy all the time. But yeah, when people--

That toxic positivity, when it's not genuine, when it's not authentic, when it doesn't lift people up, then that can be really problematic. I don't want to get labeled in, you know, a part of that, because people sometimes make assumptions about positivity or about what people bring to the table, but I bring my whole self; and you know, that's what you get, and you're going to get someone that sees the glass half full.

You're going to get someone that believes that tomorrow is going to be better. And, you're going to get someone that when it's really hard, when it's really hard, like you can count on me. You can count whether it's hard on myself or whether it's something hard on my family. Like, you can count on me that I'm going to be okay.

Jackie MacDougall: Wow. That's amazing.

Jennifer Abbott-Aston: My number one strength-- It's funny how Jenny and I, our strengths marry, is futuristic. So, I can often be-- I love to foresee what's going to happen. So, something like WEWIL, something like Lean In, something like a women's networking group.

And, as Jenny has taught me, people can think of that as a dreamer. Well, so you've got the dreamer and you've got the positive person together; and imagine it actually happens, and it's amazing. And, it was something we thought of. And, that's exactly what's happening. So, our two strengths are married, and it's worked beautifully.

Jackie MacDougall: Wow. So, what happens? And, I'm going to assume, terrible interviewer, I'm going to assume that you have had someone, at least one person in WEWIL or Lean In or one of the other areas that you work together in your lives that showed up and was not such a great fit. So, how does the dreamer and the positive woman deal with a situation like that?

Jennifer Abbott-Aston: We have had that. And, as you both know, and you've worked with me, I'm really all about, yes, I'm visionary, but I'm futuristic, but I really love things to happen naturally. And, if I'm feeling that way, I'm betting that the other person's probably feeling that way too. And, they need to go through the steps. And, it's beautifully happened in that, those people have removed themselves like, you know--

And, very kindly, 'now I'm going into a different part of my life this year in 2021 or 2022. And, I think I'm going to step back from this project. And, it's been great and I've learned so much, but right now it's not a fit for me.' And, I love that because that's the truth. It's not a fit for her right now. And, it wasn't probably a fit for the group, but everybody loved on that woman when she left.

And, that's what we really lift each other up. And, it may not be a fit for somebody, but we'll lift it up and honor that. And, 'thank you for so much of the time that you gave us. And, we get that it's not a fit right now. And, we're always here for you.' So nothing's ever, ever-- I mean, this sounds like the whole positivity, like Jenny was saying it, but it really does work.

You know, if you let that person, that woman come to it on their own, and it's organic. It happens naturally, and there's-- We've been really lucky. There's been no-- There's really been no issues in any of our groups.

Jackie MacDougall: When someone comes to one of the things that you're doing, one of the groups and they aren't a great fit, you don't try to force them out. You don't try to say, "Maybe this doesn't work." You just let it happen, because the likelihood that they're going to step back themselves, you don't have to make it happen. Is that what I'm getting? Is that what I'm hearing?

Jenny Ketchepaw: Yes. And, sometimes it's hard to get to know somebody in the initial space. And so, you give them space and maybe the relationship changes in a positive way. Or maybe it just doesn't become a good fit. With Lean In, it's interesting because the principles behind it are to go really, really deep. I mean that--

I think that you like the model of what the circles are supposed to be. You know, Sheryl says, "Go deep," but in order to go deep, it means your circle's closed. And so, one of the things we're doing right now is because we have so many women that have reached out to us, like, we love what you're doing. It'll be really hard to say, "Hey, come join our circle," when we've spent almost three years now going deep, like how do you, how do you do that?

And so, the idea is create more circles, create more spaces. So, we're working on empowering women to create more circles. And so, with that, you know, nobody has left. We've had people that have wanted to join. And, in the very beginning, we let people come check it out.

And, someone like self-selected out of it; like, 'this is really deep. This is too deep for me.' [laughs] And, that's okay. You know, it's all okay. And so, now, we're at a point where like, 'okay, we're not going to do that anymore. Now, we'll just figure out, how do we empower other people to be a part of it?' But, our nine original, are the nine that are still here.

Jackie MacDougall: That's amazing. And, there's something to be said for vulnerability. And so, it sounds like not only getting vulnerable yourselves, but giving the space, what do you think are the benefits of being in a space where you can be vulnerable as a woman?

Jennifer Abbott-Aston: I think that there's not always the opportunity to whether it's with a best friend or a husband or partner or with your family. And, we aren't a part of each other's daily lives, but we have this trust and this-- Confidentiality is a huge part of Lean In, and it is that way. And, everybody has each other's trust.

And so, to be able to have that, I don't know that I've ever had, even with my best friend, sometimes you're so close with them that you can't confide in the stuff that's happening in your life. So, I think it's a value that I've never experienced before and something about women coming together for the same purpose, but not from the same-- We're from the same community.

I mean, we live in the same city; but the same close-knit community, we're not. And, it's such a value because it's something that women don't really ever get. And it's, and it's very hard to put words to it. And Jenny, maybe you can help, but very hard to put words to being able to confide in somebody that you've known for, not that long. The room just turns into this amazing space.

Jenny Ketchpaw: It is such a gift to be seen by other-- I'm going to get a little emotional. To be seen by other women for exactly, like who you are and to be appreciated and to just take all the worry and the stress off your shoulders. And, it is such a safe, safe place, but I know that I can make a mistake, but I'm still seeing through positivity and that who I really am. Like, I really, can be my most true self.

And, I think that's what scares people; 'how do I be my true self? And, are people still going to like me, love me, care about me?' And, we get to be our truest selves. And, I don't even have to worry, like if I say something wrong or I make a mistake, I'm still going to be liked, loved, supported, cared for. There's going to be no drama behind my back. Like, it's really-- I just feel really, really seen and really, really heard.

Jackie MacDougall: And, isn't that really the goal? And, for so long-- You nailed it, so many women have not felt that, right? And, I think just to go back to the whole age thing, I think over 40, now I'm over 50, you know, you start to realize who you want to be seen and heard by. You no longer care about the masses. And, you find these groups and you find other

women and you find opportunities, I think, to be yourself. And so, I love that you have that.

Jenny Ketchepaw: And, we said it before, the magic is these nine women are not college besties. Most of them did not know each other. I mean, it gives me-- It gives me chills. It truly gives me chills. I'm like, uh.

Jackie MacDougall: Yeah.

Jennifer Abbott-Aston: And, I can't wait to see the next step of this because we are having, what are we calling it?

Jenny Ketchepaw: Mixer.

Jennifer Abbott-Aston: Mixer. We're having a mixer with anybody who's been interested in being part of our leaning group or who has said, "How do I start my own?" Or I don't know what it is, and we're going to do a mixer. And, then the ideas Jenny was speaking about earlier is to have more Lean In Circles.

But what I think would be really cool is then we could, you know, have different events where we all get together. You know, whether, I mean, it would be bigger events, obviously. And, it wouldn't necessarily be that emotional, emotional.

Well, it could turn out that way, especially if Jenny and I are leading, [laughs] but the whole idea is to be able to give more women what we're experiencing; and you can't do that in a mass group setting. And, you can't do that with people that you're very close to and know at the moment. And, it would be so cool to have a bunch of circles, especially in this valley. And, then we can all support each other one way or another.

Jackie MacDougall: Yeah. I love that. And, the big event would be really powerful because you have all of these smaller circles that have created

these bonds. And so, when they bring it to the big event, it's just magical, as you said. What would you say-- And, by the way, it's on my calendar.

What would you say to someone who's like, 'this is all fine and good, but I'm not necessarily a leader. I don't want to go and start a circle. I don't want to go and start WeWil. I just want to join something'? What kind of tips would you give them? Obviously, come to our WeWil workshops, and I'll link to that. They may not live, you know, in our area. So, what would you tell someone who's more of a joiner than a leader in how they can live like this?

Jennifer Abbott-Aston: So, I'm going to take this question. So, I think that for me, like I said earlier, Lean In feeds my soul. WeWil feeds the educational part of the workshop. And, then there's definitely a networking piece, women in business networking piece. And, I may be able to share something for our local chamber commerce for that.

You first have to look out, what's missing? Do you need to feed your soul right now? Are you feeling like you're not getting the professional development tools at work or you just want to network with women? So, I think the first thing is you have to look out what you want.

And then, there is a lot out there that even if you're from this valley, that you can find. There are Lean In circles all over the world, but there's tons of professional development online for women.

And, I think the first thing is, is you have to recognize what you need right now in your life, and then lean in to whatever that might be. And, I guarantee you that there's, everywhere, you don't have to start something.

There's going to be something either online or within your community that you can just join. And, I don't mean just, I mean, join; and then kind of feel comfortable and navigate through this world because maybe it might not be what a woman thinks it is. And, she gets into it and thinks, 'What? I can lead a class? This is-- This is easy.'

And, Sheryl Sandberg has put it all over the internet for me with all these lesson plans. I can-- I can contribute too.' So, I think, for me, I would say, definitely figure out what part of your women's empowerment within your own persona are you missing?

Jackie MacDougall: I love that. That's a great tip.

Jenny Ketchepaw: I have to say with the Lean In Circles, while Jen and I started it and we're technically the leaders, it requires nothing. [laughs] It was registering on Lean In, and then they give us all the content and then each woman hosts a different month. And oftentimes, it might be at like my house, but Jen will be leading the content.

So, I'll put the food together and then she will lead the content or somebody else will. And, I'm not saying because we're leaders, like, it just switches every month. We don't even have a schedule. It happens, again, so naturally.

And, sometimes we have a topic and we even have homework and we read an article, and we come and then something else has happened either in the world or in somebody's life. And, we go, 'okay, let's talk about this.' And, everyone's fine with that, like, which is so cool.

So, there's not work in the terms of leading it. Jen and I had to do one thing, I think once, I mean, as leaders, but really the hardest thing and the most important thing was bringing the women together. So, if someone just wants to join, they can either find, you know, a circle around there that they could join or get a couple of people together, kind of throw it out there.

And then after that, they can kind of step back and it kind of starts to build. And, we're really passionate about this. So, honestly, if anybody's interested in starting a circle anywhere, we are happy to share tips, tricks; help guide the first couple meetings, I mean.

Jackie MacDougall: Awesome.

Jenny Ketchepaw: We, because we're deep divers, we did a deep dive and figured out everything there is, but you can just be like, 'I want to do this tomorrow.' And, you literally could.

Jackie MacDougall: Right. Right. No excuses, just make it happen. So, you've talked about networking a couple times, Jen. What does networking look like?

You know, I think about, when the word networking first, sort of, came into my universe, we were probably in college and it was like, you have your business cards and make sure you wear a suit, and there were drinks; you know, and it was an hour or whatever it was. Like, obviously, it's evolved through the years; and especially networking with women, what does women's networking look like in 2022?

Jennifer Abbott-Aston: So, it still looks a lot like that.

Jackie MacDougall: [laughs] The wine is just better than when we were 22.

Jennifer Abbott-Aston: Right. It's really not my favorite thing. My husband and partner in our business, he's amazing at it. It's not my thing, but I put myself out there and I knew, like I was saying earlier, I knew that that piece was missing for me. And so, there's a bunch of different groups around town that I kind of went and met at.

And, the Chamber of Commerce here in Santa Clarita, actually happened to have a women's event. And, it was a lunch-and-learn, and this was pre-COVID and then they stopped everything. And, a girlfriend of mine, actually, who is in Lean In, who Jenny introduced me to, she co-chairs it with me so we got to kind of redefine what networking for women looks like, which has been such a cool tool for me, because I don't love it to begin with.

So, it still is the suits and the drink and the hour after work. But what we've done is we have speakers from the community that are women come in.

So, we've talked about women in service, or we've done women working in the men's world and all different leaders from our local community coming in and speaking so that there's an opportunity for everybody to feel comfortable because I do not love going into a room and for an hour, I just have to chit-chat with people. It's just not my thing.

Jenny can do it great. Andrew, my husband, can do it great. So, by having a program, you still have that chit-chat, but then when the program's over, you have something to talk about, which is so great. So, but it is, it is still down to kind of the old-school networking, it just with a little more entertainment and all-women.

Again, it's a safer place. And so, the networking seems safer. I don't know if that makes sense, but for me, it really does. I have a great husband and I have all brothers and all boys, and I actually adore men and I have always felt safe with men. But from a networking standpoint, I love just hanging out with women and sharing what everybody's doing at work and where they're. So, that's how I've leaned into the networking piece.

Jackie MacDougall: What about you, Jenny?

Jenny Ketchepaw: I've been in the same networking group for 19 years.

[laughter]

Jenny Ketchepaw: It's not a women's networking group, but it's a more small networking group that went rogue off of one of those big networking groups years ago. I tend to like rogue, and I love that group. It's a group of really incredible people. And, in fact, two of our Lean In sisters came from my interactions with them and knowing how empowered they were, but we weren't really social friends.

And so, we had reached out to them, like, 'I know your story, I know how you empower others.' So, you know, everything kind of comes full circle, in a way. And, I don't get business from the group because I'm an HR. I don't need business. People are like, why are you still this group? Except that we truly, truly care about each other. And so, it's been a really great networking group, and I love it.

Jennifer Abbott-Aston: That's one of the things, Jenny, that I really love too about networking is that I'm only going to do it if it feels natural and, it feels I use the word a lot, as you both know, organic. And, you have that

in your group, and I'm starting to have that in mine. And, networking in business can happen, in my opinion, if it's forced.

I want to work with the people that I can empower and they can empower me. I want to work with people who are like-minded, and sometimes that means business isn't going to come your way. But then, for me, it's not the right business.

And, I think that that's huge for me with networking is I don't go in thinking, 'I need to business out of this event.' I think I'm going to make friendships. And, if something comes down the road, then that's just a plus coming out of it.

Jackie MacDougall: Right. What do you think are the benefits of networking if it's not to get business, because that's exactly the way it was, right? You go in there and then you shake hands; and next thing you know, I'm selling the person a house. Like, I always think of, you know, the accountants and the realtors and all of those people.

And, then they're just like swapping business. So, like, for someone like myself, who's a content creator, who's a coach, you know, why would I want to network? Like, is it to get clients? Is it to make friends? Is it to-- You know, many of us are so tapped out that someone listening might be like, 'oh, that sounds exhausting.' So, what would be the benefits of networking?

Jenny Ketchepaw: I always look at networking, especially right now, because I don't need-- I don't want to say I don't need business, that's not-- I don't need to sell anything, I've nothing to sell. I look at it as centers of influence. And, my networking group is a center of influence, and everybody knows I'm going to go to Jenny when I need to know who does this, who does--

I can't tell you how many times I get people reaching out to me saying, "I know you know someone that does this, and I trust your opinion." So, I feel like I've built a really amazing center of influence; and same, I can go to my networking group too and say, "This is what I really need right now." And, this was all built on trust.

And, I think when you have that trust, when you've been together, when you know-- To me, I look at that as a really powerful center of influence. And so, then tapping into all of those resources and the people that will

help you, however, your business is going to grow, whether it's with a CPA or a realtor or someone in HR that just feeds you [laughs] with engagement and development.

Jennifer Abbott-Aston: And, I think it's a long game. I think that healthy, in my opinion, healthy networking is a long game. Like Jenny's talking about knowing these people for years and having those resources and places to pull from. It's not-- Networking can look like a short game by the exchange of the cards, but in my opinion, those relationships and business don't last.

And yeah, you're going to make your money or sell your house to that one person. But the real success in business comes from the long game and those long relationships and the things that happen naturally. And, I do think that networking can be a long game. I don't think it has to be the exchange cards and we do business the next week. And, if I don't do it, I failed at networking. It's a really long game.

Jenny Ketchepaw: Unless you're a handyman, we have a handyman that came as a guest to our networking group, and everyone's desperate for a handyman. And, he left that first meeting with like 10 appointments.

Jackie MacDougall: Wow.

Jenny Ketchepaw: They're in hot demand. [laughs]

Jackie MacDougall: So, let's just imagine a woman's listening, and she doesn't necessarily want to be in the handyman networking group. You know, like she wants to be in something that feels aligned with her business or with, what kind of tips would you give in finding networking opportunities?

Jennifer Abbott-Aston: I would say go to as many, as many as you can. And, when you know, you know,

Jackie MacDougall: Mm.

Jennifer Abbott-Aston: When you know the people in the room, you're clicking and driving with, and you have great conversations and you come home and you feel empowered and fulfilled; it's going to be right. But if you come home and you feel dirty, or you feel like it was a lot of salesy, or then, you know, just go once and be done. And, sometimes it takes a long time to find the right one.

Jackie MacDougall: Yeah.

Jenny Ketchepaw: Not just in this community, there's a lot all over; and starting you just, again, go to each of them, check it out, see how you feel.

Jackie MacDougall: So, just Google in your area, 'networking', see what kind of events there are. And, then usually they let outside people in for a different fee or something like that, right? Jen, you said something earlier about knowing what it is, like, where the gap is, right? What is it that you're looking for in your business or in your life? Is it the soul piece? Is it the women's empowerment, the personal development?

Is it just getting your business out there with other people in your own local community? I mean, there are plenty of also networking opportunities that are online and that are more national or international. And so, I think just everything goes back to that first question that you posed and is it, what is it that you need and want in your life right now? I think is really powerful.

Jennifer Abbott-Aston: It can change and that's okay. And, we need to remember as women, if you're into something that feeds your soul for three years and it no longer feeds your soul, and you want to go into that networking for business, change. There's no rules.

Jackie MacDougall: Oh, I could not agree with that more.

Jenny Ketchepaw: Also, a big fan. If a woman is looking to get involved and whether it's an official networking group or something else, what calls your heart? And, if you're in a community that has great nonprofits, what's the nonprofit that calls your heart, because you end up meeting wonderful people. And, it's a great way to do business and to connect with an organization where you can make an impact.

And so, that was actually probably my first foray into anything was getting involved in some of our local nonprofits. And, that totally changed the way I was involved in my community, the business professionals I met along the way. So, especially if somebody's like, 'the idea of going to a networking meeting sounds horrible,' volunteer for a nonprofit, and be connected to an organization and meet other people that are volunteering.

Jackie MacDougall: Yeah. That is a fantastic tip. And, I think that, you know, making an impact, giving back, specifically; obviously, it's good for the soul. It's good to, you know, when we get caught up in our own stuff, it's always good to help other people. It's like the kryptonite, right, for all that stuff, we can-- We can sit in, right?

All that self-loathing, but helping other people helps us sort of get out of our own way. But how do you think working on a board of a nonprofit or volunteering at a nonprofit event, does that directly impact your industry and your business, or how does that do that?

Jenny Ketchepaw: It can. You don't go volunteer because you're planning to get business out of it, but good attracts good, like attracts like. I think, especially in a community, specifically like ours, we're very heavy in nonprofits and we're very heavy in a lot of small businesses. When you are working with somebody on a board; and when they're like, 'I have an opportunity to change banks or to change realtors.'

And, all of these things, you're like, 'oh, I work with-- I work with Jackie on that nonprofit and I see how much she gives of her heart.' Like you just, all of a sudden-- Again, it goes back to trust and building relationships.

And, you're not there just talking about your business, I'm seeing you as a person and I'm seeing your commitment to an organization that I'm also committed to, so you already get like points. And it's like, oh, that's what I'm going to think of kind of naturally.

And, then if you serve on committees, you just get to know people in different senses and you see the way they work. There's nothing better than serving on a committee with somebody and seeing how they work.
[laughs]

Jackie MacDougall: Right. And especially, if you want to potentially work with them, or not.

Jenny Ketchepaw: Yes.

Jennifer Abbott-Aston: That goes back to what we were saying earlier about, you know, what cup do you need filled as far as your soul and your education and your networking? Well, you have got to volunteer for what your heart is, for where you're at. You know, so if it's-- You know, there's so many--

There's so many, especially in this valley, but anywhere, 'where is your heart? Is it with just women? Is it with children? Is it with-- You know, is it with cancer? Is it--' And, if your heart is in it, it's all-- Like Jenny is saying, it all attracts each other. But, wherever you--

Wherever you are fulfilling and empowering yourself, your heart has to be in it; I believe. If your heart's not in it, 'you're not going to attract the right people. You're not going to feel empowered. You're not going to--' You want to come home from everything feeling like your cup was full from that meeting.

Jackie MacDougall: Yeah.

Jennifer Abbott-Aston: So, I think volunteer, you really have to figure out where you want to put your time.

Jackie MacDougall: I love that. And, I think that if someone's listening and is like, 'I don't own a business, I don't need to network for business, I'm not into it;' all of these tips also translate into making friends.

Jennifer Abbott-Aston: Yeah.

Jenny Ketchepaw: Yes, yes. Yes, my strong.

Jackie MacDougall: Right? Because that's one of the challenges I see with a lot of women. We started talking about kids and everything that, you know, kids grow up, friendships change, we all evolve. And, sometimes we're looking for friendships where we are right now in our lives. And so, any of the things that you have mentioned is also a great opportunity to make friends just like, you know, 'see that full circle there?. That's my own Lean In Circle.' [laughs]

Jenny Ketchepaw: I love it.

Jackie MacDougall: So, you two, anything else that you feel like my audience needs to know before we finish?

Jenny Ketchepaw: Well, I just-- I love Jackie, what you have been able to do in the space of bringing women together. And, I think that the synergies between women being able to come together and be themselves and share and feel supported; I think that's just a really, it's really special. It's really special to see that. And, thank you for bringing us together. Thank you for everything that you've done.

Jennifer Abbott-Aston: I want you to also realize how much you are empowering women. I remember listening to your very first podcast-- Well,

it was the very first for mine. I think it was one of the first with Heather Stewart.

Jackie MacDougall: Yeah, that was the very first one.

Jennifer Abbott-Aston: And, this was all before Lean In and WeWil; and naturally, I'm involved in a bunch of things, but as far as like leading and thinking of what it's going to look like in the future, I listened to your podcast and they were-- You gave me the strength. And, I know that sounds so crazy, but I couldn't even see myself doing this five years ago.

Jackie MacDougall: Wow.

Jennifer Abbott-Aston: And, just listening even-- And, you ask, you know, how do people get started on this? Listen to podcasts, listen to things that are going to make you feel empowered; and then you might actually out and do it. But Jackie, you're definitely instrumental in so many women's lives. And, you give us some courage that it's there, but we just need it brought out.

Jenny Ketchepaw: I have to talk about full circle. You listen to Jackie's podcast with Heather on it. Heather and Vanessa got really close in our Lean In circle, and they're launching their own podcast tomorrow.

Jackie MacDougall: And, Heather was one of my podcast students years ago. I taught her how to podcast. And, you know, what else is kind of crazy, Jen, you were, I think the first person to ever reach out to me about that you listened to the podcast, and you asked me to meet for coffee. And, you were like, 'I listen to pod--'

You gave me this description, you know, feedback on one of the episodes or whatever it was. And, I was like, 'oh my God, somebody listens.' Like, I see the numbers. I see that people are listening, but sometimes you pod,

like, one can podcast into the ether, right? You record and you hope that somebody's getting something from it.

And, you sent me this email and I was like, 'I'm going to have coffee with someone who listens, and I don't even know her.' Like, you were the first person that I don't know. [laughs]

Jennifer Abbott-Aston: And, I was having coffee with you to get the courage to be able to start these groups. Like Jackie, do you think this is going to work in this community? And so, we probably both had our--

Jackie MacDougall: Yeah. We're both fangirling; and man, [laughs] it was awesome.

Jennifer Abbott-Aston: And, talk about full circle. Now, Jackie, you are a part of WeWil, which is-- I mean, it really is full circle to think about me listening to your podcast, then getting, you know-- It's amazing how it all can evolve in such a short period of time.

Jackie MacDougall: Definitely. I think when women have the courage to reach out to one another and ask-- I mean, the fact that Jenny asked me to speak at WeWil, I was blown away. Like, why would anyone want to-- We all do that, right? Why would anyone want to hear from me? You know?

And then, to show up and to do it. And, it was so much fun. And, it was-- I was like, 'I need to-- I need to be part of this,' not knowing you would ask me to be part of it, but you have something really, really special. I'm excited to learn more about your Lean In Circles. I'm bummed that I can't join your circle, but I'd be happy to join a new circle. [laughs]

But yeah, you're both amazing. You're both making such a huge impact. You know, one of the things that I am committing myself to is to make that impact more where I live. I tend to be an online person.

I tend to be, most of my clients live all over the country, sometimes outside the country, but there are so many women in our own community who are powerful and amazing and vulnerable and willing to put

themselves out there authentically. And, just being around the two of you, it just reminds me how much I want to meet those women as well. So, thank you for that.

Jen and Jenny's commitment to their community, our community and beyond, is inspiring in a perfect reminder that even putting yourself out there in a small way, can lead to big things. Please, join us for our next, WEWIL workshop, linked here in the show notes.

We have them quarterly. They're \$15 and open to all. If you're interested in creating your own Lean In Circle, I will link to that also. And, you can reach out to me at hello@grownasswoman.guide to get Jen and Jenny's contact info, if you want them to guide you through the process.

[music]

Jackie MacDougall: I want to hear how you engage in your own community or how you plan to, join the conversation in our community. I will also link to that in the show notes as well at grownasswoman.guide/episode161, and just a reminder, get all of The Grown-Ass Woman's Guide episodes on your favorite podcast app or at grownasswomen.guide.

One of the best ways to empower women is to share their work. It is our mission at The Grown-Ass Woman's Guide to empower more and more women to live their most badass grown-ass lives. If you feel inspired, please, share any of the episodes with the women in your life.

And, if on social media, be sure to tag The Grown-Ass Woman's Guide so I can chat with you there. Come back next week. May is Mental Health Awareness Month, and we kick off four episodes created to help you prioritize yourself and your mental wellness.

Until then, you are a grown-ass woman. Act accordingly.