

EP136

Elaine Lou Cartas: Lately, I've been hearing from a lot of clients that they just wanna blow up their career, and maybe that's why you clicked in this podcast episode, 'cause they're not happy. They realize they are masking, being performative. They realize that their 100 is actually, like, 2,000% for the rest of employees, and maybe if they give 20%, that's actually 100% for everyone else.

Or maybe you relate to them where they're not even happy in this current industry that they're working in. And you might be feeling this way. This is why you clicked on the episode. I promise it's not clickbait. But here's the thing. If it makes you feel any better, and I'm gonna put this mic down, I have blown my life up, my career life up three times.

One, changed industry working in political campaigns to nonprofit sector as a fundraiser. Two, decided to leave the nonprofit sector right after I got my master's degree because I thought I wanted to be executive director, and realized, you know what? I need to start my own pod- my own business and podcast.

That's what I was gonna say. And third, I even blew up my business because I realized I was making it more complicated. The complications and stress that I left work- working in political campaigns, I actually brought into my business, and now I've made it more simple. And because I don't want you to feel alone, don't worry, it's not just me talking this episode.

I'm also interviewing a fellow coach, a client, Meredith Hereta. And also warning, letting you know ahead of time, there are cuss words, so if you're around kiddos, you're probably gonna wanna put your headphones on and a notebook. So grab your coffee, tea, and boba, and let's drop the beat.

Hey, everyone. I feel like if you're watching this in video, we are wearing a beautiful neon red shirt. Well, dress. I don't know. Shirt, dress. What is it, Meredith?

Meredith Herrera : Definitely a shirt.

Elaine Lou Cartas: Okay, and then I'm wearing... Well, at first I was wearing a black cardigan, and then I sh- I changed over to a pink blazer 'cause I, I was like, "Oh, this is not giving executive presence."

Meredith Herrera : gotta rep the jewel tones.

Elaine Lou Cartas: So we are here... Ugh, I, was offended apparently. We are here to talk about midlife, and I say offended because did you remember, Meredith, like I think it was during COVID, 2020, when the American Psychological Association defined mid-age as 35? Do you remember that? Oh,

Meredith Herrera : no, I missed that.

Elaine Lou Cartas: Yeah. That's-

Meredith Herrera : I think... I don't think that's true. Although for some women it can be. But interesting, yeah, I would probably be offended too.

Elaine Lou Cartas: Yeah, I was super offended. I thought that was in your 50s, but it is not, you know? We are- Yeah ... we are considered mid- How do you wanna describe midlife, by the way?

Meredith Herrera : Yeah. I don't know if it's so important to describe it as attached to age.

I think, you know, I think the way it gets talked about for women is almost always physiological, and that kind of annoys me. 100%. 'Cause I think it's more about this chapter in life that I think can arrive at different times for different people- Yep ... where we are starting to evaluate what brings us purpose and meaning in a different way.

Elaine Lou Cartas: Yes. And what's interesting, and I guess I'm cooler than Meredith, I'm not trying to one-up her, 'cause I was like, "Do you know that this is going viral?" So I'm holding on... I'm holding my phone right now. I know. I love that. But apparently mul- so there's like this viral post, if you see it, people are just copying each other 'cause that's how social media works.

I'm gonna roll my eyes. And so what I'm reading, it's millen- millennials, you're entering a midlife crisis. So choose your crisis, number one. I'm curious, actually, if you're open- Yes ... to answering this. I wanna know which ones- Okay ... you have met. Number one- Yeah ... run a marathon.

Meredith Herrera : Yeah.

Elaine Lou Cartas: Me too. How many have you?

Okay. I've run one. I

Meredith Herrera : know I've not run a marathon. Okay. But I, bet I can guess the list. Okay. Nu- Is it like buy plants, eat more protein?

Elaine Lou Cartas: Ho- hold on, girl. Okay. Number two, get a tattoo. I don't have one. No.

Meredith Herrera : Haven't done that.

Elaine Lou Cartas: Three, start baking sourdough bread.

Meredith Herrera : Definitely not.

Elaine Lou Cartas: Four, go to therapy. I always

Meredith Herrera : do

Elaine Lou Cartas: that.

Yeah, same. Same.

Meredith Herrera : Standard.

Elaine Lou Cartas: Five, grow your own veg. Been doing that pre-midlife. Eight, go to an ayahuasca retreat. No, but I might do psilocybin soon. Same. nine, I'm skipping things. Nine, pierce something, but I've had my ears pierced since I was a baby, but nothing besides that. And then 10, which we're here to talk about, blow your whole life up.

Meredith Herrera : Yeah.

Elaine Lou Cartas: Blow your life up, or not. Yeah. I would say I, I've done it multiple times because we're around the same age. I mean, like, I was working during the recession was already-

Meredith Herrera : Yes ... blown up, unfortunately.

Elaine Lou Cartas: Yeah. Yeah. Th- that's a good, that's a good point too. Like sometimes We don't

Meredith Herrera : get to choose if our life blows up.

Elaine Lou Cartas: No, there's- It just blows up sometimes ... external factors. So Mer- I- Actually, let's talk about our love relationship, and then we'll get straight into it. Yes. Because I'm sure all of you- Okay ... have clicked, like, should you blow up your career in midlife or not? So both Meredith and I were doing the ICF PCC training, which I know is a lot of jargon, so for those of you that don't know, it's a certification for coaching.

and to be transparent, for both me and Meredith, I wanna hear your side, but I was like, "Oh, it's so nice to see another woman of color here. Let's talk." Meredith is laughing 'cause I'm assuming she's validated. Anything else?

Meredith Herrera : Yes. I think I'm trying to remember kind of exactly when w- we interacted, and I kind of almost feel like I saw you make a face that I was really trying hard not to make.

And I was like, "Okay, good. Home girl's got, got the vibe." yes, I thought it was a great program, and as two women of color who work with a lot of women of color, maybe we could have add a little bit of dimension to the curriculum.

Elaine Lou Cartas: Correct. There was, there's been statements that have said, But this is what I tell people.

The reason why I joined the program, knowing the makeup of it, is this is the reality of the world we work in, and I just didn't want the fluff, life coach-y stuff. mind you, I've had a life coach, I go to therapy, I think it's very important to do all that stuff, but both of us as executive leadership coaches, like, we wanna get things done, but in a realistic world.

That we're living in. Yeah, I

Meredith Herrera : think we have to kind of face the re- you're right. Like, that's the majority And we gotta, you know, I think for- The

Elaine Lou Cartas: majority in

Meredith Herrera : power, I would say- The majority in power ... I'm just being real. Now- For now ... for now. For now. not the demographic majority. And I think if we want the minority to have more power, then people like you and me, I feel like it's vocational work at this point.

Like, I, my clients, I'm like, "I want you to have more power." I'm sort of, like, nakedly talking about it that way these days b- because I want you to be able to change systems. And if you- Correct ... need to change systems, you need to know how the system works.

Elaine Lou Cartas: You need to know how the system works. You need to know how to work with allies.

Like, it's just the reality- For sure ... of it. so I think that's what we appreciate about both of us. And then, you know, we, went to the next level. Meredith became a client. We

Meredith Herrera : took our relationship up a notch.

Elaine Lou Cartas: And then became friends. Like, we're gonna meet in each other in person in two weeks, which I'm excited.

Meredith Herrera : I know. I'm really excited.

Elaine Lou Cartas: All right, let's get into it. There's a reason, I promise the title of the episode Should You Blow Up Your Career in Midlife was not just clickbait-y. We're actually gonna talk about it.

Meredith Herrera : We are.

Elaine Lou Cartas: So Meredith, who are you?

Meredith Herrera : Let's

Elaine Lou Cartas: go. And why did- Okay ... why did you wanna talk about midlife?

'Cause at the end of our coaching contract, I was like, "Okay, now I can have you on my podcast. We need to talk about this." Why did you wanna talk about midlife? Why did you wanna trigger people? Tell me.

Meredith Herrera : I know. Sorry everybody who feels activated by this conversation. I... Hopefully, by the end of it you'll feel like your nervous system has been affirmed.

Oh,

Elaine Lou Cartas: well, there was a, there's a life coaching there. Yeah, for

Meredith Herrera : sure. I think, okay, so who am I? I am currently an executive coach. I run a coaching and consulting firm called Meredith Herrera Consulting. But my fir- the first half of my career looked very different. I was a senior leader in schools, and I did all the things, because a lot of women, and a lot of women of color leaders do the most all the time.

And in 2021, I was real tired. Real tired, and I, love my work. It did still bring me meaning and purpose, but I was like, "Yo girl, we cannot- I didn't pull an all-nighter in college or grad school, but I did with work. And something about that period- Wow, good for you. Not, that it's so

Elaine Lou Cartas: good. Continue.

Meredith Herrera : I don't know

Elaine Lou Cartas: that I would say.

Meredith Herrera : No, I mean that there were probably moments- I know ...

Elaine Lou Cartas: where I

Meredith Herrera : probably-

Elaine Lou Cartas: Sorry, apologize. Take it back ...

Meredith Herrera : I should have probably pulled an all-nighter. no, I'm not, we're not celebrating working the most.

Elaine Lou Cartas: Continue.

Meredith Herrera : Yeah, so I paused, and all I wanted was a pause because I didn't feel like I could do any good thinking about my life and what I wanted while working these insane hours.

And- good thinking, I wanted to be responsive, not reactive, and so I paused, and then I had a lot of former colleagues reach out to me to do supportive work in coaching and consulting capacities. And that, over time, just emerged into this business. And now that's what I do. I, help mostly women, and mostly women of color, leaders, navigate senior leadership, navigate transitions, figure out complexity, deal with people that are hard to deal with, all the things.

why I wanna talk about midlife, it honestly, like, I was having this sort of private journey over the last couple of years by myself. I sort of got... My business grew, more clients. Most of my clients are probably, I'd say, 35 to early 50s. Like, that's kind of like the sweet spot for me. Same. Mm-hmm. I can't tell...

You might experience this too, Elaine, like I am constantly talking about this. My clients are constantly asking, "I love this piece, but I'm not sure I can do this anymore."

Elaine Lou Cartas: Mm-hmm. "

Meredith Herrera : I, have the job that I've worked so hard to have. It's not what I thought it was gonna be." And so it's just been coming up a lot, and so I decided to talk about it more because I don't think women's health, wellness gets enough attention.

Elaine Lou Cartas: I mean, I think both of our experiences, and please correct me if I'm wrong, I would love your feedback, as women of color, I w- I grew up, I can only speak for myself, right? I'm the firstborn in this country. I grew up, work really hard, do all the things, do what people tell you to do. So there's the people-pleasing, following, straight A's, valedictorian, check.

And then the moment for me was like, I graduate for my master's. I also work in higher ed, which is why we get along too well together. I'm like, "Wait, I've been doing what everyone's telling me to do. What do I want?" And I, did it. I never knew what I wanted 'cause I was just used to people telling me what to do, and then that was a whole journey- Totally

that I had with my own therapist that we're not gonna have with you obviously individually or those of you listening. But I think it might h- just help for all of you to hear it from both of us. I mean, do you relate to that? I'm curious what you're sharing. 100%, you

Meredith Herrera : know? I'm Mexican American, and I was socialized to be good.

To be nice. So what is that? Nice girl. You... So what does... Yeah, be good girl. So what does that mean, right? It means all the things you just said. It means don't make waves, achieve like a mofo. do that because that's... Sometimes we're doing that culturally because that is necessary- Mm-hmm ... to move or elevate a station in life.

And we don't think about the privilege of considering what we want, we think about what we need to do, and that's a big difference. And so I got to the same place where I was just, you know, and I think as a woman of color working in predominantly white spaces, you're not just navigating like normal demands of leadership, which are a lot, but you're also navigating all the other stuff, the code switching, the heightened scrutiny, the ways in which you're watching maybe majority identifying colleagues get promoted and you're not.

Like, those kinds of dynamics are this additional labor on top of already a lot of labor, so. Yeah. And I just wanna

Elaine Lou Cartas: emphasize what you just said earlier, the pause part, right? Back in this is how we know we're only, like, 21. 2021, okay. We were, born in the late 1900s, everybody.

Meredith Herrera : Yeah.

Elaine Lou Cartas: Giving it away.

Yeah,

but the pause- The before

Meredith Herrera : times, Elaine. The before times

Elaine Lou Cartas: Before 1999, which is insane 'cause I think, like, the last time the N- yeah, I was overhearing from the New York mayor, the last time the Knicks were in the playoffs was 1999.

Meredith Herrera : Oh

Elaine Lou Cartas: my gosh. Anyways, basketball's just relevant right now.

Anyways, let's go back . The pause part. Yeah. Unfortunately, you know, we were conditioned as women of color, as marginalized communities of, "Oh, y- don't pause. You need to continue working"- Yeah ... which means you are not listening to what you just said. Do you really want versus what do you need?

Meredith Herrera : Yeah.

Let me, tell you what my dad said to me when I finally told him that I was no longer- The professor ... gonna be working in schools. Yes, my, my, dad, the professor. So mind you, everybody who's listening, I am not, you know, a reckless person because that's not how I was conditioned, and that would not have flown in my house, right?

And so I knew that I was considering leaving. I had some early conversations with my boss about this, and we sort of agree on a timeframe. And in the kind of organizations where I worked, when you're leaving a position at the level where I left, you typically are giving, like, a year's notice. They do a national search to find your replacement.

So this is not, like, a two-week thing. They had a year. I gave notice a year in advance, and so that was great in a lot of ways. It let the organization get used to my departure. I was able to sort of socialize to that. I was able to save money, et cetera. So then I had sort of built this financial runway to be able to not work because what I really was clear about, I had a job since I was 13 years old.

I needed to not work for a hot second. Okay, but I still have bills to pay. I have a... You've seen my dog. Like, he takes up a lot of energy. Like, I have things I... that cost money in my life. I like expensive skincare products. So I was able-

Elaine Lou Cartas: Your skin looks great. Your skin looks great, by the way. Thanks. Thank you.

Do a skin routine video later. Continue.

Meredith Herrera : Oh, I could... We could do a lot about that. I have a lot of thoughts on that. So I, you know, I was able, and not everyone is in this position. So this was a, certain kind of privilege I had to be able to sort of save enough money to really not be able to work, really, for a year, maybe six months, without making any adjustments to my lifestyle, a year if I was willing to make some adjustments.

So I call my dad, right, ready to present this very thoughtful, very responsible plan And the first words out of his mouth, and I think he meant it well ultimately, but I was like, "Damn, dude," were, "Wait, so you're unemployed?" That was it. Didn't hear anything about the preparation, didn't hear anything about the stress, didn't hear anything about, like, what had, gotten me to that point.

He's like, "Wait, you don't have a job? Like, that does not compute in our family." And I was like, "Yeah, Dad, I am unemployed and I love it." So I think it's a radical move for a lot of us. It's a revolutionary move. Like Audre Lorde talks about self-care as being revolutionary, particularly for women of color to give themselves permission to pause.

Maybe your pause isn't as long as mine. Maybe it's a weekend. That's cool. But, like, giving yourself permission to pause is so powerful.

Elaine Lou Cartas: Of the pause part, I mean, I always tell everybody to read *Rest is Resistance* by Tricia Hershey, just... And even now being older, being in that uncomfortable place of my thoughts and feelings and things that has happened throughout the day, instead of dismissing it and just doing the next thing.

Meredith Herrera : Yeah, or busying yourself into oblivion.

Elaine Lou Cartas: Yeah. Where it's like, "Nope, this happened. Let me sit with it." Yeah. And sometimes there's no meaning to it. Sometimes just like, "Okay," like... Example, I'm gonna give you the minor example. I went to, which I need to tell you offline, but, like, I bought this camera because I do so much speaking gigs, and it's really tiny.

It's called the Osmo Pocket 3. So I went to go see an old high school friend who has a video production called Feed Media, so Gerald Nividad, I'll name-drop him. And I thought I forgot my journal. I'm just such a tactical person, and this journal, I share secrets in it. Okay. not my- mind you, and it's not a burn book like *Mean Girls*, right?

yeah, It's like my goals, like reflections, and I thought I forgot it, and I was going crazy. Like I, and I always do this my whole life. My whole life, I alway- always forget something. Like I lost a beanie in an airplane. I forgot my sunglasses at a restaurant that I need to go get from last month.

Like I just always forget. and, but I had a very deep therapy session, I think I told you from my last session, where I was just like crying, like ugly crying, but it was needed crying 'cause I had this huge level of self-awareness and was starting to integrate and heal it. And then that was two weeks ago.

This week I'm like, "I forget things. Why do I forget things? Oh, I think 'cause I don't know how to be really present." I think about the next thing. I'm stressed about doing the next thing.

Meredith Herrera : Yeah.

Elaine Lou Cartas: Why can't I just be present? So that was just like a huge thing. Mind you, that's like a small thing, but I've had it my whole life.

So I'm like, "Okay, how can I integrate more presence? Okay, I'm gonna make sure that when I eat, my phone or laptop's not here. I'm gonna be alone with my thoughts and chomp on my food."

Meredith Herrera : Yeah Good. That's good growth.

Elaine Lou Cartas: So the pause part, even though it's minor, it could also be to what you were sharing earlier, right?

You wanting... You were burnt out. So I'm curious, in that one year-

Meredith Herrera : Yeah ...

Elaine Lou Cartas: where you had the break, what, how was that life-changing for you? For people that's like, "Oh- Yeah ... I wish I could have a break." And mind you- Yeah ... Meredith did say it doesn't have to be a year, it could be a weekend. But why was that one year- No,

Meredith Herrera : it could be-

was helpful? ... two hours. Like, I think real- there's lots of ways to build in spaciousness, because I don't think everyone has the capacity to, you know, that I did at that time to take that much time off. Well, to be honest, it wasn't a year, because people started bothering me. But here's what I, here's what I will say The first month, I did nothing.

There was so much- And how was that? It was both liberating and disorienting and wonderful and terrifying all at once. And here's what I mean. And I actually, I had a call with a woman today who used to run this really fancy school, and she left about a year and a half ago, and she was sharing with me what I think a lot of us who've taken a pause can relate to.

It took me a good maybe six months to kind of break out of this. There's real trauma sometimes that we have to process after we leave these roles. And she-

Elaine Lou Cartas: 100%.

Meredith Herrera : Yeah. She was talking about these, the sort of reflexive responses we've conditioned ourselves to, like, check our email and make sure we're responding to everything, the sense of urgency.

It took my body a good couple of months to just decompress from constantly running at a high octane sense of urgency, and to relax the hyper-developed sense of responsibility that I think so many women leaders, and particularly women of color leaders, that we're just so... Like, we are so used to being perfect and often very intolerant of, you know, n- not being perfect.

Like giving something a B-minus level effort. That's just anathema to a lot of our conditioning, right? So I think that... Okay, so I was able to really rest, but part of that rest was difficult because, to your point, I had to wrestle with what came in. When we don't busy ourselves constantly, guess what? Some stuff's gonna slap you upside the head existentially, like, "Whoa, where am I in my life?

Is this what I wanna be doing?" Doubts. "Did I make the right decision?" Because it's this sc- you're, pivoting. I was pivoting into a place of uncertainty. But along with that comes insight, and that insight becomes really powerful. And it's so fascinating to me that in that journey,

the people that show up in your life to provide wisdom, support, guidance, it's just like the, you know, the clouds part for the first time in a while.

And at first you're not sure if you still need to, like, walk around with your umbrella and raincoat. So it's a little weird, but then eventually you kinda get used to it. And you're, I was able to be so much more creative and so much more stimulated than I was earlier because I was no longer under duress.

Elaine Lou Cartas: So much more creative. I love that you said that. And I say that because even in my work, in my business as a coach, and I've shared this even with you, and we've had sessions, like, I need to build out quiet time to just process things.

Meredith Herrera : Yeah.

Elaine Lou Cartas: But then what ends up happening through the processing, it's like, what are little tweaks I could do in my business, one.

Or two, content starts coming out for me, and I know you love also writing yourself, not because you wanna post it, just you love writing. I love writing myself. Not research papers, okay? That's a different thing from, like, undergrad or grad school. And, it's interesting 'cause for me, I had... I feel like I've had different midlives.

Like, for me, it was, like, back in 2017 when I wanted to leave, and then it was again 2023 in my business. And I think people need to hear this, for those of you that have a business or wanna have a business. When I created my business in 2017 up to probably 2021, because I will say 20- 2023 to maybe 2025, I was, like, in functional freeze, just, like, doing mid, but not...

Just, like, doing the cycles of things and not changing anything. 'Cause what I realized in my business is I built my business in that hypervigilance of what I did in my work before, because I was used to it. Yeah. Also, I think this might relate to everybody, I was comfortable in the chaos because I grew up in chaos, and I had to do so much unlearning- Yeah

and healing of the calm and the boring- Totally ... like, that boring could be actually really good. And so I was having a friend with... A, a, conversation with my friend Jerrel, who also has his own business that does the videography. I'm like... He's like, "So what do you think has helped you grow in your business?"

I was like, "I've made my business boring." He's like, "So you don't like it?" Like, "No, I love it. It's just I realized I made my business so complicated in the beginning."

Meredith Herrera : Well, I think what you're describing is something that so many of us in midlife start to reckon with, which is this, we have been on the achievement hamster wheel-

Elaine Lou Cartas: Yeah

Meredith Herrera : running fast for a long time, and probably we can still do it. That's the thing that I love about my clients, because they are so badass. I'm like, "Do you... You can, still do that for the next 20, 30 years of your life or your working life. You can." But what's different, I think, about midlife is we start asking ourselves a slightly different question: Do I want to?

Do I actually want to? And that's really different. Can you? Of course. Like, if you wanted to kind of continue to operate at that level of frenzy and chaos, you could. But you're making some conscious choices to sort of introduce a different set of norms for how you work. So I think our, like, relationship to work changes in midlife.

Elaine Lou Cartas: Or even, like, our identity, what life is, what's important to us. Because-

Meredith Herrera : For sure ...

Elaine Lou Cartas: y- and then you start seeing- People you love pass away, even people around your age, whether they're first degree of separation or second. So you've shared with me, right, midlife has terrible PR.

Meredith Herrera : Yeah.

Elaine Lou Cartas: What's the reframe you wish for?

Meredith Herrera : yeah, I do think midlife has bad PR.

Elaine Lou Cartas: Yeah. W- actually, I always joke around. I'm like, "You know what? I really love, I love being older," because in your 20s it's so easy masking things, so easy, and you have so much energy to just do everything. And then as you get older, as a woman, your hormones shift and change.

But honestly, I'm in the, I love this, like, I don't give a fuck BS hormone that's happening.

Meredith Herrera : Yeah. I mean, I think that's the reframe in part. Reframe is not, the, reframe is that midlife is not some crisis. It is an appropriate stage of development. Okay, so I am, like, such a little nerd ball about this, but this is, a lot of what I studied in graduate school is sort of counseling and developmental psychology.

So right when we think of human development, we think of, like, babies. Do they roll over at the sa- you know, at the right time, walk, talk? Maybe we think of adolescence, like, in terms of puberty. Okay, well, development doesn't stop. As long as we're alive, there are certain developmental milestones that we go through, and one of the least talked about is midlife.

And usually when it's talked about, it's, like, for men, I think it sorta gets framed as this, like, crisis where they, you know, buy a Corvette and, like, leave their whole lives and act

irresponsibly. For women, it's usually about hormonal stereotypes, which I think I find really frustrating. And I find the, like, discourse on social media about it, like, really annoying because it's always kind of like how you started.

It's like, "Walk 10,000 steps, eat more protein." Yeah. you know, basically a list of demands is what's given to us in midlife, and it's so, like, the opposite of what is appropriate developmentally. So it's basically, I think, this normal developmental moment where we start to realize, okay, a lot of my life I've been focused on advancement or proving myself or achievement or getting the job or getting the title or getting the house or the relationship.

And now, because a lot of those things are kind of humming along or running or we've established ourselves by sort of traditional metrics, there's a shift that happens for a lot of us where we start asking ourselves different questions that are more about alignment and meaning and purpose. And you know, so if you're asking yourself, if you're in that moment where you're asking yourself, you know, you're waking up at 2:00 in the morning asking yourself these kinds of questions, it doesn't mean you need to, like, buy a winery in Tuscany.

But b- before you go to, like, solving all the problems, I think it's important to just know, like, those questions are so normal and really healthy to be asking. So that's the, that's how I would reframe p- midlife.

Elaine Lou Cartas: Yeah. It's... I think a lot of you would relate, but when one of my clients shared this, who's in midlife, was like, "I'm just done portraying myself."

And then I've used that same line to other clients who have shared this conversation, which is a lot of people- Yeah ... 'cause we work with similar clients. Yeah. They're like, "Oh, those are the..." Yeah, those words. Exactly it.

Meredith Herrera : You used the magic word earlier, I think. Like, a lot of what- A lot of what we know from the research tells us midlife is, like, we slough off the stuff that no longer fits.

That can be jobs, that can be relationships, that can just be not speaking up for ourselves, that can be not taking care of ourselves. And so, like, integration and sort of, like, almost like this distillation of what really matters, where who you are and what you believe and what you do start to become more aligned.

Like, that, to me, is, like, the magic of midlife. Like, that's, like, the dope part. And part of that means, to your point, like, you'll give 0.0 about other things that at 25 you cared about, but now at, you know, 45 or 50, you're like, "I don't give a..." You know what? Can I curse? Can I curse?

Elaine Lou Cartas: Yes, I just was dropping F-bombs earlier.

Okay. Well, then

Meredith Herrera : I don't give a fuck.

Elaine Lou Cartas: I mean, to your point, it's like giving your 100% earlier, but I've even s-shared with my clients, like, figure out what your enough is, because the reality is your 20% is probably 100% to everybody else at this job.

Meredith Herrera : Totally.

Elaine Lou Cartas: You don't need to be doing 100 in every aspect of your life.

Mind you, like, if there's, like, a family crisis or a parent needs you, like, maybe your work's gonna go, like, down 20% and you need to focus more on your parents. Like, work-life balance is a lie. I just think it's like, a game. Sorry, I'm using game. It's like, what's a priority now?

Meredith Herrera : Yeah. It's just like lovers.

Elaine Lou Cartas: Yeah. Just... Yeah, exactly. Lovers. I thought you said lovers. I was like, "Lovers, yes."

Meredith Herrera : Levers. Let me see. Sorry. Sorry, everybody.

Elaine Lou Cartas: Okay. So people listening right now-

Meredith Herrera : Yeah ...

Elaine Lou Cartas: they pro- And you and I have heard of, heard this from our own clients. "I think I just need to blow up everything and start over." Yeah. What is actually underneath that impulse, and how do you help them discern, you know, what's real versus a reaction and how to make sure they truly align to what's important to them?

Meredith Herrera : Yeah. It's a, such an important question. I mean, and I'll be honest, like, sometimes you do need to blow things up, but most of the time it's about, it's not really a question of, like, should I quit my job? Should I leave my marriage? They're ask- It's, more, the question underneath the question is, can I keep living life the way I've been living it?

Like, is this, can I keep doing this way? And if I don't wanna do it this way, what is the way? And that could be in a relationship, that could be with work, that could be with your relationship to your children. It could be all kinds of things. Your in-laws. So I think... You know, and why is that the case?

Because we usually are living in a life that we built 10, 15 years ago career, you know, goals, et cetera. And a lot of us have been so busy, we haven't kind of evaluated or updated that

stuff in a while. And I think we tend to... So what would I tell someone? I would say sometimes the answer's a major change.

More often it's something smaller. It's maybe a boundary that you have been meaning to set that you haven't been setting. Maybe it's a new role, maybe it's reintroducing a hobby or exercise into your life and really treating that as like sacrosanct time. You know, it's not always changing everything 180 degrees different.

And then in terms of like, well, how do you know? Like, okay, Meredith, but like, how do I know? This is what I used to say with parents when I was working with children in crisis. I'd say duration and severity. We don't wanna like make permanent life changes based on temporary feelings, like probably not the best move.

Okay? So we're gonna, like, to your point, we're gonna pause and we're gonna sit with this discomfort, and if it persists, you know, and you try the new role and it persists, that's when we might need to like examine if something more significant is required. Because I've seen everything, every ... I have friends who have blown up their lives, and it's worked out great.

And I have friends who've impulsively blown up their lives, and it's worked out terribly. And I've had friends who've made minor adjustments, and it's worked out fine, and other friends who've made minor adjustments, and it wasn't enough. So I think it's really just allowing yourself, giving yourself permission to be in like, almost like an anthropologist in your own life.

Like, let me be a scientist right now and, like, sit with this and look at the trends over time.

Elaine Lou Cartas: That part, the trends and the patterns. And it could be the smallest things. So for example, like, I think about my crazy ass, like, in my teenage and 20, like, during my teenage years and my 20s. Like, when I was like- Were you

Meredith Herrera : crazy?

Elaine Lou Cartas: Oh, 100%. Thank you to my therapist. Really? I would like to share all, to all my high school and college friends, I acknowledge I was crazy, and I apologize. But I think about all the moments where I responded w- with reactivity and emotion, and it did not work well. And those are s- minor conversations, right?

Versus, like, maybe a big thing about, ugh, this work. Like, you could just see patterns of what is happening, which is very important to what you were saying, Meredith, let me be a scientist. Okay. Next time my narcissist boss comes up to me, let me try this. Let me try saying to him why my idea would work by taking out the word me, because narcissists don't like the word me.

Meredith Herrera : They don't like that, yeah.

Elaine Lou Cartas: And let them know how it would benefit them. So then you start seeing things you could test and play with. I'm gonna bring the video game idea up. Like, oh, okay, this is what is in my control. Can you ever change someone? No. I- Do I wish everyone in my life would go to therapy? Yes.

But I cannot force them. That is a choice they make, just like you cannot change the narcissist boss or coworker- Yeah ... that you work with. But you could ask yourself and test things, what can I do to change? Mind you, when you've done everything you can in your control, then you can ask the deeper question: Can I play this game at this work?

Yeah. At this organization? That's a question to ask. Well, and I

Meredith Herrera : think what is a ... I might sort of ... What does it gain me to play this game? What is it costing me?

Elaine Lou Cartas: Costing. Costing, costing, costing.

Meredith Herrera : And are the costs worth it?

Elaine Lou Cartas: I remember waking up, you probably felt this way too from what you shared, I remember waking up every day for a job where, like, I had full-on anxiety, like, on my chest.

I was not exci- excited. I felt I was gonna get yelled at. There was gonna be a mistake that was gonna happen. It was just not helpful for my mental health.

Meredith Herrera : Yeah.

Elaine Lou Cartas: And then when, I got out of the job, I noticed how things shifted in my personal relationships, the person I was dating, to even my parents. I was like, "Whoa, I'm a different person."

Meredith Herrera : 100%.

Elaine Lou Cartas: I didn't realize- Yeah, there's a lot of cul- ... I was so much of a bitch, like, when I was at that job.

Meredith Herrera : Well, I think that's, the cost part. Like, what's the collateral damage of continuing to ignore? And I think most women I know, you all who are listening, you know. Like, that's the other thing I wanna say.

Like, you can listen to me, you can listen to Elaine, you can listen to... You can read some books. You could, like, download a Brene Brown you- TED Talk There's gonna be a quiet voice inside of you that is there and it is not going away.

Elaine Lou Cartas: Correct.

Meredith Herrera : And it's been there for a while. Correct. That's your truth.

That's what you gotta listen to.

Elaine Lou Cartas: Yes. And I will say that has been an ongoing thing I've had to personally work on and continue to work on, is the listening to myself because what I- how I became successful, I'm putting air quotes, up to, like, was listening to what people had to say. But then in my chest, like, ugh, this doesn't feel good.

Like, even just even family dynamics as the oldest daughter, like, going to every single family gathering, even a small one where I'm like, "This is way too much." And now I have boundaries with my family, and they still love me even though I don't go to everything. It's kinda like

Meredith Herrera : I sometimes think it's like when you have been out of shape for a while and you go back to the gym.

Like, those first two weeks suck, but then you sort of find the rhythm and you- Ugh ... find a groove. So the first time you set that boundary, or you make that different choice, or you don't answer your narcissist boss email at night bec- and you start, you show up with these m- I, for me, they're micro moments of bravery.

Yes. I think sometimes we put so much pressure on ourselves to be so courageous all the time. Like, nobody's got time for that. Like, micro moments of courage and bravery where you can start to, like, throw a thing against the wall and realize, "Okay, that was maybe a little uncomfortable, but the sky didn't fall.

Like, I'm cool. Everything's okay. People still love me. I didn't get fired." And I think those experiments build confidence and clarity over time.

Elaine Lou Cartas: Micro changes. So one thing I forgot to mention in the beginning, what Meredith and I have in common is our shared love with Muay Thai-

Meredith Herrera : Yes ...

Elaine Lou Cartas: Thai kickboxing. And so even in our coaching sessions that I've had with Meredith, and we talked about small tweaks, I'm like, "Oh, you know, like, when your hand is down, someone's gonna hit you, but you should have your hand up."

Like, I started using Muay Thai sports analogies, and I'm sharing this with all of you because you could see life exactly like that. Like, the, or pickleball is a huge sport that everybody

loves. I have not gotten into it yet. Notice I said yet. Who knows, it may change. but it's like small little adjustments, tiny little things that you're doing.

Meredith Herrera : Well, I think one of the things you and I were talking about beforehand, before we started recording, is sort of how someone can tell, you know... 'Cause a lot of times these conversations are coming to me from women who at least use language, burnout language. Like, okay, I'm, you know, like, what's the difference between I'm burned out and like, oh, I just need something different, like, I've just outgrown, like, these shoes are too small now.

And I think that- First of all, I wanna say, like, sometimes it's both. For me, it was kind of both. I was both burned out and I needed something more stimulated and interesting to do professionally.

Elaine Lou Cartas: Stimulated and interesting, yes.

Meredith Herrera : Yeah, I was no longer, Because for me, that's one of my values. Like, intellectual stimulation's really important to me.

I needed to feel useful. I needed to just feel like I was learning and growing. Like, I love to learn. Like, that, that value wasn't getting sort of scratched in the same way. and I was real, real tired. So I think, like, okay, so if you're out there and you're listening, "Okay, am I burned out, or do I just need, like, to change jobs but stay in the same industry?"

I would say burnout is urgency. I need relief. I need it now. And when you rest, burnout gets better usually. Like, meaningful rest.

Elaine Lou Cartas: Yeah.

Meredith Herrera : Growth- I need something different. I've outgrown something. The, like, I just don't like this anymore. It's not interesting anymore, is, more less about, like, relief and more about, ah, I just feel, like, underutilized.

I need something different. And if you rest with growth, it sort of doesn't go away. You're more rested, but you're still feeling misaligned.

Elaine Lou Cartas: I wanna add to that. So I always tell people, I don't have the, "I hated my job before I started my business." I had my dream job. I had an incredible boss, an incredible team.

I worked at Pasadena City College where I was a former fundraiser raising millions of dollars for community college kids, so I didn't have to deal with, like, crazy trust fund kids. Like, they were kids that we were changing lives. And as you know, working in education, to go to campus every day, you feel that youthful energy.

Meredith Herrera : It's so fun.

Elaine Lou Cartas: Yeah, change is gonna happen. However, I mean, working also in education, there's a lot of bureaucracy. Things move slower. Prior to that, I worked in campaigns, so I didn't feel as intellectually stimulated, which is also one of my m- important values in learning and growth. And, it sucks because, like, I should end...

Let me-- I've had internal conflict. I should just put my head down. I'm making great money. I'm doing such a good job. I have a great boss. Like, I don't have toxic toxicity, but intellectual stimulation was really important to me. So to what Meredith and I were talking about, trying something, I was like, "Let me just try coaching on the side."

so I did. I tried it. And unfortunately, I, like, I was interim. I applied for my own job. I didn't get the job. While at the same time though, I'm grateful that happened 'cause I wouldn't have left So I don't have a similar story to Meredith where I chose to leave, although I probably was mentally, emotionally wanting to, but I was going to stay if I got the full-time gig.

But honestly, I'm not surprised I didn't get the job. I kept making too much mistakes at my job. Like, my boss had to have a meeting with me. She's like, "Elaine, what is going on? Like, you are a high performer. Like, you're making simple mistakes." And because I had such a great relationship with her, I was like, "My heart's not into this anymore.

I'm not meant to be here."

Meredith Herrera : I, you said something earlier that I think is so important, because I run into this a lot, and I certainly have had my own, like, nine rounds wrestling with this particular beast.

Elaine Lou Cartas: the kind of like, I should just be grateful- Yes ... conditioning. I hear it all the time- Ugh ... from my clients too.

I should be so grateful. Do you hear a man say that? Actually, can I say this out loud? You don't hear a man say that. It's usually-

Meredith Herrera : I- ... you don't hear men. I wish men said that more. Hey, men, maybe say that from time to time. no. I, the kind of like, I have, like, aren't I so lucky that I have this job, and da and I think it comes...

Like, there's a I- we could have a whole other podcast on, like, where that comes from, but, and why, and the cultural conditioning, the psychological predispositions women... Well, whatever. Like It's, you can be multiple things at once. You can be grateful for opportunities that have come your way in life and still feel like they're not what you want.

You are allowed to dream. You're allowed to be bold. And I just think a lot of us don't get encouraged in that way when we're younger. And so we, end up kind of conforming to, like how you and I said earlier, like what we are told is good and right and appropriate and proper. And like sometimes I think for me, midlife has been about I don't know.

It's, been like I am going to center joy, I am going to center ease. It's just been a shift of what I am valuing and centering, and that might mean I have to say, "Fuck this," to some things and be okay with that.

Elaine Lou Cartas: I'm gonna give an example 'cause I think this might help people, but even in my relationship with my partner, what...

The, hardest question to answer: what are we gonna eat tonight, right? And so in the beginning, very good girl. We talked about good girl. Yes. Whatever you want.

Meredith Herrera : Yes.

Elaine Lou Cartas: And then it got to a point where he got frustrated, like, "You always are asking me what I want. What, do you want?" I'm like, I don't know.

Whatever." And so then I started testing things. Okay, he's not liking this. Like, I just need to hear what you want, and this is just food, right? So then I'm like, "Okay, I wanna eat this." "Okay, good." And then sometimes I would feel shot down if he said no, so I've learned I'm gonna give two options I want. I wanna go here or here.

Which one? This one. I'm like, "Oh, okay." And then so what I've learned, like, oh, I think that was, an example of me people-pleasing and also kinda giving my power away to please the other person- Yeah ... as opposed to even saying, what do I want? Yeah. That's like a really minor thing-

Meredith Herrera : Yeah ...

Elaine Lou Cartas: but it's like how has it shown up in other things?

And even in my own business recently, I'm like, ugh, I have this feeling I need to increase prices. I'm like, nope, I need to increase it. It's gonna happen. So giving that space and time to reflect on these things, to what you were saying, patterns.

Meredith Herrera : The question I s- I ask my clients a lot, and I ask myself this regularly because this is an area of challenge.

Like, this is sort of one of those perennial areas of challenge for me. I grew up, I went to 12 ye- years of Catholic school. Being good was, like, real emphasized. But the question I ask is if no one were disappointment, disappointed, what would you want?

Elaine Lou Cartas: Say that question again just in case people need to hear it again.

Go ahead.

Meredith Herrera : If no one were disappointed, if we could create a universe where no one was gonna be disappointed in you or your decision, what would you do? What would you want? Let's start there.

Elaine Lou Cartas: Lunch. You asked me what-

Meredith Herrera : You want lunch. Yeah. Fair. Let's get you some lunch.

Elaine Lou Cartas: It is lunchtime as, it's 12:04 Pacific right now as we're recording it.

Meredith Herrera : Yeah, But you know, the other question I also like, 'cause sometimes I s- I watch-

I mean, as a coach, you know that there are sometimes moments where you look at your client's behavior and you're like, "Why do you do that?" And one of the things that I see is the ways in which women of color gaslight themselves a lot. Ugh. And so I will often ask them, I'm like, "What are you pretending to not know that you know?"

What's- I- What

Elaine Lou Cartas: is

Meredith Herrera : real?

Elaine Lou Cartas: Like, well, let's start telling ourselves the truth and- Or even knowing they are. Like, I was working with an executive who's in HR ver- like 20 to 30 years, right?

Meredith Herrera : Yeah.

Elaine Lou Cartas: And talks about gaslighting. And when He was sharing a specific example. I'm like, you're being gaslit." Shit, I am, and I talk about this all the time.

So it's interesting 'cause even though we could be experts, like, okay, 'cause we start second-guessing each other. I should be grateful. Oh no, that's just how he is. But then the question, too, it's like, what are you doing to enable certain behaviors, whether it's from yourself or to other people as well?

Meredith Herrera : And I always come back to that, what's it costing me?

Elaine Lou Cartas: Yeah. What is it? So talking about costing you, and we talked about this- Yeah ... earlier. For a woman of color, they've spent years, decades code switching- Yeah ... over-delivering, navigating spaces that weren't built for them. How does that cumulative weight show up differently when it hits this developmental crossroads?

Meredith Herrera : Oh, gosh. Well, I'll give an anecdote, and obviously, this is not representative of everyone, but I think it is representative of a good chunk of us. So I was on a leadership panel a couple months ago, and it was for women leaders in California private schools, and I was the only person on the panel who was no longer in a school, and the rest of the women were all heads of schools, and they were all women of color.

And we were assigned, you know, which questions we were gonna answer, and the question that I was not, this was not one of the ones that I was assigned to answer, was basically like, "What were the s- what are the trade-offs or sacrifices you've had to make to be in this role?" These are all very, like, highly accomplished women.

Okay, so then I was, you know, it was one of those like, get your face, Meredith, you know, like, moments for me because it's not that I was surprised, but from left to right, this is what it sounded. The first woman, a Black woman, "Well, five years ago, I had ovarian cancer and had to have a full hysterectomy.

Went on a medical leave of absence." The next woman, "I'm currently dealing with some pretty major health things, some just autoimmune stuff that's been, and I had to take a break from schools." the next woman, all illnesses, straight down the line. And I'm listening thinking, "Oh my God, like, how awful."

So I mean, what is one of the consequences? I do believe that of course there's gonna be an emotional and mental health toll that continuing to perform in a way that no longer fits your life, fits your goals, fits your values, but there are real physiological consequences to stress. And most of the women I'm working with who are questioning if they should like blow up their life, they are, their cortisol levels, if I had to like actually do like some blood testing, are ridiculously high And so I think it's like, you know, you asked me at the start of this conversation, like, why I wanted to talk about this because, you know, we're joking around a lot and we're being playful, and I think it is something that we should be playful about, but it's got real serious consequences.

If we don't really... If we continue to sort of privilege everyone and everything else before ourselves, that's gonna- that's not gonna end well for us.

Elaine Lou Cartas: That part where we privilege everyone else besides ourselves. So I am going to validate, this is how you know we're in higher education, validate that story- Yeah

with research and data. So I got... Are you familiar with Dr. Gabor Mate, by the way?

Meredith Herrera : Yeah. Yeah,

Elaine Lou Cartas: yeah,

So he's a Hungarian Jew. He survived the Holocaust. I think he was, like, two months old when the Holocaust- Yeah ... happened. And he's a real doctor. I say real doctor- He is ... 'cause we're both in higher ed, but, like, medical doctor from Canada.

And he was sharing that with autoimmune diseases, as well as, like, any diseases, whether it's physical, mental, or emotional, there are higher stats with women versus men, and that's because of how society has taught women to hold more, to comply, to hold more emotional labor. And-

Meredith Herrera : To

Elaine Lou Cartas: suffer

Meredith Herrera : more ...

Elaine Lou Cartas: yeah, and not, put themselves first.

Because you put themselves first, then it's like boo-boo, but then it shows up in our bodies. So you could research it, use Google, use AI, that there is higher percentages of women in autoimmune diseases versus men. And also fun fact that he shared, a male, a straight male, he shared this. White men... Sorry, no.

Men in general who are married live longer when they're married to someone, to a partner, right?

Meredith Herrera : Yes.

Elaine Lou Cartas: married women not. Single women actually live longer.

Meredith Herrera : Single women, golden girl style is, like, the lifestyle all should strive for. Yeah. For sure.

Elaine Lou Cartas: Look up the stats. I am not trying to encourage not being married.

What both Meredith... If you believe in that, and not saying I don't, I do believe in it. No, yeah,

Meredith Herrera : yeah.

Elaine Lou Cartas: But what I'm trying to encourage or what we're hoping our intention is, like, when you put yourself first, you don't have to be sick and go through all these things.

Meredith Herrera : Yeah.

Elaine Lou Cartas: It does blow up. Like, and I'm not saying blow up in terms of your personal life, but it will blow up in your body, unfortunately.

There's so much research and data. You were gonna share something. I saw you

Meredith Herrera : have- Well, I just am listening and I'm like, I'm kind of thinking about- You know, if I'm a woman listening to this and I'm sort of, like, at the crossroads, like, what would I need immediately? And I would say you need people who've gone through this who you can talk to.

Elaine Lou Cartas: Yes, and I would say I did that. What I did- Mm-hmm.

Meredith Herrera : Same.

Elaine Lou Cartas: What I did was I went through my little Rolodex. If you don't know what a Rolodex... Well, I m- wait, we're talking about midlife. You should all know what a Rolodex is.

Meredith Herrera : Everyone

Elaine Lou Cartas: listening- Address book.

Meredith Herrera : Please, i- if... Email Elaine. If you don't know what a Rolodex is- she'll send you a picture.

Elaine Lou Cartas: No, don't email it to me. Fax it to me.

Meredith Herrera : Even better.

Elaine Lou Cartas: Rolodex, contact. And what I did, and I had to be honest with myself, I went through my contact list. Who are people that I respect that have aligned their lives to what feels good for them?

Meredith Herrera : Yeah. I love

Elaine Lou Cartas: that.

And,

not necessarily the, like, CEO corner office, but, like, they could be an art teacher, but they, you know that they're fucking happy.

Like, and we all know who's, like, truly happy in their lives, and just interview them. Be a scientist, like what you said earlier. and guess what? You're like, "Oh, I don't wanna waste their time." People love talking about themselves, and the unfortunate thing about this decade, the 2020s, because of COVID, is that we're so virtual.

We think, "I'm just gonna deal with it myself, be a superhero, be a superwoman." We are human beings. Like, our ancestors survived and thrived living in a village.

Meredith Herrera : Mm-hmm.

Elaine Lou Cartas: Yeah. Yeah, I, and I think you'll know. You'll know. You'll, see who... You know, when I was starting

Meredith Herrera : my business, I know nothing about... I don't have a business background.

Like, I, probably if you had to draw up the opposite of a business background, that's what I have. And the people who stepped up for me were mostly women of color, some men, for sure, and people were... People are energized and motivated by courage, and I don't... You know, people are like, to this day, people will be like, "That's so courageous that you did this thing, and you left this really secure career.

You were really successful." I still don't think of it as courage, honestly. I th- I understand why they do. To me, it's about an in- I became... I reached a point in life where I was intolerant. I was no longer willing to ignore my value system. Yeah. My values were loud, and they were like, "Yo, girl, you, we, we are not aligned, and this feels crappy."

And once I gave myself, once I sort of bet on myself just a little bit more each day,

Elaine Lou Cartas: like, just a little bit,

Meredith Herrera : I would reap that benefit. And it, you know, it gave me just a little bit more encouragement to do it again the next day, right? So I think I also just want people to really hear that powerful change can happen from incremental moments.

And I want people to hear that

because

Elaine Lou Cartas: we live in an Amazon Prime world, in a capitalist society where it's, like, fast. You wanna lose weight? Go get Ozempic. just really quick, but it's those minor little things. But I wanna make sure we go back to actionable steps people could do. So I heard the first step from you is go Through your Rolodex.

Check

Meredith Herrera : the Yellow

Elaine Lou Cartas: Pages. And I was... Yeah. Yellow Pages, for those of you that don't know- I'm bringing

Meredith Herrera : it back. I wanna bring it even back before that ... are,

Elaine Lou Cartas: are basically what Yelp and Google was before. Literally, it was Yellow Pages. It was a big book that you would get. I think PacBell gave it to us. Who was the company?

Meredith Herrera : PacBell? Yeah. Whatever the phone company is in your area.

Elaine Lou Cartas: Back, but PacBell doesn't

Meredith Herrera : exist anymore. Before

Elaine Lou Cartas: you had cell phones. Yes. So anyways, so one, I'm hearing the talk to people, and then two, we talked about it a little too, like, give space and time for the voices in your head To come up, like give space to speak to them.

Anything else you wanna share?

Meredith Herrera : I think having some kind of critical self-reflection practice, I think that can look really different for everybody. That might mean you journal, that might mean you go to yoga, that might mean you go to therapy. I think just giving yourself, when you're in those moments of quiet, giving yourself space and time to reflect.

For me, I can do that by myself to a, up to a point, but then I need external help. So, you know, it's part of why I go to therapy, it's part of why you and I were working together, because I really believe in, like, seeking wisdom. I don't have to learn everything the hard way. I can, like, solicit the wisdom of other people.

the other thing I would say is you're probably gonna feel vulnerable during this time, and so it's really important, you know, this is not the time to be, like, on the phone with that one friend who's kind of always the naysayer. Like, this is the time to really surround yourself and tap into your village that you know really on a deep level have your back and, like, trust you.

Because there will be moments in this journey where you will not trust yourself. You will wonder if you've made mistakes. You will question things. And what you need in those moments is someone who can remind you of who you are. No, you got this. You'll figure this out. And- You're good ...

Elaine Lou Cartas: and you'll know, I mean, whether it's a friend, a therapist, a coach, all three, ask yourself the hard question, like, "Do I feel safe with this person?"

And it's nothing on the person, by the way, I also wanna share.

Meredith Herrera : Yeah, Totally.

Elaine Lou Cartas: And I will be direct. This probably happened to you. You will trigger the fuck out of some people when you're talking to them when you think you feel safe, because they're probably in a midlife crisis, but they don't wanna talk about it.

And I don't even think I shared this with you, Meredith, 'cause I am up for my recertification for my PCC. It's a certification for coaching, and I'm doing this program called Internal Family Systems, and I-

Meredith Herrera : Yeah,

Elaine Lou Cartas: I

Meredith Herrera : love IF- IFF stuff ...

Elaine Lou Cartas: yeah, my therapist has used it on me, and I started being nerdy. I was like, "Wait, is there a coaching program?"

And there was, so I'm going through it to get the units. But I'm gonna just paint an image for all of you, 'cause, like, I don't wanna pause and listen to my thoughts. So think of it like inside out. You have a boardroom, except that little voice that Meredith was talking about, this doesn't align with your values.

Maybe you don't like this job. Maybe, like, you need to improve on your relationship," they're the people that you've been hushing the voices. Like, "Shut the fuck up." Like, "This person's gonna take the money." We don't have time for

Meredith Herrera : this.

Elaine Lou Cartas: We don't have time for this. We just need to do the work. This hypervigilant person, they've per- been performing.

They've been hitting, like, our quotas. We've been getting bonuses with this person. But then the pro- it starts cracking. The floor keeps cracking. And so what you need to do, and mind you, all parts of yourself, they are all coming with good intention Right? Like anxiety part. Like there's a fire next to you, you should probably run away.

Anxiety could be good. So all those parts finally raise up, and you do need to give voice to them, whether you're listening, talking to a friend, talking to a therapist or a coach.

Meredith Herrera : You know, as someone who struggles with chronic kind of overthinking, I also, and I don't know if this is useful to say, I also needed to give myself permission to put parameters on it.

Because here's what would happen to me. 'Cause I'm so used to running at, like, such a high... When I first left schools, I was like, "I have to solve this problem as fast as possible, so I'm going to journal from nine out." First, I'm gonna go to all the therapy. I, like, over-corrected initially, which is also quite counterproductive.

So it's about finding balance. So, okay, I'm gonna spend two hours, you know, kind of investigating, what's next step, and then I'm gonna go to the gym. And then I'm gonna, like, go to the grocery store 'cause I need to, you know, think about what I'm making for dinner tonight. And really, because so many women I work with think they have to be hyper-productive constantly, or else disaster will strike.

So part of the bravery, part of these micro moments of bravery is also recognizing you actually don't have to have all the answers by end of business today.

Elaine Lou Cartas: Yeah. And I think what has helped me to make a decision, the micro ones, not, just the big ones, right? The micro does end up going to the big, is making sure I'm not making a decision in a heightened state.

Totally. And what I mean by heightened state, I'm not make a decision when I'm completely elated or completely sad, right? Completely elated, yep, I feel so 100%, I'm gonna do this. Completely sad to, like, fuck this shit, I don't wanna feel this way, I need to make a decision. I make sure I make a decision where I am neutral, and that's when I know how to move forward from it.

Meredith Herrera : Yeah, I love that. Yeah, if your little amygdala's getting tickled, just, you know, go sit on the couch for a while.

Elaine Lou Cartas: So I am sure people are in love with you, hopefully.

Meredith Herrera : Oh.

Elaine Lou Cartas: Go ahead and send Meredith a fax. We'll put Meredith's fax somewhere. Send

Meredith Herrera : me a... Yeah, send me your fax. Wait till your dial-up connects.

Elaine Lou Cartas: What was your AIM screen name?

Meredith Herrera : Oh, gosh. Oh, I think it was, 'cause I think it was USC Mare Bear.

Elaine Lou Cartas: Yeah, she's a Trojan. She went to USC. I did. Sorry, everybody. My partner went to USC, so I always have to hear Trojan. And I'm like, "Okay, let's do the UCLA eight clap," and they're like, "Fuck you." For those that don't know USC and UCLA- My, my dad went to UCLA

are big rivals.

Meredith Herrera : How's that? We can- Can I claim both?

Elaine Lou Cartas: Yeah, and then became a USC professor.

Meredith Herrera : Well, you know, that's where- ... I get my job, so- ... I don't know.

Elaine Lou Cartas: so people probably- Yes, ma'am ... fell in love with you. And for the... I don't think a lot of people have faxes unfortunately, so if people want to- It's true

connect with you

Meredith Herrera : Fair.

Elaine Lou Cartas: What's your- That's okay ... AIM screen- I'm just kidding. Thank you. Well, how can people connect with you, learn more about your work?

Meredith Herrera : I want, if you are gonna connect with me, I want you to send me what your AIM screen name was. That would be so fun. yes, that would be great. Well, okay, so you can always go to my website, which is just M Herrera Consulting.

I'll spell my last name. There's a lot of Rs. M-H-E-R-R-E-R-A consulting.com. I'll put it in the show notes too, by the way. Okay, and how- Or you can look me up on LinkedIn. I mean, that's probably the best place to learn about what I do and talk to me directly. and it's just under my name, Meredith Herrera. It's H-E-R-R-E-R-A.

Elaine Lou Cartas: And

Meredith Herrera : you got to work with me. Anything you wanna share about how it was like

Elaine Lou Cartas: working with me? Oh, wait. Before that, I should share- Oh ... my AIM screen name. I apologize, everybody. Yeah. What was yours? Mine was okay, you're gonna all think I have a dirty mind. I thought it was cute. I'm just gonna give context, okay?

I thought it was, one, cute, two, I was born December 1st, okay? So I wanted to do a winter theme.

Meredith Herrera : Oh, no, I'm so scared.

Elaine Lou Cartas: My screen name was Snowy Lollipops. I promise I did not have a dirty mind then. Different now. Wow. I know. I mean- So I have to give context, okay? It was cute. Don't you think it's cute? It is

Meredith Herrera : cute.

When you frame it, yes. When you think about that time in life- ... where we were and how old we were, yes.

Elaine Lou Cartas: Yeah, teenagers. Like, I just wasn't thinking that, but- Yeah, now reflecting back, nope. Okay, so how was- That's hilarious ... how was it working with Snowy Lollipops?

Meredith Herrera : Snowy Lollipops was great, everybody. that's so funny.

I'm gonna see you in a couple weeks and I'm gonna try really hard not to say that out loud in front of other people. yeah, it was great. I mean, because... Okay, so I think I need to give people context. So, like, part of the work that I'm doing with Elaine is sort of learning to sort of trying to pivot in some different directions with my business, trying to amplify my business in a different way.

And again, I shared, I don't have a lot of that context and background. So I, go to what I think is so helpful. I pri- try to practice what I preach, which is so- solicit the perspective and wisdom of people who navigate this all the time, help others navigate it. So it's been great because I think having...

When you enter new spaces, whether professionally or personally, you kinda don't know what you don't know. And so having guidance and partnership in that journey is, like, so important. And then we laugh. And you and I think it's also... I say this to my prospective clients, like, coaches, to me, like, therapists, coaches, they're like shoes.

Some are gonna fit better than others. So I also wanted to work with someone who has, like, a shared... We have some cultural overlap, I would say, and some, like, a shared sort of philosophy. And I also can't work with, like, humorless, old white men. Sorry, is that okay to say? I wanna laugh and find joy and, learn and, I want those all to be in the same 50-minute coaching block, and it is, and it's great.

I do.

Elaine Lou Cartas: Well, how would you describe my coaching style to anyone that might be interested in working with me, and the

Meredith Herrera : results

Elaine Lou Cartas: you've gotten?

Meredith Herrera : I think you provide a lot of space for people to think out loud, but then the sort of really good strategic questions you ask help me, at least, hear myself more clearly, like define things

Elaine Lou Cartas: for myself-

more

Meredith Herrera : clearly. You know?

Elaine Lou Cartas: I'm laughing because, like, Meredith, I'm just using your words right now

Meredith Herrera : when

Elaine Lou Cartas: I ask a question. Yeah,

Meredith Herrera : take

Elaine Lou Cartas: that on. Put that on your website. What do you want? You want it ... I, got you, girl.

Meredith Herrera : yeah, I think that's what it's like. It ... You know, you're deeply supported. You ask really good questions that push my thinking in a different direction, or

And you're good at tracking, you know, what I might have said three minutes earlier, and you're like, "No, girl, we're not gonna skip over that. I know you think we were gonna skip over that, but we're gonna go back to that." And it's usually right on point. So it's great. It's thought partnership. It's encouragement.

It's accountability partnership. Like, "Hey, did you do the thing that you said you wanted to do in the week that we ... you had to do it?" And I'm like, "Sometimes yes, sometimes no." so that's, what I would say. I know you still haven't gotten the green suit

Elaine Lou Cartas: yet.

Meredith Herrera : I have tried. In my defense, I have tried, and every time, it's sold out in my size.

Elaine Lou Cartas: I'm also a stylist. I'm kidding. No, it's just, like, we do talk about

Meredith Herrera : We do talk about that. And I think it's important, because I mostly dress in athleisure, so I do need to up my game a little bit.

Elaine Lou Cartas: So to close out this episode, what is one thing you wanna ... 'Cause, you know, we're humans. Yeah. We were talking about enough.

We can't, possibly hold everything together when we have serious conversations like this. But what's one thing you hope people get from this episode?

Meredith Herrera : I think one thing I would say is if you find yourself wrestling with some of these existential questions, and that, the fact that you're asking those questions just feels scary to you, I want you to hear that it's really normal, and you're not alone.

I mean, Elaine and I meet with clients all the time who ask themselves these questions a lot. It's a really normal part of this phase of life. And- There are answers to those questions, or it may be just a moment where you're asking those questions. So I think that's what I would want them to know, is that it's normal to be thinking about these things.

It's normal to like, you know, in a... When you're driving to work like, "What the fuck am I doing? Do I wanna keep doing this?" Like, it's normal to ask those questions. They can sound dramatic on the surface, but they're... That's okay. It's normal. And you're not the only one asking them. That's what I would want them to know.

Elaine Lou Cartas: And I'm just gonna add that analogy. I am glad we're at your boardroom, and you're giving space for these people to finally speak, to be

Meredith Herrera : listened to, rather than shutting them down. So Meredith- Yeah, maybe that's the... Yeah, maybe that's the last takeaway, is like you deserve to give yourself permission to redefine your life.

You're the author of your life. Nobody else is in the driver's seat. You get to decide at every stage of life what life gets to look like, and it's okay to have that desire.

Elaine Lou Cartas: You know, and I think a huge thing, unfortunately, as a woman of color, well, I guess I can only speak for myself, where it's like, I want someone to tell me what to do, right?

Meredith Herrera : Mm-hmm.

Elaine Lou Cartas: But the- Oh, yeah ... reality is, different points of your life, the only person that knows is you. So mind you, like, I mean, Meredith and I, right, we're coaches, but even if we give suggestions, we al- we'll always ask, "How does that land for you? You know, does this align for you or not?" But you need to ask yourself that question yourself.

So when you have conversations with people, even to w- working with a therapist or a coach, like I was yelling at my coach like, "I didn't listen to what you said because this, and this." But yes, I'm spending money, but I was like, "But there's a reason why." Like, it's learning how to trust your own voice.

Meredith Herrera : That's the work.

Elaine Lou Cartas: Yeah. That's part of the work. Meredith, thank you for this, a conversation.

Meredith Herrera : You're so welcome. Thank you for having me. It's such a treat to be able to- Oh ... talk about this stuff with you.

Elaine Lou Cartas: Yeah. And you'll see snowy lollipops in a couple weeks.

Meredith Herrera : Snowy lollipops, here she comes.

Remember,

Elaine Lou Cartas: you are not alone. Reach out to people, that you realize, you know what? They look happy. They were able to reinvent their life. And when you talk to them, be a researcher. Ask them questions. "Hey, what made you decide to make this transition? How do you feel now compared to before?" And if you need further help, consider getting a coach, getting a therapist, or figure out which one you need or maybe both.

And I always get asked what's the difference between these two. So if you think you are going through a block where you need to honor your voice or you feel this pressure from loved ones, from society, then definitely work with a therapist because a therapist will help you with those blocks in the past.

And if you already have a therapist, if you're aware and you need a plan and accountability to be aligned to this current version of you, then a coach like either me or Meredith would be extremely helpful. And if you're interested in possibly working with me, you could schedule a call with me at elainelu.com/call.

And if you know one or two people that could benefit from this episode who feel like they just wanna blow up their career right now, share this episode with them. Send them a personal message, "Hey, you need to listen to this. I know we've been talking about this a lot. This would just resonate with you."

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All right. I'll talk to you next time.