



Equality Talks Podcast - Transcript

Episode 3: Women Supporting Women with Heidi Roizen

Equality Talks, brought to you by WORK180, where we discuss how to finally put an end to work-place discrimination. Let's talk about what it really takes to succeed, what people are doing to drive equality and what can still be done.

Gemma Lloyd:

Hi, everyone. Some of you may not immediately recognize my voice, because we've changed things up for this episode of Equality Talks. My name is Gemma Lloyd, and I'm the CEO and co-founder of WORK180. I've very selfishly taken Samantha Sutherland's place today because I am personally interested in and inspired by our guest.

Gemma Lloyd:

Today, we have Heidi Roizen, who is a partner at leading technology venture firm, Threshold Ventures. In addition to being a venture capitalist, Heidi is a recovering entrepreneur, and we'll dive into that a little bit later, and corporate director for DMGT, Planet, Zoox, Memphis Meats and Polarr.

Gemma Lloyd:

Heidi has also been the VP of Worldwide Developer Relations at Apple. She has multiple degrees, including an MBA from Stanford, and co-leads the Stanford Threshold Venture Fellows program in the Management Science and Engineering department at Stanford University. She is also the proud mother of two kids and two rescue dogs, Joey and Cosmos.

Gemma Lloyd:

I first met you, Heidi, in California, back in 2018 at what was then DFJ. And the meeting has truly stuck in my mind to this day. And there's so much I would like to unpack, but I wanted to start with how I first heard about you, which is an incredibly interesting story. So, I'm hoping that you can share with us, to begin with, the Harvard Business School case study, where you were the subject of the Heidi verses Howard experiment, I guess we could say.

Heidi Roizen:

Sure. And good to see you again. Thank you for having me. Yeah, I am the subject of a case that was written by Harvard Business School. It's been around for quite a while, 20-some years. And it is a case that's about building business networks.

Heidi Roizen:

And a number of years after it was released, it was actually a professor who was at the time at Columbia, who did something interesting. He got permission from Harvard to teach the case in two

sections of his class, but in one of the sections, he changed it to the Howard Roizen case. So, the case was about me as a woman. Well, it's not as a woman, it's me. I happen to be a woman in the case. My gender is identified. And he changed the case so that there was another case just like it, only it was a person named Howard instead of me.

Heidi Roizen:

He then taught it to two sections of the class, and at the end he had them take a test to determine the competency of the person and the likability of the person. And interestingly, those who got Howard and those who got Heidi, both felt that the person was equally competent. However, the people who got the Heidi case didn't think Heidi was particularly likable, and that she was somewhat aggressive and manipulative and out for her own good. And the people who got Howard thought he was a heck of a good guy.

Heidi Roizen:

So, sadly, I think it is an example of subtle gender bias, that just the case being exactly the same, but my name being feminine or masculine, changed people's opinions about how likable a person I was.

Gemma Lloyd:

I talk about it all the time with customers and in meetings and things like that, because we often hear that people are hired or promoted based on merit. And I think this is a very clear example of where that merit trap falls down. But how was that for you personally to have experienced that? And did it change anything for you and how you approached work or spoke to people following that? Did you feel, "Maybe I am aggressive."? How did you deal with that?

Heidi Roizen:

I was very surprised by the outcome, and I don't think that it is a hundred percent indicative of reality. I know many times I've met people who've read the case and then afterwards will say something to me like, "You're far nicer than I thought you were going to be." Or, "You seem like a much more genuine person than I thought you were going to be."

Heidi Roizen:

And I think part of this is the reality that cases are two-dimensional representations of three-dimensional people, and are inherently not a full picture of a person. The case doesn't cover things like the fact that I have friends that are people I don't work with. And so, I do think there is a little bit of that you have to take it as one facet of the way people might view a person. I also think... I'm going to put a positive spin on it.

Heidi Roizen:

In the case, I throw dinner parties, I hang out with my children. I do things that I think are quite feminine. And perhaps the people reading the masculine version thought, "What a great guy! He cooks dinner. He hangs out with his kids." I mean, maybe. Maybe it isn't that Heidi is unlikable, it's that Howard is likable.

Heidi Roizen:

But that said, I certainly have in my many, many years of work life, where I'm often the only woman in the room, at least less so now, but for many times have been in the past, I have seen and I have experienced times where people might feel that a woman is... For example, I have people say, "Well, you were awfully aggressive in that meeting." Or, "So-and-so," talking about a woman leader, "was very bossy or she was very aggressive or she was antagonistic."

Heidi Roizen:

And I would always, when I hear those things, think about if that person had been a man or if I had been a man, would my words or actions have been seen in the same light? And I do think that in general, in societies, societies have an expectation that women are somehow more conciliatory and behave in a way that is different from men. And when you are in a work environment and you do a 'male-like action', that it makes people sometimes uncomfortable. And so, yes, it is harder for women sometimes.

Gemma Lloyd:

You mentioned being, or you used to be more so the only woman in the room. And you are a venture capitalist, obviously, at Threshold Ventures. There aren't many women VCs, and also, I think it's about 2% of venture funding that actually goes to women. How many of the businesses invested in by Threshold are founded by women?

Heidi Roizen:

We actually have a fair number. First of all, we have a number of female partners. We have two investment partners at Threshold Ventures, myself and Emily Melton, who's the co-founding managing director. We have another woman on the deal team. We have both our talent partner, our marketing partner, our CFO are all women. And those are all very senior positions.

Heidi Roizen:

So, actually, in a small fund, when we're in our partner meeting, there are more women than men around the table. It's either roughly even, or we have one more woman in the room. So, depending on who all is in the meetings.

Heidi Roizen:

So, we definitely have a different type of firm, I think, than typical. I certainly have been seeing those numbers changing and have been seeing a lot of venture firms, some adding women, but even more so, some new firms springing up who are being formed by diverse groups, including women partners. So, I do see it changing.

Heidi Roizen:

I don't actually know what our statistic is. I should know it, but I would say it's almost gender parity in terms of women founders in the last couple of years. I'm going to guess that it's probably 40% of our companies and maybe the last three to four years, but I could be wrong. It could be 30, it could be 35, but it's not five.

Heidi Roizen:

When I think about it, I know the deal we just closed and are about to announce is a woman founder CEO. Some of the companies; loftium, Bento, LaunchDarkly, Front, those are all companies with women CEOs. Zoox is a woman CEO. So, it is not a rarity in our fund by any means.

Gemma Lloyd:

Do you believe that is because you have a more gender-balanced partnership or is it purposeful, or are there lenses that you place over your investment decisions to make sure you're removing any unconscious bias?

Heidi Roizen:

I do think a lot of it has to do with the fact that we are a diverse team ourselves and that for a long time, our firm has had diversity in its ranks. I do think that we are aware and obviously we lean in, for lack of a better way to put it, when we are approached by a woman entrepreneur. But at the end of the day, we are not rewarded or motivated by that specifically as much as we have a commitment to our limited partners to do the best deals and return the best capital.

Heidi Roizen:

And so, our goal is to go out and find the best deals. And many of those deals are women-led. And so, I think it's just natural. We're more open to it. We more seek it and we probably are more willing to believe, because many of our partners are women, that women have a role at the head of these companies. And we're very comfortable with that.

Heidi Roizen:

And so, I won't say it's completely unconscious. I mean, we do make an effort, but I would also say that it isn't like we're sitting there with some quota to fill. We are finding the best deals and many of those are run by women, and we're thrilled about that.

Gemma Lloyd:

Yeah, that's fantastic. And I won't get into it now, but I've certainly had my fair share of experiences with VCs, some positive, some not so much. But even one of them did call me after. A male VC called me after and admitted he had asked me much harder questions than they had asked the male pitchers that day, but I was really impressed that he had actually recognized that unconscious bias that they had and ended up investing in us, which was a great result, but it's certainly not common, I think, amongst many.

Gemma Lloyd:

Changing gears a little bit, you yourself started your career as an entrepreneur and even call yourself a recovering entrepreneur.

Heidi Roizen:

Yes.

Gemma Lloyd:

I believe your father was an entrepreneur as well.

Heidi Roizen:

Yes.

Gemma Lloyd:

Can you take me back to those early days? What led you to start your own business? I mean, I'm interested, are entrepreneurs born, in your view, or are they made? Was it a result of your family experiences?

Heidi Roizen:

Look, I think anyone can become an entrepreneur if you are passionate enough about an idea, and if you're willing to take the risk and have the tenacity to go do something from scratch. So, I don't believe in the idea that you can't be an entrepreneur unless you were born one or born into a family of them or something.

Heidi Roizen:

My father was an entrepreneur, but he wasn't a very successful one. And in fact, our family went through personal bankruptcy and that sort of stuff. And so, I don't necessarily think that what I got from my father is that the road to wealth is entrepreneurship. It was more that he was a huge believer in the idea that you could craft something out of nothing, and you could set your own rules and not have a loss. Those were the things that were very important to him.

Heidi Roizen:

And he was, in essence, a one-man consulting firm. And he only worked for clients that he found interesting. And he even used to joke with me that sometimes there were certain clients he didn't like, and he would just charge them more money. I would say, "Well, dad, was that fair?" And he said, "Well, I set the price. Because I don't like working with them, I set a price that's so high that if they still say yes, then I can feel good that at least I'm paying my obligations by working with these people."

Heidi Roizen:

But he really did, I think, in many positive ways set this idea that work was something that you did. He did work for joy and he liked to set his terms. I mean, my first entrepreneurship journey was when I was, I think, 12 years old. I started doing puppet shows for children's birthday parties. We were pretty broke and I had some puppets from when I was a kid. And I decided that I was going to start doing these puppet shows and rent myself out to children's birthday parties.

Heidi Roizen:

I ran an ad in the newspaper back when you did that sort of thing, and some nice mom hired me, and I showed up. And I was barely older than the kids coming to the party. And my mom used to happen to drive me and my stage to these shows.

Heidi Roizen:

I got better and better and more professional, and actually, did that all the way through high school. And by the time I was a senior in high school, I was doing six, seven shows a weekend. And actually, it ended up that I was making about the same amount of money as my first job after college. So, it was an interesting journey.

Heidi Roizen:

Now, I don't really like children's birthday parties anymore. My kids laugh about that because when they were growing up, I always used to say, "I've been to enough children's birthday parties for a few lifetimes." But it was something where I learned a lot. I had to be a one-woman show and I had to do the bookings and market. And I had to deal with times when I was sick, or when you had issues of scheduling, the show must go on and had to be creative.

Heidi Roizen:

And I think I learned a lot about entrepreneurship. And again, really showing up and being responsible and making the budget work and all of that, even on a tiny little microcosm like a puppet business. And that was, I think in a way, good training ground for my future.

Gemma Lloyd:

That's so interesting, and not something I was able to dig up when doing my research on you, Heidi. So, thank you for sharing.

Heidi Roizen:

It's a little known fact. Heidi and the puppets! Pre-internet.

Gemma Lloyd:

Relative to many, you've clearly had a lot of professional success, and there are lots of smart people out there. But what is it, do you think? Your attributes or your mindsets? What is it? What's the reason for your success?

Heidi Roizen:

Well, first of all, and thank you for saying that, I mean, I am very fortunate, and there's a lot of really successful people out there in the world, and I'm grateful for the success I've had. And I don't necessarily sit around and bask in the glow of that or whatever. You wake up every day and you work. And I'm grateful for the work I do. I always say I think I have the best job in the world. I get to work with these incredible people every day, just trying to make these companies into reality.

Heidi Roizen:

I do think if I look back at my life and my career, first, I mean, a couple things, right? One is, my parents did not have a lot of means, but they were focused on higher education. And neither of my parents graduated from college. My mom only had an eighth-grade education and they were very dedicated to making sure their children had a good education. So, A, I started with a good education.

Heidi Roizen:

I have a lot of tenacity. I am very driven to not fail. And it sounds a little bit like a Hallmark card, but every time you get knocked down, you have to get up again. And the day you don't get up, is the day you've defined your own failure. And so, I do think particularly when you're an entrepreneur, that I can think of countless moments as an entrepreneur when it's three o'clock in the morning and you can't sleep, and you don't know how you're going to get through tomorrow, and yet you get up and do it, and you find a way. And so, I think tenacity is very important.

Heidi Roizen:

I think the third thing that I have built, and it goes back to the case we talked about, and again, I don't think it's naturally born. I mean, I think, yes, some people are a little better than others, but I think anyone can learn how to do this, is to what I call lead a relationship-driven life, and really focus on people and relationships as opposed to transactions.

Heidi Roizen:

When you say build a network, I don't even like the word network. To me, it sounds like you're a monkey barring your way across people to get what you want. I think of it much more like a coalition of fellow travelers in life who you help and they help you, and you learn from them and they learn from you. And I do believe learning is important, continued learning, having a growth mindset.

Heidi Roizen:

I was just joking with someone on the phone before this, that I thought at 62 I knew it all, but it turned out I don't. Every day, I'm still learning new things and testing what I know and adapting from my experiences in the world.

Heidi Roizen:

And so, I do think that those are a collection of the attributes that I think are not only where I look back and I say this is what I would say has helped me to achieve a level of success, but a lot of that is also what we look for in entrepreneurs, that tenacity, that growth mindset, that ability to connect with other people. Those also turn out to be very important in entrepreneurship as well.

Gemma Lloyd:

Yeah, a hundred percent. All of that resonates a lot with me. And I think one of the things that I've been particularly interested in lately as well, is how men are particularly good at this, I guess, for lack of better term, networking piece and supporting each other and sponsoring each other, and women don't tend to do that as much from what I've seen. So, I think that's really good advice that you're sharing there.

Heidi Roizen:

But I do think, by the way, that women are... It's funny because every time I say something about women are this or men are that, even my own kids say to me, "Mom, don't stereotype," and I'm like, Well, stereotypes are there for a reason. It's because a lot of people do fall into these patterns.

Heidi Roizen:

But I actually think that women are very good at nurturing, at forming alliances, at understanding human nature. There are some, what I'll call more female attributes, that actually work very well for this. But I think that you also have to remember that if you don't have a critical mass, if you don't have enough women in the organization, if you don't have enough women in positions of power, they can only help each other so much.

Heidi Roizen:

And I think that as you see more women in positions of power, you see this dynamic really shifting because they have all the tools, they have all the intelligence, they do, and the growth mindset and all those things. It's not like one gender has it over the other, but you also magnify that by things like your

position. And therefore, one can be more helpful when one is in a more powerful position. And the more of us who get there, the better it is for all.

Gemma Lloyd:

Yes, absolutely. And I'm about to ask you a quite cliché question, I think, but when it comes to domestic duties, this usually falls onto the shoulders of women in Australia. Deloitte recently did a study that showed women do an average of 13.8 hours of unpaid work than men?

Heidi Roizen:

Yes.

Gemma Lloyd:

Yes. So, you've got two children, have been successful as we've discussed. How have you managed your work and family life?

Heidi Roizen:

Well, I'll tell you, I mean, I was very fortunate in that, and this isn't the recipe I recommend to everyone, but I didn't have my children until fairly late in my life. I was in my late thirties. And I started the company with my brother in my early to mid-twenties. And so, I had already been a CEO for a decade before I had my first child, which is pretty atypical.

Heidi Roizen:

And by the time my oldest was one year old, I sold my company and therefore I had financial resources to get a lot of assistance and I hired help. And ultimately, I actually hired my own sister-in-law. My husband used to jokingly call her my wife, which is obviously very sexist and stereotypical in and of itself, but she was the person who picked the kids up from school and did the grocery shopping and took our cars in to get fixed and took the dry cleaning in.

Heidi Roizen:

And she did a lot of the domestic things, as her full-time job, by the way. It was a full-time job for which she was paid a full-time wage. And she was fantastic. And I don't know how I would have done it without her. And of course, part of the joy of that also is she was family. So, I really trusted her. She's a really amazing woman. To this day, my brother jokes with me that she brags about my kids more than I do. So, I was very fortunate to have that situation and to have the means to do it.

Heidi Roizen:

I have, as recently as last week, run a class that I'm talking with another woman entrepreneur and my students. And she also said to the students, "Look, even if you have to make other sacrifices to have to hire people to help you, you cannot carry it all yourself."

Heidi Roizen:

I mean, I believe in two things, the first thing is I'm a really big fan of the book and idea that is called Getting to 50/50. And the idea is that in a relationship with two working parents, they should be sharing the duties more evenly. That is not only good for marital harmony, but it's also good for the children.

And I think both parents have the opportunity to build stronger relationships with their children by doing that.

Heidi Roizen:

And then, I believe in there's a lot of things that if you're working full-time, time is the most precious resource you have. And so, when you think about what are the things I don't want to spend my time doing, can I hire other people to do them for me? And are they, I call it kid-facing activities, right?

Heidi Roizen:

So, for example, if you are a full-time working mom and there are volunteer activities at your school, and everybody has to do so many hours of activity per month, try to do the kid-facing ones. Do the monitoring the playground, or do the driving to the field trip or whatever it is because your children actually don't care if you're working in the back office or working on the auction or whatever the heck it is. They only care if they see you.

Heidi Roizen:

And I'm sorry if that sounds selfish, but as one of my friends when my kids were little said to me, there are other moms who don't work, who enjoy the managerial functions in the PTA and things like that. And it's okay if you are not the person to do that. You can do the things that your kids care about. You can still contribute, but you're just doing also the things that your children care about.

Heidi Roizen:

So, a little tongue in cheek about that, but actually, there is some truth to it as well. I think you just have to be careful about how you use your time, and money that you earn can buy you freedom. You can choose to have a nicer house or a nicer car, or instead you can choose to outplay some of those activities that you don't want to do.

Heidi Roizen:

I do think particularly right now with so many people, at least where I am, in a work-from-home situation, I really think the moms struggle, the ones who also have children at home that they're homeschooling. The vast majority of families I know, the vast majority of that work is falling on the moms, not the dads.

Gemma Lloyd:

Absolutely. And during this time with the global pandemic, particularly for WORK180, we've really had to increase our empathy levels with our team, and particularly our working parents and the women within the team, knowing that a lot of those homeschooling duties are falling on them. So, increased empathy and increased flexible working. And then, they're very relieved that finally the kids are going back to school.

Heidi Roizen:

Yes.

Gemma Lloyd:

Starting to go back to school, but I will also put that book that you mentioned, Getting to 50/50, in the show notes. It's something I'm very passionate about, and I think I'm in the fortunate position where my husband's probably 60 and I'm 40.

Heidi Roizen:

Well, that's pretty good. You should write a book about getting to 60/40. That could be a new hit.

Gemma Lloyd:

With the last bit of time that we have together, Heidi, I want to talk more about Threshold Ventures. How does Threshold make their investment decisions? You've got an amazing portfolio of companies and very innovative organizations there. Zoox has recently been in the news, obviously for potential acquisition, which you may or may not want to talk about what's going on there. But just going back to the original question, how does Threshold make its investment decisions?

Heidi Roizen:

So, I'm very fortunate to work with this amazing team of people. We are all of the same focus and I think we have the same goals, in terms of helping great entrepreneurs, making a return for our limited partners. We have thesis areas that we all work out in terms of where we think where the next corner is and how can we look around it.

Heidi Roizen:

But we also have a lot of diversity. We have gender diversity, which we also talked about. We have diversity in terms of our backgrounds, our age, our ethnic diversity. And we can always do better on all those fronts, but I think that because on our investment team, we have people in their twenties, thirties, forties, fifties, and sixties, even in a small group. And we do bring a lot of different perspectives to the table.

Heidi Roizen:

And so, I think in a way, they're all out there hunting on their own. Each person, each one of the partners has a thesis around whether that's AI or robotics, healthcare, SAS and the evolution of the enterprise, the evolution of the consumer. And then, they're out hunting and connecting.

Heidi Roizen:

And then, once a deal comes in and it's of interest, we do work as a team, where we'll divvy up. We are very active right now on remote channels and Slack and email and Zoom, and all the other things everybody else is doing to try to stay very connected. And we work on something, try to get to know the entrepreneur and ask both the kinds of questions that are very oriented towards metrics and those things and market, as well as some of the more real, the personal motivation and the background and the history and what we can glean about the person or people at the home of the company.

Heidi Roizen:

Then, at the end, we really are very collaborative in our decision making. It's not something where there's a vote and some people are violently opposed and others are violently for. It's more of a process of, why is the right time now for this company, and what would have to be true for all of us to feel good about making an investment?

Heidi Roizen:

And those processes are usually months, sometimes weeks. They're certainly usually not days. I mean, when you're writing a check for five, six, seven million dollars, at least we feel it's very important to have a fairly strong conviction about what we're doing and what that entrepreneur is doing.

Gemma Lloyd:

Are there any particular sectors that you're really excited about right now?

Heidi Roizen:

Well, we're looking in a lot of spaces. I mean, I think the last few deals that we did, I would say are related to the healthcare space. For example, a deal we just did called Tia. And we've done the changing evolution of how healthcare is administered and also the application of AI and ML to various things, including healthcare, manufacturing, automation, QA. So, we've done a lot of things of AI as an overlay.

Heidi Roizen:

Another deal we haven't announced yet that's in that space, it's using AI to analyze data in a way that is unique, and then we think very powerful. And so, I'd say those are the current things, but we are also looking at even things right now, like what does the next generation of the workplace look like? What are the implications? We're going through a cataclysmic time, and those times sometimes usher in some fairly dramatic changes in how people work and how people live. And so, we're also spending a lot of time talking and thinking about that as well.

Gemma Lloyd:

Absolutely. It makes sense. And I've got to wrap up now, conscious of time. I could talk to you forever, it seems, with everything that you've been sharing, but my final question that I'd really love to ask is, who inspires you, Heidi?

Heidi Roizen:

Well, I mean, I find inspiration in a lot of people. We talked about my father. He was very inspiring to me. My partners are very inspiring to me. I mean, I'm so lucky to work with people who are so intellectually curious and also just good people.

Heidi Roizen:

I am also inspired by my students. I teach this class at Stanford. We just had our closing session last night, and it was really sad because we've been together. We have this program called the Threshold Venture Fellows at Stanford, and we just had our 12 students through a six-month period. And I'm inspired by my students. I am inspired by the things they do and what they're seeking to achieve, and how much they learn and their attitudes.

Heidi Roizen:

So, I'm very fortunate in that way. I don't think that inspiration just has to come from those above you. It can come from around you. I'm very inspired by my daughter. She's only in her second year of being an out-in-the-workforce person, and she lives at my house. So, we have a lot of conversations about things that are going on at her work and how she handles her work situation. She's a young manager and I'm

very inspired by how she approaches the challenges that she's facing. So, I think we can look for inspiration everywhere

Gemma Lloyd:

To finish off with, is there anything else that you would like to say, or even promote, selfishly promote? You have the floor.

Heidi Roizen:

No, I just want to say thank you. And I just think that we are all in some very challenging times right now. And I think that the world needs us, those of us who can be agents of change, to be agents of change in a positive way.

Gemma Lloyd:

Thank you, Heidi. A big thank you to our guest, Heidi Roizen, for such a fantastic interview and being so generous with her experience and time. We will be including in the show notes a reference to books, *Getting to 50/50*, and also the Harvard Business Review case study around Howard versus Heidi. If you're interested in learning any more about WORK180, visit work180.com. And we also have all of our previous podcast episodes there. Thank you.

Speaker 1:

I really hope you enjoyed today's chat. If you can help us spread the word by giving us a review on iTunes, that helps even more people find Equality Talks. To find out more about our mission, check out current opportunities with WORK180's endorsed employers. And to read and listen to more inspiring stories, please head over to work180.com. That's, work 1-8-0 dot co. See you next time.