

# WorkWell

A Deloitte podcast series to empower your well-being



## Making self-care inclusive

**Jen Fisher (Jen):** Hey, this is Jen. Before we get started with today's show, I have a quick ask of you. If the show has helped you in any way, please take a couple of minutes to rate and review the show, let us know what you think, let us know what has helped you, let us know what you want more of, what you want less of, but just take a couple of minutes to do that – it would mean a ton to me, and it will help us get better and better in the future. I really do want to hear from you.

When we have so many responsibilities in our lives, it can be easy to forget about the most important person to focus on – that is you. Taking care of yourself is a must if you want to show up for your loved ones and be your best self at home, at work, and when life gets challenging. Taking care of your mental and emotional well-being becomes even more vital, but when we are so focused on everyone else, how can we make time for true self-care? This is the WorkWell podcast series.

Hi, I'm Jen Fisher, Chief Well-being Officer for Deloitte, and I am so pleased to be here with you today to talk about all things well-being. I am here with Naomi Hirabayashi and Marah Lidey, co-founders and co-CEOs of the self-care app Shine.

So, let's get started. Naomi, I will start with you, and then I want to hear from you, Marah, too, because there are two of you. Tell me about your entrepreneurial journey and what inspired the two of you to start Shine and to start it together.

**Naomi Hirabayashi (Naomi):** At Shine, our mission is to make caring for your mental and emotional health easier, more representative, and more inclusive of all our experiences. What inspired us to start was really our own need. We started Shine because we needed it, and that really came from our own experiences. So, for Marah as a black woman and myself as a half-Japanese woman, a lot of times our experiences weren't represented in mainstream wellness – everything from our body types to our skin colors, financial access or stress, and past traumas. When we looked at the mainstream wellness brands, those experiences were overlooked, and so that perpetuated this feeling of being "otherized." What we knew was that we were really lucky that we got to meet each other as coworkers 10 years ago, and the support that we found in each other really changed everything in terms of our ability to practice daily mental health. So, it was from our friendship and our own experiences of really feeling overlooked that we knew that we had to help more people cope and process, and ultimately heal on a daily basis, in a way that works for them, in a way that was a lot more accessible, inclusive, and representative of their experiences. So, it

was both our own journey and our own backgrounds, as well as the serendipity of being able to meet and really find each other at work, that inspired us to create Shine. So, that is really what Shine exists for. We are on a mission to make caring for your mental and emotional health easier, more representative, and more inclusive.

**Jen:** Yeah, the app absolutely does that, so well done.

**Naomi:** Thanks so much for saying that, Jen.

**Marah Lidey (Marah):** Thanks, Jen. Just to add to that, I think that something that we are always reflecting on is the fact that Naomi and I really didn't ever see ourselves as entrepreneurs, so certainly when we started the company, a big part of the process for us was that it started as a side hustle. As Naomi mentioned, we were getting up at 6 AM, meeting up at diner around the corner from our office, stealing away for lunches, and then happy hours after work. And then as we got to the place of, "Oh wow, this could actually be more than a side hustle but a company," that process was really all about just giving ourselves the confidence, and kind of borrowing it from each other to see that we could be entrepreneurs. I think that is very resonate in our product in terms of just that you can't be what you can't see. So, I think us taking the leap was, just as Naomi said, serendipitous because we were able to lean on each other and lean on the fact that we both were terrified. Now, I think that reflected in the product is both our own experiences of checking in with each other every day and our mental health, and also that vulnerability of maybe you don't always see yourself as this thing, whatever that is for you, but you have more power than you know. So, we really hope that the product does that for our community.

**Jen:** I love that. Can we dig in a little bit more to, if you are willing to share, your own personal experiences as women of color, and how this has impacted your journey throughout your career, in addition to starting Shine.

**Marah:** I think what is really powerful is that our identities as women of color and all the identities that come with that, for myself identifying as female, black, multiracial, and coming from a lower socioeconomic background, and where I was the first in my family to go to college, Naomi went to four colleges in five years, two of which were community colleges. So, there are so many parts of our identity that have impacted our experiences in the workplace and then as entrepreneurs, but I would say both have hindered our experience as founders now, but also have elevated the experience and thus is the reason that we are successful. What I mean by that is certainly throughout our paths, different for each of us, but throughout our careers, I can speak for myself, I started my career suppressing a lot of my identity and who I was – literally straightening my hair and dying it as blonde as possible and wearing all the corporate things that I could find. I was really trying to belong I think in a way that suppressed who I was. Then as time passed, I think I started to realize that I would get rewarded for that, but there really was nothing that would ever be enough to kind of make me be as homogenous as I was attempting to be. In my mind, I think when I started my career, I assumed that it was just like a right way to be, and once I started to realize that there isn't a right way and I am not just trying to crack that code, but instead I could breathe a little bit and be myself a little bit. It was, I think, around the same time that Naomi and I met, and a huge part of it has to do with me meeting Naomi and seeing somebody really live so authentically as who they are. We actually ended up rooming together during a company staff retreat a couple of months into working together. Sharing our backgrounds – it just made me gravitate towards her and I wanted to be around her and just learn how I could just be my authentic self.

I think now, having created Shine as a team and fundraised for Shine, we have both learned so much about how our identities, in suppressing them, has hindered us and been harmful to our mental health and harmful in so many ways. I also think that Shine as a product would not be nearly as successful if we weren't women of color, if we hadn't experienced what we had experienced. When we started the company, we immediately put a black woman on the website and we started to get emails from people saying, "Oh wait, is this only for women, or is this only for black women?" It's just so funny because you see like a white guy on a website for XYZ product, nobody asks, "Oh, is this only for white men?" Because you assume that is the default. For us, because of who we are and not because of anything we wrote down or mandate or anything, we just over-index. We focus on more marginalized experiences. We highlighted people that look like us and that look like our friends, and we told their stories when it came to mental health and how they were taking care of themselves, and where they were really excelling and where they were struggling. That has just evolved so much and become this core to our community and our product – it's about vulnerability, it's about accessibility, and it's also about intersectionality. It's about the fact that we all have different parts of our identities that society either accepts or rejects, and that again hinders or elevates us in our journey. I think that is where we are so grateful for, in so many ways, our backgrounds and what we have experienced. But it certainly has come with its challenges, and I think now looking back like four and a half years into this, we have done what so many people in our identities do, which is we have proven ourselves. Unfortunately, and I know we know this as women and women of color, you really do have to have that traction and really prove yourself a lot more than other demographics. So, I think that proof in our community, in our product, and in the efficacy has actually just made it easier on the industry side as well and feeling that acceptance and that elevation from the wider community.

**Jen:** Congratulations. I mean, obviously, you probably made the journey sound a lot more eloquent than it really was. So, congratulations, but just I mean, really powerful. Marah, was there anything else that you wanted to add there, or did I just mix you guys up?

**Marah:** Oh, no, all good.

**Naomi:** I think that was really beautifully said.

**Marah:** I think Naomi said she was good with that and didn't have anything to add.

**Jen:** So, clearly the two of you are close friends. Thank you for sharing that part of your journey. You started this company together, and you have eluded a little bit to kind of the relationship and the support you have provided to one another. But how does that, or I guess how has that impacted your journey along the way of having one another, having the support of one another. Also, current day with everything that is going on in our world, how is being cofounders and co-CEOs – how does that continue to impact your journey?

**Naomi:** I think the first thing that comes to mind is gratitude. Just specifically talking about the "now" and the fact that feelings of isolation are obviously on the rise for a lot of reasons. The entrepreneurial journey is hard no matter what. It can feel isolating no matter what. So, I have always just felt so much gratitude, and I know that I couldn't do this without Marah because the foundation Shine was built on is our friendship and us collaborating together and leaning on each other and supporting each other. Also how that translates to remote work and not being able to get that same energy from day-in and day-out at the office – I just feel a lot of gratitude for how much we have invested in our

relationship from the beginning, so we are able to adjust to this in [remote work] a way where we are keeping the traditions that matter that we can do remotely.

The first thing that comes to my mind that we have done from the beginning is “founder dates.” We think that is so important because...well I married, I have my partner at home, and when we have a family and the baby and all those wonderful things. Marah is my other partner, and so just as I invest in my partnership at home, I need to invest in my partnership at work because Shine is so much more than just a job. It’s a personification of us and our friendship. So, what that looked like pre-COVID was, we would every single Friday get out of the office, go to lunch, sit down, make eye contact and just look at each other and say, “How was your week? How are you feeling? What do you feel good about? What’s been stressful? What can I help with?” We would talk about work, we would not talk about work, and because of the brand, too, we know that so often work and life come together: how you are feeling, what stuff going on personally impacts your work, and vice versa. It was really important for us to check in not just as business partners, but as friends, co-founders, and human beings. That is something we were really intentional about doing very early on when we didn’t really have that big of team. We were maybe over-engineering our schedules, but it was so needed because you just get kind of wrapped up in the day-to-day and all the things that you need to get done. Taking that reflective pause at the end of the week was a way for us to practice what we preach and make sure that we are checking in with each other.

**Jen:** Is there a time that you are willing to share...you know, I am a big believer in the importance and the impact to our well-being in a very positive way of having friends at work, having a best friend at work, or having meaningful connections at work. Clearly, there are some people that say, “I don’t want to have friends at work because then I am too emotionally connected, and I can’t focus solely on the work that I need to get done.” Has there been a time in your friendship and work life where you disagreed and did the friendship help or did the friendship hinder that?

**Marah:** I love this question because I think it is something that we had to really figure out when we were first fundraising and taking the leap to quit our jobs at the non-profit. We really had to convince people that the co-CEO model was the right choice for us. I think if you look at the co-CEO model, a lot of the most successful ones you see are of women, and we could talk about that for a long time. Even anthropologically, how women working together has historically been, in this sense, much more of an equal collaboration versus, I think, the more alpha environment. For us, obviously we didn’t say that in our pitch meetings, but we were more focused on how we already relate and how we already collaborate because we did work on Shine for a few months as a side hustle before we ended up taking the leap. What I am so proud of is that what was true at the very beginning is still true today, which is we absolutely disagree. There are things that we have different perspectives on, and that is the whole point – the whole goal of getting to work with each other. I mean, we get each other’s feedback on so many things; I would say for most things it’s incredibly helpful because, to Naomi’s point, you do, as founders, get in these silos. It’s certainly not only lonely, but also you think in the opposite of groupthink, right? You are by yourself and you are thinking about the same things for a very long time. Overtime, your own thinking starts to compound if you are not getting stretched. Certainly that happens from your own team, but no one quite understands the lens that you have as the CEO of the company across the entire company and your investors and your wider community and the responsibility that comes with the care that is so important to take with that, and the

mental health challenges that come with that. So for us, being able to not only have each other as a gut check like, "Hey, does this feel right?" but also as a check of like, "I am thinking this on a specific project and I feel really passionately about it." Sometimes hearing the opposite from one another is just so helpful. I think this applies to any relationship hopefully at work, but when you can lead with curiosity when you do have to disagreements, and you can find places to just really get curious about why that person might have that perspective, I think it helps to stretch your own thinking and bridge that gap between being passionate about something and just sitting in that space – just wanting to do it that way. So, I think for us the fact that we do disagree and have different perspectives on things is what elevates us so much and what makes our partnership so strong, as opposed to what people often think of as a co-CEO relationship, and especially female co-CEO relationships, that it's all like hunky-dory all the time and we are like, "Yes, yes, yes and...", and always. It is fine, but it's also really helpful to have that friction that makes ideally everything better.

**Jen:** I loved what you said about being there for one another, specifically around mental health, because, and obviously, that is part of the business you are in. But mental health is so strongly stigmatized in society, and, in particular, in the workplace. It's not something that we often talk about. I think that for many of us, it's not something that we think that C-suite executives struggle with because how could somebody who is so successful, somebody who appears to have it all together all the time, struggle with their mental health? I get that a lot because I struggle with anxiety and I am very open about it. But I also get the reaction of, "You are so energetic, and you seem to have it all together." Because most of the time perhaps I do, or at least I am good at projecting that and putting that out there. But that has come with many years of working on myself, and it's a daily pursuit. So I love the fact that the two of you are there for one another, not only in the business and the business decisions, but also having the authenticity and the vulnerability to say, "You know, we are human and we struggle." No one can quite know exactly what it's like to be in your roles, but you have each other and I think that is so beautiful.

**Naomi:** Thanks, Jen. And thanks for sharing that, too, about the feedback and all the different roles, I think, we work particularly as women or women of color, and the space that people are trying to kind of box you into in a certain way. We talk a lot about all the change that is needed in leadership modeling, and one of the things that we were inspired to create, because we had trouble seeing it in our own worlds, was personality diversity in leadership. I think especially some of the reckoning that is happening around these very problematic ways people have led that perpetuate this idea of the alpha dog and "you know everything," so there is no room for humility – just a feeling of someone that is on the other side and is almost like they were just born into this. Whereas, what has always been interesting to us and I think this is something that we really value is that a lot of people have only been entrepreneurs, but we have done so many jobs and from all levels – we were members of those entry level jobs, and we were members of those service jobs, so that comes with a level of humility and we remember all of the things that didn't work. The things that I know I resented in leadership when I looked at it because it's like, "If that's what it has to be, then I don't know if I want to be the leader." Whereas, like Marah said, we didn't set out to necessarily be entrepreneurs. We didn't set out to start our own leadership style, but what's powerful about the times that we are in is for the first time ever, it feels like there is starting to be this change in direction. There are a lot more channels for accountability, everything from Glassdoor, to people mobilizing on Twitter, to healthy callouts of where there is that discrepancy between what is publicly shown and what

happens internally. I think particularly for women and women of color, the idea that you can be kind, compassionate, and strong and direct, and human and also high conviction – all of those things have always existed in one person, but we haven't yet had the examples of what that looks like with power.

**Jen:** I love that. So, coming back to the stigma that is associated with mental health, well-being, and quite frankly sometimes even with self-care. One of the things that I really love about the work that you guys do through your app is...in some ways I personally feel like society has turned self-care into this reward that we get at the end of a long week or at the end of a really hard day, where we deserve something because we have done something difficult. I try to debunk that as often as possible and say, "Self-care, yes, it's great if you want to take a bubble bath on Sundays or drink a glass of wine on Wednesday evening, not a whole bottle, but a glass or two.

But that should be part of a regular self-care program or regimen that you have for yourself." Quite frankly, sometimes self-care is hard because it requires us to make difficult decisions that are good for us but may go against something we really want to do, but we probably shouldn't do. So, it's not this luxurious escape, although parts of self-care can be luxurious, but a lot of it isn't. I think so much of what you all promote is really aligned with that and helps to break down the stigma around mental health and debunk this view that we have created about self-care. I would love to know your thoughts specifically around taking care of our own mental well-being, and then your views on self-care and how important it is.

**Marah:** I love that you shared just the inaccessibility that self-care has unfortunately taken on and been made to seem like something that you should do when you are treating yourself. I think what we have really worked at as a company, and even as individuals, is making it really clear that when we say self-care, we are talking about an approach to really taking care of our mental and emotional health. Mental health is still unfortunately such a loaded term. It makes people kind of go inward either in a way where they are like, "Yeah, I have struggled with something and I can think of what that is, or "I don't know. Mental health – that is not me. I am fine. I am healthy." But we do believe that breaking down the stigma around mental health starts with really open conversations about what we are all struggling with. That started with Naomi and I at work talking about like, "Hey, I feel like I was just not great in that meeting, and I am feeling really insecure about it. I am wondering if I am really cut out for this." So, we are affirming each other, but also giving each other space to say, "Yeah, like, I have been there. I have been in a place where I felt like an imposter. I have had really bad anxiety, and here is how I have navigated it." So. I think, similar to what we did for each other, we do offer that as a company and as a product with Shine – where it is about offering people a safe space to have those conversations and connect with other people.

Also, offering a daily ritual for people to just know that it's a normal thing. We felt like to normalize the conversation around mental health, it was important to say, "We are going to have a conversation every day." Every single day, we are going to start our morning with a different mental health theme because this isn't about just the moments when you are in crisis; it's about everything, right? It's about every little way in which you are showing up for yourself. Or maybe you are not prioritizing yourself, so how can we create a space where there is a new mental health theme every day? And that is the core of the product.

I think what we didn't have in the time during which we were getting to know each other and really supporting each other in our own mental health journeys, but have now created through Shine and through our incredible team that we have and the partners that we work with is giving people the language and the tools to know how to navigate what they are going through. That is probably one of the most powerful things that we get feedback on as a company. Giving people the language to understand that they might be dealing with anxiety or depression – it can be as simple as that, or it can be helping people to understand a new language. For example, where we might all kind of understand the idea of burnout, we might not know that there is a concept called representation burnout, which is the feeling of exhaustion that comes from being the only one, right? Whether that is being the only woman in the room, the only queer person in the room, the only person of color in the room – that comes with a different kind of burnout, and it comes with different level of fatigue. Things like racial battle fatigue, which has to do with the physical and physiological symptoms that our body reacts to after years of often dealing with microaggressions in our lives. So, when we think of mental health, again, it's from the approach of an intersectional approach to mental well-being, meaning we are thinking of a lot of different types of people and their experiences. It's both important to offer that safe space, create that daily ritual, and then give people the language and the tools to know that not only are they not alone, but also that they have something that can help them really push through it.

**Jen:** That is really powerful. You touched on this a little bit, and I will be completely transparent and say that I, myself, have been learning a lot more recently, and perhaps it's because of the many recent racial injustices that we are all witnessing, but knowing that they have been going on for many, many, many years. So many of us probably weren't paying attention in the way that we should. But what I am learning is mental health, in general, is stigmatized, but in other communities and in other races, it's stigmatized even more because there hasn't been racially sensitive, and this probably goes for other groups too, but racially sensitive ways in which to seek help. Or if they did seek help, they were misunderstood or misdiagnosed, so the system itself deterred people even if they tried to reach out for help. Obviously, that is part of what your app and your company is addressing, but can you speak a little bit more about that and educate me and our listeners who may not know about that?

**Naomi:** That is absolutely right that unfortunately the research shows that even when minorities, and any marginalized communities, seek help and support for their mental health, they are often referred to things like the Juvenile Justice System or the prison system, as opposed to getting the actual support we need. So, unfortunately, mental health issues do over-index for minorities and specifically for the black community. There are so many challenges...I mean there are so many reasons for that, the biggest one being systemic racism and the daily challenges that we face as black Americans, as black people. There is certainly history and there is so much research around trauma and how trauma does stay in your cells, so it is passed down. Certainly, the impacts of slavery and racism in our country have physiological ways in which they come to life for us.

To what we were speaking about earlier on the treatment side, unfortunately we see just a lack of cultural competency when it comes to treatment for mental support for minorities and particularly black Americans. Just a couple of years ago, the American Psychological Association only had 4% of its membership that identified as black. When you think about what already happens in the physical healthcare system, which unfortunately lacks much integration with mental healthcare, you have similar trends of the black community really

being misdiagnosed, not necessarily being taken seriously, and receiving worse care across the board. That is not even addressing the stigma that exists within the black community around mental health and culturally where that comes from. But if you don't have the cultural competency on the resourcing side, we can't even do the research on the stigma, we can't even address some of the challenges, one of which being just language, right? There is a study that was done recently on the fact that while black women may not specifically say like, "Oh, yeah, I have anxiety," a lot of us might say, "My nerves are bad...it's really bad for my nerves." Just small things like that, understanding the language from a cultural competency standpoint, would make such a massive difference in being able to research and address and solve the problem. But there is a massive gap and unfortunately, not only the resourcing and people available to support and treat mental health issues for black Americans, but also in the stigma and in the problem of where we are being directing when we do express that we need some help or need some support.

**Jen:** Thank you for helping to raise awareness and educate all of us that need to be educated on that, myself included. I truly appreciate it. In addition to that, obviously we are still in the midst of this global pandemic, and it seems like this is where we are going to be for a while. I know that you all have been doing some great things to support your community and others during this time, especially those who are new to struggling with anxiety, and just in general or potentially with depression, PTSD – anything that might be coming out of this pandemic, which I guess some of it is still to be seen. But certainly the uncertainty, the loneliness, the loss of life as we know it, which for some can be grief and grieving, what is the best advice that either somebody gave you, or you guys gave each other, or that you give to other people, for taking care of their mental and emotional well-being, especially during this time?

**Naomi:** Advice for others that we are trying to put into place for ourselves, is that right?

**Jen:** Yes. We are all a work in process.

**Naomi:** Yeah, exactly. I do think that one of the powerful outcomes about this time is that there is a shared sense of struggle. Obviously, this pandemic is highlighting so many inequities in our country, so the experience for so many people is very different. But there is a common struggle in that we haven't experienced what we are experiencing or anything like it. There is no playbook. We are trying to process this time and trying to get through it. I think one of the powerful things is that, in a very American way, we usually respond to, "Hey, how are you doing?" with, "I am good, I am fine, things are okay," even though that probably might not be true most of the time. I think now we are being a lot more open about what's hard versus trying to smile through it.

We did a survey to better understand how our community was processing and navigating their mental health during the pandemic and the racial justice uprising in our country. One of the things that we saw was that people actually said that they were expressing their emotions more than they were before, and the big reason why was because they knew that other people were struggling, too. This speaks to this communications theory that Marah and I were really inspired by at the beginning, at the start of the Shine, which was this concept of the "spiral of silence." Meaning, the idea that for fear of isolation by publicly speaking out, you don't speak out, and as a result common human experiences stay either taboo or oppressed. An example would be miscarriages, which so many people experience, but for a long time women were kind of suffering beside each other, not realizing that this was a shared experience because there was so much stigma about speaking out. I think we

are experiencing a time where that stigma for mental health and that spiral of silence is starting to be broken. The more that people speak out, the more they will speak out and continue to find those connections between people.

The other thing that we found that was really powerful, and this is to the question of, "What is something that you do every single day?" I try to practice remembering to share. Like Marah said to me, and this was such a big reason why we started Shine and why we connected, is to speak about what's hard. Speak about that inner narrative that's tough, that thing you feel ashamed about. But once you mention it...for example, I did this the other day with Marah: I said, "I am just being really hard on myself about feeling behind." We were talking about productivity guilt, and how that is obviously a big thing right now because in some ways you have more time and in other ways you have less time. Your energy depletion – that is very, very real. When we got to talk about that, I was able to be more compassionate with myself. That is a similar thing that we heard from our community as well. So, the people who are speaking out more about their mental health struggles are also practicing more self-compassion. What I love about that is it's not about this quick fix or silver bullet or any of that because none of that exists in this space. But rather, what are the ways that we can be kind to ourselves and be more compassionate with ourselves? If we can have either virtual networks or in-person networks where it is possible to connect over that struggle because that is, I think, one of the most important things that we can do during this time.

**Jen:** I completely agree on that. I am experiencing myself that the people are much more open about talking about what they are struggling with. That is something that I really do hope continues, and I will be at the front of the line, hopefully with the two of you, leading that charge long past this pandemic that we are in.

So, I have one more question for the two of you, and it is something that I like to ask all of my guests because well-being means something to all of us. But I have found in my own experiences that it means something different to all of us, so I would like to know how each of you define well-being.

**Marah:** I can start. I think for me well-being is about feeling like you can live as your authentic self and show up in the spaces that you exist – at work, at home, and in your community – and really have that sense of belonging. You also have the tools and the language to navigate the challenges that life will undoubtedly throw your way.

**Naomi:** For me, I would say a feeling of realistic peace. The realistic comes with the idea that there are systems that we are part of, and there are things that we just don't have control over – bills need to be paid, etc. This is just the reality of life, and trying to find peace within that is, I think, when I feel the most well. That is everything from feeling like you are stealing back time from your day by not rushing as soon as you get up to jump into stuff, or taking your time in the morning, or setting boundaries because you really just need time to do something for yourself, or for your family, or for a friend in the evening. But a sense of realistic peace.

**Jen:** I love that, realistic peace. That is a new one to add to my library, so thank you for that and thank you Naomi and Marah. Thank you so much for this conversation. Really meaningful for me personally and I know for so many people that are listening to it as well.

**Marah:** Thank you for having us. It's fun to do these conversations that are just like real talk because it's like therapy. You can tell that the approach is so authentic and the

questions are so authentic, so we feel privileged to share and to be here. We appreciate you all having us.

**Jen:** I am so grateful Marah and Naomi could be with us today to share their stories and the importance of self-care.

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