



## Afraid of Disappearing in the Role of Mom

Mykella is excited to become a mom, but fears she'll throw herself into the role and risk losing a fulfilling career as a media maker and the beautiful life she's created around it. Stevon shares strategies to remain adaptable and reframe our thinking when anticipating change.

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Stevon Lewis:

What's up, everybody? Welcome to How To Talk To [High Achievers] About Anything. I'm Stevon Lewis, a licensed psychotherapist. Today, we welcome Mykella. Mykella is getting ready to become a mom. It's something she's always wanted to do, and she feels emotionally and financially ready. But when she thinks about the sacrifices she'll have to make, she worries about what she might lose in this new role. Her career, her lifestyle, even her identity. Let's get into it.

Mykella:

My name is Mykella Van Cooten. I am a podcast producer and audio storyteller from Toronto, Canada. I am about to adopt a child, a newborn. The child is about to be born very soon. And yeah, I mean, I don't have any other children. I haven't adopted before. I've wanted to. Different things have happened and I didn't. And it's, I mean, I've always wanted to have children, so I get to have that opportunity now, when I didn't think I was going to have that. And I again have never had a child before but everyone around me says it's the most beautiful and wonderful and heart stretching thing you can do. And I'm up for that.

I do feel ready, but I have no idea what to expect. I'm getting a lot of support, a lot of family help and support around it. It's really just ideal. I feel like I'm living the life I want to be living. I have a lifestyle I enjoy and I feel good financially and emotionally and wellness wise. And so it is a really good time because I have the space to take care of someone else.

I'm always being asked to take on leadership roles and I think I'm most proud of the times I haven't taken them and kind of chosen myself, and creating a life that I have right now, I'm really, really proud of, like, I have a home I adore, I have my little doggy, and we have a little wonderful life and it's like, free time. I like to go to the theater. I want a life that's fun and nice and has a lot of luscious moments in it that aren't about work. I get to make choices of how I want to live because I created a life that I'm happy with.

Mykella: I don't really know what it takes to raise a child. I don't think anyone does until they do it. So I have fears. I have fears around losing this beautiful life I've created and the happiness around it. And having to be up late nights and then resenting that. Or having to give up some of my creature comforts and resenting that. I spend money on things that make me happy. I have a really weird feeling around being like, "Oh, well I do this and I have a maid," which I don't. It's just once in a while I have someone, honestly, I don't like cleaning, so I have someone else do it and I can afford to do that. But if I have to use that money for other things relating to raising a child, expenses I don't even know or understand yet, I might resent that. Or I might just have a really gross house and then not have anyone over, which I might resent that because I like having people over.

But I do have fears around what I don't know yet. Just changing how my life works. And I have a little bit of resistance to it. Of course you have to make sacrifices in any relationship or in so many areas of life. But there's a point where you make so many that your life changes and then you look back and you go, "Oh, what happens to the things I wanted?" I just don't want that to happen. I mean, I can think of so many different little moments in the course of my life when I saw myself sacrificing and was like, "Oh, am I going farther than I want to go?" I think I spent much of my life doing a lot of extra stuff and not asking for help because I wanted to be a hero. Also, I'm Black. So from as far as I can remember, I was taught that I had to work twice as hard. So you kind of get used to working hard.

I have to prove I'm a good mother by doing things the way other people think that good mothers would. And I think that's the beginning of the death of myself. And so I know I will have to balance that, because I haven't done this before. I am going to get everyone's opinion. I'm going to get family's opinion, friend's opinion, stranger's opinion. The thing I need to consider is when I'm about to do something, I don't know, maybe it's dress my kid in the most expensive pair of Nike sneakers for a child. Is this because I want to look like I'm the best mom, the most on trend mom? Or is this because I really think it's a good idea for me and my child.

The worst thing that could happen would be I give up my new career to make money or I literally lose my personality as Mykella and all I do is go to play dates and ballet lessons and all the things. But I don't really get to be myself anymore and I just become a mom and all I can talk about is my child and I'm hovering over them constantly. So they don't get to be who they are and I don't get to be who I am. And I just become this nervous wreck, constantly worrying about what people think, and then worrying about what I'm doing, and wondering if it's right, or if it's wrong. I think that would be the worst thing that could happen.

Lewis: Thank you for sharing what you're going through, Mykella.

When I listen to Mykella's story, it really speaks to a common theme that happens. People are excited about this new endeavor or accomplishment and also extremely fearful at the same time. She's taking on the task of becoming a new parent, a mom, and she's always wanted, it sounds like, to be a mom, like this is something she's looked forward to and maybe had some concerns about it ever happening or becoming a possibility. And she's now here at this stage that she's getting to the goal of the thing that she's wanted so much and now she's terrified. So she mentioned that she doesn't have kids, this will be her first child, and she's ready for the challenge and super concerned about whether or not she knows what to do or will know what to do.

There's this belief when we engage in kind of new activities or new spaces or new endeavors that we ought to have all the knowledge about this new thing we've never done before. That if we know more or we have more control over, then the outcomes will be better. And I don't know that that's necessarily true. So I kind of question that. So with Mykella's kind of situation in her becoming a new parent, there's this idea or belief that she has that if she maybe had prior experience, then this time around would be better. She's thinking if she's got some experience, she'll perform better because she knows what to do. She doesn't really take into account, and I think high achievers do this often, all the stuff that they can't control.

: Not every kid is the same. What worked for one kid may not work for the other kid. And that's an instance then, what you've known in your prior experience doesn't really bode well or help you in this next iteration of you becoming a parent. And I think that we put too much emphasis on the idea that having prior experience is necessary for doing a good job. I do believe that it can add to your confidence or maybe decrease some of the self-doubt, but in the end you don't know how things are going to work out every time you do something.

High achievers, in my opinion, ought to focus more on the overall ability to be flexible and resourceful and the kind of intangibles that they bring to any situation that allows them to find success. I think when they become too myopic and think solely about this specific situation and the amount of preparation they have in this area or amount of knowledge that they have, then they become more fearful than they need to be. I would say a better predictor of how you will perform is more of, what do you do in situations that are, I guess, previously unfamiliar to you? How have you performed in the past in those situations? What have you done? Have you failed miserably in all of them or have you found a way to figure out and learn and become successful? If it's the latter, why are we not applying this to another new situation or any new situation that we embark upon?

Lewis:

Part of what is making Mykella so fearful or concerned about becoming a parent and her performance and ability is what she's worried about losing. Some of the stuff she says is that, "I don't want to have to sacrifice my identity. I'm worried about the death of myself," not so much literally, but figuratively, like who she's created. She's really happy with the life she's created for herself and her fear is that it will all be taken away when she becomes a mom. I'll caution her against listening to that. "I'm going to give up my identity." Well, nobody wants to do that. And if that's what you're associating with becoming a new mom, I would be worried too.

If I were working with someone like Mykella, I would really try to get them to change their language about how they're framing the situation or the upcoming situation so that they aren't talking about what they're going to lose, but also that they are instead kind of focusing on and including the strengths that they bring to the table. Say, "Hey, I'm going to be a new mom. I'm adding this new responsibility and major role and I want to do a good job. And I know that I find a way to make things in my life work so that I can live a life that I enjoy." And she's done that really well. I would have her include that in her assessment or evaluation of what the future might look like.

When I hear her talk about having to sacrifice and some of the fears of possibly resenting that sacrifice, it makes me want to suggest or help her identify new language around that and how to talk about it. Part of what I hear is that there's going to be a change. So maybe we don't call it sacrifice. Maybe say that there's going to be a change. And understand that like when we grow, we are different afterwards. And I think if she embraces it in a way of not focusing on what she loses, but saying that she's going to be growing and gaining, and some of the things that she's letting go might not be things that are going to serve her in this new role and space. And it's not an immediate thing of where she's now a new mom and whoever she was yesterday, she gets rid of all of that. I would say do it in stages. Some of the stuff she's going to find as a new mom is that, "This doesn't work. Maybe I can't go to the gym five days a week. And that's what I used to love to do. As a mom, I can go three, three times a week."

And I think letting go of the perfection of, I've created this vision that I have for my life. And I want to add this other piece to it, and holding onto that I don't want anything to change, then that doesn't really make sense to me. Because if you're adding something, then things are going to be different. I think about it like a recipe. If you add something new to the recipe, it will possibly change how that tastes. Doesn't mean it's going to be worse. It's just saying it's going to be different. And I think that she's somehow defining different as possibly less than, or bad.

Lewis: One thing that I found helpful that I think holds true for this situation with Mykella is this idea that uncertainty needs to be met with more control. She's operating in a way and most high achievers do because they want to have good outcomes, that they need to be more rigid and have more control over the situation in order for it to obtain good outcomes. And I don't know that I agree with that. I think that what really makes them successful is their ability to be adaptable and flexible. And so that's kind of the opposite of having all the control over the entire situation or being more rigid. They control what they can and that's really just how they respond to whatever happens. So some of the stuff she might have in mind of doing might not fly with this particular child. And that's okay. And I think that's the inconsistencies in the thinking that causes them to be more worried than they ought to be.

And that's a wrap. Thank you so much for listening. How To Talk To [High Achievers] about Anything. We have really big plans for our show and we want you to be a part of it. We want to hear about your successes and challenges, your sacrifices, the ways you've celebrated, and what's ahead as you grow. Send our producer Virginia an email, and we'll get your story on the show. She's at [virginia@lwcstudios.com](mailto:virginia@lwcstudios.com).

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