



## Episode 109 - Life and Entrepreneurship with Guest Meg Keene

Lee Burgess:

Welcome to the law school toolbox podcast. Today we are welcoming special guest Meg Keene, author and entrepreneur extraordinaire. I am incredibly excited for this episode so I hope you enjoy it. Your law school toolbox hosts are Alison Monahan and Lee Burgess, that's me. We're here to de-mystify the law school and early and early legal career experience, so you'll be the best law student and lawyer you can be. We're the co-creators of the [Law School Toolbox](#), the [Bar Exam Toolbox](#), and the catapult conference. Alison also runs [The Girl's Guide to Law School](#). If you enjoy this show please leave a review and rating [on iTunes](#). If you have any questions please don't hesitate to reach out to us. You can reach us via the [contact form on LawSchoolToolbox.com](#) and we'd love to hear from you. With that, let's get started.

Welcome back. Today we have a special guest in the podcast, Meg Keene. Although Meg is not a lawyer, but she's married to one, so we consider her part of the club. She's a kick ass entrepreneur with a lot of very interesting things to say.

She's the founder and editor-in-chief of [A Practical Wedding](#), the top independently held wedding publication in the world, the author of two books, [A Practical Wedding](#) and [A Practical Wedding Planner](#), and a new project called [The Compact](#). I started reading Meg's website when I was planning my wedding eight years ago, but the thoughtful writing that she and her team do on relationships, entrepreneurship, motherhood, and feminism is really where I think they work the most, even though I do love your wedding stuff too. I think that she and her team are producing some of the best content out there on these topics. Alison and I have both been fans for quite some time, so we're thrilled to have her join me on the podcast today. Thanks for taking time out of your busy schedule.

Meg Keene:

Hi, I'm so glad to be here.

Lee Burgess:

So Meg, we talk a lot on this podcast about the path to entrepreneurship. Alison and I have chatted about the learning curve to running and building your own company. How did you learn what you needed to know to be successful?

Meg Keene:

I feel like I didn't. No, I had sort of an unusual path to entrepreneurship, I think. I went to school for theater at NYU. I was pretty clear from pretty early on that I wanted to work for myself. Going back, it's sort of I'm not even sure putting it together, I don't know, that's just where my head was at. I grew up ... If we trace it all the way back, I grew up at renaissance fairs. I grew up around a lot of small

business artisans, sort of entrepreneurs. I did have a feeling of I knew early on I wanted to be a mom, I wanted to have some flexibility. I think I thought I wanted to work from home and have my kids at home, and then realized that was-

Lee Burgess: Almost impossible?

Meg Keene: 100% not what I wanted. I remember coming home and telling my now husband that, and he was like, "Yeah. I was just waiting for you to figure that out." It does give me the flexibility and ability to be the mom I want. I started blogging back when it was kind of setting up a blog with an account. You didn't need any startup capital, you didn't really need any sort of business structures. I didn't have a business checking account for two years. I do think recently we did a content audit, and so I just dug through what is now nine years of content, and now ... I mean the internet being where it is now is a totally different place. I don't know how many of you were reading me in the internet in great depth nine years ago, but there was not-

Lee Burgess: Because we're not spring chickens anymore?

Meg Keene: There was just not the volume of content, this was pre-BuzzFeed. Pre-Twitter? No, Twitter was in its infancy. Pre-the Facebook feed kind of thing, so we were all sort of desperate for content. There was no real sense of professionalism. Anyway, doing this content audit I went back through and was like, "I feel like I figured out what I was doing two years ago." It is an ever evolving process, and I think my personality is just one that I think I am far more comfortable than most just throwing myself in the deep end and just being like, "Whatever, I'll figure it out." That's what I did with my business.

Lee Burgess: Yeah, I think that willingness to keep learning is just one of the main things to survive entrepreneurship I think you have to have.

Meg Keene: Yeah, and willingness to keep failing. If we're going to be honest.

Lee Burgess: Fair point. Let's talk about failure, because that is one of the major things.

Meg Keene: Yeah, I feel like I just ... We just had our nine-year anniversary as a business in March, and I feel like I'm fresh off of a really hard failing spree that has been January until now. It really just never stops, and you never stop being like, "That was a total disaster, absolutely the wrong thing to do." I don't know, it's easy to look around and be like these people know what they're doing. When I do that I feel like I'm often looking at male entrepreneurs, but I realize they also have in general, sort of a lot of structural supports that we don't have. The joke has always been if our company was run by a man, we would have funders lining up around the block trying to get in on it, because we are now the largest privately-owned wedding publication in as far as we know, the world, but maybe there's one in China, but we're bigger than India.

It's fine. We haven't actively gone for funding, but if you're a male that's sort of a different setup. It's easy for me to look at men who are my age who are running companies with large amounts of funding and feel like they know what they're doing more than I do. Look at Uber, clearly, they don't

Lee Burgess: Right, exactly. They're making plenty of mistakes.

Meg Keene: Plenty of mistakes.

Lee Burgess: I think it is this idea for a lot of women entrepreneurs, is that we're kind of creating something to solve a work life conundrum that we see. I think for me, it was looking at the people down the road at the job that I had, going "If I don't want that life, what do I do next?" It's like, "Is anyone going to give me the life that I want? No? Then I guess I have to come up and make it myself." [I used to call myself a reluctant entrepreneur](#), which is a terrible thing to say.

Meg Keene: My coach would say, "Be careful with your words."

Lee Burgess: Right, exactly. I realized when I first started talking to other especially women about entrepreneurship, I used that language, and then I actually did have a man at an event who was a professor at the college I went up to come up to me, and he says, "You cannot be a reluctant entrepreneur. You're just an entrepreneur. Own it. You made choices, this is what you're doing." It was kind of this aha moment, you're right. I did make this choice and I am building something. When I run payroll and I'm like, "Wow. There are people who are living with the work that we're doing. That's a no joke business." All of a sudden you feel like you're in something really legitimate.

Meg Keene: Yeah. I mean I've never been a reluctant entrepreneur in any capacity, this has always been what I wanted, and gone after really hard. I have made a decision to build it slowly, and to build it sustainably, which is one of the reasons every time I look at funding I'm like, "Ugh." This last quarter I had gotten a business line of credit for the first time, really for like no reason, but it ended up being good timing, because we decided to move into office space which is near my house, which is great, which involved some renovating so I was like, "How much could that cost?"

Lee Burgess: More than you think.

Meg Keene: Fired up, the whole nine yards. I ended up going into the line of credit but that's the first time I've even touched any sort of credit at all. I've always ... And this is lucky that I entered this particular business at a point in time that this is doable, but I just come from a background where we did not have a lot of money, and I grew up in an area where no one had a lot of money. I grew up in the second most impoverished city in the United States after Detroit. That just sort of is the attitude I grew up around, I don't know, you just figure out how to make it work. The business has always ... I've never put a dollar into it that the business

didn't earn. We did ... I don't even think we used credit, actually, we never went into the red. I just sort of used it to make sure, but there was always a pattern there. It's always been sort of dollar in, dollar out.

Lee Burgess: Did you ever read the, is it [Chris Guillebeau, his \\$100 Startup](#)? Did you ever read that book?

Meg Keene: I know his name, and I've read other stuff by him, but I haven't read that. Yeah, actually, I have read that. If you had 100 dollars what would you do?

Lee Burgess: Yeah, and he profiles entrepreneurs who basically do. They start things with like 100 bucks. When we were starting out, I think Alison gave me that book to read, and it was really powerful because I think I had this idea that you had to have all these resources to build something.

Meg Keene: Yeah.

Lee Burgess: We built it in kind of the same, bootstrapping, you grow as you can afford to grow type of way. We were able, because of technology, to have a platform to do it that way. I just didn't even know that was possible.

Meg Keene: Yeah, I think because I grew up really well outside the upper middle class, in a way that I have now, with a husband who's a lawyer has ... I feel like I learned how to navigate. My husband and I grew up together, we didn't date in high school or anything, but we were born in the same hospital, went to the same preschool kind of thing. We grew up together, but his family was one of the few sort of professional upper middle-class families in town. My parents are both very well educated, but sort of only one person worked at a time, and there were health crises or whatever, so money was always tight. He had a business owning mom and a public defender dad, so they were ... That was rich for where I came from. Because I came from this place where it's just like you just put it together with what you have, that was never really a question for me. I had I think maybe I had \$2,000 in the bank when I started the business, but that was not \$2,000 dollars for spending.

Lee Burgess: That was like \$2,000.

Meg Keene: That was \$2,000 of emergency money. Yeah, so I literally was not a \$100 business, it was a zero-dollar business.

Lee Burgess: Other than the fact that funders aren't often particularly interested in women. What do you think of the other challenges of being a woman entrepreneur?

Meg Keene: The biggest challenge has always been the being taken seriously challenge.

Lee Burgess: Even in this market, where it's kind of a gendered marketplace?

Meg Keene: Particularly in this market, I think. More because people don't ... If I were a man and I had a large wedding business, people would be like, "Oh my God you must be a brilliant entrepreneur, that's a multi-billion-dollar industry." For many, many years, everyone's sort of treated me like, "Oh, you must've never gotten over your wedding. You have this hobby." Also, because I have a husband who's an attorney, for many years I was treated like, it's so nice that your husband has this job and he can support your hobby, which was infuriating, because I helped put my husband through law school. I had quit and was working on my own when he graduated, and he graduated in the worst of the recession and he was trained in public ... He was going to be a public defender, and everything was frozen. There were no jobs. He graduated from Berkeley, and all of his friends that had trained in criminal law were just unemployed. They were top of their class and unemployed.

There was a whole year where he was working at the San Francisco public defender's office on a fellowship, he was taking one bar and then another bar because I was like, "You passed that bar, you don't have a job." So I made him take the New York bar too. He's taken the California and the New York bar, poor thing. Those are two of the hardest bars in the country. Then I was like, "We might want to live in Louisiana, maybe you should take ... Or New Orleans. Maybe you should take the Louisiana bar." He was like, "Look I'm drawing the line. It's not even the same." Louisiana law is like totally different law, and he's like, "No, I'm not even qualified."

Yeah, so I then supported us for that year until he got a job, and I've always out earned him, partially just because my career was a little bit more established. Yeah, it's never been like I have a hobby job situation. In fact, we were so used for a while not having his income because he'd been in law school and then hadn't been employed that we treated his income like bonus money. We were like, "I'll just put it in the bank." We lived off of my income kind of thing.

Lee Burgess: Yeah.

Meg Keene: It's only been ... I've been in business nine years, and I would say in the past two years people have started treating me like I have a real job.

Lee Burgess: That's really amazing.

Meg Keene: Yeah.

Lee Burgess: We got some interesting questions when I got pregnant. We had some people ask us, like one they asked if I had told Alison or if I had been hiding it from her, which was always one of my favorite things. I was like, "She's my business partner, I told her right away." She was in the top bundle of people that I told. We had done strategic planning knowing that I was trying to get pregnant.

Meg Keene: We did not have it together enough to have done strategic planning, but now we're professionals. There's always somebody on maternity leave here. I only employ women in their 30's, a lot of them are newly married, some of them are not married at all. Two years ago, when you count freelancers, and our lawyers, interns, whatever, two years ago the company had eight babies.

Lee Burgess: That's amazing.

Meg Keene: I don't know if amazing is the word you're looking for.

Lee Burgess: Amazing has a lot of different connotations.

Meg Keene: It's my two maternity leaves that have been brutal. Now my second in command is on maternity leave, but at this point it's like ... Then we are planning for her second in command is going to try for a baby next. People don't always tell us, but she has told us. We assume Maddie will want a second. I think I'm done. I literally am like, "This is the lineup." We just function with the idea that someone is always going to be out on leave.

Lee Burgess: Yeah, you know it was interesting. It started even before I got pregnant, Alison cut her finger and couldn't type. She had to have crazy finger surgery, and that finger surgery was one of the best things that happened to our business because it forced us to realize that we couldn't do everything on our own. Then when I got pregnant, now Lee's going to have a limited capacity. We need to find other people. When you look at our company's growth, it's these things that happened that most people would say, "That was the downturn." It was actually the opportunities for growth.

Meg Keene: We have always grown enormously every time someone's gone on maternity leave, because for me to go on leave, and then again for Maddie to go on leave, we have to hire someone to fill in, and then usually by the time someone comes back from leave ... Maddie's hire we did not hire in a temporary basis, but usually what happens is we have to hire someone and train them to take over, and I ... California we're blessed, we have FMLA and disability and whatever. I give everyone the same leave that I have, which is six weeks disability before, and then six weeks FMLA and six weeks. It's like, four months maybe. Usually by the time you get back, the person that is there is essentially earning their own salary, so it's easy to keep them on and they go to out earn our salary. So we definitely grow each time someone is on maternity leave.

Lee Burgess: See, so you getting pregnant is really a good thing for business.

Meg Keene: It actually in my case 100% has been, yes. I'm tired. Actually, I'm less tired now because my kids are sleeping through the night.

Lee Burgess: Yeah, we've had a really good run with sleeping right now, so we're pretty rested at my house too. One of the things that I always find interesting about

your sites is that you have made conscious decisions ... Say that again. You have made conscious business decisions to have a social mission as part of your work. I noticed many years ago when you were setting up vendors and sponsorships that all of your advertisers signed a sanity pledge. I think you still have that as part of your website, and part of that sanity pledge is about being welcoming to LGBTQ couples.

Meg Keene: Yes, which was an issue at the time. We really have been sort of rode that whole marriage equality wave because we started in '08 and nobody was even publishing same sex weddings. It obviously happened very fast, but yeah. We were really sort of on the edge there, on the front edge of that for a long time, and that was obviously very directly related to our business and what we do. It's something that was super important to me. We spent a lot of time educating, and winning hearts and minds, and just being like, "All right person by person, commenter by commenter." We really found that we have this great entry point with people both for feminism and for ... And now feminism is now a buzzword, so both of those things have moved a lot in the last ten years. We have this great entry point for people where it's like this moment of joy, and you're looking at people's happy pictures and whatever. You're able to move the needle with people in a way that you certainly could never on Facebook, because is anyone's opinion ever been changed on Facebook?

In the current political climate, it was just an obvious decision because it's what we've always done to keep our social and political focus.

Lee Burgess: Right. I think it's still important. I was actually at dinner with a gay friend who recently got engaged last night, and I was telling him this is what I was doing today. I was telling him about your website and then I was like, "All their vendors are LGBTQ friendly. That's part of their platform." He was like, "Really?" I'm like, "Yeah."

Meg Keene: We're actually prepping for pride week. We've always said pride week and then we didn't do it for a year or two because it was right after ... I mean this year it feels important, but it was right after gay marriage was legalized, it just was falling flat. Everyone was like, "We're there already." Apparently, we're not there already.

Lee Burgess: We're not there, there's plenty of good work to be done.

Meg Keene: That is what I was doing was right before this podcast was prepping our pride week that we decided to do two weeks before pride. So let's pull it all together.

Lee Burgess: Yeah. I think that is interesting what you said kind of about the wedding market being an entry point. You want to have these bigger discussions because you, especially in the light of the recent elections and things like that have been doing a lot of writing about social issues, political issues, women's issues, you name it. I think it really resonates with us, but how do you decide to incorporate

that into your business? With the size leadership that you have, not everybody's going to agree with you.

Meg Keene: No, not everyone's going to agree with you. Although at least for our business, and I suspect for a lot of businesses we sort of have two audiences. We have our really core audience, and then you have the more drive by audience. The more drive by audience is coming to you for resources, and they're not that invested. Yeah, I mean I think part of building a brand is deciding who you want sort of on your team, and also who you don't want on your team. There's been a lot of writing about sort of building a brand around this, but I think that is really critical, and frankly applies across the spectrum. It applies in terms of law firms, for example, as well. I was just reading the debacle about Trump's private lawyer in the New York Times this morning.

Lee Burgess: I haven't read that yet.

Meg Keene: It's real fun. He's Bill O'Reilly's lawyer, right, so already you're like we're sliding downhill. He's also ... His firm represents the largest state bank of Russia, and represents an oligarch who's a close personal friend of Vladimir Putin.

Lee Burgess: Do you think he'll want to be on our podcast? I feel like maybe-

Meg Keene: That's building your brand. That is law firms, who they are working with and who they're not working with, whatever. I think that's really important. We can't, particularly in the moment, and we have a lot of our ... In the current environment, we just have a lot of skin in the game, we've made a real conscious, very conscious push to really diversify our team which we've made a couple new hires in the past few weeks, actually, which further diversifies our team, which is great. Our family is Jewish, and we have gay staffers, and we have staffers of color, and we have one of our staffers is Iranian. It's all very personal. There's no ... We would be ... I think it is such a privilege to be able to pretend that things are separate and to be like, "My politics are separate." Okay, maybe that's true if you're a straight white man, and you have the world at your feet. For the rest of us, it's not separate.

I'm a little less freaked out now, but I had really terrifying fears for my Jewish kids at the beginning of this administration. There are neo-Nazis in the white house, oh my god. That is not really something that I can separate out, and then just pretend there's this other little thing I do. That said, we have also done some recalibration recently. Now that we're a little further past the election, where do our brand limits lie? What are we going to talk about, what are we not going to talk about? How do we keep focused on the brand, but keep our politics in it? It's a balancing act.

Lee Burgess: It is. It's interesting, the first time we really felt pushed to talk about politics ... I mean we're two Bay Area lawyers, it's not shocking what our politics are. It was right after the election, so we're both devastated, we were on a Skype phone

call in tears trying to discuss how this happened. Then we sent out an email blast to both of our brands, just basically saying here's where we are. We're regrouping. We wrote about wanting to be the helpers, and we really ... We wanted to kind of include something in our business model from our perspective that was like we see some of the problems, how do we move this forward? How do we help new lawyers navigate, so we can get the new lawyers that can fix some of these things and are happy with it? Out of law school, and as fast as possible. We got some incredible responses. These emails that were just like also women in tears. It was mostly women, but it was really touching. Then we got a few that weren't so nice.

Meg Keene: Whatever.

Lee Burgess: Right, but it was interesting because it was the first time I was kind of like are we okay with that? It was the same thing, we couldn't pretend like this hadn't happened, you know?

Meg Keene: Yeah, and you want ... I really ... I gave a keynote in January, and it was sort of the ... It was the end of the week that Trump got elected, and the travel ban had just gone into place. I get chills thinking about it. I was there with my daughter, who was one and a half at the time, and a staffer whose passport says she's from Iran, she's an American Citizen. It was so bad that all of us traveled with passports, because we were like, we don't know. This is moving so fast, are we going to have to leave the country, basically. I was away from my husband and my son, and so ... We had our passports. It sounds crazy, but also it was ... That was just a week where it was like you don't know what is happening. She suddenly couldn't get family members in and out of the country, it was terrible. I gave the keynote at this design conference and nothing had really been said even though the organizer's politics are pretty obvious. I just was like, "Look, these people don't ... We are now in a moment so extreme if these people are voting for people that wish ill towards you or your children, who are you benefiting by not saying anything?"

Lee Burgess: No, it's true.

Meg Keene: Plus, whatever. The lawyers and judges are saving us right now, so it's really important.

Lee Burgess: Yeah, and actually it was the travel ban ... We did an interview during the show where [we interviewed lawyers at the airport when the travel band happened, and that was such a special podcast](#) for us because Alison and I separately did these interviews and we put the episode together and it gave me chills. There were guys out there who were law students we love you too, we need those male lawyers too, but they were women lawyers who were at those airports.

Meg Keene: We went, and we took our kids, and we also had these conversations about my husband's family is Jewish. They came to the states right before the travel ban in

the late 20's, so literally the only reason that my husband exists, or my kids exist, is because they were able to come in before everyone they knew was killed. Anyways, but yeah, I was like, "Do you need to be there as a lawyer?" He was like, "Yeah, I need to not be there. That is not the kind of law I do. I need to not be." Even one of my good girlfriends is an immigration lawyer, and I was like, "Do you need to go?" She was like, "No. That's not the kind of immigration law I do." There were people who this is what they do, and the best I could do was bring them snacks.

Lee Burgess: Exactly. I did have lawyer friends who went and were delivering the snacks, and writing down names of people, because I didn't have that background either, and I thought do I go? I am cluttering the space.

Meg Keene: Exactly, that's what my husband said. Nope.

Lee Burgess: I can interview people, and highlight the people that were there. That is how I contribute. I think it's going to be interesting I think as we move forward, I think a lot of businesses are becoming more politically minded a little bit because it's so hard to ignore.

Meg Keene: I think it was West Elm that was on Instagram a month ago, I don't know. They had a post and I was like, "This is what corporate leadership looks like." It's really happening. There's also examples of this is what corporate failure looks like. Again, like Uber. Yeah, I mean I do this, this has always been part of our business, but put your ... You vote with your dollars.

Lee Burgess: Yeah, that's really true. Well, then let's move to kind of authenticity, this idea of authenticity. I think one of the things that I've always appreciated about your brand since I started reading them, and when I started reading them I think you had a practical wedding about reclaiming the wife.

Meg Keene: Yeah, which was really never its own site. It was a portion. It's still there, it's just like rolled in.

Lee Burgess: Yeah. You have talked a lot about what happened to your own personal life, your own struggles, your team is very honest about things that they have gone through. you even recently, I think during mental illness health awareness month-

Meg Keene: Accidentally, but yeah.

Lee Burgess: You did it more than once, so in my mind it wasn't that accidental.

Meg Keene: Yeah, because someone was like, "Do you know it's mental health awareness month?" I was like, "I did not."

Lee Burgess: How do you kind of decide to share this public persona and to be authentic about who you are, because this is a very personal brand. You are kind of the face of this brand.

Meg Keene: Yeah, I don't know. At first there are things that I don't share, and it sort of rotates what that is. I actually think of myself as reasonably private in some ways, certainly for someone who's online. There's more that I keep private. I've loosened up a little bit lately, but I don't post my kid's full face on the internet, I don't use their names. That for me, I can make my own choices, but I want to be somewhat careful about what choices I'm making for them. Also, I get recognized on the street. I have walked ... It's the Bay Area. I've walked into daycare at the Y, and been like, "I know who that kid is. Their mom must be here." Because of Instagram. I don't necessarily want my kids in that position. I don't know. My background is theater, so I always had I think some expectation of public life, and I don't tend to share something if I'm in the middle of it going through it. In a way, I feel like I haven't processed, because don't share something on the internet that you don't want people's thoughts and opinions on.

Lee Burgess: That's very good advice. Everyone should write that down.

Meg Keene: Yeah. For real.

Lee Burgess: For real.

Meg Keene: Literally, like don't share your bathroom.

Lee Burgess: That's so true.

Meg Keene: Yeah, so I was very, very depressed during my first pregnancy, like dangerously depressed, and I did not talk a lot about it because it was unclear if I was going to be 51 50 at some points. I was not in an emotionally safe space and I did not feel like, the support of the internet will lift me up right now.

Lee Burgess: Right.

Meg Keene: A lot of things, I talk about, I just ... We eluded to this, but I just went off an anti-anxiety medication and had horrible withdraws, and I talked about it on Instagram, which I generally find to be a very supportive platform anyways. To me that's not like ... I don't have any shame or stigma issues around it. If you ask me if I was on anti-anxiety pills I would be like, "Yes, yeah." I think everyone has to know what they're personally comfortable with, and people say a lot of things to me like, "The internet is forever." I'm like, "Yeah, sort of." I mean, but also, it's really not forever.

Lee Burgess: It's kind of in passing as well.

Meg Keene: It's kind of in passing, right? The worst, I got trashed on the internet, I was blessedly trashed on Twitter for like three days running when I announced my pregnancy. It was great timing, because I was like suicidally depressed. I'm fine. Twitter is the most passing, like good luck finding any of that now. But yeah, I have a hate forum that I think is a little bit bored right now, but I've had a hate forum for years. I've had various moments of being more and less emotional about that. Personally, I have a really great business coach who I've been working with the past few years, and I have really gotten to a point of being like, that's other people's issue, it's not my issue, and it's not my business. My business is to be an adult and deal with my own stuff. Yeah, it's like it is easy for me to share from an authentic place. I'm a business owner, other than that, I mostly consider myself to be a writer, even though the books I've written are not great works of personal essay-ness, but it's hard to get paid for that. Maybe one day.

I'm also a how-to writer. I can ... Give me your boring subject I can make it interesting. I'm a personal essay writer as well, so sharing within the form of personal essay, or even within Instagram. I'm trained as an artist, so it's just like if I have a forum, I'm not just sharing willy nilly. I'm writing a personal essay, and you will never see a personal essay that hasn't gone through three editors, and a copy edit and whatever. It's not just blah, and Instagram is sort of the same way for me where I do a lot of sharing now, where it is like a very specific I'm taking a picture in a specific image crop, and I'm editing it in a certain way, and then I'm putting a certain kind of text. There's a form to sort of hold of that, and it makes it easier for me.

Lee Burgess: I think what you're saying, even about kind of your writing and your Instagram and things like that, a lot of people when they think about running their own business, or they think about a social media presence, or they think about building a brand, I think they just think you take lots of cute pictures and throw them on Instagram. I have to say, our social media presence is nowhere near your team, and every time I see your guys feeds go by, I'm always like, "My God, how much prep has gone into that?" Because it's so solid and consistent. I really respect that. Now, before I was running my own social media, I would never ... Yeah, it's supposed to look easy, but I think a lot of people don't realize that you're really ... To make it look easy it's really hard. It takes a lot of work for the written work. It takes a lot of work even our blogs, nothing gets thrown up to the second.

Meg Keene: I have a team of six people, so social media sort of depends what you're talking about. My personal feed is just like me throwing stuff up, but it is also me throwing stuff up with an entire skillset of editing suite of tools on my phone.

Lee Burgess: Right.

Meg Keene: Other moms will send me pictures and I'm like, "God, would it be rude for me to edit this and send it back?" It's horrible.

Lee Burgess: Can I start sending you my kid's pictures so you can edit them and send them back?

Meg Keene: I will edit it on my phone, because I'm like this is a great first start. Then I edit it and it looks a thousand times better, should I send it back?

Lee Burgess: If our kids ever hang out and we swap pictures, just send it back.

Meg Keene: I don't actually ... Well for the compact, I do run our social feeds, so it's been a rough two weeks. There's nothing on them right now. I don't touch any of the other feeds. There's too much. I am the boss, I can't do that at this point. I have staffers, that's their job. The amount of prep, you guys, we're not just throwing stuff on Instagram, we have a whole program where everything's programmed out and we look at it, and preview, and we make sure the color story makes sense, and we have an entire team of people sourcing images, and when any shoot that we've taken there's hours of work that's gone into it, so yeah, none of it is on the fly at all.

Lee Burgess: Right, if you want to run a brand, again, you can outsource that stuff to a point, but once you're building something you have to be willing to do that. You have to be willing to learn it all.

Meg Keene: Yeah. I mean we do two posts a day. At one point, we did three posts a day, Maddie sprung that on me when I was on maternity leave. My first maternity leave, she's like, "Now we're doing three posts a day." That was just like I never was done. Nothing else got done in the business, I felt like I was in this hamster wheel of content. It came up in the comments recently, and people were really complaining about it. They were just like, "I don't understand. Why can't we get three posts a day?" First of all, it's free, so you get what you get. Also, it was like I know that I looks like we could just throw up an extra thing every day, but I would say the average of a post that goes up, I would say between four and six hours of work goes into each post. It's written, and then it goes through ... We have a whole process. It goes through prep, and then it goes through the editing filter, the editing layer, and then it goes through the final prep, and then it goes through QC, and then it goes through copy editing and QC which is our quality control.

There's five different color markings on our co-schedule calendar. Getting something out the door. Yeah, it's just like, and this is I will say being married to a lawyer, the difference is people automatically think his work is work and is important, and anything involves the same number of systems, tools, and skills. Whatever.

Lee Burgess: If you're going to do anything with excellence, excellence is hard work.

Meg Keene: Yeah. He's just writing a memo and I'm shopping for black wedding dresses, it's fine.

Lee Burgess: It's totally fine. Totally legitimate. How do you juggle kind of business tasks, and keeping the business running? This is always something Alison and I talk about a lot. We talk about scheduling deep work, and then we've tried all these different things.

Meg Keene: It's so hard. The team has sort of come up with a phrase, which is thousand dollar an hour work. Which is that I'm supposed to be doing thousand dollar an hour work. I'm supposed to be doing thinking the big thoughts kind of thing. It varies, and it varies. We had to let some people go on our team recently, so I'm a little bit more in the weeds than I was. It's fine, because there's other things I'm not dealing with. We do try to be very aware of the fact that my job at this point, which has changed so much over nine years, but my job is to be CEO. I will have employees come to me and be like, "I need you to not do this because you have to be the CEO." I still write, and this last quarter and a half was so rough that I wasn't writing, and I think the brand suffered. I was just trying to bail us out. That has to happen sometimes. I do write, I am the final call on all things editorial, but I also have to carve out time for I have to do the books, I have to make the big hiring and firing decisions.

I have never found that my job works well on a schedule. It really is just I have a paper checklist in front of me of stuff I'm trying to get through, but it really is like what has come up, what needs to be dealt with, what's the inbox? Which is fine, because I work well that way, and people in other parts of my team that is not how they work. They have a very specific on Monday I do this, on Tuesday I do this, whatever. They're just different jobs.

Lee Burgess: I know I've tried that.

Meg Keene: It doesn't work.

Lee Burgess: Yeah, I was going to do these admin tasks on Monday, and then it works for a week and then it's all out the window.

Meg Keene: Right, exactly. Something happens.

Lee Burgess: Something happens. I also have a paper checklist on my desk, because no matter what I try, and we have tried them all, it always comes back to the paper checklist.

Meg Keene: It's fine. I work better that way. I don't want to know what I'm doing, which sounds crazy. I don't want to know what I'm doing when I get into the office exactly. I generally have a general sense of today I need to work on the books, and I need to do some employee stuff and some editorial stuff, but that is really it. This morning for example I thought I was going to do the books, but I did not do the books, I've done some offer letters, and I've done some moving around content and editing. That's fine. It keeps me entertained. A lot of people want to just know what they're doing every day.

Lee Burgess: That's true, that's true. I think that openness to the uncertainty, and that willingness to pivot constantly, if you're not comfortable in that environment then you shouldn't be running your own shop.

Meg Keene: Yeah, if you don't like uncertainty. Also, so much of my job is strategy and strategizing, so it's like I like writing a lot, I live and breathe on strategy. Making a budget go, and whatever, and that's really critical. There's a rule in my family that my husband cannot start his own firm. It comes up. He has friends that have started it, and I am like, "You are a great lawyer and you love being a lawyer. You would be garbage running a company. Then I would have to run it and I have a company. And I don't want to run a law firm ever, so you cannot do that."

Lee Burgess: Yeah. It's different skillsets for sure.

Meg Keene: You can be a partner at someone else's firm, that's fine. God forbid they make you the managing director, I would have to go speak to them and be like, "Are you trying to fail?" Please god, just let him write and go to court.

Lee Burgess: I can talk to you all day, but before we have to wind up, I did want to talk to you about this role that you have living with a lawyer.

Meg Keene: I do, I do. I have lived with lawyer for a long time.

Lee Burgess: A long time, and you were with him when he decided to go to law school, you've been through the law school journey. You encouraged him to take more than two bars.

Meg Keene: I did. A little-known fact, we co-led our mock trial team together in high school, and his dad was our coach. I as the lead prosecutor and he was the lead defense attorney.

Lee Burgess: Who won?

Meg Keene: I mean, I was better.

Lee Burgess: Okay.

Meg Keene: Well we both got a lot of awards, but I did have an undefeated season, and the only reason we did not go to state is because he tied one. I know.

Lee Burgess: Look at you still holding onto that.

Meg Keene: Yeah, we've been doing a lot together for a long time.

Lee Burgess: Yeah. We actually write a lot about what it's like to be in relationships with lawyers and law students, and people taking the bar, because it's hard at times,

because it can be all consuming. Do you have tips as someone who's lived in that role, either for people that are looking at how to support their significant others?

Meg Keene: It's interesting. One, David went back to law school a little later. He was 26, and I was 27, which we thought was normal but a lot of people go straight through. I will say he loves the law, and a lot of people that went straight through have since dropped out.

Lee Burgess: Yes.

Meg Keene: Because he had a whole other career and was like I don't want this. I want to go to law school. He really just approached it like a job, because he'd had a job. He was up in the morning, kept really regular hours. I was working in an investment bank, and I worked six am to six pm. I actually had a much-

Lee Burgess: That's a really great work life balance there.

Meg Keene: Yeah, and then I was building the business on the side. I would have to do two 28 hour shifts per week during earnings, which was two weeks every quarter, so I had four 28 hour shifts per quarter. I somehow managed law school to look like a work of art.

Lee Burgess: You did. You're reading cases, whatever.

Meg Keene: I know. I would be like, "I see you're on the couch doing some homework. Seems rough for you. I was up before dawn getting on the bus to support us both." I didn't do a lot of supporting him. Frankly, I was in a really bad situation. He was just really organized and didn't need a ton of support. I made him take two bars. I feel like my role has been like it's not that tough, get over it. Which is maybe mean.

Lee Burgess: Well, I think there's something to be said for that.

Meg Keene: I'm like you're a lawyer, you're reading some cases, it's fine. He also ... I will say that my role over the years has been hopefully guiding him into decisions that I think have been better for him and for our family. When he was deciding, he was like should I get my PHD in history or should I be a lawyer, and I was like I'll leave you if you get your PHD in history. I was like, I don't want to live in Iowa, and I don't want you to struggle to find work. It sounds great, but please do the thing that ends in a job. His dad was a lawyer so he had a really good sort of sense of what it would look like.

I also really guided him away from corporate law, and all of our friends that have gone into corporate law are miserable and many of them have left. Now he's at a mid-sized law firm and he does education law. I helped sort of encourage him, and again this has been encouraging his own instincts, because I

think a lot of what happens in law is people either go into it for the wrong reasons, or get pushed in directions for the wrong reasons. There's a lot of you'll make better money here, it'll be more secure here, whatever. His interest was always being a litigator. He is a litigator. I think it is not unrelated that he is one of the only lawyers we know that loves his job, and that he's a litigator. He goes to court a lot. He's a TV lawyer. I am sort of continuing to push him as our kids get older, as I potentially sell the business, or part of my business. I'm continuing to push him to look at going back into criminal law because he's the happiest probably when he's a defense attorney.

I think that, I do make him get over himself because I'm like, it's not really that bad. The corporate law kind of is that bad. I had the equivalent of a corporate law job when I was at the investment bank. I really have just pushed him towards things that I think will make him happy, as opposed to will make him the most money. We're currently in the year long fight over whether he should go to 90% time which is something that his firm offers. You get paid 80% for 90% time, but it's something that pretty much all of the moms with young children are doing. Most of the other associates at his level are women in his firm, but he's like, "I can't do it it's bad for my career." I'm like, "I think that's like the patriarchy talking."

We've also had conversations about his definition of success, and how it involves working a lot of hours, et cetera. How the women that we know that are lawyers that he considers successful are not doing that. I've pushed him on that, but I just think pushing people to where they're actually going to be happy because the thing that we've seen the most in our friend's law careers is burn out, working too many hours, doing a kind of law that anyone would be miserable doing doc review for a thousand ... We're watching Better Call Saul and I don't know if you guys watch it. Oh my god, the female lawyer who single handedly being the lawyer for a bank, and I used to cover banks at the investment bank, so she's looking at loan ratios and working 14 hours a day. I'm just like, of course you don't like your job. Nobody would like your job. It's good money, but why??

Lee Burgess: I remember my hours and hours and hours of doc review.

Meg Keene: He just doesn't do doc review. That's not a thing he does. He writes and he goes to court. I do think that one of the best things that your partner can do is one make you get over yourself, you're not a coal miner, and two, really make you ask questions about what's going to make you happy and what you like about the law. When he started law school I gave him a copy, which we have, so obviously, of To Kill a Mockingbird, and wrote in It I hope you always remember what is important to you about the law. I have been the one who's sort of continued to remind him, and I think that has helped him build a career that he actually-

Lee Burgess: That's a really good point, that loved ones, whether they're significant others or loved ones can be that reflection for you, because you can get into the weeds. You can lose perspective because you're in this environment where everyone's freaking out or super stressed. You do get offered this job that doesn't match your priorities. The money is great, and everybody is telling you to take it.

Meg Keene: Here's the thing. I have worked those jobs. You can make 200,000 a year, but if you do not have time to live, there is literally no point. I never left the office, and I was just like, you could pay me a million dollars a year, and I am literally not living. Why? I will also say splitting the workload has been important for us. We know a lot of lawyer families with kids about our age, and in many cases, we work the same amount of hours that they do, we make the same amount of money that they do, if not a little bit more, and the difference is we have two jobs, right? I work 40ish hours a week, he works like 40 to 50 hours a week. Combined we make the same amount of money, and then are able to cover daycare. In their lawyer family, one person stays home, one person has a corporate law job, they work 80 hours a week and they bring in the accumulated amount of money. One of those scenarios is more miserable than the other.

Lee Burgess: That's true.

Meg Keene: Also, one has more job security. One person gets laid off if you have another person with a job. Splitting it. Not letting your male partner get really sucked in. I still think ... I mean you would know better than I do. I still think there is this very male idea of what it is to be a successful lawyer. And a lot of women are not doing that which is sometimes why they're not partners at firms. Although his firm has a lot of women and people of color in partnership roles which is great. But he's still like I have to work 60 hours a week or I'm not successful, I haven't made a name for myself. I'm like, constantly questioning that. Right, but you have two kids, they'll be older. Do you want to spend that extra 20 hours a week locked in your study on the weekends, or do you want to spend it with your children? You need to make some choices.

Lee Burgess: Yeah, life choices. I love the thing you said about to kill a mockingbird. We sometimes tell our students just a they're starting out fresh faced and excited about law school to write letters to themselves about why they're there, what they want to do with their lives, what made them make this decision, and go back and read those letters when it's final exam time and you don't want to do it. Or studying for the bar.

Meg Keene: Hot tip to you that are fresh faced or thinking about law school, if the reason you want to go to law school is your parents really think you should and the money is good, stop. We know people that are like, "I really wanted to be a teacher." And you're like oh my god, and now they're \$120,000 in debt and I don't have the option. If you're not going to law school because you love the law, you should probably do something else.

Lee Burgess: 100% agree. All right, well that we will be out of time, unfortunately. I want to thank Meg for taking time out of her busy schedule to chat with us, and inviting me to visit her new office space which is pretty sweet. The sun is shining, it's so gorgeous. If you'd like to learn more about Meg and her projects, we have links to her website and show notes and you have your new, The Compact project?

Meg Keene: The Compact is coming up. It's going to be more lifestyle, but a lot of law students are getting engaged and getting married, let's be honest.

Lee Burgess: That's true. You have various entry points.

Meg Keene: Various entry points. Go to [practicalwedding.com](http://practicalwedding.com), and [thecomcompact.com](http://thecomcompact.com) is coming soon.

Lee Burgess: Excellent. If you enjoyed this episode of the law school toolbox podcast, please take a second to leave a review [on iTunes](#), we really appreciate it. Be sure to subscribe so you don't miss anything. Our episodes are typically released on Monday. If you have any questions or comments, don't hesitate to reach out to myself or Alison at [Lee@LawSchoolToolbox.com](mailto:Lee@LawSchoolToolbox.com) or [Alison@LawSchoolToolbox.com](mailto:Alison@LawSchoolToolbox.com) or you can always contact us via our website [contact form at LawSchoolToolbox.com](#). Thanks for listening, and we'll talk soon.

#### Resources:

- [A Practical Wedding](#)
- [The Compact](#)
- [A Practical Wedding: Creative Ideas for Planning a Beautiful, Affordable, and Meaningful Celebration, by Meg Keene](#)
- [A Practical Wedding Planner: A Step-by-Step Guide to Creating the Wedding You Want with the Budget You've Got \(without Losing your Mind in the Process\), by Meg Keene](#)
- [Why Women Don't See Themselves as Entrepreneurs, by Claire Cain Miller](#)
- [The \\$100 Startup: Reinvent the Way You Make a Living, Do What You Love, and Create a New Future, by Chris Guillebeau](#)
- [Podcast Episode 83: Lawyers in Action – The Airport Immigration Crisis](#)
- [Podcast Episode 87: Affordable Bar Prep & Social Entrepreneurship \(w/ Chris Henjum of Esqyr.com\)](#)
- [Podcast Episode 58: Non-Profit Law and Social Entrepreneurship \(with guest Adrian Tirtanadi of Bayview Hunters Point Community Legal\)](#)
- [Podcast Episode 86: Resources for Aspiring Entrepreneurs](#)
- [Podcast Episode 91: From Lawyer to Entrepreneur to Mayor!](#)