

EPISODE 88

“SW: You’re going to lose, especially when you’re up against the most powerful lobby in country that has a \$350 million annual budget and is entrenched in our state legislatures and congress and companies, you’re going lose. But you’re going to win too. Or even though you’re going to lose, you’re going to win a lot of important knowledge. We also call it losing forward. So every time we lose we kind of regroup and think of, “Okay, how could we have won that, or what can we do differently next time?” Because we know there’s going to be a next time when it comes to the gun lobby.

It was June of 2013, we were only seven months old as an organization, and I was watching the news and I saw that Starbucks had decided to ban smoking and electronic cigarettes 20 feet outside their stores regardless of state law, and they were being lauded for this for, obviously, the health and safety of their employees and of their customers. Starbucks also was allowing open carry inside their stores. In fact, at the time, for years, gun extremists have been having an annual day of celebration by bringing all their guns into Starbucks every — I think it was like February 2nd to represent the Second Amendment, and Starbucks allowed that.

So I called them and I said, “Look, are you going to still allow open carry by state laws, because you’re going to do this with smoking?” And they said, “Yes.” I thought, “I’m a lot more scared of secondhand bullets than I am secondhand smoke. This is absurd.” We were so small and we were only 7 months old but we decided we’re going to take on Starbucks. In retrospect, that’s pretty funny.”

[INTRO]

[0:01:44.1] AS: You know battling food in your body doesn’t work. You want to love and accept yourself, and because you’re insatiable, you want results too. You bring the same intensity to your life, wanting to maximize your time, potential, and experiences you have here on our beautiful and wondrous planet Earth. Fair warning, it will be a rollercoaster. But for those insatiable, this is your primetime to thrive. Here is just saying yes to the hunger of wanting it all.

I'm your host, Ali Shapiro, who is dedicated to pioneering a saner and more empowering approach to health and weight loss.

[INTRODUCTION]

[0:02:24.8] AS: Welcome to episode 88 of the Insatiable Podcast with Shannon Watts, founder of Moms Demand Action for Gun Sense in America on How Activism Fortifies Your Health.

Taking on the National Rifle Association, or NRA as they're known, one of the most well-funded, intimidating, and recently turned extreme lobby groups in America sounds stressful at the very least and putting your life on the line at most. It would make me run for all the chocolate.

In this inspiring interview, Sharon shares how Sandy Hook changed the course of her life and how it's the moms leading the way with a new type of strength necessary for the world we live in today, the organizational mindset for when the moms whose legislative battles. This philosophy is necessary for any of us trying to do hard life-changing things, and how she some purpose community and hutzpah in her activism, including the strength she gets from leaning into the horror of gun violence and the health tools she uses so she doesn't burn out and can continue to restore our public safety.

Before you learn more from this real-life wonder woman in our episode, here's more about Shannon. She is the mother of five who, prior to founding Moms Demand Action, was a stay-at-home mom and former communications executive. The day after the Sandy Hook tragedy, Shannon started a Facebook group with the message that all Americans can and should do more to reduce gun violence.

This online conversation turned to a grassroots movement of American mothers fighting for public safety measures that respect the second amendment and protect people from gun violence. Moms Demand Action has established a chapter in every state of the country and is part of every town for gun safety, the largest gun violence prevention organization in this country with more than 3 million supporters.

In addition to her work with Moms Demand Action, Watts is an active board member of Emerge America; the nation's leading organization for recruiting and training women to run for office. Let's be real, that's what's going to turn this ship around. She's been featured in Vogue, NPR, All Things Considered, and People Magazine. You're really going to enjoy this interview, and for those of you who are listening out of our country, you're going to see how crazy America is in regards to their guns. Not the whole, but a very vocal and intimidating minority. I know might not make sense coming from a different country, but prepared to be astounded. Enjoy the interview.

Welcome insatiable listeners. Today, we have Shannon Watts, founder of Moms Demand Action for Gun Sense in America. I am so happy to have you Shannon. Thank you for taking the time to inspire and educate us today.

[0:05:17.2] SW: Thank you for having me.

[0:05:18.3] AS: Yeah. After the 2016 election, many of our listeners and clients were really interested in getting involved in their community. I wanted to have you on today to share your activism story which started back in 2012 and learned how you found community involvement to be really fortifying for your help and spirit including the challenges.

To start off with, Sandy Hook, the gun massacre in Connecticut was the catalyst to get you involved in sensible gun reform. Who were you before Sandy Hook and who were you after?

[0:05:51.0] SW: Completely different people for sure. I had been a corporate communications executive for about 15 years, and after my marriage I became the mom of five. I have three of my own and two step-daughters. I decided to sort of set back from the corporate world and to be a stay-at-home mom which is what I had been doing for about five years when Sandy Hook happened.

I just couldn't believe the news. I was folding laundry, I can remember. I was in my bedroom and seeing the news come in and thinking, Dear God, please help this not be as bad as it seems." As we know, it was a million times worse, really, than the human imagination can even fathom.

I thought, "Okay, as a mom with kids at that time in elementary school and middle school and high school and even college, how do I get involved in this issue? How do I speak to this as a mom, as a caretaker?"

I went online and I looked for something like Mothers Against Drunk Driving, but for gun safety, and I was probably online for a couple hours and I couldn't find anything. I knew how to start a Facebook page and what was amazing was that as soon as I did, and just keep in mind that at the time I had all of 75 Facebook friends. I was not a social media phenom, but women from across the country started to see this page and they were in tough states like Texas, and Montana, and the Carolina, places where this is not an easy issue to address, but so many women and moms with little kids were really shaken to their core by Sandy Hook and I think we all felt that if we didn't do something after that shooting that we would be culpable when it happened again. I know that's how I felt.

[0:07:34.8] AS: That's so interesting, because I think the media likes to paint where these red and blue states when the reality is there's everyone everywhere. I don't know if that's the right phrase.

[0:07:44.5] SW: No, that's true. It's funny because it's brought so many women together in states where they didn't know that they had people that would sort of stand up and fight with them. I think about Texas, and the women in Texas are absolutely amazing and they, I think, feel grateful to have found one another.

[0:08:02.0] AS: Yeah, it's easy to criticize social media. However, I've been looking at historical change and all the stuff and every time that the democratization of information happens there is this upheaval, whether it was like the printing press or when the church no longer could go on information. I think about the long-term gains of people being you to connect and find each other now that they can communicate so freely.

[0:08:26.7] SW: First of all, I don't know how moms or Mothers Against Drunk Driving did it. They had telephone and snail mail. I'm not quite sure how they galvanized and were able to do all that they did within the first decade. It's pretty astounding, but technology has turbocharged what we do. Some of the corporate campaign that we've won were all won online with hash tags

like burritos not bullets for chipotle or, shakes not shotguns for sonic. Within days of using these hash tags we got these companies to change their corporate policies around open carry.

We spent a lot of time online harassing our elected representatives and asking them to weigh in and do the right thing. Then, also to your point, gathering in private pages on Facebook and having very frank discussions or using pages in every state to say, "Here's what happening where I live." It's really been game changing in terms of organization and organizing.

[0:09:25.1] AS: I love to hear that, because it's easy to just say, "Oh my God! Social media is only negative," but it really is galvanizing, so I love hearing that. One things that you said is you would've fell culpable in the next attack. What made you take ownership of this though? I'm always curious. What happens in our identity that I'm not going to leave this to someone else?

[0:09:48.8] SW: I'll be honest. I obviously did not know what I was getting into. I didn't know that I would be leading such a huge organization, but I did sit through as an American, as so many Americans have. All these mass shootings — I can remember I lived in Dallas when one of the first mass shooting in a public place happened. There was a huge shooting in a restaurant called Luby's, and I was in college in Texas, and then Columbine happened and I really couldn't do anything because I had little kids. I just didn't have the bandwidth as a working mom. Then Virginia Tech, and then Gabby Giffords shooting, and then Sandy Hook. I really think I thought after the Gabby Gifford shooting that congress would do something when one of their own had been struck down by a bullet.

Just like after Sandi Hook the call was more and more guns and fewer gun laws, and think I was just outraged and knew that that was immoral and new that our country was broken and I didn't want to raise my children and then have grandchildren in a country where the lives of 20 1st graders and 6 educators were expendable.

I think that that there were so many women who felt that way. A lot of the skills I had learned in corporate communications, at companies like General Electric and Anthem and others really immediately came into play. Being able to tell a story, being able to get people to galvanize around a message, and counteracting with the gun lobby, the NRA had done for so many years which was to make a very vocal minority afraid.

Then, suddenly, this silent majority was afraid. This vocal minority was afraid their guns were going to be taken away, but this vocal majority now, or the silent majority now was vocal because they were afraid their children were to be taken away. I just thought that's the emotion that will win this at the end of the day.

[0:11:42.3] AS: I love that, because I think a lot of times in the self-help field, it's like you have to find your calling. It's like callings come to you daily.

[0:11:51.4] SW: Absolutely. I did feel like everything I had done up to that point in my life was sort of preparing me for this.

[0:11:58.3] AS: I love that, because it's the meaning we give to those emotions, and I love that you said emotions will win this because I think in our culture we demean emotions. Even now with the healthcare bill, they're saying people who are speaking out are hysterical. That's an attempt to shame them versus, "Oh my God! It's if you have morals. You don't want 23 million people to die or lose coverage."

By the way, side note. I used to work for GE in communications too. I didn't know were —

[0:12:24.0] SW: You did? Which city?

[0:12:26.4] AS: Oh, I was in New York at NBC Sports. I was in Lynchburg Insurance. I was in Paris, France at real estate, and then Pittsfield, Massachusetts in Plastics, and then Water in Philadelphia.

[0:12:39.1] SW: Oh my gosh! I went in Waukesha for GE Healthcare.

[0:12:43.7] AS: Oh! My good friend used to work for GE Healthcare but out of Boston. That's so funny.

[0:12:49.3] SW: Who was it?

[0:12:51.0] AS: Kelly Starman.

[0:12:52.3] SW: I don't know that. I worked for Pam Wickham. She's now at Ratheon.

[0:12:55.3] AS: Okay. I worked for Pam at Plastics.

[0:12:59.4] SW: That's hilarious.

[0:13:00.4] AS: That's so funny. Yeah. It's so funny. You said that emotion is going to stir this on. In one of the things in other interviews, you said that anger has spurred you on. This is a totally selfish question because I am still learning how to deal with my anger from this regime in politics. I was talking to my husband the other day and I said, "I'm just so angry at not even Trump, just like the symptom that he represents and all the injustice I'm now learning about." I just started crying. I don't have a way to effectively — I'm working on the Affordable Care Act and all that stuff, but it just doesn't feel like enough, and the assaults keep coming. How have you managed to turn your anger into a really important tool?

[0:13:47.1] SW: I think everybody struggles with that from day-to-day, and the best remedy for anger I think is action. We have grown so much. In 2014, we were still really kicking butt in state legislatures and in corporate board rooms, but we only have 4,300 active volunteers. Now we have 50,000 in just three years later, and a lot of them came to us after the election.

I really didn't know what happened after Trump was elected. Would women say, "Okay, there are other issues that are more important to me," or just feel defeated and give up. Really, the opposite happened. I think it's because we give women an easy way to plug in and act, whether that is holding an educational presentation about how to responsibly store guns at your PTA meeting or in your community. Whether it's text or call, right? All you have to do is text the number on your phone and it would send you right to your member of congress, or running a chapter where you live, or getting involved at the grassroots level.

I think acting is the anecdote to being angry, because if you don't act then you just feel frustrated. Trust me, I was in 15 states the three months before Hillary Clinton was elected, trying to campaign for her and I was at the Javits Center the night that we lost the election, and

it has been a tough row to hoe to get back to feeling optimistic and hopeful. I don't feel that way every day, but I do feel like I'm making a difference and I think that helps.

[0:15:21.3] AS: Yeah. I loved how you talked about how these apparent setbacks. You call them inflection points, and can you talk about that, because I think that so important. Anyone who's going to do anything worthwhile is going to have setbacks. It's emotional up-and-down. I hate this, like, "Only loving life! Only think positive." You're not doing something very hard if all you can do is think positive.

[0:15:43.7] SW: Yeah. You're going to lose, especially when you're up against the most powerful lobby in the country that has a \$350 million annual budget and is entrenched in our state legislatures and congress and companies, you're going to lose, but you're going to win too or even though you're going to lose, you're going to win a lot of important knowledge and we also call it losing forward.

Every time we lose we kind of regroup and think okay, "How could we have won that, or what can we do differently next time?" because we know there's going to be a next time when it comes to the gun lobby. There have been several inflection points along the way. We started in December the day after the Sandy Hook shooting of 2012. We were standing behind the president during his press conferences in 2013 trying to pass background checks. I was in the senate gallery when we failed to pass this background checks in April of 2013. I thought, "Okay. I really tried my hardest. It's been six months of hard work and I'm going to pack up my bags and I will probably all go home."

The exact opposite happened. We pivoted. We went to our state. We immediately started helping Governor O'Malley pass sweeping gun reform in Maryland. It just continued to grow and to become exponentially stronger and have more wins. We've had a lot of losses along the way, but we also have an incredibly strong track record against the NRA.

I really think what our organization has done is to embolden women. You feel like a bad ass when you're going up against the strongest gun lobby in the country. You can't help but feel like you're really doing something significant and really understanding what does it take to win and accepting the fact that you will lose I think is the only way that you can keep going.

[0:17:26.2] AS: I love that. Just expecting it so that when it happens you're — You're really — I'm always teaching my clients growth mindset from Dr. Carol Dweck, that's what you're doing. What did we learn from this? I like how you say, like fail forward or lose forward. It's only failure [inaudible 0:17:39.1].

[0:17:41.2] SW: A good example is we just thought Campus Carry the State of Arkansas, and when we started fighting Campus Carry in Arkansas, it was one of our smallest chapters. As you can imagine, we had a really tough time growing the Arkansas chapter. It's not a state where the gun issue is something that people galvanize around or want to talk about. It's polarizing.

We just found this amazing woman who led our chapter and fought so hard and grew the chapter and showed up every day at the state house and lost. They ended up passing Campus Carry in the State of Arkansas this year.

That said, we grew our chapter so much and we are now known around the state house and we now have political power and we helped strip an amendment that was allowing guns in razorback stadium after they passed the bill. All of those things are wins because if we hadn't tried to fight that battle we would still be insignificant in the state, and now we are really growing and getting ready to fight the next battle.

[0:18:46.6] AS: That's so important because mindsets take a long time to change, right? It's not like someone's like — I think that's so important that you're looking at different metrics rather than just did the bill get passed or not, because at the end of the day it's always a cultural issue. As I'm learning how to be a better activist, it's like, really, the public pressure is then what forms the laws. It's not really vice-versa.

[0:19:08.0] SW: That's right.

[0:19:08.8] AS: You need both. Yeah, let's talk about this. First, I want to talk — I always say America has trouble with the concept of and, and I like that Moms Demand Action. You guys are not for taking everyone's guns away. That's what a lot of that extreme majority hears when you say gun safety. What is your mission? Then I want to also talk about who the NRA is, because I

realized really — I knew they were this iconic figure and powerful, but I want to find out are they your main opposition? Is it cultural? Let's first get with what Moms Demand Action is for.

[0:19:43.7] SW: We are an organization that is fighting for something we call gun sense, and that is just the idea that we can be doing more to protect our families, to protect our communities from gun violence this country, that we can be doing more. That there's a crisis given that 33,000 Americans are shot and killed every year, hundreds of thousands more are injured, and it's this idea that more can be done. We are not anti-gun. We do not believe in confiscation. We do not believe in registries. This is not that we are going to come take your guns away. We are simply acting for the responsibilities that go along with the right to being a gun owner.

Many of our moms are gun owners, or they are married to gun owners. This is not a discussion about being pro-gun or anti-gun, which is what the gun lobby wanted to be. It's how insane has this country become that we are allowing things like open carry, which is basically to walk up and down the street in 45 states with a loaded AR 15.

Really, it's a much more reasonable discussion about if you're going to own a gun, what does that mean in terms of responsible storage? What does that mean in terms of background checks, or training, and where is it acceptable to have a gun and where isn't it? That's a discussion that hasn't been had.

[0:21:01.6] AS: I love that, because I noticed that the current regime — and I call it a regime, because Reuters is covering it like a regime, so I just want to be clear with everyone. It is a regime. All of us have, when turn to authoritarianism, there is a music playing in the background that says, "Hey! Your democracy is gone."

[0:21:18.3] SW: Right. Exactly.

[0:21:20.6] AS: What I found interesting is they endorsed the NRA clearly but they ban guns at the inauguration.

[0:21:28.6] SW: Yeah, it's really this idea of guns around the but not around me for lawmakers. It's funny because, in Texas, when they were talking about passing open carry — Believe it or not, Texas was one of the last states to pass open carry. The lawmakers installed panic buttons in their offices because people were coming to the state house with guns and threatening lawmakers if they didn't pass open carry without any background check or training, an absurd law.

The lawmakers were all about protecting themselves, but when it came to laws that protected their constituents, they were sort AWOL. They just didn't show up. It's is a bizarre network of laws across the country that really are written in many ways by the gun lobby.

[0:22:14.1] AS: Yeah. I went down to D.C. for the Affordable Care Act and I had to go through a metal detector to get into the House of Representatives [inaudible 0:22:20.4]. My parents taught in the the city. They did that at certain schools my parents taught on, but not in general public places, like, "Oh, okay."

You talked about that the vocal minority started scaring the silent minority. From what I've seen from your Twitter feed and everything, most gun owners support these commonsense, this gun safety stuff, right? As I was prepping for this interviewing, I realized the NRA, it used to be just about being able to carry in your house. It was never even a question if you'd bring it outside, or it would be ak-47s, or there wouldn't be background checks or anything.

Now, it's this total extreme. Is it because the fringe are so vocal and so threatening? Is that, in addition to the NRA, obviously, giving lots of contributions to politicians?

[0:23:17.2] SW: I think what has happened was the NRA is they've become so radicalized. The leadership has become so radicalized over the past couple of decades, because they needed to protect gun manufacturer's profits. The reality is that fewer people are buying more guns in America. The NRA has convince this vocal minority that they need an arsenal. That they need 10 to 20 handguns and AR 15s and all different kinds of weapon. What the NRA started to realize was that the our profit share is going to shrink if we do not figure out how do we expand the number of people who buy guns. In another words, the silent majority.

They have backtracked on a lot of their policies. In 1999, the chief lobbyist for the NRA, Wayne Lapierre said on tape that they supported a background check in every single gun sale. This was before sort of the online marketplace was ever imagined. The internet was not yet used for commerce. Then they also said in 1999 that they opposed guns in school of any kind, college campuses K through 12 schools.

Flash forward to today, those are the bills they're trying to pass. They do not want background checks in any gun sale. They would love to eradicate the federal law that requires background checks on license sales. In America, you can go to a gun show or you could get online and you can buy a gun with absolutely no background check. That's how millions of guns are sold every year, and they do not want to close that loophole, and they also are pushing for guns in K through 12 schools and guns on college campus and something called permitless carry, which would basically allow Americans to carry guns without any background check or training, and that's been passed in nine states so far.

The NRA has become increasingly radical as this vocal minority has as well, but the silent majority supports background checks. 90% of Americans support background check on every gun sale. The vast majority of gun owners, 74% of NRA members support commonsense guns laws like background checks. The NRA is out of step with the rest of the public, but they were also the largest outside donor to Donald Trump's campaign. They currently have a lot of power.

[0:25:36.5] AS: That's so interesting. Yeah, I found it interesting how, like, I know someone, I think, he was in Buffalo, New York. He was going to run for mayor. He was a democrat, and was going to — I guess it's very republican there, and he got like death threats. I'm like, "Whoa! Who are these?" It seems like this radical fringe is very violent or at least threatens violence. Do you guys worry for your safety?

[0:26:01.5] SW: It's been really bizarre. I really didn't know the underbelly of American that existed before I started Moms Demand Action. The death threats and threats of sexual violence to me, to my girls started immediately. We very rarely have a public event where we were not surrounded by mostly men who are open carrying. There was a very famous incident that got a ton of international media play when — I think it was 2014. Four of our moms were talking about membership. They were volunteers that are at a restaurant in Dallas, and it had been on

Facebook, the invite, and gun extremists found out about it. These four women looked at the window and 40 men were pulling up in trucks and pulling long guns, like AR 15 and AK-47s and basically stood outside the restaurant trying to intimidate them, and that's not against the law, so no one could call the police. These women just basically had to wait in the restaurant until these men went away.

It happened last week too when we had a Wear Orange in Houston. It is something that it has become a bizarre and dangerous part of a culture, which is that it's okay to use the second amendment to completely and intimidate people trying to exercise the first amendment. I'm not sure along the way when that became acceptable, but it shouldn't be. It should be something we all push back on.

[0:27:20.9] AS: Yeah. When you were saying that, I find it encouraging that less people are buying guns. I'm not a big gun person. It scares me, violence of any kind. I can even watch violent movies. I cry, and so gradual.

Now that you're talking, I just feel like that's — We've been making so many prosecutor — If you're into progressive values. I am. I believe everyone's equal and everyone should get a fair shot. It seems like this backlash is because our society is becoming more tolerant, more peaceful, and it's almost like people who don't have the skills to cope in that kind of culture are now using violence, because what else can you use? I guess it seems like — I don't know.

[0:28:03.6] SW: I think whenever power starts to shift, and I think you can look at this in the history of people fighting for change. Obviously, the civil rights fight and movement, when the people in power are threatened by a shift, and I think guns represent that. The NRA has made sure they represent that. It's your manhood. It's your power. It's your freedom. When those things are facing some kind of perceived existential threat, there is blowback. In a way, it's encouraging, because it shows progress, but it's also part of the fight and it can be exhausting and dangerous and intimidating and all of those things.

The thing I'm most proud about is how resilient our moms are and how they refuse to be threatened or intimidated or to back down in the face of these gun extremist, because I think so

many of us feel if we lose our children, we really have nothing left to lose and so we are going to stand up to gun lobby.

[0:29:05.3] AS: I love. Yeah, when you were describing those moms in that restaurant I'm like, "Talk about fierce." Right?

[0:29:10.8] SW: Yeah.

[0:29:11.5] AS: Anyone can go with a gun and that's the strength of staying in there and pressing on, to me. It's interesting too, because — This isn't a direct kind of — I'm kind of going off in a tangent, but part of the reason that you want background checks is because isn't it, usually, a lot of people who end up killing people with guns have a domestic violence, records, and so that's a great precursor of ways that you can make sure that people who might commit crimes don't do it. Is that is that correct?

[0:29:44.0] SW: The way to look at it is, in this country you have — Say, you're going through TSA. You're going to go to the airport. You have two lines. One is a line where you have to go through TSA and get a background check, or go through the monitor. That's the licensed gun sales in this country. The other line, you don't have to get a background check. You can just walk right through TSA and not go through the scanner.

If you are a domestic abuser, or if you are a felon, or if you have been adjudicated severely mentally ill, which line are you going to get in? You're going to get in the easiest line that doesn't require you to get a background check, and that's what happens in this country. Whether it's guns bought legally, because it's so easy to get a gun in the country even if you have a record. The NRA fights to allow domestic abusers to have guns, or if you have a record, it's still easy to get a gun in this country because you can simply use a private sale loophole.

Yes, many of the mass shooters in this country have a record of domestic violence. It is a precursor and an indicator that you are violent and the gun in your hand is probably a very bad idea. We should be making it harder for people with that kind of history of violence to get a gun and yet it's incredibly easy.

A lot of people don't realize the federal definition of a domestic abuser is basically your spouse or your ex-spouse and the law does not require states to remove the guns you already have. What we have to do is go into states and we have to broaden the definition of what a domestic abuser. It's also a dating partner, it's also a stalker. Then we have to put laws in place that allow police to remove the guns that people with restraining orders or convictions already have, and we've done in 23 states so far.

[0:31:35.6] AS: That's amazing. Yeah, you guys had a lot of luck when you pivoted going local. Can you share some of the really cool things you guys have done and the wins you've had, like the stroller day. It's so creative.

[0:31:50.2] SW: When we lost the background check in 2013 in congress, we immediately pivoted to the states. In fact, Governor O'Malley post Sandy Hook was working to pass some really strong and sweeping gun reform legislation. We jumped in to help him, and it was funny because we would show up at the state house and we would have all these kid and baby paraphernalia plus the kids in tow, and it made a logjam. It made it impossible for state lawmakers to walk through the halls without answering our questions, and so we started calling those stroller jam and we actually started holding those in statehouses, public transportation, the capital, all over the country, kind of a hallmark of what it's like to be a mom activist.

We've had incredible success because we are moms and showing up in our red shirts that say Moms Demand Action and filling overflow rooms and statehouses and senate galleries, it makes a huge difference because before moms, it was really just gun lobbyists, and police, maybe some educators, but we have really sort of taken it to a new level as the first grassroots movement on this issue.

I was just at a meeting with the democratic governors association and I was on a panel with Governor Raimondo of Rhode Island where for three years our moms have showed up at the statehouse almost every day of the legislature, legislative session, and fought for a bill that will keep guns out of the hands of domestic abusers. We are so close after three years. We're hoping it passes this week, but she said it is because we show up every day, because we are still well-branded, because there are so many of us, because we are moms and lawmakers are

scared to vote against us because we're the majority of the voting public. It's why we're making such a difference.

Last year, we beat 15 out of 15 guns in school bills across the country. We beat 17 out of 18 guns on campus bills. We beat 18 out of 22 permitless carry bills, and we beat the expansion of stand your ground in four out of five states. Showing up works and we have a pretty amazing track record against the strongest lobby in the country.

[0:34:05.9] AS: That's so inspiring. I have chills. Have you started to realize, as I get more involved — Because I wasn't really political. My parents were city school teachers, so we grew up talking about social issues and laws and my parents were just kind of more, I guess, politically aware. We talked about it a lot, but I really didn't pay that much attention until after this election. I'm starting to realize, so much of politics is about the optics. What do things really look like? That's so brilliant that you guys are branded and you're making yourself visually present taking up space in a way that's really effective.

[0:34:41.6] SW: I do think it's important. I think it's important to look sophisticated in terms of your branding. I think it brings people together and makes them feel like a cohesive part of a tribe or a sorority or however you want to phrase it. I think we've created what the NRA created, which is this idea of people wanting to come together and not just be activists, but also socialize.

Every year we have something called Guns Sense University where we invite all of our leadership and we show up in the city and we spent three days together having a good time, learning, teaching one another. I had someone say to me, "This is lightning in a bottle," and it's really true. If you said to me, "Go create a grassroots movement around this issue." I couldn't do it. I don't think again, and it's why no one else has been able to do it in this space. You really have to have sort of all of the elements in branding, certainly, a big part of it.

[0:35:37.8] AS: What is your spiritual outlook? Because, like I said, I didn't know what I was getting involved with. My whole thing is health and about 15 years ago I started realizing how big pharma, big food, big ag, basically, conspire to make us sick and then profit off of it. That

was one dark night of a soul. 2016 elections was the second dark night of the soul. They keep coming. Good thing I'm building skills.

You also start to meet great people and there's so much healing. What is your spiritual outlook? What do you draw from when you said, "I don't think I could do this again," but you're in it now and you're going to keep going.

[0:36:16.1] SW: Yes. Go ahead.

[0:36:17.9] AS: I'm curious, your spiritual outlook, or religious gravitas. What do you pull from? I know you said you know you're making a difference and all that stuff, but what is the bigger picture of that look like for you spiritually?

[0:36:30.7] SW: Yeah. I think there are several things. First is when you work with so many survivors of gun violence, which we do closely every day, because they want to be activists too. They want to turn their grief into action. They want to turn their pain into purpose. They want to help other people. You can't help but feel grateful for the safety of your own family and your own children, but also to feel like you need to fight for these people who have suffered so greatly and continue to suffer and to feel any other way would seem to be selfish.

I think that is a big part of the impetus of how we keep going, to draw on the strength of people who show such incredible courage and grace even though they've been dealing with such a huge tragedy in their lives.

I think the other piece is to understand that there has to be also another part of your life. I am fortunate and that I married to who I am convinced is the greatest person on earth, and I take such strength for my husband who also is a teacher of meditation and a longtime Buddhist and just sort of a rock for me. My family has never been afraid. They don't do this, even though they've been harassed, even though I've been threatened. They've never said I don't want you to do this, or I'm scared. They've always been incredibly supportive and proud.

I also think nature plays a big role. I moved to Colorado two years after I started Moms Demand Action. I spent a lot of time outdoors. I just climbed Mt. Kilimanjaro, and I do a lot of physical

activity, and I also think that's an incredibly important outlet for all of the stress and suffering and grief the you experience when you're working on gun violence prevention all the time.

[0:38:13.7] AS: I love that, because I think our culture just kind of dismisses the body. I think if we saw that as more sacred we probably have better gun laws, we have better healthcare. I love that, that it is really — You almost use the body — The stress almost propels you further physically, it sounds like.

[0:38:32.6] SW: Yeah. I think some of it is just how I'm made as a human, and I did crisis communications for a long time, and I'm used to being in sort of crisis mode, which you are when you're dealing with mass shootings all the time in the country. I can remember waking up the morning of the horrific Pulse Shooting at a nightclub in Orlando, and it was Sunday morning and I was going to spend the day with my family and that was not what I ended up doing. I ended up making sure that we leveraged this horrific tragedy to talk about the need for stronger gun laws. That's what we do. That's how every day can be when you're working on this issue.

The other piece is saying, "Okay, I've been going nonstop now for five days and it's time to sort of get outside and go hiking and take a break and recharge. I do think a lot of it is recharging your battery, whether it's vacation, or physical activity, or meditation, or spending time with your family. Everyone has a different way of doing it, but it is so easy to get burned out, and lots of our volunteers do. Don't get me wrong.

We have people who come and give everything they can for a year or two and then that's it. They have to kind of go away and recharge, but then we have other people who can figure out how to do that simultaneously and they've been with us from the very beginning. I think some of it just depends on personality.

[0:39:54.9] AS: Yeah. That's definitely true. I was reading a Harvard Business review article about resilience and they said people think resilience is about just showing up, showing up, showing up, but actually it's really about the recharging that you —

[0:40:08.5] SW: That's interesting.

[0:40:10.5] AS: Yeah, and I was like, “That’s such an interesting point, because I know I feel — When I was first starting my business, I was in grad school at the same time, that was a dumb move. You don’t know what you don’t know.

[0:40:23.4] SW: To your point, I was exhausted after the election. I mean, we all were for a variety of reasons, but I had been in 15 states campaigning for Hillary Clinton in the months leading up and I just was so tired and decided that this was going to be the year of vacationing. Of my five kids, only one is still at home. He’s going to be a junior in high school, and we are doing that. We’ve probably been to Mexico once a month since the election and I’m getting ready to go to the Baltics, and I’m good to go to Patagonia in January, and I decided this year that if I didn’t do that, if I didn’t spent time recharging in that way, I was going to burnout and. It’s been fantastic and it also helps me, I think, focus and be better at what I do when I am present.

[0:41:16.7] AS: Totally. I think that’s — Again, if you get involved, and for people listening, if they’re going to get involved in a social cause at whatever degree, it’s like have the expectation that this is a long-term commitment so you can pace yourself more like — I feel like I was calling furiously every day, my state seminars, my local ones and now I’ve just kind of honed in on the healthcare act, and I also signed up with Moms Demand Action. I love it. I want you to let everyone know how they can do it. I get the text messages, I call my reps when I get the text messages from moms about legislation that’s going on in Pennsylvania, and it’s so easy and it feels like, “Okay, did that,” but I have the things that I focus on rather than just like everything that’s coming down, because I’m like — My husband said to me the other day when I came home just so angry, he’s like, “Are you going to be in the state for four years?” I was like, “No.” Perspective. This is unsustainable.

[0:42:13.1] SW: Something I say all the time to our volunteers is that this is a marathon, not a sprint. If you think you’re going to get involved we’re somehow going to have same gun laws in a year. That’s not going to happen. It’s going to take a long time to undo the damage that the gun lobby has done over the past 30 years. The expectation that we will lose is important as well. We actually have a #internally with all of our volunteers which is just keep going. You’re going to win, keep going. You’re going to lose, keep going, and don’t give up because this is a fight worth fighting and we’re going to win it at some point.

I'm a full-time volunteer. Our organization is made up mainly of volunteers and the incentive we all have is to save the lives of others. When you know you're on the right side of history, I do think that knowing someday we'll say to our grandkids like, "You won't believe this, but one day you used to be able to carry an AR 15 around the grocery store." The ideas that we will somehow make a safer future for our families and our future grandkids I think has to be the reward.

The other piece of that — Coming from the corporate world, the people I managed kind of had to do what I said because I paid them, the company paid them. In this role, people need to do what we all agree on because they are kind and smart and good. What that requires is not financial incentives, but thank you, and praise, and acknowledgment, and that's a completely different mindset. I think that's been life-changing for me too. What a great thing and what an honor for me as a volunteer to wake up as a leader every day get to say thank you. What you did matters, and keep going, and please keep doing this. That's life-changing too; living in this idea of a gratitude for others.

[0:44:01.1] AS: Yeah. They've done research on meaning and people who are dedicated to deep meaning in their lives, not the hedonistic treadmill a pleasure. Their biomarkers are actually healthier. Even though they struggle more, they're more exhausted and they had the highs and lows, but their biomarkers are still better than people who are just kind of waiting for that next pleasure head, and I think that that speaks to that spiritual meaning, like health metric that we don't measure, but we should because it's really when you feel connected to something greater.

I know — I have a friend here ins Pittsburg, Ray Warner, who I know you know, who's big into Moms Demand Action and he finds the community, like that community connection of people who care and want to do meaningful things, so fortifying too. I think America would become so isolated in our little pockets. We may be connected via Facebook or social media, yet that in-person committed to something greater than ourselves is — It really is its own energy generation tool.

[0:45:02.2] SW: Yes. I completely agree.

[0:45:03.6] AS: I also want you to mention about, in the beginning, you talked a little bit about those wins with Starbucks and Chipotle, but can you tell us some of the other stuff about — Who's doing this research? I didn't even know you could carry guns in Target, or a Starbucks. I was like, "I didn't even that was possible." Can you talk about some of those wins too?

[0:45:22.3] SW: It was June 2013, we were only seven months old as an organization, and I was watching the news I saw that Starbucks had decided to ban smoking and electronic cigarette 25 feet outside their stores regardless of state law, and they were being lauded for this for, obviously, the health and safety of their employees and of their customers.

Starbucks also was allowing open carry inside their store. In fact at the time, for years, gun extremists have been having an annual day of celebration by bringing all their guns into Starbucks every — I think it was like February 2nd to represent the second amendment, and Starbucks allowed that.

I called them and I said, "Look, are you going to still allow open carry by state laws because you're going to do this with smoking?" They said, "Yes.." I thought, "I'm a lot more scared of secondhand bullets than I am secondhand smoke. This is absurd."

We were so small. We're only seven months old, but we decided we were going to take on Starbucks. In retrospect, that's pretty funny, but weren't big enough to boycott them, so we had something called Skip Starbucks Saturday. We would share pictures of our mom deciding to have coffee at home or at a competitive of Starbucks and we are also making images of people open carrying inside Starbucks across the country go viral, and the more we did that the more they open carried inside Starbucks. It just became this incredibly heated thing, and then a bunch of open carry extremists showed up at a Starbucks in Newtown, which got that community involved. Then I think it was 50 gun extremist showed up open carrying at a [inaudible 0:47:03.7] Starbucks, terrifying the customer there, made national news.

Three months after we started this campaign, Howard Schultz, the CEO of Starbucks came out on CNN and said guns are no longer welcome inside our stores. That was when we were like, "Well, moms make 80% of spending decisions for their families. Maybe there's something to this. Maybe we could really have a lot of power."

So we've replicated that at places like Chipotle, and Sonic, and all the brinker restaurants, in Target, in Trader Joe's, Panera. More than a dozen restaurants and retailers. Even in cities we've done it. After open carry was passed in Texas, our moms went door-to-door in Texas and over 400 restaurants and retail outlets ban open carry by putting up signs. We handed out signs that were required to do that. In fact an NRA board member who lives in Texas said he wished they never passed the law because now he can take his gun in fewer places than he could before. It really is about grassroots power and pulling the levers of power that you have, and as women our votes, our checkbook, our voices, those are levers that we have to pull.

[0:48:15.4] AS: love that. I wanted to ask you about the voting. Is gun rights — Is it kind of like the environment, Like everyone cares about the environment but it's not something that's going to make a break a vote, kind of like jobs or embryos, like the pro-life people, pro-birth. There's a lot of pro-life who really are pro-life from embryo to grave, but many are not.

[0:48:37.8] SW: Right. That is exactly the problem I think with guns is that it has not been an issue that people have gone into the polling places and voted on necessarily. It's something we most of us agree on, but it's not something that we've gone in to vote on, and that's mainly because lawmakers haven't made it part of the policy platform because of the NRA, so they're afraid of the blowback, they're afraid of getting into a polarizing issue. That is changing more and more.

Ralph Northam, who just won the democratic nomination for the governor of Virginia, he ran solely, not solely, but mainly on the issue of gun safety. Hillary Clinton was one of the first presidential candidates to make it a priority in her policy platform. Polls show that, in particular, women support this issue more than many other important issues now. Again, it is a marathon, not a sprint, but it's explaining to lawmakers why if they support this issue, they will win in. It's also educating donors to say, "Hey, Heidi Heitkamp in North Dakota is really bad on this issue even though she's democrat. Please don't give her money," and she voted against background checks. She's one of the only democrats to do so.

Lawmakers need to pay a price when they vote against our safety interests and they need to be supported and lauded when they do the right thing. The more we do that, the more we'll change that whole dynamic.

[0:50:01.3] AS: love that. I love that. One more questions before you tell people how they can easily get involved with Moms Demand, because it's so easy. Listeners, like I do it. It feels so good. You call your lawmakers. Although I have a question for you because my lawmakers — My state lawmakers, I live in a very blue area, so they tend to always agree. I'm curious if you have any tips for that. Before, I want to ask you, we had Justine Musk on the podcast. She's a writer, a feminist, she's also the ex-wife of Elon Musk, and one of the things we talked about is when their divorce became public. How the trolls came out in ways that were so vicious.

I was curious because if you're a woman speaking out, you're to get blowback, and it's hard to maintain your voice sometimes as you gradually get threatened. It's not like the one time, it's the daily. How do you — Because I really admire your Twitter comebacks. You're so clever, and you don't back down. Which I was like, "Wow!"

What do you draw from again? What's your positioning on that, or how do you deal with the trolls and the fact that you know you're going to get called out just by being a woman.

[0:51:06.2] SW: Yeah. It's been really a fascinating experience over the past five years. I wasn't even on Twitter, really, before Moms Demand Action. Dealing with all these trolls at first, I was overwhelmed and, "Wow! They're saying such horrific, vicious things about me. They're making up complete lies."

The trolls were such horrible things that you can't even imagine about your personal life, about your children, about your marriage. It is bizarre. It becomes noise after a while. I think I'm sort of like a gremlin, like if you feed me after midnight I just become empowered, and more these trolls are harassing me and trying to go after me online, just the more out there I become, because I'm not going to back down. I'm not going to be intimidated. I'm not going to be silent. This issue is too important.

As a woman, I have a right to have an opinion and a voice. I think a lot of has become noise at this point to me, but I recommend blocking, wash, rinse, repeat block. Everybody who insults your Twitter, there's no reason to have them around and be able to access your feeds. I wish it was a friendlier environment for women in particular, but I think the more present we are — I actually love how Chelsea Clinton, when people horrible things about her, she retweets them and says something kind. I'm not sure I'm quite that about yet, but I do think it's important to not be intimidated and got my own prevention activist, I think get it worse than even gaming or female politicians. There some kind of mixture about gun extremism and misogyny that seems to be the most toxic of all.

[0:52:49.7] AS: I can totally see that. I saw this funny tweet, it was like — It basically was describing social media. It's like Pinterest; in planning a party. Facebook; I'm going to a party. Instagram; I'm at the party. Twitter; we're all going to die.

[0:53:05.6] SW: It is. Twitter is — Oh my gosh! It really is nonstop discussions, but the great — There's so much upside to Twitter too. It's just been so incredibly effective as an organizing tool. If you can ignore the bad or combat the bad and really leverage the good, then it's a worthwhile process.

[0:53:25.7] AS: Yeah, totally. Shannon, thank you so much for your time. Will you please tell everyone how they can easily get involved with Moms Demand Action and get community, get meaning. What a bargain?

[0:53:38.7] SW: Yeah. Absolutely, and it really is. I have friends that I now vacation with every year that I didn't know before Moms Demand Action started, and they will be lifelong friends. It's just such a great community to get involved in where you live, and if you have something that's important to you, you can work on corporate campaigns, or you can work on state legislative campaigns, or you can work on religious campaign around gun violence.

There's a spot and an opportunity for you to get involved, and so go to momsdemandaction.org is our website and it explains show you can join the organization. You can also text the word join to 64433 and you'll get a text back that that immediately enters you into the organization. We're on Twitter at @momsdemand. We're on Facebook. We also have an, in addition to our national

page, we have a webpage for every single state so you can know what going on near you. For people who live in blue states, people who live in states with good gun laws, there are ways for you to get involved. We're always working to strengthen gun laws even in states like California and Hawaii that already have strong gun laws. There are always laws that can be passed to make those laws stronger. We actually do work in blue states on different campaigns.

We also have something called a Gun Sense Action Network, which is a really great way to get involved to Moms Demand Action. If you live in a state where a lot of your laws are already good, you can call into states that don't have great gun laws. An example would be when we were passing ballot initiative in the state of Nevada last year, which one, to close the background check loophole so that every gun sale would require a background check. A lot of our moms across the country would get on the phone every day and we make it very easy for you to call and to say, "Here's what this ballot initiative is. Here's what it will mean. Here's how you vote on it and why you should vote on it and where you vote on it," and we won by a very slim margin, but we one, and I think large part of it because we have the ability to mobilize people in different states and in different localities. There are all different ways to get involved.

[0:55:37.4] AS: That's really helpful. Yeah, I mean, I'm in Pennsylvania. They do not have great guns laws. I was just saying my senator [inaudible 0:55:42.8] house. That's good to know that I can call other people in the state and say, "Hey — ", they were just trying to have guns in schools, and I have my husband, me, my parents, everyone calling.

[0:55:56.0] SW: That's right. Pat Toomey, you can visit him every Tuesday with Patty Toomey Tuesdays and Moms Demand Action. There's so many different things you can do.

[0:56:05.8] AS: Yeah. He is bankrolled by the Koch Brothers. I don't know if they're involved in the NRA or not.

[0:56:09.2] SW: I know. He was one of the sponsors of the background check legislation after Sandy Hook. We know that he can be reasonable. That was called the Tommey Manchin Bill. We know that he can be reasonable, but we just have to keep them sort of on the straight and narrow.

[0:56:26.7] AS: Yeah. That is for sure.

[0:56:29.1] SW: Yeah.

[0:56:30.1] AS: Thank you so much, Shannon. This has been a wonderful. I know it's going to be so inspiring for our listeners. Thank you. Thank you.

[0:56:35.8] SW: Wonderful. Thank you for having me.

[0:56:38.1] AS: Yeah.

[END OF INTERVIEW]

[0:56:42.1] AS: Have questions or reactions about the episode? Reach out to me on Instagram and Twitter @alimshapiro, or Facebook at facebook.com/alimarieshapiro. If you love this show, please leave an iTunes review and tell one friend this week about how to get the Insatiable Podcast on their phone.

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