

Kathryn: Welcome to episode 19 of compass, I'm your host Kathryn Hunter. Do you ever get so enthusiastic in your ambitions that you need to give yourself permission to let up some? In this episode Cori Carl and I talk about that and more in our discussion on her path to becoming a managing director. Cori, welcome to the show.

Cori: Hi, thanks for having me.

Kathryn: I like to start with your early life to see where that influences you later on. What did you want to be when you were five?

Cori: I wanted to be a doctor and that's probably because that's what my grandmothers encouraged me to be, because they were both nurses.

Kathryn: How had that changed by the time you left high school?

Cori: I had, I'm not really sure what I wanted to be when I was in high school, but I guess like wanted to follow my uncle Joe's footsteps. He has a jewelry store on main street and he owned some rental properties and so he owns, he knows everyone in town because he's a small business owner and he really seemed like he was in control of his life because he had his own business and then he had the rental income. So he seemed like such a good role model.

Kathryn: Did you pursue college?

Cori: I pursued a lot of college. In high school I discovered that my parents would give me spending money as long as I was taking college classes and that as long as I kept like a certain GPA in high school, I could take college classes at the local community college. So, as a consequence I actually have four associates degrees. But I did eventually transfer and get my BA in media and cultural studies from The New School. And then I got my masters in communications from CUNY.

Kathryn: From that, I'm guessing variety of things that you did there, anything that you pull from that in your day to day now?

Cori: Yeah, all the time. My incredibly interdisciplinary background informs my work and really makes me versatile. So, I can roll up my sleeves and do a lot of different things, which is very helpful when you're working with small businesses who may not have other people on hand to do stuff, but the right background. And I went to an engineering high school and then worked with sustainable engineering firms for a few years. So I definitely see every problem through the framework of the built environment. And the larger systems at play and that really influences my work right now.

Kathryn: How did you get into being location independent?

Cori: It sort of happened as an accident. During college I worked as a graphic designer for a printing company and when I left to go backpack Europe, they never replaced me and

instead they talked me into working remotely for them when they would need me. They didn't do a lot of graphic design work, so that actually was okay. Even though this was back in 2008 and so I didn't even bring my laptop with me on the trip because it was so heavy, but I would work in university libraries. So, I didn't work a lot on that trip, but I made enough money that after four months of backpacking I came home with the same amount of money I started with. And then it sort of set me up to be a freelancer because I got to keep all of my existing clients. And then the printing company continued to send clients to me and then over the years I shifted from graphic design into communications and marketing strategy.

Kathryn: How do you describe your job to people who are being polite?

Cori: To be honest, I go to great lengths to avoid this question as small talk. When people hear I'm pet sitting, they usually assume that's my job. And I don't often correct them. If I'm vague about what I do and they know I'm traveling, they usually assume that I like had some boring office job and I hated it. So I quit it to chase my dreams, and I'm finding myself in some sort of like Eat, Pray, Love thing. People definitely don't expect someone who's living out of a backpack to have kept their office job. Like my current role started as an office job and I really love it. But if I'm not vague about what I do, strangers oftentimes will really open up to me and tell me about like the darkest moments of their lives, uh, which you know, can be really great.

Cori: I've, I've had some incredible experiences through that, but it can definitely be a little intense to go from talking about the weather to someone getting teary eyed about their grandfather's slow decline from Alzheimer's and what it's done to their family. So, I definitely have spent time debating like what, what I could tell people that sounds really like boring and just checks the box off so we can move on to the next question.

Kathryn: Yeah. And when you, when you've got someone who's really interested in, wants to know what you do, what, what kind of description do you give them?

Cori: Okay, so, I'm director of an organization called the caregiver space. So, it's a tiny nonprofit and I run a support platform for people who provide care to loved ones or clients who were ill, elderly or disabled. And I'm also researching factors outside the healthcare system that impact the caregiving experience because something about our world today has taken this essential aspect of the human experience and turned it into a solitary burden. So I'm really interested in seeing what has led to that transformation.

Kathryn: How did you get started working in this space that you are now?

Cori: I worked on some healthcare projects for Ben Gurion University and the Central Conference of American Rabbis. And then I was feeling, I was like looking for a change. Um, I wrapped up a big project for some other clients and the posting for my current organization popped into my inbox through my alumni career office.

Kathryn: At first the job was on location and you eventually talked him into being remote?

Cori: Yeah. My now ex wife was transferred to a different location and so for a little while we were, um, I talked my boss into letting me split my time between two cities and then eventually I transitioned to being a hundred percent remote.

Kathryn: What was your first major struggle as managing director?

Cori: The founder and I are both very ambitious and enthusiastic and sometimes we have great ideas and we dive right in and things will take off, but they're just not sustainable. I had a daily email for a while with a really phenomenal open rate, but I just couldn't keep up with that on top of everything else. For three years I was publishing one or more articles a day and I recently dropped it down to once a week and I've also cut back a lot on our social media activity. About two years ago I went to an event and this speaker was the director of BuzzFeed Canada and I learned that I had a bigger reach on Facebook than BuzzFeed Canada. So it felt really good, but it also sort of gave me the permission I needed to chill out, that like they have a staff and an advertising budget and I was doing this all on my own. So I'm getting a lot better about being realistic about, not only what I can build, but also what I can maintain and remembering that the idea is not for me to be some sort of like phenomenally productive person, but it's to build a community and a connection between our members.

Kathryn: How about your first major success?

Cori: One of the biggest challenges of running an online community is maintaining a safe space. The caregiver space was founded to be welcoming to people who often don't feel welcome in other caregivers support organizations, specifically like queer people, trans people, young people and visible minorities. And in this like constant struggle to maintain a safe space, the most effective thing I've done was put a stock image of a Muslim man above our signup button. Like it just, everything else I've done to maintain a safe space has been like far less effective than that stock image that just like weeds out the troublemakers before they even join.

Kathryn: I love that it's something, it's so simple and it's nothing that requires upkeep, but it's still so effective.

Cori: So effective.

Kathryn: If you could start fresh today, would you have done anything differently?

Cori: Probably a lot of things, but I feel really good about where I am now and it's hard to say what I could have done differently without knowing what I know now.

Kathryn: Do you have a typical day?

Cori: I do tend to keep a routine, but it changes every few weeks because I'm house sitting. And so it depends a lot on what sorts of critters I'm looking after, if, if there are critters. I check my email obviously and social media and our groups every day. Um, but I can do that on my phone so I can do it on a boat or wherever I am. In the middle of a hike we

can stop and take a break and I can do that in little pieces. I batch other tasks, so I'll spend a few hours on them every few weeks. And that makes it really easy to adjust my work schedule to the weather and my mood and what I want to do in a certain city.

Cori: Um, a lot of times I'll have my laptop in my bag and work for a little bit between going to art galleries and getting dinner with friends or whatever it is I want to do. When I'm focusing on my research or other big projects, I find it useful to have several days without any real interruptions. So I'll find a house sit somewhere really lovely. And just work and hike and relax and cook all my own meals from scratch and it's a really fantastic experience. So, probably depending on what day people catch me on, they think either I like work all the time nonstop or I like basically never work and I just am like playing on my phone sometimes.

Kathryn: Do you keep up with any kind of continuing education?

Cori: Yeah, I mean the research I'm doing has me spending a lot of my time in libraries and uh, that has given me the opportunity to meet some really incredible people. Right now I'm choosing my locations either based on the research opportunities, which is why I'm in Asheville right now or to be near friends and family.

Kathryn: Do you primarily stay in North America right now?

Cori: Yeah. Right now I've been in the U S and Canada. Um, because that's where a lot of my friends and family are and I'm also, I'm a permanent resident of Canada and so that has certain requirements for being there. But mostly I want to spend time in Canada to, you know, get to know this country that I just immigrated to. And also to work towards meeting their requirements to apply for citizenship.

Kathryn: So now it's time to get into some numbers. What would you say your salary range is and how long have you been doing the work?

Cori: So I've been with my organization four or five years. And , it's tough to say what the salary range of a tiny nonprofit would be because a lot of other people who are running small nonprofits are doing it on a volunteer basis or accept sort of whatever the organization can afford. So they're really fundraising for their own salary. I don't have to do that. And my salary is pretty close to the median income for the US. More established nonprofits, generally the pay would maybe start at like \$70,000 and can go up to maybe \$300,000, but typically a director of a small nonprofit would make around like \$125,000ish.

Kathryn: When you're first getting started, is that more towards the \$70,000?

Cori: Yeah, I think it's, it's a combination of, um, what the organization's financial situation is as well as your own experience. And like, because, because my salary is quite low, my boss is really encouraging of me doing consulting work. A lot of people running other organizations in the caregiving field, especially people who are working on projects for

millennial caregivers or projects for the LGBTQ community. They'll reach out to me for consulting work. And so, um, that definitely supplements my, my salary.

Kathryn: Do they expect 40 hours a week from you?

Cori: It really, I set my own schedule. So it's one of those things where I answer to our board of directors and the founder, but it's not like anyone is supervising me and certainly in such a small organization, if I weren't getting things done it would be very apparent very quickly.

Kathryn: So it's more about output than it is time.

Cori: Yeah. I mean, no one's watching what I do.

Kathryn: When you were going through the process, was it a negotiation?

Cori: Not really. It was like the organization is funded by our founder, so she basically set the, the salary.

Kathryn: Okay. So she posted it and you said that would work?

Cori: Yeah. Yeah. And you know, I've gotten since then, but I think like in other roles and certainly in my consulting work there's a lot more negotiation. But given her situation she has like a set amount of money to work with. So any amount of money that's going to me directly is money, that's like taking away from our operations.

Kathryn: What's your number one tip for women looking to become managing directors?

Cori: It's sort of unusual for me to be running such a small nonprofit that I didn't myself found. Most people end up as directors because they founded an organization or are like hired from private industry to run larger nonprofits.

Kathryn: What are your next steps?

Cori: With traveling? I've ended up doing a lot of sort of accidental ethnographies of people providing care for someone who's ill, disabled, or elderly. And it's been really fascinating to see the gulf between what other researchers are finding and my lived experience of actually staying in the homes of caregivers or meeting them. So in the next year or so I'd love to find an organization to partner with so I can do this work. Studying people's lives requires a lot of careful thought about ethics, especially when working with a vulnerable population. So even though I do a lot of interviews with caregivers, I can't really use that work in any sort of official capacity. It can sort of inform my work, but I can't, you know, publish a journal article or reports about that. So I really need to partner with an institution with an IRB. So I'm sort of looking at what sort of organizational partnerships to form or if the easiest way to do it is to go back to school.

Kathryn: And what's an IRB?

Cori: Institutional review board. It makes sure that any sort of study you're doing is ethically conducted.

Kathryn: Where can listeners find you?

Cori: I have a personal website at remoteswap.club so people are really confused about the name sometimes, but it's because I am a remote worker traveling through the sharing economy. And sort of over time, my personal website has shifted from talking about traveling to discussing culture and economics. And The Caregiver Space is at thecaregiverspace.org. And we are super active on Instagram, Twitter, and Facebook all under thecaregiverspace.

Kathryn: Corey, thank you so much for joining us. This has been great.

Cori: Yeah, thanks for having me.

Kathryn: If you want your own location independent life and are eager to take that next step, join us in [compass insiders](http://compasspod.com/insiders) where every week I send you actionable tips, inspiration, and motivation so you can take that next step towards going remote. Join us now at compasspod.com/insiders, that's compasspod.com/insiders. Did you enjoy this episode of Compass? If so, please take a moment to write a review. Leaving a review helps other women find us so they can find their direction too. Thank you for listening to Compass. You can find today's show notes at compasspod.com/019, that's compasspod.com/01. Next week we'll be talking with Christina Gawlik, math writer.