

Welcome to right here in Mass. We're a weekly podcast that features individuals throughout the Baystate who are on our radar and should be on yours from the Berkshires to Boston, Cape Cod in the Islands. Tune in to learn about who you should know right here in mass.

Happy Thursday right here in mass. Listeners. Joining us today is Abby Romano, the co-founder and C E of raising the bar, an alcohol free co craft cocktail subscription box. Abby was recently named one of Boston Business Journals, 40 under 40 recipients, and has appeared on w CVBs a Chronicle, as well as N B C 10.

Abby, welcome to the show. Please share more about you and what you do. Absolutely. Thank you so much for having me, Ashley. Um, so yes, I'm the founder and c e o of raising the bar. And, uh, we created Raising the Bar to share alcohol free options for those who aren't drinking for any reason. So whether you're sober, sober, curious, taking a break, pregnant abstaining from medical reasons, um, we're just here to bring joy and fun to drinking alcohol free drinks.

Love that. And what inspired you to start raising the bar? So just over four years ago I quit drinking myself. Um, so I'm now just over four years sober and it was right around the holidays and right before New Year's Eve, so I was feeling that FOMO of missing out on the socialization and celebration.

And I had always been the one hosting parties, mixing up drinks, getting creative with mixology. So I thought there must be something to kind of help me through this transitional chapter as I explore early sobriety and a very quick Google search led me to nothing and I was like, I can't believe this isn't already an idea that somebody has done.

So, um, we kind of sat on that idea for a couple of years and I. We would talk about it every now and then. And my husband Devin, who founded the business with me one day was like, listen, I think this is a great idea. We've chatted about it, but we're either gonna do it or we're not. So let's do it. Or stop talking about it.

Um, so right before the pandemic in February of 2020, we started our branding and working on the concept and design and everything. And then the pandemic hit. We were suddenly home with our two kids, um, homeschooling, trying to work our full-time jobs. And I was pregnant with my third at the time. Um, so everything kind of got put on hold as we were just kind of getting by through the day today and after the baby was born in May.

Um, and I had some time at home with him. That's when we really were like, if I don't do this before I go back to work, then it's never gonna happen. So we launched September, 2020 and the rest is history. Amazing. Uh, one of the things that I always find really interesting about subscription boxes is just how they find and curate the items that go into it.

So I'd love to hear how you've done that in terms of researching and making sure that the company that offers these products are a right fit for the box as well. Yeah, that's a great question. So, um, before I made my way into this business, um, my background is in art history and museum work. So I did curatorial work in small museums, and I've always loved just like piecing things together visually and the creativity.

So in a way, the curating of the boxes is drawing from my early experiences, um, with art history, but. We have found that brands in the alcohol free space are so excited about this category and willing to share samples and get the word out. So we've been very lucky that we basically have a dining room filled with a library of every ingredient under the sun.

So we get to sample everything ourselves and make sure we really love it and think it's a quality product. And then from there, um, to your point, we have to test everything to make sure these recipes are not only gonna, you know, have products that look great in the box together. But taste exquisite and are really providing a wonderful experience.

So it is trial and error. Um, but after, you know, doing this for the past couple of years, we really start to have honed in on really good instincts, what's gonna work well. And um, so we usually start with, we know what our spirit or, um, main ingredient will be, and then we build upon it from there. Very cool.

And how do you get inspiration for recipes? Is it kind of seasonal based or perhaps what you're seeing is becoming popular with, with, um, alcoholic drinks, you might wanna make non-alcoholic a little bit of everything. So, um, some of it for sure is seasonal. So we just in January had, um, our first blush box, which featured Monday, zero proof.

Whiskey. So in those colder months, you know, a darker spirit, more warming spices, um, and like in the summer maybe we'll do a tropical drink or something like that. So we definitely like to do something seasonal. Um, and then also to your point, we are taking inspiration if there's a trend that's going on in the traditional cocktail industry or if we want to do a take on, you know, a classic cocktail, like an old fashioned or a Cosmo, um, we'll kind of weave those ideas in as well.

Oh, awesome. And I know that in addition to offering the boxes, you also work with corporations. And so what inspired you to take that route? And are you able to share some examples of how you've been able to work with those corporations in Massachusetts? Yeah, so that was one, um, when we began, we were very much in just like survival mode with a new baby and the two kids at home.

Yeah. So we kind of went in just with not too many expectations. We're just like, let's get it off the ground and see what happens. So I think it was our second month of business where we were pack packing our monthly box and I got just a, a cold outreach from a pharmaceutical company and they

were leading a virtual employee gathering in December, and they were like, Oh, we found you guys on Instagram.

Do you ever do corporate boxes? And I was like, yes, of course we do. And I was like, we'll figure out how to do this. So my husband and I had to figure out how to source all of this stuff for this event. We ended up having to rent, um, get a truck for, uh, a freight load that would pick up a pallet in our driveway.

Like, oh my gosh. Everything was kind of on the, on the job learning. Um, That experience led us to realize, like, this is a really exciting opportunity. A lot of businesses and companies are realizing how important inclusivity is mm-hmm. Um, in the workplace. And that can extend to things like people who might not drink again for any reason.

Um, and corporate drinking culture can be a really complicated thing. So we did start doing some outreach. Um, You know, it's, it's not our main portion of the business, but for instance, we did a box for, um, the Harvard, uh, sector on, um, astronomy. They were, you know, doing a celebration, wanted to have something again that everybody could enjoy.

So, It's something we'd love to build out more and are always interested in, in doing. Um, and I think the challenge now is as people get back to more in-person things, you know, how do we translate that offering? So we're starting to build out offerings to help construct a menu and do ordering for, you know, in-person events so that people can really enjoy, you know, something that is zero proof in their workplace.

Yeah, absolutely. And I especially imagine that it's a really good fit for PE for companies that are doing like client gifting because being in this space, like a lot of people are so prone to just give someone a bottle of wine or something like that, and so it's really nice to have exec, like you said, that inclusive alternative for sharing the non-alcoholic.

Uh, boxes that people can use to still have a really great cocktail, although mocktail, that's exactly right. And I think one other interesting thing we found, you know, friends and family who wanna support us, but they're not necessarily interested in mocktails. You can add your own spirit to the drinks.

So if you wanna host something and have it be for everybody, like some people can have theirs fully leaded and others is zero proof. And that's the other thing, just having these options. Um, so I think you're right. Like that's, you know, that is a gift. That is not as complicated as something like a bottle of wine, which could be a trigger for somebody or a temptation, right.

Or something like that. Absolutely. And I love that you mentioned that you're thinking about offerings to bring out now that things are coming in person again. So is there anything that you're able to share about what your plans are for that? Yeah. So one exciting thing that we just did was,

um, a restaurant in North Andover reached out to us and they wanted to have an alcohol free cocktail list on their dry January menu.

Um mm-hmm. So we got to finally go to the restaurant last weekend and order off that menu and see it live, and that was so exciting. I think that is one of the things that, um, you know, the hospitality industry is being more and more conscious of this. Desire for zero proof drinks and not just, again, from the sober community, but from people who maybe are drinkers and they don't wanna have a second or third glass of wine, but they still wanna have something festive.

Um, so that was a really exciting thing we did that was with TAVR on high in North and Dover. And we would love to do more of that. Um, We were at another restaurant in Newburyport a couple weekends ago, brine, and they had an incredible zero proof cocktail menu. And it's not just like the Shirley Temples or you know, elevated lemonades that they're curating beautiful, um, menus that include zero proof.

Spirits and wines and sparkling um, wines as well. So that was really, really cool to see and we hope to do more of that. Yeah, and it's definitely interesting, exactly like you said, to see the different options that come out of it because I feel like people probably think like, oh, I'll just get a soda, water and lime as like a non-alcoholic drink.

So yeah, I think it's awesome that there are a bunch of different options for being able to still be involved in the social aspect, but have a choice that feels comfortable to you. Exactly and beyond the social aspect, like for me, I've always been interested in food and drink. So to have a really, you know, well-crafted, complex drink that happens to be alcohol free is great too.

Like there is a huge opportunity with creativity and culinary aspects of these drinks. And I think the restaurants are starting to realize like, you can charge a decent amount for a well-crafted, zero proof drink. So I think for a long time also it was like, oh, well sodas aren't, you know, a good up.

Charge or whatever. But from a business perspective, this alcohol free trend is not going anywhere anytime soon. And I think restaurants are, are really taking notice, right. Especially because, I mean, even a few years ago, companies didn't really, or restaurants didn't really have that option of the, um, zero proof drinks on their menus.

And so it kind of, From what I've seen just with friends who weren't really drinking at the time, it made them feel uncomfortable to ask the bartender or the waiter or waitress that was serving us for a non-alcoholic drink. And so with that, do you have advice for people who might be going to a restaurant or bar and one is your proof drink, but they don't really see it on the menu for just getting more comfortable and not feeling like they're being too needy for asking for a mock down?

Yeah, I think that's such a great point. And I've had that experience so many times and I. Still do, even though I know like how to ask for things. Um, but I kind of feel like these zero proof options

are almost now becoming like a gluten-free, a vegan, a vegetarian option. Like they should just be offered and should be accommodated because mm-hmm.

Everybody should have a seat at the table. But we actually just recently did, um, An Instagram post that had a bunch of different things that you can ask for at a bar or restaurant with like specific ways to ask for it. So one of my favorite go-tos is, um, it's just grapefruit juice with club soda and bitters.

Um, so I will caveat that many bitters do contain alcohol when they're used in a drink. The dilution is such that it's less alcohol than a glass of juice. But I do like to point that out. Um, and I ask for it in a champagne glass because part of it is you don't want that like water, Tumblr. You want something that feels festive and special and like for an elevated occasion.

So I think glassware is a huge part of it. Um, another one that I like is just classic bitters in soda. So instead of the lime and soda bitters has that complex botanical, um, kind of bite to it. That is really satisfying. And then another one I would say if, um, you're at a restaurant that has those cute little copper mugs, um, doing, you know, a mojito or a, a mule.

So basically just club soda, some ginger beer. Lime and mint. Um mm-hmm. And usually you can look at the menu and see like, can I piece a couple things together? Um, but yeah, we do have a few go-tos that are really easy to ask for and are delicious to drink. I love what you mentioned about the drinkware, because I never thought about that, but you're, you're so right.

It's like no one wants to order some mocktail and just have like the plastic cup that comes with regular soda and Yeah. That's a part of the experience too, is having that fun glassware and I think that's a really great point that you brought up. It is, and it's also like one of the things we love to do in our kids is most boxes include a garnish too.

Like garnishes really dress things up, whether it's a dehydrated lime wheel. Or, um, you know, a, a hibiscus flower in syrup. Like, there's so many great ways to really elevate that experience simply. Absolutely. This episode of Right Here in Mass is brought to you by Melissa j Pond, I l c is your mission driven organization struggling to secure funding or communicate your strategy effectively?

Meet Melissa j Pond, I l c. An expert in grant writing, strategic planning, and visual storytelling. With over 15 years of experience in the nonprofit in government sectors recognized with multiple professional awards, Melissa can help create lasting change and improve the lives of those you serve.

Connect with her today@melissajpond.com to see how she can add value to your organization. That's melissa j pond.com. And for someone who is looking to transition to focusing more or

consuming more non-alcoholic drinks and alcoholic drinks, do you have advice for them on making that switch so they feel more comfortable and whatever aspect it may be in?

Yeah, so I think for me, the ritual of drinking was almost more important than the drink itself. So like when you're in a social event, you know, having that drink in your hand almost everybody else does too. So you just feel like part of the crowd you can. Cheers with somebody. Or if you are used to drinking a glass of wine or a beer in the evening at the end of the day, and that's your unwinding ritual, how can you translate that ritual?

So, For me, um, early on, and still now because everybody knows me as the mocktail lady, I will bring my own drinks to a party and bring some to share too. So in case, you know, it's very sweet, a lot of my friends these days now keep a stocked mocktail fridge or, you know, alcohol free beers. But I like to just know that I'm going to have something I'll enjoy and then I can also, you know, have extras to introduce people to them.

So if you're in those early stages and you're trying to drink less or cut out drinking, Just being prepared so that you know, you'll have something you'll enjoy is a great thing. And then if it's more, you know, something that you enjoy on your own at the end of the day, um, you know, just finding ways to build in that same concept.

So if that's your relaxation, you know, can you have a really nice new mug with fancy tea in it that really feels special and indulgent? So, I think the first thing is just addressing like, when am I drinking and when am I using this as, you know, part of my, um, you know, way to feel comfortable or relaxed.

And then exploring from there what substitutions you could make. I love that. And was someone looking to start having these drinks instead? They might feel like, well, I don't even know what I would like or what to try. Like, do you have examples of that? And I know that your boxes are a great way to get into it because people can try different drinks through it.

Yeah. But do you have any tips for helping people kind of dip their toes in the water and see what they might like or not like? Yeah, so definitely to your point, the boxes are great because they're really kind of an ingredient discovery. So, um, you're gonna get things and if. If that month isn't your cup of tea or your cup of mocktail next month could be.

Um, but I think the really cool thing is these days a lot of liquor stores and groceries and even some drug stores are carrying some of these products so you can go and check them out. So for instance, total Wine has a huge zero proof selection and um, depending on if you're looking to replace beer or wine or spirits, um, there's going to be something under all of those categories.

Um, but there are a lot of great. Canned zero proof drinks. So if mixology is a little overwhelming to you, there's some really great canned, canned pre-mix mocktails that you can try as well. But I

think going to see things in person and reading labels and just thinking like, oh, what do I usually have and what might be the closest, analogous thing would be my recommendation.

Yeah, that's great advice. And speaking of like, on the topic of people kind of dipping into, um, trying Mocktails for the first time, one of the things that people struggle with, from what I've seen from friends telling me about is that people tend to be really nosy and say, oh, why aren't you drinking? And it's none of their business why they're not drinking.

So do you have any advice on how people can answer that, um, when they might feel put on the spot or a little bit uncomfortable with that pr uh, prudent ultimately from someone? Yeah, absolutely. I think this is one that is really subjective and, um, there's a couple answers that I share with people, you know, to just have ready.

So one of them is, I'm just taking a break. Um, you know, if you don't wanna get into it, that's okay. You can just say I'm taking a break. Or if you don't even wanna go that far, you can just say, oh, I'm just switching it up with water. You know, you don't have to even acknowledge it. Um, If you're more comfortable talking about it, you can say, you know what?

I've just realized I feel better without it. So I'm cutting back or I'm cutting down. I think for a long time, especially, um, when AA was kind of the only way that people got sober, there's this idea of anonymity that, um, not drinking means you have this shameful secret to hide and right. I have kind of now come to the other side of the spectrum where when people ask, I'm like, I'd be thrilled to tell you.

Like that's, you know, that's part of my story and I'm not embarrassed about it. And it was other people sharing their stories with me that allowed me to kind of confront my own drinking and evaluate whether or not it was, is good for my life. So, um, you know, taking a break or another one that kind of shuts things down, like, oh, I'm the designated driver tonight.

Um, you know, again, if you don't wanna get into it, Um, but you're right, people are very nosy about it. They are curious are, are you pregnant? Um, right. You know, what's going on? And I was so guilty of those things before I stopped drinking and now I'm like, oh my gosh, I'm, you know, I wish I knew then what I knew.

Now I. But yeah, that's all great advice, and especially what you mentioned too about other people sharing their story and you sharing your stories. What kind of encouraged you to take this step? And I think that's really powerful with just people being able to see a company like this and hear about your story and say, well, if Abby did it and all these people did it too, then so can I.

It just makes people feel more. Comfortable and welcome when they might feel like they're alone in that process. So I think that's really amazing. Yeah, there's so much shame and guilt around

drinking for a lot of people. And I think for many that prevents them from seeking help or making changes, um, because they don't wanna talk to people about it.

They feel really alone and isolated. And the more I open up about my own story, the more I discover so many people who I rec. Affect and admire and are just crushing it at life, have very similar stories. I'm not alone. It's not unique to me. And I think y yeah, the more we share the better off. Absolutely.

And with getting more into in-person events, do you ever think that you do anything with weddings, because that tends to be a very alcohol heavy event. Do you ever see, uh, raising the bar, perhaps getting into that space? I love that. So, um, it's funny you say that. One of my best friends got married about a year and a half ago, and they had like a pallet of athletic brewing delivered to their wedding.

And it was so exciting to have like a great craft beer option, alcohol free. And then also just to see like their sea of guests dancing on the floor with those athletic cans in hand. Like, and I know not all of them are non drinkers as their way of life, but to see like this is just. Another drink option.

You know, it's, it's not just for sober people. So I think there's a lot of opportunity there and I think certainly, um, in the event space and weddings, that people are becoming more conscious about those options. So we don't have anything specific, but we definitely should think about that. Yeah, absolutely.

Especially because it just gives people an option and not make them feel like they need to just resort to water or that club soda and lime or the standard drinks that typically people think of when it comes to non, non-alcoholic drinks. I just love that it gives people a variety and it makes them still feel included, which of course, is a big focus of raising the bar inclusivity.

Absolutely. Yeah. And like one of my favorite zero proof drinks, um, there's se several that I really like, but joyous sparkling non-alcoholic white wine is a great champagne replacement. So, um, you know, having, uh, something to toast with that you can enjoy and feel comfortable, like I've seen that showing up at weddings too.

So I think that's a really great, um, Mindfulness that people are bringing to their events. Absolutely. And speaking of events, I know you mentioned this briefly, but for people who are hosting just casual get-togethers with friends and wanna make sure that they're mindful of guests who might not wanna drink alcohol that night.

Um, in addition to them having like mocktails or non-alcoholic drinks available, do you have any recommendations for people who are hosting a party and might wanna be conscious of that? Yeah, that's a great question. So I think for sure having options. Um, but one thing I've seen people do, which I really like, is they will batch mix a cocktail that can be enjoyed with or without alcohol.



Mm-hmm. And, you know, they'll put a spirit that you could add to it if you wanted. So it's not an afterthought, but like, here's this pre-mixed delicious drink, and if you wanna add alcohol to it, you can. So rather than being the exception, um, you know, it's, that's the default. Yeah. And if you wanna upgrade to the.

The leaded version. Great. Um, but I think in general, just anything besides water, even if it's seltzer, but anything besides water. Yeah, exactly. And I think that's so important too, like water or juice boxes if they're good at the party. Yes, yes, exactly. And like the funny thing is like, I've got three young kids and they love the drinks.

Too. Like they love making 'em. Yeah. And I caught my daughter the other day, she had a friend over and they were taking out ingredients that I had approved, but they were like mixing up their own drinks. Like showing kids that drinking doesn't mean getting drunk, showing kids that drinking is just part of socializing and celebrating so that hopefully when they're older, you know, they don't think, oh, I'm gonna have a drink.

That means it has to be an alcoholic drink. Like, yeah. I think there's some conversations that we can have early on to say that socialization doesn't mean. An alcoholic based beverage. Yes. And speaking of celebrations, that just made me think of this specifically with 21st birthday celebrations, that is always about the drink of people being legal to have alcoholic drinks, and I'm really, really curious to see how the growth in non-alcoholic drinks will change that.

And so I'd love to hear if you have any thoughts about how that will change. So that is such a great point. And the really interesting thing is that this next generation is absolutely drinking less, um, than millennials. And they are not necessarily strictly sober, but they're just drinking less. And so that's part of what's contributing to the category growth in the non-alcoholic segment.

Um, so I. Now you're saying this and I'm like, oh, we need a 21st birthday box. Oh my gosh. You do. Uh, which is such a great thing cuz you're right, that feels like that rite of passage that on your birthday you drink to celebrate turning 21. Um, yeah. So that's, that's super interesting. I'll have to get back to you on that, but that's definitely one we'll explore for sure.

I love that. I know, I just thought of it because like really me being 26, I mean it's, it's freshly happened of turning 21 and that's always what happens is going out to the bar and getting that drink. And so for sure, I think it's really interesting that you shared too, that the younger generation is drinking less, and so it'll be interesting to see how that plays out and affects things.

Yeah. One of the things I've been curious about is, you know, for, for a lot of these products, and not all of them, but some of them are trying to recreate something. So wines and beers obviously, but then like a whiskey alternative or a gin alternative. So I'm wondering if. Younger people are

drinking less, will they be as interested in those things when they are looking for non-alcoholic drinks?

Cuz maybe they don't even know what real bourbon tastes like or real gin taste like. Yeah. So they're not going to be interested in those flavor profiles. So I think it's still such a young category. There's lots to explore, but there's also a lot of opportunity. Um, and I'm just excited to see what happens with them.

Yeah, absolutely. And as of the time of this recording, it's February 1st, so we just passed the holidays and just passed dry January, and so I'd love to hear what both of those events had as an impact on raising the bar and some interesting things that you might have seen over the past month and a half.

Yeah, so one of the things that we've seen, so we've now been through three holiday seasons and for sure, um, gifting spikes during the holidays. Um, so that is different from like our normal subscriber traffic where they're renewing. Um, it's a recurring membership, uh, but we see those finite gifts and I think that's really cool because.

When we get those gifts, we get to see, you know, the notes that people are putting in there and to see the different milestones that people are celebrating with this. Whether they're welcoming babies or recovering successfully from a surgery or, um, you know, have a birthday and or celebrated their first year of sobriety.

Like we are seeing that this is not just for sober folks, this is for so many different types of people. Um, so that's one thing that we're seeing. And then the other thing is, We definitely see a lot of traffic throughout July, January, post holidays of people, overindulged a little bit. They're thinking about a clean slate for the new year and for sure we see a spike.

Um, we actually ended up selling out of our January box, which we hadn't intended to. Usually we try to have leftovers so people can, uh, buy them if they miss them. Um, But dry January this year, I don't know what it was, but the momentum around it, not just for us raising the bar, but for the entire, um, alcohol-free community.

I've heard it from everybody. Like there was just so much excitement and so much anticipation. And, uh, people are really interested in this concept. And again, not just the non drinkers, but, but people from, you know, all sorts of different drinking habits. Yeah, and I saw that too. Um, I'm very active on Twitter and that was one thing that I noticed a lot as a popular conversation on Twitter over the past two weeks was a lot of people participating in dry January and then making the decision to continue that, whether it's permanently or maybe moderated a bit.

Yep. Um, to cut back, which I think is really awesome. Yeah, I think that's so exciting. And another big change that I feel like I'm seeing now versus four years ago when I quit drinking is, you know,

There's a lot of all or nothing mentality. So dry January is like dry, so that's nothing. But people have been talking about a damp February, to your point, like moderating or cutting back.

And I think, um, you know, a big, a big concern for me. I came from a college which had a huge drinking culture of heavy drinking. And when I finally was ready to make a change, it just felt like I have to cut it out completely. I don't really feel like there's resources or tools or support around moderating the way that I would like.

Too, and I wonder if that would've been possible, you know, in the landscape that we find ourselves in now, it doesn't matter at the end of the day because I'm really happy with my choices and I feel really confident in my sobriety. But I think, um, The drinkers coming of age now are just in a better position because of the more and varied options that are out there.

Exactly. And that made me think of that. Um, for people who might be coming from dry January to now, perhaps going back to regular drinking or maybe doing it moderately, do you have any advice? Uh, for that, for them so that they don't necessarily go full force. Like I'm thinking of it with diets where people veer off their diet, they really over-indulge it cause of the, uh, devoid of it or the fact that they haven't had it.

And so what advice would you give around that? So my number one thing would be to bring a mindfulness to the times that you choose to drink. So if you're wanting to reach for a drink before you just automatically go for it. Ask yourself, do I really want this? Why am I reaching for this drink? Is there anything else that I can do to address that need?

Um, and another one is to play the tape forward. So, Am I gonna feel good about this choice in the morning? Will I have a twinge of a hangover that's gonna derail my day? Is that cost worth it? So really just not having that, you know, instinct and just going for it, but taking a moment to step back and reflect on like the why.

And I think that's for anything in life, whether it's to your point, diets or um, You know, binge watching a TV show or not going on, um, you know, to your workout or whatever. It's just right. Taking a step back and saying, what will, what will I feel good about? Is this something that is really actually going to make me feel good and I feel good about?

If the answer is yes, that's great. Yeah. Yeah. I love that approach, especially because, uh, with me personally, I probably, when I go out, only have two to three drinks because I know if it's more than that, the next day I'm gonna have a headache. I'm just not gonna feel so great and I'm gonna be mad at myself.

Yeah. For losing a day for how I feel. And so I feel like I've become more mindful of that, to your point where I stop and think before ordering another drink. Do I really need one? Like am I ordering one just because everyone else around me is ordering one? Exactly. Exactly. Um, and it

really has prompted me to make different drink choices, whether it's just water or club soda and lime or whatever it may be.

So I love that, that you share that. I think that's so healthy. And to your point, like you lose a day, is that, is a day of your life really worth the extra drink? Most times the answer is no. And then it's not just missing the day. But I think a lot of people experience, um, I don't know if you've heard the term anxiety.

Yeah. But like if you have had a few drinks and the next day you don't feel great, I. Then you also feel anxious and disappointed and guilty. And it's like, not only are you missing the day, but then you're beating yourself up and that doesn't feel good either. Absolutely. Absolutely. Um, and so now I'd also love to ask you, uh, shift gears a little bit because we've talked so much about raising the bar, which is really exciting.

And you did mention your, what your career was before raising the bar with art history. And so I'd love to share just what you did in the past and what you enjoyed with it. I, I always love hearing about people's career journeys and different changes that they made. Yeah. Yeah, so I started out, um, at a museum in Connecticut and, um, made my way up to Boston to go to grad school and get my master's in art history.

Um, I worked at the Danforth Museum in Framingham for a little while and then, um, at the MFA for a little while, which was, I really like my dream job to be at the M F A. That's what I always thought I would wanna do. And um, I randomly stumbled across my Facebook a job posting for this brand ambassador for Baby Gix, which is a baby products company.

And at the time we had just had our first child and I was feeling really stuck with the lack of flexibility working at the museum. And I was just like, I'm going. Take a random chance on this job. It sounds really interesting. I'm in the thick of motherhood, so I think I'd be like the right person for this job and I ended up loving marketing.

It was, um, So exciting to me, especially working on a brand where I felt like I could really identify with the consumer as a fellow new mother. Mm-hmm. Like I was really in the thick of it. Um, and so then, you know, after that I worked for another baby products company and then my last job before I, um, quit to work on the full-time was in the pet food industry, but also doing, Brand marketing work.

So I don't have my MBA or a real business background, but I think there was a lot that I learned through these marketing roles and then previously in museums, like, you know, visually and aesthetically how things pieced together. So it's a very meandering road. Um, but I'm so happy to be here and feel really grateful that all of the kind of random experiences I've had in the past have dovetailed nicely to provide a solid foundation for raising the bar.

Absolutely. And with co-owning, raising the bar with your husband, how have you been able to navigate kind of like your personal relationship and your business relationship so you don't muddy the waters ultimately? Oh my gosh, that is such a great question. So he does, um, work full-time for another job, so, but we still do a lot together.

Um, there's one, one night I remember we were going out to dinner with friends, um, to Oliana, which is one of my favorite restaurants. It's in Cambridge. They have a great mocktail menu. Uh, but. We were about to meet our friends and I was like, oh my gosh, did you send that invoice to that company? Like, and he was like, no, but I'll get to it.

I was like, you were supposed to do that several days ago. And I was just like, could I not have waited until after dinner? So we, we had take a few minutes to kind of sort that through and then put our husband and wife hat back on. Um, But I think it's, it's good for him to have his own job, for sure.

Mm-hmm. Um, and in a way, because he's not as close to the day today, he's got great perspective on things that I'm really like, yeah. What we've done. Um, but between that and parenting and both working from home, we have definitely had to create some boundaries and make sure that we're having space for just us as a couple and, and getting out and.

Um, getting that time together. I love that. My fiance works for his dad who owns a plumbing company and I always find the relationship so interesting too, of how they go from like father and son to Boston employee. Yeah. It's funny. I have not thought too much about that, but it is, it is an interesting one.

And you had just mentioned that restaurant in Cambridge that you love to visit. Do you have any other local businesses that you love to support? Yeah. Um, so Boston Shaker, which is in Somerville is a great bottle shop. So they, um, sell ingredients and tools and glassware and mixology books. They definitely cater more to like traditional cocktail enthusiasts, but they're not a liquor store.

So when I go in there, I'm always finding new shrubs or bitters or syrups or tools to try and they've been a great place, um, for just discovery of products. And then another restaurant I love that has, um, incredible mocktail options owned by the same folks as Olea is Sarma in Somerville. And then we are based in Melrose and there's a great store in Melrose on Main Street called Buckaloo, which is kind of like an upscale general store, but they also have a lot of really great interesting ingredients that, um, we've tried out there as well.

Oh, very fun. Abby, this has been such a fun episode. I really loved getting to know more about you and raising the bar, and I'd love if you could share with our listeners where they can find you online if they'd like to connect with you further. Absolutely. So our website is, we are raising the bar.com and we are on Instagram at We are Raising the Bar.

Perfect. And I will link to those in the show notes in case our listeners would like to click through and connect with you from there. But thank you so much for being a guest today. Thank you, Ashley. I really appreciate it.

Thank you for tuning in to this episode of Right Here in Mass. We hope you enjoyed listening to it as much as we enjoyed recording it. Be sure to subscribe, leave a review, follow us on social media and share our podcast with your network. See you next week.