

Fourth Trimester Podcast

Episode 80: Prepare For Taking Maternity Leave Like A Pro

Sarah Trott: [00:00:05] My name is Sarah Trott. I'm a new mama to a baby girl and this podcast is all about postpartum care for the few months following birth, the time period also known as the Fourth Trimester. My postpartum doula, Esther Gallagher, is my co-host. She's a mother, grandmother, perinatal educator, birth and postpartum care provider. I've benefited hugely from her support. All parents can benefit from the wisdom and support that a postpartum Doula provides. Fourth trimester care is about the practical, emotional and social support parents and baby require, and importantly, helps set the tone for the lifelong journey of parenting.

When I first became pregnant, I had never heard of postpartum Doulas, let alone knew what they did. So much of the training and preparation that expecting parents do is focused on the birth and newborn care. Once a baby is born, often the first interaction parents have with medical or child professionals, other than the first pediatrician visits, is the six-week checkup with the OB/GYN. *What about caring for mama and family between the birth and the six week doctor visit? What are the strategies for taking care of the partner and the rest of the family while looking after your newborn?*

Our podcasts contain expert interviews with specialists from many fields to cover topics including postpartum doula practices, prenatal care, prenatal and postnatal yoga, parenting, breastfeeding, physical recovery from birth, nutrition, newborn care, midwifery, negotiating family visitation, and many more.

First-hand experience is shared through lots of stories from both new and seasoned parents. Hear what other parents are asking and what they have done in their own lives.

We reference other podcasts, internet resources and real-life experts who can help you on your own parenting journey. Visit us at <http://fourthtrimesterpodcast.com>

Sarah Trott: [00:00:43] Hi this is Sarah Trott from the Fourth Trimester podcast. Welcome back. We have a great episode for you today. I'm super excited because we have a great guest, Sharon Weinberg, who will introduce in a moment. I want to remind everyone before we get going that we have a website which is fourth trimester podcast. We're on Facebook and we'd love to have your likes and have your followers. You can also sign up on our website for a newsletter, so please check us out and sign up.

Sarah Trott: [00:01:16] So Sharon Weinberg and I have worked together and it is such a pleasure to be speaking with her today. She's an executive leadership team performance and business strategy coach. She is passionate about helping leaders, especially women leaders, elevate their leadership impact to build strong teams, positive work cultures, to achieve better business results and live with greater ease and fulfillment. Sharon, you have a wealth of experience. Welcome to the show.

Sharon Weinberg: [00:01:47] Thanks for having me, Sarah. So nice to be in conversation with you again.

Sarah Trott: [00:01:52] Sharon and I do work together and we thought that it would be such a fantastic resource for our community here at fourth trimester to share some learnings around preparing for leave. And this is one of those topics that, you know, you think you, you know, you put your out-of-office on and you're ready, right? We're going to walk through that. Maybe there's a little bit more.

Sarah Trott: [00:02:18] But I found that, you know, after talking to a number of friends and other contacts, you know, there isn't a lot of professional guidance, I think, that is shared around going on a leave, whether it's maternity leave, paternity leave, maybe other types of leave, other than some of the actual facts that are coming from h.r. Or your benefits companies around, you know, dates and limits and and laws and things like that. And, you know, we really want to see if we could add some finesse to create as smooth a leave as possible for everyone.

Sarah Trott: [00:02:51] And Sharon, I just want to start with just some high level background on you as well. So I want to talk about leave, but tell us a little bit about yourself and why you're excited about this topic.

Sharon Weinberg: [00:03:03] Yeah, that's great. So I've been doing leadership and talent development for about 30 years, and for the last five years I've had my own practice as a coach and consultant and professional facilitator. I've done a lot of work, been internal to organizations for 25 years, small organizations, really big organizations.

Sharon Weinberg: [00:03:31] I've gone on to maternity leaves during that time and I know that it's really challenging when you have, especially if you have a fairly high pressure job and a lot of responsibility to get everything ready before you go on leave and to be able to leave things in a way in which you're not having a whole series of calls afterwards or feeling completely like it's not completely ready for everybody else to step in.

Sharon Weinberg: [00:04:03] So my passion around doing this work with you and other moms who are going on leave and also some dads is to make it that transition from I'm at work and I'm not taking care of a young baby to one where there's an ease in taking that time off and knowing that things are left in good standing. And I would completely agree with you that I don't think businesses typically give guidance on really how to do this transition planning.

Sarah Trott: [00:04:36] There's a few goals we've identified around going on a leave, so let's walk through those. So the three goals are, one, ensure you have fulfilled your professional responsibilities in handing over critical information to your colleagues, direct reports and boss. Right. So just what information do other people need to do the job while you're gone? Secondly, ensure you have enabled your colleagues, direct reports and boss to be successful while you're out. That could mean a lot of things. And three ensure you have created the necessary clarity and expectations and actions for the people covering you so that the strategic and operational efforts are not disrupted.

Sharon Weinberg: [00:05:19] Good goals.

Sarah Trott: [00:05:21] Yeah, I think we need to make sure those are all taken care of.

Sharon Weinberg: [00:05:24] Yeah. And, and I think often that's not, you know, I think the work you and I did together around this was really I mean, it was transformational work from the standpoint of I know it gave you clarity about what do I need to do before I leave? And I think sometimes the idea that people are just going to pick up the pieces is really a dangerous way of leaving things.

Sharon Weinberg: [00:05:55] I mean, that happens sometimes because things are unexpected, but you really want to keep in mind whether you're coming back to this job or whether you're not about leaving things in a way in which there's not extra disruption that's happening because you're not there and somebody else or a team of people is doing your work.

Sarah Trott: [00:06:21] Even if you weren't returning. There's just a similar or same set of goals.

Sharon Weinberg: [00:06:26] Absolutely. You know, the thing is, is that even if you're right, if you're not returning, it's your reputation and you've also build relationships with these people. And so you don't really, really think about you know, you've put the hard work in into building good relationships with these people. And you've also developed a reputation within the organization based on your work. You know, if you're leaving on a on a maternity leave or even this would apply.

Sharon Weinberg: [00:06:57] Also, if you have something like a planned medical leave or a sabbatical or anything where you've had some time to plan. The key here is, is to not create chaos and could somebody step in? The question to ask is. Can somebody easily step in and keep the ball rolling and do what needs to get done in a way in which, yes, there may be some awkwardness initially, but not something in which suddenly there's major fractures in terms of operations or in terms of guidance of a team or how a team is performing or in terms of a leadership vacancy.

Sarah Trott: [00:07:43] So let's say hypothetically, we have a listener out there who's expecting maybe it's their first child. They know they're going to be going on leave. They have a rough you know, they know their due date. So they're not round about when they're going to go. But maybe there are four months pregnant. When do you think is a good time to begin the planning process?

Sharon Weinberg: [00:08:02] So once you let your employer know that you're pregnant and that you will be going on leave, I think a good a good place is to sort of start from the end in mind. And, you know, we never know with babies and with pregnancies, we have an expected due date. But who knows if that's actually going to occur on that date? It may, in fact, happen early, as often is the case.

Sharon Weinberg: [00:08:31] So I think from a sort of safety perspective, it can be wise to plan on having your transition planning done a month before you're expected leave date. And I know that seems maybe far in advance, but we do know in fact, you know, people have had babies come a month early, two months early even. And so or maybe you get put on bedrest or something like that occurs. So the key here is not to leave it up to the last minute. So I would say back it up about if you assume that you want the transition plan and people knowledgeable about it a month before your actual due date, then you should in fact start the transition planning two months before that. So we're talking about at least three months.

Sarah Trott: [00:09:26] And then maybe it's not even due date. It's just whenever you're going on leave, you know, a lot of people will also take a month off their final month of their pregnancy off to Prepare And rest. So so it's kind of. So you're saying really three months before that leave date?

Sharon Weinberg: [00:09:40] Exactly. And I think the reason why is that there's never any harm in being doing the planning early. What ends up happening is when there's a plan to, you know, I'll make the transition one week before I'm going to leave and then suddenly you have to move that up and you're not ready. You know, that's that's an extra stress you just don't need.

Sarah Trott: [00:10:07] Yeah, right. Being in the hospital and worrying about.

Sharon Weinberg: [00:10:10] Right, right. Or being on bedrest or.

Sarah Trott: [00:10:13] I sure hope someone on my team knows X, Y, Z.

Sharon Weinberg: [00:10:16] Exactly.

Sarah Trott: [00:10:18] So we've identified, I think, four major steps in this process. So let's go ahead and walk through these. So the first step we have is identifying major projects and workstreams. Let's talk about that.

Sharon Weinberg: [00:10:29] Yeah. So, you know, imagine that you have familiarity with what's on your plate. And if you're in a leadership position, there's major functions that you're overseeing or major initiatives or projects that you're overseeing. So in fact, you can identify those into distinct chunks, even your responsibilities if you're overseeing a department. Right.

Sharon Weinberg: [00:10:55] And there are sort of the, you know, what I call the kitchen drawer of responsibilities, all the some of the miscellaneous stuff that is associated with running a function or a department that too can be put into the concept of a project. All of those things have to be covered. And so if you can break it into distinct chunks, it might makes it much easier to delineate who actually is going to be responsible for it while you're on leave and what exactly they need to know and do.

Sarah Trott: [00:11:32] And so, for example, we could identify a handful of pieces of information for each area. So so if it's project based work, for example, it could be the project title, the goals of the project, what are the timelines and dates for that project? So, you know, is there a project plan for it already? And making sure you have the information organized somewhere like a shared spreadsheet that has the links to the project plans or any relevant internal wiki pages. Things that other teams might need.

Sharon Weinberg: [00:12:05] Yeah. Who else is involved in the project? What are their roles? Right. And what are their responsibilities if you have, for example. You know, a project where there may be many players it might be worthwhile to even put together if you haven't already something like what's called a stakeholder matrix, which actually identifies who's involved, what their responsibilities are, what their contributions are, what their influence is.

Sharon Weinberg: [00:12:36] And this is a way of helping somebody really get up to speed. And for all the people who all the other people who are involved on this project for you, with you that you've taken away or remove the responsibility of having them have to educate whoever is covering for you, they can actually move into a place of greater partnership rather than from a place of foundational information.

Sarah Trott: [00:13:07] Brilliant. All right. So we have a list of of ten chunks of responsibility, ten projects. Now, what's next?

Sharon Weinberg: [00:13:16] So identify the owners for each of the projects. Right? It may not be one person, so it could be that you're spreading it around. Let's say if you have a team, this can be actually a wonderful opportunity. If you're in a leadership role, this can be a wonderful opportunity for people who are at the individual contributor or staff level or team lead level to actually stretch into some new responsibilities.

Sharon Weinberg: [00:13:47] So it gives them sort of a defined window for, in fact building some core skills and taking on some extra responsibility which in fact can prepare them for in the future, whatever promotion or other opportunities they may get. So define who's owning it. I'm a real believer in Plan A, Plan B, and so for every person you define. Also defined to in terms of overseeing that given project, also identify who's their backup and the reason why is life happens. You don't know what's going to happen for the person. Who you have assigned something to.

Sharon Weinberg: [00:14:37] They may leave the organization. You know, they may have something in their personal life come up that requires them to take a larger chunk of time off. So having a plan B, a designated person as a backup identified allows things

to go forward. And I think a great way to think about it is that if you've ever gone to the theatre or the opera or the ballet or any dance performance, there's a reason they have understudies and backups because singers get sick and dancers get injured and things happen. And so if you don't have a backup, then they'd have to close the show. So if you could look at it by from the perspective of having in a way, an understudy for whoever you've designated and they too are included in whatever planning for this transition, then in fact you're well covered.

Sarah Trott: [00:15:35] So I've got my list of projects, I've got my stand in, I've got their backups. Now what?

Sharon Weinberg: [00:15:41] So one of the things that happens and we often hear about it after the fact, is the concept of somebody saying, I didn't know I was supposed to do that. And so when we're talking about the actual transition planning, it's not simply about having having designated the person a person or persons, right?

Sharon Weinberg: [00:16:05] A primary and a secondary. It is about actually sitting down with them and making sure that they are first willing to take this on, that they're comfortable to take it on, and that as you go through the planning, transition planning, that they are clear every step of the way. I think all too often where we're planning goes awry, especially collaboration goes awry, is people make very unsecured assumptions about a person's commitment. And so they're throwing the ball into their court and they're just expecting them to run with it. But they've not the other person hasn't yet committed.

Sharon Weinberg: [00:16:53] Well, unless you're clear about that, assume that in fact they haven't committed. So it's really about asking that question. Do they have the time, you know, are they willing to make this commitment talking about what, in fact, is going to be involved and even getting them to sign off? And I know that seems a bit formal, but what it does is it ups the ante for them about truly honoring the commitment that they are making to you and to the organization.

Sarah Trott: [00:17:26] That way you don't end up with someone saying, Well, sure, you put my name there, but I never said yes. Right.

Sharon Weinberg: [00:17:35] Exactly. Exactly. And then everybody looks bad.

Sarah Trott: [00:17:39] Oh, okay. So then everyone in our hypothetical has signed off. Everyone understands. Is that it or are we done yet?

Sharon Weinberg: [00:17:48] No, not quite so. So then what you want to do is you really want to communicate the plan broadly and and by broadly this means, you know, one, sharing it with everyone. You've got to have something in writing, right? It's not it cannot be only verbal. This is one of the biggest mistakes I see both leaders and non leaders make is everything is done in verbal in a verbal format or or on slack.

Sharon Weinberg: [00:18:20] These are not the kinds of things to be done in that way. You need to have them in a Google doc or an email with a document attached or very clearly laid out. But you really want to make sure that everybody is that's involved, is aware who's going to be involved, is aware of exactly what's going to transpire. And so once you have that done where you've you know, that your department knows exactly, let's say, who's covering what and who's the plan, who's the backup and what the steps are. One of your last steps.

Sharon Weinberg: [00:19:01] Is, in fact, to meet with your boss and to make sure that they are completely clued in on the plan and that there is space for them even to make some adjustments. So you don't know perhaps what your boss has in fact envisioned for one of the people you've assigned or who has opted to support you while you're on leave. It's really about making sure you get their buy in as well.

Sharon Weinberg: [00:19:34] And the reason why is that way the person who is responsible for covering for you isn't put in a difficult position when you're gone. Of Do I follow through on what my boss the boss is telling me, or do I follow through on this assignment that I've committed to? I can't do both. Right. So this is a way for you to

clear the path with your boss for the work going forward. And that way everybody is on the same page.

Sarah Trott: [00:20:06] Brilliant. Well, thank you so much, Sharon. This has been fantastic chatting with you. I'm so honored to have you on the program and think there's something that you wanted to mention for listeners of Fourth Trimester Podcast.

Sharon Weinberg: [00:20:19] Yes. So for fourth trimester podcast listeners, I'm running a special just for you, and that is if you'd like to try out coaching, if you'd like to in fact have some support in putting together your leave and and your re-entry plan or if you want to work on how to create greater life work integration.

Sharon Weinberg: [00:20:45] When you come back from maternity leave, I'm offering a special for 60 minute coaching sessions for the price of three. Sarah will have an email in the show notes and you can just send me an email and just put the words forth and we'll set up a time to chat beforehand and see if there is a fit and and how I can serve you. And if you'd like to go forward with that, then you'll get 460 minute coaching sessions, one on one with me for the price of three.

Sarah Trott: [00:21:18] Fantastic. And I think you said you're also open to having a quick chat with someone first before they make any commitments.

Sharon Weinberg: [00:21:23] Absolutely. We'll do a quick 30 to 45 minute chat. Absolutely.

Sarah Trott: [00:21:27] Wonderful. Well, thank you so much, Sharon. Thank you again. Listeners, please tune in next time for the fourth trimester podcast. Don't forget to look at our website, which is fourth trimester podcast. Sign up for the newsletter like us on Facebook and we'll see you again next time.

Sharon Weinberg: [00:21:42] Wonderful. Thank you, Sarah.

Sarah Trott: You can find out more about Esther Gallagher on <http://www.esthergallagher.com/>. You can also subscribe to this podcast in order to hear more from us. [Click here for iTunes](#) and [click here for Google Podcasts](#). Thank you for listening everyone and I hope you'll join us next time on the Fourth Trimester. The theme music on this podcast was created by Sean Trott. Hear more at <https://soundcloud.com/seantrott>. Special thanks to my true loves: my husband Ben, daughter Penelope, and baby girl Evelyn. Don't forget to share the Fourth Trimester Podcast with any new and expecting parents. I'm Sarah Trott. Goodbye for now.