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Jean Knaack: A woman's experience out running is always going to be different than a man's experience, and a lot of that stems from a woman always has to be hyperfocused on her surroundings in a way that a guy can probably run through a certain area at a certain time of day and not even think about it.

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Christine Burke: Welcome to Set the Pace, the official podcast of New York Road Runners presented by Peloton. I'm Christine Burke, chief commercial officer at New York Road Runners.

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Erica Edwards-O'Neal: Hi, I'm Erica Edwards- O'Neal, chief diversity officer in New York Road Runners.

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Christine Burke: Today, we have the honor of sitting in for Rob and Beccs. Beccs is off today, and Rob is traveling home from 11 days in Kenya. He has been stymied by the blizzard that hit New York City yesterday, so he is stuck in Amsterdam but will be home hopefully soon. Erica and I had the privilege of representing New York Road Runners for the last week and a half in Kenya, and there's so much that we learned and that we want to share about our experience there.

But as it relates to our conversation today around runner safety, we wanted to share a little bit about our experience with an organization that we met with during our visit in Kenya called Tirop's Angels. Tirop's Angels was founded by Viola Cheptoo Lagat, who was a training partner with Agnes Tirop, who was killed by her domestic partner in 2021 after returning home from a record-breaking 10,000-meter race that she ran in. And Tirop's Angels mission is to change the dialogue around gender-based violence in Kenya. And we wanted to share a little bit about what our experience was meeting with Viola and the Tirop's Angels organization during our trip there.

Erica, can you share a little bit about your impressions that we take away from our meetings with Tirop's Angels?

00:02:07

Erica Edwards-O'Neal: Oh, absolutely. I am so inspired, still struggling to find the words for the experience. What we watched were a people who are, yes, resilient with the answers, creating and solving problems. We saw the Tirop's Angels teams collaborating with the local men, the boda boda cyclists who are men, and watching them educate and advocate and show up. We saw the love and support from the community everywhere we were. Men, women, and children were sharing

their pride in what Tirop's Angels were doing. The commitment to support that work. We see so much collaboration, community and support for helping to end gender-based violence. And so we just had the opportunity to sit, listen, and learn. It was not about jumping in, assuming we had any answers. Each day, we were just uncovering a different layer, looking at different solutions, folks... Just incredible, just an incredible experience, and I am really looking forward to learning more and understanding how we can support there and at home.

00:03:41

Christine Burke: I echo everything you just shared. The experience, we're really still digesting. And runner safety and women's safety is so important to us at New York Road Runners, and we're really honored to have two conversations today about this really important topic.

00:04:06

Erica Edwards-O'Neal: Well, before I jump in there, I'll say we understand that runner safety and women's safety and gender-based violence are not exactly the same issue. We know there might be a through line, but we know that when we're talking runner safety, it's not one particular lens or layer. We know that is a different conversation for women, for people or gender-expansive folks, for people of color. We understand that each group and identity has this unique set of challenges. And so we don't want to lump folks all in together, but we are excited to be starting the conversation and can assure you that it's not a one and done. We're looking forward to many conversations throughout the year.

But coming up, we are looking at runner safety again from two perspectives. First, we're going to have Jean Knaack and she's going to join us to talk about how run clubs and race leaders think about safety, where the gaps still exist. And then we're going to hear from Ashley Raymond and Meagan Doyle, whose own experience has pushed them to create a solution for women who are heading out alone on a run. So stay tuned.

00:05:20

Speaker 4: Peloton is taking running and race tech to the next level with the new Peloton Cross Training Series Tread+ powered by Peloton IQ, built for runners who want top-tier performance. The Tread+ helps you train smarter and get race-ready with precision. Peloton IQ offers personalized insights that evolve as you progress so you can fine-tune your pacing and peak at the right moment. And with strength workouts designed to build the muscle you need to support

every mile, your training goes beyond the run. Plus, Pace Target classes designed to build consistency, boost speed and improve your splits. Every single run supports your full training cycle, from recovery miles to challenging race pace intervals. Experience our most advanced Tread yet at onepeloton.com. Peloton, the official digital fitness partner of New York Road Runners.

00:06:15

Christine Burke: Our first guest is Jean Knaack, CEO of the Road Runners Club of America. Founded in 1958, RRCA is the oldest and largest distance running organization in the United States with over 1,500 running club and event members representing 200,000 individual runners active in the running communities. In fact, New York Road Runners started in 1958 as the Road Runners Club New York Association. So our organizations are very connected, founded in the first year and with New York Road Runners being a division or association of the RRCA. Since 2005, Jean has led thousands of clubs and race directors across the country shaping the culture of grassroots running. Under her leadership, RRCA has strengthened safe sport standards and education around creating harassment-free training environments. As conversations around women's safety grow louder, Jean helps us step back and take a look at the bigger picture. What responsibility does the sport itself have to make sure runners feel safe when they step out the door?

Jean, thank you so much for joining me and Erica today. We're so excited to have a conversation with you.

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Jean Knaack: Thank you for having me.

00:07:31

Erica Edwards-O'Neal: Great. I'll jump right in with a first question. Again, I'm so excited to be in conversation with you, learning more about you and your amazing history in this space and being an extraordinary advocate. So again, welcome. I'm so excited to meet you. I'll jump right in with our first question, and it's Jean, can you tell us when did you realize that runner safety needed to have a systemic approach and not an individualized conversation?

00:08:02

Jean Knaack: Tough question, right? I mean for a long time, I've been with the organization for 20 years, and it is something that has predated my work with RRCA. So advocates that were working in this space well before me were having, I think, meaningful conversations about safety in this sport, especially towards women and beyond pedestrian safety because

that's inclusive of all runners, but really more physical safety against violence towards women. And the RRCA really was leading the way back in the eighties. There were situations that made national headlines of a woman I know in Iowa who was violently raped during a run. And so that really spurred the RRCA to create a lot of education around being safe while out running, especially alone. And we've just really continued to continue that dialogue as more younger generations come into the sport because you can't just be like, "Okay, work done. Back in the nineties." Right? We keep seeing more and more and more younger people coming into the sport and so we have to keep that dialogue going about safety.

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Christine Burke: And Jean, where do you think that the running community and RRCA are doing a good job around conversations about runner safety, and where are we still falling short?

00:09:37

Jean Knaack: The problem we have is we have the conversation when something tragic happens. Right? People start talking about it again. And then there's so much to talk about in our sport that then it just kind of drops off. Right? So it's almost that space in between when there aren't terrible things happening where people do need to be reminded, both men and women, about what are some opportunities to increase and improve safety for people that are out running, especially if they're alone, but even in a group dynamic.

00:10:14

Erica Edwards-O'Neal: Yeah, thank you. Are there examples of what a truly safe club culture looks like in practice that you can share with us?

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Jean Knaack: Oof. That's a tough one because you're dealing with humans, right? And I think a lot of clubs who do it really well, they're focusing on being inclusive, being safe, having I think upfront and strong member code of conducts and leaning in on them and trying to proactively address if there are concerns and situations, monitoring comments on social media related to their own organization. Some groups will have WhatsApp or different chat group apps that they're using that are very solely for the membership of that entity. And so clubs that are really kind of moderating those, I think they're doing really well. And clubs that are really making an effort to, again, be inclusive but in a safe way.

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Christine Burke: What responsibility do you believe that male runners and leaders in running clubs have in shaping safer running environments and running culture?

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Jean Knaack: I think my experience, my opinion is it is a shared responsibility for male and female club leaders, but certainly, men can step up and really understand that a woman's experience out running is always going to be different than a man's experience. And a lot of that stems from a woman always has to be hyperfocused on her surroundings in a way that a guy can probably run through a certain area at a certain time of day and not even think about it and be totally fine, and that is not the female experience out running. And so really raising the understanding of that situation, I think, is really important. And also, helping men understand how can they be safe advocates, which is you're out on a run, maybe it's dusk and you see a female runner, don't follow or don't be creepy, don't be stalker, but also be aware of the surroundings, and if you see something or someone that doesn't seem like they should be there or they're kind of there in a potentially nefarious position, it's okay to say something.

00:13:01

Christine Burke: Erica and I and New York Road Runners in general really believe in the value of sharing experiences and sharing them out loud, and that being how real change can come about when folks realize that they're not alone in their experiences and that together, we are stronger than going solo.

What stories have you heard from women in running clubs that have stayed with you?

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Jean Knaack: There are a lot of situations I help club leaders manage through when you do have behaviors that cross a line, and that can be related to things were kind of fun and light until someone started maybe being a little more assertive, maybe leaning into a little stalker kind of behavior. Sending inappropriate DMs through social media is always one of those member code of conducts that some club leaders have had to manage and navigating behavior that's not acceptable in a group dynamic.

And so I've definitely helped counsel club leaders how to manage that, and oftentimes, it's look, you get one warning and if you don't get your act together, you're out, that you really have to have a pretty zero-tolerance attitude when it comes to making sure everyone feels safe. I know

there's a group that I worked with, and it kind of started with one person. The more people talked, it was like, "Oh, this is a much bigger issue." And what they were realizing is they were losing female membership because of an individual. And when they were very proactively removed that individual, a lot of those women came back into the club, back into their group run. And that was a male leader. Right? He was just a little kind of taken aback of having to navigate that situation. And in my opinion, they did the right thing. So I think that's what's really important is when a woman expresses that something is not going right, especially if someone is making people feel uncomfortable, leadership has to just be really proactive in those situations.

As a female runner, I've had my own like, oh God, I'm not in a safe situation. And I've told this story that happened quite a long time ago, but there's a section of our multi-use trail where I was running, and it's kind of an area where there's a lot of brush and the opposite side is a retaining wall on the freeway. And there was someone on a bike and he looked behind and he kept slowing down and slowing down and watching me, and I kind of stopped and was like, "Oh, God." Right? Like your spidey senses come up and you're like, this is not good. But I couldn't go forward and I didn't want to turn around because I didn't want him at my back. So I kind of stood there, did the hands on my head. I was like, "I see you." And then he got off his bike, he was fiddling with it and I was like, okay, what do I do?

I looked back and there was a guy running down the hill just on the trail, but I flagged him down and I explained to him what was happening and I was like, "I feel really unsafe and our options are: can I run with you until we get to kind of a junction in that area where it's a lot more populated, a lot more people, or can you run me back to kind of the entry to this trail area?" And the dude was totally cool about it. So we opted to the we'll move forward, and the guy on the bike got back on his bike. He turned around and went the opposite direction. So that's just kind of my own case study of one, but again, you're like, we are a community and so feeling empowered to flag somebody down and be like, "I don't feel safe," I think... And the guy in that situation, he totally got it.

I've flagged down female runners where... And especially when I've been on a bike and I'm like, "This guy's casing you. You need to take your headphones out for a bit." Right? We can be advocates, if you see something, when you're out there, you're like, "This just doesn't smell right," I think it's important to step up for each other.

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Christine Burke: For sure. I think it was Mr. Rogers who said, "Always look for the helpers." And-

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Jean Knaack: Yeah. Exactly.

00:17:49

Christine Burke: ... often, there are folks around that you can flag down to just be by your side until you can get to a spot where you're safe. But thank you for sharing your personal story. I think that we probably all have one or more like that unfortunately, but it's a good example of how you can look for a helper and trust your gut, trust your instinct that something's not right.

00:18:14

Jean Knaack: Exactly. That is exactly right. Right? Trust your gut and it is okay to be like, maybe, today was my 20-mile run, but you're like, trust your gut, this is not safe. Get out of there, alter course. Just have another better run a different day. That's always been kind of my... Again, but that leans back into we all do have a personal responsibility for our safety, but there are things that we can do as a society and a community to really help women be and feel more safe when they're out there running.

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Erica Edwards-O'Neal: Absolutely. Jean, we need so much more time with you. I'm looking forward to a longer conversation. Having opportunity, we love, we talk about these things from an inside-out approach, making sure we're educating our staff, and so I know there's going to be opportunity to have much longer conversation, and we are absolutely looking forward to it. I hope you're open. Thank you so much.

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Jean Knaack: Absolutely. Of course.

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Christine Burke: Yeah. Thank you for joining us today, Jean, and good luck with all the important work that RRCA is doing. We're here to support and look forward to continuing to work together in the years to come.

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Jean Knaack: Great. Thank you for having me in this important conversation.

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Speaker 5: New York Road Runners is a nonprofit organization with a vision to build healthier lives and stronger communities through the transformative power of running. The support of members and donors like you helps us achieve our mission to transform the health and well-being of our communities through inclusive and accessible running experiences, empowering all to achieve their potential. Learn more and contribute at nyrr.org/donate.

00:20:04

Erica Edwards-O'Neal: Ashley Raymond and Meagan Doyle met in a college when working on a class project. As they started tossing around ideas, the conversation kept circling back to something that felt all too close to home – personal safety. Ashley started running as a way to manage her type 1 diabetes, but after being followed on a run and after violence hit close to home on their college campus, that freedom started to wane. Running didn't stop, but it came with much more calculation and caution – where to run, when to run, who to run with. So they and their co-founders took a deeper look, what would it feel like to head out of the door and feel prepared rather than cautious? Their answer to that question eventually led to Safely.

Welcome, Ashley and Meagan. Thank y'all for being with us.

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Ashley Raymond: Thank you so much for having us.

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Meagan Doyle: Yes, thank you.

00:20:58

Christine Burke: Yeah, thank you. We're so excited to have you here and hear a little bit more about your stories and about the story of Safely.

So I'll jump in. Ashley, can you take us back to that run in high school? What do you remember most clearly about being followed on that run?

00:21:16

Ashley Raymond: For sure. I was thinking back to it, and something I clearly remember is that day I was running with my dog. He kind of looked like a chocolate lab, but he was a mutt. I've run this route many of times in my neighborhood at this point. And at first, I noticed these two men across the street from me, and the next thing I knew, they were right behind me running after me, and in that moment, I felt a fear wash over me. I had heard things on the news before. I had read articles. I knew it was important to be aware of my surroundings. And I just

had this thought, " Oh my gosh, this is actually happening. I can't believe this is happening to me right now. How am I going to get away safely? Will I be able to get away safely? What am I going to do if they catch me?"

All sorts of thoughts flooded my mind to the worst case scenario as well. So I kept running and called for help, and luckily, I was able to get away, and luckily, the men were arrested, not because I stuck around to file a report, but because they were actually publicly intoxicated. And when the cops called to tell me that after the fact, I felt a big rush of relief that they weren't out there on the street anymore and that no one else was going to be in danger, at least for that day. But at the same time, I felt this overall worry and fear that had now become real for me. This could happen on any run that I might go on in the future. This could happen to anybody else, and I don't want that to be the case.

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Christine Burke: So after that happened, did you change how you ran, where you ran, when you ran? How did that experience change your behavior?

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Ashley Raymond: Yeah. I think I had it in the back of my head, but at this point in time as a high schooler, I wasn't thinking of starting safely or anything like that, but it definitely changed... When I went running, I was a lot more aware of my surroundings. I noticed anything that seemed a little bit off and created distance between myself and whatever that might've been. And I preferred, too, to run with other people at some points in time, closely after the incident happened, but then, I do overall prefer solo running, so went back to running by myself.

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Erica Edwards-O'Neal: Thank you. Thank you so much for sharing that. It's interesting because you were running during the day with dogs. It does seem like some of the best guidance you were taking and it still was not proof, a hundred percent proof protection, but thank you so much. I'm so glad that you are safe, we're safe, and thank you for sharing that story with us.

I'm going to jump to Meagan. Meagan, you shared before growing up with women in your life who were survivors. How did that shape how you moved through the world?

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Meagan Doyle: My family, in general, has a bunch of women in it, and they're all very strong and powerful women, and so

I grew up with mostly that influence from a young age, and then were also women that are survivors in my family, too. And so that was something that we had open conversations about. Maybe not all the details when I was little, but something that I grew up with kind of as a normal conversation. And unfortunately, one of these incidences happened when I was in middle school and then kind of unraveled in high school.

And so that was something that I dealt with then at the time, but then also coming into college, moving to Austin, and that was such a much bigger city than the hometown that I have. And in my hometown, we didn't talk about things like this outside of my family, and in Austin, people are always on campus, especially, debating different things and talking about things very openly. This was 2016, and there was the first female candidate for president, too, so there was just a lot of talk about women. And then we've previously talked about the two students who were murdered on our campus prior to our class project. One of those students was a woman who was just walking home at night, which is a very real and scary situation a lot of women can relate to. And then during our class project semester, I'm pretty sure that this is the same semester that the MeToo movement really picked up traction.

So all of these things that started with how I grew up and this domino effect of this event that happened really led to my mindset, I guess, trying to think of things that I could do to help. And at the time, whenever I was going through that, it was something that that was my biggest regret or thing I felt guilty about is that I felt like there was nothing I could have done. And that led to whenever we had this conversation with my eventual co-founders in this class project, it was something that I guess I felt I could just speak about openly because I had been thinking about it and talking about it for the several years leading up to that.

And I just hope that... This is something that I haven't really talked about a lot, and I think that it's important that I mentioned that it's not something that I've ever thought about in the way of, oh, how can I use this to help me? But I think something that we talk about at Safely, it's very important to have open and honest conversations and the more women we have talking about these things. That doesn't mean that anybody who has been in this situation has to come forward or anything like that, but I hope anybody who hears this that can relate just knows that they're seen and that this is why Safely ever existed in the first place. And we hope that one day things like this aren't happening, so it doesn't have to exist.

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Erica Edwards-O'Neal: Absolutely. I love that. Can you tell me, speaking of speaking openly and from that class project, when did you realize you had something much bigger than a class project?

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Meagan Doyle: I think that it was after the project ended and none of us wanted to quit working on it. I think it was actually Ashley, at first, who mentioned we should meet up and keep talking about this. So I can let her speak to that, too, but it was something that all of us... It was our first group project, if not the only group project I'd ever felt it wasn't just for a grade and was something we were really passionate about.

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Ashley Raymond: A hundred percent. It was something that we talked a lot about together. We spent extra hours preparing to present this class project because it was more than a class project to us at this point. And after the project, too, when we presented our idea and got a ton of feedback, we thought to ourselves, "Okay, how hard can this be to do? Let's do this. This could help a lot of people." And we quickly learned that it was very hard to launch a company, and the first company we launched together in college ended up not working out. And so we went back to the drawing board, and in 2021, we launched Safely, which is the company we have together today with still some of our other classmates, too, from that class project.

So it's just been really cool to see that if you have a mission that you believe so strongly in and you can see that there is a way to make a change and there is a way to make a difference, even if you fail the first time, it doesn't mean that it can't work out the second time, and it doesn't mean that you should quit, but maybe you should think about it differently and figure out how you can help the most people.

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Christine Burke: So many class projects start and end in a class. You work on a group project, it starts, you deliver the final presentation, and you walk away. And so it seems that you truly believed in what you were working on that this extended beyond the class. And as you mentioned that despite failing the first time, you believe so strongly in it that you kept at it.

Meagan, you have shared that you did not run outside before Safely, and would love to learn a little bit more about some of the Safely products, including Sidekick and what that

product is and what sort of confidence it gives you when you carry that when you run, giving you the comfort to run outside.

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Meagan Doyle: Yes. I wasn't really the athletic person growing up in general, which is something all the other people in my family played sports and I just was like, "That's not for me." But as I got older and kind of fell in love with going to the gym and working out in my own way, I just never really even crossed my mind that, "Oh, I would go outside and go for a run by myself." That just seemed like a crazy idea to me. Ashley is one of the first people I ever met that did that. None of my friends are runners or anything. So I watched her from a young age, I guess. When we were first in college and met in our class project, that was something she did regularly.

And the more and more, whenever we started Safely and developed out these products, the Sidekick was something that we wanted runners, especially, to feel comfortable carrying, so we wanted it to be lightweight and compact enough that it wasn't a burden to be carrying this with you on the run. And then whenever we got the Sidekick and I got to hold it for the first time and it was actually real and I would take it on walks and everything and see Ashley go running with it, I had the thought of, "Oh, maybe I should go for a run and see what this is like." And so it was the first time that I went on a run and I took the Sidekick with me, and now, I run with it all the time. And Ashley and I got to run our first marathon this past year, and then we just did a half this past weekend as well, or two weekends ago now. But yeah, so it's been incredible. I have fallen in love with running. I guess I got the bug, and it all started with Ashley first and then the Sidekick.

00:31:39

Christine Burke: Yeah. It's so common that in order to really enjoy something, you have to feel fully safe in it, and that can be psychological safety, physical safety, can take lots of forms, but you can fall in love with a sport, like running, when you feel safe.

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Meagan Doyle: Definitely.

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Erica Edwards-O'Neal: So I do have to ask, do your other co-founders run?

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Ashley Raymond: Not as much. No half marathons or full marathons yet, but at our last board meeting, I let them know that next year, we'll do a marathon together jokingly, but I just think it's been the coolest thing to see Meagan start running. And I think running changes a person. I know running's changed myself. And now, instead of me texting Meagan races, Meagan's sending me runs to sign up for. This is so cool. This is a full circle moment.

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Erica Edwards-O'Neal: Awesome.

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Meagan Doyle: Ashley, do you have a Sidekick with you?

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Ashley Raymond: Yeah.

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Meagan Doyle: I didn't grab mine. If you want to show what it has.

00:32:39

Ashley Raymond: For sure. So the Sidekick, too, it is our five-in-one self-defense tool. And when we were creating it, like Meagan mentioned, we really focused on how to make it very convenient to run with. So even though it might look a little bigger in my hands, it's lighter than an iPhone. And everything down to where the flashlight is, is pretty much because I wanted to put it there because of running, so that when you're holding it and you're running with your hands, you're seeing where you're stepping in front of you on the ground, safety from the perspective of not trying to fall down if you're running early in the morning or at night, but then also having it easily available so you can move the light around instead of wearing a light on your shoe where you can't really easily look to the side, so you can stay super aware. The flashlight's also very bright, so if it were pointed directly in somebody's eyes, it would temporarily blind them a little bit or disorient them, and then you'd have time to use the pepper spray if you had to.

And then you might notice the spike on the bottom. It actually comes off. Some people don't prefer to run with this because they might be worried they could fall on top of it. So you can unscrew it. But the reason we have the spike here is because if someone were to come up from behind you on a run, which is the most common situation a runner might find themselves in, if a situation were to arise, you could use that little jabby to get away. So we

really thought of runners when creating this device. And this cord around the wrist, too, is an alarm. So you can pull that to activate it. If someone tried to take it out of your hand, the alarm is going to be going off. All sorts of things in this one Sidekick device.

00:34:22

Christine Burke: Well, thank you for sharing. For those of you who can't see it because you're listening online, it looks very ergonomic and it's colorful, so it's visible. When somebody approaches you, they'll be able to see that you're actually holding something in your hand.

I'm sure you've talked about it with the other members of your company, and we're curious to learn a little bit about how you feel about pepper spray or the Sidekick shifting the responsibility for behavior and protection onto the women. What would you say to somebody who says, "Women shouldn't have to carry anything?"

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Ashley Raymond: First, we agree. We wish we didn't want to carry anything either. I think the ideal run is one where you do feel safe and free to run with absolutely nothing on you. You could have your music at the loudest volume, you could have your hair in a ponytail, all of these things that sometimes as runners we've been told not to do, but unfortunately, that's not the reality of the world we live in today. So if someone is opposed to carrying something when they run, I just would love to know that they're doing something else to still be able to protect themselves if a situation does arise, because I think unfortunately, even though it shouldn't be our responsibility as women, it is our responsibility in a way because the worst thing we can do is do nothing and have something happen. So it's so, so important to just stay prepared whatever way that looks like for you.

00:35:58

Meagan Doyle: Yeah. And we don't think that it's fair at all that it is like this, and it should not be this way. And we hope that by, again, speaking openly about this and raising awareness about this being an issue, that eventually, even though it seems a little idealistic right now, but the burden would shift to the actual people who are causing these issues anyway.

And with safety products, it is something, like you mentioned, Christine, that if you're holding it and someone can see it, then they're actually less likely to even approach you because you are not seen as an easy target. So it kind of, just by carrying it, helps somebody not be in

a situation where they will ever need it. But we also say, too, that we would never say, "This is the only device you should have," or "You have to have this, and this is the answer." As Ashley mentioned, you can have a safety mindset if you don't carry anything, as long as you are just aware. And I think the more knowledge that you have of the situation and different things that could happen, then you're more prepared in that sense, too.

00:37:06

Erica Edwards-O'Neal: Absolutely. And I know that you've shared that you've received letters from women who say that your products have helped them. Can you tell us a little bit more about any of those letters or any particular letter or story that stands out for you?

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Ashley Raymond: For sure. We have put a lot of effort into teaching people how to use pepper spray, which might sound a little funny. We get a ton of comments, "Is this really something that needs to be practiced?" Well, absolutely. Anything in life seems easy until you try it for the first time. And if you've never practiced something, how can you confidently know that you're going to be able to use it, especially in a situation where it really matters to get something right on the first try? So we have practice sprays that are filled with waters. We've gone to a ton of different Fleet Feets, run clubs across the country, teaching people how to use pepper spray with our pink skeleton Pinky that Meagan found that target. He's been our best \$ 50 investment we've ever made in Safely.

And one story that sticks out in particular is we had somebody at one of the Fleet Feet events, practiced using the pepper spray, and life went on. She went on with her running, and I think it was about eight months after she had attended the event, I received a text message one day, and I'd love to read it-

00:38:29

Erica Edwards-O'Neal: That'd be great.

00:38:29

Ashley Raymond: ... if that's okay. She said, "Hey, Ashley, how are you doing? I actually had an incident on Saturday and I got attacked, and luckily, I had my pepper spray. So I kind of want to educate everybody about it, and I would like for you to be there, too." So she had this happen to her, a very terrifying incident. We talked on the phone after this, as well. She was running in her neighborhood during the daytime. She told me not to be mad,

but that she doesn't always carry a pepper spray on runs, but for some reason, this particular day, she had this feeling that she should bring her pepper spray. And I would never be mad at anyone for not carrying their pepper spray. Again, I don't think you should have to carry it.

But luckily, she had it this day. And she was running. She saw a car kind of pull over on the side of a street, and I think this is every runner's worst nightmare. She saw a guy get out of the car. She ran by him and thought, "Okay, he must just be waiting for somebody. I'm in the clear," which also I've had that thought many of times as well, except for her this time, she next found herself on the ground, and she was able to get her pepper spray and spray this individual and get away safely after being knocked to the ground.

So a very, very scary incident and a very real incident, too. And she sent us this message basically saying she wouldn't have known what would've happened if she didn't have pepper spray. And we know why we do this when it comes to Safely, but hearing the story and knowing that if she hadn't practiced, if she hadn't carried the device that day, what would've happened? We spent a little bit of time crying that day too, just because it's so terrible and she should have never had that experience in the first place.

00:40:33

Christine Burke: Thank you for sharing. As Erica and I have learned significantly over the last couple of weeks, that sharing stories and telling about experiences can help people feel that they're not alone and look for solutions, be they physical solutions, like a Sidekick, or community solutions. So thank you for sharing both of your stories, as well as the stories of other women you've impacted positively through the starting of Safely and development of Sidekick. It's so important, and as you mentioned earlier, we hope that we can live in a world and run in a world at some point where this is completely not necessary and we can put you all out of business. But until that day comes, we're really grateful for the work that you've done, and what all started with a college class and college project is really making a difference. So thank you all.

00:41:34

Erica Edwards-O'Neal: Absolute impact.

00:41:35

Ashley Raymond: Absolutely. Thank you so much.

00:41:36

Erica Edwards-O'Neal: I do want to ask a quick question

because we know that there are national and local and regional differences. How do state laws and regional differences affect access to self-defense tools like Safely?

00:41:50

Meagan Doyle: Yes, there are different restrictions in every state, and then of course, in different countries, too. But here in the United States, pepper spray is legal in all 50 states. However, there are some states that you cannot ship pepper spray to. New York is one of those states, so if you live there, unfortunately, you have limited access in the sense that you have to go to a licensed dealer to purchase a pepper spray, so that could look like a gun store or a pharmacy. And it also just creates even more of, I guess, putting the burden on women to figure these things out if they want to get pepper spray.

And we are working with a senator that is in New York to get these laws changed in order to allow people to ship pepper spray to New York, also to allow that the legal strength be raised, because right now, it's half of where it is everywhere else. And so these are obviously come down to state and local restrictions and policies there, but it's not impossible. In California, there used to be similar laws, and they have changed them since then. So it is hopefully going to be available in New York and places like that soon. And then when that happens, then the important piece will be educating people on the fact that it is available, because that also is part of the problem with accessing it is if you don't know that you're allowed to have it, then women still don't have it or people who may need it still don't have it. And yeah.

00:43:30

Christine Burke: Yeah. Thank you for sharing that. It's going to take all sorts of efforts at the government level, at the local level, at the personal level, at the run club level to make these changes.

00:43:41

Meagan Doyle: Yes. And we wish that it weren't so complicated. This law was brought up in, I think, the nineties in New York, so it's been a long time that it has been this way. And still, a lot of people don't even know that they can't get pepper spray shipped to them. We get a lot of messages from people on social media or through our website, wondering why they can't check out, and it's because they live in a state like New York, and our website handles those restrictions. And then also with the Sidekick, it has a new, I guess, level of restrictions with the knuckles, which is a big reason we also came out with the strap, so places that

had restriction on the knuckles, you could also instead get a strap. And the practice spray is also something that, since it has water, is allowed in all of the states and we can ship. So obviously not ideal to be carrying around water, have to go find your own pepper spray to put in there, but it has other tools that hopefully are helpful.

00:44:43

Erica Edwards-O'Neal: Thank you both so much. Ashley and Meagan, thank you for the work that you're doing. Thank you for joining us today and the conversation, and we look forward to many more conversations. We know that this is not a one and done, that runner safety is such a complicated issue, and we really do appreciate you for sharing your story and educating men and women across the country. Thanks again.

That does it for another episode of Set the Pace. Thank you to today's guest, CEO of Road Runners Club of America, Jean Knaack, and Safely's Ashley Raymond and Meagan Doyle.

00:45:21

Christine Burke: Beccs will be back next week with our very own Ted Metellus to tell you everything you need to know about the upcoming United Airlines NYC half. So make sure to tune in next week.

If you like this episode, please go ahead, subscribe, rate or leave a comment for the show on whatever platform you're listening on. This not only helps us, but it also helps others to find out about the show, too. Have a great day, everyone.

00:45:46

Erica Edwards-O'Neal: Thank y'all.