



Evany Turk on Motherhood, Trans Rights, and Magical Women

The incoming co-executive of Positive Women's Network USA, Evany Turk, shares her candid views on everything from capitalism to motherhood.

March 7, 2026 By [Mark S. King](#)

Evany Turk is a woman living with HIV who recently became the co-executive director, with Marnina Miller, of the powerhouse organization Positive Women's Network USA (PWN), one of our country's leading advocacy organizations. PWN has a diverse membership and its leadership is known to never mince words. Evany is a perfect example of PWN's candid, values-driven leadership.

In my interview with Evany, she speaks frankly on topics ranging from motherhood to capitalism to the sometimes thorny job of holding together a coalition of cis, trans, and gender non-conforming members.

Here is our conversation, gently edited for length and clarity.

Mark S. King: Hello, Evany. You've caught me sorting my meds into my monthly pillbox. I remember in the 1980s when someone with HIV would be sorting all these medications and I would think, "If I ever have to do that, just shoot me." Because being on meds back then meant you were going to die. Now it means we're going to live. It's weird when I think about it.

Evany Turk: I've been grappling with this myself. I remember my grandmother used to have a lot of meds. I used to say I don't ever want to take that much medicine. I was judging her. Well, I'm older and I'm there now. There's a pill for this and a pill for that. As much as I fought it, I have to. When I was diagnosed in 2001, I was taking 8 pills twice a day.

Let's cut to the chase. I've been in a constant state of anxiety and grief over our country in general and the destruction of public health. Is there anything you can say that might help me feel better?

(Laughs.) Well, you look fabulous!

I'll take that as a no.

Really, I think the way I get through this without anxiety is that we've been through this before,

not exactly, but we live in cycles and we know how to get out of it. We know how to fight back. As of right now, you have to live your life the best that you can, and fight back the best you can, until we get out from under this regime. What angers me is we're here because of our relationship to capitalism. And people are followers. They go along to get along. That's to our detriment. That pisses me off.

My appreciation for women living with HIV extends as far back as the 1980s, when women living with HIV started to teach me and nurture me and sometimes dry my tears. But am I oversimplifying you, by viewing you in a kind of motherly, nurturing role? Because you're also bad asses.

I think that's a part of who women are. One of the reasons we exist is to be nurturers. It's innate. We're taking care of the world. We say, if you help and listen to women, we'll all be okay.

Waheedah Shabazz-El [once told me](#), "When you serve Black women you are serving everyone. When you heal Black women, you are healing everyone."

That is correct.

Is it fair to ask, or even possible to describe, the experience of being a woman, here and now?

I don't ever want to be anything but a woman. It is glorious over here. We are resilient and magical, we have so many different qualities that make us more than meets the eye. It is a joy to unravel what a woman is. And Black women have been given so much shit to deal with, and we are the least respected group of people in the world. The fact we come out and live our lives as gloriously as we do says something about us. We created the world.

Evany Turk, left, with PWN co-executive director Marnina Miller.

I need to know about your seven children and being a mom. My mother had six kids and I honestly do not know how she survived it and remained centered and maintained her own identity. How the hell do you do that?

Women are multi-taskers. That's part of the magic. Five of my kids were pre-teens when I got them as a foster parent. I love teenagers.

Why? Aren't teens just awful to their parents about that time?

Yeah, but I yoke 'em up.

You do what now?

Yoke 'em up. I ain't playing. I love them because it is amazing to have conversations with young people. At the beginning of life, they're curious. I'm here to support them when they make mistakes. They're hard headed. But they do have realizations that I was right about things.

How old are you?

I am 48. I've been a parent since I was 15 years old. My youngest is in his third year of college. He saw me yoking up the older ones and he's been the best kid. I'm proud of the mothering I have done.

Outside of PWN, you serve as the Director of Residential Housing at Chicago House and Social Service Agency. I see a theme here of providing what people can call home.

Yes. Providing stability. That's who I am. Stability is important. HIV disrupted that for me, and I ended up homeless at one point. The experience changed me in a way that I will never forget. I want to make sure people have a stable environment.

With the loss of so much government funding, I think people are blindly praying that Big Pharma will save us as service providers. I think that's a mistake.

I've had a love/hate relationship with pharma. People in my community have been elevated by pharma. I get that part of it. The hate is, pharma is a big smoke screen. They produce drugs that save our lives and charge us an exorbitant amount for it. That's a crime against humanity, but it's because of capitalism. They support the community with grants but I truly believe they do that as a business model. Nobody is gonna save us. We have to save ourselves.

I once wrote a piece about supporting black women [in an arena once run by white gay men](#). Is it still a struggle for respect and leadership opportunities?

Black women are still not listened to, not paid the same, and not respected for our opinions. PWN still has to bring people to the table, rather than it being automatic to include us in the space. If white men would take their ego out of it, we could work together.

It's about sharing the space.

There is space for everybody. Even in a space where I know I have privilege, as a cis straight woman, I am going to ensure that I can elevate a gender non-conforming or trans person, because their voice matters. I'm going to make sure they can get there, so that they have child care, whatever it takes to make sure their voice is heard and it is not an inconvenience for them to participate. That's a responsibility of leadership.

I've been excited to see the voter registration drives that PWN has organized. It's gutsy for people living with HIV to step into the political space, on any level, with social stigma being a constant. Are y'all literally going door to door with voter registration drives?

Yes! We are doing a door knocking campaign in Philadelphia. We do phone banking. Our voter engagement campaign is run by our members and their families. We pay people to do this work. We are a whole temporary staff during campaign season. They run the door knocking, the training, all of it.

Do you identify yourselves as women living with HIV or with PWN? What does that even look like?

Not necessarily. They typically have campaign shirts, not PWN shirts. But with phone banking we often say we're from PWN and people sometimes ask about that. We talk about who we are. People are intrigued, not rude. We've actually built our base that way.

You have members from every possible background. That includes trans women, who are clearly under attack in this country. Is it a constant educational process among your members as to why you are inclusive in this way?

Yes. I'm glad you asked this. It's something people need to understand. We have to do a lot of education with our members because everybody doesn't understand the diverse membership. More than half of our membership is older Black women living with HIV. That is not something they are used to (the inclusion of trans women), so there's a lot of education about why we are inclusive of every type of woman. We don't tolerate transphobia. This is not easy work. We get criticized a lot by both cis and trans women.

You get it from all directions.

If someone is harmed within the trans community they can have a negative viewpoint of the organization. Our members have to do the work to respect the existence of trans women and gender diverse people and live within that. If they can't, we are clear that you can't be a member if you don't agree with our values.

Do you worry for trans women doing voter engagement or other activities?

Absolutely. If someone wants to participate in a public event, we make sure we have safety plans for them to ensure we can control as much as we can control.

How has that affected your sense of unity to protect and elevate trans women?

It helps you realize that some people will never accept change. That's okay. No matter if you are a member or not, if you are a woman living with HIV, we are still going to fight for you and love on you and help you have your best life, whether you can accept our values or not.

I've been thinking about the meaning of social justice a lot lately. For HIV advocates, it's historically been pretty simple: fight HIV stigma and racism and sexism in all its forms. These days, it's become so much broader, because of the collapse of our democracy. Voting rights, the rights of the Epstein victims, of immigrants. Is the list getting longer, or are men like me just starting to pay attention?

The things we are seeing have always been there. People are seeing them differently now. I think we should all understand that there are basic human rights people should have. The problem is capitalism. The 1% wants to remain the 1%. As long as there is greed, we will have these problems. People with power want to keep it.

I remember being invited to attend the PWN Summit some years ago, one of the few men there, so I could [write about the experience](#). It felt like such a sacred space. I was afraid to intrude on it.

I just watched the video you created there (see above) and it brought up so many memories. I remember the dance party.

I tried to be subtle but couldn't help dancing down the line like I was on Soul Train.

You fit right in.

How can people support the work you do and the women you represent?

Donating. We can't do anything without money. Find out more about the members in their area and get to know them or interview them. And bring us into rooms where we might not be. We are life creators and life changers and I am so in awe of our members.

I'm in awe of y'all, too.

We're magic. That's why.

Mark

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