

HOW TO PIVOT IN YOUR BUSINESS AND HAVE AN AUDIENCE THAT GROWS WITH YOUR BRAND WITH TARA GENTILE

Welcome back! I am so excited right now because we are joined by the amazing Tara Gentile. She is the creator of the Quiet Power Strategy. She is the author of several books, a sought-after speaker and just an all-around amazing entrepreneur. In this episode, she takes us behind the scenes of her business and shares with us what it's been like to build her business from literally quitting her job at 9 months pregnant to building something that is so successful. It's full of the most amazing words of wisdom. You are going to love it. Make sure you stick around right until the end to discover how you could be in with a chance of winning a spot in one of her upcoming online retreats. It's worth \$3400 — so it's amazing! Definitely stick around for that and enjoy this episode.

Tara, it is so good to have you here. Welcome to the She Means Business podcast!

Thank you so much for having me, Carrie.

I'm so excited about this because we've obviously done 10-minute master classes in the past and you've come and shared your amazing and wonderful tips with us. This is the first time we're going behind the scenes of your business and your entrepreneurial journey. I'm really excited. I feel like you always seem like you've got everything figured out, well put together and so well organised. I'm excited to go behind the scenes of it all and just talk to you about your story.

Well, I hope that that's true. I don't know that it's entirely true, but I love going behind the scenes so I'm really looking forward to this as well.

This is going to be a bit different. We are going to pretend that there is a movie coming out and the movie is called She Means Business starring Tara Gentile.

This movie is all about your entrepreneurial journey and how you turned your dreams into reality. I already know it's going to be a great move; it's going to be a blockbuster. First, let's set the scene for everyone so the audience knows what kind of movie of it is and the vibe. What would you say is the style of the movie and the vibe or the feeling that you want associated with this movie?

Oh man, that is such a great question. Well, I have said before that my spirit animal is Tina Fey. I still have not seen her last dramedy movie Whiskey Tango Foxtrot, but I would guess the spirit of this biopic would be a very Tina Fey/Liz Lemon/Samantha Bee-inspired — comedic but also heavy-hitting romp.

This is going to be amazing. I'm so excited for this. OK, the movie begins and the first scene starts to play. This is you right back at the beginning of your entrepreneurial journey. What is the story? What is going on? Why did you decide to become an entrepreneur?

My good friend Brigitte Lyons always says that the best way to start telling a story is right in the middle of the action. The beginning of my entrepreneurial journey was really a phone call that really, really, really ticked me off. The phone call was from a friend of mine at the place I was working at the time, which was Borders Books and Music Store, letting me know I had not gotten the promotion that I had been all but promised. Instead, somebody with less experience with the company, less time with the company, less experience in general had gotten the job instead of me. Imagine also in the scene that I am 9 months pregnant. I was weeks away from giving birth to my daughter and I was livid. What set me off on my entrepreneurial journey was a realisation that I had no control over my livelihood, over my ability to get ahead, over my chance to just dig in and do better work, to do more work, to give myself more responsibility. I am the kind of person that does not do well when I don't have that kind of control and when I don't have the ability to raise myself up and put myself in the best position that I can be in at that moment. That's really what set everything off — that realisation that I had more to do; I had more to give and that the people I was working for at the time didn't need it and didn't want it. They're out of business now and I'm not. I think there's a good chance that they did really need what I had to offer, but I figured if there are other women, other people out there doing their own thing, making money from home, offering their skills and talents in unusual and creative

ways, then I can do that, too. There's nothing that anyone else can do that I can't also do. I sat down at my kitchen table and figured out what do I have to offer, who can I offer it to and then I sat down at my computer and started looking up all the ways that people were actually doing and started to put the pieces together.

I love that. This is a very dramatic start to the movie.

There's a lot of swearing involved.

That's pretty amazing. When you have that moment of realisation of taking control of your life, realising that you can create what you want and we can all create success for ourselves, it's such an amazing moment in all of our lives I think. So, you got started. How long did it take you to figure it all out? The research and trying to plan it out — how long did that go on for?

Keep in mind that I was a brand-new mother at the time this was happening. As I was sitting on the couch, I also had one hand on the computer. It was about 6 months from quitting that job to starting my first website, my first web community really. That's not to say it took me 6 months to start earning money. I think I earned \$50 that first month. It was another 6 months after that till I replaced my old income. And then it was another year after that until I had my first 6-figure 12-month period, so about 18 months to earning about \$10,000-\$12,000 a month.

That's really impressive and that's really quite quick as well to go from within 6 months to be replacing your income. What were you doing in the first months of building the business? What was it that you were focusing on?

Community. It's funny right now in my business we're really getting back to community. That is our emphasis for 2017: people and community and bringing business-minded people together so that they can help each other. That was really what I was doing at the very beginning, too. During the first 6 months of research, I literally had no idea what I was doing. In launching that first website, I also launched a Facebook group at the time. I don't think they were called groups then, but I'm totally blanking at what they were called. It helped that the website was local-ish, it was regional but it was for Pennsylvanians. It was really easy to find the people who matched my ideal reader because I was starting a blog. I wasn't even thinking in terms of business yet. I was

thinking in terms of a blog and making money from a blog. I was looking for readers so I started pulling together this community, just putting content out there that they could be excited about. The way that I put out content that I knew they could be excited about was that I was highlighting them. I was doing interviews. I was writing stories about the people that were reading and that made them want to share. It wasn't a big community, but relative to what I was expecting and relative to what I had experienced at the time, the community grew really, really quickly. Not only that, it grew very tight. These people weren't just friends on the internet but they were getting together in their local communities. They were realising that there was somebody next door or a block down the street or in the next town over that was doing something very, very similar to them so they started getting together for coffee. At the same time, I was getting involved with local organisations that had a similar mission. One of them was the Pennsylvania Guild of Craftsmen. I started doing workshops for them, meeting their members, helping their members out, helping them with marketing, social media and all of that stuff that as a digital native I was uniquely skilled at 8-9 years ago and they weren't. That's really what grew that community, got my name out there and started paying some bills, too. Those early workshops didn't pay a lot but they paid me more than I was getting at the time, which was next to nothing. It was a grassroots start to the business. It was not some phenomenon of digital marketing. It really was person-to-person, organisation-to-organisation and really like I said grassroots.

I love that. What was the blog back then? What was it about?

It was about the arts and craft movement in Pennsylvania. It was called HandmadeinPA.net. The site actually still exists. It's now run by the Pennsylvania Guild of Craftsmen.

Oh wow.

Yeah, it's their marketing blog. I love that it's still out there and I love that some of the people who met through that site are still friends. I watched them doing other things together, whether they're still making, crafting, doing art or not, they're still getting together. They're still commenting on each other's stuff on Facebook. It's really fulfilling to see that.

That is really cool. I feel like my start to FEA was similar. I didn't know what I was doing really. I had no idea how I was going to build this network so I started a blog. I started to reach out to people and asked if I could share their story of how they built successful businesses. I guess I felt like it was going to add value to my audience, but it was also going to add value to them and then they would want to tell their friends about this website. At the same time, I was networking like a crazy person and going to all these local events and meeting people. I felt like it just created so much momentum when I got out there and had conversations with people. All of a sudden, it wasn't just this little blog I was running; it was this thing that I was creating that other people knew about and wanted to talk about. It's so powerful what connections can do.

Yeah, absolutely. If I can just add one other really specific behind-the-scenes thing, when I was creating that content, doing the interviews like you did, I didn't know what I should be doing. If you would have read Pro blogger at the time, everybody said, "Send 100 people a list of questions, just copy-and-paste them into blog posts and get the content out there." I was coming from an academic background. I love to write. I love to craft information into stories. So, I was not doing that. I was just emailing questions but one, I would research really heavily beforehand. I'd read all of the bio I'd look at their products, I'd see what their inspiration was and craft specific questions just for them. And then instead of copying-and-pasting, I would actually go in and write out more like a news story. I think that had I known the "right" way to do it, maybe I would still have success, but I don't think it would have had the same connection that I achieved by doing it the wrong way. I think a lot of people pause in getting something started because they're trying to figure out the right way to do things. More often, we need to not pause and just go in with what you know, do what you're good at and people are going to respond to that.

That is such a great piece of insight. I love it. You got your blog ready and you start making money. Firstly, how did you scale that to 6 figures?

With an online course. We were all doing it at the time. I think in that particular market, I was pretty early with only products and courses. I launched what I think to be the first digital product in the craft business space, which was an ebook on blogging. I launched that at the very end of 2009. Quite a long time ago in online marketing terms, not the longest but a long time, so

I launched that. A few months later, I launched a website-building course. I think I also launched a marketing course that year. As those things got cranking, that's when the money really got cranking as well. I was never one to sell to hundreds or thousands of people at a time, but I was really good at selling—and still am—something that is high ticket, high touch to a good chunk of people and put together my revenue that way. That was really what got the wheels turning in terms of revenue. At the same time, the foundation of my revenue generation was web design at that time. People would come to me because of the blog and say, "Hey, I know you designed your own website. Could you design a website for me?" So I started doing that more and more, honed my skills a little bit, started charging more and that added a significant revenue stream to the business.

What was going on in the sense of how you were feeling about it all, the experience that you had in the first 18 months of building the business? What kind of things did you experience?

I think one of the big ones was realising in that second year that I was starting to feel a little trapped by the scope of the community that I had put together. There are a lot of people in the maker and artist space who are ambitious and business-minded and love creating products that people want to buy and therefore, love building businesses around the products they feel really passionate about. And there are also a lot of people who love to make all day long but don't understand why the business doesn't just happen. Making all day long is great, but that's not how you build a business and it's not how you get your product in other people's hands. What I realised in that second year was that I was trapped in the scope of the community—not necessarily the people themselves—that was not allowing me to grow as a business-minded person, as someone who wanted to create an empire or a movement. In that early stage, that was one of the things that I started really bumping up against and needed to figure out how I was going to pivot into a space where I had more expertise, where I could grow and challenge myself, and also where I can grow and challenge my community in a way that they will be really receptive to it. I can talk about charging the real value of your product all they day or I can talk about marketing all day long or I can talk about business development all day long, but if people don't want to hear about it, that's not helpful to anybody. I really needed to pivot that community. That process took a long time. From that second year, it was probably 2-3 years after

that until I really felt that that pivot had come full circle. Until I was able to do 100% full-time what I really, really wanted to be doing. Also, so that I wasn't constantly getting inquiries that were not a great fit for me either.

I was about to ask you that question of how long it took you to pivot because it's a bold and brave thing to do, especially when something's working financially, it's growing and you're creating good revenue. It's hard to turn your back on something like that and pivot in a new direction. It's interesting that you say it was 2 years to come full circle on it.

Yeah, absolutely. Even just a year or two ago, I was doing an interview and someone said to me, "You're kind of known as the Etsy girl." No, I'm not! "You've been known as the Etsy girl for years now." I think that's just a good brand, a good story, a real focus. I think it goes to show how important those things are in terms of solidifying your brand and solidifying how people think about you or your company in the market and how diligent you have to be if those things turn out to be not the right fit or you need to go in a different direction — how diligent you need to be in actually making that turn. And you can't give up. You can't be like, "OK, it's 6 months in and I'm done." It's not a 6-month process, it's not a 1-year process; it's a 2, 3 or 4-year process, regardless of how successful that pivot is.

Did you create a new website, rebrand everything? Did you start rebuilding a new audience?

First of all, to back up and give the details, I sold off the HandmadeinPA.net site at the end of that first year. I had purchased a second website halfway through that first year called Scoutie Girl, which was a national —global, really— maker and craft blog. I was writing there full-time and really using that as the launch pad for the digital products business once I got that going. I was also making money through advertising at that time, too. As the pivot started happening, I put more and more emphasis into my personal brand, so starting to write more full-time on TaraGentile.com, starting to brand myself as that, not talking so much about the other properties that I had. I put that property Scoutie Girl more on auto-pilot. I had an editor there, I had writers that were creating content for that, the site kept going and kept the traffic out. We removed advertising at some point, except for advertising my own products. It sort of petered

along for awhile as I moved into my personal brand more. Three years ago now, I finally decided to sell off that property as well and just have my own. My own brand and the Quiet Power Strategy brand has been my focus for the last 4-5 years.

How have you built up those businesses to where they're at now and have had the breakthroughs and created the success you're experiencing now in your business?

My brand has been very evolutionary. There was never any "I'm burning this down and I'm starting this other thing from scratch." In terms of building up my personal brand and then moving into the Quiet Power Strategy brand in the last couple of years, it's just been guiding my community through those transitions and being willing to let go of the people whom change is not a good fit for and saying, "I appreciate you want to hear more about this or I appreciate that you wish you spoke more to this kind of person, but that's not what I'm doing now. Here are other places you can go for that or here's the unsubscribe link." A lot of the community has grown with me throughout this whole 8-year period. There are people that follow me now who have been following me from those very first days. I've done all the things that people do: I've used affiliates to grow my audience. I've used books to grow my audience. I've used advertising to grown my audience. I've use media to grown my audience. I've done all of those things, but I really think at the heart of it has been this engaged community that is willing to talk about what I have to offer, willing to talk about what's different about what I have to offer and grow organically from there.

How do you engage and cultivate that community?

Email marketing — that's my jam. While I have a blog and I have a podcast and I have all the things that people have, the real heart of it is email. Everything starts as email. I guess the podcast technically doesn't start as an email, but my approach to the podcast starts as email. I have not have comments on my blog. You are so good Carrie at asking for feedback on your Facebook page and getting people involved and getting all the comments together. I don't do that. It's not me. I love when people comment and I love great conversations. For whatever reason, it's not just the focus. I use email marketing as a way to create a community that is implied as opposed to explicit. My email marketing is very directed to that one reader that's out there who needs what I have to offer, who's engaged in the conversation that I'm leading, that has the same

personal values as I do, who has a similar set of outside interests like I do. I speak to them very, very directly through that email marketing. In doing so, I have attracted a community tens of thousands of people who fit all of those things. We have this large implied community and we do have a small paid community of those people as well. I think that implied community has been a key part of it. No one feels like a number. No one feels like they're not being heard because I'm literally speaking to them —that one reader— week in and week out and multiple times a week. They have that sense that they're in it with me and that they're in with all the other people that are reading. The email may read that it's written just for you, but everyone knows it's going out to lots and lots of people. They realise that "Wow, she wrote this just for me and her whole list is full of people that she's writing just for them, then there are all these people out there that are like me, too." That has been the focus of how I've grown the audience and community in terms of community now.

I like that take on community. I also think it drives home the point that community means so many different things to so many different people. I think that that's OK. It's about finding what works best for you as opposed to looking at someone else and thinking you have to do the way they're doing something. It's trying to follow your own intuition and your own idea of what you think is the best fit in what community means. That's really insightful to see how it works for you. How do you keep up with it all? How do you keep up with all the different things that are going on? There are a lot of things we need to do. We are spinning lots of plates as entrepreneurs to grow our businesses and to get to the next station. Every time we chat, it's like you —I can't think of a way to say it — you seem to have this air about you. It's a really good air. When we're together, I just feel so comfortable and confident, like you just got it together. You're so stable and strong. It's a good thing, a really good thing. I don't know, I can't really explain myself very well, but it's a feeling I always get from you after we chatted in the past. How do you keep it all together?

One, thank you and two, we get to have a whole other interview about this. What that air is is what my Sally Hogshead would call my particular brand of fascination advantage, which is the maestro. Carrie, I don't know if you're into fascination advantage at all, but the idea is that there

are 7 different ways that we are all fascinating, 7 different tools or languages that we speak that make us fascinating. Mine are power and prestige. So, that air is exactly that — it's those 2 things operating together, so I can't help but sound like I have things together. That said, that is also the key to how I keep things moving and how my team is organised as well. My job it's to be out in front, it's to be the face, it's to have the vision, it's to be the strong leader. My team makes sure things don't fall through the cracks because I am horrible about letting things fall through the cracks. I wilfully let things fall through the cracks. That's why I have a great team that makes sure that things are organised, the I's are getting dotted and the T's are getting crossed at least most of the time. Plenty of people see plenty of my typos that get through. They're the ones that are really making sure the details are happening. They're also the ones who are largely figuring out how things are going to work. I'll say, "OK, we need to do this" and then my awesome assistant Rosie will put together a trailer board for that. Brianna, our operations person, will come up with "This needs to happen, and this needs to happen, and this needs to happen." I don't do that. That's one of the reasons it sounds like I have things put together even though often, I feel like I'm a little behind. Full disclosure: one of the big things I'm going to be working on for myself this year is making sure that I'm saying no to more things, that I'm culling down our business operations to the very bare minimum of what it takes for us to create an exceptional experience for our customers as well as for myself and our team. We adjusted my schedule later last year so that I'm only taking calls on Wednesdays and Thursdays now. That gives me 3 days a week to make sure things don't fall through the cracks and to be the manager that I really, really want to be. It's those little things like that that we'll be working on this year to make that even truer. Really, it's a lot of me having things put together is me backing off and saying, "That's not my strong suit — you guys make sure everything's put together."

That's such a big skill as well. A lot of entrepreneurs struggle with it. I know I struggled with it because I wanted to be in control of stuff. In the past when I have worked with other people, I remember one time I was doing a launch and I had everything together. The marketing people were taking care of the graphics, the ads. They were coordinating with each other and taking care of customer support and the onboarding. Everything was in place and I felt like, "What am I supposed to do? What's going on here?" I obviously had things to do but it was so

smooth that part of me I freaked out. How is it like this? You can do customer support for yourself. I think when I stopped having that interaction and seeing the feedback from emails, it made me feel really disconnected from my audience. I really struggled, especially when I wasn't in control of the marketing and I wasn't the one putting it all together. I was just seeing reports that said this converted into this and this came from this ad. It wasn't the same as really being in it and in the trenches. I really struggled to find a balance between having help and feeling being the heart of my business. Have you ever felt like that?

Yes, absolutely. I think that once you remove yourself that much, you suddenly have space to engage with people on a level that you haven't engaged with them for so long because you've had this deluge of stuff in your face, whether it was marketing, admin or customer support. When you remove yourself all from that, you'll be like "Oh, I have space to have real relationships now. I have space to engage with people on a whole different level." That's how I looked at things. The more I get the rest of the business humming without me, the more I actually have the opportunity to go hang out in our membership community or run 2-day events or all these different things that a year or two ago I would never have dreamed of being able to do that. Now, that's what my mornings consist of: hop in, answer questions, talk with people, find out what's going on. I have space for that now where I didn't before.

That's really cool. That's a good way to look at it. I was going to ask you do you have a really organised schedule and you know what you're doing and when you're doing it or is it more flexible? How do you work day-to-day?

I really like personality tests. I mentioned the fascination advantage earlier.

Yeah, I need to do that. I've heard of it, but I've never done it. I'm going to look it up.

Do it. Tell me what you are and I'll tell you what it means.

OK.

I'm also really into Meyers Briggs so I am an INTP, which is pretty unusual especially for women. What that means is that I'm a thinker, not a feeler. I like big-picture stuff and I don't like to be

hemmed into particular systems, although I love creating systems. I just don't like following them. Anyhow, that means my schedule has to have a lot of empty space in it. It has to have a lot of flexible time in it. If I'm not being super-productive and efficient, I get really, really down. This is one of the big things I'm working on personally. This year, I'm experimenting with things a little bit differently. Like I've said, I've changed my schedule so that I have 3 pretty much empty days a week where I get to choose what gets worked on those days, whether it's things that are pressing and have deadlines or whether they're creative things that I want to experiment with. I have that space now to do that. I'm using a physical planner and at the beginning of every day, I'm plotting out what I'm going to do that day. I can't plot it ahead of time — my brain doesn't work like that and my personality will rebel against that severely. At the beginning of the day, I simply plot out "OK, these are what the top priorities and here's when in the day I'm going to tackle each of those priorities," that works really well for me. I need the space, I need the flexibility and I need the on-the-spot planning to ensure that I use that time productively.

I love that. Talking about working on yourself, are you into personal development and do you do different things to help you get through overcoming obstacles and challenges or any twists and turns that you didn't expect to deal with along the way? I have my little bag of mindset magic tricks I call it just to help me mentally stay in the right place so that I can keep moving forward past any insecurity, fears, worries or doubts and all that kind of stuff. Is there anything that you do that has helped you?

This is where my personal development shame comes in because I am not a personal development junkie. I'm not reading all the self-help books. I started my first Brene Brown book a couple of weeks ago and I have not finished it. I am interested in the science and the art of personal development and self-help and making yourself a better person for sure, but it's not something that is really integrated in how I operate or into my day-to-day. What ends up happening is that I happen to have some brilliant friends who are very into it. I have a lot of life coaches that I am very good friends with that have amazing bags of mindset tricks, like you said. When I run into a mindset block or I'm feeling especially down and I just need to check in with somebody, I will check in with one of them. Generally, it's Tanya Geisler at TanyaGeisler.com. She's a brilliant coach; she's brilliant in terms of leadership and breaking out of your comfort zone;

she's an expert in the impostor complex as well. She has really helped me get past many of those blocks as I've identified them. For someone who does have personal development shame, I'm very self-aware so I know when I'm sabotaging myself. As long as I hold myself accountable to sabotaging myself and ask for help from someone like Tanya or one of my other go-to people, then I feel like I'm moving myself in the right direction, but it's not a hobby of mine or a particular interest of mine. I have a lot of shame around that. In the field that we're in, I feel like everyone around me is super-duper into these things and I just don't speak that language.

Maybe it's because you're so aware and you have the strength already mentally to get past it. When I was a child, I had really low self-esteem. I worked on it and I worked on myself because it helps me to move forward. If I didn't, I don't know how much progress I would ever make. Everyone's so different so I guess maybe you don't need to rely on it as much.

I would like to think that that's true, but I don't think that's probably true. I think I have my own little way and we'll see how that evolves in the next 10 years.

OK, to end your amazing movie —and it has been amazing— we're going to end on a high of your dreams have become a reality and you've built this incredible business for yourself. What is life like now?

This is actually a big question that I was asking myself over the holidays: what's worked, what hasn't worked, what am I going to do differently this year and in the coming years? This year, I feel very, very strongly about getting back to my original mission or a mission in my business that really emerged very early on, which is creating political change through the businesses we are supporting right now. My dream at the end of the movie is really being in a position to not only lead my community and help them become real economic powerhouses that do have a say and an influence on the way our society works, but also using that to create public policy change in support of the entrepreneurs that we support. Things like enacting a social safety net for entrepreneurs and small business owners who are not supported by those things in the United States, and just creating more awareness on a societal and governmental level for entrepreneurs who are risking everything to follow their passion, to follow their dreams and really create

amazing things for the people around them. I think that if I can support that, then the people I'm supporting can create amazing change in their communities, in their families and in themselves.

Wow, that is amazing. That is so incredible. To wrap up the movie with one profound statement —no pressure— what do you think is the biggest lesson you learned in your entire journey?

Oh man, I think it's make it up as you go.

I love that!

Yeah. Coming back full circle to what really worked for me at the beginning, which was doing things the way I knew how to do them as opposed to doing things the way you were supposed to do them. That has never failed me. It's not that I don't go out and learn how things work and how things are supposed to work — I absolutely do that. I soak myself in those kinds of learnings and trainings and figuring out what's working for other people. But at the end of the day, with all of that knowledge, my goal is make it up as I go. Putting that stuff to use obviously, not necessarily following a formula or someone else's plan, but making my own plan, my own formulas from my insights, my experience and my knowledge of my audience so that I can make what I know work for them.

I love that. That's very profound and very inspiring. It's a great thing to remember for all of us as we continue on our adventures as entrepreneurs. Thank you so much for joining me and sharing your amazing story with us. It's so inspiring. It just goes to show what's possible, especially for anyone out there at the moment in a job and everything is going wrong and thinking "I need to turn my life around." Your story is really inspiring. Thank you so much. I appreciate it.

Thank you.

I hope you all loved it as much as I have and are feeling inspired and fired up right now. On a very exciting note, if you would like to be in with a chance of winning a spot in one of Tara's upcoming retreats —get this, this is incredible— this is worth \$3400. This is amazing! All you need to do is head over to the blog,

leave a comment and share your biggest take-away from this episode with us. This is so exciting! I've leave a link in the show notes as well so you can read all about it. Definitely head over to Tara's website. The link, again, is all in the show notes so definitely go and check it out. I will see you next week for another episode of She Means Business.