

CREATING YOUR ENTREPRENEURIAL ADVENTURE WITH MICHELLE WARNER

Welcome back! I am so excited right now because we are joined by the amazing Michelle Warner. She is an online business growth strategist for entrepreneurs who are ready to experience the freedom made possible by sales funnels, which is very exciting. In this episode, she takes us behind the scene and shares her amazing and inspiring story with us. She talks of how she was CEO of a 7-figure plus tech startup and her journey into the business she is running now. We talk all about the importance of connections, the importance of having an impact and serving our audience, and the importance of personal development. Honestly, there is so much goodness in this episode so I really hope you enjoy it.

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

Oh my gosh, thank you so much for having me, Carrie. I'm thrilled to be here.

I'm so excited to chat with you and talk all about your business because you've helped me in the past on my business. You've seen behind the scenes of my mess.

I have. Through all the mess, you've done amazing things.

I'm not saying yours is going to be a mess. It probably isn't a mess like mine. I'm really excited to hear all about how you created your business and talk about your entrepreneurial journey. This isn't going to be like the traditional interview. In this episode, we are going to pretend that there is a movie coming out and the movie is called She Means Business starring Michelle Warner. This movie is all about your entrepreneurial journey and

how you turned your dreams into reality. First of all, we're going to set the scene for everyone so everyone knows the vibe of the movie, the emotion of it. If you have to pick a vibe for your entrepreneurial movie, what would it be?

That's a great question. I'm excited to go down this journey with you and set up my own movie. If I have to pick a vibe, I think it would be destiny, finally figuring where I was supposed to be all along.

Ooh, I like that.

Can destiny be a vibe? We're going to make it one.

Yes, I'm liking the sound of this movie already. OK, the movie begins. The first scene starts to play. This is you right back at the beginning of your entrepreneurial journey. This is going to be interesting because I feel like you have had an adventure in your business life. When I was reading your website, your personal life has been an adventure, too, and going off into the backcountry, which is pretty cool. Anyway, I digress. Going back to the business movie, this is the first scene. It's the beginning of your entrepreneurial journey. What is the story?

It's funny you used the word adventure because adventure is very tied to this story. It starts in 2008 or 2009—I can't remember which year now—and I had been working in digital marketing for forever. I was working full-time and getting my MBA full-time. I always assumed that when I finish my MBA, I would go off into another corporate job management consulting. I actually had a job lined up in Europe. I live in Colorado and I had a job lined up where I was going to pick between the Barcelona and Rome offices. It was going to be this grand adventure for me when I finish my MBA. However, one day, we were sitting in and finalising the recruiting process and it was literally the day the banks crashed and the recession started. I remember so distinctly looking at some of my classmates and we all knew right away that the world when we graduate was not going

to look like we thought it was going to look like when we graduate. So, my adventure was on hold. Ultimately, my adventure was taken away. I got a call one day and they decided, “You know what? You can’t start in Barcelona or Rome. We can’t get you a work permit anymore. You’re going to have to start in our Detroit office.” Detroit was not on my list of places that I had been planning on going on my adventure. I recalibrated everything. I picked up my life from Chicago where I’d lived all my life, moved to Colorado for the adventure’s sake. Also, because I had an interim time when all this was going on with the recession and figuring out what my new reality is going to look like, I had really done a gut check on my life. I realised that I was just checking a bunch of things that I thought I was supposed to do. What I was really interested in is making a difference in the world. I had gotten involved with a social venture while in school building a health clinic in Tanzania. My entrepreneurial juices were flowing. I actually found a foundation out here in Colorado that had a really interesting asset around internet connectivity. They needed somebody to create a business out of it so they hired me. I was a tech startup CEO for hire, I guess, which is not a position most people find themselves in. I was hired to create a business out of this asset that this foundation held. I did that for the next 5 years. When I left, it’s an 8-figure business and they’re still growing and doing tremendously well. I was there for 5 years creating the thing from scratch. When you say adventure, it definitely was an adventure because it’s not what I was expecting, but as most adventures do, it landed me in exactly the place I was supposed to land.

I love that. Words of wisdom right there. So obviously, you left that organisation. What happened next?

I left that organisation because I was a CEO for hire and I wanted to create my own. I left about 3 years ago to create my own business. I wanted to own my own thing. The organisation —it was called Mobile Citizen— that I started and we worked on internet connectivity. My customers were people who had internet for the very first time. As I was meeting them and talking to them, I was meeting all of these single mothers, women

who were in their homes creating businesses that they had never had the ability to create because they had my product; they had internet for the first time. That just set off a spark plug in me. Wait a minute? What is this industry that all these women were tapping into? What is this opportunity in this market? I took a look at it and I was so intrigued. I ultimately ended up leaving that business to create my own to support all of these women that I was seeing create their dreams online. I was just so intrigued by the potential.

At that point when you were at the beginning of starting this business of your own, how did you feel? What kind of thoughts did you have running through your head? Did you have any doubts? What was going on internally?

Oh absolutely I had doubts. I think that was one of the most interesting things to me about this journey. Before I even had a startup, I ran divisions in companies. I was very used to growing businesses and growing business units. I had grown a business to 8 figures and then all of a sudden, this thing was under my own name and I freaked out. I realised it's such a different thing to grow a business in your own name — at least, it was for me. It launched a whole personal development trajectory for me as well. I realised I had to deal with my so many of my own doubts. I knew in my core that I knew that I knew that I knew that I had so much value to provide and I know growing businesses like the back of my hand. Being able to share that in a different way really threw me for a loop that I was not expecting because my analytical brain just thought I could strategise my way out of everything. That was not the case.

It's good that you said personal development. That's come up in every single interview that I've done so far. Personal development has been absolutely key it seems in getting people through their entire journey as an entrepreneur. It's not just at the beginning when you feel like a crazy person and you have all these doubts. Throughout, it's cyclical. You have a

new goal and you get that goal. You get another goal and that pushes you outside your comfort zone again. It's interesting to hear when you say that. What personal development things were you doing that helped you to get through those times?

I really started learning personal development. It was nothing I had ever looked at. I started with the very basics: meditating, just being in a quiet space, and understanding what I was thinking and feeling. I am so brain-driven, analytical-driven, and data-driven that just sitting with the thoughts I was having was brand new to me. That's expanded over the years. I've sought out mindset coaches, productivity coaches, performance coaches and all those different things to help coach me through that process. I realise it's an ongoing process. I loved what you said that everybody struggles with this or is challenged by this continually because every income leap that you make, every new goal you're going for not only requires a new strategy, but it also requires a new leap in your mindset and a new leap in personal development. That is such a tough pill for me to swallow. Again, I've always been the girl who just hustles and muscles my way through a strategy. It just didn't work in this case and couldn't work.

What were you doing at the beginning to get the business off the ground with your strategies?

You know what? Pretty boring strategies because I was just making connections and making friendships.

That's not boring.

I teach sales funnels and all these fancy things. At the end of the day, to get your business going, I tell my clients all the time who want me to build all these big, complex things, "Do you have relationships? Do you have connections?" because at the heart of business is still connections. Even if you're building online, I think it's easy to think that you can just take your personality out of it, take the relationships out of it and it's not this personal connection, but all business is personal connection. That is what I've always

focused on even as I help other people scale and build the complex things that you can build once you have your core relationships in place. I'm always focused on connecting and networking.

So you're building these relationships, which I assume built so much momentum for you. I know it did for me starting FEA. Networking really got the ball rolling and made me think "Wow, this is actually going somewhere." Even though it was at a snail's pace, it felt like it was going so fast. What else were you doing at the beginning that really helped you get things off the ground?

I was doing a lot of market research, listening and looking at the market, just seeing where I can make the biggest impact. I knew that I wanted to help people who were chasing crazy dreams but maybe didn't have the business background that I had. Because they're putting themselves on the line, I have so much respect for that and I always want their businesses to work. I have this huge, broad spectrum of business knowledge. Where can I have the most impact? Where can I niche in and pick one thing that I know about? I've been in digital marketing for 15 years. I've built an 8-figure business. I could do all these different things. Where can I have the biggest impact? That's what I was really looking for in trying to figure out where I could help the most.

I really love all of that. Having those connections and having that impact is amazing, especially at the beginning.

Yeah, that's what it's all about, right? That's when you know you can build and scale once you figure out those basics.

Definitely. OK, so you were doing that stuff and things were moving. Were there any other key things that happened at that stage or as you began to develop the business that were really key moments we can put in this movie?

I think for everybody, it's the first money that comes in. I was working on retainer at the time so it's the first retainer that came in from people who gave you their trust. I was helping people scale their businesses. The first people who came to me and said, "Yes, I'm at an income plateau and I want you to walk me through this," those were the pivotal moments for me. I still have the email or however it was communicated, the same way you see business first \$10 bill that they earned framed on their wall. I like to remember that. It brings me back to the core of, again, serving with the impact that I had. Those are the key moments that I remember — the first time something sold that I knew could have an impact.

Oh, I love that. Obviously with most businesses, they aren't always plain sailing. Have you had any drama along the way or any twists and turns that you didn't expect to deal with and that kind of thing?

There are always twists and turns, right? It's just how dramatic they are. At the beginning for me, there were more twists and turns than I thought there might be. I left my startup really burned out. I thought maybe I needed a week or two off to recover from that, have all my energy back and be ready to go. It took me a year-and-a-half to recover from that burnout. I had so many plans. It was a very delicate balance of giving myself the time that I needed versus giving myself the permission to go for it. This is part of my development journey actually. I have realised that I operate only on the extreme ends of the spectrum. I'm not a person who can work 9-to-5 with a perfectly colour-blocked calendar. I'm either on and working 24/7 or however long, or I'm doing nothing. I didn't realise that about myself so I always operated on the extreme end of the spectrum of going, going, going. Learning that, I can appreciate that about myself and not put myself into a 9-to-5 box, but maybe only go on a crazy sprint for 2-3 weeks and then take time off. That was a really interesting balancing act for me to understand about myself and then give myself permission to do. Everybody's productivity hack in the world you get inundated with, and you think that you're wrong if they don't work for you. That's been an ongoing lesson for me for sure.

I love that. I'm exactly like you. Even though I would love to be one of those people that can work a few hours here or a few days a week, I am all or nothing. I am either on it or I am hibernating. I remember one time, I just finished a big launch. At the end, instead of being like "Woohoo, this was amazing! I'm on a high," I was like "Ugh, I need to hibernate." It's been this massive stress and chaos with the launch and then it was into hibernation for awhile. I remember speaking to a friend and she was telling me that she was exactly like me. Oh good, I'm glad it's not just me that's like this. I noticed since then that my years are like that. In fact, I already see this year in phases of "on it" and phases of hibernating and taking some downtime. Last year, I took so much downtime that halfway through, I was like "Seriously, I need to get back into this work thing."

Yeah, there's a point where you start to annoy yourself.

Yeah. I'm not quite as good as you. It would be nice to do a few weeks on and then have a week off or something. I don't know if that's how you do it. I'm not sure I can make that work. I think I'm more like I'll go for months and have a month or two really chilled out and not really doing much.

I'm not going to lie. I love that you say that. I love that you're recognising that about yourself because I have only fully recognised this within the last 6 months and I am still playing with it. I would encourage that you play with it and see how much of a difference it makes for you. You might find that you can start paring down the times you're on. When you fully own the fact that you're going to be off, oh my gosh, I can't even tell how much of a difference it makes. You get so much more done and you don't run into the potential burnout. You do not want to be me laying on the couch watching Netflix for a year-and-a-half thinking about what you should be doing.

Yeah, true. OK, this is the best part of the movie now where you have created the life that you love. You built your business, you've created the success. What is life like for you now?

Life is pretty great right now. I just described how I set up my life. When I'm in creation mode, I really think of my business as art and creation, which some people don't really understand because I'm so numbers-driven, but I see it as an incredibly creative pursuit. So I'm either diving into that and really in the flow of it and it's very exciting for me to be creating that. When I'm off, I do live in Colorado in the mountains. I'm a huge adventurer I go into the backcountry with my backpack and couple of girlfriends for a week at a time and disconnect as much as I'm able to. I like to go surfing. I like to be outdoors and now, I have the freedom to do that. Again, you have vacation time when you're working a job, but you actually don't have the freedom to set it up exactly how you want to. I've just taken to creating the days, my weeks, my months for the seasons and for what I want to be doing for the rest of my life. It's an amazing to realise that you can create that.

I love that. This is why I love doing this podcast and hearing stories. It's so inspiring to realise that we all have the choice as to how we create our lives. We can get so intentional about it and literally create the life of our dreams, or we can just not really think about it and have this life that is it is what it is but not really how we would have chosen it to be. I think so much is possible when we decide that that's what we want for ourselves.

I could not agree more.

To close out your movie, let's end on a profound statement. What is the biggest lesson you've learned throughout your entrepreneurial journey?

That you can have whatever you want and you're responsible for creating it in a good way. You're creating your own reality.

That's such a good end to the movie. It's very uplifting. It's all about destiny as well, like you said.

Yeah, I really think so.

It's a great movie. If you'd go and see this movie, leave in the comments and say, "Yes, I'd see this movie." I would see this movie.

Thank you.

I also want to talk to you aside from your story, obviously, you help people scale their businesses, to grown and create funnels. You must see so many challenges and frustrations that entrepreneurs have when they're trying to scale and they're trying to break through. What are some of the key things that you discovered about the way entrepreneurs feel and what would your top piece of advice be to those people in terms of how they can move forward?

I love this question because I do see so much. I feel like a huge part of my mission is to share it and to make the pain less. It's always going to be a little painful as you scale because there's going to be doubt, but I just love the idea of making it less. A couple of things that I see: number one, I tell everyone there is a big buzz to learn to listen to your body and your body is talking to you. I tell business owners your business is talking to you as well and you want to listen to what your business is saying. You can strong-arm your business to a certain income level with all the free resources that are out there. Then, there comes a point where you don't fit in the black-and-white anymore. To reach your goals, you have to start reading the gray areas. They absolutely stop working and to accept that fact and to start listening to what is right in your business. One way that that really translates into funnels is understanding what has helped you grow so far. What I mean by that is a lot of people, again, think that it's their course topic that really helped them grow or it is a specific offering. It's really not because there are a million out there teaching list-building so no offense, but if you have a list-building course, that's not what's

special about your company. It's whatever people connected to you with. Is it your personality? Is it a weird way that you say things? Is it the fun way you present your videos? What is your "secret scaling sauce"? Recognising what that is and building off of that attribute, rather than building off of a course because the course is not the sustainable thing about your business. It is whatever personality trait or whatever is unique about your business that actually is unique to you and figuring out how to build and grow that piece of your business is what allows people to scale like crazy as opposed to saying, "I have a successful list-building course so I'm going to double-down on list-building." That works to some extent, but it's not actually the heart of what is giving you your success.

So true. It's so important for us to be our authentic selves because that's what really determines the people that we resonate with and the people that join our tribe, so to speak.

For sure.

It's so important. Michelle, thank you so much for coming to share your amazing story with us and your words of wisdom. It's been so interesting and entertaining to hear. I feel like your movie is full of connections, impact, being of service — I love it.

I love hearing that summary of it. Thank you for helping me discover it. I'm so happy to have been here.

Thank you. Also, I hope you all listening have enjoyed this episode. Very excitingly, if you would like to be in with a chance of winning Michelle's 21-Day Funnel-Building Challenge, all you need to do is leave a comment over on the blog and let us know what your biggest take-away from this session has been. I will see you next week for another episode of She Means Business.