

CREATING APPS WITHOUT CODE WITH TARA REED

Hello! How are you doing on this lovely day? The sun is actually shining for me for once. It's really rare in England, but that actually happened. Anyway, I am so excited that you're here right now because our guest today shared some unbelievably amazing insights. I have the lovely Tara Reed. She's the founder of Apps Without Code and she basically teaches people how to build apps even if they have no clue when it comes to technology. That is me and I'm in the middle of building an app or depending when you're listening to this podcast recording, that is. So, if you are interested, too, in doing that, then you're going to love the beginning of this session because she basically gives us a lesson in creating apps, which was amazing. Then, we get into the nitty-gritty of being an entrepreneur. This part of the interview inspired me so much. I love having just honest, real conversations with entrepreneurs who open up about the truth of building a business. It is not a walk in the park, even though so many people make it seem that way with the posts they have on Instagram. It leaves us thinking, "What is wrong with me?" The thing is it's a rollercoaster for all of us no matter how successful we are. Like Tara shared in this episode, you have to enjoy the process; you really do. I'm so excited for you to listen to this. Honestly, she shares so much amazing stuff. Get ready to be inspired. Enjoy this episode.

Tara, welcome to the podcast. It is so good to have you here.

Thank you so much for having me.

I am so excited about this. We are TEDx buddies.

Yes.

I just watched your TEDx. It was from 2015?

Yes, it was.

I just loved it so much. It really blew my mind with you talking about how you can build apps without knowing any code. It was eye-opening when I was listening to it. Obviously, that's your passion and that's what you teach. We're going to be talking a lot about that, which I'm really excited about, considering I'm working on that myself. Tell me about your TEDx.

How many people were there?

Oh goodness, I don't know how many people were there. It was a pretty big talk. It was a pretty big theatre.

It looked it.

Yeah. Pretty much what I talked about was my journey as an entrepreneur being a non-technical person, but someone who has an idea for a tech-enabled business. Most of our businesses these days have some component of technology. It's kind of hard to avoid these days. I knew that I wanted to build a startup that was going to leverage an app and I had no idea how to do it. Prior to launching my own company, I had worked in tech before. I had worked at Google, FourSquare and Microsoft but as a marketer. I had worked really closely with engineers. I knew how they worked but I didn't know how to write any of that code that was in a totally different language that I spoke. What I had to do, largely out of necessity, was learn how to build my platform, test and validate my startup without writing any code. There was an opportunity for me to call up some of my developer buddies and have them build something for me. But the ability to make edits and changes for yourself for your own platform when you're early on, validating everything in your business for me was really important. So, it made a lot of sense for me to figure out how to build this thing on my own. That's largely the story I shared in TEDx.

It is really cool. I'll definitely leave a link in the share notes for everyone to check out. Will you just share the title of it just in case people want to go and Google it?

Yeah, it's called How to Build an App Without Code.

I just feel like everyone's going to listen to that now. We live in this technology-heavy world. When you're building a business, we need a website. Apps are becoming more popular and all that kind of stuff. What's amazing is the fact that there are so many tools and resources now that are enabling non-techie people to actually be able to do it, which I love. I would never have been able to get to where I am now if it wasn't for the platforms that made it easy.

Right. A lot has changed since I did that talk a few years ago because this space around tools being built for non-technical folks like you and I and probably most of the folks who are listening are changing so fast. We saw several years ago Squarespace and WordPress pop up as tools to allow us to build websites without code. That same thing is really happening for apps. What these tools look like are on the front-end, you drag, drop, point and click and make the app look the way you want it to look using tools we all can very easily learn to use. And then on the back-end, you just logically tell the app what to do. If this, then that. If user clicks the button, then log them in. It's pretty simple logic statements, but you use it to set up all the functioning for your application in English instead of having to learn a whole new language.

I love it. That's all we need. It's really cool because it reduces the barriers to entry for us to be able to turn our ideas into reality and get concepts and ideas out there. It's really revolutionising the way we do things and build stuff. So, how on earth did you get into all this?

That's a really good question. I mentioned I worked in tech before. I launched a company called Collecto, which was an online art startup, and I started to casually blog. Anyone who's working on a blog, you cannot underestimate the value of having your blog and just candidly sharing the things that you're going through as an entrepreneur. I was just candidly sharing my journey of trying to figure out how to build this thing in a way that helps people find cool and affordable art for their homes. I was just blogging about my experience. After a while, I had so much interest and people messaging me back and saying, "Hey, I'm non-technical, too, but I would love to build an app. I just have no clue how to do it." It's one of those things, whether you're building a tech business or not, as entrepreneurs, you have to know. In my scenario, I was at a lemonade stand and selling lemonade, but what people really wanted was the red cup that I was selling the lemonade in, right? So, I had to learn that there was a ton of interest in just the cup. I started off by sending out an email to 100 subscribers in my blog. I said, "Hey, I'm thinking about doing this thing. I don't even know if it's going to work, but I'm going to take 5 people and teach them how to build their own app without writing any code, without having any prior technical experience." I sent out that email and I immediately spilled up all the secrets of the program within a day or two. Oh, this will be fun. I'll help 5 people. This was a side project. I always talk to folks, too, about side projects. I always have something going on on the side. I think it's important. This launch is my side project and I took 5 people and helped them build their apps. by the time I had helped those 5 folks, they had launched their apps. They had started their own companies. I had a waitlist of other people who also wanted to do the same thing. So, I stumbled into this business. This is my second startup and it's called Apps Without Code. I teach people how to build their own fully-functioning apps, web apps and mobile apps without writing any code.

That is really cool. I love the entrepreneurial journey. You just never know where the path is going to lead. So many people start out wanting to know everything. We get told about we need to have this big vision, bloody-blah. Yes, you need some vision and you need clarity on the steps you need to

take next. But you just can't foresee what's going to happen, or what's going to crop up, or what opportunities you're going to stumble across, or what your audience is going to tell you they need that you never even realised before until you got started. I love that. Your story is a brilliant example of how things can just change and evolve. I love it.

Yeah. I think if you constantly have your ear to your audience, then you're able to make those pivots at the right time. I don't know if everyone has read *The Lean Startup*, a really good book about how to stay on your toes. You can have a plan, you can have everything fleshed out. But you also what to stay on your toes around what the pivots are that you might want to make. For me particularly, being able to create my own technology platform, have it be something that I can actually go in and make edits to myself allowed me to more quickly make those sorts of pivots. The traditional model is if you want to build an app, it costs you a minimum of \$10,000 to hire a developer to do that kind of work for you. You have to communicate with someone who speaks a slightly different language than you. That's fine when you got your business really established and you know exactly what it is that you need to build and you know exactly what your audience wants. For a lot of folks starting up, they don't know exactly what their audience needs. They have an idea, but it hasn't been validated yet. It's always nice to be able to pivot when you need to, like you said.

Do you find that people who are creating apps, do most of them already have established businesses or do you find a lot of people who have an idea and want to create an app, too?

It's totally a mix. I run a boot camp program where I help people do this. It's a mix of people who know their audience really well and have an established business, but they want to add some technology component to it, like yourself. Then, there are a lot of people who are entering a market that they don't necessarily know a lot about, right? The guys who built Uber didn't necessarily know at the time the taxi services and they're entering a new space. I do get a good amount of that, too. I'd say the third group

of students that I work with are people who had been in an industry for a long time. For example, one of the graduates of my program worked in manufacturing operations in Chicago. He helps manufacturing plants become more efficient. He knows that industry really well. A lot of the things they're still doing on those assembly lines is they're still reporting everything on pen and paper. He goes, "I see this huge opportunity to create technology tools for them because they're still managing the process on pen, paper and a clipboard." He's done really well and is selling huge licenses to folks, and has Coca-Cola using his app and all sorts of great things. Those are the three different kinds of folks that I see.

Do you find people able to really get their app to take off?

Yes, if they have the right kind of business model. One of the things I get so blown away by is I talk to a lot of people who want to build an app but don't really know how business models for apps work. When we open up our phone and we go to the app store, we see all these free apps so we think apps are all supposed to be free. Usually, that's not a great way to go unless you have an established business already where this is going to be a lead gen into your existing business. Even then, I usually encourage people not to build free apps and not to build apps where it's going to be free upfront and then you cross your fingers and hope that you can do advertising one day. For most folks, that's not the way that it works. It requires you to be pretty broke for the first few years because you've got to establish a large enough audience base in order for an advertiser to want to advertise with you and that takes time, right?

If people are open to the "go niche, sell high" kinds of business models, those are the best these days. For apps, that can look like membership groups. It can look like any niche market where you're charging people for something that's high value. It can look like licensing your app to other businesses. Usually, what I do when people start on my program is we start to get creative about what the business model will be. We don't change the app idea necessarily, but we think about how can we make this something

premium that people will be willing to pay for. That way, you start making money from the beginning. Folks who are willing to do that and really think about business models outside of the small sample size of apps we see on our phones that are all free, people are able to do really well.

The reality about most of the apps that we see for free and a lot of the startups that people look up to is that many of those startups are still not profitable. Companies like Amazon, companies like Uber are still really struggling to be profitable. A lot of times, I see people come in and they want to build an app and they say, "I want to build something with the business model of Uber or business model of Airbnb." One of the first things that we do in the program is take a look at actually the numbers of those companies. They don't look as cool or sexy as we think they do. Most folks that I work with, there's a split. Some people want to build large VC-backed companies and get fundraising for their companies and all sorts of things. We talk about how to do that. I've done that for some of my companies. Then, a lot of people want to create a more flexible lifestyle for themselves. We also talk about how to build that, where you want to go first and then back into the business model.

Yeah. It is cool. I know obviously mobile traffic and mobile users are just growing so much. I see it in my Google Analytics the difference between people who come to the website on a computer as opposed to coming on a mobile. Mobile far outdoes the traffic coming to the website. It's crazy and obviously, it's going to get more and more. We're on our phones all the time. We go everywhere with this.

Yeah, absolutely. One of the things that's interesting, too, is that people don't know there are different kinds of apps. Most of the time, we think about apps that are in the app store and that the only kind of app that we think of, but there are really 3 kinds of apps. Many of them can allow you to get the mobile experience that you want without having to build and do all of the work of doing the app within the app store. There are native

mobile apps and those are the ones we think of in the app store. There are also web apps. I'll go through all three.

First, there are web apps. When you open up your computer and you go to Facebook.com, that is a web app. You can still log in. It saves information about you, but it's on your computer, it's on the web. That's Facebook.com on your computer. Then, if you go to your phone and you download the Facebook app, that's a native mobile app. It is native to Android or iOs. It still allows you to log in. It has the same information saved as when you are in your computer, but it's a native app. That's usually the one we think of most. The third option is a mobile web app. If you open up your phone and you go to a browser —Chrome, Safari, Firefox and one of those sites— and you type in Facebook.com, it's different from what you saw on the website. It's configured a little bit differently; it's made for your phone. It is slightly different from the one that you downloaded on your phone. It's a mobile web app.

Oftentimes, I encourage people if they're starting off to build a web app and a mobile web app. Take their web and make it look nice on the phone first and then launch with the one that comes in the Android or iOS store. It's usually easier to launch that way. You don't have to do all the competition with other apps in the app store. Think about how many times you downloaded an app and never used it. It's actually harder to compete with a native mobile app. So, I usually encourage folks to build a web app and a mobile web app which people can use just the same on their phone first and then graduate into a native app.

Yeah, that's smart. I love this. It's like a lesson in building apps and cool stuff, which is not supposed to be the point of the podcast. Nevertheless, I'm very interested and intrigued by everything.

Yeah, we're getting nerdy.

Talking behind the scenes of all this wonderful stuff that you do, how has the entrepreneurial journey been — the good, the bad, the ugly? How has it felt to you over the years of developing this stuff?

For me, I had to really learn how to appreciate the journey because being an entrepreneur, as we all know, there are so many high highs and low lows; it's a rollercoaster. Really loving the process is just key to getting through those low points where you're like "Oh my gosh, I totally want to quit today." Getting through those days is for me, at least, all about loving the process. I would say realistically there have been many times across both of the companies I have run where there were times where I'm not really sure how we're going to get through the next quarter. I had those moments. All right, let's take a look at money. Is this where we need to be? Those are the panic points that happen in all businesses. At some point, there is a panic point: I don't know if we're on track right now or not. Those panic points usually, at least for me, spark so much more creativity. I take a step back and say, "OK, here's what's not working, but here are some ideas we can bring to the table."

That kind of approach is pretty unique to online businesses. There are a lot of older school business where that's not the approach. There's enough lean-ness where you can take a step back and say, "What can we tweak here? How can we twist the Rubik's cube in a different kind of way to get us to think about some new offerings, some new ways to serve our audiences, etc.?" To me, the high points I don't even need to talk about those. We all felt them. We're really excited about the business. Things are working. Money is coming in. We're helping people. It's the low points that are the most challenging. Usually, what spark the most creativity is the "We're not on track. I don't know how we can make it" kind of moments of being an entrepreneur.

I love your approach to it, though, because the fact that you allow that spark of creativity and inspiration. I think for some people, those lows cause such a high level of stress, anxiety, panic, worry and doubts. Some

people just completely crumble and give up. I have known people who have been doing great things and then they have a wobble and they just stop. They stop for a little bit, then it becomes a little bit longer. They kind of put it to the back of their mind. Eventually, a few months later, they realise they've given up on it. It's really sad. Where would you be today? Everyone goes through that crap. There is no escape from it. If you hear an entrepreneur saying, "Oh, it's been amazing, and I've just flown through this whole experience," they are talking absolute crap. Let's be real. I always talk about this and it's nice hearing it from other people, too, because there are so many people out there who do freak out. Like you said, you have to enjoy the process. It's one of the things I wrote in my book *She Means Business* that you have to honour the process of being an entrepreneur. There are no two ways about it. You have to get your head around how you're going to do that. Like you said, when stuff gets tough, you have to take a step back and look at how you're approaching things, you need to tweak things, and you need to get re-inspired. I really love that approach. It also goes to show why you have created what you created and why you are where you're at because of your approach and your response to the things you experience as an entrepreneur.

Yeah. There are really two tools I use to get through those tough points. One, I would say is having a team in place. I know for a lot of people that are just starting out, that feels so far-fetched that you would have a team; maybe it's just you right now. The team operation makes a big difference. Even for me, I am a solo founder; I don't have a co-founder, but I do have a team where we've got enough of the business automated and enough of the business operations in place such that I can take some time when we're on that low and I know that at that point, that's where creativity needs to be pushed in order for us to get to the next step. I can take away from the side of the business for a second and start brainstorming some new solutions and know that the existing business is going to keep running and keep operating. That makes a huge difference. When you're

constantly in the weeds and you can't come up for air, you take those moments of panic, which are going to happen, you take them, and you let them take you down as opposed to letting yourself step aside and think about "All right, clearly I missed something. How can I pivot this or find a way to solve this problem?"

I love what you just said. I did a podcast interview with Jen DePasso and she said literally the exact same phrase "You've got to get yourself out of the weeds." It's true, though.

Yeah, it really is. For me, I love to be in the weeds. It's one of my favourite things -- to be in the weeds. I have to pull myself back as a CEO. My team is really good at that. They've got it covered. The strategy part is the most important part. I was just looking at this. I forget what it's called. It's like a 4-way quadrant graph of how to think about the kinds of tasks you should be doing. Do you know what I'm talking about?

I feel like I have seen that before, yeah.

OK. What's on there are things that you should be working on: things that are important and urgent, things that are important and not urgent, things that are not important and not urgent, etc. One of the things I'm really working on is making sure that I'm focused on the things that are important but not urgent. In my first 2 years of business, I was working exclusively on the things that were important and urgent, which meant that I was always running around, something that's really critical and had to be done now. Now, I try to make sure that my team is working on —it's counterintuitive— the stuff that's important and urgent, and I'm working on the stuff that's important and not urgent because that's the forward-thinking strategy part.

It is a smart move. Otherwise, you just end up feeling overly stressed because you're constantly in that panic state of "get it done, get it done, get it done" you can't think straight eventually. You go back in the weeds. If you're in that important/urgent phase, you're in the weeds.

It's impossible to get out of the weeds when you're on the important/urgent phase. That's one of the tools that I use for myself. I'm constantly working on it. I do not have it perfect either.

I don't think anyone of us do. No one does. No one has it figured out. We live in this world where, especially with social media, we see all these fancy little pictures online. You see people who got this perfect desk and perfect life and they go on these perfect trips and all this stuff — it's not true. We just don't often get to see into people's backends, which is why I love doing this podcast because I'm talking to people. I love the fact that in this conversation we've had, we've started with you talking so much about your business, everything that you do and how amazing it is. It's like a mini-lesson in apps. Now, hearing behind the scenes, I feel like everyone is going to fall in love with you so much more and know that you are real. I think it gives so much inspiration to everyone about what is possible. You just have to enjoy the journey, like you said.

Yeah, absolutely.

What would you say is the top lesson that you've learned along your journey?

Oh wow. I have learned, first and foremost, how to launch quickly and get things out there and validate them. I see that a lot of people, myself included, have the tendency to want to work on an idea, just keep it to themselves, and work on it until it's perfect. Just like you said, you never get to a point where you feel like it's perfect. A friend of mine said "Hell is building fancy stuff that nobody uses." I think that is so good because a lot of us just want to constantly tweak. For me, that's one of the biggest things I've learned. I think it's been critical to my success. When you find successful people, it's not that they are magical in any kind of way. They just have done enough iterations such that some of those were failures and some of them worked out, but the statistical number of tries

that they have had are just larger than the number of tries that you have had. For me, I just learned to keep putting things out there to launch stuff, websites, apps, whatever, even when I think they're ugly and then constantly start tweaking them as they're live. I think those have been things that have been really critical to my success.

I love it. That's such a good lesson for every single one of us. Tara, thank you so much for coming and sharing your story and also, for giving us so many tips on apps. I'm definitely going to go and check out everything you've got for the app I'm creating. I'm sure everyone else is going to do the same. What is the website? It's blogs.appswithoutcode.com, isn't it?

People can just go directly to appswithoutcode.com.

Perfect. I will leave all the links in the show notes. So, everyone, go and check that out. Thank you so much. You're such an inspiration. I'm so glad that you came on the show and shared your story and also your amazing app tips for everyone that's not very good with technology.

Thanks so much for having me.

I hope you have loved listening to this, too. It's been so much fun, hasn't it? Thank you so much for hanging out with us and I will see you next week for another dose of inspiration with She Means Business.