

## LETTING SUCCESS HAPPEN ORGANICALLY WITH JENNY FITZ

***Hello and welcome back to another episode of She Means Business! In this episode, I was joined by the lovely Jenny Fitz. She the founder of FEM International. In the episode, we talk all about the highs and lows of being an entrepreneur and how to create momentum in your business early on and get connected with experts and influencers. So much good is in this episode. I really hope you enjoy it.***

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

Thank you. Thank you for having me.

***I am excited. This is the first time we've connected. I'm excited to hear the behind the scenes of your story. You were telling me a little bit just before about how it was 12 years ago that you started your business.***

It was. It was 12 years ago. I can't believe it. I can't believe it's been that long.

***I'm excited to hear all about your transition from doing photography into FEM International. It's so exciting. In this podcast, we are pretending that there's a movie coming out called She Means Business. This version of the movie is obviously starring Jenny Fitz — that's you. This movie is all about your entrepreneurial journey and how you navigated your way through the entrepreneurial world and created success. Firstly, to set the scene for everyone listening, what vibe does this movie have?***

Well, there are twists and turns. You don't know what's around the corner, a little bit of suspense, maybe some excitement and hopefully, a happy ending. It's what we're aiming for. Being an entrepreneur definitely has its ups and downs. Drama, maybe.

***So, the first scene of the movie begins. This is you right back at the beginning of when you set off on your entrepreneurial journey. What is going on? What happened? Why did you embark on this journey?***

Well, I was an elementary teacher for about 7 years. I taught in London in the UK, which I loved. It was amazing. I had some great opportunities, but when I moved home, there really weren't a lot of positions available. My husband had actually said to me that there was no way that I can make photography a full-time business. That set the wheels spinning and I said I was going to prove him wrong. I was pregnant with my first son and I knew I was going on mat leave from teaching. This will be the perfect opportunity. I'm getting a mat leave. I'm getting coverage. Why not try something that I really love and I'm really passionate about? I really love photography. It's amazing. I learned a lot from my dad. I was self-taught. I didn't go to school for it. You know what? I'm going to take a chance and try it. If it works, great. I'm going to give myself 6 months. I'm going to do it out of the basement of our house. Friends were having babies and I was having a baby. I thought "OK, let's do this." I was pretty much the only one in the area that was doing it. I had an opportunity to open a physical brick-and-mortar location and it just bloomed from there. I should backtrack a little bit. I wasn't actually pregnant with my first one when I first started the business, but when I opened the brick-and-mortar store, that was when I was pregnant with him. That was when said I was going to invest money and take it to the next level and see what's going to happen.

***Were you doing photography on the side?***

Sorry. That was good and it was busy. I couldn't decide if I wanted to be a teacher full-time or do photography full-time. I really didn't think that there would be a business in photography full-time. I really didn't think that would happen. But when the opportunity

came up when I was on mat leave, that's when all that happened. We did about just over six-figures in the first 14 months.

***Oh wow. So, you proved your husband wrong.***

I totally proved him wrong. Yeah, I gave up teaching and I pursued that business full-time.

***How did you get that off the ground? How did you create such a big success of it early on?***

I was the only one in the community doing it, really. When I opened the brick-and-mortar store in 2009, Facebook was there but not a lot of people in the area where I was living at the time had websites or were on social media. It wasn't really quite that big yet in our area. It was a lot of word-of-mouth. I had already been doing it part-time for friends and family in the area. One of the things we were doing early on was an Easter Egg Hunt for the community kids. That drew out so many families. With that, they would get to go on an Easter egg hunt and they would come have their photos taken with live bunnies. This is our 8<sup>th</sup> one this year in a couple of weeks. There are 300 kids that come out to these events. The first one started a snowball of other events we could do, just unique things for photography. Families really took to it. It did really well.

***That's really clever. What a small idea to think so far outside the box to create a unique experience. That's really good, especially with photography, you put yourself in a little box of what you should be doing and how to do it. It's the people who can break out of that box and think ways to delight their audience far beyond what they could ever imagine, that is so cool.***

Yeah, we have Halloween in their Halloween costumes or pictures with Santa. I was volunteering my time all the time doing community events, covering corporate events, covering trade shows. We weren't just set on doing just babies or just doing just families. It was everything. My dad had been doing weddings for years before that so I partnered

up with him and went to some weddings. And then, I was able to hire him and contract him out.

***That is so cool. When you were starting out, how were you feeling? Did you ever doubt it?***

Yeah. The only reason that I really could do the rental a brick-and-mortar store was because I had worked at a summer camp. I had \$3000 and I said that's enough for first and last month's rent. We're going to do some renovations. I got my friends in there to volunteer to do renos. We brought in our own furniture and things like that. It was really scary to give up teaching and the benefits. We have a great healthcare system. To give up everything that I would have access to as a teacher, my pension and all of that, when you become self-employed, it's really scary. You don't know what you're going to make every couple of weeks. You might make some money; you might lose a lot of money. It was a really big step for me, but I just knew I had to try it. I knew I wasn't going to be happy if I didn't take a chance.

***Was there anything in particular that helped you get through those doubts and worries?***

My family. We made good money that first year, but there were so many expenses as well. I had at one point 6 photographers that were being hired out to cover things and the expenses of the rent and the renovations and things like. We brought in revenue but I was losing money still. It wasn't making me any money. I really relied on my family a lot to help out and to take care of my son at the time when I needed help with him. You need a really good support system. You need people who actually agree with what you're doing and don't think it's an absolutely crazy idea, that they're behind you and that you know you can rely on them. Financially, that's a huge thing. I went to several different banks and was trying to get loans. It was really difficult. I ended up winning a \$25000 interest-free loan for 5 years. There was a community application that you could do and it was for this region. I ended up getting that to help later on when we needed to move

to a different location and we needed to do more renovations. But then, you have to pay that back, right? It's really scary. People that can go in there, start a business, make money right away, maintain that and actually make money is pretty incredible that they can do that.

***Yeah, it is scary. It's so important to have that support around you. One of the coolest things now is that if people don't necessarily have it in terms of their family and friends, there's so much support now online for people. There's a world of support. I love it when I speak to my entrepreneurial friends from the other side of the world. I feel like sometimes, they know more about me than my actual real friends. These are virtual friends.***

I know. It's so weird but it's amazing. That was part of the reasoning behind FEM International. We as entrepreneurs now, we really need to start looking at the younger girls and boys, too, the younger generation coming up who are really connected digitally and disconnected to meeting people or socializing and that kind of thing. We really need to work on mentoring them so that they can develop the entrepreneurial skills. We missed that whole disconnect for years. I felt I was always engaged with people around me as well as online. That's the reasoning behind that, too.

***Yeah, I'm so disconnected to that generation. I was really shocked. I remember last summer I was in New York. We went to Fire Island. I was there with a relative I actually have never met before. His son was 13 and we were talking about Facebook. He was like, "Ugh, Facebook is for old people." What? Are you kidding me? You think it's for old people. Oh my gosh, what is happening to this generation?***

I know. We have no idea.

***He made me feel really old when he said that. He was just a child.***

Yeah, that's true.

***You're getting going with your business and you have the brick-and-mortar photography business. How did the journey unfold from there?***

I got it in my head that "Oh, we're doing really well. Let's move to a bigger location." It's a very small town. A building came up available so we decided to move there and it needed a lot of renovations. That's when I got that loan for the \$25000. I invested \$40000 of my own money to do these renovations, but I was very naïve. I didn't know and I didn't educate myself enough on lease agreements. I was in a lease-to-own agreement. Instead of actually having bought the building straight out, I did a one-year agreement that I would buy the building after one year. It became a disaster. I ended up having to walk away from that entire project. It was either me closing the business completely or saving my sanity and keeping my marriage together. It was an awful, awful experience and I would never wish that upon anybody. But it was because I wasn't educated on the things that I should have really researched, and I should have asked more questions. Hindsight is 20/20.

***You were in a situation where you were in debt because you...***

Oh yeah, I was about \$100000 in debt.

***Oh wow. So, what did you do after that?***

I still had the business going. I moved again. We were there for about a year-and-a-half. The year was up after the lease agreement. What happened was when a building is appraised, it was appraised at \$20000 less than what they were asking for that building. The financiers who were typically going to basically buy the building and I was going to mortgage it from the them, they backed out because it didn't make sense to invest in a building that was not anywhere near the asking price. From there, things started to unravel. I had invited people into the building to share the space and it wasn't working out the way it should have. It became a very toxic and unhealthy environment. It was

really affecting me emotionally and financially. It just came to the point where I was either going to claim bankruptcy and close everything or basically move to a smaller location and rent again and not own. I felt like that was a turning point for me. I felt like I was living in a bubble and that I was missing out on worldwide opportunities where I could really connect with other people who were on the same level as me or who had the same ideas that I had that I wasn't getting anywhere in the community that I was in.

***This is definitely the drama part of your story.***

Yeah, it was awful. To make it even worse, we moved at the beginning of March. It was a few years ago. A few weeks later, my father-in-law was in a car accident and he passed away. That was the tipping point for me. I was like "You know what? Screw this. Being in business does not mean as much to me as I thought it once did." You know. You spend hours and hours and hours to trying to build something up and I was not getting out of it what I was putting into it. Everything was really suffering because of that. That was when I said, "That's it. I need to move. I need to move out of this town. I need to move away. really promote women, support women and not try to tear them down, not try to make their ideas seem not valued." Things sort of tipping the other way. FEM International was born out of that. I know this is where I'm supposed to be now. I know this is exactly what I should be doing. I know it's really going to be making a big difference. That's sort of the nutshell.

***It's really good that when you find something and in your heart, it feels right and it feels like the right things to do. It's nice. So, you started this last year, didn't you?***

I named it last year, yeah. I've had in my mind and in the works for a long time, but I couldn't figure out how to make it a reality. There were so many things going on that I would look at and research. I was connecting with people, but I didn't know what... Like you, you wanted it to be community-based. You want to be able to serve your followers, your members or your clients even. You really want to be able to give them everything

and I didn't know what to focus on. I couldn't decide. I didn't know what to offer people. I didn't know if I should do a product or do a service or whatever. It was last year when I was, "OK, this is it. I'm doing this." It's just been going from there.

***How did you get the clarity, though? This is the thing that a lot of people feel overwhelmed. They don't know what to focus on and they don't know what route to go down. How did you get that moment of clarity of "OK, this what I'm going to focus on"?***

You know Denise Duffield-Thomas, right? We've had our house for sale for 15 months. This was all happening at the time when I really need something to save me. I need a sign. We're not a religious family. We don't go to church or anything like that. I started to get into this whole Law of Attraction thing. It was a really stormy night one night. It had been 15 months. I was at wit's end. We were totally out of money. We were selling our house because of my debt and I felt horribly guilty about that. It was a house that my husband loved and we loved the property. It was his dream house. To me, it was just a house and I felt like we need to sell this so that I can actually function — that's what where we're at. I came across Denise. You know what? I'm going to try this whole manifesting thing. I'm just going to try it. I'm just going to see what could happen. I actually emailed her and I told her a little bit of my story. "OK, we're going to sell the house and I'm going to make \$40000." Those were the 2 things that I had said. The next day, we had 2 competing offers for our house. It was crazy. We sold our house that night. I had a friend at a tourism organisation and had told me about this job posting. I love tourism, I love photography. Maybe this will be my key to give me some money to have a steady paycheck, which I hadn't had in years and years. I applied for it. I got a job interview the same day that my 3-year lease was up on the brick-and-mortar building. I made the decision not to renew the lease. "I have a job interview and I know I'm going to get this job. I know I'm going to close the store and I know that we're moving to a new house." The day we moved, the day our house closed was the day I closed the storefront. We got \$40000 out of the sale of our house. It was insane. Oh my God, this actually happened.

OK, I need a name for my company. “Empower” is such a used word, right? It’s a wonderful word but it’s very much out there. I wanted something like that. I really want it to be a mentorship program. We were golfing one day, I just kept saying “I need a name.” I was trying to manifest a sign or something. If I do FEM, female entrepreneur and mentorship movement, that’s sounds pretty good. If I do “international”, then it’s not just in Canada. I searched domains. Everything fell into place for it. It’s pretty crazy. That’s basically what I was been doing. I just came across Denise and—

***What were the next few steps that you took? This is quite interesting, actually, because a lot of the people I talk to are 4-5 years into the business that we are talking about. This is relatively new, which is exciting for people who are in that phase. What has been working really well for you in terms of getting it off the ground? It’s fascinating the challenges you went through of trying to figure it all out. I remember doing the exact same thing myself, of being back there and not knowing. “I really just want to help everyone. How am I supposed to decide? Who should I help? Should I do this with these women?” You go around in these circles. What have been the things that you’ve doing and what’s really been working well for you?***

Well, what I’ve really been doing is just reaching out to women like yourself who have an amazing business going and who have communities that they’re offering services to. For example, Marie Forleo who’s incredible, last November, I just randomly ended up getting a...The way I got connected with She’s The First, a charity that she supports, was earlier that year. I support the WE Charity by Marc and Craig Kielburger. They’re from Canada. Anyways, I’ve been reaching out to these women or these organisations and saying, “This is what I do. I really want to support what you’re doing as well. If there’s a way that I can, I would love the opportunity.” I ended up volunteering to be a photographer. This photography business has led me to meet amazing women like Natalie McNeal, Debbie

Travis who I love, Marie Forleo — It just goes on from there. I had the opportunity to go to New York City last November to take pictures at the mentor breakfast, which She's The First had put on. This organisation provides scholarships for girls around the world. Marie Forleo was the keynote speaker at it so I got to meet her. I reached out to her team and I said, "I'd love to feature here." I'm getting responses. I'm getting Vicky Saunders from in Canada. It's just amazing. I'm just reaching out to these people or meeting them in person. It's just becoming like this networking thing. I've just been in the right place at the right time, I guess. For years, I was trying to make myself be in the right time and the right place and it wasn't working. I don't know if that makes sense. I would want to have the right experience because I would feel like that would propel me to the next level if it happens organically, that's when things really seem to take place.

It's reaching out to whoever you can. I support women of all backstories, whatever business ideas they're coming up with. Our goal is to get into grade 7-8 classrooms in a pilot project. What we would do is set them up with mentors virtually and in person, but have them really focus on key things like public speaking and digital disconnect. That means unplugging from your phones for a few minutes and learning how to be social and to connect with other people in a real-life scenario. Empowering girls, empowering women, entrepreneurship. We would be teaching the kids by doing challenges to give back to their own communities. Creating out of that, they would become mentors. They would mentor a classroom let's say in Kenya or Uruguay or in a country where they don't have the same resources or the same education. These kids could be mentors and they could be the ones that really impact these communities. They're the ones who are going to be growing up and the ones in society. It's a little scary about the way teenagers are right now with social media and the disconnect.

***It's really cool. What you said is really key about getting out there, networking and connecting with people. That's where the magic happens. For anyone who's starting out in business or is feeling in a lull, get out***

**there and network and connect. That's where the opportunities come from. That's how the path starts to unfold. It's not sitting on your backside at home, twiddling your thumbs, hoping that everything is going to come to you because that doesn't work. It's a simple thing of reaching out to people and asking a question. Most people will say yes. I remember when I started a magazine in 2012. At the time, FEA was pretty small. I remember emailing Kim Kiyosaki and asking if I could interview her. This magazine didn't even exist at this point. Oh, this is going to be ridiculous. She just replies, "Sure." I was like really?!**

It's the same with me. What? Is this real?!

**People will say yes, but a lot of people just don't ask the questions. No wonder they're not getting anywhere.**

I find, too, that a lot of the women I talk to, they feel like they're alone. When you're at home and you're trying to build your business, you don't want to tell anybody your ideas because you don't want them to steal them, but you don't know who to talk to about building your business. You may buy into these programs that you know could be really expensive and may be not beneficial to the person because they're not geared to their exact business. They feel like they're alone. I have felt like I was alone. There were many days where I'd sit and try to develop something. I would feel like how am I going to get this out there to people?

**It's definitely true. It's a bit of a lonely path. Even though we can be so connected online, it can be so lonely, which is why everyone has to get out and meet people. Jenny, it's been so good to chat with you and hear your story. It's really exciting. I'm so excited for you. I feel like you got some amazing things coming up. I'll definitely be on the lookout for that. Thank you for coming and sharing everything with us.**

Thank you for having me.

**Also, on a very exciting note, if you would like to win a copy of Jenny's book *Dreaming Big and Being Bold*, then all you need to do is head over to the website, find this podcast, leave a comment and let us know your biggest takeaway from this session and we're going to be picking someone to win. Also, we're giving away 1-year membership the FEM International. Again, leave a comment and we'll pick a winner. Do you want to say something really quickly about the book or the membership?**

Well, either one would be wonderful to spread the word with the membership and involvement in the community. There are memberships opportunities and ways to promote your business as well. So, head on over and leave a comment.

**The website is FEMInternational.ca, isn't it?**

.com, yeah.

**Oh, it's .com.**

.ca will redirect you to .com.

**OK, cool. Amazing We'll leave all the links over on the website. Definitely go and check it out. Jenny, thank you again so much. I hope you all have loved this episode and I will see you next week for another episode of She Means Business.**