

# So, Here's the Thing Episode 103

## **Laylee Emadi**

Welcome to so here's the thing, the podcast for small business owners, entrepreneurs and creative educators who are ready to take their business to the next level, through candid conversations, tactical approaches and a few unpopular opinions. We're lifting the veil on what it takes to build both a life and a business that you love. I'm your host, Laylee Emadi, a coach for creatives and founder of the creative educator Academy, where I help entrepreneurs step into the role of industry leaders and educators. I'm so glad that you're here. Now let's jump into today's episode. Hey, friends, welcome back, we have a returning duo here with us today, James and Jess are with us. They were on the podcast a while ago talking about how to make more money doing what you do without adding more work to your life. And now we're gonna be talking about something a little bit more. Behind the scenes, we're gonna be talking all about the behind the scenes of building and creating a conference because and spoiler alert, I guess. But James and Jess, along with their good friend, Tyler Spire, who's also been on the podcast would have fun world, they are putting on an amazing luxury wedding photography conference in Santa Barbara this year. And I am so pumped about it. So I am going to basically turn the mic over to James and Jess, we're going to talk all about behind the scenes of creating this because I know so many of you are interested in adding education and figuring out what route of education is best for you. So, James, yes, welcome,

## **James**

although we're so stoked to be back again. And I love that we're returning. I love that Tyler was already on this. And it's all familiar. But thank you for having us. Excited to chat because I just share more. And yeah, spoilers that it's going to be an amazing conference. And we're gonna geek out hard on that in this but we're really excited.

## **Laylee Emadi**

I'm so so excited about it. Okay, so tell us like give us like a rundown like a quick synopsis of what this conference is going to look like. And then we'll dive into like the behind the scenes of the planning and just all the things behind it.

## **James**

Absolutely. Yeah, love to share more. So it is called Thrive photo conference. And it is a I would call it a completely immersive experience in a conference. And we can we'll break all this down throughout this podcast. But it is, I guess the premises of what sparked it all is just and I started doing in person retreats years ago, because every time we were at a retreat, or a conference or some kind of formal in person, education, all of the conversations I had that I loved and all of the friends that I made, including you lately happened, I say in between, like the in between moments, like at the bar in the pool, over a cocktail, or like when there was a set break, and everyone's like, oh, let's scatter, and you kind of just find people. And the formal education is very necessary, you know, the keynotes and the and, and I have a lot to say about boring versus exciting keynotes and all those things in timing, but we wanted to create an event that captured all of it. From moments we can be together in between moments with professional, amazing speakers on stage, and it kind of came out of a need. Tyler Spire, we've considered doing this for a long time. And Tyler, who if you don't know him, he is a luxury wedding planner. And he's just an animal. He did our wedding eight years ago, just at his wedding 11 or 1210

years ago, right before Justin I started shooting together. And we realized there was a gap in the photography industry where a few conferences were wrapping up. And the ones that we saw weren't hitting the points or pain points that we needed. So it's kind of born out of necessity. And this desire to elevate not just the wedding photography space, or the wedding portrait photography, space, but in person events as a whole for experience because I've been to too many where I'm disappointed. You know, we've been getting a lot of DMS we've been leaking out, you know, the conference and we're getting all these concerns of will it be like this? Well, I had, you know, I'm feeling a lot of people are burned out on conferences because they weren't handled well. And we're gonna change that.

**Laylee Emadi**

I love that it is so exciting for me obviously, I'm a little bit biased because I love you guys but also our listeners know and like you guys know, I can't really ever be too biased because I'm also a little bit judgy when it comes to education and quality education you should be as I should be right because that's that's what I do. So I love seeing high quality educators step into the role of basically like creating things that they wish that they would have seen. So I love that that's what prompted you guys to make that move. I would love to know like a little bit more about kind of your thought process and like how are we going to make this event unique? I know that you said it was born out of something that you saw a need for a born out of necessity born out of almost like I feel like people have been asking for this without knowing they're asking for it and that in itself is like such a sad Such a great skill to be able to be listening to what people are saying before they're actually like verbalizing it to you. So what what have what was your thought process? Like when you were planning? Like, how are we going to make this stand apart?

**James**

Yeah, that's, I love that question. Because it was so specific how we started,

**Jess**

we sat down, and we wrote down everything that we hated about conferences, everything

**James**

that sounds negative Justin actually a very positive people. But I think it's because so much of the negative, we had so many experiences where there was a lot to list off. Yeah,

**Jess**

I've been in this industry. I've been a wedding star for for 16 years. So I have spoken out and been to so many conferences and seen this industry change so much over the years. So we sat down, we listed out all the things that we hated. And then we listed out all the things that we love about conferences, and we realized we don't want any of the things that we hate, and we want to crank up the volume on everything that we love. And

**James**

we through that we realized there were gaps. Like we listed out this big list of things that really sucked about conferences, if I'm being blunt, and there's so many fun things like I've had, I've met my best friends at conferences, you know, I've made my favorite connections at conferences, I've lost my voice singing karaoke at conferences, there's been really fun moments, you know, and I keynoted and and when people come up to you, after education, and say like, Hey, last year, you changed my life, those are all amazing things. So we want that volume be turned up on all levels. And then we realized through

those two lists, there's a lot that we wanted, that wasn't there, you know, so we're going to add all of that in as well. But for instance, some of the things we hated like, although really light on some of the things we hated, like shitty coffee, or no coffee at all. I we were just talking, I'm on my second or third and I just had a Celsius lately. I think you're on like your 12 cup or something. I get it. And so instead of having because usually what it is, there's like some crafts in the back like coffee is like no, no, this is gonna be different to one of our friends runs a thing called Welcome coffee cart. And it is it's amazing what she has dialed and we work together like 12 years ago and college is baristas. She has this Sprinter van, and she presses a button and out the back of the Sprinter van comes an entire coffee, like a like a coffee shop, like on a cart. And that's just gonna be there 24/7 Because we're all gonna get jazzed up on caffeine. And nothing sucks more than coming in after lunch and having to go to like a break or something because it's necessary because education is quality, but you need something to kick you. So I'll probably put a bottle of glue underneath it or something just in case anyone wants to get a little little toasty after lunch.

### **Jess**

We also hate 8am Start Times, because we are we're throwing a party every single night. Which means we'll talk about that in a second at and the next morning might be a little bit rough. So we're having that coffee cart starting at 8am. Do you can just mix and mingle with people, but nothing formal is happening at

### **James**

10am is like the hard start. And I've been there so many things, 90 minute keynotes. And all you know if you've ever read the book, How to give a TED talk, you know, it's pretty self explanatory. But 18 to 20 minutes is the sweet spot for a TED talk, because they've psychologically broken down. That's how people are sitting in a chair gonna absorb information. And so we have it mapped out where it's going to be just as much education and entertainment, you know, with enough margin so people can actually absorb it instead of just getting flooded by a firehose and worried if their money was well spent, because they can't remember anything.

### **Laylee Emadi**

Oh, my gosh, this is also genius. I really want to point out to people who are listening in on this and like wanting to apply it to that you can apply everything that James and Jess just said to any type of education or any type of offer. Listen to the pain points of your audience. Like just because conferences have been done. When you were talking, I literally could feel it was like a visceral reaction. You guys like I could feel that post lunch slump. I'm Oh, yeah, you got tired. Yeah, you're exhausted. You're sleepy, you work hard, probably hungover because, I mean, at least that's how I do conferences. Like I go hard, like the night before, because I'm socializing, and I want to I want to meet people I want to mingle. And then you get exhausted. And you literally cannot find caffeine anywhere on premises. And it's kind of its own special torture. So the concept of listening to the pain points and then actually addressing them and not being a cookie cutter, carbon copy of something that you think works because somebody told you it works. Genius living for it. Tell us about the party's like one listening.

### **James**

That's just wisdom from Laylee. Like, yeah, there are I was can I go on a really quick tangent, yeah, Natalie for speaking at a conference and she was a genius. And she was talking about how she's talking on social media. Like, everyone on reels. It's like, oh, I need to do this education thing, because educators are at the forefront of trends. So they always see that and then all of a sudden it gets boring.

Because everyone's copying each other. And so I think you take that concept with any education or it's like, how would I want to learn and what people said they want to learn like, so I just love that. Shifting gears to parties. Yeah, this is a passion of mine. So I guess as it encapsulates, as a whole, that one of the things we wanted it to be like was one, Santa Barbara is a destination. It's one of the biggest destinations for weddings and vacation like everything in the world. You know, CNN a few years ago, named us best weather to live in, in America. And for good reasons. It's 80 degrees outside today. It's fantastic.

### **Laylee Emadi**

A little bit hate you guys right now.

### **James**

It's in November, and November here is prime. And it's not prime a lot of the other places in this world, so we want it to be gorgeous. We wanted it to be a destination it is Santa Barbara has some kind of magic to it. And we wanted people everyone who attends to show up. And it just presses play, they don't have to worry about where they're going or what they're doing. Or if they have enough time or not enough time. Of course, I encourage everyone to take margin before and after, because it's an amazing town. But the second you know, we press play on thrive. You're going to be completely submerged with beauty and celebration. And I hear a lot of I'm an extrovert. So the joke is like how do introverts make friends like an extrovert adopts them? Everyone I've talked to, it's like there's never enough time or maybe lunches and we're not together here. It's like, well, let's all be together. You don't have to be here. But there's an option to be somewhere every night that's hosted or every lunch is hosted. But for the party specifically, we wanted it to be a celebration, you know, we went through the past few years was hard for if you want to be in person a lot, or just a little and it's time to party, and it's time to celebrate. And it's time to process together all the things you're going to learn at this conference. So we decided every single night will be an event. And it will be designed by Tyler and his team. And because when we when we first made this decision, Tyler we have the meeting and Tyler everything that stressed me out about a conference, I sit down and I was like here and he hands me this envelope. And I was like, Oh my gosh, it's all it's all there. Everything because photographers shouldn't plan photography conferences, planners should plan a conference no matter what the genre. And he's doing that. And he's also the designer and his team is brilliant. So every night there's gonna be a party, little sneak peek that glimpses the first one, Santa Barbara, Spanish heritage and justice Spanish and Santa Barbara has a deep culture. So there's going to be a proper Fiesta, where there's going to be mariachi, and there's going to be tacos and margaritas. And if anyone follows me on Instagram, you know, I'm a big cocktail enthusiast, I will actually be slinging the first hour of bartending, and making cocktails for everyone before I start dancing. So it's gonna be really fun. And then I can't really give all the details for the second two parties, because Tyler's designs are just wild, but there's going to be full inspo, that goes out. And they're going to look different every single night. And of course, the last night on Wednesday is going to be a gala. It's going to be a beautiful black tie Gala. And it's going to be so much fun. And I think one of the bigger things about this is a lot of people's like, oh, conferences can be Clicky. And this and that. I was like no, we're that's why we're all doing it together. Like you don't have to choose to come to these things. You can not watch it. But it's included, like let's go, let's all get in it. And let's all mingle, and let's party and I just there's that balance, we have formal education, but it's such a shame when someone you know, you go sit and you listen to all these brilliant things. And then there's not really much to do. Yeah, yeah, so we wanted there to be not only things to do, but the best things to do.

**Jess**

We've seen a lot of conferences where people sat alone at lunch, because they didn't have anyone to go with. And that sucks. Everyone left property to go grab lunch somewhere and they didn't have a car. And so they just sat there by themselves. And my heart breaks when I say that because I never want someone to feel that way. If you want to eat lunch by yourself somewhere. I'm not an introvert. So I don't understand that. But if you want to be with people, and if you want to learn and grow from peers and speakers and everyone around you, that's what this is created for is that you can sit down and have a drink with someone that you look up to sit down, have a drink with with anybody there and just chat, just talk like that's when those real conversations happen. That's when those real friendships friendships happen, and that's when the information you've been processing actually hits the ground and starts going. So we're very excited for all that and we have worked so hard. Photographers work so hard. This is the craziest busiest year of wedding since 1984. Which I don't know what happened. Maybe for I don't know, but to happen. By November, everyone will have photographed so many weddings and portrait sessions that they deserve this. They deserve a chance to be a guest at an event just as elaborate as a wedding and to let loose and party already and just enjoy that brand.

**James**

And at the same time, you know, Justin, I run in the education world, we make courses and we have retreats, and we host this. Anyone who is a photographer in the education space, you're going to be working really hard to because the demand is more than ever. Like, we just have 46 Weddings this year. And we love it. And we don't have associates, it's just us. And we love it. Well, we have a team behind us, but we love it. But the courses and the questions and the coaching is firing off too. So anyone listening who was just like diving into the education space, it's conferences for you too, because there's going to be really amazing educators for you to connect with, there's going to be opportunity for future conferences, because we don't plan on stopping anytime soon. And you deserve to celebrate as well and be a part of it and mix and mingle and get to know your industry more the people you're teaching the people who are already teaching and the people you want to cross pollinate with.

**Laylee Emadi**

That was a lot of really great advice. Because a lot, like in the best way, I'm like, I'm over here, keeping my fingers crossed that people are taking notes, or going back and re listening. Because honestly, the last thing you said is something I really want to focus on. Because I 100% agree. I mean, you cannot learn, there's no better way to learn than getting in the same room as the people who are doing what you want to do. And doing it well. And I think that's something that you've already voiced is like, you're taking into consideration that the people you're inviting to take the stage and to like, really show up are people who you know are doing it well. So that's amazing. I love it. I also cannot believe you guys are shooting so many weddings. That sounds like my worst nightmare as a retired wedding photographer.

**James**

That is the love it. I mean the most humble way possible. It's the wedding day for us is the easiest thing that we do. Because we have our systems so dialed in. If there's any photographers listening, just shoot me a DM or something and ask because I'm happy to share where we can do it sustainably. You know, if we didn't have a team behind us and systems in place, and automations we would be dying. But it's really fun and fortunately allows us to teach more and do more fun stuff like this, too.

**Laylee Emadi**

That's amazing. And oh, and you love it. Like you said you love it. And that's like the most important thing. I love my couples but no thanks.

**James**

I know I got the map. And I was like that's almost 100 new people like this year like 100 new relationships. That's correct. Just a couple that's crazy, man.

**Laylee Emadi**

No, no, you guys, both extroverts that's necessary. Love that for you. Says the extroverted introvert who like at the end of a wedding day is like how hard pass I'm not going to talk to anybody.

**James**

I literally like I go to almost every after party with our couples.

**Laylee Emadi**

I love that about you guys. Okay, well, I would love to know, we're gonna we're gonna take things into the negative a little bit. I'm just kidding. But I want to hear about like some of the challenges that maybe surprised you like, as you were creating this new offer, because, as you said, and I was gonna mention to like, I know that you guys have been doing workshop style things. You guys have done retreats, you guys have had you have courses, you've had your hands on a lot of different places with education. But this is new. So like, what are some challenges that were unexpected for you?

**James**

That is a great question. And I love that question. Because the good news is, you know, there's a lot of things that we're all really excited we dove into. But like at a certain point you're like, if I knew this going into it, I don't know if my answer would be yes, fortunately, that has not been the case with conferences. And I would say a huge part before and there are definitely things and I'm happy to share those. A huge part of curbing those stresses and anxieties is having the proper people in the proper space. Tyler and his team of professional planners, like that's the I don't have to worry about little logistics like that, like the hotel room block and all that stuff his team knows what to do. So anyone listening for whatever you're doing, is it worth like having the right people in place? Yes, I know, if it's like tossing a little bit on the front to do it's actually worth it because you you tabs will be shut off and the money will flow if you're doing what you're supposed to be doing. Nothing said of course, there's always surprised challenges that come up. Number one was when we first created this, it was when you know when and where and that's of the same as weddings, you know, it's like when and where you know, you can't do anything unless you have a date and a space. So we were going back and forth this ideated in January. So the very beginning of this year, just when I took January off of shooting so we could focus on bigger dreams and this and this and Tyler and us went out for coffee. And the you know, we just knew it. You know, we just had this. We all felt it and it was all in agreeance that this is happening. And then we have this Okay, well let's do 2023 And then we're gonna Well, January, February, and we're just like, you know what we just, we're like, let's take the weekend and we all met up the next month. Pay it every single one of us like it has to happen this year. And

**Jess**

during that time, we've learned other conferences that were canceling or

**James**

postponing or shifting gears like, like show unite, it was like, there's so much fun. It's like going to summer camp every year, and they shifted as they properly shed into a different space, you know, so there's so much opportunity. And so the bigger challenge is, once we knew we wanted to do it this year, it was reaching out to everyone that I knew had conferences, or events, even like United doing Spark, which isn't for photographers at all. I also just didn't like, I just wanted to make sure every piece was working. So then I called every vendor I knew and friend and then it was putting the team together, you know, well, will these dates work? Do we do a weekend? Most likely not? Do we, you know, we're not obviously we don't have any weekends. There's not even 45 more weekends this year, for weddings. But I think that was more of the logistical challenge of figuring that out. And then it was a fun challenge. So it wasn't negative. It was like what once we had the vision, who do we trust to carry through that vision. Because you need speakers, you need education, you need team, you need style, shoot leaders, all those things. And we're very intentional about it. And I think the challenge would be there's so many educators, and fortunately, in my circles, there's really good educators. But it's also curating. Like, just like choosing a photographer, or whatever else you want to invest in, it has to match the bill, you know, has to match what we want to carry through, for thrive in that specific niche and that specific subject. So it was a very fun challenge to find everyone and you bragging about this girl right here, you on our top of our list, we were like one of the first things out of her mouth, which was awesome. So we're very excited. You're going to be there. But yeah, it's not like negative. And I know there'll be like, pressure stress of like times and due dates, just like all things you're planning. But we are doing this because we we know what we want from it. And we we have this love for it. So that were the challenges gladly accepted.

### **Laylee Emadi**

I love that. I feel like there's so many things in there that like I really want to harp on. And that is a like knowing that you are going to have to put like puzzle pieces together, but not letting that stop you from moving forward. It sounds like you guys really took things as as they're coming, which is great. I love what you said about putting the right people in place. I work with a lot of event hosts. And actually, just last week, I was working on sifting through speaker applications for somebody's in person retreat. And it is hard. I don't even know these people like and it's hard, let alone knowing them and having them be in your close inner circles. There are a lot of things that I think can be challenging and difficult. But I think knowing your mission, at the end of the day, it's like, it makes it so worth it. Right?

### **James**

Totally. Yeah, it makes it 100% worth it. And just on that thread of whether it's thrive or anything else, you if you're listening, and you're an educator, like I want to speak, I want to teach that I want to be a part of something, just know that it takes time. And if you get a denial, it's not because you're not worthy of that. I mean, the amount of DMS and stuff which I hear of just pure excitement, I was like, man, we've already built 80% of this, you know, out. And there's a lot of people who are really good at teaching, I think so just keep going for it. And my encouragement is when you're applying to speak or teach anything, I think what you should, the mindset you should have is how what you're trying to portray why you being a part of something will add the most amount of value that will actually make the event better, you know, and justify rolling to a wedding day, for example, in the most humble ways, like, if they say no to us, I think they are thinking, I know it's not going to be as good, but they're not going to be there. Because I know if I'm at that wedding, it's going to be a better day. Because of the amount of service and experience I get. So if you're thinking about anything about virginity to teach, building a course applying for a podcast, speaking on stage in front of 100,000 people I don't know where you do that but wherever whatever industry you're in, understand that you just need the way you need to tone

it is in the most humble way possible portray why that event will be better with you as a part of it. You know, because it's easy to get in that like celebrity versus leadership. Like I would just want to be a part of it. Yeah, of course you do it some things are amazing, you know, not saying just thrive but like in general things you apply to. But what are you going to bring? You know, I think people know that they forget to enunciate and and say that out of excitement, genius,

### **Laylee Emadi**

because 100% Yes, I we've had a couple of episodes. For those of you who are listening and haven't maybe like heard a lot of previous episodes. We've had ones about pitching yourself for speaking engagements. And obviously I talked about this inside the creative educator Academy, but I see the exact same thing and and that's to twofold one, keep applying. Keep trying. I have been rejected from so many speaking engagements, I've been speaking for years, I was a speaker before I was a photographer in different industries. So like, I have had many a rejection. And if you take those things personally, and I take everything personally, but I try so hard not to take rejections from speaking engagements personally, because there are so many factors that go into it. But also just knowing like, how are you approaching these applications? How are you approaching these pitches? Is it here's my resume? Or is it here's how I can help you and your audience? And knowing who you're talking to? Like, especially in our creative industry? Who are our hosts? Well, prime example, James and Jess are the hosts. So who are you writing to? And how are you approaching those people? Is it Look at me, look at me Look at me, or is it Hey, I recognize that this is a new endeavor that you're doing, I want to help you, I want to lead, I want to be able to take something off your plate and give something amazing to your attendees and contribute to your whatever I feel like people are probably gonna be like, you're gonna get a bunch of emails with that exact script, you'll be like, oh, yeah,

### **James**

yeah. Oh, no, that's, that's great. And I love hearing people's passion, for sure. And then right on with the thing, it's like, if anything, the rejection doesn't mean, you weren't worthy, it doesn't mean that you're not good at it. You understand, like people building anything, they have eggs, they they're usually have a really good idea of what they want. And there's exceptions, of course of like, well, I didn't think about that. But it's that relational thing. You know, whenever Jess and I lay, we've talked about this, whenever Justin, I want to speak or be a part of a new event. Even if I don't get accepted, I go, you know, I front up the money. Because if I want to show someone and it's true, and if I if I afterwards, I'm like, Oh, I didn't get to speak, I'm not even going you're like, Wait, that's the wrong heart behind it, you know, so go and make those relationships and see those people. And sometimes it just needs to be that kinetic connection in person.

### **Laylee Emadi**

Yeah, absolutely. And I mean, I even could equate that to like, How many times have I wanted to go to like TEDx or TEDx women or whatever. And like, one day, Will I ever be on that stage? I have no idea. But that doesn't mean I'm not going to go and like, absorb the genius that's on the stage in front of me like, What a counterintuitive thing to do. So I love that you mentioned that. I think that's such a solid piece of advice is like show up, show up as much as possible, and just soak up what you can do there. It matters.

### **Jess**

And even when we are keynoting, at a conference, I love sitting in the audience and learning from other educators, because there's always something to learn. Because the second that we say, Oh, I know it



all. It's time to hang up our camera and be done. But instead, I want to, I want to be a lifelong learner, I want to continue to absorb information. And at the conference, we were out a few days ago, I took so many notes during Natalie Frank's talk. And I told her afterwards and she was so honored. I was like, No, I got a lot out of what you said, because I can apply that in so many different areas in my

### **James**

16 years. You know, if anyone is in underneath that I'm we're up there. And it's I'm learning every single day. Yeah, you know, and it's not out of ignorance. It's just out of excitement for it. And I think the coolest thing is, I mean, I've learned from I've learned from past retreat attendees, you know, like Ryan and Anna refugees, geography, they're just, they're animals. They were at my retreat two years ago, and now they have a team of like, 15 or 20 people, and I don't ever want associates, but if anyone's like, I need to talk about associates with go talk to Ron and Anna. They know what they're doing, you know. And so I think there's a, there's a, you have to have a healthy dose of humility in the game. It's like being very proud of what you do an understanding that you can learn from anyone. Yeah.

### **Laylee Emadi**

That's amazing. I love it. All right. I have one more question before we hit up the unpopular opinions. Because you know, we have to, but I obviously you haven't hosted this yet. It's your first go round. It's in November. But what if you had to, like guess into the future? What do you think is going to be your favorite part of like the entire endeavor?

### **Jess**

I, I already know the answer to this. So we, we want photographers to thrive in business and in life, that has always been our mantra patient, which is why we named the photography conference thrive. My favorite moment is going to be breakthrough is going to be when the photographers realize like, I've been going in this direction and it wasn't working. I've been at a plateau and this is what is going to change my life and my business. Those breakthrough moments are everything for me. And I am already so excited to be a part of that and be able to see that

### **James**

yeah, that I mean that kind of sums up the heart behind it and I think I just kind of like close my eyes it's like they're like a real like, man, what is it going to and I have expectations and I know they're gonna be different but I I've seen this like I've been in the space right and if you want near the end of this, I can kind of give like the details and map out the kind of geography and timing of it all. But I see that room full of 150 photographers and educators and it's so intimate and also overlooks the ocean. Like literally the Conference Center is built on the sand, I think, yeah, that energy that you feel and I'm like a rah rah way, but understanding that everyone in that room as they start to like get those aha Oz and glass shattering moments and light bulbs coming on, that creates like a buzz that you can feel in you, like, you get energy from it, like you get like tingling from it, you know, and I'm excited to experience that because what that translates to me as people are starting to thrive more people's lives, they become alive more, and I say in business and in life, because just to intermix the two, we're married within business partners, we do everything together. And we've worked out together because like, our lives are mixed. There's no like separating the business from the heart. And yes, we have boundaries on when we work and when we don't work. But having three days together with a bunch of photographers who are ready to level up and all those things and thrive. I just like, my heart starts to beat faster, knowing how amazing that's going to be. And I already know it'd be worth every second. You know, like after our first retreat we ever did, I felt that with a dozen people. And everyone walked out of the venue.

And I laid on the floor of the hardwood floor. Because physically I was exhausted, but my heart had never been that full. And that times however many people oh my gosh, I don't even know how to handle.

**Laylee Emadi**

That is so amazing. And it's so true. I know that feeling well. I know it as an attendee, I know it as a host. I know it as a speaker, and I love love that you're so excited about it. And that it's going to be something that is just put together so intentionally and for people to really come together. And like you said, just have their lives and businesses changed. Because even even for those of those of us who are doing it on our own, it is a mix of business and life. Like even if you don't have you know, as amazing of a like I love I love that y'all work together, it makes me so I'm so jealous, and like the best way for everyone. I know, I know it. And but I think like my business is my leg like it is they're intertwined at all. I mean, my office is my living room, there's literally no escaping it. So you've got to thrive in both. And I love that you guys are making that happen for so many people. All right, you guys. unpopular opinion. Let's go. I'm having your opinion on conferences. I think let's let's do that on on conferences or in person events.

**James**

Okay, great, unpopular opinions. Oh, my gosh, do you have one?

**Laylee Emadi**

I mean, I have so many you got let's just start firewalling some funny pick the spiciest. One, obviously.

**James**

Okay, this is pretty unpopular. I don't think there should be just a blatant open application. I think there should be application. For speakers, I think there should be very specific guidelines on applications. Because I mean, here's the thing, if a speaker wants it bad enough, Jess and I lived in this isn't like a flex, but we lived in Paris in 2019. And every time I say that, it sounds like such like oh, like and I did. But it's not to show up. It's because Parisian culture is so interesting. And one of the things we learned there was no doesn't mean No, it means convinced me, French, or Parisians in general have this? No, it's just a no until they're convinced. And everyone has something that will turn them to a yes, most of the time. And so the reason I say I don't think there's just a general, you want to talk come talk is that means that speaker who in my position who was curated this event, whatever it may be, hasn't given it enough thought to say here's the guidelines of what I know is going to make this work. And if someone wants it bad enough, though, they'll probably figure out the way to do it. Whether that's coming to that conference that first time and diplomatically creating a relationship or sending a video, I send videos if I ever want anything before even send an email like if I want it bad enough, and I need it to be impressive enough, I will record a video of me talking because my tone can come across more. So I unpopular opinion, there shouldn't be an apply here button in general, for any event. It should be very specific and have specific guidelines. And if someone wants it bad enough, as a potential speaker, they will figure out a way to get it.

**Laylee Emadi**

I love that. I actually totally agree with that. I remember I did. I think it was two years ago I applied for a three it was pre pandemic, I applied for a conference, but I knew that if I didn't get this one topic like I wouldn't go it was a topic that I felt was needed for that conference. So I recorded a video and I was

like I'm applying with the caveat that I'm doing this topic but if you don't want me and you don't want this topic then I don't want to come under much nicer way and

**James**

what it is. I think people get scared to be specific and ask and say like, this is how I'm going to bring the value. This is why you need me there. Last year moved put out an application for a new executive assistant, the woman I ended up hiring said, which at the end of the application was most four page specific, you had to send a video. And that weeded out most people, if you're not willing to send me a 32nd clip of saying, Hi, I'm so and so I'm not even gonna read the rest of the application. She said, I am convinced there's no one better suited for James and Jess than me. And the best part, she was right. Did I test it didn't interview a bunch of people. Yeah. And I was like, shit, she's right. She works for us. It's amazing. But that was that right? There was so attractive because you said it so well. And so competently and not cocky. You know, so I think

**Laylee Emadi**

that's hard balance. That's a hard balance. It's

**James**

better than than being passive about it.

**Jess**

Just do you have a popular opinion, it's gonna sound like a popular opinion. And then I'm going to tell you why it's not. Okay. Geography Matters. We know that geography matters, a conference in a desirable place for a good amount of time, where if you're flying out there, you act like you're flying out there and putting all this money into it, you want it to be a place that you actually want to be a destination where you actually want to, for photographers, you actually want to get more work in the future, you want to have more destination work there, when a conference is in a place that nobody knows about, that nobody wants to go to. And it's only in a short amount of time. It's really tough. So we have spoken at so many conferences, and we've experienced so many things. And we said, We want a three day full experience. We want this to be in a place where people are, like, just jonesing to go I don't know why I said Jones like that's a weird word. People desire to go like we got voted number one weather in the US, we got voted all these great things like Santa Barbara is such a desirable place, that it's an easier sell. But as people are planning their conferences and planning other events, keep in mind that geography matters, because that's a huge deciding factor. If someone's going to invest in an experience, it needs to be a place that they are jonesing to go to.

**James**

And we know, we know people weigh their options. You know, it's like, we love that we've created this life that we love and successful businesses and multiple streams of revenue and all kinds of stuff. But we still time is still like, we cannot get our time back. I know that. So I know that there are hundreds if not 1000s of people looking at multiple options, whether that's a course whether that's to invest in come to thrive, whatever that is, they're weighing their options, just like any wise person should. I want it to be the most desirable option if it's properly fit for you. And we just know one of the things is geography,

**Jess**

our styled session on a sailboat

**Laylee Emadi**

you guys are too cool. Honestly, you're so much cooler than I'll ever be. But that's okay.

**James**

You are very cool. You have an unpopular opinion. I'm trying to think of more.

**Laylee Emadi**

Oh, my I have I have too many I should not be allowed to participate in this conversation. However, I'll pass. Let's hear it. Okay, my unpopular opinion, it's not unpopular, probably. But it's something that I don't think a lot of people would voice and that is if you're going to charge high ticket prices, there's two things that need to happen. You need to be able to pay your speakers and you need to be able to deliver to your attendees. And when I say delivered to your attendees, I mean all the things that you guys listed, things like good quality coffee, food that's provided all the events included, don't nickel and dime your attendees after charging them upwards of \$1,400 and give them like, you know, Chick fil A like let's not do that. I love Chick fil A but like we don't cater that for lunch. Yeah,

**James**

yeah. I couldn't agree more. That's a I think that's a popular opinion. That's not voiced enough.

Yeah. Right.

**Laylee Emadi**

And, you know, the geography of it that Jess was mentioning, I love that you said that because not only do you think it needs to be desirable, but the geography of like, How convenient is this for people from the hotel to the venue? Is it going to take them an hour and a half to drive? How are they going to get there, they're gonna have to rent a car, they're gonna have to get an Uber and and spend hundreds of dollars like driving from Podunk Ville somewhere to in the middle of nowhere. Like it's just things like that really do add up to the experience and it makes it really difficult for people to recommend that the next time around to their friends. So even if you do get them to show up, what are they walking away saying?

**James**

And that's, that's a great unvoiced popular opinion. I think most unpopular opinions are probably just unvoiced popular opinions. Yep.

**Laylee Emadi**

I literally just said that in our episode, I got interviewed and one thing that Sarah my friend who interviewed me was like, what have you learned and I was like, I've learned that my whole shtick of unpopular opinions is just people being blunt. That's it. Yeah, that popular opinion. But

**James**

the ironic thing is those are like most of people that state those are people's favorite people. You know? I mean, Marilyn Monroe said, what if I never broke the rules have never gotten anywhere in life. And I completely agree with that. And people like I love Marilyn Monroe. She's fantastic.

**Laylee Emadi**

I mean, nobody hates me. After all these I'm not gonna lie. I don't I truly don't know.

**Jess**

I mean, they're still listening, there's still for the record, the hotel being a far distance, short distance thing. Our hotel is a across the street, also on the ocean, across the street from

**James**

a room block. And it's amazing. And we're all going to be there together.

**Jess**

It is so true. No one has to read on that thread

**James**

of all those things of all the Unpopular Opinions, popular opinions about conferences about that specific thing. I think one of my mentors told me, way back when I started doing events in general, and even courses and anyone listening, this can be applied to if you're giving a wedding experience, support your experience building a course hosting conference, start with the end in mind, where, like, You already asked what at the end of the conference, what do you want people to walk away with? Even? How many of these do you want to do? So if you can work backwards from what is it going to take to get the outcome I want? And that's how we did it. We reverse engineered an ideal, almost like landing place of like, where do we want this to end? With? How do we want people to walk away? And then you build it backwards?

**Laylee Emadi**

That's so smart. I love that approach. I think it just makes things a lot more clear to probably for you guys in your planning stages. Oh my gosh, something to come back to?

**James**

Yes. Like, for instance, we have elm Academy, which is one of our most popular courses teaches people how to sell ton of albums and serve the clients well without any in person sales. Because we do so many destinations. I, I didn't be like, I'm just gonna start this systems like what is the outcome of this, I want people to get X, Y, and Z and have this setup when this course is done. Then you have to work backwards. And it's like that with all things. So any educator listening? Clutch?

**Laylee Emadi**

Yeah, that's so important. I love it. Okay, great. So Well, I'll tell people how they can like sign up for this. If they're listening. And they're like, I gotta go right.

**James**

So let me let me kind of lay out the details. Guys. This is like I'm getting all excited. So it is Thrive photo conference, and this photography contest for anyone in the wedding, portrait boudoir, just as crushing boudoir and she's gonna have a whole thing on that. And family space. So if you're a portrait photographer, wedding photographer, in general, we have a seat for you like this is for you. If you're a creative educator, come grab a seat, because you're going to be surrounded by handpicked world class educators and fellow photographers where you're going to learn so much. And on top of that, let's be honest, if you just like, zoned out for a couple sessions, and you're like, I'm gonna go to every party, I'm gonna mix and mingle, I'm gonna get the best coffee in the world worth it right there for the price. So,

thrive photo conference.com is where you can find this. It's going to have all the information you need, you can find us at at Jess Fairchild at James Woody, and hit the DMS you can email us at Hello at James and desk.com and ask any questions but thrive photo conference.com is where you're going to find that. And right now we are in kind of this. The tickets are just going live we had an early bird sale to our waitlist and those got picked up way quicker than I thought so like Oh, okay. So in honor of this podcast, if you guys use the code lately at checkout, it will take \$200 off your seat and there's a payment plan. So all you have to do is 50%. And it is remarkably affordable for what it is. And I just kind of want to say that out of the tone of it's in Santa Barbara, California, it's on the beach, there are dozens of the most world class speakers that we have recruited to be here and every meal is included. Copies included, speakers are included parties are included, it's just going to be wild. So it is \$1,100 Without the \$200 off. So take \$200 of that you're at \$900 for this and the room block is stupid affordable. And we've just been sending that via email as soon as people book. But by the time you're hearing this, we are launching hard in the next few weeks. So a lot of people are hearing about it. And there are total 150 seats and a grip of those were taken up by earlybird. So we would love to see you there lately is going to be there. We're going to be there it is going to be outrageous. Like I said the conference centers on the beach. The hotel is right behind the Conference Center. Santa Barbara is stunning. And just the way I think if I wanted these, like excited about watching people walk across the street into the conference center as I'm in the conference center, looking at the beach and then grabbing a coffee and knowing the flow of the day and how it's going to go. The whole week is just going to be remarkable. So if you're interested we would absolutely love to See you there?

**Laylee Emadi**

Oh, that is amazing. I'm also so generous. You guys know, for those of you who listen in all the time, I don't like, I don't do sponsored things. I don't ever really share anything or hard Pitch Anything. But I'm going to tell you right now, if you are even interested in this \$900 is insane. I actually am a little bit like James Jess, we should have a chat and let's like double those prices. But that's fine. Listen, I'm just I'm just keeping it real. As you guys know, I do. I would go and snag that ticket before somebody else does. Because Dang, that is that is a good deal for what's included.

**James**

Thank you. We're so honored. And trust me, we've had those conversations. When you asked about challenges. It's like, well, what do we want out of this? I want it to be accessible. We always say with our I mean, we charged luxury prices for weddings, but the experience you're giving us luxury with open arms. And that's what

**Laylee Emadi**

this is your founding group. So like, how exciting for the attendees to be like for an attendee to show up and say like I got in at the beginning.

**James**

Yeah, this is gonna be the lowest parent it will ever be for any experience like this. And we're gonna blow it out of the water. And I'm so excited for every single one of you who's considering this because I give you my word it'd be worth every second and every penny

**Laylee Emadi**

I'll back that up. Oh, back that claim. Just from no you guys. Really money guarantee. Thank you guys so much for coming on and sharing just all that like behind the scenes and transparency. I know that it'll

help so many people as they're like trying to gauge what it's like to plan and, and what it's like to move forward on big big dreams. So I'm just I'm so happy for you guys and cheering you on so hard over here.

**James**

Oh, I'm honored. I'm all like goosebumps now because of this. So, thank you. We're excited to see you. I know we're gonna see you before then. But we're excited to have you in Santa Barbara.

**Laylee Emadi**

I am thrilled and like I'm so glad you guys said something because I wasn't about to do like a spoiler like, I'll be there but I will be there and I'm so honored, so pumped. Thank you guys.

**James**

Love it.

**Laylee Emadi**

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