

So Here's the Thing Ep 119 Transcript

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.

Laylee Emadi

Hey, friends, welcome back to so here's the thing today, I am so excited because my lovely friend Brooke, of Brooke Michelle is joining us. And I've known Brooke for like, five or six years now, no seven. And a lot of years now we go way back to like, I think a workshop we took when we were both just like baby photographers. So we have come up together in this industry. And I've loved watching her grow and watching her business kind of flourish and take on so many different sides to her business. So today we're going to be talking with Brooke about growing the passive income side of her business. And hopefully she'll give us I know, she'll give us some amazing tips. So if you're interested in growing passive income into your business, or adding your first passive income stream of revenue into your business, this episode is for you. And for those of you guys who are listening to this, when it comes out, we are going to be talking about passive income at the creative educator conference. And I would love to invite you guys to join us, we still have a handful of tickets left, and you can check those out at Creativeeducatorconference.com. Okay, so without any further ado, I'm going to have a further ado, what is this whatever we're gonna have Brooke, tell us a little bit about her journey, her business and why passive income is important to her.

Brooke Michelle

Yes, thank you so much for having me. This is so exciting. It is crazy that we started as like baby photographers, and then now interviewing for your podcasts super weird. So I'm Brooke, I have been a photographer for going on 12 years, I think for 2023. Since I'm thinking about the future, and I started as a senior in high schools always say that being naive was the best asset I had when starting a business. So I didn't really know what I was fully getting into, which is fantastic. Just had to roll with the punches after I'd already started. I am a primarily High School senior and wedding photographer, those are my two passions that I have found. And so I just mixed the two together, I consider myself a professional hype girl. And I'm really excited to be talking about passive income today. So passive income to me is super important and exciting. Because it just allows me that ability to grow my business and hit those like revenue income goals that I have every year in a way that allows me to not work quite as much. So I get to have more freedom. And truly get back to running a business in order to provide the life that I want. And instead of having my business run my life, so that is why I love passive income.

Laylee Emadi

Oh my gosh, I love that. I totally agree with that reasoning. And I feel like we have, we just have a lot in common anyway with our thought processes on this stuff. So I'm so excited to hear kind of how you got

started in it and what people can do when they're kind of looking at it and maybe feeling overwhelmed. I don't know about you. But I feel like I used to be really overwhelmed by the concept of it. Because, you know, you hear passive income, we all know that there's very little that's truly 100% passive, but it's more passive than like trading your time for your money and your services like showing up and photographing something or showing up and working event or whatever. So I love that you already kind of shared what prompted you to make that move and like why you do it. So what were like the first steps that you took, like, what was the very first thing you did when you thought like, Okay, I need to start getting into this, I need to start selling things outside of my services.

Brooke Michelle

Absolutely. So the first thing that I ever released was actually a preset pack. For me that was the easiest to just kind of get my foot in the door because of something I was already using on a daily basis. So I went from I have a very specific editing style, if you've ever seen my work, so that's kind of like my signature and something that will probably never change. So I was already using this preset that I had created personally and I was using it all my sessions and then you know, once like I was out with friends and taking photos on my phone. I then was using it on the mobile Lightroom app. So for me that was already like created and maybe just needed to be tweaked or added to and was super easy to just export and kind of put my foot in the door and release that act. Once I released that I kind of took a huge gap of time between releasing the next thing or figuring out what the next steps were because I also was overwhelmed and then I moved on to actually selling merch. So I kind of created an apparel shop, because I realized that I had this huge audience of people that followed me. And it was high school seniors and people planning a wedding. And they, I can't serve everyone, I can't photograph 100 weddings a year or not everybody could afford to have my services or even like, want my services. So I figured that this was a way to kind of like take the audience that I had already built and kind of like put them into a new funnel of like passive income through apparel, all of the ones who followed me that were in wedding planning, maybe they were just following along for tips or inspiration or whatever it may be, are still gonna have bachelorettes still gonna have bachelor parties still gonna have you know, all of the like, bridal showers, the honeymoon, all of that good stuff. So I was able to make merch based off of knowing that I already had that audience there. So I start I made bachelorette T shirts I made till death do us part hoodies. And then I also really, really felt like there was a lack of colorful and bold, creative entrepreneurial apparel. So I went ahead and added some of those into my collection as well, which those are absolutely my best sellers. So I guess that other people also thought that there was a little gap in that area. Yeah,

Laylee Emadi

I mean, I bought one. So yeah.

Brooke Michelle

Appreciate it. And so but when I was feeling overwhelmed, I think that my first thing that I would do and recommend is to really just like, one brain dump in a Google doc is always my go to absolutely to just like get everything out of my mind to make space for you know, like logistical thoughts instead of just like overwhelming emotion, but then also just like looking at what is making you overwhelmed. So for me the design process of when I was releasing like digital products, it was really the design process that had me stuck, I didn't feel like I had like the eye to create PDFs or like anything. And there's 100 different avenues that you can go when you're making passive income, especially digital products, there's so many different like, websites you can host them on or sell through and things like that. But for me, I was totally fine, like YouTubing, and Googling and figuring all of that out, along with having an

awesome coach. But I really struggled with having time to like, sit down and design my products that I had already completely outlined in Britain. So they had been sitting in Google Docs for literally like a year. And then I just decided that that was like the one thing I could use help on. So just really like, tunneling in and figuring out what was actually making me overwhelmed. It wasn't releasing the products, it wasn't putting them out into the world. But it was like truly the production of putting them into these PDFs that would then like link back to where I wanted them to link back to or like give the resources that I really wanted to give people and the look that I really wanted to give to people that really helped me to actually like put them into the world and kind of take that overwhelm off my plate. Because once I had, you know the design going and outsource to that I was able to really focus on like everything else that I had already felt comfortable doing.

Laylee Emadi

Yeah, it totally makes sense. So like, let's say, somebody's brain dumps into like a Google Doc, like all the things they're thinking that they might want to sell, or they might want to create. But maybe it looks kind of like, in both of us, we both have resources, and we have a apparel. Right. So like, let's say somebody's brain dump, and they're like, well, I could do like this physical product, maybe I want to sell mugs, but I also want to sell like guides or templates or courses, but I don't know where to start. And so I'm just gonna let it sit there for over a year like, what do you how do you determine what to start with,

Brooke Michelle

I always start with what either people are asking the most for from you, or what you feel is the easiest to produce and just get your foot in the door. So if that's mugs, if that's like, you know, putting your like designs on mugs or tumblers or whatever it may be then to truly just like starting with that and doing like one step at a time. So just seeing like, you know as soon as you've started the project it's so much easier to continue and add to it's really just the starting point that is the hardest to get over the little hump once you've like messed up figured out how to make your shop pages you know, whether that's through Shopify lite and connected to your site or through like a Shopify like whatever it may be store then once you've kind of learned that the first time and really stumbled through it, watch the YouTube tutorials or you know, whatever you may have to educate yourself on how to get those started then the next ones are are a breeze so you like the first product is the hardest to launch and So creating that you know page or sales funnel or whatever you may be struggling with might take you way longer and once you have that one down, the next ones are just going to flow much easier because you're not figuring it out in that process. You're just replicating what you've already done.

Laylee Emadi

Yeah, I think that's great advice. What do you think about like, how important is it to niche down on your like passive income stuff like shouldn't all be related to what you do? Should it all be related to one person? Or can you have like a variety?

Brooke Michelle

I think you can have a variety, if that makes sense for your business, if you have a very niche down business, then you shouldn't, in my personal opinion be discussing things that are not along that niche or that you don't have personal experience in. I think it one one, it makes sense for your audience and to just wouldn't make sense for a business plan or marketing or anything that comes after.

Laylee Emadi

Yeah, I agree. Like I know, I have several friends who are like, like lawyers for creatives. And when they see people selling like contracts in their shop, who are we're not attorneys, they're just like creatives who used a contract and are reselling that contract. They're like, what, this is not your expertise. What are you doing? So I agree with that

Brooke Michelle

the legality of that whole situation makes me so stressed. That I think that if you have you know, a collaboration piece that that is totally fine. If you've like worked with a lawyer on that together, that could make sense. But if like law was not your forte, and then you decided to resell it, the legality of the whole situation and what problem, it seems that more problems would arise from that than benefits. So

Laylee Emadi

I agree. I agree. I mean, honestly, there was a time. So Tim, my husband is an attorney, as you know, but for our listeners, Tim is an attorney, and he used to write all my contracts. Now I buy all my contracts from the legal page. Just because it's, it's I just trust her more because she is the one that is in the creative industry doing what I'm doing. And I thought about for a while, like, oh, Tim, like, Let's collaborate on a template. But even then, I was like, I don't want that kind of responsibility. So I just love that you said like, it doesn't have to be niched down to like a tee. But it does need to make sense for your business. Like, I have presets because I do photography, I have apparel that's targeting creative entrepreneurs, and I have resources for educators. So like it all makes sense, even if I have a little bit of variety in there. Right? Right. Okay, so on that same note, I'm just like rapid firing questions at you. But I love this because I feel like you're such a wealth of knowledge. And I think so many people have these questions like I had them in the beginning. And I still sometimes have to, like, talk myself through them, especially this one.

Brooke Michelle

I feel like that is actually the passive income issue as a whole is that people don't specifically know what questions to ask to get started. It's like people that are planning a wedding for the first time like we have been in the wedding industry, or like, I've been in the wine industry for like, so long. And so I know what questions to get started. And I like or where to like, go to figure out the answers for the questions that I've had. But when you're starting passive income, sometimes it can be polar opposite to what you're already offering. So you aren't sure what questions to even begin asking to start or launch that passive income?

Laylee Emadi

Yeah, you're like a baby beginner again. So anytime that happens, it's like scary.

Brooke Michelle

Yeah. It's like, I don't know what I need to know. What do I need to know?

Laylee Emadi

And that's what we're telling you today. I love it. Okay, so what would you say to somebody who's like, Okay, I've done my Google Doc. Here's a bunch of ideas I have my first one. The easiest one is, let's stick with our preset example. Since we've talked about that. There are like a million photographers out there with presets in their shop. The market is so oversaturated is there even a point in trying to sell this?

Brooke Michelle

Absolutely. One thing that I always reference when I'm talking to others who are potentially going through this and like some of us have all like, I think majority of us that have experienced impostor syndrome at one point or another owning a business is that as business owners, we're following those specific niches and keeping up with those specific niche niches everywhere. So we like our feeds are filled with like, you know, other photographers, other business owners and other products that we're seeing from people. But the some of the customers or consumers that are following you do not follow those people, they have no idea those people even exist. So regardless of if your like, product is super, super unique, or maybe it's something that like you feel is super oversaturated in your industry, it's still something that your consumers and customers may have never been introduced to before. And it still is something that they may be needing or wanting from you. I think always starting with the products that is that you're most asked for will kind of help to start that confidence. If you first release a product that people have been begging you for asking for consistently bringing up in conversation. I think that that'll initially kickstart your passive income confidence and you'll see the sales come in, you know, if marketing properly, there's always you know, you have to do the work to get the sales to come in, you don't just launch it and it comes in. But I think that if you like start with the thing that people were most interested in, it can kind of just give you that confidence to know that like whatever you're gonna launch next is probably also needed or wanted from them. And I referenced this quote in pianos podcast when I was on hers. But Natalie Frank, our lovely Natalie Frank, I remember really, really early on said this quote, and I've brought it up 1,000,001 times, and I feel like I'll never stop bringing it up if it rewires people's brains, like everywhere in mind, but she said something along the lines of like, your geometry teacher didn't invent geometry, but they can teach it like so like, just because you didn't, you're not like, this isn't an original idea or like something, it doesn't mean that you're not going to be the one that gets through to people, like you might teach it in a totally different way than somebody else. And you might be the one that makes their like light bulb go off and change their business, like the way that it has changed here is

Laylee Emadi

I love that. Of course. Of course, we love Natalie,

Brooke Michelle

of course, Natalie said something. What a shock. It's crazy.

Laylee Emadi

That's amazing, though, I really, I really do love it. And I hope that it encourages people because imposter syndrome is real. And feeling like everybody that you're following is already doing it. And maybe doing it better than you would is a really hard thing to overcome. I always like to encourage people, like, if you have an idea for something, but the the person you're targeting, like your target audience isn't people who are doing what you're doing, find like three or four people and ask them like, Hey, have you ever heard of something called a preset for your photos? And they'll likely say no. So like, just giving yourself the permission to do that little bit of research and ask around before you, like completely disregard an idea, I think is a really good action step for you.

Brooke Michelle

Absolutely. And there's such power and asking your consumers what they want, like just straight up, like at putting out into the world, like, is it something that you guys would be interested in? I know that when I was starting to create apparel, I had all these questions. And so my graphic designer who made my

brand actually had an apparel shop. And I like set up a mentoring call with her to just kind of like get my footing and like understand, like how to even go about this. And she told me that one of her ways to know if a product would sell is she would take that graphic and she would put it on Instagram on her feed, and you know, type of a caption that was related to it. And if it got like a ton of interaction, and it was like a graphic that people really like interacted with. And she knew that it was a product people were going to want on a t shirt or something of that sort. So that was her way of almost like there's a way to just outright ask your audience, is that something you'd be interested in. And then there's ways like that where you can kind of like, introduce it to your audience. And then they'll see the graphic, they'll love it. And then you know, later you like launch the t shirt. And they're like, oh my god, I remember, like, save this graphic earlier. Like, now I want to wear it around. So I think that there's like subtle and like, you know, direct ways to just go about getting your customers or like ideal clients reactions to what you're going to be offering.

Laylee Emadi

Yeah, I love that way of gauging interest. I think that's, that's such a good tip.

Brooke Michelle

I feel like that was one of those moments where I was like, that's so genius. Like, why did I not think of that?

Laylee Emadi

Because it's almost like it feels like okay, of course I would do that. But it's not something that you would just probably do without encouragement, I guess.

Brooke Michelle

Yeah, or if your head is like just down like thinking of how to launch these products, I feel like that's one of the harder like taking a step back to actually see, like the interest in it. Because you're just like trying to get it done, right. We're just like, sometimes like, so we have the idea. And now we just like want to execute it so that we like don't have time to talk ourselves out of it or anything of that sort. That's my game plan. Whenever it comes to impostor syndrome, I'm like, the faster that I get it done and out there. The last time I have to talk myself out of it, or just like convinced myself that it's not good enough. So for me, I would just like have my head down, you know, grinding, finishing the Google Doc, whatever it may be, and not actually take time to be like, Oh, this is a great marketing tactic to start even launching this product. I like that

Laylee Emadi

I like that approach, like work fast. So you don't have time to doubt yourself.

Brooke Michelle

Yeah, Done is better than perfect. And with passive income, I feel like that is what I've learned the most is that like, your first product you put out there is probably not gonna be your best product, but it's going to be the one that like, introduces your audience to what you're wanting to offer. And I like put, like, launched my digital products. And then I remember I was like, Oh my gosh, like, I should have included this answer or like this tip or whatever it may have been. But then I can go through you can have like version two, version three, version four. It's not that what you put out into the world is like stuck as is. It's an always like ever, like learning process. And you can go in and change like you truly are your own

boss, which is the best thing ever because you can make your own rolls and you can go in and do whatever you want. I mean, like with integrity and grace, but

Laylee Emadi

no, actually the other day I got I had bought like a guide from someone maybe like two years ago and I got I completely forgot I had it. And I got an email like a couple of weeks ago that was like, Hey, we have a new version and you get it for free because you bought the first one and Whereas like the updated version, and I was like, that's a really kind, but like, I don't need it, but I love that I have it. Like, I just think that's like a really, it was a good example of like, nothing is finite, nothing is forever, you can definitely make changes and and offer those up to the people who become your first purchasers and your first customers.

Brooke Michelle

Absolutely.

Laylee Emadi

Is there anything that has like, I'm sure, actually, I know that there's probably things that have surprised you in this process. But like what has surprised you the most in the process of like, building out like educational resources, or passive income or your merge or anything that you've added into this part of your business?

Brooke Michelle

I feel like there's 1,000,001 surprises, and I'm trying to think of like these specific ones. I think a big one for me is the products that people actually like purchased or like the popularity of certain products, there were some that I like was creating. And I was like, oh, like, I haven't really been asked about this too much. But I feel like this was something I could definitely like bring value to, and ended up being like my top selling product by like, a lot. So I think that that really surprised me just like that. People were interested in something that I did want to offer but wasn't really like discussed prior too often. And then just the surprises of like, how many things can go wrong during the launch, and just really having to just like, Be human, because you can't change it like that, like I said, you like live and learn. You just put it out there. And you'll learn from the next time. But like, I remember, I launched my products and I got all these emails like, hey, the product wasn't attached to the, like, email confirmation I got and I was like, oh, solid. Yeah, that makes sense. So I think it's like, it's a huge lesson in humility, if anything, to just remind you that like people make mistakes, and life goes on. But like, sometimes you have to, like fall on your face to then like be a better person. That's never a quote, but we're just gonna go.

Laylee Emadi

I like it. We're making it a quote. And I love it. And I think I honestly think like, it's a good reminder to think about, like, if you were the customer, and that happened to you, would you be mad? Like I wouldn't, I would just be like, Hey, you didn't do this. And then you move on. But as the person who's putting it out there, you're like, Whew, that was hard.

Brooke Michelle

Yeah, it's like when you send an email, and it has like, the, like, the wrong subject line, or whatever it may be, because maybe you duplicate it from my past email, you know, it's a huge lesson in humility, but it also kind of like, I feel like brings you down to the same level as your consumers. Because if there was any kind of like, I want to buy this from her, because I think she's so rad. It's just like, Oh, she's

also human like this things happen. Also, technology happens, like technology is so so hard to understand sometimes. So technology also pulls up.

Laylee Emadi

Yeah, I mean, things are glitchy and things are just finicky. And it's just kind of tough. So I love that. And I agree with those with those things. What has been like your favorite thing to see come out of creating this, this part of your business, like what has been the very best thing to come out of it for you. I mean money but aside from money when

Brooke Michelle

I think honestly, and stuff like this makes me so sentimental, but things like this just kind of like bring me a newfound confidence or inspiration for being a business owner. So I think that that is honestly like my favorite thing. That's kind of it. I feel like sometimes it's so easy to get wrapped up in the two dues and like everyday feeling like a repetitive nature of like, okay, this morning have to wake up, I have to do my emails, I have to edit this gallery, I have to, you know, I have all of these checklists to get done every week and finding something else. Along with photography that's like in the same realm that gives me such passion. There were nights that I was like staying up till 3am because I just couldn't put my google doc down. I just like couldn't close the laptop because I was so into whatever I was writing there just like teaching people what I was writing, or I would like text myself ideas. I'm like, Oh my God, wait, this could be valuable to someone. I think that the competence and inspiration and almost just like rekindling of a spark, especially when things get repetitive or like burnout starts to happen at the end of wedding season was really like my favorite thing. It's just like a way to just kind of like, mind myself, like, I do have a lot to offer to people and there's a way to offer it to people. And even if it is scary, I feel like just knowing someone asked me on an Instagram story right before I launched my shop, they're like, What is your what is something that you like love most about your business? And I feel like that's it as a whole, like the competence that being a business owner has given me is like, unmatched I feel like I was like the shy little squirrel when I was like 17 and then like, from there I've just like blossomed. I feel like people that they knew me from high school and then they like see me now or just like that's not the person I remember. I was like quiet kind of and like didn't really interact in like big social settings. And if I did, I was always like the quiet one in the group because I didn't want to like over speak anyone. And I feel like now I'm like okay, taking up space. I'm like, okay, being loud. I'm okay being like nice. Help and sharing my unpopular opinions or like even just doing a podcast interview right now, like, like I was telling you, I was so nervous before. But like, I just like the confidence that it gives me to see that people, like, aren't even interacting at all. If I get five customers, I'm like, thrilled.

Laylee Emadi

Yeah, that's amazing five, because it because that's five human beings that are like, respect your authority enough to like

Brooke Michelle

to purchase a product like is insane.

Laylee Emadi

It's amazing. It's a great feeling. I love that positive. I like almost don't even want to go into unpopular opinion. But we have to because it's about like, let's, let's, I've been waiting for the unpopular opinion. Let's soak in the positive vibes. And then let's switch gears and go with the real real, what is your unpopular opinion on this topic?

Brooke Michelle

Okay, so I really, if somebody has a rebuttal to this, I would absolutely love to hear it. But my unpopular opinion on like education, and just like passive income, or things of that nature, is that you should, there should be a time cap for how long you can teach on it if you haven't been actively pursuing it. So for example, if you like have been out of weddings for seven years now and you're releasing courses on how to be a better wedding photographer, there should be a time limit or a cap on you being able to teach on that because what was happening in seven years ago today is like ever changing. It's always something different. There's new trends, there's new ways of marketing, there's new ways of customer service, or like client experience. So I think my main unpopular opinion would just be that there should be a limit on being able to teach outside of actually practicing.

Laylee Emadi

I actually also think like when you said that, I was thinking, there should also be a cap on how long you can sell something that was created that long ago? Because I know that like, yeah, like update your stuff.

Brooke Michelle

versions, we want versions version two point out. We want the version

Laylee Emadi

two and the three and, you know, continue on because it's just like, you're right, nothing is stagnant, like things are changing all the time.

Brooke Michelle

Absolutely. One of my semi most popular products is the DIY guy. It's DIY your merch shop for \$8 month. And I remember I released it. And then a month later, they upped it to \$9 a month. So even just something as simple as that, like my title isn't even relevant right now. Because I need to update it to \$9 a month. But like it, they're like, things are always changing. Inflation happens, you know, like social media algorithms change how people like like to be spoiled as clients change. There's just so many things that can change. And like, I think that there should be a cap on if you are out of practicing, then you just have to like retire that that piece of your content a little early.

Laylee Emadi

Yeah, I get it. I get your unpopular opinion. I spend a lot

Brooke Michelle

but I do. But if anybody has a rebuttal, I would love to discuss it. I've been like dams are open. I'm like waiting to hear the rebuttal because I love like kind of being proven wrong. But I just like I need to I need the reasoning, I need to know, I'm open to change my opinion. And new new information is presented. But right now I'm pretty solid on this one.

Laylee Emadi

I'm actually pretty much with you. The only I guess the only I always say there's like one exception to every rule or whatever. But like I think the only exception would be like, if your entire like work was researching new trends and researching and getting data and seeing like it maybe you're not shooting the wedding. But all your clients are shooting weddings and you're really invested in you're spending all

the time and like in the trenches with them. Maybe then it's like you could still still maybe have something relevant. But even that I feel like is a little iffy. I am pretty much with you on this one.

Brooke Michelle

Yeah, there's definitely an exception to everything. But sometimes I say that everything's solid on

Laylee Emadi

this one. We're sticking with this. We're sticking with it. We're good on this one. I love it. Oh my gosh. Well, thank you so much for sharing all I know this was a lot you guys with passive income, but like hopefully, you have a good place to start. Follow along with Brooke, where can people find you most easily? And we'll link all your stuff in the show notes.

Brooke Michelle

Yeah, so my Instagram is at Brooke, Michelle J. And then my website is Brooke Michelle photo.com.

Laylee Emadi

Thanks for being here, friend. You're amazing.

Brooke Michelle

Thank you.

Laylee Emadi

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