

So, Here's the Things Episode 144

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, Layli Ahmadi, 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, I am so excited because today we are talking about something that we actually we have spoken about on this show maybe a few years ago. And we're going to be talking all about like brand identity and how to discover and uncover everything behind your brand and what that should look like. And I have the perfect person for you to meet today, if you haven't met her already, my friend and the incredible Rachel Curtis of Rachel Lee photography, she is a brand photographer, she's a strategist, she is just a wealth of knowledge when it comes to this not only as a brand, photographer, but also as somebody who's done a lot of research on what it means to actually, you know, discover what a brand is, and everything behind it. And she's also the founder of the brand plan. And the brand plan is I'm gonna let her tell us all about it. But it's a it's a group coaching program. And it's incredible. So it's actually at the time that this episode will go live. I believe her cart is closing like today or tomorrow. So if you guys are listening to this episode, and you are which you will be blown away by Rachel's knowledge, I highly suggest you go check it out. But before I tell you all about the brand plan and everything behind it, we're gonna pick Rachel's brain today, because that's what we do on the show. So Rachel, welcome to the show.

Rachael

Thank you. Thank you. So excited to be here.

Laylee Emadi

I'm so so grateful to you for sharing your expertise. So tell us a little bit about you and your pivot. I know you were a wedding photographer a while ago. And I've kind of gotten a front row seat to seeing you pivot and uncover all of this incredible knowledge. So tell us a little bit about like your entrepreneurial journey.

Rachael

Well, yes, like Lily said, I'm Rachel. I am currently a brand photographer and coach for creatives. But I started out my business straight out of high school in 2017. As a wedding photographer, I kind of took the if you've been in the wedding world at all, you know who Caitlin James is I kind of took her course path to success. And that was my way into the industry. But around 2019 2020, I started getting tired of the role of being a wedding photographer, I was looking forward into me like I'm still single, I'm still figuring out what life looks like. And I was looking forward to the days when I would have a family one day. And I'm like, I don't want to live life on the weekends. So that was reason number one. And then Reason number two for my pivot was, I never could tell you why I was a wedding photographer. And that was really very unsettling, other than the fact that Caitlin told me how to do it and how to be successful in it. And so with that reality, I am a person that loves going all in on what I'm doing, I wholeheartedly believe in whatever I do. And so the fact that I couldn't necessarily tell you why I was a

wedding photographer beyond the fact that it was the easy way in and I loved serving people. It was a bit unsettling. And so I kind of went on this unlearning and relearning of who I was and what I really loved. And I quickly found out that I had moonlighted as a website designer for people, I had helped friends, get their brands off the ground. The entire time I've been in business Janome said was low key my idol throughout this whole time because I think I watched every single webinar she put out, listened to every podcast she put out there attended every talk she ever did at United even though I did not need to because it was basically the same talk every year. But I quickly realized that like my passion for brands and building brands, far superseded any passion that I had for weddings. And so then it was like, Okay, how do I make this happen without quitting weddings, cold turkey, and then switching those identities. And so between 2020 and 2021, I started testing out brands and started fading out of weddings, launched my new brand at the end of 2020. And then kind of took off. I had a really, really great season and 2021 and then come 2022 I kind of was no longer riding the high of the pivot. And when that happened, I had another bit of an identity crisis. Because you're like, Okay, I went from being a wedding photographer to now I'm a brand photographer to wait this has to also be deeper than just transitioning and serving people. pull in. So throughout the process of both of those things, I quickly realized that none of the freebies or the courses I'd taken to help me figure out this brand thing ever worked for my brain. And they always left me wanting, they didn't help me get from questionnaire to final why statement or final value statement. I don't like generic, ideal clients of like women named Jane Doe in their 30s. Because those don't help me. And so when I was starting to pull stats of like, what people what my clients are actually connecting with, it's more of the things that I ultimately care about more than anything else. And so then the question was, how do you actually translate this into a brand that works, and functions, and then into marketing that actually pulls in people I want to work with and doesn't appease the masses. And so just having that conversation with myself and my business, and then also having said conversation with other creatives, realizing that the problem wasn't isolated to myself there in the brand plan was born. And so it is a program is kind of alongside of brand photography, it helps me to help creatives curate a brand that like sells without saying a word, to be the standout type of brand that we all longed to be, but that nobody handed us a handbook when we signed up for an LLC that was like this is how to brand your business, or this is how to market your business. And so yeah, I'd said like Layli said, it's an eight week group coaching meets course framework that helps you to trade your brand identity crisis for like, rock solid clarity, and then rhythm based marketing. So yeah, that's

Laylee Emadi

amazing. Love you sharing all of this, there were so many things I want to like dive into within your story. One, I feel like I say this, I'm such a broken record on this show about not discounting and disqualifying, like the experience that you are building or that you have that is not necessarily like 100% related to what you're doing at that moment. So for you, it was doing things like moonlighting as a you know, as like an unofficial website builder, or, you know, web designer, or whatever, and all of the little things that you're doing to build up all of this additional experience, and then being cognizant of how you feel doing that I think is so important. But there was one thing you said that I really want to like, jump into the conversation with. And I think that is everybody's dream sentence, which was you said, a brand that sells without saying a word, because everybody hates selling, everybody hates I mean, maybe not everybody, but if you love it, like I don't know if we're like best friends, because I I hate it. So tell us a little bit more about that, like, what is a brand that sells without saying a word mean? And and how do we start to like walk down the road of accomplishing that? Well,

Rachael

I think starting off the idea of a brand that sells without saying a word actually came from a client review of mine. And she said that I gave her images that kind of allow people to sell without saying word. And so I was like, I'm a person that has a hard time claiming something like that statement, if it came from me because it's a little audacious. And so the fact that it came from a client allowed me to like dog eared it and be like, Okay, now I'm using that in my marketing. But the reality of a brand that sells without saying a word comes from like my thought process comes from a line from Seth Godin, where he talks about the idea that people like us, we do things like this, if you think about the reality that you have a business that serves and think about also that selling itself is serving someone, it's helping them to find transformation, it's helping them to find the solution to their problem, it's helping in whatever shape or form realize their dreams or find a solution. And so if that is true, then we need to sell. But selling can feel icky. And wouldn't it be more beautiful? If your brand was the magnet that drew in everybody that was like you and needed what you have to offer. And so that's how I've built my business, I would rather be the person that's so good, They Can't Ignore You like what Cal Newport says, and that it draws people in rather than having to raise my hand all the time on social being like hi, bye for me, I have sessions available in q2 and q3. And so the way that that manifests itself is the first part of it is identity because a brand is identity. And it's perception. It's It's whatever you the identity that you have as a business and then the way that that is perceived by your clients. And so first you have to be crystal clear on who you are and what you have to offer. And once you're crystal clear on that And then it's ensuring that that translates well into messaging that draws in that ideal client. So the second part is getting crystal clear on who you're serving. And we're not just asking where they live, we're not just asking where they buy from, we're asking what matters most to them. Because what I've found with a few of my students and with myself is that there's a couple of lines and a couple of things I say all the time. One of them is like, wherever you are, be all there. That's something I say often. Another thing that I talk about is living the season of your life that you're in to the fullest, and being fully present where you're at. Another thing that I say often is, I am building a business that serves my life and not the other way around. And then another thing that I say is in these have a point, I promise. Another thing I say is that I don't settle for good enough, that I'm always improving that I'm always reaching. And what I found is, the more often that I reiterate those statements, the more often that those things show through in my work, the more often that I am just fully transparent about the things that I believe, the more I realize, I can hop on a discovery call after someone skimmed through my website or saw my work. And my conversion rate is usually like 75%, which is stupid, good. I don't know what the actual status, I know that it's below 50, like the average. But if I can get someone in a room and get them on a call, after they've in some way experienced my brand, it's like I saw without saying a word because they're pre qualified.

Laylee Emadi

Okay, love this. And I think the two things that I really want to focus on as I'm like jotting down notes furiously to be honest, and I hope people who are listening are too, I love that you said that there are like two things that you really need to start with. And that's identity and perception. And I'd love to hear kind of like, as you're describing what they are, I guess my first question would be, where do you start? Like, can you give our listeners and myself, like, a couple of things to do to start to, I guess, unravel that identity? Because I love what you said too about? It's, it's knowing who you're serving and what they want versus like, where do they shop? Where do they live all of the things that we used to hear all the time, and we still do I mean, a lot of a lot of people who are just starting down this road of like trying to get clear on their brand identities. They're like, Oh, well, I need to find out where my ideal target consumer shops and their style and things like that. But I'd love to hear like, how do you get deeper? Especially? Because I hope that the people who are listening? I mean, I'm sure they are because I

have been in business for over a decade now. And I still am like, every so often I need to go back to figuring out who is it that I'm actually helping? And like what do they actually need slash want? And how can I uncover that? So like, what's a good starting point for going deeper in identity process?

Rachael

Okay, well, number one, you have to understand that you are not inventing all of this stuff. Your brand in and of itself already exists, especially if you've been in business for a certain period of time. And one of the one of the lines, I say often is that a brand is more a work of observation than it is of invention. And so if that is true, then step number one to clarifying your identity a little bit more, is start taking notice of what you do have what resonates of what feels really great, because likely, within your business, there are things there are messages that are really easy to talk about that you cycle often. So the question is, if it's something that's really easy to talk about for you, then you ask yourself, Is this a main message? I want to cycle around my brand? And then number two, is it something that my ideal audience is engaging with? Now, a lot of the times we think of engagement as a comment on an Instagram post, but it's not always that because sometimes engagement is a DM with something that like, so for me, my coffee journey is something that I wasn't going to share a lot about. But it's something that my clients talk back to me about all the time. And so I'm like, Okay, well, I'm going to continue with that in my personal brand. But then I also occasionally will put out a, an Instagram reel with a script that's very poetic, that sometimes cycles with one of those main messages that I told you about earlier. And with that specific post are those few I get a lot of comments on those. I get a lot of engagements in shares, but then it also comes up in regular conversation with my clients. So whether that's on a coaching call, whether that's in a discovery call, whether that's in a text back and forth, like it's interesting how many people will bring up certain messages or things that I say, and that happened even in my wedding photography years, like clients would bring up things about me They cared about or that they also resonated with. And so it's more about finding where do we have common ground. And so all of this just starts with paying attention. And it's really easy in our businesses to just turn our brains on autopilot and to move through the motions of serving people and loving on people and doing things as we have always done. But the question is, is how you've always done it the way you need to keep doing it. And with that perception piece, you have to start paying attention to, like perception is really just asking yourself, are they picking up what I'm putting down? Are they actually hearing me the way I want them to hear me? And if they're not, then you have to pay attention to the gaps, because those gaps might be costing you clients. It also might just be costing you clarity and making you answer way more questions than you need to. And so that's what I would say is step number one is to just start observing. And once you start observing things are going to, you're going to start processing a lot more once you notice you're noticing, you notice things all the time. It's like when you are going to go buy a new car. And you're like, I've like for me, I had never seen a gold wrap for anywhere. And then I buy my new car and I see gold wrappers everywhere. And especially old people driving them, I was like, Oh, I have this really cool, cute car. No, it's an old people car, I quickly realized that it was very sad. But it's the same principle that once you start paying attention to the things that people engage with, to the things that you do well, to the things that you love, you're going to start seeing more of those things and where they come in to practice. And then I typically, once you start noticing, then you need to just start making notes of what that means. How does this cross over? Ask yourself? Is this something I want to continue carrying on through it? And am I saying it in the clearest way possible?

Laylee Emadi

Okay, I love all this specific examples. Like, I feel like that was really helpful for me to start to imagine like, How can I start to do the rape, like the equivalent of Rachel to my audience, you know what I

mean, and I think that is that is so great to hear, especially like, I love the way that you have the commonality enough and the awareness that your audience and the people that you want to attract would have that like that response to a poetic beautiful reel that you would create. Whereas like, mine may better resonate with something that was like a little bit more like go getter, motivational, you know, like, that's kind of like where my bright brand identity lies. But as a consumer, I would be so attracted into what you're doing. So I love that I think that like understanding the difference is so helpful in discovering your identity. Hopefully, that's that gets people's brains moving on identity. And like, digging into that, I'd love to hear like your views on the perception part of it. And like how you're able to kind of leverage that for people's perception. So that then you can do that whole, like selling without saying a word like strategy.

Rachael

Yeah, so that's the fun part. When I get to come alongside someone in their brand, as a photographer, I immediately become the observer, I always joke that I tumbled down research rabbit holes, anytime that I step up to photograph someone's brand. And the reason I do that is because my goal is to see their brand almost as clearly as they can, because I'll never be inside their brain. But I also need to be able to view it from their client's perspective. And oftentimes, we don't sit and think about who's viewing it when we're creating it. And so I usually come up on the other side of it with imagery. And I'm obviously I'm in one bucket, right of their brand. We know that a brand is not entirely imagery, it's made up of a whole list of things. But specifically in the perception side of things. When we're looking at visuals, there's a lot of ways we're accidentally making ourselves look more inexpensive than we think we are. There's a lot of ways that people might come across with the wrong personality, there's a lot of ways where someone might accidentally be unapproachable. And so when you step up to do stuff with brand photography, specifically, I'm usually looking at it with an eye of is the imagery they're currently using, does it does it match the caliber of the brand that they've created? Is there offers is the value of their offers being communicated with the images that they're using? And sometimes I have to have very kind but hard conversations with my clients, saying like, Hey, do you know you're accidentally making yourself look cheap? And it's never your intention. But there's certain brands that once you hit a level in business, you they don't need to associate with you anymore. And a lot of the time, like my clients, I'll ask about brand boosters all the time and their questionnaires and stuff and the amount of times that someone with a five or six or \$7,000 service will tell me that target and Starbucks and Chick fil A are still their brand Booster's I'm sitting here like, we need to level you up friend. And it's only because you might be speaking your own language. But the reality is, at some point in business, you hit a point where your ideal client is no longer yourself. And that is a hard reality to step into, especially on the perception piece. But that's where you have to be compassionate and curious enough about your audience to step into their shoes and understand their world. So you can ultimately serve them better. And that will serve your business better and your brand better. But it will also serve you better.

Laylee Emadi

Oh my gosh, that was incredible. I like I feel like if I was listening to this, aka I'm listening to this. And I'm like, I need to take this, this group coaching program. I sound like I'm like hired. Rachel did not pay me to do this. I am NOT an affiliate you guys. I just think she's so brilliant and uncovering like things that so many coaches are not talking about. And so many educators don't actually dive into with the intentionality and depth that Rachael does. So I really encourage all of you to go check it out. And we will link everything in the show notes for you guys. But as we wrap up here, because I could ask you a million other questions, but I really I mean, we would this, this would be way too long. Rachel, do you have an unpopular opinion about about, I guess, brand identity and uncovering a brand identity, I feel

Rachael

like I have a lot of unpopular opinions. And that's kind of what makes me a good brand photographer. But my number one unpopular opinion is that we need to stop running to items and other brands to give our brand identity. And what I mean by this is that the moment I associate myself with something that is basic, my brand accidentally becomes basic. And that might be a tactic for you. But you have to be careful. And the revolution of and we're still coming out of it of my brand is tacos, my brand is iced coffee, my brand is all of these things, because I see influencers talking about it, and I need to connect with my people. You're not an influencer. And nobody ever asked you to be as a business, you have to be a content creator. Yes. But that doesn't mean that your personal brand needs to show your entire life. For some people that works. For me, I'm a personal person, I would rather have a conversation with you in person. And I would rather my brand not contain every part of my life. And so with this, I had to look because I'm also not a basic person. I don't like Starbucks, I make my own espresso on my espresso machine at home. And so because of this, there were a lot of ways that people and I'm single, I don't have any pets, I don't have any children. There were all of these ways that people built a brand around all of these things. And I did not have these things. And so I had to figure out okay, what other than coffee do I have to share with people? And what I realized was the moment I stepped outside of the basic and the easy, and the surface level conversations was the moment that I reached the depth that I wanted in my business and that actually my clients are craving. And I would have never found that out had I not gotten uncomfortable with the things that I put in default to. If that makes sense. That

Laylee Emadi

makes total sense. That is so brilliant. I totally agree. And I think that is like such a hot take but also like not I mean, it makes complete sense when you hear it and I was loved it so much. Thank you so much, Rachel. Okay, where's like the fastest way people can connect with you. Aside from everything, we will link in the show notes.

Rachael

Um, the easiest way is probably on Instagram. And you can find me at Rachel Lee photos. But note I have two difficult spellings of my name. So Rachel is spelled like Michael ra CH, AE L and then Li is Le IG H. So that's the easiest way but if all else fails, it will also be in the show notes. So absolutely.

Laylee Emadi

Yeah, you guys go connect with Rachel. She's incredible. Check out the brand plan if not for this round for the next round. But if you can do it this round. I mean, I'm like ready to jump in like take my money. I love this. And you guys I will catch you guys on the next snack size episode next Monday. For show notes and resources mentioned on today's episode head to so here's the thing podcast.com This show is brought to you by the creative educator Academy, where we teach creative entrepreneurs how to teach because I believe that industries thrive when experts can share their knowledge. Well, if you're enjoying the podcast, I'd love to read your review on iTunes or see your rating on Spotify. Thanks so much for listening, and I'll catch you on the next episode.