

EXPLORE YOUR ENTHUSIASM

EPISODE 202: BEST ADVICE EVER. YOUR QUESTIONS ANSWERED

What's the best piece of advice I've received for my business? Today I'm answering a question from one of the listeners to talk about three different pieces of advice that have shaped my business.

Welcome to Explore Your Enthusiasm, episode 202, with me, Tara Swiger. Today I'm answering a question sent in on the voicemail line. If you'd like to ask a question, just call me at (567) 393-8272

Michelle from [MadebyMEE](#) asks, What's the best advice you've received in your business.

Thanks so much, Michelle!

I have a few answers, for different points in my career.

1. Become an expert

This was the advice that shaped my yarn business and helped it grow, way back in 2006-2009. Naomi of [IttyBiz.com](#) taught me this. She would say throughout her blog posts and classes - become an expert in a micro-niche and it'll be much easier for people to talk about you, because they'll get what you do. When they think of your topic, they'll think of you. Which leads to sales and press.

How I applied the lesson:

From the start, I didn't just make hand-spun, hand-dyed yarn - I sourced ethical fiber and yarn - from women's coops in Nepal to wool mill-ends to locally spun hemp yarn. So my thing was (way before any big yarn company had an organic or sustainable line) - ethically sourced yarn. At the time I heard this advice to "become an expert", I had written about my choices of yarn maybe once or twice on my blog, and on my yarn labels. But I hadn't really focused my brand in any way (I didn't have a brand!). At first I dismissed Naomi's advice as just being for people who sold info products (which I didn't at the time), but then I realized that I could become an expert, at least among knitters about sustainably sourced yarn. So I did!

Not only did I research and learn, I started writing about it on my blog (why organic cotton has such a huge environmental impact, the difference between buying mass-produced wool roving and local wool) and I started visiting local farms (there weren't many!) and featuring the farmers on the blog. I also made some yarn from recycled material, like a skein of yarn that had used silk tea bags spun into wool that I had dyed with the tea.

The results were what enabled me to quit my day job: That tea-dyed yarn photo was licensed for a book about green knitting, I was interviewed as a "green expert" for a knitting magazine, and before any of the press, my yarn started selling out every time I listed it, because people had followed it's story on my blog and flickr.

Keep in mind, this was before I used Facebook, before Instagram, before I had a podcast. I wrote 2-3 times per week on my blog, sent a monthly email to a list of 150 people, and posted on Flickr and Twitter photos of my yarn or process every day. (Flickr wouldn't let you link back to your shop!)

But becoming an "expert" gave me something TO write, something specific to share! Instead of constantly wondering, I focused in on my "expertise" and that in turn gave people some way to understand my work, something to talk about.

2. Teach people what you're learning

I don't remember her ever saying this directly, but I learned this by hanging out with and reading Havi Brooks. And this is what sparked everything I do today.

How I applied this lesson:

So when I quit my day job, I decided to use it as a marketing opportunity and make a BIG deal about it. I had a sale, I did daily giveaways. And the important part: I did a Twitter Q+A and a series of blog posts (linked up in the transcript. Download it at taraswiger.com/podcast202 I re-read them this week and they are so awesome, and so sweet! So great to remember how I was seeing my journey thus far, almost a decade ago). I just shared what I had learned as I was learning it.

And the reaction was not what I intended. Sure, I sold some more yarn. But I got TONS of questions about the business. TONS + TONS. My email inbox filled up:

"How did you start a business?"

"How do you know you'll make enough to quit your day job?"

"what was the one thing that created this success?" (**Spoiler alert:** there is no one thing. For anyone)

So I decided to do what Havi said and teach what I was learning. I wasn't sure if anyone would be interested in really learning from me, so I set up a series of (free!) Q+A conference calls (so 2009! I wish I had had live video!). over 50 people signed up to come to them. Side note, Kari Chapin came to my first one and asked about her felted mitten business! The next year, she wrote Handmade Marketplace and interviewed me for it!

Based on the questions I was getting, I could see where the gaps were in people's knowledge and the available resources (Etsy barely had a blog and I wrote a series of blog posts about marketing communication in 2009!). I didn't think people were looking at it systematically, and I wanted to show them how to look at it holistically, and create a marketing plan that answered the right questions (who is my customer? What online platform does she use? What's special about my work? How do I communicate that?). So I wrote my first class: Share your Handmade Goodness. It was 3 weeks of one hour telephone lessons and worksheets. I kept creating more classes (one on Twitter that was SO GOOD, but only had one student!) and Shannon of Cooperative Press asked me if I wanted to turn it into a book with them in 2011, the book, Market Yourself was published in 2012.

All of this to say - I didn't set out to have a teaching business. I just listened to what questions people had and answered them. I taught what I was learning - not what I was an expert in. But, following Advice #1 - I created a very tiny niche (at the time!) that I decided to become an expert in.

This advice has served me well since then - just share what you're learning in the moment. Whenever I do this on the podcast it resonates with you guys SO MUCH MORE, than when I try to teach or speak about the stuff I learned years ago, that I've heavily researched. We are all, as a community, growing and changing, and by sharing what I'm learning, I'm staying on top of our growth curve.

(The corollary is don't teach what you don't know. I regularly point people to other teachers if they want to learn something I either don't want to teach, or just don't feel excited about learning. A lot of Starship Captains graduate after growing their business to a certain point (usually after mid-six figures), because they need to learn stuff I never had to learn - about inventory, taxes, employees. I'm open and honest about that, because my job is to teach what I'm learning.)

3. Document, don't create.

Gary Vaynerchuk says this ALL the time. In fact, he has a great video that explains the concept, linked up in my show notes. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RVKofRNldyI>

What it means is: you don't have to create new marketing stuff, just document your process. If you're starting a business, document the creation. If you're creating a new product, document the process.

How I used this:

I was pretty much doing this in the beginning of my business, but as more and more social media tools proliferated through the years, and I started to build platforms on each of them, well, it just can be overwhelming. Then I was watching [GaryVee](#) a year or so ago and he says "Document, don't create" and it just freed me up to not make fancy marketing material on all my social media - I just share. This is what I'm working on, this is what I'm learning, this is what's coming up. When I'm doing so much, like the last few months, I just use Instagram Stories and my vlog on YouTube to just document what's going on - behind the scenes and in my own head. This has allowed me to do a lot more, than if I was trying to be perfect, which has allowed me to reach a lot more people, and reach them more consistently. So I have 2 podcasts, 3 YouTube videos a week (if you're not subscribed to me there, you're missing daily videos in April!), several FB pages, and groups for people I'm mentoring, Starship Captains, customers and listeners ([Take Care of Yourself with Tara Swiger](#) is the FB group you should be in), daily Instagram posts, several IG Stories a day on both Instagram accounts (@taraswiger and @essentialenthusiasm), weekly webinars, and live workshops around the country. ALL of it is built on documenting - for my crafty biz business, I'm documenting what YOU are asking me about, what issues my listeners and Captains are having. For my doterra business, I'm documenting my own learning about essential oils and how I'm using them, and how I'm taking care of myself. That's it. By documenting and not creating, all of these channels just come...not easily, but from a sense of flowing, from living my life.

4. You haven't failed until you quit.

I wanted to end with this one because it's the most life-changing. My dad said it to me when I told him I was quitting my day job to make yarn full-time. He was encouraging and I told him I was a little afraid it all might crash and burn. He was so certain I wouldn't fail and I asked him how he could possibly know that (he's hardly a yarn expert) and he said "You haven't failed until you quit."

It's so true. YOU get to decide when you quit (some things you'll want to quit), so you get to decide if you've failed. And anything up until totally giving up...no matter how bad it is, no matter how far you are from your dream...it isn't failure.

This keeps me going in hard times, and I hope this, and all the lessons help you in your own business (or life!) journey. If you'd like a transcript of this episode, along with the links to those blog posts i wrote in 2009, head to TaraSwiger.com/podcast202 and scroll down and put your email address in at the bottom of the page and we'll send you your transcript right away. Oh, and don't forget to join up my FB group Take Care of Yourself with Tara Swiger, where you'll get access to weekly videos, Q+As and a book club!

Thank you so much for listening and I hope you have an enthusiastic day!

HOW I QUIT MY DAYJOB SERIES, WRITTEN IN 2009:

1. Intro <https://taraswiger.com/launching-a-life/>
2. It starts at home <https://taraswiger.com/the-path-to-yarn-it-starts-at-home/>
3. I learn to knit <https://taraswiger.com/path-to-yarn-learning-to-knit/>
4. Debbie Stollar changed my life <https://taraswiger.com/path-to-yarn-debbie-stollar-changes-my-life/>
5. Move into cubicle land <http://www.blondechicken.com/path-to-yarn-moving-into-cubicle-land/>
6. Into self-employment <https://taraswiger.com/path-to-yarn-out-of-the-cubicle-forest/>