

SUBSCRIPTION ENTREPRENEUR



HOSTED BY ERIC TURNNESSEN, FOUNDER OF [membermouse™](#)

How Elena Muttono Built A Successful Membership For Language Teachers

“For me, turning my attention to a membership site was really what helped me reach more people. It was an opportunity to connect with more teachers, hear their problems, and create courses that really answered their questions.”

INTRO:

You're listening to Elena Muttono – my special guest on today's episode of The Subscription Entrepreneur Podcast.

Elena is an online entrepreneur, coach, and educator who helps language teachers start and grow their online teaching businesses

In our conversation, we dive deep into how Elena navigated the specific growth stages of her membership site – from startup to scaling.

She shares what initially inspired her to start her business. Plus, how she found her niche, got traction, and built her content & community platform.

And like most people building online businesses, Elena faced a fair number of technical challenges along the way. You'll hear all about these hurdles and discover what she did to overcome them.

I'm honored to share our conversation with you and sincerely hope you enjoy it. As always, I'm your host Eric Turnnessen — and this is The Subscription Entrepreneur Podcast.

Eric: Elena, welcome to the show.

Elena: Thanks, Eric. I'm glad to be here.

Eric: Great. It's my pleasure to have you. Very much looking forward to our conversation. And before we get started here, can you just give our listeners a brief background about who you are and what you do?

Elena: I've been doing online business and teaching online for the past 12 years full time. And I started as an ESL teacher. I worked initially in Ukraine, then I moved to the U.S. And I couldn't find a job. So, I started teaching online. And because working for somebody else, there's lots of platforms that allow you to teach English or other languages online, but those platforms are a big challenge to get noticed on. So, I decided early on that if I was going to do anything marketing wise, I will do it on my own platform.

So, I created my own blogger blog in 2010, and I did a lot of different things, experimenting. A few years into it, I realized that I wanted to change things up a little bit. Prior to that, I had only been working with a Russian speaking audience, and that was kind of limiting for me. And I decided to niche in a different way, reach global audience, and do two things. Coaching other online teachers who want to do the same. They want to do the same thing that I was doing. And then also doing accent training. I couldn't decide which one I wanted to do more.

And a few years later, I realized that really, my passion was to work with online language teachers. So, that's what I focused on. And I created an online community to help online language teachers grow and build their businesses on their own terms.

Eric: Nice. So, you came to this country, and the first thing you did was you started teaching English as a second language online. And at that point, were you just figuring it all out as you went?

Elena: Yes. That was the hard part. Yes. I moved here. I'm in New Orleans. But I was in the area north of New Orleans at the time, and I was trying to apply for a job. And there were lots of openings for ESL teachers, but nobody was able to take on the paperwork, immigration paperwork that I had to submit. And I don't think public schools really are equipped to do that or funded to do that.

So, I just started experimenting with things. Then I had been tutoring online, ESL online in Ukraine. And then I had moved these clients to get more engaged online. At the time, I think I did partly online and part of it I still did in person. But then of course after I moved, everybody went online. And yes, I was figuring things out. I wanted to start a blog, and I would go and Google and figure it out. Social media is the same way. So, that's why I have so much experience of things that didn't work. And I think that's what makes me probably today a coach who can empathize more with people that are starting out and are totally overwhelmed and lost. And there's so many things, and they just need someone to tell them that it's going to be okay.

Eric: Well, it's interesting, right? Because I think when people approach from a blank slate thinking about doing an online business, I think a lot of people will think that the technical challenges and hurdles will be the thing that they need to focus on. But oftentimes, people either don't expect or focus on these kind of mental challenges that happen in terms of getting the ball rolling with a new business, all the different aspects like content creation, how you're going to price your offer, how you're going to promote it to people. There's just so many things, and it's very easy to get overwhelmed.

Elena: Yes. And there is a lot more steeper learning curve in the beginning. Especially at the time, I was kind of away from the community. And most of the people that were doing online teaching business were kind of out of reach for me. They either seemed like they were already

achieving great things. So, I just couldn't connect and I couldn't see how their expertise could help me.

So, because of that kind of isolation, it made it even more challenging to research things and say, "Okay, I don't really need this at the moment." Prioritizing what's important, what's not important. So, I think that compelled me so years later, when I switched to coaching to focus on helping other online language teachers with the same kinds of issues that I had had before.

Eric: And to this day, is that what you focus on?

Elena: Yes. The niche itself as you know, as we all know has evolved. So, initially, I was just giving tips on how to get started online. What do you need to do? What do you not need to do? Largely, I was talking about what you don't need to do. Because it seems like with Facebook advertising or everything you read on blogs, it seems like you just need everything. And at the time, especially was 2014 when I started focusing primarily on working with teachers. It seemed like you had to be everywhere, Google+, and Twitter and all other channels. And it was hard for people to learn to say no.

But eventually as I worked on my niche, I realized that my superpower and expertise went in the area of how to help people scale their business. Because also, I went through this. I got to a point where I was super busy with online classes and I taught five to seven hours a day. Then on top of that, I had to create content and promote it. And I was doing everything on a really tight time margin. And therefore, I really had no space to develop and to understand what my niching was. So, I had to come up with different formats of teaching online, teaching a language online, and kind of break the stereotype that the only way to teach online a particular language is through one-to-one classes, which is not true.

Eric: Is that when you kind of got introduced to the concept of membership sites?

Elena: Yes. And other things as well. But it was just the different kinds of formats that I was exploring. For online language teachers for example, they could do a variety of things to encourage their clients to learn. And membership sites and membership communities were just one of them.

For me, turning my attention to a membership site and just growing an online community was really what helped me reach more people and lower the price for the people that want coaching or want their question answered. And at the same time, lower my load as a coach. Because by then, I had also gotten to be really busy because coaching, it's a higher price point. But then you can only help very few people.

So, for me, a membership site was an opportunity to connect with more teachers, and hear their problems, and create courses, and packages, and write books that really answered their questions. And now I see a lot of teachers that I work with switch to membership model, or try

it out I should say. With conversational clubs, book clubs, and all other ways that you can utilize the model of growing a community.

Eric: I mean, it seems like that track of starting with doing it yourself, solving the problem yourself, then moving into one-on-one teaching from what you've learned. And then from there, releasing it to a larger group through membership site or other things. That seems like a very common path that people take. And there's something that is very important about the one-to-one experience. There seems to be a lot of lessons that you can learn that help you to be a better teacher.

Because of course, when we learn it for ourselves, there are very particular things that we have to work with about ourselves and get beyond. But that doesn't necessarily make us an expert about how to help person A, B, and C get through because people are going to have different obstacles.

Elena: Right. Right.

Eric: What kind of things did you learn during your one-to-one period of time in coaching that was beyond what you learned when you did it for yourself?

Elena: You mean what I learned from working with teachers?

Eric: Yeah. Basically, what prepared you to be able offer this to a group? because I think when you're offering something to a group, the reason I'm asking this because I think a lot of times people want to skip the coaching step. They don't work with people one-to-one. They basically solve it for themselves and they think that they're ready to teach it, like start a membership site. And maybe they are. Depends on the subject matter. But I think that people I've seen who have success, they do this period of time where they do one-to-one. So, I'm just looking to understand where the value lies in that to help people understand that.

Elena: Right. Yes, absolutely. I think one of the things that I discovered initially is in order to be effective to help people, you need to really focus on who you're helping and what their main issue is. Otherwise, it's going to be, "Well, I can help you with this, and this, and this."

So, the process of niching down is what I had to work on and decide okay, what exactly am I helping people achieve? And I realize that for me, helping people shift their mindset from an online teacher to an online business owner was more important for me. I felt like this is what held people back is that idea that I'm not an online business owner, I'm just teaching. So, because of that kind of mindset.

So, I help people see that. And in the process of working one-to-one, I noticed that as I worked with essentially similar people and listened to similar issues, I've discovered that there were same problems. People were kind of going through the same struggles of, "In order to offer something valuable, I need to niche down. So, how do I do this?" So, I spent a lot of time

helping people to niche down so that they find something that is truly authentically theirs. Then after you do that, the question is how do you speak about this? So, you need to pull out your why, the core message. I was like, "So, why are you doing this? For example, you teach English to the IT world. Why is that important? Why does it matter to you?" So, that had to be addressed as well, your story.

Then how you write it, how you talk about that on social media. How do you position yourself on social media so that you are both approachable, and knowledgeable, and all those things?

So, as I was going through these and it felt like I was repeating myself a lot, I would put my answers in the blog post, and then later I would put them into books. But I realized that the training, actually me talking about this issue was the most effective way. So, I started recording videos that I was later selling. And because I'm very prolific and I tend to also over-function when I'm anxious, I was really creating a lot of materials, and I was over-delivering. And then it was really confusing to my audience. And that's what actually pushed me on this road of creating a membership site. Because I felt like if all these teachers could come and then have access to all these answers to the same questions. What is my niche? How do I position myself? How do I express my core message? How do I market? How do I price my services as an online language teacher? Right? So, it's less generic. This is how you price it. But very much specific, because I know what pricing issues online language teachers deal with because I dealt with them. So, where do you find confidence to put your face online?

So, that helped me, that one-to-one kind of going over similar issues, and particularly diving into the area that I was super passionate about is how do you actually become a business owner? Not a hustler or of lessons.

Eric: Right. Which is vastly different.

Elena: Yes. Yes.

Eric: Because as a teacher, your focus is you're helping this one person and you watch their progress very closely, which goes back to your point about it's hard to scale that, right? Because you only have so much time. And as a business owner, you're thinking a lot more about how do I bring this to a larger group. And when you answer that question, you naturally start getting into things dealing with technology and other aspects of running a business, which a lot of people when they think about putting their offer out online, think that they didn't sign up for that. "I didn't want to deal with all this other stuff."

So, what you're really describing, this path from a teacher to a business owner, to me it's a real path of transformation. Because it starts a lot of times with helping people understand that a change needs to happen. And especially when you're talking about niching down, I find that a lot of people have resistance to niching down. Because having a very broad market feels very comfortable. Because it's like, "Well I don't know what I'm doing. If I have this shotgun approach, I'll hit something."

Elena: Right. Right.

Eric: "But if I niche down, if I choose something very specific, then maybe I won't hit anything." So, is that something that you experience in your-

Elena: Oh yes. Absolutely yes. And I think there was a lot more resistance to it I should say when I first started. And maybe it was because the online teaching industry or language teaching industry rather was not as over-saturated as it is right now. Because it gets more and more saturated every year. So, maybe in 2014, people still thought, "Well, I can wing it by offering so many things to so many people and being Jack of all trades. It's so much more 'viable' or it makes me attractive."

Another thing that lies here is our own understanding of expertise. And I had to deal with that mindset shift where I almost felt like if I said no to some people that, "I'm sorry, I can't help you." That somehow it reflected on my own level of expertise. That it meant that I'm not an expert enough. Am I not qualified to help this person? I should be able to do that. So, a lot of teachers take it personally, especially niching down like, "No, no, but what about these people? And what about those people? They also need me."

But I must say that eight years later now, there is a lot more understanding of the importance of niche. And people do pick a niche. Like, "Okay, I only want to work with this group of people." But then the issue becomes of why? How do you bring values into your niche? So, it's not just, "Okay, I'm an expert to teach the IT world, English to the IT. So, that's what I'm going to do." Well again, how do you add your values to it? How do you bring your story to this? Because it was enough maybe eight years in go to say, "Hey, I teach English to the IT," and today it's not enough.

Eric: Why isn't it enough today?

Elena: I think because people again are so oversaturated with offers, and options, and voices that in order for them to truly commit to work with someone, they need to feel like this person really cares and connects with them. So, that's why I think that messaging that brings about your core message, your story, and your idea of why, why you're doing this. It is today more valuable to people, because nobody wants to feel like they're being targeted or they're being treated as bags of money. People want to feel like they're seen, and you can only appreciate and see people and their value if you understand where they're coming from. If you bring about your values, that will resonate with their values.

Eric: For sure. And I think that you're using MemberMouse right now, but I think that you've gone through a number of tools prior to this. So, again, this can be a common experience. First of all, it's not that necessarily where you ended up with a tool choice is the right answer for everybody. And a lot of times, this is just part of the process of building a business is you try things. If it doesn't work for you, you try something else.

So, can you explain this process for you a little bit when you were working with technical tools? What kind of limitations did you experience? And then they were big enough limitations that you decided make an investment in a switch because switches are not to be taken lightly from either a financial perspective or a time perspective. It's always a big deal to switch something and start up something new. So, what were you experiencing that led you to think about it? And then ultimately, how did you decide to go ahead and make a switch?

Elena: Yes. In the beginning, I must say that when I switched to working with teachers and when I envisioned that idea of helping online language teachers, I felt like I wanted to work with a web designer, a graphics designer who knew something about plugins and things like that.

So, that was my first big mindset shift. And I hired someone to work with me in 2016. First of all, we revamped my website. And then later, we introduced the membership site. So, that was the first big leap of faith for me.

But when we together came up with the idea of a membership, my first thought was, "Oh no, this is a logistical nightmare. It's more technical issues. It's more promotion. How am I going to promote it?" So, we decided to give it a try. And in order to try something and the way it's going to work, because we envisioned to host our membership on my own website. So, there are different ways you can host it elsewhere.

But the way I thought of it, because for me mainly it was the materials plus the forum component, which initially was not as popular. But the materials I thought, "Well I really need to host them on my website," and there's no way I could have done that myself. So, my now co-host of the community Veronica, she did a research, and she found a plugin that would be really cheap for us, and affordable, and something that we could try because I was like, "Okay, we can install it and see if we're even going to have people joining. I want to know, are we going to have people joining us or not?"

So, we did have about 20 people, and then we just continued experimenting since then, which will have been I think, yeah, will have been five years. Because we opened it in March of 2017. And we experimented, and we did monthly launches, and we did open enrollment, open/close enrollment, all different things to give us ideas what will actually work?

We were trying to learn how to retain people, how to bring in people, how to redo our sales page copy and so forth. So, two years into it, and we had been running into issues with that plugin. And we realized that it was taking a lot of our time and effort, the admin time. Like, "How can I change my password and how can I redo this? I can't log in," and so forth. There were several requests every single week.

So, instead of focusing on how do we bring more people, how do we connect with them? How do we get our forum to work? We were trying to resolve issues of how to get people to access the membership materials.

So, two years into that, we decided to make a big switch and to go with MemberMouse. And we had done some research. One thing that was very appealing to me by then, I could justify the expense of monthly payments. This prior plugin, I only paid once a year. And I saw a great benefit of having access to support, because we did not have a good access to support prior. So, we went with MemberMouse. It was kind of scary because I canceled everybody's payments. And then I said, "Hey people, can you please sign up here?" And then just like, I hope and pray that they will. And I did.

And from the user standpoint, I liked more stats. I liked to see a fuller picture of where people were, what they were doing, and all that. And we really enjoyed all the capabilities and have been enjoying MemberMouse as in the checkout page, you can adjust it. You can make it look the way you want it to look, which is more professional. So, yeah, this was kind of the short story. It was very challenging to move for people that are listening. But I think it was very important for me to know what I want.

Eric: What kind of challenges?

Elena: We ended up hiring people to help us move. And those people, there was a misunderstanding in terms of how available they were going to be. So, they helped us to a certain extent, and then we had to do a lot more work ourselves. So, I think we should have just done it on our own.

Eric: Yeah.

Elena: So, that was kind of frustrating.

Eric: You never tell where the lessons are going to come from.

Elena: Right. Exactly. Exactly. But, those lessons are really necessary. Right now, people ask me, "Hey, what are you using for your membership site? And how are you doing this?" So, I'm able to tell people. So, in the beginning, if you cannot justify the costs, particularly recurring costs, try something really simple and basic. Try it for a few months, see who stays with you. Learn how to market your community. Learn how to redo your sales page. Hire someone to help you rewrite your sales page so you increase your conversions and so forth. Find ways that work for you, and then switch to something that you feel is going to give you enough support, will help you with the layout and all other things, and also reduce the number of problems. I mean, I haven't heard people write into me and asking, "Hey, I can't do this. I asked to change my password and I did not get anything."

Eric: Yeah. And I tell people the same thing really is at a certain stage, there's a lot more experimentation and self-discovery that needs to happen before you commit to more expenses as a business. Because in the beginning when you're bootstrapping things as a solopreneur or something, it's very important to keep an eye on where money is being spent, especially recurring expenses. But the idea is that once you've proven things out and you know something's going to work, then you want to support yourself with something you can trust to scale.

Because basically what you ran into with the previous plugin were scaling issues. As you got more people, you were experiencing a problem. Which maybe if you have 10 people a month needing to contact you directly for password resets, that's doable. But if you want to grow to 100 people, you're going to have to hire a team member just to handle that process.

Elena: Exactly. Or you're going to exhaust to current team members, which was happening with Veronica, who does all the tech support. But she no longer does tech support, but she was more focusing on the graphics design and so forth. And she couldn't do that because she was constantly trying to reset people's passwords. And then it got really precarious, because what if somebody loses access over the weekend and we can't help them? And we had to make those choices.

Eric: And I think it would be helpful to share with listeners some of the other tools that you find useful for your site. What are some of the other tools that you use that you find helpful?

Elena: Yes. So, we used Slack for community management. And initially again, we signed up with Slack because it was what was available at the time. It was free and we were already using it. So, it worked. I actually think it's really good to use some tools for a while before you incorporate them into something bigger, because then you're just reducing stress for yourself. So, there was Slack community.

Of course, we are using Mailchimp for integration. And that was one of the challenges too with the previous plugin. The integration was really awful. And by integration, I mean for listeners who may not know is this connection with MemberMouse and Mailchimp. Prior plugin was also sort of connected to Mailchimp. But whenever people unsubscribed or canceled that subscription, they still received emails that they were not supposed to receive. So, that was a miss. So, there was a lot of manual work.

Now with MemberMouse, I'm really, really thankful that that's not the case. I mean not without glitches here and there, but it's very, very rare. I can look at my current members on Mailchimp and I actually use that to go back and say, "Okay, this person." And it's very, very, very helpful.

Yes. And we use a couple of plugins. Well, one plugin specifically that was developed or designed by Paul Jarvis for online courses where you complete this or something like that it's called.

Eric: WPComplete?

Elena: Yes. Yes. So, when somebody completes a video, or watches a little tutorial, or maybe downloads a workbook, they can mark. We'll give them a tick. Yeah, so very satisfying. Yeah. So, my members usually write to me and they're like, "Something's not working. Can you make sure that it works because we really need the dopamine rush." So, yeah, that's very satisfying. And yes, and I use Flywheel as our hosting. That has been really helpful. And as we grew and we had more people buying, which is great. But I also had to hire two more people. One as a web developer to help make sure that our cart is working, everything is caching right. Now I'm speaking a foreign language because I really don't understand how it works. I just knew that when people were trying to buy, it wasn't working. And with the resources we had, we couldn't resolve it. So, I had to hire someone. Initially I hired a person for updates or to make sure that everything was working on Upwork. And that was pretty frustrating too. I had done that before, but this one was like I don't know. It's very difficult. So, eventually I did find the right person to do that. And then a virtual assistant who helps me welcome the new people that come in and send emails. We send e-cards and all those things. Yes.

Eric: What you're getting into now is another major difference between teachers and business owners. As a business owner, you start usually in the trenches and doing the content creation, the support, all that stuff. But then ultimately, you get to points where you need to find help and have people provide those services as you grow. So, can you talk about you go on Upwork and sometimes the people you hire work out, sometimes they don't. There's really no secret to it. I mean, you can get better at hiring and interviewing, right? But ultimately, until you work with somebody, you don't know. So, what kind of things have you learned about hiring and knowing when it's appropriate to spend money on an additional resource?

Elena: First of all, I just want to tell everybody that it's always a leap of faith. It's always a matter of growth, anytime you choose to hire a person. My litmus test for me is this. It got to a point for example with my website development, I got to a point where I neither have the desire or the understanding, even if I were to learn. The desire to learn or understanding to do this task as well as an experienced web designer would do. So, when I got to that point of realization that, "Okay, you can be everything. Even if you take five courses on web development, it's still not worth it, because you just don't like."

So, there's two lessons, I guess many lessons on hiring. First of all, hire a fan is my motto I guess. The best people that I've hired have been the people that have known my brand. So, I hired Veronica. She prior to that been reading my newsletters. She had been my subscriber. She had bought every single thing that I had put out, and she really benefited from it for her own business as a designer.

So, when I approached her, I had confidence that she would treat this project, which that's another hiring tip is do not hire on a regular basis. Give a person a project and see how you work. And then after the project is done, then you can assess. Do you want to continue?

So, that's what happened with her. And that was a really, really good experience. Most of my Upwork experiences for me, I don't know it might help others, but for me, they have not been successful. So, they were successful for a short period of time. And I think that's what Upwork is probably good for is you just need something fixed really quickly, and you might do that. But it's a lot of emotional labor to really go through all the options, and decide, and then wonder if this person is going to do a good job.

The second person, the actual web developer, the one who does coding and all the language that I don't understand, he actually found me first. And then he bought an event that I was running for online language teachers, because he was just curious. And he was a web developer. He lives in Poland, and he was practicing his English. And he watched it is like, "Okay, well let me just sign up for Online Teacher Summit and see how it works."

So, he immediately introduced himself and he was talking about, "Is this something that you like? Do you think that if I answer people's question and about web development, because a lot of teachers have these questions if they're building their website." He says, "Is this okay?" He actually approached me. And I thought this was really honest of him to say that. Obviously, he was doing that out of the goodness and kindness of his heart. And I said, "Absolutely, whatever questions people have." So, I took note of that, and then later I hired him. So, another fan. So, he's able to see my work and actually take care of the work that I do in a way that is like an owner would do.

And my virtual assistant I found through a direct referral with a coach that I work with. She said, "You might want to work with him." And that worked out, although it was more of a learning because unlike the other two, he knew very little about my work. Almost nothing. But with some learning and training, and he's really eager. So, yeah, this is how it worked out.

So, hire somebody who knows. This is the best-case scenario. Hire someone who knows what you do. Hire them for a short period of time. Just, "Can you help us with this project? Can you help me with the launch of my community to make sure that I don't have any glitches?" And then see how they do. And then after that, make a decision.

Also, be ready that you may not get an immediate return on your investment. So, be ready to sacrifice. And maybe even there was a time in my experience, I also had another virtual assistant who was a good friend. And we worked together for two years until she moved on to her own business. But, there was a time when I felt like we were growing and I was trying to get new projects and so forth. And I realized it was too much. So, we had a meeting and I said, "Okay, we can't take on more projects, because I can't pay anybody." So, we had to even reduce our load. We looked at all of our responsibilities, which is another way of doing that. So, if you feel like okay, I don't want to lose these people, but I really cannot continue after a couple of months. You cannot just sit down people and say, "Okay, here's my issue. Is there a way that we can reduce everybody's load so that we're not running and chasing after every project?"

Eric: Yeah. I resonate with all of those things. And especially the one about hiring people who are familiar with your brand. Because in some cases, there's so much to unpack about it that I don't know if I can accurately explain why it works. But it's almost like the way we create our businesses is a reflection of our personality. So, if people already resonate with the brand and how things work, then there's already a bunch of things that are already checked off the list. Because I definitely have had the experience when I've hired developers and other people for my team that technically, they have all the skills. But then they get in and they don't fit culturally, or they can't wrap their head around the way we run business or what our product is. So, those things to me, if they aren't known or learned by people, they're a lot harder to learn. I would sooner hire somebody who fits with our community and brand, and lacks the skills than I would the other way around. Because the skills, as long as you recognize and see in them the potential, they can learn the skills.

Elena: That's true. Yes, absolutely.

Eric: Something I wanted to ask you about, I noticed that you like using The Hare and the Tortoise. Is there a particular kind of place that came from, the connection you have with The Hare and the Tortoise?

Elena: So, the first time I introduced use them or I wanted to introduce them is when I was rethinking my website, when we were redoing our homepage. And I wanted to put in something that would not scream business coach at you. Something that would be a little tiny little quirk, right? Something that people will remember. And I had done a lot of obviously niching work. And I realized by then, that one of my most important, my core message was I am really passionate about helping people work smarter, not harder.

Now that's a cliché of course. But in our context, it was this idea of how can you make more money while working less? Which is super illogical and counterintuitive, particularly in the online language teaching world where it all evolves around how many hours are you putting in? How much do you charge per hour? And so forth.

So, I thought about that. How could I just add a little story to that? And of course, the image of a turtle came to me and I thought, "It would be so cool if I could just rewrite the story of The Turtle and the Hare, and redo it in my way."

And of course, Veronica was game. She's like, "Sure, let's go and look." So, she looked for an illustrator and then worked with the illustrator. And we came up with that. And I like it. I hired people to redo the copy for my homepage since, and one person was saying, she says, "I would probably not use that, but I know you've been using it for so long."

And I can tell you that people have taken that image. I mean, people in my community send me these emails and say, "I'm just like this turtle," blah, blah, blah. And the idea is also about business, the vision of a business as a slow process, as a marathon. That's another aspect of it that I always turtle on. I'm turtling on with you and all that. So, the language now is a part of my

subculture or my little brand ecosystem. People are using these messages with little videos of The Turtle and the Hare, and all that. And, "Look at this." So, it's kind of funny, but it just made my business coach image a little lighter, messaging a little lighter.

Eric: Well, it's a more personal touch. I mean, I would say if this image wasn't on your landing page, your conversions would probably be half of what they are.

Elena: That's totally true. Yeah.

Eric: So, don't listen to your copywriter, but there's something about what's behind those images to you, right? You talk about why it's important for people to have a why. I think it's important to have things like this on your site that you chose personally, because this is about you. And it's important that you feel comfortable expressing yourself and your personality. And when they're there, there's more that they communicate than just the words and the image.

And something I like to do is I have this animal speak book. It's a little pocket guide for animal totems. And it tells you when animals show up in your world, you can look up what they mean and stuff. So, tortoise, it says, "Move through pressure. Pressures are easing and movement is slow, but steady. Things will happen in the time and manner best for you. Focus on essentials," which I mean is really a lot about what ... and I'll read you the mouse too. Because I didn't choose the mouse based on this, but I think it also makes sense for my journey. Mouse is about details. "Focus on the details, attend to the little things. Will lead to bigger opportunities. Do not allow your attention to be distracted."

So, it's interesting. My little animal totem was really a helpful energy to have on my journey with my business. And it seems like your little animal totem of the tortoise is also there with you and kind of a friend along the journey, you know?

Elena: Yes, yes. That's so true. Yes. And people resonate with that. The idea of a slow and persevering journey or moving along at your own pace on your own terms. That's a really impactful message. It's something I live by every day, especially when my results are not coming quick enough for me. I remind myself what is important and what matters.

Eric: Yeah. And that things take time. And no matter how many times that's remembered, it's always easy to forget. I have to remind myself constantly about things like that, no matter how many times I've gone through the experience. So, as we're wrapping up here, do you have any other general advice or words of wisdom you'd like to share with our audience of online entrepreneurs?

Elena: Yes. I would encourage people to find their community. It's so easy that online world makes businesses to be. Just get out there, put yourself out there. Do this, do that. And it's very easy to feel like you can do it all on your own.

And it's tempting. I think it plays into our desire to overcome. I as an immigrant too, I have that strong desire. And I think a lot of people can resonate with that. So, try to find people and connect with people.

And then connect with your audience. Make every effort. Whether you're on social media primarily or you're using podcasts. Find ways to reach out, talk to people where they are. To hear them, listen to them. Listen to their feedback. Because I think we get so wrapped up in, "I need to produce something." Produce something, and we create something that's actually not really connected to the people that we want to serve. And mainly, it's because we feel like we know it better, the 'experts.'

But I think really listening to people is so educational. And I liked in the Q&A that I was listening to that you did where you said they are here, and they allow us to be here. It's such a good reminder, but such a big mindset shift because I had to even stop the recording and think about this is so true. Nothing that we put out there would even create any impact if we did not really have a connection with someone. And the more we focus on that, the more opportunities we make for ourselves to connect with others. I think the greater good we can bring out of the business that we are building and a reminder that it's not just for us.

Eric: And I think it goes back to what you said earlier as not seeing everybody as just a money bag. And understanding that transitioning the perspective from more of a dominance perspective like I'm going to succeed. I'm going to make something that people want to buy and all this stuff. Versus yes, I'm going to bring my skills to the table. And I'm also interested in understanding what people see in me as value. I think when we really open ourselves up to the conversation between us and our customers, we become vulnerable and allow ourselves to learn about ourselves. And I think that's part of the unspoken challenge about being an entrepreneur and running a business. And the part that a lot of people would rather avoid is that it is a journey of self-growth. If you put yourself in the position of running a business because you're willing to listen and adjust yourself and what you're offering to meet where people are at. And go through that constant evolution process, because it doesn't stop. And it's fun ultimately.

Elena: Yeah. It's very rewarding. It's super rewarding. Yes.

Eric: Yeah. Like when you get to see at this time, you're at the point where you have teachers who are going out and doing what you've done. Right?

Elena: Right. And also, being able and have the confidence, the courage to do what I probably couldn't do because it just took me so much longer to believe that I could do it. Now, I can tell them, "Yes, you can do it." And not in the sense that I did it, you can do it. But in the sense that your work is not in vain. Even what you feel right now is just so useless and pointless, trying to respond to people's stories, or put that blog out there, or maybe correspond with someone by email. It's not in vain.

Eric: Right. Well, it's been really great chatting with you. I appreciate you coming on. And where can our listeners go to learn more about you?

Elena: Thank you Eric for having me. My website elenamutonono.com. You are welcome to go and check out my turtle.

Eric: Yes, check out the turtle picture.

Elena: The poor exhausted-

Eric: Did you draw those?

Elena: The poor exhausted hare? No, we hired someone. But of course, we made sure that the person put in a little bit of our kind of understanding of you look at the ... I mean, so many times people write to me and say, "I'm a total hare. I can see myself, I'm like that hare." I have a podcast called OnlineBound, and that's for online language teachers, online teachers, and coaches who want to build sustainable businesses on their own terms. We talk a lot about mental health and provide encouragement and support through the stories and interviews. So, I try to make it less about the technicalities, but more about the help on the journey, which is kind of the idea of moving along. And yes, you can learn more about me also through my books, which you can find on my website as well.

Eric: Perfect. And we will put all those resources in the show notes for people. But definitely check out the picture of the hare and the tortoise on the website. It's very good. And of course, that will lead you to the podcast and the books as well.

Elena: And you can contact me on Instagram as well. That's my platform where I enjoy spending most of my time. It's [@elenamutonono](https://www.instagram.com/elenamutonono) on there.

Eric: Well thank you so much again Elena.

Elena: Thank you Eric.

OUTRO:

Thank you so much for listening to my entire conversation with Elena.

I hope you are walking away with some ideas you can use to start, grow, or scale your business.

Many thanks to Elena for coming on the show and sharing so freely from her experience.

To get links to all the resources we talked about in this episode, you can head on over to SubscriptionEntrepreneur.com/177.

There you'll also find the complete show notes and a downloadable transcript of our conversation.

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Thanks for being here and we'll see you next time!