

SUBSCRIPTION ENTREPRENEUR



HOSTED BY ERIC TURNNESSEN, FOUNDER OF **membermouse**[™]

Build A Business That Bursts Through The Noise with David Sherry

"It's so noisy out there. So many people are on social media. So many people are making videos, posting photos, writing their blog, etc. It's so noisy, right? Yes, that's true and there's more media being created than ever, but I actually think there's an opportunity that comes with things being noisy in the marketplace. The way to stand out through the noise is to speak to somebody specifically about a problem that they're feeling in a way that resonates with exactly what they're going through right there. I think the simplest way of putting that is personalization."

INTRO:

You're listening to David Sherry, my special guest on today's episode of The Subscription Entrepreneur Podcast.

Now before I introduce you to David, can I ask you a quick question?

Does it ever feel impossible to stand out in a world that's getting noisier each day?

If so, know that you're not alone. So many online entrepreneurs are struggling with this right now.

The social channels we relied on in years past are either over crowded or collapsing entirely.

New competitors and alternative solutions seem to emerge on a daily basis.

And the act of building an audience without spending a fortune on ads feels like a herculean task.

Yet despite all of this, there's more hope and opportunity than ever before.

At least that's what David thinks.

If you're not familiar with him, David is the founder of "Death to the Stock Photo" — a subscription business that provides highly creative photos to its members.

He successfully grew the company to over 500,000 subscribers and \$1.5 million dollars in revenue without the use of advertising.

And in our conversation today, David shares how you can find your voice, create content that resonates with your audience, build momentum, and take the right next step in your business and marketing efforts.

This conversation was a breath of fresh air for me, and I hope you enjoy it as much as I did.

As always, I'm your host Eric Turnnessen and this is the Subscription Entrepreneur Podcast.

Eric: Hey David welcome to the show.

David: Thanks so much for having me on. I'm really looking forward to it.

Eric: I'm so happy to have you David. I really appreciate you taking the time to spend and do this with me. Normally the way that I start the podcast is I ask the guests to say a little bit about their background. In your case, I don't want to do that. I'd like to spend our time and focus on during this interview is talking about stuff that you are interested in right now. I think a philosophy you may share - correct me if I'm wrong. Stuff that we have done in the past has its value and is important in terms of where we are now and where we're going, but there's not so much value in actually rehashing it and going over it in detail.

David: I love that. I love that you're also diverting from the typical show script to let things unfold naturally. I think that's definitely something I share. My hope as well is for people who are listening today is it's the most current version of what I'm seeing. I'm happy to discuss some stories from the past that might help illustrate things. Some of the early days of business just so I can let people know that yes, I struggled too and had my fair share of problems. The market changes really quickly. What people are interested in and attracted to in business changes quickly. I think we can both talk about some of the things that might have changed and also some of the things that don't change, which are the truths you can buy into that lead to a more sustainable way of growing your business. That's how I grew mine.

Eric: That's a good place to start. From your experience, what are some of the things that come to mind for you that don't change?

David: The question for a lot of businesses that I get right now is - it's so noisy out there. So many people are on social media. So many people are making videos, posting photos, writing their blog etc. It's so noisy. Yes, that's true and there's more media being created than ever, but I actually think there's an opportunity that comes with things being noisy in the marketplace. This is something I don't think has changed. I don't think will change for a long time which is - what is the way to stand out through the noise. The way to stand out through the noise is to speak to somebody specifically about a problem that they're feeling in a way that resonates with exactly what they're going through right there. I think the simplest way of putting that is personalization. Every day, everybody is walking down the street. People are walking to work, getting coffee, or whatever and they have problems that are milling around in their head that

they're pondering on their way to work, or on their way to a meeting. People might come up and try to sell those people something. There might be somebody who is passing out flyers in the street or there might be somebody who is trying to get them to sign up for a cause. The truth is those people don't care about that cause. That's noise, right? People just walking up to you trying to sell you on something. That's more noise to your day and the more people that do that than the more you want to tune them out. If somebody were to come up to you and mention a very specific problem that you are actually pondering about and telling you a story in a very personal way that shares with you that they might be able to help you move past that problem. Well then suddenly we snap to attention. Suddenly we have all the attention in the world for people that are speaking personally and directly to us. I think one way that is sort of tried and true forever - way that marketers, or brands, or even people can stand out apart from the noise is personalizing and speaking directly to individuals and not the masses. I think the problem is if you're trying to compete in the noise by adding more noise for everyone, then you're not signaling to that one person - those few people who have a problem that they're hoping somebody comes up and solves for them. If that was vague I'll give an example. This is true. A friend of mine back in Columbus, his name is Chris, we are getting together at a coffee shop and I was just catching up with him asking how things were going. He said, "man every year at this time stuff in my family just gets kind of difficulty. The reason stuff gets kind of difficult is because my daughter - it's actually her birthday, which you think would be a great thing, but she has some severe food allergies. She can't have nuts, dairy. One of them leads to severe reactions where she has to go to the hospital for." He said, "man I just got bummed around her birthday because we can't give her that typically experience of what most kids get with their birthdays. They got to go to the pizza shop and go get ice cream and the have all their friends out. We always have to host it at home and my wife puts in so much work putting it together, but I wish we could just give her the experience that most kids have on their birthdays." As he was telling me the story, I thought to myself, what if someone was sitting next to us at the coffee shop and they leaned over right at that moment and said, "hey I couldn't help but hear that story you just told. I totally get where you're coming from. Actually, my son has severe food allergies and we had trouble every year on his birthday throwing a party for him that gave him the same experience as all the other kids. You know what we ended up doing something about it. We actually opened up a gluten-free, nut-free, dairy-free, health certified kitchen. It's a pizza shop that's downtown and we have a back room that specifically for hosting kids' birthday parties. I would love to host your daughter and all her friends at our pizza shop. You guys can come by this week to try the food and make sure it's a place that you want to host at, but I think it would be really helpful to you." Can you just imagine his reaction, my friend's reaction? Can you imagine how happy he would be to be able to tell his family that they now have a place to go? How excited he would be to know about this product and excited to purchase from this business. The reason I tell that story is because that was a personal relevant message that spoke to a direct problem that he was having. When we do that, we have all the attention in the world.

Eric: Right, but that's called relating. Relating as humans. When we feel like we are being related to, there's something that really eases up and connects us with the person who we feel like we are relating with. But, your story opened with listening.

David: Right. Yep.

Eric: You didn't jump to the problem. I feel that is such an important step. It's something that marketing so often blatantly ignores I would say. You're just throwing the problem/solution in somebody's face and I think if you haven't developed some rapport - even if they have that problem, then it won't necessarily land.

David: I think you're 100% right. Here's how we can prove that out. Imagine you're sitting there and I just heard him sharing that with me and somebody walks up and they go, "hey I couldn't help but hear your discussion. I've got something for you. I have a new Ford truck that is available and it's perfect for mulching. You can come down and I can show you the car and we could drive together. Maybe you want to purchase it? The complete opposite of what you want to do, right? I think you're spot on. It is an empathetic understanding. It's a consideration.

Eric: How do you do that?

David: That's a great question.

Eric: It's clear and it's even not necessarily clear when you're sitting across the table from somebody. It's not always easy to relate to everybody. How do you do that when (A) you're not sitting in front of that person and (B) you're trying to target a larger number of people?

David: That's a great, great question. There is a way to personalize at scale and I'll get to that in a little bit. I think what you're really asking is how do you get the privilege of listening to a potential customer? Would you agree? If that's the question, and I think that's a great question to ask - it's very relevant. The way you do that is you have to go first in sharing your own story and your own vulnerabilities. When we tell our own stories, when we discuss things that happened in our past, problems that we've overcome - we open the door for other people to share similar problems. Even if the hypothetical person sitting next to us at the coffee shop hadn't opened his own pizza store, they still would have built rapport because they shared this common problem in their past. The way that you get someone to open up to you about something that they're feeling, a problem that they have, something that they're desiring or wanting to become is by first and foremost sharing that yourself. That's the way that a community forms. Communities are really built around one person who had a perceived deficiency. They felt like something was wrong with them, something was off. They felt like they were different from everybody else. When they take that perceived deficiency and flip it and make it not something of shame, but something of value that actually puts you in the club - that's the way that you build a community. What that hypothetical friend at the coffee shop did was he had a problem in his life with his own son at his birthday parties. He built a space that celebrates people that have this perceived problem and welcomes them. And, actually makes it a good thing. Now you're sort of a special person here. That really is the way that community forms. One person has to flip the shame they feel about something they're having a problem and let it be known that it's something they're either working or have worked through. If that

sounds like you, if you sound like someone like us, then you are welcome to this group. I think through sharing those stories is where you begin to hear replies from other people. Other people saying, "I'm so happy you brought up this discussion. Nobody's been having this discussion. I thought I was the only one." That to me would be the first way of getting the privilege of listening to somebody - is a bit of courage and understanding. I guess what I just discussed.

Eric: In terms of particulars, do you have methods of how you deliver those messages and how you share that are more successful than others?

David: I think that's another great question. Let me answer that thing that I posed a little earlier around how to personalize at scale. Then I will try to get to how you can tell a story that might resonate in that way. The problem is if personalization is this way that you can actually attract people's attention. If everything is noise. How you attract someone? Well you can do it by personalizing and connecting, being empathetic like you said. Well I'm trying to build a big business so how do I personalize at scale? It's so hard to email all these people and listen to all these individual conversations, right? One way of personalizing at scale is recognizing that you don't have to tell the right story every time. You don't have to tell the perfect story. You just have to keep sharing stories in different ways that hint at the same themes. With my newsletter, let's say, and I think anybody's newsletter - what is really the goal of a newsletter? To me, the goal of a newsletter is to personalize at scale. It is to tell stories that won't resonate with every single person on my list. Every email that I write 80% of people, it's not the perfect email for them, maybe more, but 5% of people maybe that one story resonated perfectly for them. Little by little, chipping away. Maybe 5% at a time suddenly over the course of months, you've hit that perfect story for different people in your audience. I think the first thing I would say is the good news is you don't have to tell the perfect story. It's more about continuing to address similar themes in different ways. Almost by mistake, but also by intention. Then certain parts of those stories will resonate with different people in your audience. My goal for a newsletter is I want to connect with a few people every time. The people who feel that strong connection through the story, they're going to stick around through the next time until it hits like that. That's enough to lead them forward. I'll wait for a second here in case there's something you want to bring up, but then I'll get into some tactical storytelling structures.

Eric: From a delivery standpoint it definitely helps to focus on a few rather than a whole. When I imagine doing that, immediately my mind doesn't work as much to try and think of what the right thing to say is. It's more like, what do I feel like saying? What is my message right now to this small group of people? When I imagine doing that I realize that anytime I give a message where it has some root or seed of interest within myself, there is something intangible about how that's delivered and how that comes across that makes it more interesting. I'm just imagining somebody on stage reading the same exact words where one person is interested in what they're saying and the other one is not. The message is the same, but the involvement of the person delivering it is different; therefore, engaging to the audience. Do you find that that's something that helps you even in something like print where your face isn't involved, your mannerisms aren't involved?

David: Yes. You've pointed at an honest nuance that exists, that is under-discussed, but 100% I do believe that's the intention. We can call it whatever we want to say, the energy behind it, the intention behind it, how personal we are feeling in that moment. I 100% think that that does translate. There's a lot of reasons for that. Maybe, a way of making that something that somebody is listening can take home and think about as an easier way of approaching this. I think there's a lot of nuance to getting yourself into that space. That's maybe a bigger discussion, but I 100% agree. I think that's a beautiful thing to point out. When I started my second newsletter - it's called Creative Caffeine - the idea was exactly almost what you just said. I had this big email list and I was sharing a lot of visuals with my first company. I said what if I did everything the total opposite? What if there is no visuals in this message and it's just text? What if instead of speaking to all the people, I write this email like I'm writing to a friend? I actually picked a friend. When I would write that text I would actually write, "hey, their name." It was supposed to almost feel and sound like an email that you would get just from a friend out of the blue checking in, seeing how things are going or sharing a story. I found that to be pretty helpful in breaking out of what you're saying, which is the problem - feeling like you should say what people think you should say. Putting yourself into a box by saying the right thing instead of saying what's natural. Maybe it's not for everyone, but I think it is. Most of us can really have that power to connect when we tell stories, when we write, when we're on video. Our problem is we think we have to do something different. We think we have to have this other method, or we have to sound a certain way.

Eric: There's the PowerPoint conundrum. You think, "oh I need to hit my bullet points!"

David: Exactly.

Eric: That move works against the natural flow of being whatever you feel like being.

David: Humans are amazing BS detectors. That's why we pick up on the smallest changes - maybe a word choice. There's a great example of this I'm just reminded of. Ira Glass who is the NPR reporter, he plays this clip when he first started out as a reporter for NPR. He's huge now. He has a bunch of good shows. He plays it when he goes out and speaks about what he does because it's him in his first year of being a reporter, using a reporter voice. His tone and the way that he is talking on the radio sounds absurd because it's the most over-the-top reporter-ey sounding voice ever. Now he's the total opposite and everyone loves him for it. I think that's a really good example of somebody trying to be something that they're not. That's a way to lose attention and not gain attention vs. what he found by being himself and by sharing naturally, and using his regular voice. We don't have to do all this work. We don't have to be all the stuff we're not. I think that's the hardest thing for people is it's almost an unlearning process. Maybe that's a good quote. How to think about writing to a friend. I've heard someone say that the best way to think about public speaking is to think that you're just talking aloud to yourself when you're on stage. I haven't tried that, maybe that's a helpful example of what we're talking about.

Eric: How do you find the voice? I think you were just getting at this. The word that came to my mind is you said, "I'm learning." The word that came to my mind was "allowing." Which, to me is very similar. Allowing who you truly are - the things that you've learned to make you not who you are naturally fall away and then you just are, who you are. That can be a challenging thing to go through on an individual level. I had to go through that with my company. I'm pretty sure you've gone through that with each of your projects. It's a continuous thing because with each project, we can make the mistake of trying to define ourselves again. Who we are? Like you said at the beginning, things are constantly changing. Why should we become static? That's a big part of branding. This whole thing of labeling things, avatars, branding, marketing etc. - it does a disservice to what we're actually trying to do. By labeling it we think that it's a static thing, something you can learn in a book, tactics you can follow, strategies you can execute. That you can just repeat and copy, but when we were talking about the newsletter and this intangible thing that comes through. I will say a bold statement. You can do anything, doesn't really matter what you do, what you say, but if you're genuine, it's going to be a lot more powerful than if you try to copy ten of the most successful things that have come before you in your space.

David: Yes. This is all beautiful. Thank you for having this discussion and hosting this discussion because I don't think it gets talked about enough. I agree on the change piece. I'd also point out that many people who become successful become a parody of themselves because they don't adapt again, like you were saying. I think there's this initial problem of finding your own voice and then there's this problem of you found your voice, but now you can't find the next authentic version of your voice. You become obligated and bound to what worked in the past, and you're chasing what you had instead of moving forward in the future. This is a problem that can arise for people at any stage of business. That's why I think this is an important discussion to have and why I was saying thanks for having it. I think related to that change is more present than ever before and it's a hard thing for us all collectively to adjust to. Technology is changing very quickly. It feels like our society is changing very quickly because of our technology. The thing that needs to flip in people's heads is that that change is future opportunity and it's a good thing. How can we essentially step in and use that change to get to the next level to actually grow? The common response is to dig your heels in as change approaches and this is never effective. If you understood that it keeps you moving backwards and puts you in the past, I don't think you would do it, but it feels like a safe thing to do - which I totally understand. We are used to acting the way that we acted in those previous grooves that worked for us. What's exciting is the change of this positive reverie material that we can use. When we use it in the right way, we get even better. We end up in an even better place. My mind's taking me to Arnold Schwarzenegger who really learned in a change multiple times in his life from a bodybuilder. Actually, he was a real estate millionaire before he was a bodybuilder, or maybe it was the other way around. Bodybuilder, real estate millionaire, Governor, actor, those were all positive changes that he made in his life that actually expanded who he was. What a shame it would have been if he had double down and dug into only being just a bodybuilder.

Eric: Or just the actor. That would have been horrible for a lot of reasons.

David: Yeah for different reasons too. We would have many more Arnold movies that we would all have to suffer. I think that's the difficult thing. Josh Waitzkin who is both the champion of the world at chess and also the champion of the world at Jiu-Jitsu, which is a pretty amazing combo. I really like this one thing that he said about how at some point you realize when you're doing Jiu-Jitsu that it's actually the move that your opponent makes that is your opportunity. He's actually awaiting the strike and how he essentially absorbs, or maneuvers, or uses that strike against him is how he wins. I like that visual of this change that's coming at us and how we respond to it is actually the way forward. It's not a natural thing for us to do and I think it's because things are changing quicker than they used to.

Eric: I agree with you. We can get into a disease state where it's not natural, but I think it is natural. I think the thing that creates the state of disease with change is there's this thing in business where constant growth is always the thing that's sought. There's always this idea that our metrics should continue to improve, growth should continue to happen, income should continue to increase. It shouldn't wax and wane, but that's not how nature works. Imagine a rose that never stopped blooming and took a rest for the winter, but yet rose is one of the most beautiful things in the world and gets the most attention. In business there's this disregard for the seasonality. That can end up meaning that we are (A) ignoring change and (B) therefore we can't respond to it because we're ignoring it.

David: I think everything does have a bit of a cycle to it. One way, or a different way of looking at this growth problem of always feeling like you need to grow in one direction is actually realizing that more growth happens when you make a lateral move. I'd like to say I really like Seth Godin's Purple Cow. There's a time to create the Purple Cow and there's a time to milk the cow. If the cow is out of milk then the best thing is for this lateral move into something new. I actually think it could work for the person who does want to optimize for growth. Google is a great example of a company that, I don't know if they found a huge success with it yet, but they invest an absurd amount of money into R&D because they realize what got them here will not be what will get them there. I think this notion of change is available to people that are high growth-minded or not. I think if we're bringing this down to the ground level of someone listening right now, another way of having this discussion is to say - this is something that I see with businesses all the time. It's so funny. I'm sure you've probably thought this way and I'm sure everyone can relate. You think that when you finally get your 5th customer then you're going to be really ... I'll just say a freelance photographer and you're starting out and it's so hard to get the first two customers. You just think "man if I get customer three and four, I will be set." Then maybe really quickly or maybe after a few months you get four customers. Suddenly, you've got a few customers on retainer. The minute you get those customers you take them for granted. You're already looking at the next thing. What I think is a mistake that a lot of brands big and small make - people just starting out make is they forget how valuable the people are who are already listening - the people who are already raising their hand and saying I want to work with you. I want to read your newsletter. We chase numbers and we forget the value and meaning of the people who are already there. I think it's a really great opportunity and privilege for to think that there are ten people you could change. That to me almost sounds outrageous in a good way. What if I could change ten people in my life? The good news is, that's pretty

doable. I think we also have this inclination to reach that goal and then suddenly take that for granted. When I work with companies, and I think this is affective from a business standpoint, like I said from a growth metric standpoint as well. I'll work with a company and I'll say "if you were to tell me your five best customers, who are those five best customers?" Usually, they have an answer and they say, "of course Jennifer so and so. Oh yeah I get emails from so and so all the time." And I'm like that's awesome. What if there were ten people that have been essentially the same in how they are using your product and how engaged they are on your newsletter? What if there was ten other people just like that, but you've never sent them anything special? You don't know what their name is. You don't pay any attention to them. Wouldn't you do something if you knew who those people were? Almost always people say "yeah of course." Well that's happening right now. There are people in your audience who are already saying that they care about what you do. They use your product. When we're always focused on new leads in the funnel or whatever, sometimes we neglect them.

Eric: It's like you're looking at the metrics of how many click-throughs did we get. How many subscribers did we get to the newsletter? I've heard you say something to the effect of everyone knows that word of mouth marketing is the most powerful form of marketing, but nobody is actually spending the time and actually creating word of mouth marketing. What better than word of mouth marketing than taking those ten people right in front of you, who are really successful and doubling down on them? What better sales pitch could there be than from somebody who is happy with your service or product? Having the opportunity to tell somebody else? Being at that coffee shop, at that table listening to somebody else's problem and being like "oh well I use this product and service and they are freaking awesome!" They're going to go to your website. They're not even going to look at your pricing. They're going to sign up and there is nothing that we can do as a company that's more powerful than that vote of confidence.

David: People who already buy from you and like you typically know people who also would like you and buy from you. I like the example from the story because if you're the person, a child who has a severe allergy like that, then you probably found some other people. It's just such a good bond and a signal. You probably know all the other families. You probably have been hosting dinner with all those other families. I think people like to find people like them. It's sort of a great way to tap into new audiences by expanding the people who are already listening, and already caring.

Eric: Do you have specific ways that you coach your clients and businesses on how to discover these people? Then methods for how to interact with them in a more engaging way?

David: I can explain the general philosophy. There's really two things that you're asking about right now. The first thing is the 'tooling metrics discovery' and then there is the 'what do you actually do?' How do you engage with your best people? That to me is the science and art. The science is for the data and the art is how you move people to act, or how do you get your best people to talk about you? I will address those one at a time. My personal philosophy, and this is something I saw, but it didn't really codify until after building my first company - was this idea

of what I called the 'commitment curve,' which is that every business and brand is a growing level of commitment between you and your customer. If you picture a hockey stick curve going from left to right and all the way up to the top right of the graph. The beginning of that curve is the what people would say is the beginning of your "funnel." That's where your website would lay, that's where your newsletter would be. Maybe it's your Twitter. It's where people first find out about you. Then you need to take an action to commit with your brand. They might follow you on social media. They might respond to an email. They might book a call with your company. Basically, as you go left to right on this curve it's essentially building more commitment with that person. If you think about Airbnb. They are great example of this. Maybe I've heard about Airbnb from a friend. Now I'm on this curve. Trending upwards on this curve. Then I check it out. My friend refers me and I signed up. Now I'm further down the curve. Now I sign up and I stay. Now I'm even further on the curve. Eventually, Airbnb did such a good job building commitment, a committed following to what they were doing. They actually had people protest on behalf of cities that were trying to remove them from existing. That's the way top right end of the commitment curve is somebody who is so bought in that they are willing to essentially go out there and rally for you. The science to me is - you can call your customer journey or whatever, but what are these steps that somebody can take with your brand that deepen their level of commitment with you as business? Is it following you? Is it replying? Is it commenting on your Instagram? Is it joining a 30-day challenge? There's so many. What is the general order that people might go through? Some people might go quick. Some people might skip ahead. That's the data piece. There's so many data analytics tools. I think this is more of the community part of this process, finding the data. Intercom is great, Mixpanel, Google Analytics or whatever you want to use. There's plenty of ways that you want to start understanding against a data perspective. Who's following you and who's using your product etc. The bigger question in my mind is okay we know this group of people follows us on Instagram and they signed up to our newsletter or whatever. We know that this group of people is here on the curve. How do we get them to go to the next step of the curve? How do we get somebody who bought from us to refer? How do we get somebody who signed up to buy from us? That's the art of marketing. The art of community building. The art of sales. There's a lot of discussion I think to be had from around that. I'm happy to illustrate, give you some stories from the past, but does that make sense? I know we're talking out of mics here, so without the visual it's a little bit hard to describe. The intention here is to grow your commitment overtime with groups of people who care. The last thing I'll say is when we are discussing "what about those ten people that really love you, but don't talk to much." They are the people on the top right of the curve that you ignored and are probably the best people who might then go right for you. I like to work with companies, personally, not at the beginning as much as, businesses who are already established that have a community, have some people moving through that. Then how do you sort of optimize that tail end? How do you grow that deep commitment on the top right?

Eric: And, for those of us who maybe don't have the benefit of working directly with you and maybe we are on our own and we know we have an issue. Are there some helpful perceptive tools that you have for yourself where you've come into a situation, it's a company, and they are well-established, but they have some efficiency issues in that upper right corner: not

engaging with their top people enough. If we can't identify where the problem is with the Jiu Jitsu metaphor, we can't identify and respond to it. How precise do you need to be in identifying what you're going to go after when you're determining what steps to take to improve a business?

David: I want to give two answers to this and they are opposing. The first way to answer this is 'problem discovery' is half the battle, if not more. If you're feeling stuck, and this could be at any stage with anything you're working on, it's possible that you're not working on the right problem and that's why you're continuing to do things, add tactics, work harder and not get different results. Definitely isolating the problem is probably where you want to start no matter what you're doing in business. I do think that's very important. The second thing I will say, is that I feel when I work with clients I need to be very precise about this. In fact, that's probably a lot of the value that I bring is really helping them see the right area to focus on, in what order. I find myself spending a lot of time thinking about a lot of different material, lot of different actions, a lot of different problems etc. and really refining that down to something that is the specific thing right now. I know that there is an order of operations here that will lead to the most benefit. Working on the right thing is better than working hard on the wrong thing. That's the general philosophy. With somebody who is starting out, and you're feeling like you're stuck, honestly, I feel like our discussion earlier about finding your voice is really the most helpful. A lot of problems in business can be ignored until they become a big problem. That traction that you get when you start sharing your content, from a unique place, the traction you get from that when you find something that works really helps you go a long way momentum wise. Honestly, let's you ignore some other things. If you're starting out and your message is really resonating, you're doubling down because it's working. You might not actually have to care so much about taking care of your best people. I actually show up when the wind from the sail starts dying. That's when it's like "hey maybe you neglected this group and you sure you should have been taking care of that all along," but it's more acute right now. I think if someone is just starting out, I would definitely spend more time finding something that works. Finding your voice and then doubling down when you find that thing that is resonating. Some of the other problems that I was just discussing happen further down the road. Does that make sense?

Eric: Yeah, for sure.

David: I will give a good visual so people can picture it. You have to create the Purple Cow which you probably read Purple Cow by Seth Godin, I'm not sure. You have to create the Purple Cow, which is something that stands out, is your unique voice. Once you can do that then you need to milk the Cow, which is just sort of doubling down - really advancing with what you got. Then if the cow runs out of milk, that's one area that I help show up in. Now it's how do you get to the next step? It's different areas I suppose of problem.

Eric: My guess is to you this is both art and science and how to do this - coming in, finding that problem. Because what is a problem? In the essence of it it's wondering what the next step is. What is the correct next step to take in the evolution of the business to reach a certain objective and a certain goal? One of the things that I think is very clear about the path you've

taken in your experience, with your businesses and career is a constant refinement. Not stopping once you've gone to a certain place and saying "okay now I know everything now." Recognizing, that art is not a static thing. The more businesses you work on, the more situations you work on, the more nuanced you're going to be able to be when you come to a situation and look at somebody's business - see where they're at and know "this is the ideal next step for you to take." But again, I want you to explain your genius to me. How are you looking at things? So that you have a higher probability of seeing what people should be doing in certain situations?

David: This is a great question. A few thoughts. The first thing, and I said this a few minutes ago, identifying the problem gets you 50%, if not more, there. Sometimes when you just define the problem and understand it really clearly, the path to the next step becomes really clear to you. If I were to say what I think I help people with, is where I'd like to be and where I think I'm continuing to head, is actually further away from the science piece of this and much more to the art which is all nuance. That's just essentially learning to see and learning to see the problem. If you help people understand and see the problem - I'm actually less interested in what the solution is at that point. I would also say that that becomes science in a good way and that I will never be able to tell you what can work or doesn't work. I just know that the intuition based on understanding the problem is going to lead to steps and that is going to lead to momentum - of half which will not work. That's just by the nature of experimenting essentially. A lot of stuff in business is experimenting. Nobody has perfect knowledge of what will work and, but you don't want to get caught either not developing something that is unique and natural to you, getting locked up in your voice, working the wrong problem, avoiding a problem and then throwing tactics without any genuine sincerity around them, which definitely won't work. I think I'm helping people understand what works and what doesn't work, but I'm not somebody who has the answer about the perfect next step. It's like, we're going to be walking the right direction, right? We are now walking North. That was needed, you might stumble, but over the long run we are all heading the right direction and if we do it from that place of understanding the problem, in a genuine place, then we will find a good solution.

Eric: What are the biggest mistakes that you see people making when they're trying to self diagnose their own problem?

David: I'm going to think about this for a second because it's such a good question. The first thing that comes to mind is always wrong.

Eric: [Laughing] That's a conundrum.

David: I think that's what a good partner/leader/coach/teacher etc. does really well. You come to them with your problem and they help you see that you have a different problem, but when you hear it makes so much sense that you already have an understanding of what you want to do next. If you're flailing, if you're trying many things in many different directions and none of them seem to be working so you're doubling down on this flailing process, which is I need to work harder, I need to do more things, I need to try more tactics. That to me would be a sign that you don't understand the right problem. I think it's a way to self-diagnose a little bit. If my

gut reaction is to always grab some other thing, or tactic, that to me is where somebody could use help in seeing something different. Yeah, so the first thing that comes to mind is probably not the real problem. I will say that is almost always the case. The second thing is that you can become aware that you have a problem if you're really trying a lot of different things at once and not having much success. Then you think if you only double downed on how hard you work that that would help you. I don't think that typically does.

Eric: You mentioned earlier that in your current personal evolution of your career you're moving more towards the art of things than the science. To me, that has to entail some amount of mind work. You're doing a lot of contemplation, inquiry into certain things within yourself and training yourself, learning more. What is the nut these days that your mind is most interested in in cracking and working on?

David: Yes, it is 100% the case that I believe that the more nuanced and understanding myself that I do, the better that I serve people. A lot of the problems that you can help people with are the problems that you have seen yourself and in that way, you know exactly what they're feeling in that moment because you've been there. I guess it's - can I build a successful... There's two things. One thing which is really interesting to me and another thing I think is an opportunity that I see, but other people might have as well. I'm curious whether or not I can transform people's businesses continuing to go more towards the side of art, which means really helping people see it more clearly in their business without having to be as hands-on on the tactic side. I think the opportunity that I feel is here, but also the way that I can help people the most is actually taking a bigger risk myself, by not doing as many tactic focused actions - by getting more out of the science. That's something that's really interesting to me because I think it's the most effective thing. I think it's the way that I can help people the most. I love the idea of this Holy Grail of - my goal is for us to not continue to work together forever because if I'm good at what I do, then this shouldn't take that long. Refining the amount of time that I would have to work with somebody and honestly just taking a personal risk, being okay with being less involved in some of the day-to-day tactics of a business - that's sort of a leap for me just because it's not how most things are set. It's not like the way that every, I guess business relationship is structured as well. I think personally the opportunity to serve people in that way is really interesting to me. I really like this idea of having less clients, but spending more time thinking and focusing on them.

Eric: That sounds like a contradiction. The first thing you said is that you want to have this- oh, I don't know why I'm thinking of Kung Fu Panda right now, but you know that spot on the body where you just touch it in the right way and you can completely shut things down. At the same time, you're also saying less clients more time. I would think that if the first one was successful then you would have less clients, and less time.

David: The interesting thing about myself and all people is that there are many different problems that arise. Actually, as the world changes there are many areas to look. I'm not saying that that's an extraordinary amount of time. Yeah, can I do the Kung Fu Panda thing for somebody over the course of a year or over the course of two years, but each time that

happens we're moving to a completely different area. I think that's the way that you would do it.

Eric: You're just more precise on average touch point.

David: Yeah. I think the same problems are arising and I become more precise with each touch point. I guess the reason for having less clients is more so that I can have space in how we work together. Be more precise about how I work with them. If I have too many people that I'm talking to, I don't get to spend enough time being helpful or attentive, really listening. Like we were talking about earlier listening to each person. That's something I'm exploring and that I think is a really interesting way... I'm not saying this is what I will end up doing, but it's an interesting way to build this part of my career. We can always discuss this another time, but I'm in an interesting spot in that I started a company. It's called Death to Stock Photo it's a subscription business for premium stock photo, video. I think it's a lot more than that. I think people who sign up and use our service recognize it's a lot more than that. After a few years of building that business and this is what we talked about this today, I sort of plateaued and became aware that I owned a company. And becoming self-aware that I owned a company, I became reactive and defensive and I didn't have that voice that I had in the beginning. Through a long process of discovery with that, I removed myself from the day-to-day business, hired Shaun Singh who is an amazing CEO of the company and that led me to this next chapter which is, what does it look like for somebody to step outside their business and? You finally get that thing that you wanted, to build the company and then remove yourself from it, but now what? I'm in that interesting phase in taking what I learned through - what actually was a really difficult period of about two years - and working through why I was so stuck all of a sudden and why I wasn't showing up like I used to. I got shingles, which is another story for another day. It's a stress-related ailment that I'm not supposed to have at my age. Yeah, this journey that I'm on now and what does it look like to build this next chapter. I'm really inspired and interested in seeing where I think I'm heading naturally and it feels good. It's sort of is like, is there a lot here? Is there as much depth here as I think there is? It's been really exciting.

Eric: My perspective of it, for what it's worth, is that there definitely is. You've already been on that path with all the transitions that you've been making because it's a constant refinement. How to do more with less. My journey with MemberMouse sounds very similar to your journey with Death to the Stock Photo. It starts off as a creative endeavor. "I am just doing this because I'm interested, it's something I want to do. It wasn't the intention to build a company." Then, stuff happens, success happens and then it's like "oh wait a second, now I'm being asked to play roles I didn't sign up for." Then you have that choice. Do I resist that and continue to play a role that I'm comfortable with, which is the creative role in my case, or do I make adjustments to become what is needed for this thing that's been created that is now taking on a life of its own. That hasn't stopped. I don't even know what a CEO is don't ask me, I don't even know what it is. To me, my role constantly evolves. It's the change that happens that tells me what I'm supposed to be doing. If we are lucky, the things that we are involved in do ask us to change and do you ask us to try new things. I have also, in the period of resistance where I resisted changing, I also ended up with certain stress-related illnesses and other things. I think disease is

a resistance to change. Ultimately, when we give into following what change is happening, it seems obvious. The whole time that we were resisting it, it seemed like such a thing, but all we are really doing was we were caught in the current of a river but holding onto a branch and not wanting to let go of that. When you get caught in this current of the change, it carries you pretty much is what I find. Sometimes, it can be uncomfortable when it changes and we get comfortable with the way things are for a period of time. Ultimately, I feel like I can't take ownership of any of the success that happens. Any of the major insights that have come to me, where they come from? I act on them, but I can't take ownership.

David: Yeah, I would totally agree. I think it's beautiful to highlight that story and struggle and what you learned. That's the way that we help other people see possibility or sign up for something. This is sort of the authentic storytelling that we were discussing earlier. It's just genuine. It's what you're seeing, it's who you are, it's not a tactic for x, y and z.

Eric: Sometimes the most helpful advice or support that I've gotten from people is just from somebody who has been there and they say, "yeah sounds about right. You'll get through it." It's not about, "oh you're in a situation that's a problem, let me give you a tactic to get you out of it." No, it's, "oh yeah that's a stage. I've been there. You'll get through it, so just do your best and keep moving."

David: I think that you said it again beautifully. It's using the changes that are coming and not, as we dig our heels in we get stuck. As we allow the change to happen and we move with it... Like you said, suddenly you're taking action you're not even really having to think about it very much. I think the best things that work happens when we're not over-thinking it and we're not attempting to make it something it's not. Those are really fun periods to be in, but both are necessary.

Eric: Exactly. As we wrap this up, or there is there anything that we haven't touched on that you want to talk about or say?

David: Nothing really comes to mind. Thank you. Thanks to your team for organizing this. I really appreciate you opening the floor to have a discussion like this. I know that you you threw out a little bit of the general flow of things. I appreciate that. I am better with less structure in some ways, so thank you. If people want to check out my newsletter creative-caffeine.com it's a good place to do that. I write pretty regularly there. I have a course on community building that has been really fun to help people with. I actually emailed back and forth with all the people who take that. It's called Generously Human. I think I may have said that to you all. Hopefully, I just get to continue to experiment and try stuff. If you check out my site and you see a bunch of experiments it's because I'm trying stuff out and seeing what works. This discussion we've had today is definitely been the main focus and has been a joy to think about and to work on, so thanks for letting me share some of that.

Eric: My pleasure. It's been really a great pleasure talking to you about this. This is also stuff that I'm really interested in. We will share all the sites you just mentioned in the show notes for

people so they know exactly where to find things. Again, thanks for taking the time to come on this show. It's been great.

David: Awesome. Thanks.

OUTRO:

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

I hope you're walking away feeling inspired to connect with your audience in the way that feels most authentic to you.

Many thanks to David for coming on the show and sharing so freely from his wisdom and experience.

If you'd like to get links to all the resources we mentioned, head on over to SubscriptionEntrepreneur.com/190.

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!