

There's no right way for growing an online business. And honestly, me and my guests are more than fine with that.

I'm Haley Thomas. And this is the podcast that lets you be a fly on the wall for candid conversations and mini lessons with a variety of online entrepreneurs who are growing their businesses based on their own visions. We are on a mission to normalize and laugh about the behind the scenes truth of achieving a new level of success in your business. This is one year from now.

Hey, everybody, before we get into this episode, I have to make an admission. This podcast episode I recorded with my podcast producers, Sara and Ray. They are incredible podcast producers. They are incredible editors, and I love their business and their model. The only downside is that occasionally they trust me to do stuff. And occasionally I screw it up. So I want to warn you ahead of time that this podcast episode I was recording on my end, and I did not press the correct buttons. And therefore what I was able to give to Ray and Sarah to edit was not the best quality audio. So I just wanted to give you that heads up. And the reason we're not re recording it is because the content was so valuable. And I wanted to make sure that it was still used. And so you can still hear it's completely fine. But note that I might sound a little bit louder than Ray and Sarah and it's because of Haley Thomas's foible and not anything to do with my production team. So listen to this episode, gather all the nuggets, because it is really, really good. And I hope you enjoy the show. Hey, everybody, welcome to this episode of the podcast. And I'm so freaking excited. First of all, today's the first day of fall, which is my most favorite season. So I'm already in a great mood but an even better mood because I am recording this podcast, but my podcast producers and my wonderful team that makes this show happen. Sarah and Ray Smith, how are y'all doing?

Hey, Haley Haley, nice to be on the other side of things. This is gonna be very interesting.

Yeah, he's an actual full day in Texas. So we're in a great mood to Yes, nothing can ruin our day today.

That is fantastic. I love so much that I have you on the show for listeners like these are the people that I am not constantly but very often, like, deal with my like, can you guys publish this in two days? Or like, Oh, I forgot. So we're just skipping this week, like he had been so amazing in delivering the quality show to you. And then also dealing with me, the client who's like, very laid back and her recording schedule is what I will say. I'm very grateful for that. Let's do a really quick introduction. Obviously, we know y'all are podcast producers, but tell us the kind of width of your brand because you have multiple businesses. I want to know what the width or breadth of your brand is. And then what are the roles that you each play among them.

Okay, cool, I can definitely help there. So we started our media company. We're a husband and wife team founded it three years ago, and the name is speaker box media. So that is the brand and within speaker box media. We address a few different aspects of podcasting. But our goal is to provide you a podcasting solution A to Z.

So that includes physical studios, post production, podcast, launching, guest booking, just all the additional services and layers that come with producing a very high quality podcast. And so that's kind of the brand all in one. And like you mentioned, there's different aspects of it in different avenues that we use in order to provide an all encompassing solution. But speaker Vox media's goal is to help clients and brands develop communities and a sense of kind of mission to their brand through podcasts based interviews. So that's basically in a nutshell kind of what we do.

That's so awesome. I love it so much. Tell me where this business started. Because you said like there's launching podcasts, there's the actual recording and setting up studios. So you have like a physical component to your business. Which piece did you start with?

So I started with audio because I was an audio engineer. And I say I was just me at the time. Sarah still working full time. And yeah, I started just doing audio. And at the time, I had took a gig at a church actually, that had me doing multimedia. So animation and video, were kind of added to my plate like, hey, we don't have a budget, but we have a budget to train you. So go get some training. So I was excited about that. So I went into took some training or might have been watching YouTube videos, formal training through like online courses and things like that to learn animation and video, and I would just tag along carry people's bags, or they would do whatever I had to learn how to do video, because it was my very first time strictly stepping out of corporate. And I was on my own. So I was saying yes to literally everything like, can you do animation? Never done that before? But give me about Thor? Yeah, I'm on it. I got you. So yes, turn it off with audio. And of course, as the podcast industry progressed, this was 2018 more people want it? Animations more people want it video, and all these other services. So that's where we started to add services on to the audio, which has always been our foundation. So

okay, so I have two questions that come out of that. One is when did Sara join the team like officially joined the team? But on top of, actually, let's start with that question. When did Sara like when did you leave your corporate role and then move into this business.

So I started to taper off probably about a year after we had decided to found speaker Vox media full time, and Ray was going to be full time in it. And so I started coming on kind of part time at that point. And so I was part time for about a year. So now we're two years in and then year three, we had to pull the trigger I had to come on in order for us to scale. And it was one of the biggest and scariest but most necessary things that we had to do in order to get the business to the level that we wanted to which was providing an all encompass solution.

Yeah. Okay, so we're gonna come back to that story, because I think it's so significant. It feels risky. And I'm using air quotes y'all can't see on the podcast. So it risky to like, leave a corporate job, I feel so settled and move into entrepreneurship. But so I want to go back in a second and talk about how you knew for yourselves like this is the right choice. Not assuming like, everything's gonna go great. And that's perfectly fine. But how did you build that confidence in yourself? But before that, I want to ask, even with that first transition, when you

were part time, and we're gradually doing more and more, did you have any markers in your business? Like specific things you were looking at that dictated like, Okay, now I'm going instead of halftime, like three quarters time, okay? Or were you just like, This feels like there's too many things on our plate, we need to make a choice, like, what were the metrics or the things you were looking at that help you make that decision? Well, I

think there's a few layers to that. One is you have a vision for where you want to go. So you have an idea per client, the resources that you need, in order to scale at that rate, I know that there's a metric as far as how many hours and resources do we have to allocate per client to get to a certain level, which for us, we both were very straightforward about, we never want to become this detached, huge podcast machine that's pumping out 200 podcasts a month, we always wanted to have a very customer centric and human centric approach to our business. And so it requires more hours. And so we've been kind of calculated that in and so that was a metric, once we get to a certain number of clients, we know that we need another full time person. Another metric that I think is important to think through is the founders mentality, or the entrepreneur mentality is very different. And so what you would get out of another full time operating manager, you will not get out of an entrepreneur, because they will go past the point in which you can measure, they're not giving you \$40 or \$50 of value an hour, they're giving you 200. Because they're a strategic thinker. And so we always kind of kept that in mind that at some point, we would need another strategic thinker, like Ray who was thinking on the business. And so we kind of left that there was a little bit of a, let's see what feels good for him, because he would know when he needed another strategic thinker in his corner. And then I think the the obvious kind of third play that people kind of talk about is just financially, there's basic numbers, there's basic numbers that you need to survive, you need to be able to pay yourself, we came in saying, Hey, we can live a very minimalistic lifestyle at this amount. And when we hit that mark, that's when we're going to make the move. Even though it's not the life that we want to live. It's not taking a vacation three times a year, like that. We agreed on some basic financial principles that we both stood behind and said when we hit this mark, we're going to go and it's going to be a little uncomfortable, but we're willing to take that risk.

So good, so good. And I love that differentiator between like yes, you can bring people into your business that will produce right like we talk about production hours me and my clients that will be able to produce edit podcasts or for some of my clients like do the graphic design work or the programming for you, whatever, but you need strategy, you need space for that. If CEO level thinking, if that's the case, if you're doing this much 80% production work, and there's only 20% room for CEO work like that has to come from someplace else, right? Like rest of that has to come from someplace else. So you started off with audio editing. Eventually, Sarah joins the business. Tell me about the next piece you added. What was the next thing that you added to the brand?

Outside of just the production stuff? Mm hmm. Yeah. So the next piece, I would say, kind of reluctantly was the studio. I had kind of tossed idea up. And Sarah, kind of liked the idea of this studio thing. So I was just like, worst case scenario, we go start looking at some places, and we pop on a short term lease, and we give it up.

Because I'm total online entrepreneur. I love sitting at home in my PJs, editing or creating something new. I like going outside and going across town to in physical location. Yeah. So this idea just kind of came up. And we went looking. And the first place we looked was at expansive, co working in Houston. And I mean, they told us, Hey, you can do whatever you want to the room. And they were good at selling it, because they're like most co working spaces won't let you do this. But you can come in, hang up all the stuff you want, totally got the room and do exactly what you want. So I was just like, Okay, I'm kind of sold. And then you know, they set us down. And yeah, we went through the process, like, alright, this makes sense. And on top of that, we had kind of a checklist going in ways we could make some revenue off this thing. One being putting it into a co working space where our target customers lived pre COVID, of course. So I did kind of see it initially as a great amenity for expansive customers. So long term strategy, we always have this big grandiose goal for any product, that goal was to integrate it nationally into their co working spaces. So that product was added. And we went at it with the Lean approach of we're gonna test test test, test test, get feedback, great feedback loops, because I've never done this before. So that part of it was very scary. I've built studios, I've installed things like this all day long, but I've never operated it for it to say would be successful. So we took it, total approach was this is a test. Let's see how this goes. And I think you know, something great will come from,

I love this so much. And a couple things I want to pull out. One is that you don't have to, but I think it is very wise to have more than one purpose for any new thing you bring into your business, right. So like anything you add to your business, whether it be you decide to blog regularly, or you decide to add a new actual product, each one of those things is still a product, I consider my podcast, a product of my business, just because of how much time and energy and effort and thought it takes. And so when you're adding a product, it's so important to think like, what are all of the purposes, and then you have to weigh that with? What are the resources, it's going to cost to create that thing. And so I love that you're like, okay, not only is this in the same place as the demographic of who you serve, you've got a long term goal of okay, we do this once we can replicate it over and over again. So that's easy enough. And you have the Lean approach of like, let's just test right, the version one, somebody said somewhere, the version one of your products should embarrass you three years later, like you should be embarrassed. Right? The point is like, get it out, get it live, test it out. And you did that. So tell me about what made you reluctant. And you talked a little bit about it. But I think this is important, especially for my audience, many of them and myself included, were like online business all day digital assets all day long. And then you're like, oh, physical location, hard assets. Was that part of your reluctance? Or tell me about?

Yeah, I think you know, especially when you're a small business price is always going to be something you're looking closely at. So for us, we're like, gosh, anything that costs 600 to \$1,000 a month is going to be huge for a small business, especially at that time, we didn't have more than two or three customers that were going to use that each month. And so the price was definitely a reluctant thing being tied into a contract. And like Ray said, we work in the digital space. So when your customers start to ask questions as to why are you in a physical location, if doing this doing audio is completely digital, and you have to really think carefully

about the impact that it has on your brand and how that changes your messaging. Because for us, it directly challenges kind of the validity of what we're saying right conversation, whether it's digital or happening in person, I think is extremely powerful. And so that's kind of what we came up with, but reluctance also came from what we could do with a space So like, let me just throw this tidbit in there. And when you talk about being embarrassed three years back, I think that that space was 79 square feet, it was literally a square, it was in downtown Houston had a window, and it was 79 square feet. And so it was a very small office. So what we did is we named that spot the Houston pod, and we decked out that tiny spot to where it looked like the coolest four walls you wanted to be in, in this space. And so we took the opportunity in our limitation and said, We're gonna go into this feeling reluctant about XYZ, where can we curb this for us? Well, financially, let's get the smallest space, we can that we can test in comfortably. So that was curving that first initial reluctance. The second was, we had to think thoroughly through our messaging and how we were going to connect the physical studio to our brand and make it make sense for our clients. And then the third one was, again, thinking about our long term goal, always having a long term goal in mind and thinking about how the product that you're bringing in impacts that like what step ups are you going to implement to help you get to where you're going. So it's always going into something with a long term mentality. So for us decking up the space, not only one helped our client experience in there, but two, it helped us really show expansive what was possible with this space and how you could take something even at the smaller price point and make it really attractive, which I have to say later on paid off. But little,

gosh, love the story so much. Because what we're talking about is a transition in the type of business you run. And not even a transition but one that a little bit opposes the direct messaging you're sending out, which is like you can record amazing audio anywhere, it doesn't matter. so challenging that assumption. And then on top of that, which we're going to talk about in a second, it ends up paying off for you all quite well. But being able to say like, yes, we're going to make revenue from people renting the space, smallest space that we can actually validate this idea, validate this offer, and then realizing oh, the long term play is, hey, let's kind of connect with the expanse. So tell me about how the rest of that story played out. What happens next? First of all, tell me like dates. When did you kind of first get in the space? And then what happens?

So when we first opened up the space, it felt like between building, getting it up, and then getting a few people interested, which the first one was a group called AMA, which is the American Marketing Association. So Oh, awesome, a great first customer, because they're bringing great people. And we were getting tons of inquiries. It was one of these products where it was just like, what do we do? Like people are so interested? Do we hire engineer? What do we do? So we were kind of in this weird pattern, like we had enquiries every month coming in and was just like, alright, what are we gonna do with this product? Because we have a whole nother business growing. And then I think, right around that time, I felt like COVID started to come up.

timing wise, we open the studio after construction and everything, like late summer, early fall of 2019 is when the actual studio was open and put together. And then

COVID happens. Yep, you want to talk about making a decision? And then instantly feeling like the impact of that. That's where you're breaking

up. Yeah. So that was kind of a blow like, Okay, what do we do? We look to our left and right, people are closing their offices. It's like, man, and then like one of our mentors who had a podcast studio kind of same situation, in a co working space, he ended up closing his socks, just like, do what do I do when a young business and we're about to go through like this economic downturn, Pandemic Studios are closing left and right. I'm like, did we close that really came to mind, but I was just like, man, it's time to see what we can do. If we're going to go down. Let's go down swinging, you know? Yeah. So we, I think approached, expansive around that time. And I think they were kind of facing similar challenges, of course, because they're losing people. So we wanted to make the space more attractive by why coming to a co working space when the new thing is working from home. Everyone's working from home. Mm hmm. Yeah. So we transitioned into having that conversation. It wasn't a split second conversation with them. It was a conversation that existed over months, almost, I would say six months to a year somewhere around there.

Yeah. So 2020 There was a closing of the studio in compliance with COVID precautions and things like that. So we did end up having to close the studio for a few months off to other external users. And it just functioned as our office for a few months a way to get out of the house, but go to one place to write to be So stir crazy for creative people. That's literally the worst is having to be Just one space all the time. So it functioned in that aspect allowed us to still kind of move around a little bit. And so it was close for a few months. And then once we kind of had an idea that, okay, there's a vaccine coming, this will lead up at some point, I think that's when the pivot to we need to approach about this conversation. And that was a conversation that Ray started to approach. And like you said, it was a conversation that took a few months. So that was a few months kind of that went by in which COVID lightening up people are coming back into the studio, we did end up having to upgrade the space and get a bigger space to allow for more distancing. So that was an additional measure we took while this conversation is happening in the background,

yeah, there's a lot going on.

Yeah. And I want to clock that, right. Like, I want to praise you all, but also just like recognizing, when you are an entrepreneur, your thought is not necessarily have what's immediately in front of your face, right? I think sometimes people are literally thinking about the next three months or six months. And if you're doing that, and going through COVID, like we all just did, then you're like, oh, shit, the end of March 2020, you're like, oh, three months from now, we're still looking about the same, right? But you have to have this long term, I wouldn't even say long, long term vision, like a year out, as we talk about on this podcast. But I think more than that, it's just this belief, this true absolute belief in your ability as an entrepreneur, because nobody knew, obviously, when the vaccine was coming, when people would start, you know, moving around a little bit more freely. But you ultimately held this belief that like, we're gonna figure this out, we're gonna figure it out. But closing, if let's say that part of the brand shattered, right, we'll just build something else. Like there was never this like, oh T or like, my

whole livelihood is hung up around this one moment. And if I fail, it's going down. You know, it's like, no, we'll figure it out.

Yeah. And I think that's important. When you're taking financial risks, you have to know kind of where your boundaries are with that. So for us that was signing a shorter lease and being able having some flexibility to renew or pivot if we needed to. And I think, yeah, totally, that's the attitude is, if you believe in a product line, because you've verified that it's a need. So the podcast studio came about as a potential need for our clients, technology is cumbersome, and there's still a huge amount of people who don't want to deal with it. So if we could provide a solution that would solve that problem, the actual setting up a microphone recording, there'd be a clientele base that would love that. And so I think that's important to mention. And something that we constantly do is every single product that we've brought into the business was validated by a customer, or by a need, or by a group of customers. So so it's never what arraign Sara think is the best thing to bring in the business because we could dream all day. It's really about what do my clients need? What are their problems? And how within the realm of what we do? Can we solve those. And so that's how all these different product lines came about, from audio to adding digital assets to guest booking, and then a physical studio, it was our customers that told us what they needed. And so when you're chasing it for that reason, then I'm chasing it for their solution. I'm not chasing it for validation of my great idea. We're able to pivot and able to courageously kind of go against our fears, because we're trying to help someone, and that just feel so much better than it like,

yeah, and it's way easier to consistently stick to that, right? Like it's external data that's like, Hey, this is what works, this is what they need next, or this is the thing that our main offer doesn't quite solve. So let's solve it in this way. Like, that's the best way I think, to add things to your brand. Because the minute that you add another product to your brand, your thoughts get divided everything you have your thought, your energy, your time, your effort, your brainpower, your marketing, it gets split, like what are those, like? I'm thinking of the video and some great science of like, the cells like splitting. Yeah, right. And so very often, I think entrepreneurs split either too soon, or they split because they have their creative and like this is fun. And not because someone asked for this because they have a base to go to.

Yeah, you want that validation from customers. And mean, you Haley, we did a research call. Yeah. And several changes were made, whether that was to external or internal, based on your feedback, but I'm always seen as like the genius or like, how did you guys come up with like, it's our customers like they tell us, there's this book called shut up and listen, and I love but it's all about listening to your customers. Like they will do 90% of your innovation work for you. And they want to they want to help. So at the beginning of the year, we made the decision to say we're going to put basically our dollars behind customer experience. We want our customers to have the best experience and a studio was a risk, but we knew that that was an add on. Like if you had a big guest and you want to impress them, that was a value point for them. Like we're like, hey, that's worth taking a look at so that our customers Kim record with confidence. So that's where a lot of this stuff comes from is the research and contacting your customers. I think a lot of brands these

days are so disconnected. And even with all the money and things behind them, I think they lose that personal touch with their customers.

Yes, my time in tech and project management, like many of the early projects I did before I was a coach, I did project management, and did like customer research projects and customer service projects. And like, Molly, you would be surprised at how many companies think about it. So secondarily, and all of the answers are there. Like they will literally just tell you, and there's some thoughts around like how to get that information out of them, blah, blah, blah, but like, they'll just tell you what you need to build next. So it's our job to pay attention and balance our curiosity and our interest with okay, what do they need? Who am I? Are we what is this offer this thing that we have to offer the craft of what we have to offer? What do they need? And then how do we make those two things meet. So I don't know if you're able to talk about this. But tell me about what happened. Like after the six months conversation or multiple conversations you're having with this co working space, what came of that what happened,

right actually reached out to the CEO and they started a great conversation. And then we started a dialogue with their internal team. And we really both strategically kind of brought the best of both worlds, they are one of the largest co working spaces as far as footprint in the US. So every major city expansive workspace has a location, it's part of why we looked at them as a valuable partner, then on our side, having the podcasts and kind of tech knowledge to make a good recommendation on where these potential locations could take off. Being very honest about the different value it brought both of us as brands and as companies. And then of course, having to figure out what that would look like what does it actually look like executed financially. And so there was a big consultation phase back and forth that we went through and collectively decided that Austin would be a great place to pilot their very first flagship podcast studio. And so we're super excited to say that we have expanded with expansive workspace into the first flagship location of theirs in their North Austin location. It is a collab between expensive workspace and speaker Vox media. And so we now have our second location. And we are currently in the talks of what are the next ones to go, I think it's really rare that you get to set a goal or a big, audacious goal. And I think that that's something that as entrepreneurs we dream about all the time, sometimes we don't even say it out loud what we really want to happen, but in our mental, we're like, oh, this would be a dream. If I think that you rarely get to see that big, audacious goal kind of come to fruition. And it is, we are two locations now, Houston and Austin. And we are in the discussions of more. And so that's what's come about and one of the most like authentic and really trial and error ways. And I think it just kind of goes to what you said is that you can go into something and as long as you have some parameters about expectations, you have some financial buffer in there for you. The worst thing that could have happened was it could have failed, and this didn't happen. But if the best thing of it happened, it's worth the risk. And for us, I think in the failure even and to pause for a minute, I think the mindset around that is so important for me, and I think sometimes for right, what we do is we go to the worst, what is the worst that can happen? Let's live in that for a second. Let's figure out if this were to happen. How would we pivot if this were to happen? And let's say nothing goes our way? How do we pivot from there. And I think sometimes just living in the worst for a second and realizing that it's not actually as bad as you think

it is that even if you failed, you would have learned so much up to that point gives you the courage to kind of get out of that space. And now let's get to the optimistic base. Let's talk about our big audacious goal is talk about how we get there and break it down. And let's go after it. And I think that that's kind of a culmination of what this was, this was stepping into an uncomfortable opportunity that we thought would be good for our customers that we thought could potentially if it were great for us go this way. And it happened to so ah,

the word that keeps coming up is failure. And I think when you come into entrepreneurship, I think that word is it loses power more and more. Yes, because what really is failure I fail every single day at something, but I'm learning as I'm failing. So I think the big thing here is like constantly redefining what failure means and me and Sarah had a deep conversation, especially as like First Generation Entrepreneurs and things like that, who are actually stepping out doing ourselves like our parents failed not because they had a setback but they weren't able to get back up or they could still come back. And I think they will. But it was dead contributed to our fear that we didn't even know we had that subconscious fear of like, I don't want to end up like this. Or there's the fear of failure that's attached more to like how people view me, you got to get outside, that's really at the heart of it, how my family viewed me, you got to get all of that stuff out of your system, you know,

you really have to leave your ego, somewhere, leave it leave it somewhere back at your W two job someplace, right? Because that's the biggest thing, right? There's. So I think two important things I'll just said one is like, think there's two ways you can go about it. Sometimes our brains automatically go to the worst case scenario, but it's doing it like on its own, and you're not watching it, you can take it there on purpose and just go like, what would really happen. And very often, we are living the worst case scenario, it's this, it's you don't have a studio. That's it. This is the worst case scenario, right? And so like, normally, you will survive, whatever your brain can think of is the true worst case scenario. Most of us are so many steps before homelessness, living under a bridge somewhere, like it's like, that's not even really a part of it. Even though if that's what my brain loves to go is like, then we'll be homeless, like no. Like, you have friends, you have fat, like, that's really a concern.

I'm always thinking, Yes, yeah. It's

not like really a problem. But you have to like, take your brain there for a second and then decide with those parameters. Is that risk worth it? And then what you just said, right about like failure. It's like it is the fuel of entrepreneurship, like you don't get to do the stuff. You don't get to win and have the success without being willing to feel badly, because that's really the failure of the ego is like, Oh, I feel badly. Yeah, there's money spent time spent, and I feel bad. But like, if you can allow for that, like, Yeah, that might happen. Sure, absolutely. You might spend money and not see your ROI on that. Yeah, that's the thing. You might feel terrible and sad and embarrassed. Yep, those are feelings. But if you're willing to allow those things, there's so many things you can build. So that's the Columbo Go ahead, even further,

more into that which I had a great conversation on this last week. And it's just, it feels so refreshing for me to think about it in this perspective. Now, if you're looking for longevity, and business, it's going to require you to innovate. Innovate doesn't mean technology, it's the growth or improvement upon anything else. And so if you are going to create longevity and business, you are committing to fail, because you will have to innovate to grow your business. So you have to in the forefront of it say I am committing to fail, or to learn every single time I'm doing something new, because you don't know what you don't know.

There's no way to know it. Like you have to do it. To know it to learn it. You have to there's no amount of I, my husband, who I love so much is not an entrepreneur. And he's like, Well, let me read up on it. Like let me study, there's probably a book or a course or a video, like there's no amount of learning you can do. You have to do it and learn by doing the thing. That's how you create wisdom is by having done something I'm like, Oh, let me not do that again. Now, you know,

exactly. It's

funny that you say that because that's my personality, I'm that there has to be information about it. And because Ray was in it much longer, he had to really, really, and I still don't think I quite believed when he said it, you just have to do it. You just have to know. But again, we had got to our mark, but now being in it for about a year. Now. I'm like there's no absolute way. I'm here to tell you i was the skeptic guys, there's no way you have to be in it, you have to be in it. There's no book that tells Otherwise everybody would be doing it. There's no book that's going to tell you in your industry, or that's going to keep up with data and research and trends as fast as you can. Being out there on boots on the ground, failing, learning pivoting as it comes.

So good. Okay, so last point I wanted to make about this piece. And I think this is also vitally important. Before you all started this new thing, you had your primary source of income sorted, like that was sorted and rolling. And that gives you the mental financial space to like, let that conversation take because we're talking this is total, like a two year thing, right with the studio before it really is to a place where like, Okay, now it's scalable. Now we can roll with is almost two years. So very importantly, I think entrepreneurs skip that step where they get their main source of income like 50% there or 60% there and then want to start doing stuff and then it puts so much pressure on the new thing of like, I need you to work because this isn't working for me. Right? So I just wanted to add sometimes my clients or my colleagues will be like, you talk about constraint too much and I'm like cuz I'm not trying to have people here broke I mean, constrain, get the main thing you're going for going and then you can add whatever you want without the stress of it feeling like I have to make it work right now. Okay, so tell me about entrepreneuring as a couple, y'all are very different personalities, but I love you all. so much because you complement each other so well. So tell me about what has been really fun for you and what has been less fun, more entrepreneurial as a couple, you'd like him

to turn she's complaining about it. Oh, you know, the funnest part is really getting to see your spouse in a different light. I think Ray and I have known each other for a very long time we met when we were 15, we didn't date or anything until later in

life, but we got an opportunity to see who each other were as young adults. And so it's really another layer of the journey and relationship. And so that's fun getting to see your spouse, I think if we go back to corporate world, you hear about how your spouse's workday is and what they do, when you do it together doesn't allow you to hide, you really get to see how your spouse operates, the great qualities, they have the areas of improvement. And I think we have always approached our relationship as we're here to sharpen each other, God's join these two unique people together, and we're here to sharpen each other. And so at this allows us another layer of transparency, to see where we have opportunity to improve as I think individuals, and then also as a couple, the not so fun part is that there is very little transparency, we're both very different. So extrovert, introvert, creative, analytical, I mean, as different as they come. Something that joins us is we're both very driven. We're both very goal oriented and have growth mindsets. And so with that comes the layers of personality, we both have strong personalities, we both feel what we feel pretty passionately, up to that point before we present it or we think about it, we've thought about it pretty deeply. So sometimes some of those conversations can be very difficult to navigate. The first six months of working together challenged us more than honestly, I think anything in our relationship, because and I think it's important to just say that we were in it like Did we make the right decision here? Are we really as good partners? Yes, I thought we were because I don't think you realize how much time you actually spend away from your spouse, you spend more time at your job than you do with your spouse. And so this became all the time, it's also during COVID. So it's even more all the time than you want it. And so I think getting to see different layers of each other has been the best navigating difficult conversations when you're both very certain about things. And you're both trying to be your version of a leader has been the most challenging, I think,

Oh good. Yeah, my favorite thought is, or one of my favorite sayings is like, if you want to go on a self discovery journey, start a business, you go learn some things. And it's even more true when you're there's two of you like, Oh, you want to grow and mature your marriage, you should probably go into business together. We'll come out.

I'm telling you, why don't you think? Well, yeah, I mean, exactly what she just said, I think we were talking about this, that this do more damage to this hurt our relationship. But actually thinkin ways I'm like a really uncovered some things. Because if you're not facing challenges in your relationship, and how can you really say it's good, something might hit you 40 5060, whether that's bringing any entity into your life, that might change the dynamic. So for me, I saw it as an opportunity to grow, because I knew we weren't going to back down. But it was very challenging. I think also, me being kind of it being my thing in the beginning. And then transitioning over to kind of both of our things was like, What do you take over? And what do I take over? You know, we had, really, but we were like, Oh, we don't have to do like the whole like, org chart. And no, you have to do all those things are important. Like you have to write out job descriptions, even though you kind of know them. Because like everything really has to say be like, what's on your plate? What's on my plate? You know? Yes. And I mean, we have not mastered the art of this, I would say we are very close now. It's taken some difficult conversations, but that's the importance we're having them. So I think all in all, it's been something

that has really forced us to grow. And I'm all about growth. I'm like, I want to know if there's 5% more that we could do to make our relationship better. I want to know that like I want to go through that do that because I want to get 5% better and I think that's what this process has taught us is yeah, you guys got some things to work on steel you

got right, which is great. Like that's like, like you said the human journey, right? Like you will never stop this process until the end of time, right like until the end of our lives. We'll keep going. I love that you all share that specially with people I know. Well, I write up contracts all the time. And they're like, why this seems Extra? I'm like, No, it's not because one day you're gonna look sideways at me. And it's so easy to just be very clear. Like it just takes the guesswork out of it and just explicitly even if it's literally just in an email of here are my responsibilities here are your responsibilities. Are we both good with this? It saves So much time and effort. Yeah,

I think what this made us do one is step outside of ourselves realize when we couldn't solve the problem. So I want to be really transparent and saying, we've gotten a coach, when I say, be really transparent and saying, we've gotten couples counseling all during this timeframe, because I think you have to put your ego aside, when you say, we're not able to solve this on our own, maybe I'm not as good as I need to be as a leader, maybe you're not as good. And then maybe we need somebody else to come in and see it from a different lens than we're looking at it. And so I think that that's really important to just say, we didn't figure this out by ourselves, we've had some great mentors and resources that allowed us. And I think one of the biggest tools that has come out of this is I think, when we're in work, we operate this way. But we don't do it in our personal life. Like you said, we don't create contracts, we don't calendar things. We don't calendar, our personal time, we don't talk through what our weak is going to look like a to z when we're operating in the real world. But this made us do that. And it's changed our relationship. And it's changed our business. It started with this marriage meeting, we would do this marriage meeting, right, where we talk through what's coming up for the week, and we talk about potential areas, what you're doing is talking about potential areas of conflict, really, in a roundabout way. And then as I was doing this chart, I said, we need to be doing this for the business. And for our marriage, the tool works the same. And so literally like clockwork, we sit down at the beginning of the week, we talk about the big items that have to be finished by the end of the week, we then break that down who's doing what, and checking them off, then we make sure everything's on the calendar, everything from date night to personal outings that we do to who's going to the gym, when how many times a day. And just talking through these things you don't realize helps you resolve so much conflict or potential areas of conflict, they come up both in the business realm and in the relationship realm. And so that's a tool that's kind of come out of all this that we wouldn't have done before, we would have thought was too much or a little extra or whatever. But man, it's made a huge difference.

I love that you share that maybe we'll have another conversation about this. But my secret thoughts on motherhood and family as I was just another organization actually, that's the whole thing. That's my whole mother. My whole motherhood strategy is like, how would I manage an employee yet? That's pretty much how I

manage my child. Like, what do they need? How can I help them get what they need? How can I help them be successful? Because they're going to make life easier on me when they are and all the things? So? Okay, so we're getting towards the end of our time. And I wanted to ask, actually, one final question. Obviously, this podcast is called one year from now. So I want to know from you all based off of where you are now, what do you see for your business a year from now?

You know, I have so many ideas for our business. And to be quite candid, I think our biggest thing right now is making it through this pandemic. We talked about that yesterday, I'm not trying to push growth so much right now I'm trying to push sustainability, mental health in the season, we have a lot of people, even our contractors and things like that going through things are just not driving growth heavy as we were at the beginning of the year. So right now, it's about finding a way to sustain because we've been looking at the statistics so far. And it's just like we made this far, I think we might be good. But like 48% of black and brown businesses closing their doors like, we don't know how long this thing goes, we saw one projection that it will go to like 2022. And of course, that's a little more milder as it progresses. But I think right now I just want to see our businesses sustained. Because if we sustain, and we make it through this thing, and we come out on the other side, it's going to be well worth it, because we've built in resiliency. So that's, I guess, just third one year for now come out as a resilient company.

I love that, for sure. I mean, when I think about it, I always go to goals. And I think goals would be to continue to expand our physical locations with the hope of providing a professional solution that fosters connectivity, like nobody else is doing it. And I think we both have a desire for high quality, any anything and everything we do. So that helps us feel as if we're giving our potential clients the best value, I think it would be to not necessarily grow our organization be great if we could add on more wonderful creative people who feel as passionately as we do about this medium and about building communities for our clientele, but really recognizing the value that the people that we have have so taking that time out to really care for our team and ourselves throughout this so that when we do grow as an organization and add on more team members that it really feels like a place you want to work at. It really feels like a company that you can stand behind and that you wake up excited to contribute to And then I think lastly for our clients else it would be to help them continue to build their communities to find their people to find the people who are passionate about the solutions they provide, the education they're giving. And just to foster communication, I think I can say, we are both super passionate about conversation, and what it provides just the value that we have. I think, as humans, we have this need and this desire to connect with people. And podcasting and conversation allows you to do that. And so I just want to continue to contribute to the world in that aspect to provide great conversations and help put great conversations out in the Atmos that are accessible to everyone that allow people to tell their stories and that have this kind of exponential value that we can't even measure.

I love that. Awesome. Okay, where can people find you all on their internet's? Where can we find you all online?

As far as connecting with us, we're both super active on LinkedIn. So you can find us there, you can look up speaker Vox media, and we're both listed under there, Sarah Smith and Ray Smith on LinkedIn, our website is a great place to connect with us even if you just have questions. It's speaker box, one word media.com. So www dot speak of Vox media.com, you can set up a call there from our website, or just connect with us online. And we love to have conversations and answer questions either way. So we're definitely super active on both of those we'd love for you to hit us up there,

I highly recommend ran Sarah's team. Honestly, we might have to do a part two, because I love the way that you've built the production business. But I mean, there's tech pieces coming in, you've got the physical locations that we've talked about, like y'all are doing so many things. And so thank you for taking the time to talk with me and talk with my audience about where you've been and where you're going. And just what it looks like to be first generation entrepreneurs who have big vision, and are just walking it out day by day. Just keep going forward. So thank you so much for coming on.

Thanks for having us, Haley. We love the one year from now show and of course, just love the methodology and resources that you're providing your clients as well. You know, what's the best thing if you edit podcasts to edit podcasts you like because you have to listen to them and we love the one year from now show so thank you for having us on. We're super appreciative and honored.

Thank you for listening to this episode. And one year from now you can find the show notes and all the links we mentioned at brain space optimized comm slash podcast and if you want to chat me up about all things entrepreneurship, then head to brainspace optimized.com and join my email list. This is where we have rich conversations about the experience of business ownership. It's thoughtful, it's funny, I like getting responses and chatting with you all it's a good time. Lastly, you can find me on Instagram at brainspace optimized we will see you in the next episode.