



STSE Podcast Episode #005

Building a Successful Brand as a Professional Speaker, Strategist, & Author with Michele Christensen

GERALD: Welcome to the Self Employment Podcast with Gerald Vinci, Episode 5.

ANNOUNCER: Welcome to stepstoselfemployment.com your online business resource helping future business owners and entrepreneurs build a solid foundation towards financial success and independence. Now your host, owner of a successful marketing and web design firm, writer, blogger, and entrepreneur Gerald D. Vinci.

GERALD: Hey everyone welcome back to another episode of the Self-employment Podcast. Thanks again for joining us. If you haven't checked out of our other podcast episodes, I encourage you to do so as they post these in chronological order. I have been recapping my efforts with the Steps to Self-Employment Podcast and website, as well, as talking about anything going on my personal life that might be of interest to all of you. As I said before, I want you to be able to start this journey right along with me. I do have a great interview lined up for you today. Before we get into it I do have some things I'd like to talk about real quick. If you're tuning in for the first time and want to just take it from here.

Well, let me take a quick moment to explain what this podcast and website are all about. I've created Steps to Self-Employment and the STSE Podcast as a free resource for any aspiring entrepreneur, business owner, or even just someone looking to start living life by someone else's rules and looking to get out on their own and start their own self-employment journey. My focus for this podcast is to deliver relevant and useful information for all of you. That will come through a series of interviews, as well as through solo podcast where I talk about relevant topics for small business owners, challenges we face, and some solutions to those common problems that seem to hang us up or prevent us from starting or moving ahead in our journey.

The website is comprised of handpicked writer, all of which are in their own phase of self-employment. Whether it be running a business on the side, owning and operating a business, living and breathing an entrepreneurial mindset or trying to create a new business idea into a viable product or service. I'm taking the time to interview each of them for our podcast listeners so you can get to know more about them. These are ordinary down to earth people who are all dedicated to their craft, love what they do, and are contributing their time to steps to self-employment every month to add fresh content to the website. I think every interview will have at least one take away for all of you and I hope you listen to all of these interviews.

I also just want to note that while I focus more on business owners and entrepreneurs, don't



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let that turn you away if you're say, for example, a freelancer, or someone working for multiple employers, or whatever, etc. I think there's something to take away from this for everyone. For me, I tend to connect more on a personal level with business owners because I've always aspired to own my own business in addition to just work for myself. So those might sound similar but they're, in fact, very different, in my opinion. One of the biggest differences seems to be in mindset. A business owner is thinking more about how to help others and create value in what they put out into the world. The whole mindset of ownership is both physical and mental.

So you own your physical business but you also have mental ownership over your world and how it's perceived by others. Maybe that's just how I see it though. I know when I was freelancing, I was, technically, self-employed but it never felt legit to me, just something I was doing until the next permanent venture came along. That's, probably, just me. I like stability and being able to plan ahead. So, I'm interested to learn more about what everyone out there thinks about that. If you thinking of being a business owner, it's a different mindset from just working for yourself. On a side note, I've been toying around with different acronyms for the show so I don't have to say "Step to self-employment" or "the Self-employment podcast" every time. So I'm simply going to use the STSE podcast or the STSE website. I think that keeps it short and clean and straight forward across the board. So anytime you hear me mention those you know I'm talking about this podcast and the website.

Well, it's been about a week and a half since the last podcast. I had one of my best friends and business partner, Ryan Cote, of WP Amplify on to talk about his business, search engine optimization and how we both have utilized online marketing and strategic partnerships for our businesses. If you haven't listened to it yet, definitely, check it out, I think it's a great interview and full of actionable advice for anyone looking to compete in the online business market space.

You can check out the show and the notes at stepstoselfemployment.com/episode04. So it's now February 5th of 2014 and I'm recording this podcast right now around lunchtime. I'm very happy that I've been able to keep podcasting at least bi-weekly while getting this website up and going. I love doing this show and I hope everyone out there is enjoying it because without you it's just me talking into a microphone. There's nothing fulfilling about that unless I know that there's an audience out there getting something out of this too. I, especially, love doing the interviews because there's no better way for all of you to learn how to get started and from people who have been right where you are, took a deep breath and, literally, jumped right into self-employment.



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So it's not easy for anyone. Seriously, the sooner you accept that starting a business and making it successful might be the hardest most stressful thing you ever do. Even after all the hard work, the blood, the sweat, the tears, it still could fail. That's very scary, I know, but anyone who's persevered will tell you that nothing good in life comes easy. The only time I've seen starting a business go smoothly is if someone already has a business or is so financially secure that they can, simply, throw money at problems to put out all the fires. That's very unrealistic and not anything I condone but most people I talk to, who do not have some, kind of, a horror story or major hurdle that they had to face when starting out, usually, had a better financial setup to start with.

So that's a lesson right there in itself. If you can, plan ahead, and, probably, save double what you think you might need to get the business up and going. You will encounter a variety of unforeseen problems along the way. That could add to your cost, or add to the time before you're up and running, or the time before you're able to start generating sales. So don't be conservative when it comes to estimating costs for your business. Assume the worst and then double it. Assume the worst and then double it. That is, definitely, worth saying twice.

Anyways, back on subject here. I mentioned in the last episode my wife and I are getting ready to move our kids across country to Monterrey, California. We, currently, live in Destin, Florida. So it's about a 25 hundred mile trip. It's now less than three weeks until we leave its February 5th, so in 20 days we're heading across country for a week long RV trip out to California. Our house looks like a war zone with many organized piles starting to pop up in every corner of every room. My wife, Amber, is a master instructor with the united States Air Force. So, luckily, for us we don't have to pack or move all of our belongings but getting all of our affairs in order making sure everything in Florida that needs to be done in Florida is taken care of before we leave. It's just getting more and more challenging as we get closer to our move date.

I pledged to myself that I'm going to have six interviews in the bag for the STSE Podcast before we leave and I'm happy to report it looks like I'll be able to make that happen as I've got the final two interviews lined up later this week and next week So I'm really happy that even with all the chaos, and added pressure of the move, I'm able to keep my sanity through the podcast. Then once we get to Monterrey, I'll be focusing on STSE and getting the site launched later that month. So I cannot wait to get all of this to go live. I know it's weird because you're listening to this in the future but I have to track my progress and keep you all up to date even if it's occurred prior to



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launch. I know there's a lot of podcasts where I'll go back and listen to the podcast from the very start. So I like to record that history so you have it.

So life is bound to get a little crazier for me and my family the next two weeks. I just hope I can keep it together and be strong for the family when they need me most. Before I get into today's interview, I have one request. Please head over to stepstoselfemployment.com and check out my ever expanding library of informative articles written for you by our contributing authors. It's all geared towards helping you on your own self-employment journey.

In addition to our panel of writers I provide you with a bunch of resources to help you manage or grow your business. A weekly newsletter full of actionable advice and info about the upcoming week's show and website updates. The best part, of course, is it's all free. So what do you have to lose? You can subscribe for our email list right on the site and get great updates right in your inbox. In the future I'll also offer other premium products such as one on one coaching, webinars, eBooks, and video tutorials.

So check out stepstoselfemployment.com as we are in fledgling stages of making it a powerful resource for you and I ask all of you to come help us build it together into an online business community that will, truly, help you and others like you on your path to success. So, finally, now that I've said all of that we can get into the interview. I have another great guest with us today, Michele Christensen, a professional speaker, strategist, and self-proclaimed champion of solopreneurs. Michele and I met on Twitter, of all places, and were connected through a mutual friend whom I shared a cubical wall with in my last corporate job as graphic design and marketing supervisor for a telecommunications company in Pennsylvania.

Michele's a perfect fit for the STSE panel of writers, as well, as the podcast because of what she stands for and the huge amount of experience she is a business strategist, business owner, author, and as an open advocate for self-employment and all that is involved in the journey. Michele jumped back into her own business in 2009 and now focuses, primarily, on solopreneurs including artists, and performers, coaches, writers, and speakers and other service professionals. The goal of Michele's business is to use strategic thinking to help clients grow their business into something more than just a job or a career but something they love and remain passionate about long-term.

So Michele is very active in social media and uses her sizable Twitter following to create



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opportunities for her business. We'll be learning more about this later in the interview, as well as some more about things that work and don't work for this type of business model. So sit back and enjoy this interview on the Self-Employment Podcast where we learn about one passionate, motivated, and brilliant business woman, Michele Christensen. Hi Michele and welcome to the Self-Employment Podcast.

MICHELE: Hi it's great to be here, thanks for having me.

GERALD: Oh, you're welcome. So I just want to say, first and foremost, thanks so much for taking the time out of your day for doing this and, especially for contributing your time as a writer on the site.

MICHELE: Oh, it's my pleasure. I think self-employment is such a great goal for people to have and it's really fulfilling. It's a great way to live. Before we jump into things I just want to cop to one thing, that I do work from home and I have two dogs that can be a little barky sometimes. I did give them a nice long walk and their napping at the other end of the house. So, hopefully, we won't hear from them but if we do that's me, not you.

GERALD: Oh, no problem, no problem. So you heard the intro to the show. Would you say I've accurately portrayed you and your business?

MICHELE: Oh, yeah, yeah, I think that was a really good way to describe everything.

GERALD: Great, well, I've got a lot of ground to cover today so how about we just jump in and get started.

MICHELE: Sounds great.

GERALD: Tell us a little bit about you, your business, and why you chose this idea.

MICHELE: Well I got undergraduate and graduate degrees in business. At the time it wasn't really so much a formulated conscious choice. It was more just like, 'Well I'm not really sure what to do.' I did what's pretty typical with that degree. I went into corporate. I really didn't like it. It's very rigged and very hierarchical and not conducive to creatively and that, kind of, thing. So my friend and I jumped in the car and headed west and landed in California with no plan or anything. I started to get a lot of temp work. There was a ton of creative, small firms out here. There still is



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in Los Angeles. A lot of them needed business management or, kind of, strategic consulting type help.

So I did that for a while. The work just came really easily and it was a lot of fun but I still hadn't quite found what I love to do. I left that for a little while and worked in non-profit. Then around 2009, like you mentioned, I wanted to be self-employed again and my husband and I bought a fixer-upper house. I needed something with some flexibility to manage all the contractors and stuff. That was, sort of, when the idea of starting my own little business again presented itself.

When I first started I was working on productivity, and organization, and project management, and helping entrepreneurs to get more done. Along the way I learned to build my own practice and that was what people started to help me and ask me for help with. It's like well how are you building your business, how are you getting clients and that kind of thing. That became the new focus of my business was helping people with these tiny little businesses to grow their business.

GERALD: Do you think most solopreneurs choose this as a business model or is it something they probably just like, fell into and just feel more comfortable with?

MICHELE: I would say most of them begin by falling into it, like; I'm picturing, like, for example, someone like a dog-walker. Maybe they just love to walk dogs and they just put some flyers out and before they know it they're a solopreneur before they even realize that they're, actually,

GERALD: It's a business at all, right.

MICHELE: It's business, yeah. I find like a lot of the people I work with fall into that, like, they just work on trying to make money with whatever it is that they're good at. It just becomes a business before they know it. One of the missions that I have is to promote this idea as, like, a viable, sustainable, long-term lifestyle type business. It really is a viable model, not to be confused with the idea of starting a company with the idea of growing it big and then selling it.

GERALD: Yeah, that was what I was wondering about because, in my situation it's a little different, but, obviously, hiring employees or contractors and all that's involved. That can really crush profits but at the same time it can boost production and your ability to take on more work and produce a better end product. If I use my business, for example, I did everything myself for about ten years and then decided enough was enough and stopped doing things myself that



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could be done by others. Since doing that I doubled my personal income and I tripled my business sales. Do you think it's limiting or does it really just depend on what people want out of their business depending on the model that they choose.

MICHELE: You know, I do think it's, kind of, a given that it is limiting, there's only a certain number of hours in a week. Nobody wants to work all the hours they are awake and that, kind of, thing, so it does limit you to a degree but, like you said, it also depends on what you want out of your business. I really enjoy having this little tiny, very flexible, small, simple operation. At some point I may hire some outsourced help. I may not but I may. It's just not what I want right now. So, I think, both of those things you said are true. It does limit you but it's also important to think about what you want.

GERALD: Yeah, it goes the same for me too. I, definitely, feel like I have limits right now where I've got so much work and so many customers. My schedule is just not very flexible to let all that happen, easily, with me uprooting my family out to California and everything. So, at this moment, I'm very jealous of any solopreneur who's only got a hand full of customers to worry about.

MICHELE: I might...that is a good problem to have though.

GERALD: Yeah, it is and it isn't. It's a life style thing, like you said, it's is, definitely, at some point, I do want to scale back. Steps to Self-Employment is something that I want to make my primary focus so I can, kind of, give back more than give out with my design firm like I am now. Do you define yourself as a business owner, an entrepreneur, or both? I guess, solopreneur, you could say for you.

MICHELE: You know, I think, there are some differences and, I guess, it's, kind of, a matter of just personal semantics of what a person thinks those word mean. An entrepreneur, I guess, I think of as someone who, kind of, creates something out of nothing. You create designs and artwork where there was nothing before.

GERALD: Right.

MICHELE: A business owner, I think, can just be, kind of, rolling along doing something that's existed for a long, long, time and just, kind of, rolling along and just doing the same thing over and over, which is fine, they're both, perfectly valid ways to be in business. It's just there's a little



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difference. I guess I consider myself more as an entrepreneur because I, kind of, invented my own little specialty. I'm a business strategist and coach for these one person businesses. There were other people doing similar things and stuff but it's, kind of, my own take on it. So it's, basically, I invented this, kind of, out of scratch.

GERALD: Right. Does the entrepreneurial mindset change at all when it's the one person business?

MICHELE: I think it does for the very reason you mentioned, that you do have to, kind of, do everything yourself. So you have to be of a mindset where you're curious about everything. Where you don't view something like learning some HTML code is drudgery but like, 'Ooo, I get to learn that.' It's fun. If there are broad swaths of things that a person just has no interest in than they, probably, shouldn't be a solopreneur. They, probably, should be outsourcing.

GERALD: Right. You, kind of, answered this question about how you got started in the industry. You did mention distaste for corporate America. What, in particular, was the catalyst that, kind of, turned you away from that?

MICHELE: You know, it's a good question. Back when I was working for corporate I had what most people would consider a good job. I had the working conditions were nice, I did work a lot of hours.

GERALD: Right.

MICHELE: But I was treated well and that, sort of, thing. I think, for me, the rigidity and the inflexibility and the hierarchy. There was, actually, one time I was working for corporate and I was at whatever level I was at. I had a peer in another department. I couldn't just go to my peer and ask for something. I had to go to my boss, who went to his boss, you had both departments under him who went down to that person, to the person under him, and went down to my peer. It's just so silly.

GERALD: Oh, my God.

MICHELE: Yeah, so how is that helping anybody? How is that contributing to anybody's wellbeing? Whether it's the customers, or the shareholders, or anything like that. It just seemed so useless and wasteful.



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GERALD: Structure, for the sake of structure but it doesn't get anything done. It just makes more work for people.

MICHELE: Right, right, right.

GERALD: Yeah, I was the same way, as I said before, I was in corporate world but I didn't spend much time there at all. I think I was there for about six months and left. I just couldn't stand it. I went from working as a senior developer designer for a small firm. I always had this dream of getting in corporate America. I thought it was the way to further my career and just, I guess, climb the corporate ladder and make a name for myself. Then as soon as I got there I just realized how limiting the corporate model was. Like you said, it just wasn't for me.

MICHELE: Yeah and I talk to a lot of people like that. That they're just, 'oh that was not for me.'

GERALD: Yeah, yeah, I guess, if like, I think, a lot of people connect with it that just want to go to work, put in their eight hours and go home. They don't really have that passion, I guess, for their job like some people do. I think you see anybody who's a business owner, an entrepreneur, or anything like that they just have that internal drive to just do more.

MICHELE: Um hum, yeah, definitely. There's some, definite, perks to working for a big company like expense accounts and a nice cushy office and all of your tech needs, phone needs, that, kind of thing are taken care of. Someone else brews the coffee. There's some nice things about that. So I can see why someone would be attracted to it. It just, kind of, wasn't a good fit for me.

GERALD: Right. How do you turn helping people or giving advice into a profitable business?

MICHELE: Ooooo, wow, that's a good question. I think it depends on if your service is something that people are walking around knowing that they need or if it's something that you have to teach people that they could use. Let me think of a good example, I have a client, sometime client, who's a nutritionist and she works with very difficult to pin down and treat illnesses. She, actually, has a lot of good success where sometimes, traditional, medicine doesn't. By the time people get to see her they know that they need her. Their like, 'please help me.' Whereas a solopreneur might not know that they need business skills.

GERALD: Right.



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MICHELE: So, in my case, I do a lot of reaching out and educating to say, 'Hey if you're great at what you do that's terrific. That's about half of what you need. The other half is to learn how to have a business, to learn how to do things like your billing, your collections, how to get customers, how to enroll them, how to make sure people remember you when you do need their service.' So, I think, that's, probably, one of the key things is to make sure that people remember you when they do need your service and if they don't know that they could benefit from your service to make sure that you teach them at.

GERALD: Right, how did you finance your business when you started out?

MICHELE: I started very small. I only needed a few hundred bucks. I, kind of, gave myself a business loan. I put just the few hundred bucks into a business account and worked from there. It was maybe 100 bucks to get my hosting accounts, 10 or 20 dollars to set up a domain. I did my first website by myself, some business cards, and a few little odds and ins here and there. So I really, I never went into debt or did like a big loan or anything like that. I just started with that few hundred and used that to seed getting those first few clients.

GERALD: You mentioned networking as part of a startup cost. What type of networking were you doing in the beginning?

MICHELE: I went to, I used a scatter shot effect, where I just hit every event I could find. I was even known as the person who would double dip. I'd go to two events in one night. That, actually, didn't work. I was meeting a lot of people but only meeting them once. What I found worked better was to find just a few events and go regularly so you start running into the same people over and over again. By the time you've met someone three, four, five times they remember you they remember what you do.

You've had now five conversations about what you do and who you help and things like that. I will say that all of the results I've gotten from networking have come from people I've developed some sort of relationship outside of the networking with. Like, someone that I meet for coffee or someone that we cross refer, someone who I've publicized something that they do because it benefits the people that I work with, those kinds of really like tangible relationship builders that occur outside the networking event.

GERALD: What type of networking would you recommend for startups in 2014 that can



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generate leads, maybe both paid and free networking tools, or events, or any kind of advice.

MICHELE: Well as far as in person events, I think, one of the biggest things is to go where your people are, whoever your people are, whoever it is that you want to serve. In my case I'm looking to serve one person businesses. For example, I was a member of a local Chamber of Commerce. My people just weren't there. They were all much bigger businesses. Now if I sold something like, say, janitorial services or office catering type stuff then it would've been a perfect fit for me.

The people I wanted just weren't there. So make sure you know who you're looking for and that you go to the events where those people are. Now, I look for events, specifically, that cater to either solopreneurs. They use that word in the title, or they cater to coaches, or people who do design work, or artists, that, kind of, thing. So my people are there. That would be my advice for in-person. Then online, kind of, the same thing, the social media is great.

GERALD: Right.

MICHELE: But make sure to go, first and foremost, to where you find your people already are. Then make sure you're not just out there, kind of, broadcasting. I think it should be a focus on interacting and sharing valuable content and bring value to a conversation. Not just putting lots of stuff out there, you know one way conversation.

GERALD: Do you know who coined the term solopreneur?

MICHELE: I do not, do you?

GERALD: No, I was wondering if...

MICHELE: I wish I could claim credit but I can't.

GERALD: Yeah, I was thinking about it earlier because I hear more and more these days. I didn't know if there was a specific source.

MICHELE: Yeah, when I use that word people have either have heard it and loved it or they haven't heard it but, generally, they get it right away. They understand right away what it is which is, kind of, why I like the word.



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GERALD: Right. I said it to a couple people and they almost like chuckled, like it was clever, you know.

MICHELE: Hum mm

GERALD: What would you say are your top three skills or behaviors needed to be successful in self-employment?

MICHELE: That's a good question. I think one of my first things would be like a strong sense of yourself.

GERALD: Um hum, definitely.

MICHELE: Yeah to be able to be able to make a decision, kind of, confident about it with stand criticism, with stand people doubting you. Be comfortable, kind of, going against the grain and doing your own thing, so just that sense of self.

I think number two would be that a really curiosity and a love of learning whether you're a solopreneur, or you have employees, or contact help. I think it's just so important to always be learning. If you're going to hire someone, learn about what they are going to be doing for you and learn from them once you hire them. There's always more to learn in your craft or what you do for people. Then there's some things to learn about law, and marketing, and things like that. So, I think, entrepreneurs always need to be learning and they need to really like learning.

Then I think the final thing would be just tenacity. Don't give up, put your head down and just plow through until you get what you want. Sometimes it takes a while and it can be hard.

GERALD: Yeah, I, totally, agree. Yeah I've, actually, got thought on all three of those. Those are all great points and yeah the whole self-actualized concept, like, know thyself and that's one of the key things that I tell people when they ask, 'What is one key piece of advice you could give me,' It's know what you want or know what you can do. If more people took the time to really understand what motivates them and what they're passionate about and then turn that into a viable business idea. I think everyone would be a lot happier and in terms you had mentioned going against the grain too. If you know yourself it doesn't matter. You don't care about that. You're not worrying about going against the grain because you know you're doing what's best for you.



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MICHELE: Yeah, that's a big thing. You can't have that knowledge until you know what's best for you.

GERALD: Right, and in terms of learning that's huge too. I'm currently getting my MBA with a focus in internet marketing. So I agree that, that should never stop. I recommend, even if it's not learning in the traditional sense take the time to read books by other business owners, listen to podcasts, or about other concepts that matter to you too. It doesn't just have to be about your business. Study your competitors too. You have to know what everyone else is doing out there if you're going to compete against them. Take what's working for them or what's not working and, kind of, apply it to your own business model.

I was thinking about tenacity too. That's a great skill and in the intro of the podcast I, actually, talk about the road to self-employment and business ownership never being without some set of challenges. So, I definitely, agree with you there. You have to adapt, and overcome, and be ready to expect it. There's going to be things out of your control that you've got to deal with. You either have to let go of them, you have to overcome them, or just readjust your strategy to continue moving forward. So I don't know who said it but somebody said, 'Success is never guaranteed, it's earned.' I always think about that.

MICHELE: Yeah and there's so many messages out there of like 'make millions while you sit on the beach, or wake up and find thousands', as if it's so easy. It's not that people can't do that it's just that it's not as simple as sitting on the beach. There was a lot of work that went into it so you could get on the beach. So I think it's important to point that out. People that look successful from the outside work hard, probably.

GERALD: Yeah, probably, for years behind the scenes before anybody even knew about it. What were your biggest fears that held you back from starting your own business?

MICHELE: I think it was just this idea of, well who would hire me what do I know? That nagging self-doubt. Even though I said, one of the traits of being successful is to have a confident sense of self. I think it is, sort of, natural to be like, well, gosh, do I really know enough, can I really help people, what if other people don't think I'm helpful, that kind of thing.

GERALD: It takes time. It definitely takes time to establish that. How do you recommend getting over that fear of establishing yourself as a creditable source for advice?



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MICHELE: I think to ask for feedback once you've worked with someone and to collect testimonials, and to save emails when people tell you that you've helped them. Then when we're having a moment of self-doubt I've got something to fall back on.

GERALD: I would imagine too it's a huge fear for anyone marketing themselves as an expert, a coach, or a mentor. No matter how many people believe in you, until you believe it, it doesn't really matter.

MICHELE: I think there's an important element too of, what's the saying? To every first grader the third grader's a God. So as long as you're looking at people that are just a little bit behind you, that's a good fit. You can teach them something even if you're not the biggest expert in your field. As long as you've got some expertise and you're working with people that haven't achieved your level of expertise you do have something of value to offer them. You can even make the argument that in some ways you're more valuable than the expert who's at the top of their field because you're close enough to that person that you can remember what it was like to be where they were.

GERALD: Yeah, much more relatable. It's really funny you brought that up. My business partner and I, we joke about that all the time and how we, kind of, fell into our authoritative roles. It just really happened over time by just getting our lumps and putting in the hours I have this, I call it, the self-employment timeline. I like to try to figure out where people are on it. So, essentially, everybody begins as a starter.

Then they work their way up to going through the motions because they're really not confident in themselves, at that point. They're just, kind of, learning the ropes. Then they move onto being a veteran and then, eventually, if they work hard and do their homework they'll become experts. I don't think the expert titles anything somebody can self-apply, I think, it's, kind of, earned based on your authoritative position in the industry.

MICHELE: Yeah, people can, certainly, call themselves an expert but it has a lot more authority when someone else calls you an expert.

GERALD: Exactly, yeah, it's almost like social proof now with being online. If nobody's following you and you have all this great advice but nobody's listening. I don't know if anybody could call that person an expert if nobody's really heeding their warnings. What's been your



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biggest self-employment failure to date and what did you learn?

MICHELE: I would say my first business building strategy was a failure. What I did was I decided to start my business and I found four people that were a good fit for me. I worked with them for free. I thought that, 'Well, let's see, I'm so great at what I do. Of course, they're going to be talking about me day and night. Everyone's going to want work with me and the business is just going to flow in,' and, yeah, that didn't work. What I learned was that people are really busy and as much as they liked me and did anything I asked them too because they were so grateful for the free help. Talking about me is not most people's top priority. I had to really learn how to bring clients in and learn those business building strategies that I now teach. That was just learning, in and of itself that business doesn't just flow to you. You, actually, have to go out there and market yourself and sell yourself.

GERALD: I had like a two part question to that. Do you think, now, looking back on it that there was a better way to facilitate getting the clients to spread the word, the second part is do you think the fact that you offered your services for free caused the problem? Maybe they didn't know how to value your service or put a price tag on it. So they weren't sure how to refer it to somebody else.

MICHELE: That's a really good point about doing it for free causing the problem. I'd never really thought about that but it could be. It's, sort of, like if you do something for free, maybe they didn't really, they're like, 'Oh that was great what she did but I don't know how I could ever explain that to someone or is she really a professional even.' It was not a bad idea to do those people for free because I made a lot of mistakes. I didn't know what to put into an agreement to work with someone. I didn't know how to quote how many hours I thought I needed or if I should do it by the hour.

I didn't know what to ask before going in. So those four really let me make a lot of mistakes in a way that was, pretty much, cost free for me. So I don't think that that was, necessarily, there were some benefits to it. I did learn a lot in a situation where it cost me nothing. In terms of, like, they didn't give me bad reviews on Yelp or anything like that. So, I think, maybe what I would do is scale it down. If you're going to do some free jobs at first, pick a good, tiny thing that you can do for them and make it a really limited scope so that you're not into like a big project that you're doing for free. Also make sure from the beginning that they know that the whole purpose you're doing



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this is to get a referral source, and a testimonial, and photos if that applies, that kind of thing.

GERALD: Yeah, be upfront about that kind of stuff. Check this out. It's really funny. I found this article last night. It was about a web developer who stopped charging customers for the work he did and, simply, worked for free and let them decide what to pay him as a gift in exchange for the work he produced. So his logic seems crazy, kind of, but not really. It allowed him to focus on projects he's passionate about.

He claims he's made more per project doing it this way than he ever did when he was charging for his work. So it, kind of, makes us a strong argument that doing the work because you love the work and not because of the dollar signs attached to it could be just as lucrative and you'd be happier in the end for only having to work on projects you, personally care about. Do you think that that's a viable or possible business model for people?

MICHELE: Wow, I think, that's such an interesting idea. I guess, my first response is, pretty much, what I say to almost everything, which is each business owner should test that for themselves. That's the only way to know. I think if I was going to try that I would try it on a limited scale. Say something like, 'I'm going to give away X number of coaching packages. You pay what you think it was worth at the end, rather than making it my entire business. If it doesn't work you don't want your entire business starting from scratch again.'

GERALD: Yeah, he said that he's not making more overall but he's making more per project than he was before. So it, definitely, sounds like there's something to explore there. I know, for me, I couldn't possibly do it just because I've got people depending on me to pay their salaries. For solopreneurs I was thinking it might be a really cool opportunity for people to try. Depending on their business, I guess.

MICHELE: Yeah, I think, that's really a neat idea and even to do it as a one time or once a year thing. Like 'hey, I'm giving away ten free consultations, you pay what you want or ten consultations and pay what you want when you're done.' It's just neat and it's also very attention grabbing. You're telling me about this person. So it's grabbed my attention.

GERALD: Right, yeah, and the nice thing about it too is you could, essentially, pick and choose which projects you take on versus just having to take anything that comes across your desk because you're worried about making money on it. So more like passion projects than just regular



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work.

MICHELE: I wonder if later this year, if I decide to try that, I would love to write a case study to put on the stepstoselfemployment.com website.

GERALD: That'd be really cool.

MICHELE: Yeah that would be neat.

GERALD: I'd love to read that. What's been your biggest success so far?

MICHELE: I think my biggest success was late in 2013, I became a published author. I wrote my first book up on the Kindle platform.

GERALD: Congratulations.

MICHELE: Yeah, thank you. It's not that I made a fortune on it but it's how it came together. I really just decided I wanted to write this book, so I just got in, I dug in, I researched how to do it, and I did it. I just, kind of, like said, 'I cast aside the doubts and the objections,' and I just did it. I came up with my own plan and it, pretty much, worked. I've got the book up. I've sold some copies. I've gotten a lot of, I've given it away free a couple times and I've gotten a lot of people from that. It was really enjoyable.

It's, kind of, launched me in this new direction of being a writer. I'm going to be writing for Steps to Self-Employment. I've got my second book now, which is the first of a series, is written and I'm just doing all the cover design and that, kind of, thing now. So I feel like that's been a really big thing. It was a really, it was a big leap for me to branch into that. It's been great. I'm really excited about it.

GERALD: Yeah, finishing a book might be one of the hardest things you ever do. So many people start them. It's almost like blogs and podcasts too. There's so many people who start but it just fizzles out real quick. So definitely, kudos to you, that's impressive. I'm writing a book right now. I know, exactly, how hard it is with everything else that I have going on. Yeah, it's going to take me a couple years to get it finished. You mentioned you had a strategy that worked for you. Can you share the strategy or at least some of what that entails?

MICHELE: Well I did, like you said, always be learning, and reading blogs, and podcasts. So



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I did a lot of reading and just googling different topics and that kind of thing. I kept it small. My book is only, let me think, I want to say, somewhere in the neighborhood of six thousand words, don't quote me on it, and it's a low price Kindle book. It's a .99 cent book called, 'Is a Solopreneur Business Right for you.' It's designed to help people figure out if they would be a good fit for this business model.

It's not a good fit for everyone. My strategy was to create a book that answers one question or solves one specific problem. That's what I see doing well on Kindle. I say that both because it's what I've been purchasing. When I have a problem a lot of times I will, literally, open up my tablet and go to the Kindle store and say, 'Find me something that will solve this problem.' Yeah and so very targeted, very focused, and low priced.

GERALD: That's a great idea.

MICHELE: Yeah, so, I think, that's, kind of, a really hot thing on Kindle right now is these books that are targeted toward just one problem.

GERALD: That's a really good point. I've been thinking about that with my book. My book was called, 'Fire Your Boss and Hire Yourself,' basic beginners guide to self-employment. I've been thinking about breaking it up into eBooks where I can focus on specific topics. So I had like the first eBook I wanted to write is called, 'Transparency and Pricing for Small Businesses.' I feel like there's so many people out there who are afraid to give away what they charge for certain things. I think that's what kills them in the end.

MICHELE: I think that's great. I love that it's such a specific topic like if someone is struggling with pricing and they go onto Kindle, they'll find that. It's like, 'OH that's, exactly, what I need. Let me get that.' If they're priced at under five bucks, it's really an impulse buy.

GERALD: Do you have the book marketed anywhere else? Is it on your website too?

MICHELE: It's, there's a link to the Amazon Kindle version on my website and the reason for that is Amazon in Kindle platform has a program called KDP Select that's Kindle Direct Publishing, KDP Select. You get some different benefits from that program. One of the cheviots is that the book can only be available on the Amazon Kindle platform.

GERALD: Right, right, I've read about that. Can you market it anywhere though on any other



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website, could we put in up on Steps to Self-Employment?

MICHELE: If I take it off of KDP Select than I can, yeah. Yeah, then if it's just on Kindle but not in KDP Select then I can put it anywhere I want.

GERALD: How involved is the process?

MICHELE: I hesitate to give my, it's like pulling back the curtain on the wizard but it's very easy. I've been encouraging everybody, every time somebody talks about it.

GERALD: It doesn't matter though you did it. That's the thing and most people won't.

MICHELE: Yeah, it's really easy. Amazon does, they're one of my favorite companies. Everything they do they do so well. The Kindle Publishing is no different. They have just, extensive, support for authors. Anything you need to know is on there. Technically, it's really easy. With my book, I just wrote it in a word processing program. I followed the directions for keeping the formatting. You don't want fancy formatting. Keep it really, really light. Then if your formatting isn't very intense you can just do a file, save as HTML, and then upload that right up to the Kindle platform.

GERALD: Wow! That's easy.

MICHELE: They have a cover designer, which you can put your own photo on and stuff. So it's, yeah, the technical barriers really shouldn't get in anyone's way for a simple book. If they do a more complex book with a lot of graphics, and bullet points, and a lot of design to it than they would, probably, need a book designer who specializes in Kindle to do it.

GERALD: Right. Why do customers choose you over your competitors?

MICHELE: I think the unique thing I offer is that I'm very, very, concrete, logical, linear, step by step, that kind of thing. A lot of people think more abstractly and are able to do more abstract thinking. That's not really a strong point of mine. What I'm very good at is taking a million ideas, helping people funnel down to like the few they need to be working on and coming up with step by step plans to get those things done rather than just saying, 'Oh do this.' I helped them come up with a really step by step, do this, then do this, then do this, coming up with ways to measure if that new project is working. I also work a lot on things that are tested and researched.



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So I don't just, kind of, come up with ideas for people. I say, "Well this is what I think you should do." Here's why, here's where I got this information. I also encourage people to give me feedback. I say, 'Here's an idea, what do you think of that?' The best results I get with my clients come from when we work collaboratively. I say something, they say something, I say something, and by the end we've got this hybrid idea that is just better than anything we could've come up with individually.

GERALD: I have to say, you and I, share a very similar focus with customers in making sure we explain why we make the suggestions we do. I have to stop and talk to everyone about this just for a moment. It is such an important point for all of you to remember out there. No matter what your business, no matter what your product you sell, or service you provide, always make it clear to the customer why you offer it to them and why it's a good solution for their problem. So many business owners, they don't take the time to explain why their product or service is ideal. That's why customers never see value in it.

Make sure people understand why you are making these suggestions otherwise you'll leave it up to them to figure out what your intentions might be. Do things with purpose and explain the reasons behind them and you'll establish trust, you'll establish a sense of integrity, and a sense of authority, and credibility. Not everyone will see the value in what you do or appreciate the explanation but the majority of your customers will. I'm not sure if it's the same for you Michele, I found that it's one of the main reason customers sign on with me for marketing and design. I took the time to explain why I'm making the suggestions in the first place.

MICHELE: Yeah, I never really thought about it in such clear terms. I think that's really, really, valuable and also will help customers make the right choice for them. If people don't want someone that has the approach that you're offering then you're not going to enjoy working together anyway. When you establish, kind of, why you do things, and how you do things, and how you think. If they get that sense of ding, ding, ding, this is my person than they're perfect for you and if they don't then it's, probably, not a good fit anyway.

GERALD: Exactly, I do it in every aspect of my business, even just in a design that I put together for somebody's website, I tell them flat out. I say, 'everything in that design is there for a reason and if you want to know why just ask,' because there's a reason behind it. I guess, one of my professors in college told me that, they said, 'Always design with a purpose. Don't just throw



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thing on the page because you like the way they look, or maybe you like the color, or the icon, or something like that. I always just took that to heart.

MICHELE: Yeah, that's neat. I think it's really empowering for the customer and it treats them with a level of equality or partnership. Instead of me being the dictator and I'm going to tell you what the good idea is. It's like I understand that you're also very smart. You know your business really well and you bring things to the table that I don't. So here's what I think, it creates a more equal partnership.

GERALD: Yeah and it just establishes the transparency, too, and everything you're doing. You're not just trying to swindle them into something that they don't really understand. In my industry, anyway, that's a big deal. Web design can be somewhat of a quagmire for people and they don't understand it. They've, probably, tried it before with somebody else and it failed. So they come to us. They're, kind of, already on the defensive a little bit. So I use that honesty and transparency to, kind of, get them back on track.

MICHELE: Yeah and I find that educated clients are just the best to work with. One of my favorite points in a coaching relationship is when one of my clients will say something back to me that I said to them first. It's like the best feeling. It's like, wow, we're really learning from each other.

GERALD: Do you have any formal marketing strategies for your business and if so what's been the most successful?

MICHELE: Well, we talked a little bit about some of the offline stuff with in person events and that, kind of, thing. Making sure that the right people are there and things like that, really doing things to further those relationships that are beneficial to both parties. I think, online, I think social media is everyone needs to be, all businesses need to be on it but they need to be on it in the right way. Not just, kind of, putting stuff out and hoping it works. For me, as you mentioned, I'm really active on Twitter. That's been really powerful for me. I get a lot of my traffic from there. I've gotten a lot of, just met with some great people and that, kind of, thing. So those, I would say online, that's, probably, been my best one. My focus this year is doing more books for Kindle and I want to get into speaking more.

GERALD: Right, do you measure traffic or have you tracked data to see how many visitors are



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coming from social media to your website or have you tracked the percentage of your business that results from online interactions?

MICHELE: I have, yeah, there's, for people that aren't super technical there's a plug in that they can put on their WordPress website called Google Analytics. That's what I use. It lets the Google analytics be on your site. Then you can go in and check. To be honest, I only take a very cursory look. You could spend hours every week just analyzing.

GERALD: Oh yeah, I know.

MICHELE: Yeah, you can get really sucked into a vortex of that stuff. So I try and just look at a few things. I look at total visitors and if they're coming from a key word search, what key words they are looking for and then I look at if they're coming from another site where it is. I think Twitter is, probably, maybe a third of my online traffic.

GERALD: Okay, wow. How has being self-employed affected your family life?

MICHELE: I think it's a big improvement in quality of life just because of the flexibility. It gives you some capacity to handle unexpected things and to take care of the things that life throws at you. Up until about two years ago my husband worked at a job with really long hours. He worked outside the house. We were doing all of our stuff with the fixer upper and all the contractors in and out and stuff like that. If I hadn't been self-employed I don't know how all that would've happened. It was just so much to manage. I was able to be here and to manage the contractors and that, kind of, thing. I am pleased to announce that he has since taken the leap and now works from home himself.

GERALD: Oh wow!

MICHELE: Yeah, it's been terrific. We really enjoy it. We get to see the dogs a lot. We live in LA, everything is just phenomenally crowded. Traffic's terrible. So when there are certain things we can schedule around the times when they're not going to be crowded or when traffic's not going to be too bad. That's a big quality of life issue here.

GERALD: I'm going to have to learn about that when I move out there.

MICHELE: Yeah.



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GERALD: We live in such a, I don't want to say a rural area, but the Gulf Coast is just so underpopulated compared to California. That's going to take some getting used to. What does your husband do?

MICHELE: He's a computer programmer and makes independent games.

GERALD: Ah that's cool.

MICHELE: Yeah

GERALD: Does having two home based businesses become a challenge for you at all?

MICHELE: It's a little bit of a challenge space wise. When we bought this house, we took the smallest room and turned it into a combined office. It was fine because it was, mostly, me in there. Then we he moved his business home that's a very, there's a lot of equipment to make. He's a computer programmer so he has two monitors and a lot of different equipment and stuff.

That tiny little office just wasn't working. So we've, actually, been working on some ideas to move some things around, so that I can have a better workspace. We also had to learn to not disturb each other. It's like really easy when you're walking by each other and see each other all the time. We had to learn to say, 'Hey, I've got office hours right now.' So I, you know

GERALD: Yeah, I know. I've been working from home for 11, 12 years now. So I know the routine, definitely. Yeah, my wife's active duty military. She only had about seven years left. At that point, when she retires, I'm, fairly certain, she'll, probably, be starting her own business as well. So I'm always interested to learn more about how other married business owners co-habitate their home office and manage to make it work. Do you believe there's a formula for success or to success I should say?

MICHELE: I think, probably, the single biggest thing is to be strategic about everything you do and I do mean everything. For example, everyone will tell you, 'Oh you have to be on social media, 'When someone says that I would say, 'okay, well what site? Why? Who are you trying to reach? If you reach them what are you going to do?' Let's say you're on Facebook and, suddenly, I can snap my fingers and get you ten thousand fans. What will you do with them, how will that lead to profit?



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If you're going to go to a networking event what are you hoping to accomplish? Are you looking for people that might buy your product or are you looking for people that might joint venture with you? Are you looking for people to host you to speak? So know, exactly, like, be really strategic about it. Know what you're hoping to get out of each thing and then measure it. If you don't know what you want and then measure it you won't know what's working. You won't know where the business is coming from or how it's growing.

GERALD: Yeah, a lot of entrepreneurs, probably, just randomly add things, like you're saying. Do you think they do it because they're keeping pace with competitors, or maybe pressures from their clients or, probably both, I would think?

MICHELE: Yeah, you know there's so much free information out there and I think a lot of well-meaning people give away advice. I was at a networking event there was a guy there, I was talking to a guy that had like a financial services business and then a woman who was very active in social media, although, it wasn't her profession. She was imploring him like, 'You have to get on social, you have to get Facebook for your business you have to get on Facebook for your business.' It's like are his ideal clients on Facebook, are they looking for his financial services information when there on there.

It didn't make sense. So, I think, in his case, he, probably, went home and got right on Facebook without having any idea of why he was on there and what he was hoping to accomplish. So, I think, there's just a lot of free information and a lot of pressure. We all want to do what we do to be successful. If some expert or even someone that you know in your personal life tells you like, 'Oh you have to do this thing or you're going to fail' then you're going to do it.

GERALD: Right, do you think there's any trends every business owner should avoid or pursue, in particular?

MICHELE: I think one of the biggest trends is to be spreading yourself too thin if that's a trend. I guess that's more of a trap.

GERALD: Easy to do nowadays.

MICHELE: Easy to do it's like there's so many new sites and so many new things. If you were to listen to every expert there's the one that tells you, you have to be speaking, and then the one



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that says you have to be doing email marketing, and one that says you have to be on Twitter, and now Pinterest is the thing, and what about Google plus. I think doing a tiny bit on ten or twelve different platforms is not really a good way to be successful, generally. You'd be better off picking a handful and doing them really well. And really learning how to do them.

GERALD: Yeah, I listened to a podcast, recently, and they were talking, exactly, about this. They said master one thing and then move on to the next. Then master that and move on from that but trying to do everything at once, it's just too much. I started to do that at the beginning of the year, I thought about going into YouTube marketing and all these other social platforms. I'm like, I haven't even gotten my hands around Twitter, and Google plus and Facebook yet. I was like, 'let me get those dialed in first and then I'll focus on the rest.'

MICHELE: Yeah, I went through the same, sort of, calling down when I did my planning for 2014. I was on, I'm on several of the sites but I decided 2014 was really going to be about Twitter and Pinterest for me. That's where it seems like I'm having the most traction and the most potential. So I'll keep my presence on the other ones but I've really honed it into those two.

GERALD: How do you use Pinterest for your business model?

MICHELE: Mainly to post little quote graphics that lead back to something. That's like one of the main purposes I use it for. If you can, I, usually, pull a quote like say for my blog post. I'll pull what I think is a really interesting quote that, kind of, sums and maybe generates some curiosity about the post. Then I pin that onto a Pinterest board. If someone likes it they'll read the blog post. If they really like they'll repin it. Then it gets exposed to a new audience.

GERALD: Are you driving them back to your site every time or are you just sending them to, like to, value content that's already out on the internet somewhere else?

MICHELE: Mostly to my site but I do send them to other content if I like it. I follow a lot of business boards. So I repin a lot of content that's applicable to business owners from other people's boards. Then, I also, have links to some of my products and my books.

GERALD: What are your thoughts on social media in lieu of a website?

MICHELE: I don't think that's a good idea, probably, for some of the same reasons you do. I think the biggest thing is, probably, one that most people have heard, which is that you don't



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control social media. You could make one tiny, little mistake without even realizing it and BOOM your Facebook page, or your Twitter page, or your Google plus page is just wiped out. It happens and then you're just up a creek.

You've got nothing. You've got no following you've lost everything, whereas with your own website you control that. So, I think, that's the biggest thing for me. I do see a shift happening like sometimes on say like delivery trucks I'll see something that will link right to a Facebook page or sometimes like a resort property. They'll say facebook.com/resortname instead of sending you to their site. I still think you need a site. One misstep and you could lose your social media.

GERALD: Well you don't have control over what the social media companies going to do either. They might one day up and just decide that you no longer have a newsfeed on your business page on Facebook. They've already taken away a lot of the features that they did have at one time. So I, definitely, agree with that. I think they serve different purposes too, like the Facebook page for big brand names like UPS or something like that. I think it's good because it puts the customer right in contact with the company they post something right on the page. Then the companies almost forced to deal with it whether it's good or bad versus if somebody just goes to a website and just fills out a form and sends it in. Nobody in the public eye would see that.

MICHELE: Yeah, that's true. That is a real value for consumers to be able to put some public pressure on companies when they're not fulfilling their customer service needs.

GERALD: It's easy enough for them to delete stuff too. They can always do that but I see a lot of companies that are pretty honest with that. They keep it up there. It's good for people to see that open communication. If you ever go to Wal-Mart's page and look at all the comments on there. It's really funny, there's like thousands of comments people telling them how much they hate Wal-Mart.

MICHELE: It's funny that they leave them up.

GERALD: Yeah, I think, that's entertaining but that just goes to show you they know their business model, they know who likes them, who hates them and they don't really care. They're just going to keep doing what they're doing. That's, kind of, like the whole know yourself strategy. I think they've just done it on a grander scale. What will be your biggest challenges you face in the future with this type of business?



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MICHELE: I think it's getting progressively harder to break through the sheer amount of data people are exposed too in the course of a day. Whether its news or stuff that they read and take in, research that they do, marketing messages, that, kind of, thing. It's just so many messages that people get and people are really learning to, effectively, tune them out. So, I think, it's going to be really important to break through that and not across as just more ad channels that they're getting.

GERALD: Do you think people are just turned off by the amount of content, or just does it like dull their senses from what's really good? I'm, kind of, on the fence about that problem. In my field, there's a ton of these DIY website building tools like Wix, or Square Space, Google even just launched one. Go Daddy has one. Even WordPress has templates, which, basically, allow anybody to slap a logo on a page and add some photos and text. Then launch the site and call it a day.

I, actually, encourage these companies to continue pumping out these DIY tools. It continues to make what we do look much better. The cream rises to the top and we shine even brighter now than before. Not only do we build sites from scratch, then we also have customers coming to us who want us to tweak out their DIY website. So we make a so, so website look like a million bucks.

MICHELE: Yeah, I, definitely, think that, that is a great thing for a company like yours. People can get a basic site. Then they see how basic it is and it, kind of, it's no longer just a, sort of, mystery to get a website. It's like you can get a basic website. Now if you want a good one then you need to hire the expert.

GERALD: Yeah, we've, actually, been able to increase prices ever sense these tools came out. Now the value, it's in higher demand, the values been established. Where before it was like, you almost had to, it was like pulling teeth to get people to see the value in it. Now they understand they see how much work goes into it.

MICHELE: Yeah and those free site builders have their place but I, definitely, think you can tell when a site's been really nicely designed.

GERALD: Right, but in terms of writing and content in general do you think that there is this, kind of, a same sense of is it an overload or do you think good material is good material regardless of how much is out there.



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MICHELE: I, definitely, think there's some overload just because there is so much out there. I think, I guess, the challenge is making sure that whatever it is that makes you unique, like we talked about earlier, really shines through, so that when people are looking at ten people to do, essentially, the same thing that you do or at least the customer perceives it to be the same. That they're drawn to you if you're the right person for them or your company is the right company.

GERALD: Right, what's your favorite success quote?

MICHELE: I think one I really like is, "Heavy is the head that wears the crown." It, actually, comes from a Shakespeare play. In the play it refers to the idea that the king has a lot on his mind. So he's always worried. I think as an entrepreneur I take it to, and in my personal life too, to be like if you want to achieve excellence you can't have the comfort of being one of the pack. By definition if you want to be excellent you can't be average like most people.

So you have to be willing to, kind of, rise above, do something different, go against the grain. It can be a little lonely and it can be a little something that makes you question yourself because you're stepping out of the socially accepted norms and stuff so that always reminds me that, yeah, it can be a little bit lonely when you're trying to really achieve excellence.

GERALD: Yeah, I definitely, agree with that 100%. Making decisions, too, that impact everyone else can be tough. Even as a solopreneur you're decisions still affect your livelihood, you're families and even your customers sometimes. It's a lot of pressure and responsibility. For me

MICHELE: Yeah, that is true

GERALD: For me, I have employees and contractors that rely on my business so they can afford to pay bills and provide food for their families too. So, I definitely, am always feeling that added pressure to deliver results and to provide for, not only myself and my family, but for everyone else connected to my business either as a customer or an employee.

MICHELE: That's, sort of, the more traditional meaning of that quote, that, yeah, your, kind of, in this leadership role and because of that you have a lot of weight on you.

GERALD: Yeah, I found another great Shakespeare quote too, it was a simple one, it's just "The force of his own merit makes his way." That just, simply, means be good at what you do and to me, personally, that just means in my business, it's, simply, offering our product or service to



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your customer isn't enough. You have to own it.

You have to great at it. Once they believe it, you no longer have to sell anything to anyone anymore. So that goes back, kind of, to what we were saying earlier about knowing yourself, continuing your education beyond just your immediate skill set and making sure others see the value in what you offer and your credibility within your niche. I think that's all part of being good at what you do.

MICHELE: Yeah, and there's also, I think, a bigger obligation that, you know, if you have gifts and things that you're good at I, personally, feel like one of our roles as human beings is to use those gifts to better someone else's life or better the world in some way. If you're not owning these things and helping people to make the decision to work with you. Then it's, sort of, like, you're not really fulfilling your potential as a human to better the world with your gifts.

GERALD: Yeah, I had a conversation about that with one of my friends yesterday and it was funny because I was talking about that like, you know, everybody has this goal to make more money, make more money but then for what? What do you do with it once you make more money? You can either bury yourself with it like, King Tut, or you can put it to good use. You can't take it with you when you're gone. If you could give someone looking to start a business one piece of advice what would it be?

MICHELE: I think it's really important to just start learning from day one and don't stop. That refers to both like the learning like we were talking about like reading, and studying, taking classes and listening to podcast blogs that, kind of, stuff. Also learning what works in your business. So always be testing, and adjusting, and changing course.

GERALD: Yeah, I can't agree more and I stated my case why that's important. No man is an island. You've got to pay attention to what's going on around you. So that about wraps up all the time we have for today. Michele, I cannot thank you enough for spending the last hour with us. You've given us all great insight into your business. I know you'll give people who are contemplating starting their own business a lot of great things to think about. Anyone listening to this is better off for having done so, in my opinion. Tell us where we can go to find out more about you and your business.

MICHELE: A great place to go is my website michelechristensen.com. There is a link to that



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with this podcast.

GERALD: Okay, great, thanks again for your time Michele, best of luck in everything. I'm sure we'll talk again soon.

MICHELE: I'm looking forward to it and thanks for having me.

GERALD: Well there you have it folks another one bites the dust. Episode 5 is, officially, history. I really hope you all enjoyed the interview with Michele Christensen. She's so knowledgeable and candid about her business and how she handles her customers and is a valuable resource and a great friend to anyone she connects with regularly. Please learn more about Michele and all the great services she provides at michelechristensen.com and please head over to Amazon and pick up her first Kindle book, "Is a Solopreneur Business Right for You," which is only .99 cents. If you enjoyed what you heard please head right over to iTunes or Stitcher Radio and give us a five star review or share my podcast with others. Thank you all so much for listening and all your support. My final call to action, please visit stepstoselfemployment.com. Check out all the free resources, articles written by a panel of self-employed individuals, entrepreneurs, and business owners. Check out the show notes for every single podcast episode including the show summary, links to any people, websites, or products mentioned on the show as well as a full transcript of the podcast in its entirety.

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