

On Your Terms Episode 138:

Ambition

Sam Vander Wielen: Hey. Hey. And welcome back to On Your Terms. I'm your host, Sam Vander Wielen. If you're new here, thanks so much for listening. And if you're a returning listener, thank you so much for being here.

We're talking about ambition today, which I am very excited because I feel like this has been a topic that's been on my mind for the last several months, even before I just lost my mom. But now, since I lost my mom a few weeks ago, it's even more on my mind. And I feel like this is a conversation that I would love to keep having with you.

I really want you to reach out to me after you listen to this episode and share your reflections and feedback, because I want to dive even deeper into this topic. I would also love to bring on an expert and talk with us. I have a feeling that you're going through a lot of similar things that I have been thinking about, so I would really appreciate it if you would tell me if this hits home for you, because I know that I've been seeing a lot about this topic on social media and in people's emails and everything else.

So, okay, I want to set the stage for you. So, Ryan and I, since last year, we've fallen in love with Vermont because now we live on the North Shore of Long Island. There's a ferry here and we can take the ferry across to Connecticut and then shoot up to Vermont, and it's super easy. So, both of us have just been, like, really excited to explore a new to us, you know, area of the country since moving here. Fell in love with Vermont, now we go to Vermont all the time.

And we go stay at the super cool hotel, like a B&B. And the B&B is owned by a husband and wife. And they're so nice and they're always around and they want to chat and they're super cool. So, I was chatting with Kate, one of the owners, and we were talking about she's from Marin County, California, near San Francisco. If you're not familiar with it, it's a very beautiful, also very wealthy area outside of San Francisco. And so, that's actually where Kate's originally from.

And so, we were talking about how for the first time since they moved to Vermont, her and her husband went back to Marin County and they were visiting with their friends

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and all this kind of stuff. And while they were in Marin, one of the things that she noticed was that, like, she met up with a bunch of friends and people they used to live near when they lived in Marin, and everybody that she was talking to, she'd be like, "So, what are you up to?"

And somebody would be like, "Oh. I just started running." And she would be like, "Oh. That's cool. Like, you just wanted to get into it or for exercise or clear your head?" And they're like, "No. I'm going to train for a marathon," or "I'm going to train for an Ironman." And then, her other friend was like, "Oh. I started taking art classes." And she's like, "Oh. That's so cool. I've heard it's really meditative and blah, blah, blah." And she's like, "Well, yeah, but I committed to painting something every day for 100 days and I'm documenting it." And it's all very cool, like these are all very admirable goals. If you have one of these goals, I applaud you. I think it's amazing.

And this is not an anti-goals session, but there was something about what Kate had said and I guess she had taken away the same thing from her conversations, which I felt when she said this, I actually just really saw this in myself. I wasn't trying to judge other people, but I saw this in myself of being, every time I do something, like I want to start running or I want to learn how to paint or draw, it becomes a thing. It's like I have to be training for a marathon. I have to be training for this. I have to do this for a hundred days. I have to commit to something for a month. I have to document it. You know, it has to be a thing.

And I don't really do things just to do them or to unplug, like truly unplug. And maybe it was the combination of being in Vermont. Vermont is a life changing place, by the way. I really feel like you should go there if you ever can, because, I don't know, there's something about the air up there, but maybe it was something about being there at the same time.

And when I was there, it was the first week of May. And so, my mom had not been doing well since January, but then we had kind of gotten her situated, and gotten her some help, and gotten her in an acute rehab, and everything was kind of stable the first

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week in May when we were in Vermont.

And I don't know, there was something that felt like it shifted in me when I was there. I wasn't on social media so much. I've really been, for a long time now, probably over a year, trying to figure out what my relationship is to social media and figuring out how I want to be.

Because I'm not somebody who blames social media for everything. I feel like it's on me to think about what my relationship is to it, and to create my own boundaries, and to know when is enough, and to feel fulfilled outside of it, and all of that kind of stuff. And to just see it for what it is, like it's a free business tool and that's it. And they don't owe me anything. I don't owe it anything. And we can all go our separate ways.

So, when I was there, I just felt like really, really unplugged. And I felt the least scattered, probably. And I don't know, when I'm on social media a lot, I have difficulty being really present even if I'm not physically on my phone at the time. Like, if I spend a lot of time on my phone during the day and then go out to dinner, I find that I'm still really, really scattered. I don't know if you've ever seen that before, but I have done that for sure.

And so, I felt the first time of being like, "It's okay. It's okay to let go a little bit of this." And I guess this is where this, I don't know, idea of ambition started to get sparked in my mind of starting to get a little bit comfortable with not having to be ambitious all the time or not having to grow all the time.

I think that's something that's really uncomfortable for a lot of business owners, like if it's okay to just be. We don't have to be growing month over month, quarter over quarter, year over year. And there's a lot of pressure in that. There's also a lot of just self-induced pressure, I think, because that's probably just how we're built and it's why we're business owners.

But there was something about this conversation that, not only made me reflect on my

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hobbies and what kind of things I keep sacred and off of social media and what do I do just for me and not to share and not to make a thing, but also what's my relationship to ambition. And am I one of those people that's working a ton and then doing a bunch of stuff that's all goal oriented and never just being? I don't know.

So, after that trip to Vermont, my mom pretty much passed very quickly at the end of May. And so, it wasn't long after that that my world kind of got shaken up. And ever since then, I mean, seriously, losing both of my parents in a year has been a very humbling experience for many, many different reasons. But I feel like one of the biggest ways that it's humbled me is that it's sort of taken me out at the knees and it's like I've wanted to run really, really fast. I still have the same ambition in my heart, in my mind, but it's almost like I have heavy chains on my legs that aren't allowing me to move. Grief has just been too heavy, too big, too destabilizing.

And there's a part of me, a big, big part of me that is super ambitious. My mindset coach, Jen, she always jokes with me because I always say that I want to build the biggest business ever. And it's like, "Okay. What's that even mean?" And, also, that's a great way to create a goal that will never allow you to stop, which will never allow you to celebrate. It is legitimately one of my goals I've written down, like, "I want to build the biggest business ever." What does that even mean?

But it's also like I'm never going to be satisfied with anything that I ever do along the way. When I hit a million or mid-millions or any of these kinds of things, I've never stopped to celebrate it. Why? Because when your goal is to build the biggest business ever, until you're like Amazon, there's no celebrating, right?

It's a great way to just make a super ambiguous, vague goal that keeps you on a hamster wheel forever because somebody like me is so afraid to stop or to slow down for fear of - I don't know what - being forgotten about, everything falling out from under me, losing everything I've built up to this point. You know, it all comes back to this root of safety, and lack of safety, and just being worried about what it means to slow down.

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But like I said, I can't take any credit for slowing down because I feel like my parents' death - my parents' deaths? My parents' death? Yeah. I guess, unfortunately, I have to learn how to talk about this in multiples now - the death of both of my parents has forced me to have to. Like, I just didn't feel like I had an option and it felt really humbling.

It does feel very similar to an injury. Like, if you're an athlete, a former athlete of any sort, when you get injured, you still have that hunger and that passion to play your sport but you just can't. And that's kind of how it feels now. And so, it's been very humbling to, basically, put myself on the sidelines for the sake of myself, and not just say like, "Okay. I'm not ambitious right now, but I'll get back to it."

It's also like revisiting my relationship with ambition, revisiting my relationship with how much I want to work all the time. And maybe I'm done with not being ever okay with what I've accomplished. Maybe I don't always have to be. I mean, maybe my business will stay at the, like, one, two-ish million mark, we'll leave it there. Maybe that's okay. Maybe it doesn't even have to be that much. Like, I would also be okay if it wasn't because I've saved and saved and saved. Maybe having a business that is constantly growing or making more and more millions or whatever is not necessarily the answer, the goal, the whatever. Or maybe it's not for a while and it will be again. I don't know. I honestly don't know.

I think whenever you go through this kind of grief, it's never a good idea to make a decision about anything important. And I don't want to make any decisions. It's not even a decision to not do something in my business or whatever. It's just internal. It's more me. It's just being okay with now is not my time to be super ambitious and that's okay.

And maybe you have stuff in your life - I hope you haven't lost a loved one, but if you have, I'm very sorry - if you recently had children, or you had a different change in your schedule, or your family structure has changed, or someone in your family is sick, you know, there are a number of different things that could happen in your life, obviously, that just shake it up where your business is maybe not the biggest priority anymore. And if you're like me, then you had maybe the privilege and the opportunity of your business

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was everything to you at one point and that was your main focus. But now maybe you have something else that's calling your attention elsewhere.

And I guess I just wanted to record this for anybody who's in that place as well, like I am right now, with just being, "You know what? I physically cannot. I cannot do this, not at the same pace that I did before." And maybe the pace I did before wasn't cool. Maybe that's not okay. Maybe it doesn't have to be that way. And maybe I'll be more comfortable moving forward with being and providing really great products and providing really great service and not having to build the biggest business in the world, I don't know.

I mean, I'm also working on something really, really major. I'm going to have to be cryptic about it for a little while, while I record these episodes because I'm not sure if I've released the news yet. But when I do, you will know what I'm talking about. But I'm working on something, like a lifelong dream that I got the day my mom passed away. And it's not only a huge project behind the scenes, but I think it has the opportunity to change the course of what I do in my own business. And I would like to speak more broadly about marketing ideas, marketing strategy. I want to teach you, of course, all the legal things and how to build businesses and all of this stuff. But I also want to have larger conversations with you.

You're actually going to see a lot of episodes coming out from me about I want to do this thing where I do this corporate spotlight series where I pull tips and strategies and tricks that big corporations use, like Target and Chick-fil-A and Costco and Dunkin Donuts and Starbucks and all this. And I want to pull them out and apply them to our businesses and show you how you can do this in your own business and how I pull them out and use them in my own business as well.

So, I want to talk about some of these bigger issues and I think the big news that I'm going to share with you hopefully very soon will maybe provide me with a bit more of that opportunity to do so and move my business in, not a different direction, but broader, it's just a bit of a broader direction, I suppose, in helping more people in different ways.

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So, yeah, I just wanted to have kind of an intro conversation with you about ambition. But the other day, I was doing some digging. I subscribed to this newsletter called Girls' Night In. Actually, she just changed the name of Girls' Night into Downtime. I believe it's called Downtime now, it was like a week ago. But if you subscribe to that, then you'll know that she sent out in one of her email newsletters about ambition, and had all these really great resources and books about ambition and being ambitious about living your life and not ambitious about work all the time, which I thought was just such an interesting concept.

Like, why aren't we more ambitious about our life like traveling and seeing friends and building hobbies and taking care of ourselves, taking care of others, giving back to our community, taking care of our environment? I want to be ambitious about that. I guess that's where I'll leave it, is just that because this is all still swirling in my mind and, like I said, people who are at the stage of grief that I am at very, very early in a very traumatic grief situation, I'm not making any big decisions or any big proclamations of any sort.

But I have a lot going through my mind and I just wanted to have an open and honest conversation with you about kind of what if we were all so ambitious in the other parts of our life. So, maybe don't beat yourself up if you can't be as ambitious in your business right now. Maybe you're ambitious about other parts of your life. I think ambition in of itself is a great quality. It just doesn't always have to be about revenue. It doesn't always have to be about followers, subscribers, buy ins, opt ins, whatever. It can be about other parts of your life.

So, like I said, I really, really, really want you to reply back to my email if you get my emails or send me a DM, let me know if you listened to this episode. If you want me to talk more about ambition, I've thought about bringing on an expert, maybe one of the people who wrote some of the resources that I'll link to down below. But if you want to have this as part of a continued conversation, I need to hear from you.

So, as I always say, I can only do so much one way. You got to meet me in the middle

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and reply back. Let me know you're listening, you like it, you didn't like it, whatever. It's okay. I just want to hear your feedback. So, thank you so much for listening and I'll chat with you next week.

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