

TRANSCRIPT

On Your Terms



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Episode #: 146

What My Failed Chocolate Cake Teaches Us About Business

Sam Vander Wielen:

Hey there, and welcome back to On Your Terms. This is Sam Vander Wielen, your host. I'm so glad that you're here for today's quickie little episode all about my failed chocolate cake, or was it a failed chocolate cake? So, these episodes are always a little shorter, then my Monday episodes are a little longer. So, if you're new to the podcast, welcome, welcome and I hope that you enjoy it.

So, this all started a few weeks ago when I had volunteered to bring dessert to a neighbor's gathering. And I should probably preface this by saying these are neighbors that I love dearly, and I care about a lot, and I get really nervous to disappoint them, and all this kind of stuff. Trust me, I have lots of issues with, like, abandonment, and I'm afraid that everyone's going to leave me. Yes, even if I just, like, brought them a bad chocolate cake. So, don't worry, I go to therapy.

So, I was making this chocolate cake and this is a chocolate cake by my beloved Alison Roman, who I love so much. I'm her number one fan, officially crowned. And so, I've made this cake a million times. I've even made this cake in a cooking class with Alison on Zoom, okay. So, I've made this cake so many times and I am not a baker. So, if you know anything about me, you know I am very much a cook. I'm a little wannabe chef. I cook constantly. I feel very comfortable and confident with cooking. Not so much when it comes to baking, which I feel like that's kind of a common split.

So, even though I'd made this cake a million times, I don't trust myself necessarily as a baker as much as I would being a cook. This is why I find cooking so much easier because you can adjust. I just find it very nerve wracking to know with baking, it's so temperamental that if one thing goes wrong, the whole thing goes wrong. That makes me very nervous. So, I didn't trust my gut about something when I was cooking it. I'll have to try to see if I can include a picture down below in the show notes.

This chocolate cake has this really cool, like basically you mix the chocolate and the eggs and everything, and then separately you whip cream with egg whites, and so it becomes this really fluffy thing. And then, you fold it in very gently to the chocolate mixture so that you don't deflate all the hard work that you just got out of whipping these egg whites with the sugar and the cream.

So, I didn't trust myself because I remembered in having made this before that, when you bake it, it kind of almost looks like a souffle because it puffs up really big and it cracks. It has these gorgeous, gorgeous cracks marbling on the top. And when you do that, it often looks like it's not cooked or it's not congealed necessarily, but eventually it really does come together. And I didn't trust myself when I saw it in the oven and I thought it doesn't look like it's cooked enough.

So, I kept it in the oven for too long. I then started to smell something burning. I ran over to the oven and the top of the cake which essentially looks like a souffle had started to burn really badly. And so, from me trying to cook it more and not listening to my gut that it would come together, I ended up burning the top. I still didn't think it was cooked through. It didn't look like it was cooked through.

And I had spent like the whole day kind of getting this ready. I had spent a lot of money on fancy chocolate because, you know, a cake only relies on a few ingredients. You got to pony up for the chocolate. So, I put this thing on the oven and I was just so upset because I had promised to bring dessert.

And now I was embarrassed that I had messed this thing up. And all these people were coming to their house and I was like, "I messed up this chocolate cake. I can't believe I did that." I was doing all the beating up and negative self-talk and all of those things. And honestly, I was just ready to throw it away. So, I thought, you know, let me just let it sit here because now I've made it so it doesn't really matter. Let me just let it sit on the stove and cool and let's see what happens once it cools.

Well, what do you know? An hour or so later, I come back to check on what I thought was this failed chocolate cake. And it did, in fact, come together. There's something about in the cooling process, it doesn't look so gelatinous anymore. Yeah, it looked like it had kind of finished cooking through and it had come together. The top was still burnt because, unfortunately, that doesn't reverse itself. But it did come together.

And I'm not going to lie, a couple pieces of the cake on the side had broken off when I took it out of this springform pan and they fell onto the stove, so I was like, "Well, it's only right that I try it." And it was delicious. It tasted just the same as all the other ones that I had made to completion without thinking I had failed that time. And it was really, really good.

And so, I was like, "You know what? I'll bring this to the party anyway, and it'll be a good story. I'll tell them what happened. Like, 'Oh, I burnt the cake.' And that it came together in the end." And everybody tasted it and was like, "What are you talking about? This is delicious." I mean, maybe they were just being nice. But Brian, who would have been honest with me, told me, "No. This is really good. This is a really good cake." And it turned out to be not only fine, but really good.

Oh, this is the funny part. So, when I was very nervous about this cake, we had run out to the local bakery and we had gotten an alternate cake, a stand-in cake, in case everybody tried mine and spit it out. So, we got this alternate cake and we brought it over anyway and so a lot of the people at the party served themselves both, and everybody was like, "Your cake was so much better than the cake from the cake store." And the cake store one was really expensive and they had not burnt it or undercooked it. So, that was a very interesting lesson for me.

Here's what I think we can all take away from the alleged failed cake experiment, and I bet you see this a lot in your own life and in your own business. I don't know if you've noticed, but we are really hard on ourselves. We're, like, really hard. We are our own worst critics. My goodness. I mean, maybe you've done a lot more work about this than I have, but I am tough on myself. If I messed stuff up, if I don't get things, I

would not have labeled myself a perfectionist.

Which my mindset coach, Jen Diaz, she always laughs about this because she's like, "Yeah. No perfectionist labels themselves are perfectionist. Everybody says the same thing." I'm like, I know. I wouldn't have thought that I was, but I get really bummed on myself when I do something wrong, that and even something as silly as that.

And I thought that this little experiment, even though it was just a silly cake and all of that ended up being fine, it taught me a lot about how hard I can be on myself, how seriously I can take things sometimes, definitely the pressure I put on myself to think that other people are going to be disappointed in me. But I also thought there was some interesting alliteration here of like, sometimes we have to let things rest to come together.

I feel like in business a lot of times we push and push and push and we try to make something happen, but actually just letting things rest - what I usually call marinate - is actually what we need or the business needs. I think sometimes we also have to realize that things are good enough. And that at the end of the day, it's chocolate cake and people will be happy that they have cake.

And I think the metaphor in our business is, is that I think we try to put things out that are perfect or we don't release a course until we think it's perfect or something like that. But in reality, whatever you probably have to deal with or work with right now would be a lot for people. It would be great. It would be really helpful.

I think in general, you probably underestimate just how helpful you are to people. That's something that I find that the more of an expert you actually are, the more you start to doubt how helpful you are. Because once you become so familiar and such an expert in a space, you're kind of too far removed from something to understand really how helpful some of the most basic elements of what you do are for other people.

And so, I think sometimes if you make a chocolate cake a million times and

you're used to it being perfect, and then you think if it's not perfect, everyone's going to hate it. And then, you get to the party and everybody's like, "It's a delicious chocolate cake. Who cares?" They've never had the other chocolate cake. They don't even know what you're talking about. They just want chocolate cake, so let them have cake.

But I just thought that this was a fun little conversation to have that, you know, one, we need to stop being so hard on ourselves and demanding so much. And that we need to remember that at the end of the day, we can just serve people some chocolate cake and they'll be really happy.

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