

Laura Cox Kaplan:

This is She Said/She Said podcast. I'm Laura Cox Kaplan. I've spent my entire career as an advocate, connector, problem solver and master communicator at the highest levels of government and corporate America. I'm also a mom in a dual career household. With She Said/She Said podcast, I'm sharing what I've learned that's helped me and I'm also drawing additional perspective from a broad range of women who were creating amazing opportunities for themselves, and for others. Their stories hold great advice and perspective about common challenges, and the best ways to tackle them.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Listen, I know your time is precious, but stick around, I think you'll find this investment in you well worth it. Hi, friends, welcome. If you are anything like me, you are in search of positive content, especially right now, that's uplifting but it still makes you think. My guest today truly fits that bill. She's Adriana Carrig, the founder of the Little Words Project, and she's working to make the world a better place. One kind inspiring word at a time. Adriana, welcome to She Said/She Said.

Adriana Carrig:

Thank you so much for having me.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

I am delighted to have you. So tell us about Little Words Project. What is it? How did this get started?

Adriana Carrig:

I started Little Words Project, actually, seven years ago now. Seven years ago on November 11, is our seven year anniversary.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Wow.

Adriana Carrig:

Out of my parents basement, like all good startups begin and it's a company that's really all about inspiring self love and kindness, pretty much amongst everyone. We used to ... There has been ... For the past few years, it's really been mostly about spreading that love amongst women, but we are towards the end of this year going to be launching our first ever unisex line. So we're really trying to broaden that reach and touch as many parts of as many different people as possible, because we believe that kindness really doesn't ... Knows all shapes and sizes. So there should be no reason that men can't wear bracelets too.

Adriana Carrig:

So essentially what we are as I mentioned, to pay it forward, jewelry company. So the idea is you pick a word that means something to you, you wear that word for as long as you need it, and then you pass it on one day to someone who needs it more. So really sweet. Like I said, pay it forward concept. That just is meant to brighten your day when you look down at your wrist and see your words there and then also that of someone else's when you do eventually pass it on.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Well, it couldn't come at a better time and I'm so interested to hear that you're branching out into items for men as well. We're just coming off of what has been a very divisive election, and while we don't need to talk about politics here because if you have other blazes, they can go for that. I would love for you to maybe talk a little bit about the impact that you hope to have. I also want you to get into to really where the original idea for Little Words Project actually came from, but maybe talk about the impact that you hope to have now that you're expanding this to include men as well.

Adriana Carrig:

Yeah, absolutely. It actually does help to start with where the idea came from. Because I had grown up my entire life essentially dealing with negativity from other girls and kids of all ages from when I was very young

age, probably started when I was like in the third grade. It continued for me well through college. I was essentially bullied that entire portion of my life. Which when I tell that to people, they're shocked because I guess whatever molds they have in their head of the type of person that might get bullied, I don't fit it. However, it just goes to show that you can be targeted, you can be attacked for whatever.

Adriana Carrig:

There might not be a specific reason. It's just because you're the flavor of the week. For me, it felt like it was like my entire life, and it was. Pretty much I can remember like some incident from each year of my growing up and when I say it continued through college, that's kind of when it started to dawn on me that this was like a problem. It happened a lot with me with other girls. So that's kind of where the initial desire to start a brand that was all about kindness amongst women came from, but that's not to say that there aren't plenty of young men and men ... Just people from all walks of life, all ages deal with negativity and cruelty in one way or another and said, we've seen that a ton this year, and hopefully that's not going to happen going forward.

Adriana Carrig:

So essentially, the impacts that we're hoping to make is the same that it was since the very beginning of launching this, and that's just kind of bringing a little bit more kindness into the world. Like infringing on the territory of cruelty. Having something that lives on your wrist that is meant to be a vehicle of that very kindness. I think it just helps people take a second look and think twice before they say something negative, they just ... They look down, and they know that they are a representation, a part of our community and they know that they kind of have to live up to what they say they're going to live up to when they put on this bracelet.

Adriana Carrig:

It's almost like a bond with themselves to be kinder. So we're hoping to do that on a very large scale, as we continue to grow and it's already been, like I

said, seven years and it's crazy to me how far we've come as far as how many people we've reached.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

So where did the original idea for the bracelet itself come from? This was an idea that you had in college or right after college, but why a bracelet? Why not a necklace or why not some other tool? What was it about the bracelet that really resonated with you? I have them on. I should tell you here ... Our viewers, our listeners rather can't see them, but I'm wearing the two that ... I have two custom ones. One is she said, and one is, believe, because those were two things that resonated with me, but I really ... I love them. They're-

Adriana Carrig:

I love that. Believe is actually my favorite word, because I believe that you can't achieve anything unless you believe in yourself first. So that's been like my number one go-to answer whenever anyone asks what my favorite is. It's usually that one. So to answer your question, why a bracelet, it's really not as involved of an answer, as you might think. The answer is I was 21 years old, and I was making ... Obviously, as women, we've grown up making jewelry, and I shouldn't say just women. I'm sure everyone has grown up making friendship bracelets, whether it's in camp or with your friends. I really wanted to, I guess I intentionally took a new take on an old favorite, just a simple, beaded word bracelet, but it also comes down to the simple fact that like, it's what I was able to manufacture on my own in my parent's basement.

Adriana Carrig:

I didn't have to jump through hoops, I didn't have to figure out ... I didn't have to find a factory. I was just like, okay, I can get these materials, I can sit down, I can make these myself as I have been since I was a kid, and just kind of go from there. So the original iteration of it, I had done in high school, I was making them for myself to kind of get through difficult times, always having positive words that I can look down at.

Adriana Carrig:

Then when I got into college, and I joined a sorority, I wanted to come up with a way to keep the love circulating. So I was like, oh, I'll use these bracelets that I'm making myself and then this concept of passing it on and sharing it amongst ourselves, and it can be like The Sisterhood of the Traveling Bracelet. So fast forward once I graduated, I had seen that the girls were still loving their bracelets. I made my first batch my sophomore year, and it just continued to be something that's like symbol of sisterhood for us that was like, more iconic than our letter shirts. You know what I mean?

Adriana Carrig:

It was like that is how you know that was one of those sorority girls, whatever. Luckily, we were a really just a good group of women and really kind group. They were the reason that I felt like there was hope for kindness in girls. So once I graduate, I saw they were still doing it and I thought to myself, why not bring this sisterhood to the masses. So it really did. We started as a female empowerment brand and we're going to always be that at our core, but we really just wanted to be as inclusive as possible with this two arm of the men's unisex bracelets that are coming out this year. So, simple answer, because it was easy.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Oftentimes, those are the best. Something that's easy and obvious that somebody else is not taking advantage of is sometimes the best answer. So you graduate from college, you were set to go to law school and you said, I think I'm going to pursue this full time. At what point did you realize that this could be not just a hobby or something that you did as a gift for friends, but something that was actually a legitimate business idea?

Adriana Carrig:

I think that kind of goes back to what we were talking about with the concept of believing in yourself. I really didn't have any concrete evidence that this was going to work outside of that sorority group. So that 60 women was my little microcosm test group and seeing how much they loved it, I was

kind of convinced that, okay, the right marketing the right efforts, the right energy, there's a chance that this could really take off for the masses. So when I decided I was going to full time ... I guess it really wasn't until about a year into making them and selling them that I was able to really dedicate myself full time to the business.

Adriana Carrig:

With law school I was studying for the LSAT right around when ... Or I took the LSAT, rather, which is the test to get into law school right around the time that I was launching it. I was kind of like, oh, this will just be like a side project, and it really took off in the very beginning and my LSAT scores weren't telling me I had to go to Harvard.

Adriana Carrig:

So I was like, okay, well, then I think I'm just going to trust this and I'm going to go feet first and, or headfirst, rather, and trust my instincts and believe in myself and it really helps that I had parents that were so understanding and totally cool about it. They've been so helpful and just supportive of me ever since and if I didn't have that, I probably would have been a little more inclined to take a safer route, but I was very lucky in that regard.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

So I have so many questions about how you go about starting a business like this, how you scale it, how you go from being in your parent's garage, you making the bracelets to something that obviously has to scale in order to meet customer demand. I know that you have taken a self-funding route, which means that you're still in charge of you, you're not beholden to your shareholders, just to your customers and yourself, but maybe talk a little bit about the scaling process, and then why you made the decision to self fund, because that can be a tough ... It can be tough for people to decide to do that. It can be hard for women, entrepreneurs to get funding too, but that's a whole nother story, but I'd love to hear your perspective.

Adriana Carrig:

Of course. I mean, that's definitely a part of why I never went that route, but to start from the very beginning, when it comes to the scaling of the brand, when I tell you that I kind of just started, that's exactly what I mean. I really just was like, okay, I make these, I can make them cuter. I'm going to get-

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Was this just you or did you have a team at this point?

Adriana Carrig:

No, just me in the very beginning. I was making them literally on my bed in my college dorm room with materials from Michaels. It was that simple. Then once I graduated, I was like, let me just like ... Let's see. I think I could put together a website. So I did have ... I actually, I say I got the business [inaudible 00:12:37] because I had friends from all different groups. One girl was starting a website development business. So I was like, great, you want to make my website? I'll be your first client, whatever. Then, I had another friend who was in video production, I had him create like a little video for me.

Adriana Carrig:

I think I will give myself the credit that from the very beginning, I've always had a pretty decent knack at marketing the importance of the story, and telling the story along with selling the product and I think that's very important for young entrepreneurs today. Like if you want to start something, it's just really good to know that ... It's really good to have a story behind it and sell something more than just the product. Sell the feeling, the emotion, the experience and I think that from the very beginning, that's what we got.

Adriana Carrig:

So it was really not like a calculated ... There was no business plan, there was no, okay, after year one, I'm going to be at this stage and dah, dah, dah. I really just kind of started, I started selling, I actually ... I reference this book a lot and I don't know, you've definitely done your research. So you might

have seen me talk about it before, but I read this book called The \$100 Startup and it's literally a tiny little book. In that book, the author says, which his name's escaping me right now, but the author says, all you need to start a business is something to sell, a way to collect people's money, and people who want to buy it.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Wow.

Adriana Carrig:

I was like, well, that's simple. I'm going to do that. So I put up a website, took pictures of the product, had a way to capture their credit card payments and a way to ship them out the door. It was really just a matter of like, let's just try. Right off the bat, I had the help of the sorority, posting the link on social media, social media has been a big help in the scaling of the business. So that really helped and then as time went on, and I started getting bigger and bigger, I just kind of met the demand with a change. So if it was, okay, you're getting a ton more online orders, I need to hire someone to come help me make or I need to beg my mom to come help me make bracelets which she did.

Adriana Carrig:

My dad helped me with the shipping in the very beginning. Again, supportive parents are key. Friends or family, whatever you have, leverage them. Then as time went on, and we started going into retail stores because I had a rep contact me and say, "Hey, I think I could help you get into stores." I'm like, "What does that mean?" And I would learn. So it was really just a bootstrap experience where I would every single day, I'd learn something new and I'm still learning to this day. It's exhausting, but it's really ... It's cool to feel like you can do it on your own and I like that you mentioned that we didn't go the traditional funding route.

Adriana Carrig:

Because so many people feel as though I don't know, I feel like it's a barrier to entry for so many young people, especially young women who are maybe a little kind of intimidated by that concept. I definitely was. I'm not as much anymore, but now we don't really need it. So if I had been a little more confident back then, I guess maybe I would have tried that route, but ultimately, we ended up not needing it and we've been self funded since the very beginning, profitable in the first month, which is just exciting to think about and we've remained that since that time. We managed to double actually, or just shy of double year over a year since starting. So it's just been a wild ride that we figured out on the way and we now because after my first year, I ended up slowly building that team and went from one person to two people to three to now about 25.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

That's really, really incredible. Congratulations. That's awesome. So for a social impact business, which is what this is, right? It's a direct to consumer, social-impact business but you're also looking at partnering and using influencers and things like that. Maybe talk a bit because this whole notion of having "influencers" is kind of a new concept. It's like raging and on fire, but how do you think about that as it relates to being really ... Your story is such an important component of your business, especially when it's a social impact business.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

That's clearly something that's important to ... You've talked about that. Maybe talk about how you go about selecting other brands to work with, selecting influencers to work with. How do you think about that, as it relates to the overall story of your business?

Adriana Carrig:

I think like you said, it's a relatively new elements of the business. When I first started, Instagram was like, brand new, and I was really lucky and able to kind of ride that growth wave with it. I remember in the very beginning, I was posting to nobody. There were like three major influencers that are now

the biggest ones out there, and they were small at the time. So the concept of influencer gifting or working with influencers, it really didn't exist. So I really just catered at that time to my customer.

Adriana Carrig:

So I would post pictures, I'd do behind the scenes, I've always been super transparent on social media. I put together right now for the first time in months that we were filming. For the most part, it's like me with my hair up in sweats at the office, at home, whatever it might be, being like, this is business on it and I think that transparency really kind of garnered this community around us who just love what we're doing and love that they feel like they know us and they know our lives. They know our first and last name.

Adriana Carrig:

Well, maybe not last, but they know our names for sure. Actually, yeah, they know our first and last, and they're communicative with us and they love chatting with us via DM and that's just continuously been our thing. We really wanted people to feel like we were a part of their friend group. So that's kind of how we've leveraged social media much more so than the influencer gifting aspect. To answer your question, how we typically work with people. We ... I don't pay for posts ever. Unless it's someone that I'm like, they've worked with us before, they've shown and promoted the product on their own accord because they just love it, then I'm like, okay, I understand influencers, that's your livelihood, and I want to support.

Adriana Carrig:

So it's kind of like a mutual support experience, but you're never going to catch me sliding into an influencer's DM and agreeing to like \$1,000 a post. It's just ... It's too much, it's hard as a small business to keep up with that kind of stuff. So that's my first rule of thumb. Then the second rule of thumb is we really only work with people that are true, "nice girls" as we like to refer to ourselves and [sue 00:19:36] nice guys and really just wanting to

make sure that they practice what they preach and they're honestly who they say they are.

Adriana Carrig:

It takes a little bit more research and being a little bit more picky, but I do think in the end it really keeps us true to who we are and people respect us for that. Same goes with partnerships. A lot of times we have had people reach out that really it just ... It's not the right fit, it might be a big opportunity for us but it's not the right fit at the end of the day. So we really try to be mindful about that kind of stuff.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Who are you getting advice from? Do you have an official Board of Directors, and given the fact that you're self funded, you don't really need that in the same way. So who are you turning to for advice and counsel? Then how do you know who to listen to, if you have several people giving you conflicting advice?

Adriana Carrig:

This is going to sound really crazy, but no one.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

It does sound a little crazy.

Adriana Carrig:

There was a point in time when I first started, where I felt like I really, really needed a little bit more guidance, but again, Google is your best friend, YouTube is your best friend. I learned a lot by just doing my own research. A lot of it has been talking to other small-business owners through the [inaudible 00:20:51] circuit, which, hopefully that comes back eventually. You meet so many people who are out there trying to sell their products to retailers that are all young. I've met so many other bracelet companies, recently and it's really just asking. I reached out to the founder and owner of

Pura Vida, which is a major jewelry brand that recently sold to Vera Bradley for like mega millions of dollars.

Adriana Carrig:

I was like, "How did you do it? What was your process?" I scheduled a 30-minute call with him and he was so gracious and willing to give me that advice. So a lot of it's just being willing to put yourself out there and ask people who have done it before you, asking via Instagram, finding their email, sending them an email, but there's no board. I've had one other mentor throughout the experience, where she owned another jewelry company, and we worked something out where I'd be able to contact her whenever I needed.

Adriana Carrig:

She really helped me in that earlier phase, but again, it's just ... It's asking people in their respective industries. As we move into a phase of meeting, we will want to sell eventually, or become acquired or what have you. Now, I'm having more conversations with financial people and lawyers and every time I talk to someone who's in that industry, I'm like, "Hey, so can I just tell you a little bit about my brand?" It's just like, a constant conversation, but yeah, it's definitely a little crazy that I don't go to someone. I feel like I'm that person now, for so many young startups that it's crazy. That's the thing, but I got here, really through researching and not being afraid to ask people who've been there.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Well, and not being afraid to say, "I don't know, I really need help. I really perspective," which is really tremendous advice. So, because we are still in this period of pandemic, talk about how that's affected your business. You're a direct-to-consumer business already, but how did it affect you, and your existing team when everything shut down several months ago? What's been the impact?

Adriana Carrig:

It was hard. As a business owner, it was really, really hard, because I genuinely did not want to have to furlough any of my employees, I did not want to lose any of my employees permanently and I really wanted to make everything work in this new normal. Again, thankfully, we have a community of customers that are so loyal, and just so committed to seeing us thrive, that I was able to put up a story on Instagram and say, "Hey, guys, we need your help, we need you to buy. We need you to gift these bracelets to people who need that encouragement during this tough time." We had our customers just come out in droves.

Adriana Carrig:

We ... All of wholesale, which is where you sell B2B, instead of direct consumer, you're selling to retail stores so that they could sell to their consumer. That whole industry was like, completely bare for those four months and we're sold in some major retailers like Nordstrom, and Anthropologie and all things halted. So that was really hard, because it becomes a huge revenue stream for you. So when that halted, I was like, "Oh my gosh, what are we going to do?"

Adriana Carrig:

We applied for the PPP. Luckily, we got that and we were able to use it all for the purposes of keeping the team on board. Then our customers came through for us, and we ended up having a better quarter than we had forecasted for, despite all of the changes. I know that's not the same for every business. I know how lucky we are and I'm so grateful, but again, I just ... I really credit our community and the people that show up for us every single day.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Was there anything strategically that you did in order to leverage the existing community? So was there anything that you did with social media or with marketing differently, sort of trying to come out of this than you might have done otherwise?

Adriana Carrig:

I think definitely showing a little bit more of my cards and like talking to them, honestly, There were tears in my eyes when I gave up my little video [spiel 00:25:07] asking them to support us during this time when they had so many other companies and family members and things that they needed to support. So we just felt lucky that we were one of them, but then also, when it came to shifting focus, we stopped all worrying about our wholesale and all the things we had to get prepared for, for wholesale, which we're paying for now, because it's back and we're are not as prepared as we should be.

Adriana Carrig:

We shifted focus towards retail, and we were getting orders out the door faster than we ever have, so that this way, our customers would be able to get their orders immediately, be immediately gratified, come back and buy again, or share it with others, and it just really helps spread the word even faster. So the strategy really was just like, they are 100% our number one priority above all else.

Adriana Carrig:

I had ... While we were lucky that certain members of my team were considered essential in that they were factory workers, they had to get those things out the door. So they continued coming in, the rest of my team worked remotely from home. So all the front office, essentially, they had to keep trying to ... My partnerships director was like, "Nobody wants to do anything," and I'm like, "I know, we just have to keep planning for the future." That's really what it came down to, just really shifting gears to being very, very customer centered during those crazy months. It was nuts to say the least, they were literally all quarantining and then coming to work only, and then going right back home and quarantining again. So it was very, very unique.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

So would you consider this to be the biggest challenge that you faced in business, or is there something else that you've dealt with that is helpful for maybe would-be entrepreneurs to understand?

Adriana Carrig:

I definitely think it was one of the biggest challenges just because it was so unexpected and unprecedented. So I really just was flying by the seat of my pants, but-

Laura Cox Kaplan:

There's really no one to call. When you pick up the phone and call people, everybody was as lost as you were, presumably.

Adriana Carrig:

Exactly. So I think I just borrowed from that experience of being a bootstrapping entrepreneur that had to pivot and figure it out. I think, I'm really grateful that I do have that, and I don't have anyone to fall back on as a crutch, if you will, because it really forces me to put my thinking cap on and figure it out. I was an English major in college, just to be clear. I have no business background. So it was like, oh, my God, I'm really going to have to ... Luckily, my husband is a financial director.

Adriana Carrig:

So he definitely has a head for a lot of that stuff, but I've learned along the way and it's been easy ... Not easy, but it's been fun almost to figure out those challenges. I will say just on another note, as far as how difficult things have been. There was a period of time for about a year and a half that my husband and I were actually trying to start a family and it took a very long time. We were going through the infertility struggle and that was the hardest time in business for me, because it was the first time that I ever was like, I don't even care about the company right now.

Adriana Carrig:

I only care about what I'm eating and how I'm acting and I was so obsessed with getting over that hump. It was really hard for me to focus on the company at hand. So one of the bigger challenges as a business owner that I will say from now till my death is hiring and getting the right team. So luckily I was able to put a good group in place that they kind of carry that entire year without much help from me because I was like in such a state. So that was one of the other really hard times is just really learning how to balance yourself and-

Laura Cox Kaplan:

If I'm not mistaken, a lot of this was happening during COVID too. So on top of COVID, because you were kind enough to share on social media the great news that you and your husband are expecting your first baby. So congratulations. That's really, really wonderful ... That you were dealing with that and the infertility treatments and all the drama and hormone fluctuations and everything that goes with that, while also living through a pandemic and running a business through a pandemic. How did you keep it all together?

Adriana Carrig:

Oh my gosh, I didn't. I didn't and I didn't fault myself for that and that's really what it comes down to. I was just like, look, I am a mess. I don't care. This is what it is. My team is freaking awesome and you guys ... I was just very transparent. I talked about the infertility struggle. I shared with social media that I did do IVF for us to be able to conceive and you're right, I did those treatments all during the pandemic. My husband couldn't come in with me, he sat in the car in a mask. I always look ... Hindsight is 2020, and looking back, obviously, I wouldn't be where I am right now. I wouldn't be pregnant, I wouldn't have this baby coming to me, had it not been for all of those things.

Adriana Carrig:

In a really crazy way, the COVID, the pandemic really forced me to slow down, chill out, realize that you cannot handle and you can't control

everything. I think the lesson of infertility is exactly that and the lesson of the pandemic, and the COVID experience is exactly that. So it was this melding of the right timing, as ... Again, as weird as it [inaudible 00:30:58] I know, that was not how COVID treated everybody. You know what I mean? I just was forced to chill and kind of let the pieces fall where they may and be confident in what I've built up to that point to establish that good foundation. It was crazy.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

So it was very important to you to share authentically, to share your story and your struggle with your community broadly. That can be a very difficult thing to do. Maybe talk about why that was important.

Adriana Carrig:

Do you mean with regards to infertility or with regards to just being a business owner?

Laura Cox Kaplan:

All of it, all of it, really. Because you're making a determination about whether you want something that is really personal to you, and very private, whether you want to share that publicly. It becomes ... It's not just your story, it's your husband's story. It's your child who's not here yet but it's everybody's story. So you have to make a determination about whether everybody wants to be in the limelight and wants to have ... You know what I mean? So, talk about maybe how you thought through that, and why that was important from the standpoint of your brand.

Adriana Carrig:

So from the standpoint of my brand, and just from the [standpoint 00:32:15] of my personal brand of who I, Adriana Carrig is, I have been that girl, since the very beginning of time. I'm very open, I don't feel like I am someone who ... I just thrive in environments where I can talk and if there's something wrong, or something that I'm going through, if I keep it all in, I would combust. So I needed the ability to be able to share it.

Adriana Carrig:

Social media kind of provided that platform where not only could I share, but I could also help and being able to help other women who are going through that and often silently, because like you said, this isn't just my story. It's my husband's story. It's my in-laws' story. It's my parents story. I definitely be getting a lot of ... Especially the older generation was a little like, are you going to definitely tell everybody this? Are you going to share the whole thing.

Adriana Carrig:

Even my little brother is like ... He's a little more conservative in that regard. He's like, "Are you going to really document the whole experience?" I'm like, yeah, because that ... I understand that not everybody is comfortable with that, but for me, knowing that I'm able to help other women go through that same struggle, who can't and don't have as much of a good understanding from their family ... Or understanding of a family, I should say, rather, that meant the world's me, and having people every other week tell me, "Hey, I'm going through struggles too. Thank you for being so open. It's really helpful to see someone have their happy ending." That's what kept me going a lot.

Adriana Carrig:

Now don't get me wrong. There were a lot of times that I didn't ... I wasn't like, crying. Let me hop on and show that difficulty. I just would share the story, a lot of times after or during, but it was a subtle version. How that goes back to the brand is the same thing. It's just I've just always been transparent. I will say that since the craziness of the election, and since getting pregnant and just in general, I've been feeling sort of like icky about social media.

Adriana Carrig:

So I've been like, I'm just going to ... I'm going to be a little quieter and I've been taking my little break, and I'm giving myself that grace. People have asked, "What's going on? I'll respond, but I'm not as open right now and

that's okay. It's whatever makes sense for you. Do whatever makes you feel good.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Maybe talk a bit about ... One element of the bracelets that I don't think you touched on is that on each one, there's a little tag with a number. I'd love for you to talk about maybe stories that women have shared through these little tags and what you've learned from their stories.

Adriana Carrig:

Each bracelet has a little tag on it. I don't know if you're going to show any footage, but I'll see if I can put this in screen.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

We're for sure going to show ... Yeah, I can see that and then we'll also include some photographs. I'll get some screenshots. They never look quite as good, but we'll do what we do what we can. So folks should check out both Adriana's feed and mine on Instagram, because we'll post pictures so that you can see both the bracelets and the tags. So, sorry to interrupt you.

Adriana Carrig:

No, of course. So each bracelet has that little tag and on there is a number that you ... It's a code really, that you use to register the bracelet on our mobile app or on our website. So this is a way for you to put in your story, share with the word has done for you or what it means to you, or why you purchased it or what have you. Then eventually, when you no longer need that word, or when someone else needs it more than you do, you can pass that bracelet on and as long as she or he registers the tag, you can actually track and see where the bracelet goes.

Adriana Carrig:

So you can see how it's impacted that person and then the next person and the next person and it's really just an incredible way to, again, see how your single act of kindness affects people down the line. Some of the stories that

we've seen is really what makes me get out of bed every morning, just the knowledge that we really are making a difference in so many people's lives and just the fact that we're still here. When you look at the product, it's a very simple bracelet.

Adriana Carrig:

It's a very simple design. It's not like I did anything revolutionary. I just took something that has been a fan favorite forever and put a little extra spin on it, and to know that it's been impacting so many lives has just blown us away. Obviously, my brain is currently in fertility and those are the stories though, that really did impact me the most when I was going through my journey, because ... And also the stories are all published.

Adriana Carrig:

So you can go on our website and read all the recent registrations, which is really cool. There were bracelets that were passed woman to woman who had gone through infertility and then eventually had their babies. There were bracelets through the ... Where one woman would wear it through all of her experience, and then send us a picture of her finally holding her baby with the bracelet visible. Those really-

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Lovely.

Adriana Carrig:

Those got me, but there are stories that run the gamut from, it's a young girl who just got it for her first dance recital, to an older woman whose daughter gave it to her because she just started her first round of chemo. Then that woman wears it through her survivor story. So it's just incredible that it's this little ... I say, it's a plastic on a string. That's how we humble ourselves every once in a while when we remember that and yet it's doing so much good and it's really humbling.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

While the origin of this came from really girl-on-girl bullying, there's a lot of effort to shine a spotlight on bad behavior. You started being bullying many years ago. Do you think there's been a shift around this? Do you think that is getting better, because of efforts, not just your efforts, even though it's incredibly important, but there's a lot of effort to really shine a spotlight and make girls and parents or caregivers much more aware of the problem? Do you see it changing?

Adriana Carrig:

I do. I do. I think despite, obviously the state of the world right now, I do feel as though there's never been this much inclusivity being so important. There's never been this much talk of the social difficulties that we are going through as a nation and the importance of putting your neighbor ahead of yourself. I think that that's something that is definitely new. I always say too, like I really ... I hopped on, right as the wave was about to take off and we kind of ... We've been cresting through this experience.

Adriana Carrig:

I started the brand three years before the Hillary Clinton election and the I'm With Her campaign and the feminist movement that kind of researched and just the girl power that kind of came out from all that. We were starting something just for girls, when people were like, "Really? It's just for girls? What about the rest of the population?" So I do feel like we gave it a good seven-year run of just focusing on women and now as we have seen a slight change ... Again, I never thought I was going to eradicate cruelty with bracelets. Like I said earlier, just like seep into its territory a bit.

Adriana Carrig:

I do think that we've got women in this community and men who are just so committed to being kinder. So I don't know that I can speak to necessarily to the whole world at large, but definitely our community has grown, which means that people are more and more aware of this little piece of jewelry that is meant to spread kindness. We're very ... We beat that over the head,

that concept. So, if you're wearing a little word, I like to say that you know that's like a safe person, that's a nice person that you can trust.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

So as I understand it, you're also in the process of launching or have launched a nonprofit arm, The Block project, correct? Talk about both why you decided to also at the same time launch a nonprofit and what its focus and function is likely to be.

Adriana Carrig:

I'm laughing it at your question of like, why did you decide to do it at the same time? My only answer is [inaudible 00:41:00].

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Because you're branching out with men and you're doing ... I didn't even realize that you were reaching out to men until we started this conversation, but wow, that and the nonprofit almost simultaneously.

Adriana Carrig:

All without any help. [inaudible 00:41:17]. So your questions are making me feel like I'm crazier than I am. But it's good. I love being busy. I love ... And especially with an impending maternity leave coming up, I'm like getting it all in now [inaudible 00:41:31] so that I'm not launching something brand new in April, when I'm due.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

But they are different focuses, right? The nonprofit has a different focus. So maybe talk what that big difference is and why you felt that there was an additional need that wasn't being met through the retail business.

Adriana Carrig:

So it was always very important to me to be giving back throughout the process of having a retail business. So whether it was every month, we worked with a different nonprofit in the very beginning and I would donate a

portion of the sales of a one bracelet and I'd change that every single month. That was kind of tough, but that was the original model that we would have a bracelet per month for a different nonprofit and we could give back to that nonprofit. That was great, very hard to keep up with, as we continued to grow. So then we shifted to every quarter, then every year.

Adriana Carrig:

It wasn't until about five years ... I mean, the whole time, I knew I wanted to start something that would really be impactful as a nonprofit but it wasn't until about five years in that I was like, you know what, I think what it really should be is focusing on young women, the collegiate age, in college, who kind of were like me, who had ... I was lucky enough to have a group of women that I could turn to, and they helped shape me and I was ... But that's not always the case for everyone in sororities and nor is that the case for every girl on college campuses, who don't have a sports group or a sorority to turn to.

Adriana Carrig:

So I wanted to be kind of like the home away from home for those girls, where they could learn principles of self love, kindness, confidence, leadership, things that you're not really taught in school. So that's kind of where The Block came to be. It stands for bold leaders organizing communities of kindness, and we launched it actually a year and a half ago. So it's definitely been ahead of what's been going on ... What we're planning on doing with the men stuff, but it has unfortunately, been one of the hardest things hit by COVID because of the lockdowns, girls not going back to school.

Adriana Carrig:

We were just kind of getting into the swing of things. We already had 10 chapters [inaudible 00:43:47] trying to continue to build but everything paused. Grants paused, these girls going back to school, and then the world exploded, and it felt like, oh my God, there's so many causes right now that need more, I shouldn't say more attention, but more attention that I even

myself was like, okay, let's kind of just provide these girls who we currently have with the digital tools. So we've kind of shifted to more of like a digital panel option.

Adriana Carrig:

I'll probably share with them this recording, just to kind of provide them with that inspiration without putting any extra stress on them and requiring that they meet once a month. So long story short, that you didn't even ask how it was affected, but that's your answer. To do it all right now and to continue to run that stuff, it is hard. It's one of the harder things because it's not like you just snap your fingers and have a flourishing nonprofit. There's a lot of work that goes into it and it's going to require a lot more time and effort to build it to what we're hoping it to be.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

It's a beautiful concept, though. It really is lovely. So if you could maybe share with me the impact that you hope to have. If you had to distill it down, what's the impact that you hope you will have had?

Adriana Carrig:

I hope that over time, our bracelets are truly synonymous with kindness in the way that I was just kind of alluding to earlier. I've got plenty of stories of now where we have customers that say, "I saw someone wearing a Little Word at Starbucks, and we had a whole conversation about what her word was, and we did an exchange," or what have you and those stories have become more and more frequent. I want them to be ... I would love eventually, for it to be like, commonplace for everyone to have a bracelet and for it to be a normal thing, where you're just like, "Oh, you're going through this? I have strengths, let me pass that on," and it's not like having to teach them what it is anymore but rather just this knowledge that this product exists that is meant to spread kindness, and if you see someone in it, you know that that's a safe person.

Adriana Carrig:

If we can get it to as many wrists as possible, there's a chance that that could actually be achieved. So definitely a broad goal, for sure, but we've come this far and accomplished this much with zero knowledge of what we were doing. So to know that we've come that far, there's no telling how far we can go with it.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

If you could give yourself advice, sort of going back to the point in which you started this business, maybe a single piece of advice or something that you wish you had known then, what would that be?

Adriana Carrig:

I think it's take care of yourself. I say that because for a long time, I really only cared about this business and it took first place to everything in my life, including my sleep, my mental health, my well being. I was diagnosed, by the way as unexplained infertility. There was no explanation for it. I'm not a doctor and I'm not going to pretend that I know what exactly did it to me, but I do think that all that stress for so many years really affected my body.

Adriana Carrig:

Whether that was what did it or didn't, it's still like ... I still feel it to this day, it's hard to get out of bed in the morning. I'm ... I was going to say 29. Not anymore. I'm 30, and that just shouldn't be the case right now. So I say that because I know there are so many people who believe this concept of like, you got to hustle and never stop, and even if I were a little further behind where I am today, I do think that I would ... My body would be thanking me kind of thing. So just taking care of yourself.

Adriana Carrig:

It's not a huge business piece of advice, but when you're your best, then you can perform your best. I think I maybe would have made a lot less mistakes along the way if I was a little less tired, or a little better nourished. So yeah, taking care of myself is probably the ... I'd do it a little bit better if I could go back in time up.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

It's great advice. It's great advice. This has been such a pleasure. I really loved meeting you and congratulations on everything you have going on. The baby coming, the business, all these things. It's really terrific.

Adriana Carrig:

Thank you so much, Laura. I really appreciate. It's been a great ... You really are probably one of the best interviewers that I've ever worked with.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

You're sweet. Thank you very much. Thank you. I appreciate that. To learn more about Adriana Carrig and the Little Words Project, check out the show notes for this episode, and don't forget her amazing bracelets make great holiday gifts. So if you're starting to think about the holidays, which are coming up in just a few short weeks, check out the link that I've included in the show notes for this episode. You can purchase her bracelets directly from that link. If you're new to She Said/She Said podcast, please be sure to check out our past episodes, including the new short form pods.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

These are five to 10 minutes of perspective on a topic that comes up that I think you guys will really appreciate. The last one was on, how you can build your confidence by embracing those or building relationships with those who have a different ideology or political point of view. These are new content for the platform, and I would really love to know what you think. I'd also love to know what other topics you'd really like to hear about. Any feedback would be greatly appreciated.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Before I let you go, I also want to ask a favor. If you're enjoying She Said/She Said podcast, and I sure hope you are, I would be so grateful if you could share us with your friends and I would also be so grateful if you would go on iTunes and give us a nice review. Just a few quick words, and five stars, if you don't mind would be awesome. Nice words and nice reviews make a big, big

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difference. They help us move up the charts and they help others who are looking for content like this, to find it more easily. I really appreciate you being here as always, and I hope that you found some great perspective and got a positive lift for your week. I'll see you next time. Take care.