

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Ready to add a big dose of positivity and empowered perspective to your day, you've come to the right place. Welcome to She Said/She Said podcast. I'm Laura Cox Kaplan.

Here we tackle everything from imposter syndrome and confidence building, to the best advice on how to lead yourself through life pivots including the ones that knock you flat.

For the past three years I've talked to hundreds of experts about their stories. Here you'll find their actionable advice and lessons as well as my own tools that you can put to use in your own life. Stick around, I think you'll find this investment in you well worth it.

Hey friend, welcome to the show. I am excited to bring on today's guest. Her name is Marla Isackson. She is the founder and CEO of an entity called Ossa.

It is an innovative podcast network and platform that's focused on helping women podcasters increase their earning potential and their influence. It's a great organization and I am honored to be in Ossa's membership.

But Marla's story and her journey actually goes well beyond podcasting. She is a seasoned marketing executive having worked with some of the most major brands including Citibank, American Express, Barnes & Noble among others.

Since leaving her corporate gigs, she actually has embraced serial entrepreneurship and she has repeatedly challenged herself to really pivot into areas where she could use her skills to help create opportunities for others especially women.

At the same time, she's used those career pivots to evolve and challenge herself in new and innovative ways. One of Marla's earliest entrepreneurial efforts was called Like a Boss Girls, which hit a whopping 1.2 million followers, and this was back in 2015 well before we were really talking about Boss Girls.

One of the ways that Marla has challenged herself more recently is with the creation of her own podcast which is called Mind of a Mentor. It's such a great name and a fabulous podcast.

I was honored to join Marla for a conversation on Mind of a Mentor a few weeks ago and I've included a link to that conversation in the show notes for this episode.

But just a couple of words about Mind of a Mentor. It is fantastic as I said a moment ago and much like She Said/She Said podcast, Mind of a Mentor is an interview style conversation that's focused on women's journeys.

Again, I've included a link to Mind of a Mentor in the show notes and I hope that you'll check it out.

Marla is among other things an incredibly thoughtful, thoughtful interviewer. So I know you'll really appreciate her style on Mind of a Mentor.

Today, however, I am excited to have Marla here on She Said/She Said podcast as an interviewee on the interviewee side of the mic. Even if you're not interested in starting your own podcast, her advice on entrepreneurship and on challenging yourself to evolve will resonate no matter what your interests or career aspirations may be. Marla, welcome to She Said/She Said.

Marla Isackson:

Thank you so much for having me today. I am really excited about joining you.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Well I am delighted to have you as I mentioned in the intro. I was also really honored to join you on your fabulous podcast, Mind of a Mentor.

Marla Isackson:

Thank you.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

And we've included a link to that conversation in the show notes for this episode.

Marla Isackson:

Awesome, perfect.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

But I'm really happy to have you on the interviewee side of the mic today. We have lots to talk about but because I suspect my audience may not be as familiar with Ossa, I want to start by talking about that because it's such an interesting and innovative idea. So, what is Ossa?

Marla Isackson:

Ossa is a network for women in podcasting. The reason why we did it is because we saw in 2018, we were looking at the stats, and they were dismal. Only 22%, 23% of all podcasts were being hosted by women. Only 20% of podcasts that charted were hosted by women. So these numbers were tough.

And what I wanted to do was to do something about it and create a platform where we encourage women and help them grow their show, help them grow their businesses, help them amplify their message to give them some ... No, it's amplification and promotion actually.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Yeah.

Marla Isackson:

So that's why we're doing what we're doing. We also want to help raise and elevate under represented voices because it's important. Podcasting is such an amazing platform and it's just giving a lot more people the ability to speak about what's important to them.

So at Ossa we focus on small to mid size podcasters because we want to speak to what we call the every woman. We want every woman to be podcasting or to be listening to podcasts.

So, I don't have celebrities although I think we're great. But I'm not a celebrity based podcast and those are awesome and those networks are terrific, that's not what we're about.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Yeah. Talk a little bit about the business side of Ossa and how it works. How are you going about supporting and promoting podcasts like She Said/She Said?

Marla Isackson:

Sure. So we are essentially an agency. That's one of the hats we wear. So what we do is we pair advertisers with podcasters relevant to what the advertiser is looking for. Whatever the specific niche is, we make the match.

We offer what's called white glove customer service, and I mean that. So, once we bring an advertiser to a podcaster and the podcaster says, "Yeah, I want to do this," we handle everything.

We ensure that the script is okay with the podcaster, all things are good, that the advertiser sends the podcaster samples because I think that's important. Everyone wants to be very authentic. We handle the billing, we handle the tracking, we handle the payments, we give feedback to podcasters if we think maybe it's not quite going as well as it should. So, that's Ossa. And yeah, it's an agency.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Yeah.

Marla Isackson:

I never thought I would start an agency but yeah I started an agency.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Yeah. What about, can you talk a little bit about some of the success stories that you've had with Ossa? Maybe real impact that you're already seeing with some of these female podcasts.

Marla Isackson:

So it's so interesting because everyone gets into podcasting for a different reason. So those women who are more sophisticated podcasters are starting to see some success on the monetization front. They have the numbers, they have the downloads and they're doing very well in our deals.

They're really converting. Why? Because they're all in. It's so interesting, they go all in in terms of whatever deal we present to them. So not only do they record the ads, do the live ads on their podcast, but they embraced the advertiser.

What I mean by that is they will talk about the products on social media. When they record a product ... We actually did a big deal with Faherty, which is a clothing company. One of the podcasters is wearing a Faherty item. She then did a post in front of a Faherty store.

So she really gave a lot to that. And I think we were really able to help her and I think that was super successful and I learned a lot from it in terms of what it takes to help build a successful campaign. So we were totally excited about that.

The other thing that we do in terms of success stories, so I talk about amplifying voices. So, in addition to the advertising network part of it, we have a pretty large presence in terms of we have a website, we have social media. So we have 1.2 million followers on social media.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Amazing.

Marla Isackson:

And we will amplify our podcasters. So we will interview podcasters and those interviews get posted on social media, boost it, anything to get the message out we try to do that.

And I know that podcasters have really enjoyed that part of it. We do everything we can to get them talking. We have another series that we do with podcasters called Pod Tips. What it is, it's little mini videos, a little nuggets of ideas. But we go into the community because we know that there are women who have so much expertise and we record whatever topic they think is relevant.

I know one of the ones we recorded I found helpful was using your voice.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Right.

Marla Isackson:

How do you use your voice effectively?

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Yeah, I love that. It's really, really great content. The whole monetization piece can be frankly a really difficult thing for I think a lot of people that embark on podcasting.

Marla Isackson:

Correct.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

And people engage in podcasting for all different reasons. But because it can be so difficult to get support and to get somebody to pay for the content, I think it can be very discouraging for a lot of people.

And because you're focused on women in particular, this idea of recognizing the value that you provide and acknowledging that in order to make that leap so that you can appeal to advertisers, maybe talk a little bit about that particular dynamic of how women are sometimes, I should again generalization, but sometimes women are unique in their reluctance to ask to be paid what they're worth whether it's podcasting or anything else, right?

Marla Isackson:

Yeah, absolutely. So, boy does that resonate with me. I totally get that. The way we work is we basically tell our podcasters, "Look if you have around 1,000 downloads per episode, which is a lot, but it's not Joe Rogan size, we can get you into campaign. You will not pay your mortgage with what you will earn in this campaign but you will get started."

So, what we do is we try to facilitate women thinking about well maybe I can monetize my podcast. So, we like ... I know my podcast is over 1,000 of them and we directly contact them and say, "Hey, you'd be great at this. Do you want to do this?"

Now some women say, "No, monetization or advertising it's not part of our strategy." Fine, that's totally cool. But some say, "Wow, yeah, that's a good idea, let me try."

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Right.

Marla Isackson:

So, it's a little challenging. But we try to get over that hump of women asking because we're actually asking them which I think makes it a lot easier for them.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Yeah, for sure. It's a concept that really resonates with me and you see this across the board whether you're talking about women in politics or you're talking about women in business. It is something that historically we've not done as well as our male counterparts or for whatever reason there's a reluctance to ask for what we're worth. So, I think that's a really interesting element.

Let's talk about Ossa actually grew out of another entrepreneurial enterprise that you launched. Talk a little bit about that because you were ahead of the curve in terms of boss this or boss girls or boss that.

Marla Isackson:

Right.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

You were like a boss girls before we had all of these other stuff.

Marla Isackson:

Correct.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Maybe talk a little bit about that particular enterprise and then how and why it evolved into Ossa.

Marla Isackson:

Sure. I'm laughing with the whole boss girl thing because we were the first actually.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Right.

Marla Isackson:

And at that point I was working with a very talented editor and chief and she was just so quick with names and titles and it just felt like ... So yeah, that name resonated with us.

So Like a Boss Girls was a community and platform for women to help them really live the life they want to lead. So, we attracted leaders and go getter and entrepreneurs and so many women out there doing amazing things.

And what we did is we provided information and resources to help them achieve what they wanted to achieve. So, what that entailed was we created a whole lot of content, a lot of how to content, how to get a job, how to start a business, how to write a business plan, all kinds of topics that I thought the topics were very important.

In addition to that, we leveraged social media and we lucked out because when we were working with Like a Boss Girls, that was a point when Facebook wasn't messing around so much with the

algorithm, which enabled us to grow to 1.2 million followers. We really went viral and weren't blocked by any weird algorithm. So, that was kind of cool.

That platform was doing very well. We did online events and a couple of events in real life with panels talking about a whole lot of different topics relevant to women.

So around 2018 my team told me that I had to start a podcast because podcast was like a thing, which I didn't want to do because it's just not my thing, but I did. And I realized I loved it. It was so much fun.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

It was your thing, yeah. Right?

Marla Isackson:

Yeah, yeah, it was so much fun.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Turns out it was your thing.

Marla Isackson:

Yeah. Here I had permission to really ask people questions and them not thinking I'm nosy. So I loved it. And my background is corporate marketing and I worked for some big companies. So I said, "Guys, we got to do some research, what's going on with this podcasting thing?"

And that's when we looked at the stats in terms of women in podcasting and as I stated them early, the stats were pretty dismal.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Right.

Marla Isackson:

And I also think at that time we needed to evolve away from Like a Boss Girls because the world was changing. And we saw this new medium as a great platform to help women to continue to evolve, why? Because it helps them elevate their voice in a very specific practical way.

So, I was very excited. I thought that this was the right thing to do. And realized that it was time to put the name Like a Boss Girls away because there were probably 30,000 boss people, boss girls, whatever. And tapped into Greek mythology, which I like to do.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Yeah.

Marla Isackson:

And also was or is the Greek Goddess of gossip and communications, which I think is very perfect. And our URL is OssaCollective.com because we are a collective of women who come together under the Ossa umbrella.

So when I made the pivot, again, we were ... This is so much fun about being an entrepreneur, you can be what you want. It's like nobody is telling you what to do specifically. And that's when I decided I wanted to take some of the aspects of Like a Boss Girls in terms of the way we were supporting empowerment, but really support empowerment in a powerful way because making money to me is a very, very important part of being empowered.

So, having the ability to create this platform to at least start monetization opportunities for women, that felt important to me. So we rebranded everything, we built the matching platform, we did a major pivot with our content. Our content is really focused on podcasting. There's content for advertisers. Why she should advertise on podcasting. There's a lot of how to information for podcasters.

So it's very podcast centric and as a marketer, I think an important thing to do is really to find your niche and this was I think we found it. I felt really good about it that this felt like it was a great way to take the best of Like a Boss Girls and marry it with new technology.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Yeah, and your own experience and expertise as well that you're bringing from many years in the corporate world. So let's sort of back track a bit.

Marla Isackson:

Sure.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

And talk about your background. You actually grew up from a career perspective in corporate marketing for some really, really big brands.

Marla Isackson:

Correct.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Maybe talk about that experience and why entrepreneurship. And what point and why did you decide to pivot from the corporate world into the more entrepreneurial world? I have a similar story as you know.

Marla Isackson:

Right, right, right.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

And I'm always so fascinated to hear why people have done this and what you hope to accomplish but what was it that originally was like, "Okay, it's time to do something really different."

Marla Isackson:

Thank you. I worked for Citibank when I was much, much younger for about seven and a half years and was able to rotate around and get a lot of experience marketing in financial services. It's a great company. I learned a lot.

But my goal was always to work for American Express. That was my vision. So, after seven and a half years I was fortunate enough to actually get a job at American Express and just P.S. I tried to ... I applied to every possible opening at American Express.

Most of what I was absolutely not qualified to do, but I was determined to get a job at American Express.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Good luck with that.

Marla Isackson:

Which I digged. I really admired the brand. That was very important to me. I liked what they stood for and I just saw the tremendous opportunity in growth and financial services.

So worked at American Express for 12 years, which was awesome. Sort of came up and with promotions. I was fortunate in my last position there to do some truly amazing things.

So, it was ... My area was foxed on the customer. How do you make the customer divert whatever they're spending on Visa and MasterCard to American Express. So, there are a lot of different programs that we ... they still have at the time, membership rewards is a very powerful engagement program.

And we also realized that looking at the array of the type of credit cards that were in the portfolio that we needed to do a few other things to attract younger audience. Read the research, realized that the audience was a little older and needed to bring the young guy up.

And that's when we decided to launch Blue from American Express, which was so much fun. And basically what we did was sat around my conference table, me and my team, and we looked at each other, "You know we need to create a product. We need to recreate a product for younger people. What have we got in house? What technology, what features and benefits, what can we call to craft together to make this pretty special?"

So we actually did. We talked to technology people, features and benefits. We thought it was really cool. And then a senior person on my team helped us understand about the new technology with the chip and all that was going on, which led us to creating a very innovative design for the American Express card for this particular card.

And I give him a lot of credit because he was just determined to make this happen and it was challenging for us technologically speaking. And we launched the product and it was a huge success. It was just an incredible amount to fund. I really, really loved it.

But that was sort of at the point when .com was starting to boom and again with my experience managing existing customers, we get a whole lot of segmentation work, which you need to do.

And I realized that we were not talking to the segment the way I really wanted to talk to them, which was women, young women specifically, to help them get going in their life.

So, it wasn't at that point that I started my own business, but that's when I sort of decided that I wanted to take a step in working at a .com. So I worked in WebMD for a while. Got that crazy experience of what it's like to do a major startup.

Then worked for Barnes & Noble. I love to read and it was very cool and I managed their engagement program, which are very similar to membership awards except it was for books and reading.

And I think at that point I realized, "Okay, I've sort of done a lot of this stuff. I've gotten a tremendous amount of experience in my corporate life and I've had a taste of the .com world. What can I do?"

My daughter is my muse and at the time she was a teenager and she'd sit around the kitchen table with her friends, they talk about stuff. But there really wasn't a whole lot of conversation at my kitchen table or even out there talking about women that are inspiring.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Right.

Marla Isackson:

Women that are doing great things, that are achieving. So at that point I started my first foray which is actually right before Like a Boss Girls which was called Heart of Gold. And that was targeted towards teen girls again, giving them information and resources to get started.

A lot of conversations with amazing women and amazing teen women doing super things just again to provide inspiration. That I did for a while and then realized well my daughter is not a teen anymore and I think that I want to grow with my population, which is why I started Like a Boss Girls, which at that time when we started was much more for the millennial group of women, those just starting out in their careers.

So that was the evolution. But what I like to think about my career, it's like a giant mosaic and every step I've taken is just adding to the mosaic. So I would not be where I am today if I hadn't had all those other experiences, the build on each other.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Yeah.

Marla Isackson:

So I'm grateful for my corporate experiences, they were incredible and I'm grateful for the experience I've had in building this startup as an entrepreneur. It's very different than working in a company, that's for sure.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Yeah.

Marla Isackson:

But I've enjoyed it.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Were you ... As you were going through your career, were you consciously aware of the need to evolve and pivot or were you taking advantage of opportunities that were put in your path? By that I mean at least in my own experience, and maybe I'm unusual in this regard, but when I hit a wall in my corporate job and realized I needed to pivot, I hadn't really anticipated it coming, which is a strange thing and I was very wrapped up in just the brand. It was such a part of my life. It was hard to imagine myself doing something else even though I knew that I could but I was wrapped up in the brand and vice versa.

And so that was one of the pieces for me that was hard, was sort of untangling that. What was your experience in terms of recognizing that you needed to pivot and then sort of dealing with what can be a lot of other psychological stuff that just goes along with the transition.

Marla Isackson:

Yeah I was terrified because when you work at a place like American Express, the brand is it.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Right, it's huge.

Marla Isackson:

So, there's such a connection with a brand, doing stuff for the brand, supporting the brand, you are the brand, you live and breath the brand. But after 12 years I too hit that wall. I just didn't see any other stuff I wanted to do there and it just ...

Also, the company was starting to change in a way that I couldn't change. So, I could not be, I think what they wanted me to be longterm. So the time was right. I left right after I started Blue. So I left at a real high note.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Yeah.

Marla Isackson:

Because that was just a really big accomplishment for me. The transition to okay, what am I going to do next was very scary and yes I had to think a lot about how do I untangle and move away from American Express because not only is it the brand, but it's the way of doing things. Focus on excellence and a whole bunch of other stuff that is just part of the corporate culture.

And when you're moving into an area that's entrepreneurial and startup, yeah, you can't always do that.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Right.

Marla Isackson:

It's like get it out there, try it, test, change, repeat. So, that was really challenging for me because I was used to having a huge staff, huge marketing budget, producing great stuff based on the needs of the corporation and now I was in this completely other world which was very alien to me and yeah it took some time for me to get going, to figure out what I wanted to do.

I think that's why I did the foray into WebMD. Yes it was a startup but it was also a company and then Barnes & Noble and then at that point I said, "Okay, I think I've disengaged. Now let me build my own brand. Now it's time." But it took a while.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Yeah.

Marla Isackson:

I totally get what you were just saying.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Yeah, well you touched on fear too, which is such a big one.

Marla Isackson:

Yeah, right?

Laura Cox Kaplan:

But you plowed through it. What was your toolkit or your strategy for dealing with it, right? You recognized that you feel afraid.

Marla Isackson:

Right.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

So what were you doing to help you get control of that or channel it in a positive way?

Marla Isackson:

So there are two things that always went through my head, which was kind of crazy. One is from that movie Apollo 13, 14, I forget.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Yeah, 13.

Marla Isackson:

Failure is not an option. And I was determined, I am not going to fail. Maybe I'll have to pivot, but I'm committed to this path, I'm going to do it and I'm going to figure out a way to get stuff done.

And the other thing, I just pulled such random stuff in my head. I remember going through the process, I remember reading a book to my kids, The Little Engine That Could.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Right.

Marla Isackson:

I think I can, I think I can, I know I can. And I sort of ... that resonated with me. I sort of was channeling that little with me. I sort of was channeling that little engine saying, "Okay, you have the experience, just get a little more self-confidence and go do it."

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Yeah. Was it an actual mantra that you said to yourself?

Marla Isackson:

Yeah, all the time.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Yeah.

Marla Isackson:

Failure is not an option. Failure is not an option.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

I think I can, I think I can, I know I can.

Marla Isackson:

I know I can. I know I can. And look, as a young kid I was always very stubborn or let's call it tenacious.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

There you go.

Marla Isackson:

That's a better word. And I think I just decided to take that attribute and just really claim it. I really wanted to succeed. It was not like I was casual about this, I was just determined. This was just something I had to do, I wanted to do it, I made the decision to do it. I didn't know how I was going to do it, believe me.

And did I experience imposter syndrome? Yes, every day. Of course I did. But through it all I just said, "Okay, you know what? I can figure it out."

The other sort of mantra, and I actually really like this. There's a digital marketing guru, her name is Marie Forleo. And her quote which sticks with me every day is everything is figureoutable. Which, means we're not curing cancer. There's a way to work through stuff.

So that really helps me from a mindset perspective. When we hit crises and walls and oh my gosh the technology doesn't work, calm down everybody, let's problem solve, let's work it through.

So I think that process honestly has a lot to do with just having a whole lot of years of experience just knowing that fixing stuff is possible. I'm also really ... What's also very important to me is pulling a team together and I'm only as good as my team.

So I pick team members with complementary skills to help me do stuff I have no idea how to do and I will never know how to do. I don't know how to code, I wish I did but I don't. So getting technology people in.

I can write very well from a business perspective, but I'm not a creative writer. So, I looked for an editor-in-chief, Meredith Reed who's just amazing, who actually can write, can write really well in an engaging way. So, that's sort of how everything evolved.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Yeah, yeah. You mentioned earlier, you've talked about so many things. I'm trying to figure out where we're going to drill in.

Marla Isackson:

Sorry.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

No, no, no. Don't be. No, no, don't be.

Marla Isackson:

Okay.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

I love it, I love it. One of the things that I wanted you to talk about though relates to community and how this concept of building a community and building a brand I feel like has evolved so dramatically so that especially for people that are starting podcasts, but for anybody who is trying to create a business or build a brand you're building community and a connection with an audience.

Marla Isackson:

Right.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

And your background in marketing is so important and so on point but things have changed a lot as it relates to community.

Marla Isackson:

Yeah.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Right? Maybe talk a little bit about what you see and some advice that you share with people that are starting businesses or women who are starting podcasts about really finding and connecting with your tribe or your community, if you will.

Marla Isackson:

So, there are actually two levels of community when we talk to our podcasters. So, what we advise first of all is find your tribe in terms of other podcasters with similar interests.

There is so many amazing networking organizations out there. I belong to some of them. I've created little masterminds with friends and that really, these are very important elements in a woman's career. It helps just to build confidence, to learn new things, to engage.

So, that's sort of what I did first and I did that for a whole number of years which was what let me find a community where I can learn and grow and connect and feel supported and not feel like a failure. So, that's a big thing.

There are a lot of communities out there that do a great job. But we also talked to podcasters about finding their own community which is a community made consisting of their listener, right, because if you're serious about your podcast, you want to grow your show.

So, we talk a lot about well how are you going to grow your show? Well you need to know who you're talking to. So, this then get into the whole conversation about knowing your avatar, which is your ideal woman. In fact, I'm giving a presentation on Friday just about this topic and I talk about creating Mary who's an avatar, a potential avatar or a theoretical avatar. Mary is married with two kids. Her husband is married too. She's got a big job. She just had a baby. She's feeling fat. She's worried about their health and wellness.

So building all these things out is super helpful because you're actually starting to understand who do I want to talk to with my podcast and therefore, who are the other Marys out there.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Right.

Marla Isackson:

How do I find more Marys because I want them to be part of my community because they're going to add value and a richness in terms of whatever community activities that you may do with your audience. It's also the way to grow your show.

Podcasters who say, "Yeah, I want to do a mom podcast." Great, that's useless. Okay? Get more targeted.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Right.

Marla Isackson:

Because if you're not more targeted, you're not going to find your listeners, you're not going to build your community. So I would say I'm talking about community in two different ways, which is a lot of fun.

But the lifecycle of a community is very similar, which is identify people and engage with them, and then the nurture cycle and then the retention cycle. So, there are definitely different cycles of community I think people have to be mindful of especially when they're building a community for their business because it's about acquiring a listener or a customer, getting them to be your biggest fan, and your biggest fan ambassador and then making sure they don't go away.

So that piece is important but I would not be as successful or where I am today without the communities that I joined. They help me a lot. They really do. So hopefully I answered your question.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

You did. You totally did. And you sparked a couple of others. I'm curious if the avatar tends to be the piece, sort of, mistake is the wrong word but maybe missed opportunity that you see with a lot of your community and launching these businesses.

Is it missing the definition of that avatar and why that's important or is it something else? What's the biggest maybe missed opportunity or mistake that you see the women in your community make or maybe not take advantage of?

Marla Isackson:

Yeah. I mean I wouldn't say mistakes so much but it's like an evolution of knowledge.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Yeah, yeah.

Marla Isackson:

Because when you start a podcast for the most part people don't know what they're doing, which is cool, but they think it's a great communication tool, they're very excited about it, but maybe what they don't do is take a step back and think strategically about, "Okay, what do I want to do with this podcast?"

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Right.

Marla Isackson:

"Who is it for? How am I going to find more listeners? What's really my objective? Do I want to build a community? Why? It's a lot of work but what am I going to get from it?"

So I think what I would say is there are women who start podcasts that are niche and they're hobbyists and that's awesome. They love to talk about it, they like to engage with other people.

But I also think that if you're really interested in leveraging your podcast to either grow as a business or help amplify your other business, you need to take a very strategic approach. So I think that's maybe what is missing sometimes, is taking a step back and just figuring out, what am I doing, how am I doing it, why am I doing it, and just being a little bit more deliberate because if you don't do that, you don't miss opportunities.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Right, right. It's interesting. I certainly had a vision for what I wanted She Said/She Said to be. But it's taken me three years to really figure out who my community is and just to think about this platform in a more strategic way.

It wasn't that it wasn't strategic, but frankly we didn't spend a ton of time developing a strategy around it.

Marla Isackson:

Right.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

We launched it and said, "Hey, let's give this a try. Here are some topics we want to talk about."

Marla Isackson:

Right.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

And that's what we did and we kind of used the on-the-ground-experience, the in-the-moment experience to begin to build a strategy, which I suspect you would tell people that's a horrible idea.

Marla Isackson:

No, no, no because it worked for you. I think another thing is just understand your own personal style.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Right.

Marla Isackson:

Because what you're talking about is getting something out there and testing it and seeing if it's going to work and then evolve it. Now that's a core fact of what you need to do in marketing.

So taking that approach there is nothing wrong with it but you did have some sense of what you wanted to do, right? You did.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Yeah.

Marla Isackson:

So you started with your premise and then you decided to do a lot of testing and refining. So that's a way of building a strategy as well.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Yeah.

Marla Isackson:

There's nothing wrong with what you did, it's awesome.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Well you're nice to say that. I suspect I would have saved a lot of time if I had known you before I actually launched this.

Marla Isackson:

Right.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

And it begs another question, have you thought about with Ossa, really tapping into the people who are thinking about starting podcasts but haven't and getting them on the front end so that they develop strategies and sort of have more of a strategic approach before they even sit down in front of the microphone?

Marla Isackson:

This is perfect. I'm so glad you're asking this question because we are offering in the summer a program called Ossa Academy, which is a free seven-week accelerator program.

And each week we'll be focusing on a topic that's super important in terms of building your podcast. The sessions will be led by industry leaders. So we're tapping into all of our friends and basically

this program is for those women who maybe started a podcast, maybe it's not quite percolating the way they want or they're thinking about starting a podcast and our hope is, great, come to Ossa Academy and we're going to give you some things to think about that will help you hopefully create your strategy so that you can make a good decision and then start to build it in a far full way.

So, thank you for asking me that question but Ossa yeah we're going to start to go public with it pretty soon. We're just working on the details. I'll be promoting it pretty quickly. But yeah, that's meant to bring new women into the fold.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Yeah, that's great. That's really great. There's a lot of different elements to what you're doing and all of it requires a lot of creativity. How do you spark your own creativity? How do you go through the ideation process, if you will. What do you do to kind of keep your knowledge and your creativity fresh?

Marla Isackson:

So, a whole bunch of things. I'm a research geek and I try to get my hands on any possible piece of research I can. Again, I don't work for a big company, so I can't buy the really expensive studies but there are a whole lot of studies out there about podcasting. Edison does a great one, the Infinite Dial for example.

And getting that research and reading it does help spark ideas for me because basically the research is showing sort of trends. But also if you read it carefully you can look at potentially opportunities.

So research is important. Having conversations ... Again, my team complementary. So when I get a piece of research, I push it out to everybody. We talk about it, and that conversation also sparks creativity and discovery.

And the other thing it's just what I'm trying to do is be a lot more mindful of the process of creativity. That's a big thing for me.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Right.

Marla Isackson:

Which is just settle down, either take a walk or I'm creative in the shower or. But be with yourself because I know I am, everyone is bombarded with so much stuff every day, it's really important to just quiet down and synthesize what you're hearing. And then try to see if there are any themes are popping.

So I don't think there's real magic but I do think ... I actually do think it's framing your thinking as to there are a whole lot of possibilities out there.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Yeah. I suspect you're a lot like me. I know how much you love your own podcast and the research that goes into it and you're probably like me, you get a lot of ideas and inspiration and creative sparks, if you will, through those conversations and through the research leading up to the conversation.

Marla Isackson:

Absolutely.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

So, I always find that I am really inspired not just by what the person says even though that's typically inspiring too, but also it sparks ideas in ways of thinking about the world and ways of thinking about a particular challenge.

Marla Isackson:

Absolutely.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Or any number of things.

Marla Isackson:

So yes. Speaking to really interesting women, that's been amazing and again it does spark a whole lot of ideas. So I agree with you. Really listening to our community and what are their needs and what are their issues, we've gotten a whole lot of great insights.

And that's led us to build some features that we're super proud of based on what the community is telling us. So, that's really important, which is ask your community. Don't just do stuff because you think it's cool. You have to make sure that you're creating with your end consumer in mind. Otherwise you're going to waste your time.

So we take input from our community. I take input and distill information when I do my podcast. I look at the research, I talk to my team. I talk to my friends, my informal advisory board. That's another cool thing to do, which is take a step back and assemble a group of people that have been super supportive to you and they can become your sounding board.

People who are interested in what you're doing in your business and basically it's like a pseudo advisory board.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Right.

Marla Isackson:

So you're able to and you have permission to go to them and say, "Hey I'm thinking of doing this. What do you think?" Or, "Have you heard anything, any new ideas about whatever? Great, let me hear about it and let me distill it."

Because as one individual you can't do it all, you just don't. And I get ideas when I spark. It's like sparking off of people and I also made the decision to talk to a whole lot of industry people. Like I call it making friends.

Well I learn a lot from them and then that sparks interesting ideas.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

And you're building your network at the same time.

Marla Isackson:

Right. So I think when you get into this mindset, what I do which my team sometimes is like they're ready to kill me, is come up with too many ideas. So, you have to be able to take what the ideas you've assembled and distill down and prioritize. That's an important part as well. Otherwise you're just going to kill yourself or just make ... create a very unhappy team.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Yeah, absolutely. Let's talk just for a second before I let you go, about the impact that you hope you will have had with Ossa.

Marla Isackson:

Thank you. I really believe in this platform of podcasting. And there are so many women out there who don't have a way to articulate what's on their mind and what issues they're experiencing. So, I really want to push Ossa out because we want to encourage these women who want to, to take a stand and to use this very cool medium to communicate and talk about issues, raise issues that are important to them.

And look, it is challenging. We know that there are areas in the world that they are very underserved from a technology perspectives. So that's a little challenging. But I think overall it's a pretty low barrier to entry podcasting. You need a microphone and a headset and a computer.

Not to say that's inexpensive but you don't need a fancy studio and and a whole lot of other things. So, my hope is to give women the confidence and the skillset to be able to raise their hand and say, "I have something important to say. I want to share it with the world."

And the more I can do that, the happier I will be and the more I think I will feel that we fulfilled our mission.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Yeah, I love that. I love that.

Marla Isackson:

Thank you.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Marla, it's such a pleasure to be with you today. Thank you so much for joining me.

Marla Isackson:

Thank you. It's a little weird being on the other side of the microphone but I really had a good time. Thank you Laura, this was super fun for me.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

I'm so glad. Hey friend, thanks so much for joining us again today. You'll find more information about Ossa and my fabulous guest Marla Isackson in the show notes for this episode.

This transcript was exported on Apr 08, 2021 - view latest version [here](#).

I've also included a link to an earlier conversation that I taped with Marla for her podcast, Mind of a Mentor. Be sure to check that out as well. Mind of a Mentor is a fantastic podcast and I think very complementary to a lot of the topics that we talk about on She Said/She Said.

Now before I let you go, I need your help. If you're enjoying She Said/She Said podcast, I would love to hear from you and there are several ways that you can contact me and send us some feedback.

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Those comments help others who are looking for podcasts like this one to find it. And I also love hearing from you. You can also direct message me on Instagram @LauraCoxKaplan or @SheSaid/SheSaidpodcast.

And finally, you can use the contact list at the SheSaid/SheSaidPodcast.com website to send me a message as well.

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Friends, most of all I am so grateful that you've chosen to spend some time with us today. I hope you found this little investment in you well worth it. I'll see you next time. Until then, take care.