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**SHOW: SHE SAID/SHE SAID PODCAST WITH LAURA COX KAPLAN**

**GUEST: MORGAN HUTCHINSON, FOUNDER, BURU**

**EPISODE: 193**

**TITLE: Why TRUST is essential for building connection with your customer, and the impact it has on your INFLUENCE!**

**POST DATE: 2022.05.08**

**SHOW OPEN:**

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Building influence is something anyone can learn. It's an investment you can make in yourself and it can hold the keys to achieving your dreams and having the life and impact you want to have. I'm Laura Cox Kaplan. I've learned a lot over three decades about building and sustaining influence and how using it and using it effectively can make a big, big difference in your life and career. Here on She Said / She Said podcast, we're digging into the different dimensions that help us build and sustain influence. If you thought being an influencer was just for social media, think again. Whether you're starting a business, raising money for a cause, negotiating a promotion, running your household, or trying to connect with those who don't share your views, understanding and using the different dimensions of influence will increase your chances, success, whatever your goals may be. Listening to She Said / She Said podcast is a smart, efficient investment you can make in you. I'm really glad you're here and I'm excited we're on this journey together.

**EPISODE OPEN:**

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Hey Friend,

Welcome to SHE SAID/SHE SAID PODCAST .

I'm really glad you're here. And if you are celebrating, or being celebrated today on MOTHER'S DAY, or reflecting on how your mom or the women in your life have had an impact on you, I hope your day and your week are extra special.

I also want to give a big warm shout out to my own mom, Sharolyn. Happy mother's day Mom. Thank you for being a constant source of encouragement to me from day one. I love you.

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This week's conversation gives us another great dimension related to both INFLUENCE AND BRAND, and specifically the importance of TRUST. And, the importance of establishing trust with your customer, your client, your audience -- whomever you are trying to connect with or sell to.

I love that this conversation comes right after our conversation with fashion executive and entrepreneur Sandra Campos in episode 192. Both of these episodes continue our collaboration series with The Southern Coterie. If you missed any part of this collaboration, I hope you'll go back and listen. We've featured some amazing women who are part of the Southern C network. They've included: fashion designer Lela Rose, business coach Sallie Holder, designer mignonne gavigan, Red Clay hot sauce CEO Molly Fienning, Partake Food CEO Denise Woodard, and Sandra Campos who I mentioned.

Today, for the final episode in our series, we're joined by Morgan Hutchinson. Morgan is the founder and chief designer of BURU. You'll find her on Instagram @ShopBuru . BURU is a women's clothing line made primarily in her factory in Los Angeles, CA. Together with her cofounder, business and life partner -- her husband Brett -- they have built a brand that I'm personally a huge fan of.

When I recommend things on this podcast, it's always because I've tried them or have had some experience with them, and think you'll find value in either the products or the women who produce them, and find value from their story and perspective. Morgan Hutchinson certainly falls in that category. I've been so excited to share this episode today!

While Morgan's clothes and especially her fabrics are really wonderful, it's the thoughtful approach to creating something that is both very unique and that fills an important need that sets her apart.

As a mother of three young kids, Morgan's path into motherhood actually provided her the initial inspiration for the BURU brand. In fact, breastfeeding -- specifically -- inspired the initial designs, but she's continued to evolve the brand as her life and motherhood journey have evolved. I'm certainly grateful for that, as I'm well past the breastfeeding stage myself, as I know many of you are as well.

I often share some of my own favorite Buru pieces on my Instagram @lauracoxkaplan -- so be sure to follow along.

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Morgan focuses on establishing a high level of trust with her customer. You see that in her marketing efforts, especially on Instagram and on her blog, and you'll feel that in today's conversation. There's also a level of vulnerability she shares with her customer and that she shares with me and ultimately with you as you listen.

In today's conversation we talk about what creating that level of trust with her customer looks like from Morgan's perspective. We talk about how her past entrepreneurship efforts informed the way she and Brett created BURU. We talk about the considerations for funding her business and why the choice she and Brett made to bootstrap has been an important factor for balancing family, work and life. It's a really fascinating part of the conversation and if you are trying to build a business like Morgan's you won't want to miss that.

One of the most important elements of today's conversation focuses on mental health, and Morgan's struggle with bipolar disorder.

May is Mental health awareness month. And it's an important time to pause and think about how we can increase our collective understanding of mental health.

Morgan is incredibly candid in our conversation and it further underscores how she builds that level of trust with her customer, and also how strongly she feels about the importance of sharing her story to not only help give others who are struggling hope, but also to help change the stigma associated with mental illness. I'm grateful that Morgan opened up about her struggles today. She felt strongly about sharing this part of her journey and story to help others who may be listening.

One thing that experts say is particularly important related to the conversation about mental health is just that --- conversation, awareness, transparency, sunlight. And I can't think of a more thoughtful person to share her incredible journey.

Here is my conversation with BURU founder Morgan Hutchinson....

#### **EPISODE CONVERSATION:**

Laura Cox Kaplan ([00:08:44](#)):

Morgan, welcome to She Said/She Said.

Morgan Hutchinson ([00:08:53](#)):

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Well, thank you. I am so honored and thrilled to be here and chat with you today.

Laura Cox Kaplan ([00:08:58](#)):

Well, I'm so happy to have you. And as I mentioned before we started recording, I have become almost a cult follower of the brand, and of you. You're an amazing representative of what you're trying to bring to life with this brand. So, I'd love for you to talk a bit about what is BURU.

Morgan Hutchinson ([00:09:19](#)):

BURU, we're a women's clothing brand, we're based in downtown Los Angeles. The inspiration behind our company, and you'll hear in this chat we're going to have, we've had several evolutions. But the inspiration of it was me myself becoming a mother, I was 32 when I had our first, I'm a mom of three now, ranging from two to nine in their ages. And when I first had Olive, she's our oldest, I realized how quickly my fashion needs shifted, but also how quickly I felt left behind in the fashion world. It seemed overnight that shopping in-person was harder, obviously I had giant strollers, and with your first you carry way too much equipment. You really only need a diaper and a pack of wipes, and you can hang out. You don't know that your first time around.

Morgan Hutchinson ([00:10:17](#)):

And I also realized no-one had talked about the needs of breastfeeding in particular. So, we were living in China for eight months of my pregnancy with Olive, we moved back to the United States just before she was born. So, the name BURU actually means to breastfeed in Mandarin. Now, we are big believers in supporting moms no matter how they feed their children, and actually we have a lot of customers who are not mothers at all. But the inspo was my journey into motherhood, and new needs that I found. And so when we first started, the concept was to create a marketplace, actually, for mothers to feel that we were curating collections of fashion and accessories that worked in their lives. So easy access to nurse, washable, elastic waist pockets.

Morgan Hutchinson ([00:11:09](#)):

And we did that by carrying other ready-to-wear brands from designers we all know and love. And through a few years of that, we sort of learned that it was just more challenging. Wholesale was becoming more challenging, we'd expanded into about 40 different brands. We were struggling to keep up with chasing sales. Some of the dresses that started at 300 were all of a sudden \$695, \$795, and we realized pretty quickly that element of it was an issue. The other element was my husband, who's also my business partner, shared that our gross profit margin was 10%, which if you've never had a business with product, that's terrible.

Laura Cox Kaplan ([00:11:57](#)):

Not really sustainable, is it?

Morgan Hutchinson ([00:11:59](#)):

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Not sustainable at all. In fact, just basically a giant slope down into failure. And with that, we realized we needed to make a shift. But we knew we were onto something, because we were gaining a following of women who really wanted to see how I was styling things, and see how I was living my life as me while also being a mom.

Laura Cox Kaplan ([00:12:23](#)):

Yeah. Take us a little bit deeper into the journey of evolving the company from a marketplace into a brand where you are the primary, or exclusive designer at this point, right?

Morgan Hutchinson ([00:12:36](#)):

Yes.

Laura Cox Kaplan ([00:12:37](#)):

You're the primary designer, yes?

Morgan Hutchinson ([00:12:39](#)):

100%, and I often refer to myself as an accidental designer. I was an interior design major, so I've always loved design and textiles, I'm still very textile-driven. But when he told me that number, and we realized, "Okay, we have something here. How do we make it a sustainable business?" That's when we decided we needed to be a brand. Because what we had discovered was, even though we had these amazing pieces from Love Shack Fancy, and Rachel Comey and Ulla Johnson, we couldn't brand ourselves, and Shopbop was always going to have a friends and family sale to price us out. So we decided, "Let's design a 12-piece capsule, and see if people will buy BURU. Let's find that white space of a price point." We really felt like we were missing that hundred to \$300 range where you feel special, but it's still exclusive and attainable.

Morgan Hutchinson ([00:13:37](#)):

And so while I was pregnant with number two, Schafer, he's our middle, I designed 12-piece capsule. And we gathered an amazing group of women in Charleston, and we did this fun photo shoot in a playground with children all around. And it was super successful, and we sold out. And we said, "Okay, this is it. How do we get from this teeny point A to the next B?" And for us, that was to pack up and move our family. We were actually living in Salt Lake City at the time, we had gone there for an opportunity for my husband which was not a fit. And we packed up, moved to Los Angeles, started increasing the designs, the collection. And then eventually, we've built a factory here. So we are now-

Laura Cox Kaplan ([00:14:29](#)):

Wow.

Morgan Hutchinson ([00:14:29](#)):

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... 50% domestic production in our own factory, and 50% still overseas at a small factory in southern China. It's family-owned and amazing, and we've been there several times. So, we really do care how it's made, but we do like to continue to offer two different price points for our amazing customers.

Laura Cox Kaplan ([00:14:49](#)):

Yeah. Well, your brand is so interesting to me, because when I first became familiar with it, which is not that long ago, maybe six months or so ago. And I've ordered a number of different pieces. Now, these are pieces that maybe were designed for a nursing mom. One in particular, it was very funny, I bought the black turtleneck dress, which is so cute. And it's long, and it has a ruffle at the bottom, and you can wear it belted, or you can wear it loose. But as I was pulling it out and I put it on for the first time I was like, "Wow, there's zippers on both sides, and [inaudible 00:15:31] and up the back." So it zips up the back and there's zippers on both sides. And I'm like, "What the hell are all these zippers?"

Laura Cox Kaplan ([00:15:31](#)):

And then it occurred to me that I was probably not the demographic. However, it's a great-looking dress, and it's very forgiving, and you can wear it with lots of different things. And so, it's sort of a long-winded story to illustrate the fact that your designs work for women of all ages.

Morgan Hutchinson ([00:15:53](#)):

All ages, all phases of life. And I'm always telling people that we're a fashion first, function surprise, which obviously that was very true in your case. But I find that I want a design... I want to wear pieces that I love, and having nursed three children and been pregnant collectively for seven years of my life, I do feel I have a lot of firsthand experience that I'll never forget, even as I age out of some of these needs. I find that there are so many beautiful styles that actually work for your body as a mom, but don't work for all the phases. Some of our best customers are second-time moms actually, because they know the drill, they know exactly what they need. But they don't want to look like they're in maternity clothes or nursing clothes, that was the whole issue for me.

Morgan Hutchinson ([00:16:44](#)):

And really we're not maternity, I'd say one of our biggest struggles when I say that I design for moms is that people immediately think maternity. And I know you're a mother, think how short the maternity phase is compared to motherhood, it lasts forever. And our bodies continue to change, I mean, this is a very honest thing I'm going to admit. I'm about to be 42, and I'm starting... I don't know what it's called, peri... I'm going to.

Laura Cox Kaplan ([00:17:13](#)):

Perimenopause, oh yeah. Oh, honey.

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Morgan Hutchinson ([00:17:16](#)):

Yeah, yeah. I mean, I don't know if this is okay to share on this, but-

Laura Cox Kaplan ([00:17:20](#)):

Of course it is.

Morgan Hutchinson ([00:17:20](#)):

... I know it's women listeners. But, I mean, my cycles are coming much faster, and I'm hot all the time. And I just was not prepared for that to happen, I've been doing a lot of reading about it. But I think we do a lot of cottons, we do a lot of pieces you can layer and take off, lightweight jackets. And so I'm finding that even though I have finally phased out of the nursing phase, all of these styles are working for me in new phases of life and motherhood that I'm going through. And that was the intention all along, was to offer generational dressing and to buy investment pieces, things that are in your closet and work for you throughout this journey of motherhood and womanhood.

Laura Cox Kaplan ([00:18:02](#)):

Yeah. One of the things that I think surprises me the most about the brand is the fact that the fabrics are amazing, they really are amazing. And yet, the price point for the most part is pretty low, and you do have different price points. But for the most part, it's very reasonable, very pocket book-friendly. And yet the fabrics are really, really outstanding. And so it's kind of an amazing balance that you've struck here, and it's... You're doing limited quantities of things, so for those listening who may be looking for something interesting that you see on Instagram, you'd better hurry because you'll miss your opportunity, right?

Morgan Hutchinson ([00:18:41](#)):

Yes.

Laura Cox Kaplan ([00:18:41](#)):

Maybe talk a little bit about the philosophy behind having a limited run of pieces.

Morgan Hutchinson ([00:18:53](#)):

Yes. For our domestic production that we do in our factory, we do a lot of repeat silhouettes in different textiles. As I mentioned earlier, I think my interiors background made me so textile-driven. But one of the main reasons that we wanted to start the factory here was to create more responsible manufacturing. So we don't use the word sustainable, because it's a pretty loose word, and it's not actually that well-defined, to be honest. So, we say responsible, because we use dead stock fabric, so those are existing fabrics for our domestic production. So, we're not adding, we're not using more energy to create more fabric. We're finding things that have been ultimately left behind by designers, and in some cases are truly vintage fabrics.

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Laura Cox Kaplan ([00:19:41](#)):

I love that.

Morgan Hutchinson ([00:19:41](#)):

They've reached an age period where you could call them that. And because of that strategy... So, not only is it responsible in terms of the environment and just trying to help the fashion cycle, which is rough, as we know, with fast fashion, and the amount of returns that just get dumped in dumpsters from those fast fashion companies. So, it's responsible, but also because it's dead stock you can buy them at a better price. So what a designer once paid for that fabric to have it custom-made for them, or a company, we can now buy that at a fraction of the price. Which allows us to offer these beautiful, tailored shirt dresses in incredible fabrics at half the price that you might see something similar. And also, we are direct-to-consumer. The only wholesale accounts that we do are when we do an exclusive for someone.

Morgan Hutchinson ([00:20:38](#)):

We don't want you to ever see the same BURU piece on our site as you would see, say, on the Sill, or the Avenue, we have some new partners coming up. Because that was one of the things that we thought was so broken when we were a marketplace ourselves, was that competition. And it works for other people, obviously because I mentioned earlier we couldn't find a way to make it work, so we shifted gears. But that's how we keep that price down, is really those two things. And then additionally, having the factory ourselves. So, we've eliminated the middle man there. We don't have a contract manufacturer that's also taking a mark up on it, it is truly... They're our full-time employees. And so, that eliminates that charge up.

Morgan Hutchinson ([00:21:26](#)):

We can charge [[crosstalk 00:21:27](#)] exactly for their time, versus it being charged for their time, and then doubled so that the owner of the factory makes even more. So, that's another way.

Laura Cox Kaplan ([00:21:35](#)):

Yeah. And this is a business that you and your husband have largely bootstrapped, correct?

Morgan Hutchinson ([00:21:42](#)):

100% bootstrapped.

Laura Cox Kaplan ([00:21:44](#)):

Wow.

Morgan Hutchinson ([00:21:44](#)):

We've not taken outside money. We own it 51% me, 49% him. So, it is female-majority.

Laura Cox Kaplan ([00:21:54](#)):

Love that.

Morgan Hutchinson ([00:21:54](#)):

And we are also female, really heavy in female employees. Though our head of production is a man, and also our cutter, and sample maker... I'm sorry, pattern maker are men. But the rest of the team, other than Brett, is female.

Laura Cox Kaplan ([00:22:11](#)):

That's awesome, I love that, I absolutely love that. Maybe talk a bit about just quickly why you made that determination, why that was important for you guys to bootstrap versus going out and getting private funding.

Morgan Hutchinson ([00:22:24](#)):

Absolutely. My husband actually comes from private equity, he spent his career in finance, which is very helpful. And I just want to side bar for any female starting their own business, I'm not a dummy when it comes to business, but it is not my expertise. I think it's one reason, just one of the reasons we're a great team. But, you have to find somebody who can do that for you, and guide you. Because it is every bit as important as your idea, your talents. They are literally hand in hand, and I just want to make sure I get that in there. Because he has been the reason that we could bootstrap, he's so creative with how we use our money, which buckets it goes into, and how we scramble and make all of that work at times when you have huge inventory buys.

Morgan Hutchinson ([00:23:17](#)):

I was texting with a friend this morning who has a business, and it's a little younger than ours but she's doing so amazing. But, she was asking me some questions, and I just mentioned that we... Because our domestic production is through payroll and our overseas production is cash payment, we cannot use any credit for our inventory. And she just responded with, "Oh my God, this is terrifying." And it really can be, because there are huge swings. So, you have to be prepared, and he was... We bootstrapped, we do not come from money. I know that's a weird thing to say, but I think in fashion if you do a lot of digging, you'll find some of these brands come... There's a lot of trust funds, which is amazing and great.

Morgan Hutchinson ([00:24:04](#)):

I just say it to be an encouragement to someone who maybe doesn't have a trust fund, that it can be done. But you have to be scrappy, I mean, we still do a ton of our own photo shoots, we're very hands-on, we outsource when we absolutely have to, and we are slow to hire. We push that limit a lot. At the Southern C someone said, "So, who's your social media director?" And I really found myself almost being embarrassed to say like, "We don't have one," which I think actually is bizarre at our size, and it's something that we're working on. But for us, the

production side has so been the focus, and getting product perfect that... I guess what I'm saying is when you bootstrap you can't do everything at once, and you have to set those expectations for yourself that it could be slower.

Morgan Hutchinson ([00:24:57](#)):

But in the end, you have control of not just your business, but of your life. And that was so important for us, we want our kids to be with us, we want our kids to be involved. And if you're answering to investors who want you to grow 100X in five days because they want their payout, some of those things are really impossible. And we get this one life, and so for us the bootstrapping was for that very reason. Now, there have been some really hard days, and tears, and there's lots of stress, and we feel the weight of the world on our shoulders a lot. But you would if it was an investor's money also. So, the way I look at that is, that pressure is there. But, when you just answer to each other, and to your family, it just...

Morgan Hutchinson ([00:25:54](#)):

It opens up your life to really be your own, and that is sustainable to me. One of my favorite quotes is that entrepreneurs don't fail, they quit, or give up. And I think if I was answering to investors all the time, and if so much of our life was spent showing them financials and all of those things, I think I would burn out. I just know myself well enough, so [crosstalk 00:26:21].

Laura Cox Kaplan ([00:26:21](#)):

I love that. Yeah, I love that perspective. I think it's so... I mean, you're so honest in the way that you talk about that, and I think it's really important for people to understand that piece of your story and that piece of your journey. There were many questions that I had that popped into my head. But first, I'd love for you to talk about where that scrappiness comes from, where does that instinct to take risk even if it's hard, and even if you're crying, and even if you have to curl up in a ball occasionally to just get through it. Where does that appetite for risk come from for you, do you think?

Morgan Hutchinson ([00:27:00](#)):

It's so interesting you ask this, and my mom and I have talked about it because she is incredibly risk-averse. And so, the scrappiness, I do attribute some to growing up in a really small town where resources were slim pickings, and you had to be creative and resourceful to get things done.

Laura Cox Kaplan ([00:27:22](#)):

Where did you grow up, Morgan?

Morgan Hutchinson ([00:27:23](#)):

I grew up in Murray, Kentucky. There is a university there, I didn't go to school there. But it's a neat town, but it is in the middle of nowhere. It's two hours away from an airport, it's not on an

interstate. It was an hour just to where there would have been a mall, not that I can actually imagine shopping in a mall lately. But I mean, when I was little that was a big deal.

Laura Cox Kaplan ([00:27:48](#)):

I grew up in a very similar environment, probably even smaller than when you grew up. I grew up in a place called Rising Star, which is in Texas. But it was also an hour from the mall, 30 minutes from the Walmart or the big grocery store, all those sorts of things. So I completely relate to your story.

Morgan Hutchinson ([00:28:07](#)):

Yes, that is even smaller, that is even smaller. But so, I think that that helped to make me scrappy, you just couldn't go and grab things. And also growing up pre-internet makes you a little... That helps develop some scrappy skills. I think the risk really comes into play, if I'm just being 100% honest, in the moments in my life when people expected very little of me. Now, I'm not going to speak to my mother, she always encouraged, pushed, and was amazing in giving me that confidence to just spread my wings and fly. Though, I think she wishes that we still lived in Murray with our kids. But I think I had male math teachers who said to my mom, "I don't know why she signed up for honors math, she should just be a cute cheerleader."

Morgan Hutchinson ([00:29:03](#)):

And those things, as silly as they sound, when you're being told that in the 7th and 8th grade, they stick with you. And I am very much a person who just in my course says, "Oh, I'll show you, buddy. Watch me ace calculus." Even though I didn't really want to, it was more of a in spite of you, I will do this.

Laura Cox Kaplan ([00:29:26](#)):

I love that.

Morgan Hutchinson ([00:29:27](#)):

And I think there's always been a little bit of that in me, and I think some of that small town girl wanting to see if you could keep up with city kids, and experience life differently than what you had seen, and just wanting more for myself, really wanting to go out there and do it. My mom tells stories about me asking, like I always asked for custom business supplies for Christmas, like letterhead stamps with the date. I mean, what a weird... She would just go to the local office supply store and order me all this weird stuff I wanted, files. And so some of that I think is just innate in you, I just wanted a business. And it took me a while, in my '20s I had a lingerie company with my two best friends, which was primarily wholesale-driven. Direct-to-consumer was just being discussed sort of at the tail end of our experience. And I mean, I think business ownership and entrepreneurialism has just always been at my core.

Laura Cox Kaplan ([00:30:37](#)):

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I love that. Let's talk a little bit about... You're talking about your earlier business, which was called Passport Panties, right?

Morgan Hutchinson ([00:30:45](#)):

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Laura Cox Kaplan ([00:30:45](#)):

Maybe talk a bit about how that came to be, and also how the experience has informed in some respects your experience at BURU.

Morgan Hutchinson ([00:30:56](#)):

Oh my goodness, 100%. I think that you should, whatever your experience is in life, be jotting down all of the things. Whether you're in paper, you're making mental notes, what I learned with Passport Panties I think has made BURU possible. It's helped us to grow, and know when those... See those roadblocks ahead of time. Passport Panties started on a cocktail napkin at the Carlisle Hotel, which is interesting because I also met my husband at the Carlisle, and our baby is named Carlisle. So, special place for me. But with my two best friends, like I said, who also grew up across the street from me in Murray, Kentucky, who are very scrappy and amazing. And they live in Houston now, they're identical twins, and have an incredible company called Bada Boom, that I'll send you to later because-

Laura Cox Kaplan ([00:31:49](#)):

Please, yeah.

Morgan Hutchinson ([00:31:50](#)):

... it's incredible, and you'll be a huge fan as well. But we were in our '20s, living in New York, and I guess I'm going to bring up my period again, which is not something I talk about on a daily basis. But, that day we had been shopping in Soho, and I got my period. There used to be no bathrooms down there, you had to go and buy a Coke from someone to let them use the bathroom. And I thought, "Gosh, I wish I would just had a spare pair of panties, I would have gone into a dressing room while I was trying on, and freshened up." And so we created these little travel kits that were beautiful panties packaged into chic, bow-croc passport covers, and they had a little towelette in there so you could freshen up if your luggage got lost.

Morgan Hutchinson ([00:32:38](#)):

It was something to keep in your purse for girls on the go. And we had early write ups in Women's Wear Daily, which helped get us into Henri Bendel's and Bergdorf and Neiman Marcus eventually, and it was like I said completely wholesale. We dressed as vintage flight attendants, the sizes were window, middle and aisle, covers were beverages you would be served in first class. It was very marketing, heavy marketing-driven, such a fun product. And then ultimately, like I said, it was this wholesale market. When 2008 hit, and the financial crisis was happening,

and those stores were struggling, we saw the foot traffic at these markets go from jammed to like crickets. We knew we needed to make a shift, and we started making a shift into shape wear, which I'll say to this day some of the prettiest shape wear I've ever seen.

Morgan Hutchinson ([00:33:34](#)):

But our manufacturing partner, who was based in Thailand and actually bought 25% of the company, really was struggling with the financial crisis as well. He was feeling so many of his brands, their orders had gone down. And he just lost a little bit of traction, a little bit of faith in us when we were saying... We had a purchase order from QVC, which would have changed the game.

Laura Cox Kaplan ([00:34:00](#)):

Wow, [crosstalk 00:34:00].

Morgan Hutchinson ([00:34:00](#)):

And they ask for this... It's amazing when you work with QVC what goes into it, and what's required of you after the purchase order. And he couldn't get all the samples done that they wanted, they have to be like production quality samples. And we missed our deadline, and you get one shot, and that's it. And there were lots of tears over that, and to this day none of us can watch that movie about Joy who created the hangers.

Laura Cox Kaplan ([00:34:26](#)):

I was just thinking about that.

Morgan Hutchinson ([00:34:27](#)):

I'm like, "Oh my gosh, we were so close." But that wasn't supposed to be our path, for some reason. And so what I learned from that specific takeaways for BURU was, I didn't want to sell BURI wholesale. At least not in the traditional way, like I said we've had some really amazing partnerships doing exclusives. And we're in the process of trying to buy a building down here to grow the factory three to four times. And my fingers are crossed, I know this is a podcast and you can't see me. But if that goes through, then we just have so many opportunities to do more exclusive collaborations with people, and sort of shift the wholesale gear. But the other thing I learned goes back to that investment piece, and what we thought was the perfect marriage of having our production associated with us in terms of owning 25% of us that they would have our best interest in mind, actually ended up shutting us down. Because he had the control, we weren't just saying, "No, give us our goods right now, we're a customer," he felt he had say in it.

Laura Cox Kaplan ([00:35:33](#)):

That's so interesting.

Morgan Hutchinson ([00:35:36](#)):

So those things that sound so good on paper are probably the ones that you need to spend the most time considering, and making sure they're right for you. And I know in the end it was what was right for my life, and for the girls' life. I know we're not girls anymore, but I'll forever call them girls, because we met when we were three years old. But I think that those are probably the two biggest takeaways, and then that investment part kind of leans on this as well, is the control aspect of it. So, right now as I mentioned that we're 50% our own factory, 50% imported for BURU, the 50% that is in control has saved us during COVID. I know it's contributed to our growth, and it's because of the control. We brought everything in-house.

Morgan Hutchinson ([00:36:32](#)):

And if you've never produced clothing, I don't know that that actually means much. But I'll break it down in maybe three sentences. When you produce overseas, it's a one-stop-shop. You give them your tech packs, your designs, the fabric, they handle it. They handle the cutting the grading. Grading is when you go from size to size. When you produce domestically, traditionally it is all different people. You select your fabrics, that's one step. You create the design, you have a pattern maker who's separate from the person who grades it, who's separate from the person who does the markers, which is what's given to a cutter to lay out giant paper doll patterns, kind of, if you can imagine that. So your cutter is separate, and then your sewing is separate.

Morgan Hutchinson ([00:37:22](#)):

So, imagine the organization that that takes, and how many people you're relying on to hit your deadlines. Well, when you bring all of that in-house, and you have your pattern-maker, your grader, your cutter, all the things I just mentioned, when that's all in one you can say, "Okay, we just sold these dresses for a pre-sale, this is our top priority, here's the deadline, it's got to get out the door." And we know that it can, because no other company can come in and jump in front of us. [crosstalk 00:37:57] 15,000 or something, where we are making not 15,000, but-

Laura Cox Kaplan ([00:38:01](#)):

That's so fascinating, that's so fascinating.

Morgan Hutchinson ([00:38:03](#)):

Yeah, but so, I don't, and I... I want to make sure that applies to other people's business. But just, I think we live in such an outsourced world right now, which is exactly what some businesses need. But being able to evaluate that in your own business, do you need to outsource everything, or what can you control, what can you bring in-house? And maybe bring in in-house people to help you with it. But you might find that the control is more valuable than the flip side of that, convenience of outsourcing, I guess.

Laura Cox Kaplan ([00:38:35](#)):

Yeah, yeah. Oh my gosh, that's so interesting. I really never thought about it like that, and I suspect a lot of people listening probably haven't either. One of the things I'd love for you to

talk about, as you I think mentioned earlier in the conversation the Southern Coterie. This conversation is part of our collaborative series with the Southern C, and so I'm really happy to have a chance to talk to you. We've talked to a number of incredibly talented business founders, and business owners that are part of this amazing community. The theme for the Southern C this year has been blooming, growing and evolving. And one of the questions that I had for you as you talk about Passport Panties, and now you talk about BURU.

Laura Cox Kaplan ([00:39:28](#)):

And the original inspiration for both of those businesses really came from what you were experiencing in your own life. You were young and in your '20s when you created Passport Panties, and you were a new mom when you created BURU. Maybe talk about how you think about the brand evolving, and where you think it's likely to go as you continue to evolve in your personal journey.

Morgan Hutchinson ([00:39:53](#)):

100%. Like I said, I believe once a mom, always a mom. So I know I'm going to be... I mean, obviously the goal is to get older, right? The alternative is not something that I [crosstalk 00:40:07]-

Laura Cox Kaplan ([00:40:07](#)):

God willing, yeah.

Morgan Hutchinson ([00:40:09](#)):

Right. But it's funny you ask that, because I was just thinking about it the other day. Because I used to joke, when my knees get saggy I'm not going to be in these photos anymore. So anyway, we were looking back through pictures in Mexico and I was like, "Uh-oh, I think my time is coming."

Laura Cox Kaplan ([00:40:26](#)):

Oh, stop.

Morgan Hutchinson ([00:40:26](#)):

And I'm not serious about that, especially now because I've realized, "Well, that's absolutely ridiculous, Morgan, and just a stupid thought to begin with." But, it's just been a joke. But it had me thinking, at what point does this shift? At what point is a new, 30-year-old mom looking at me, and not realizing these clothes could be for her? But I think the attitude of motherhood in dressing for me is, wear what you want when you want, and BURU will be there to support you. And we're going to make it washable for whatever phase you're in, whether that is the spit up phase, or the sweating, hot flush phase. And I'm going to be-

Laura Cox Kaplan ([00:41:11](#)):

Love that.

Morgan Hutchinson ([00:41:11](#)):

... just talking about it, and when it becomes my memories I'll be talking about it. But at that point, there will be so many other faces of this brand. I'm still the face of the brand and still the customer, our core customer to be honest. Because I did have kiddos so spread out, and so much later. My baby is the age of a lot of our newest customers' first, but that still keeps me in their world, and so I can speak to it. And when I finally feel like maybe I can't, then I'll just be speaking to the next phase of our customer, and we'll have someone who's speaking more to that. And a lot of the reasons that we do these collaborations is for that very reason, and finding who we collaborate with is filling those holes, if you will, of what I don't represent to our customer.

Laura Cox Kaplan ([00:42:10](#)):

Interesting, yeah. I love that.

Morgan Hutchinson ([00:42:13](#)):

And that can be older than me, obviously younger than me is helpful. Different size than me, different skin color than me. And those are really... I love the collaborations because I find them fun, and I love working with other women, and helping their ideas to come to life as well. But for me, it's showing our customers different people in the clothes, and I think that will be our evolution as we grow.

Laura Cox Kaplan ([00:42:43](#)):

Yeah. It's very integrated, too, into your social media marketing, which I guess every great brand is doing, and presumably trying to do it really well. You do an incredible job of telling that brand's story, and really bringing it to life. But maybe talk about how you approach social media, and your marketing, and the collaboration piece with these other brands, or these other influencers. Maybe talk a little bit about how that works, and sort of your mindset behind it. You already said you're looking for people that look different from you, that maybe represent different aspects of the brand. But maybe give us a little more about that, that people might have some takeaways.

Morgan Hutchinson ([00:43:25](#)):

Of course. I go with social media, and I think this word is overused, maybe I should have gotten a thesaurus and come up with a different one. But it is very authentic for us, and I've been asked before, how do you make it so authentic, how do you become authentic? And I always laugh a little bit inside when I get that question, because I think, "Oh, you're so far from it if you're asking me that." But, this is the best example that I can really give. We definitely have photo shoots where we use professional photographers, and we know that there's a balance

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between the number of selfies you post, and sort of these aspirational images. So, those are two very extremes. I'd say the bulk of what we do falls right in the middle.

Morgan Hutchinson ([00:44:13](#)):

And the pictures we take, not just for launches, but just everyday life, are taken in real moments. So for example, we were just on our spring break trip. I actually wear our cotton Tegan skirts as coverups over our bathing suits, so on the way to the pool with all three kids running down, there's 150 stairs to the pool at [inaudible 00:44:39] this amazing place. So, 150 steps later, Brett was just behind me and was like, "Oh, let's just snap some going down. Put your bag down, because it looks..." It didn't match. But other than that, the picture was 100% authentic, and taken on the way to the pool, you know?

Laura Cox Kaplan ([00:44:54](#)):

Love that.

Morgan Hutchinson ([00:44:55](#)):

Just, five minutes spent just pausing. And so it's real, and I'd like to think that our customers and our followers feel that and see it. I mean, of course you have to take some that are planned when you have launches. But even those, our kids are usually standing right there with me. If they want to be in the picture, great, they're not forced. Usually you'll see that's why there's only one in the picture, and not all three. Two of them have declined. You never know [crosstalk 00:45:24]-

Laura Cox Kaplan ([00:45:23](#)):

Just wait till they get to be teenagers, yeah. It's a whole different ball game.

Morgan Hutchinson ([00:45:26](#)):

Yeah, you never know who's going to be bribed by a dumb-dumb. But, they're real photos, and so I think that our brand's story is told because it's my life. And I know it's the life of so many of our customers. I try to encourage our moms like, "Get in the picture." I have so few pictures with my mom, or of her in general. And so, I do try to encourage that, and I think if you like your outfit you might be more willing to take your picture.

Laura Cox Kaplan ([00:45:57](#)):

Yeah. I'm sure that there are a lot of women who are listening who are wondering how the heck they can teach their husband to take a decent photograph, myself included.

Morgan Hutchinson ([00:46:06](#)):

Well, I tell you what, Brett is very good-

Laura Cox Kaplan ([00:46:07](#)):

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Love my husband, but...

Morgan Hutchinson ([00:46:09](#)):

Brett is very good, and has had lots of experience now. But, there is a great app called PicTapGo.

Laura Cox Kaplan ([00:46:19](#)):

Writing it down.

Morgan Hutchinson ([00:46:20](#)):

Like, P-I-C-T-A-P-G-O, and it is really easy editing, cropping. And I mean, nothing major, but enough where you can take a photo that was maybe like an eight and turn it into a 10, or a six, turn it into an eight, just depending. But our social media is real, you know? And that's when we see a lot of engagement, is when they're the most real, to be honest. A selfie is still going to get more likes than a pretty picture. And when I mean pretty picture, I mean more out in the life, with a pretty background. So, I think that realness is what speaks to our customers specifically.

Laura Cox Kaplan ([00:47:07](#)):

Yeah, I love that, I love that. I would love, Morgan, talking about being authentic, a really important part of your story and one that you and I... Just for the benefit of the listeners who are listening, just so you know that I'm not springing this on Morgan. A part of Morgan's story is her struggle with mental health, and she speaks very openly about this topic. And because May is Mental Health Awareness Month, we talked about in advance the fact that Morgan had these struggles, and that she was willing to talk to us about that on the podcast today. So, I am really grateful that you're willing to talk about that. Share a bit of your journey with us, Morgan.

Morgan Hutchinson ([00:47:51](#)):

Of course. When I was 27 I was diagnosed with bipolar. Was lots of years of misdiagnosis, and figuring out sort of what was really going on with me.

Laura Cox Kaplan ([00:48:05](#)):

What was happening at the time?

Morgan Hutchinson ([00:48:07](#)):

A lot, huge swings. So big lows, lots of suicidal thoughts, which is something I still deal with on a weekly basis. And it took me a long time to realize that that was not normal, I just assumed that everyone was doing that, and now I am aware they're not. And then manias, and the... If you're not familiar with bipolar, the manic portion of it on the outside seems fantastic. You have tons of energy, you're accomplishing so much a lot of the times, you're more social. Or at least this is my experience, obviously it's different for everyone. But for me in particular, my family I think in a manic phase wouldn't think anything was wrong with me. But, it's actually when I would be the most detrimental to myself, and the most likely to act on those suicidal thoughts.

Morgan Hutchinson ([00:48:59](#)):

And so, I had... At 28 I was admitted into a mental institution after a suicide attempt, and spent a week in a regular hospital, and then was released into a mental institution. Which was one of the most eye-opening experiences of my life, and amazing growth and understanding of how serious my disease was, and how I would very likely live with it for the rest of my life, but that it could be managed. And I think another thing a lot of people don't know is that you can actually have, "Remission periods," I'm putting that in quotes for some reason. But remission periods of it, and that can be great, and also really scary because it can sneak back up on you. I have to take medicine every day, I'm sure I will forever.

Morgan Hutchinson ([00:49:56](#)):

It's not always the same, there are definitely times when your body's changing, it's been very challenging after the pregnancies. Usually during the pregnancies and nursing I'm okay, and then when that ends it's a whole new round of medicine and experimenting. But overall I'm a very high functioning bipolar person, I have an incredible support of my family and friends who check in on me, and Brett is so understanding and constantly helpful and aware. And that makes it possible, if you're struggling, if anyone listening is struggling with it, your support system is every bit as important as your meds. And that can also be your doctor, and making sure that they're good, and checking in on you. But I think that the reason I talk about it openly is because I function.

Morgan Hutchinson ([00:50:52](#)):

And making sure that if someone gets that diagnosis, they don't spiral into a hole of, "Oh my gosh, life is over." Because in fact, for me, getting the diagnosis was a revelation. It was, "Okay, I'm not making this up, I am... This is real, and we can find ways to manage it." And I've done so much cognitive therapy training, which is every bit as helpful as the medicine. And it's something I deal with, just like someone with diabetes. I always say it's kind of like diabetes of the brain, you know?

Laura Cox Kaplan ([00:51:31](#)):

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Morgan Hutchinson ([00:51:31](#)):

It shouldn't be taboo. And I think the more we talk about it, the less taboo it is, the more people will get help, they'll get help faster because they won't feel like there's a stigma against them.

Laura Cox Kaplan ([00:51:45](#)):

Right, right. I'm so grateful, I mean, you're such an inspiration on so many levels. The fact that you're willing to talk about your journey and your struggles in such an authentic way so you can help other people, and also make sure that they know they're not alone if they're struggling with these things... I will include some resources in the show notes for this episode as well for

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anyone who may be listening who may be struggling as well. But, thank you for sharing that, because it's such an important, important message, not just during Mental Health Awareness Month, but always. So, thank you for that.

Laura Cox Kaplan ([00:54:21](#)):

Morgan, I'd love for you to talk about what influence means to you, as you know that's a big theme for this podcast. Building and sustaining influence is really key to getting whatever you want out of your life. What does this topic of influence mean to you?

Morgan Hutchinson ([00:55:23](#)):

I love this question. To me, in my life, I think influence sort of goes hand-in-hand with trust. If I'm personally influenced by someone, it's because I trust their opinion, their values. So for me, if I've gained any influence doing this, I think it's because I have been honest. And you asked about our marketing earlier, our marketing has been very real. I never want to pitch something to a mom and try to sell her a garment that I wouldn't wear in my daily life. And so I think when they see me walking the walk, not just talking the talk, actually wearing a ball skirt to the grocery store if that's what I want to wear that day. Or if I'm going somewhere at night and I don't have time to fiddle with changing, then I became a trustworthy source to them, they believed what I was telling them.

Morgan Hutchinson ([00:56:18](#)):

And I think that that's where your influence starts. And so then if you're a trustworthy person, then when you ask for things that you want, A, you probably have proven influence, you probably have numbers you can share, or whatever it is that you're asking for the stats to sort of back up why you think you're worthy of getting what you're asking for. But I think you also are more likable. If you've been honest with people, and you are sharing real things going on in your life, then you are believable, and you can influence them in a positive way. I'll speak to something that has nothing to do with BURU or the clothes, but as we were posting pictures from our vacation the DMs were just flooding in. Is this kid friendly, I'm going to do a whole recap on the place.

Morgan Hutchinson ([00:57:20](#)):

But I was thinking, it's a lot easier to answer those questions honestly when you're out there taking your three kids to a place that, by the way, I don't think is very kid-friendly. [crosstalk 00:57:30], I mean, if you want to take 150 stairs to the pool with your two-year-old then it is kid friendly, for you. [crosstalk 00:57:36]-

Laura Cox Kaplan ([00:57:37](#)):

It was beautiful, it was a beautiful setting, yeah.

Morgan Hutchinson ([00:57:39](#)):

We had an absolute ball, and we tend to take our kids to not so kid friendly places, and we take them in our BURU bus all summer long. And I think that over the years people have seen me do those things, and so I've gained a spot, a teeny, tiny spot in their lives as being someone that they could look to for not just fashion advice, but like, "Oh, okay. How did you do that with your three kids?" And so it's a full circle story. So, if you want influence, then you've got to live it. You have to be doing it. I always find it interesting when I see people selling you something that they don't own, or didn't try. Isn't that an interesting thought?

Laura Cox Kaplan ([00:58:26](#)):

Right.

Morgan Hutchinson ([00:58:27](#)):

So, how does that play out, how does that feel real? I don't wear anything that's not BURU, and I always get tickled on Instagram when I see like, "Oh, where are your shoes from?" I didn't design them, but... I don't design our accessories, I source them so that we can be a one-stop-shop for people. But I'm always like, "Oh, it's BURU, because I don't wear anything else." Because to me, that is being the most representative of our brand that I can possibly be, and the most honest, and therefore hopefully influential I suppose.

Laura Cox Kaplan ([00:59:07](#)):

I love that, and it applies whether you're selling clothing, or widgets, or podcasts, or... I mean, it doesn't make any difference. It's a message that applies no matter what. I cannot stop this interview until you talk about the BURU bus, because we haven't talked about that. And I know a little bit about the BURU bus, but just really quickly, what is that?

Morgan Hutchinson ([00:59:35](#)):

Okay. As I mentioned before, Brett comes from private equity, but it was actually in the car industry. When we moved over to Beijing, it was with a group of investors to buy car dealerships in northern China. I say that because it was truly his idea to buy our first Sprinter van... The big, long, tall Sprinter vans is what they are, and we call them the BURU bus because I love alliteration. And so, they're not school buses or anything.

Laura Cox Kaplan ([01:00:03](#)):

Is it more like a Winnebago, it's more like a-

Morgan Hutchinson ([01:00:08](#)):

On the inside they look like stores, they have hardwood floors, and beautiful lucite racks, and they're really bright, white and shiny.

Laura Cox Kaplan ([01:00:15](#)):

Wow.

Morgan Hutchinson ([01:00:15](#)):

And we bought the first one because we went and did a pop-up in Birmingham and we rented a U-Haul, and when we got there of course all the racks had fallen over, and there were clothes everywhere. Though we sold a lot of things, Brett said, "Okay, nope. I'm not doing that exact plan again." And so he reached out to a buddy who is the largest seller of Sprinters in the country, and we got our first one. We now have four. We have one as a family that's upfitted a little bit differently to accommodate the three kids, has a smaller store section, larger human section. But for the most part the other three, which are based in Tampa... So, it covers all of Florida and a little lower south, one in Nashville that covers the southeast, and one in Austin, Texas, which covers Texas, Oklahoma.

Morgan Hutchinson ([01:01:02](#)):

And they pop up, they'll pop up in stores, they pop up in homes for private shopping parties. And it is truly our way to a grassroots efforts to be where our customer wants us to be, and to let her touch and feel and try on, and shop with her friends if she wants. There's no charge to have to BURU bus at your house. It's our way of getting out there in the world as a direct-to-consumer brand, so that we're not just digital, that we are also hands-on. And we get to meet our customers, and I learn... When I do the popups, when I'm there myself, I learn more watching five women try on, and I think, "Oh, that zipper's not in the right place." Or, "Oh, that needs an inch through the boobs," especially because I have no boobs anymore.

Morgan Hutchinson ([01:01:45](#)):

I'm like, "Oops." Like, I wasn't accommodating for nice tatas, I was accommodating for sad, little flat ones. And it's just, it's one of my favorite parts about the business. It's definitely a different approach. But it allows us to partner with so many other female-owned businesses, whether it be stores, or other brands. We pop up so often with Mignonne Gavigan, we have this really fun one with Swan Beauty coming up in Lexington, and we're about to pop to Charleston, Charlotte with Hatch, the maternity line based out of New York. So, the buses have been just that personal touch for BURU, and really helped us grow.

Laura Cox Kaplan ([01:02:29](#)):

Yeah, I love that, I love that. Okay, one final question before I let you go. Any great mom life hacks for balancing work and life with three kids? Since we're going to air this podcast on Mother's Day. Maybe your favorite life hack for balancing momming and working and life.

Morgan Hutchinson ([01:02:53](#)):

Okay, I kind of have like a handful of these. I don't cook, and I don't feel guilty about it. So, that's just sort of in general. Whatever it is that you don't do, just don't feel guilty about it, find a way to... I mean, obviously they eat. But I'm not preparing some big, fancy meal. So, that's one, find what it is that you don't want to do, or what you're not good at it, eliminate it and don't feel guilty. And then this one is really superficial, but I've found that it really works. And because we

travel with our kids so much, I'm just going to throw it out there and hope that people like it. Our kids match every day when we travel, by color. And that is so when we return home, all the laundry can be done, almost every load is together.

Laura Cox Kaplan ([01:03:42](#)):

Wow.

Morgan Hutchinson ([01:03:42](#)):

So if they are all in red for a certain number of days and there's a whole load that's red, and it's basically sorted before you even get home. And then I also travel with all their clothes on hangers, and they're grouped together in outfits. So when we get to a place, we just plop it out of the suitcase, hang it up, and then it's done. I mean, I don't know about you all, but especially with our ages, getting dressed and out the door I find to be really stressful.

Laura Cox Kaplan ([01:04:11](#)):

For sure.

Morgan Hutchinson ([01:04:12](#)):

And every day of my life, I can't believe how long it takes. I mean, you'd think we were solving world peace, or world hunger, just getting out the door. And so that tiny thing, and it does... It takes me a little longer to pack, but now I have it down to a science. But it is a hack that, if you want to travel with kids it makes it so much more enjoyable, less stressful when you get there, and not so intimidating to think about planning another trip. Because I think the gift of travel with your kids is just one of the best things you can do, we're very big into experiences over things, so...

Laura Cox Kaplan ([01:04:49](#)):

I love that, I love that.

Morgan Hutchinson ([01:04:50](#)):

Other than jewelry, I still like jewelry. Just [crosstalk 01:04:55].

Laura Cox Kaplan ([01:04:55](#)):

Hey, a girl's got to live. [laughter]

Morgan, I mean, what a treat, and what a joy to spend time with you today. I know folks listening are really going to love this conversation, and I am so grateful to have spent the time with you, and that you shared so authentically your story. You are amazing, you are really an inspiration. I really appreciate it.

Morgan Hutchinson ([01:05:16](#)):

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Well, that also applies to you. I love how you're just featuring and empowering and lifting women up, I think it's so incredible. And I'm so honored to be among the incredible women you've had on your podcast already.

Laura Cox Kaplan ([01:05:29](#)):

Thank you, really appreciate it.

Morgan Hutchinson ([01:05:31](#)):

Thank you.

#### **EPISODE CLOSE:**

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Friend. Thanks so much for joining me today for this conversation, with the amazing Morgan Hutchinson. I hope you enjoyed the conversation as much as I did. I'd love to know what you thought about Morgan's perspective around trust, and the connection that she makes with influence. I really, really loved that dimension of all of this. And I thought that her focus on trust also underscored so much of what we talk about in this conversation, as it relates to connecting with our customer, being vulnerable, sharing parts of our journeys that are really personal, how that can really help build that level of trust and connection with your customer, with your listener, with your follower, with your client, whatever the case may be.

I'd love to know what you thought, and as always, I hope you found this investment of your time well worthwhile. I'd love to hear from you. So please send me some feedback. You can reach me via the contact link that I've included in the show notes for this episode. You can also leave a review on iTunes, or wherever you're listening to this podcast. I would be really, really grateful. I love hearing from you, and I'm so glad to have you here on this journey with me. In the meantime, you take care, have a great week, and I'll talk to you again soon.

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