



The Athena Wellness Podcast
Episode 085 – Job Security Through Business Ownership
with Melinda Livingstone
October 31, 2021

00:05

Welcome to the Athena Wellness podcast, the show that invites you to take a seat around the community fire and listen to stories that inspire. I'm your host, Kathy Robinson, author, coach and founder of Athena Wellness, a company that's dedicated to supporting you on your journey to live more wholeheartedly.

00:30

Hello and welcome to Episode 85. Thanks so much for joining me.

I can still vividly remember the trepidation I felt leaving a steady corporate paycheck behind for the entrepreneurial unknown. My guest today helps her clients navigate that process.

I'm joined today by innovation coach Melinda Livingstone, who founded her company Income Connection, after a 20 year corporate career in Sydney, Australia. Income Connection leverages what she learned developing business cases to help clients identify business ideas that are a good fit for them through a combination of innovation processes and personal reflection.

Melinda is part sounding board for ideation, part safe harbor for incubation, and part midwife for assisting those who want to bring new businesses to life. Here's what we cover:

- Why business ownership can be more secure than a corporate career;
- The mindset shift from employee to entrepreneur;
- How to identify and leverage your business assets and experiences;
- Some common challenges when starting a business; and
- The importance of wellness for startup entrepreneurs.



We end this episode with our Dose of Inspiration segment where Melinda shares some of the things that are lighting her up these days. And as always, I'll put links to those items and Melinda's contact information in the show notes.

And now on to the show. I hope you enjoy the conversation.

02:17 Kathy

Melinda, welcome to The Athena Wellness Podcast. Thanks so much for being here today.

02:22 Melinda

Oh, Kathy it's such a pleasure to be here with you today. I'm so looking forward to this discussion.

02:28 Kathy

Same here. Please share a bit about who you are and what you do.

02:33 Melinda

Kathy, I'm an innovation coach. And my purpose is to inspire people to create businesses that are human at heart, amplify purposeful work, and treat people with respect. And I use innovation processes and personal reflection questions to help people come up with or get clarity around a business idea that's a really good fit for them.

I believe the world is changing and people increasingly want to do work with businesses that treat them and others and the planet with respect and promote the good of humanity. So I believe it's up to us to be the change that we want to see and start these human-centered businesses.

03:10 Kathy

Mmm, wow, that is quite a mission. Can you tell me a little bit about your typical client? Why would they seek you out and what are they aspiring to do that you can help them with?

03:23 Melinda

Yeah, so my typical client is between 35 and 60 and they have a corporate or organizational background. So that's kind of similar to myself, because that's been my



journey. And they're looking to use their career experience to start a business. And the sorts of businesses that they're looking to create are those human-centered businesses. And they will seek my help to evolve their ideas or they'll come to me with several ideas, seeking clarity on which one to move forward with and how to go to market. So I help with all of that.

03:56 Kathy

I really needed you a couple of years ago. (laughs) I'm so sorry our paths didn't cross then. (laughter) I'm curious, you know, you mentioned that people now want to take their future into their own hands. Have you seen a profile change of the folks that are coming to you now? These last 18 months we've had, some of us have had, a lot of time to think. So have you seen an uptick in your business?

04:25 Melinda

Yeah, absolutely. A lot more people are wanting to take their future into their own hands. And I think people's motivations over the pandemic have changed to starting a business. So initially, in the beginning of the pandemic, people who had on their bucket list to start a business, they brought those plans forward. They were feeling rocked by the job insecurity and the rounds of redundancies. And so they got started on those plans to start their businesses.

And I remember one client, what she said to me really resonated. She said, "I want to secure my future on my own terms, because there's just so much fatigue from all of that restructuring." And I also tell people just wanting greater agency over their futures as well.

And another client said to me, which kind of held with me was, "I want to build something that can't be taken away from me." And certainly, our businesses are not sure things. I mean, there's so much flat out blush with a business, but it does satisfy a need for us to create something of our own.

As we've seen the pandemic move forward, we've moved into this time of a labor shortage, because immigration has fallen. And so people are starting businesses, because they see that as a great opportunity. And people are negotiating part-time arrangements with their employers quite openly, so that they can start a business on their



side. And it might be a business in a similar field, but with a non-compete arrangement with their employer. And I think that's really interesting.

And also, I'm seeing people do work that was very similar to what they had done with their employer. They've left their employer and then they actually go back and sell their services to their employers and other sort of similar organizations, just seeing this acute labor shortage as a great opportunity for them to get out there and start their business.

06:25 Kathy

Yeah, there are so many new business models that have come to the forefront now. And what I find so fascinating is that what was known as the secure route, which was you get a job with a well established company, no longer feels that way. And when an entrepreneurial venture feels more secure, then what was the standard route, I just find that fascinating.

06:51 Melinda

Yeah, absolutely. I think it's also this sense of agency, in the sense that this is something I can control. It's just such a powerful feeling.

07:03 Kathy

Yeah. That said, even when somebody does decide to make a shift, and you know, I'm speaking from my own experience here, probably the biggest shift that I experienced was a mindset shift. That is, going from this person who executes these objectives and gets things done to the person that's creating something where there's no blueprint. So how do you help your clients from that mental/emotional perspective?

07:31 Melinda

Yeah, Kathy, you absolutely nailed it there. There's a massive change for us. So when we work in corporate, even at a senior level, there is no shortage of stakeholders telling us what they expect of us. You know, they might be regulators or our manager or other peers and we work within these organizational frameworks. And that propels us forward. Anne LaMott talks about us living life in a trance. And I think, for me, corporate life is very much like that. But as an entrepreneur, we have this blank page. And that can be so daunting. So we need to craft our own routines and our own rituals. And I do help my



clients with that, that initial blank page, helping them with the idea and tools like business model canvas and typical business setup process that they need to do.

But that blank page is never never far away, it's always around the corner. So there's five things that I help my clients with and I practice in my daily life, as well. And having a clear "why" is just such a foundation for us. It's the purpose of our business. It's our guiding light. And then when we do work on our business, plans for our business, they're much easier because we have our purpose really clear. And then, because we are fulfilling our purpose, sitting with that ambiguity becomes much easier, we're much more comfortable with it.

And then the second thing is to create our own daily work structure. So taking up a task each day and having that sense of success. And then at the end of the day, reflecting on our achievements, but in the sense of our own definition of what success is, not other people's definition of success. And at the end of each day, I really reflect on my day. I use the Jesuit reflection practice of daily examine, to deeply reflect on my day, because I feel that's very important.

And also to see our businesses as an experiment. And I think that takes the pressure off. So if I'm planning, it takes that pressure off, nothing is fixed. We are testing and learning. Because if we have an inner perfectionist, then that kind of lets it go. We put our plans to paper the best we can do, and then we get feedback, and then we move forward and we keep it flexible. Everything's a learning opportunity.

And then another thing is to just note that our mind second guesses itself as a way to protect our mind against change. And that's just really normal. And so we just need to push on despite that.

And then lastly, just to place value on our own goals. I think often we honor the tasks and the goals of other people, but we don't honor our own tasks. And we need to place a really high priority on our own tasks and goals and keep those at the forefront.

10:35 Kathy



What I love about that is you've just highlighted new metrics, because we're metric driven when we're in corporate. And then you leave and there's nothing to measure yourself by. You've just laid out this beautiful path.

And you can give yourself permission to see learning as an opportunity. Because if you're going to make this shift to entrepreneurship, you need to start looking at opportunity. But you've just turned that lens to the self, which I think is really wise. I love that.

Another mind shift for me was trying to see myself or stepping into a new expertise. How do you help your clients move into the space where they can step into that and fully embody this new expertise that they're building?

11:21 Melinda

Yeah, absolutely. It's a really big step. So what I do is I help them through a process called the Connection Method. So what I do is encourage people to reflect, like really deeply, on their skills, their experiences and their abilities. And this includes a process of self-empathy.

So, what parts of their career history have really energized them? When have they found a lot of flow and meaning? And also around empathy for others, like what problems and causes do they have a real great sense of passion about? Have they worked in corporate where they've had contact with customer groups or other community groups and felt really passionate about their causes or their issues? Or maybe there's been some customers where there have been some unmet needs or employees that they've been concerned about helping. And just reflecting really deeply about that.

And then also their own lives. I think, very often, the best ideas come at the intersection of our professional lives and our personal lives, our passions and experiences. Our businesses are our whole selves. And so I get clients to reflect deeply across the whole of their life experiences. And then also, I review people's CVs and their LinkedIn profiles as well. Because there's often some gems there that people haven't really reflected on or thought about.

12:56 Kathy



Yeah, I was actually very surprised when I left corporate how much risk management aligns with wellness, like I never made that connection before. And it was one of the things that really helped me step into this new profession, because it's like, you're not starting from zero. You've been doing this, but you've been assessing the wellness of companies, not the wellness of people. And it's the same kind of thought process.

So do you find that your clients, as they work through this higher level, visionary kind of phase, that they can get very practical with saying, "Oh, I can do this because I do have this experience." Do they start to see those links?

13:39 Melinda

Yeah, absolutely. I think what you said just then is that we have all these incredible experiences that we have from our corporate life. And they parallel so many other aspects of life.

So just being in a corporate, we pick up so much commercial acumen. We have such an incredible capability for analysis. So that can apply to any aspect of business or life. And that's really powerful. We're exceptional at communicating, because we have to do it day in, day out. We're great at writing. We're great at interpreting people. We're great at leading teams and influencing people. Because we have to get our projects approved, we have to convince people.

All of these skills are incredibly powerful and we just kind of get them from osmosis. And we don't realize that we've incorporated them. We're professionals. We know how to treat people. We know what we can and we can't do. And so we're not going to, when we start our businesses, we're not going to end up like many startups do and get ourselves into trouble because of lack of professionalism. Like you read stories like Uber and a lot of that is just common sense. You know, if only they had worked in a corporate, they would have realized that they couldn't do a lot of the stuff that they had done.

And we're also incredibly resilient. Corporations are quite political. We've worked really hard. And so we know how to persevere through adversity, we know how to deal with people saying no to us.



And so, yes, we have the expertise that we've built up in our particular fields, like for you risk management, for me, it was innovation and I've applied my innovation to a different group of people. But we had this umbrella of incredible skills that can be applied to any type of business. And I think it's just a matter of also being very cognizant of that.

15:50 Kathy

Can you give us an example of one of your favorite client success stories?

15:54 Melinda

Yeah, I have this lovely client called Nina and she had a long corporate career in Finance and she wanted to launch a business. She decided to zero in on a narrow slice of her role.

She had managed large teams and achieved great success through developing her teams. So she was very passionate about developing the potential of each team member and really believes that every person has the potential to thrive. So she would do a lot of development planning, and career goal planning.

In terms of her team, she structured the work of her team to bring out the strengths of each person. And that was something that she was absolutely exceptional about doing. She did that over a very long period of time.

So obviously, she had a lot of other competence as well in Finance, which is her background. But in designing her business, she thought, that is what I really love to do, that's what I really want to focus my business on. And she's conscious that when she was working in her corporate career, not every manager had the capability to do that. But also, they're incredibly time crunched. Manager's have really large spans of control and they just don't have the time to do it.

So her business is to assist managers with that process. She goes into companies and does the development planning for them as an outsourcing business. And she's absolutely loving it. She's achieving great results in terms of improved engagement, performance and retention, assisting these managers.

Because with the staff shortage at the moment, retention is just really, really important and if we don't retain staff and invest in them, then the risk is that they might move on. So



this has been a really great way for her to focus on a really small part of her role that she really enjoyed and turn that into a business.

17:55 Kathy

And I think it's incredibly inspiring because when you first mentioned Finance, in my mind, I'm waiting for the: Okay, she did a piece of accounting. But here it was this little slice of HR that she loved. She got to do what she loved going back into a corporate setting to help people who aren't as attuned. That's a wonderful, wonderful example.

Are there some common problems or challenges that tend to trip people up either as they're just entertaining whether or not they should go out on their own, or they've made the leap and kind of get hit with some things that they weren't expecting? What's that process like?

18:40 Melinda

Well, I think with the entertaining, there's a lot of hesitancy in terms of getting going and getting started, definitely. And then when people have their business idea, and they've made it a long way down the road, they can be quite hesitant with getting out there and talking to prospective clients and really launching their business. There's a concern to get everything perfect.

So several clients who are wanting to get their website perfect. They're wanting to get their professional photos perfect. Whatever it is, there's the thing that they feel they need to kind of polish up before they can get out there and talk to prospective clients.

But the thing is that we are never going to get everything perfect. And these things don't really matter in the scheme of things, because ultimately, if we get out there and start talking to the prospective clients, we're going to get feedback. And if we see our business as this kind of learning journey, everything is changing. So yeah, we were not going to get everything bedded down.

19:52 Kathy

Right, and I think it's a learning process. I found this in my case, too. A lot of times hiding behind that perfection is just stalling getting out there in front of clients. We may think



we're getting ready to be able to do that, but we're not actually conducting business. So I think that's very wise counsel.

What role does wellness play as you're advising your clients, either through startups or as they start to scale?

20:22 Melinda

Yeah, wellness is so important. We can't create good things if we're not in a good place ourselves. And particularly in business, like when we start our own business, because our businesses are us. Before this latest Delta surge, I used to host connection days for my clients, together in person, so that they could encourage each other. And I believe wellness is just really, really important.

There's three wellness habits that are particularly important. And the first one is to feel good about who you are, to work on your confidence and your self-compassion. Creative work comes from a place of optimism and positivity, but we have to work on it. Daily practices, such as exercise and eating well and affirmations and prayer and silence and other inspirational inputs - they're things that I do to foster a healthy mindset in me. Yeah, they're really important to me.

And the second thing is to be curious and having this approach of: What am I learning from this experience, even in the face of disappointment?

And then the third thing is accepting that I don't have all the answers. And even if I did, they'd get out of date and I'd have to find new answers again.

And I tell that to my clients when they're kind of in that paralysis stage at the beginning with the research. We have to act, despite imperfect information, and we learn as we go. And I think if we've come from a risk averse corporate background, there's this sense that things need to be very tightly tied up before we can move forward. But we need to learn to move forward without all the answers.

22:06 Kathy



And that's a wonderful mind, body and spirit approach, right? It's not just eating well, it's not just exercising, it's taking care of you. It's having that self-compassion. It's doing the reflection. So that's a very well-rounded wellness answer, thank you.

And speaking of wellness, our listeners love to get to know you a little bit more. And so a few questions for you personally.

You've talked a little bit about your wellness practices, but what's your favorite or a recent wellness win that you'd like to share?

22:41 Melinda

I have discovered these long bush walks close to home, which I've enjoyed. And some of them are four hours long. And yeah, walking through nature, just absolutely fantastic.

22:55 Kathy

And is that something new? Is that a new discovery?

22:57 Melinda

It is - it is a new COVID thing. So ordinarily I wouldn't have had the time to do a four hour bush walk. So yeah, something I've really, really enjoyed.

23:10 Kathy

Mmmhmm, yes, that's been one of my pleasures as well in the last 18 months. I never had the opportunity to do that when I was working, when I was commuting and working for a company. So that has been a wonderful discovery.

How about a recent wellness struggle or a place where you're focusing your wellness efforts?

23:30 Melinda

I have a daily exercise routine, but I'm keen to introduce bone density exercises into that routine, but I am yet to work out how to do that. So I do rowing at lunchtime, I've got a rowing machine. But yeah, I just need to do some more.

23:51 Kathy



We're going to get you lifting. We're gonna to get you lifting some some weights,

23:54 Melinda

Oh, that would be great. That would be good.

23:58 Kathy

What have you read or listened to lately that you've enjoyed?

24:02 Melinda

I have read the book *Status Anxiety* by Alain de Botton. It's a book about how we sort of thrive to be recognized by other people. But for me, you know, as I've sort of plotted this new path, we need to define success in our own terms and live life according to our own values and purpose and not live according to other people's expectations. So for me, I found that book quite helpful, just to be conscious of that. And yeah, plot my own path. And I read it and then I read it again. It was so good.

24:42 Kathy

Excellent. Very good. I will link that up in the show notes. What new thing or experience are you looking forward to trying?

24:50 Melinda

I would love to try Nordic tour skating. So that's like skating on natural frozen lakes. I have not done that before. It's on my bucket list to do. So I'm Australian, we don't do much outdoor ice skating at all. But that's something I'd love to do somewhere like Canada or Northern Europe.

25:12 Kathy

Wow, that is quite a change in climate for sure. So you're talking heading all the way up north? And this is outdoor lake skating?

25:25 Melinda

Yes! Have you done that?

25:26 Kathy



I have not! (laughs) No, no, I would hope that there would be a good fire somewhere close by and a cozy cabin.

Envision the perfect road trip - and this can be anywhere in the world. Where do you go and what do you do?

25:44 Melinda

I would love to drive through the French countryside. We did it years ago. Sorry, we didn't drive through the French countryside, but we've been to the French countryside. And I just loved it. And it's been on my bucket list to go back and do again, but to drive through it. I'd love to hike the Pyrénées. I'd love to stop at all the little towns and eat the beautiful food and the cheese, go to the coast -that would be a dream.

26:12 Kathy

That sounds amazing. What has you feeling inspired these days? What's lighting you up?

26:19 Melinda

So I mean, the pandemic has been an absolutely terrible thing. But what it has fostered is a lot of innovation. It's had a lot of silver linings. Around the world, innovation has just really soared and the number of new patents that have been registered in the US have doubled since 2019. And what that shown is just how resourceful we are, so much more resourceful than what we think.

26:46 Kathy

Yeah. And what we can do when we quiet and still a little bit, right?

Melinda

Yeah, absolutely.

Kathy

It's amazing. What has you optimistic about the future?

26:58 Melinda



I've made a lot of young friends lately and I've been inspired by how adaptable and wise the younger generations are that are coming after us. And I feel that the future of the planet and the future of the world is in really, really good hands.

27:13 Kathy

You know, I can't tell you how many guests have said just that, which is inspiring.

27:19 Melinda

That's incredibly inspiring. Absolutely.

27:22 Kathy

So, tell our listeners the best way to get in touch with you. If they're driving in their car and saying, "Hmm, I'd like to bounce some ideas off of Melinda," how do we find you?

27:32 Melinda

I have a website. It's IncomeConnection.com. I'm also on LinkedIn and Instagram and Facebook.

27:41 Kathy

Great. And I'll link up your website in the show notes. And I thank you for such a wonderful conversation. I really appreciate you joining me today, Melinda, thank you so much.

27:51 Melinda

Oh, Kathy, we've had such a great conversation and you're doing such great work with this podcast. And it's just been such an honor to be here.

27:59 Kathy

Thank you. Thank you. Thank you so much. And I hope you come back and keep us posted on how everybody's doing out there.

28:05 Melinda

Thank you. Thank you.

28:09



Thank you so much for joining me today. I know there are many ways you can spend your time. Thank you for choosing to spend it with me. Until our paths cross again, be kind to yourself and show your Warrior Spirit some love.

If you know anyone who could benefit from today's episode, please pass it on. And many thanks for supporting the show by subscribing and leaving a review. It means a lot and it helps others find their way to our circle.

If you'd like to access the show notes, have a question you'd like addressed on a future episode, or would like a transcript of this episode, visit www.AthenaWellness.com/podcast.

Until next time, be well!