

# WORTH EVERY PENNY *joycast*<sup>™</sup>

Sarah Petty: Today, I'm here with an incredible army veteran and new mama, who's juggling leaving a job and building her photography business and seeing where it all fits in. So you're not going to want to miss this.

So the real question is, how are portrait photographers like us able to run a profitable business and still put our families first, without selling digital files for cheap and working all the time? I'm Sarah Petty, your host of the Worth Every Penny Joycast. And I went from a stressed out overworked mama with three babies, to being named one of America's most profitable photographers without working my kids' lives away. Each week I'll show you how to find and serve boutique portrait photography clients in a world where we compete with free, thanks to everyone having a digital camera in their pocket. Take the first step to adding more joy and profit to your life by downloading your free photography business tools [joyofmarketing.com/podcast](http://joyofmarketing.com/podcast).

Michelle, Michelle, Michelle, Michelle DeLurme is, oh my gosh, one of my favorite humans and she's been in my community for several years. In fact, you're a small group. You call yourself the Ninja Turtles. Are you still a Ninja Turtle or have you moved around?

Michelle D: Well, so the Ninja Turtles, most of them are bigger leaders in the community or coaches. And so they are still of my go-tos. I always reach out to them and stuff. But now I've been in a couple different groups now. So I think I'm on my third different group, but that's something I love about the community too, is that we always get to kind rotate through and you get different eyes and stuff on your business. And it helps a lot.

Sarah: Yeah. So Michelle's been in our community for years. And Ninja Turtles will always be close to my heart. You're one of the first groups when we created this program. But I have loved watching you grow in this program from being that single person. And then we watch you get married and your life changes and you moved cities, move states and your life changes. And most recently, you are now a new mama. So take me back to before even you were married, where did you see photography fitting in your life?

Michelle: Okay. So I started a photography when I was in high school, learned in the dark room and everything. And then when I went to West Point, I was photographic editor for all the cadet publications. But photography isn't something that they teach at West Point. And there's not really a lot in the army that you can do with that. There is a branch that does that with publications and stuff like that. But I was an engineer officer, so I commissioned and photography was something that

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I just loved doing. And so at all of my assignments, I ended up getting into photography somehow for our units. And then after I got hurt, I had to kind of figure out what I wanted to do with my life, because I was no longer going to be in the army. And photography was something that I did. I was doing a lot of community service stuff with it.

And somebody had actually reached out to me. They found me on Facebook and they saw some of my stuff and they wanted me to photograph their daughter's prom. And that kind of opened the door. I ended up finding you. And as far as how I always, there was never really a plan of how I wanted photography to fit into my life. It was something that continued to evolve. I didn't know that you could have a career as a photographer when I first started. And then I learned more about it and now I see that it's something that I can do that is going to help my family. And I would've loved to eventually be a huge, the best photographer ever in San Antonio that everyone knows and thinks about. But really right now, it's just being the senior photographer in my town and that's what I want.

Sarah: Yeah. So you came into our community and you were building your photography business and then you moved cities, right?

Michelle: Yes. Yeah. Twice. So I started over twice.

Sarah: Yeah. Which is scary and hard anyway, to just move cities, but then to take your business with you where it's like, "Okay, I'm starting over. I don't know anybody." Was that so scary?

Michelle: It was, but it's something where I know that when you follow the system and when you do the things, that you see the results. And the biggest thing is about following the system and you actually just have to go do it. But there's definitely been days it's petrifying. It's so hard to go put yourself out there to people that you've never met before and say, "Hi, I'm a photographer." When most people are like, "Oh, that's great. So is my aunt, uncle, whatever." It's very hard to say that, it's very hard to go out and do that. But when you just say, "Okay, I'm going to do this," then it makes it easier.

Sarah: Yeah. And so you worked for a company as a photographer that was kind of a grind and throughout this transition, correct? So again, I know it from when I was building my career and I was working all the time before I had kids. So before you had a baby and you were working all the time, talk about that a little bit, would you?

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Michelle: So I was working 80-hour weeks. The hours were just rough. I'd have to be up by four o'clock in the morning to drive an hour to wherever we were working that day. And then it was a 10 plus hour day, and then still drive at least an hour home after tearing everything down and everything like that. So it was hard. It was exhausting. And the only draw of it was that I was learning at the same time. I was learning things that I hadn't learned otherwise. But at the same time, when I had a day off or when I had a couple days off, I was able to put some time into my business, and to work to grow my business. So that was a plus, was that it gave me opportunity and I knew I had stuff scheduled here. And so I could still go back and do something that I wanted to do something creative and something fun, and get paid well for it.

Sarah: Yeah. And so then you have your baby and it changes your perspective, doesn't it? I feel like because just everything that you think it's going to be, or you think, "Oh, I'm just going to keep going at the pace I'm going." And all of a sudden, you can't just run out and run an errand. You have a baby. So it just changes everything.

Michelle: It does. You definitely have to learn about routines and schedules in a different way, because you're responsible for something else. And you have to bring that other person with you or find somebody to take care of that person during that time. But yeah, you don't know. And I had this thought that after I had her, that I would get so much done. While I was in that first three months, I was going to do all this back end stuff on my business. And you need to rest, seriously rest when you're a new mom.

Sarah: Yeah.

Michelle: I don't think there's no way to explain it to anybody other than you will fall asleep standing up, so don't try to watch the dishes because you'll break them. But yeah, it's definitely a different lifestyle.

Sarah: So you decided to not go back to the job that was so many hours getting up at 4:00 AM and different things. How does your photography business look differently in your life now? How does it fit into your life and what are you excited about moving forward with it?

Michelle: So as far as looking differently, because the priority is our daughter. For me, that means that I'm not working all the time. I do have a travel bassinet in my office so that while I'm working, she can be asleep next to me. But I'm not working eight hours. Because you can hustle as hard as you want whenever you want if

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you don't have other things on the backside. And so you could hustle at midnight, you could sit there and you could be closing out a session or getting a presentation ready. But now I have a couple hours a day. And she's still only a couple months old. And so I know it's not quite the same as like, "Oh well, when they go back to school, you have all day." I have a couple hours a day to just do the most important things that are going to generate something for me.

So either it's going to bring me a client, it's going to get me a sale, something like that. So that's how it's really changed is looking at, it's not about, "Oh, I have five hours to scroll through Facebook and look for senior moms." I have two hours to actually talk to five senior moms. So where are these senior moms? They're at the football practice or whatever. So I haven't gone to a football practice. I don't know why I said that. But figuring out if I have to talk to five people today, where am I finding these people?

Sarah: Yeah. I love that skill that you've built. It's like a muscle. Everybody has it, but a lot of people don't use it. And then it's painful when you start using it. But learning how to go find those people. I know you were a leader in one of we did a challenge within our community last summer, sort of a game where people are having to do little activities every day where they're going out in the community and they're meeting with business people and stirring things up, all these different activities. And you were the poster child for how to do this because you just took everything on. And one thing led to another. And all those activities, even now that was months ago, here we are. And I think those things are still paying dividends while you're now home with your baby. And you're like, "Oh my gosh, I'm so glad I did that. So talk a little bit, will you, about all those little relationships and how they pay off over time?"

Michelle: Okay. Yeah. So those relationships, so the first thing is that they give you an opportunity to just support other people in our communities. Being boutique is so important to be involved in the community. If you're not involved in the community, then people don't realize who you are or what you have to offer. So I think that, that was the first thing was that I'm able to support in the community, I'm able to donate to the education fund, I'm able to all the ag stuff out here. I mean most of our county is heavy ag. And so everything is ag related in some way, and being able to do something to give back to that. And then you see doors open up to as you're at this community event, or you're doing this and then you meet somebody and then they open up too.

So I just worked with our cheerleading squad for the high school. And that opened up because of these other little things that I just kept seeing. I donated

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to the sports booster fundraiser. And then that mom reached out to me and she said, "Hey, I know you're a business owner. This isn't anything to do with sports booster, this has to do with the cheer squad that my daughter just made. This is what they're doing. Can you help out?" And so I was like, "Yeah, I'm happy to." And then they were offering to do pictures with people, but they didn't have... I was just like, "Well, I have time right now. I can photograph. Do you guys have a photographer that you're working with." And they didn't. It's normally a mom with a camera who's stressing out because she doesn't know how to get the cheer squad in the right formations or how to balance lighting.

And so they always get kind of pictures that it's kind of a check the box for them. "We got the pictures, okay, we're good." And this year I was like, "Hey, I can help out with that." And that ended up leading to, now that mom is talking to me about next year, but also about her daughter's senior pictures and having her daughter be on my influencer team and I potentially found a babysitter for that. Those little relationships and you don't realize how great they are until you're like, "Oh, and then this door opened and it led to this. And then there was this hallway and I took that turn." And instead of just sitting and waiting for somebody to call you because you posted on Facebook,

Sarah: Yeah. How has your perception of marketing... I'm air quoting it, marketing, changed in these past few years of working with us. Because I think most people think it's just that, "I'm going to do this thing and I'm going to get all these clients," and that's not even the best way to get the right clients. It's the little things. And you're so good at it, Michelle. Everything you do, it turns into another thing, that turns into another thing, that turns into another thing. It's like little drips. It's not just this one thing. Have you seen yourself grow in that way as you're learning more things? Or do you feel like you were doing it, but maybe not realizing it was marketing? Or how do you feel about that?

Michelle: So I think some of it was, I was doing it, but I wasn't doing it well. So you talk about the drip and the hammer and I am phenomenal at the drip. I have not figured out a hammer activity and how to make it go well, or as well as I would hope it could yet. But I know that, that's okay because the things that I do in this 30 days leads to my next 90 days. And that's something that I think Zig Zigler talks about it. Where like, whatever you're doing today, 90 days from now you will reap the rewards. And I'm like, "Okay, well I can do a little activity here, and I can do a little activity here." And so just doing those little things.

Like writing notes, I've always written handwritten notes because it's fun. I would even do it just when I was in college and with the other officers, I would

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write notes when they did something awesome. It had nothing to do with photography. That was before I wasn't even a photographer or I was making an income from it. But I would write notes to people and it was just because people like that. Who doesn't love opening their mailbox and seeing something addressed to them?

Sarah: Yeah.

Michelle: That's not an insurance quote, but it was learning how to do it well so that it was a way that would be beneficial and not just me just going out and talking and just meeting people or something like that. But me helping the conversation go in the right direction to benefit me, but also to serve them. So I think that's where over the years it's changed. And of course just like you with volleyball. You go and you do your drills and you go over and over and over again.

And I played softball, so every day I would go in the yard and I had to hit 10 line drives and I had to hit 10 this way and 10 that way. And my dad was very adamant about it. And I understand now that's what a coach does. They say, "This is what you have to do. Go do it." And you go do it. And then when you're in the game, when you're actually in real life having to get that result, you can do it because it's just ingrained in your muscles now. So learning how to steer the conversations or ways that I can show, "I can do this and I can support you as a business or I can support you as a mom or as a dad or help you help your kid feel loved. I have that skill. Let me help you with my skills."

Sarah: Yeah. Yeah. I love that. Where do you see your business fitting in? Now that you have a baby, you look at everything differently, through a different lens. What are you excited about, and what do you see that money that you're making in your business, what motivates you to make that money? Where's that money going to go?

Michelle: Okay. So fitting in, eventually I'm going to have that studio. We want the big property. Again, we live in super rural area, so we want to buy several acres. And I can have a studio on my property where I can do that, but where I can also frame and I can get everything done for my business and I can do cool, fun things. And I prefer taking people out and doing really cool locations. So fitting into our lives, that would be a several years down the road. Right now fitting into our life, it's about me just getting to do something that I really love, and doing it in a way that benefits my family. So the first thing is if it's going to take me away from my daughter, I have to be able to at least make enough to cover the cost of somebody watching her while I'm gone.

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So we moved to an area where we didn't know anyone. Our realtor isn't even in the county that we moved to. So we knew literally no one when we moved here. And so I know that if I want to do, even if it was just a hobby, if I was doing this, it would still have to cover the cost otherwise it wouldn't be right. It wouldn't be fair to my husband to be like, "Okay, I'm going to go do this and I know that you're working your butt off to make your business successful. So that at a minimum, I have to do that. But I want to be able to do things like take her to Disney World. I played club sports. I traveled all over the country, and I got into a D1 school because of that. I want to provide her those opportunities.

And I want to not have to eat hamburger helper at night, because I really find it not that good. So that's where I see the money that I generate from this is those things that are going to help us. Instead of just living, surviving, taking us to where we can do the fun things, to where I can actually go buy nice clothes. I can get my nails done if I want to. Or if we're traveling somewhere, I don't have to drive. I love to drive. But I don't have to drive, maybe it's okay if I fly or those little things. And at this point I think driving and flying costs the same amount anyway. But doing that, that's where I see my photography fitting in. Just a couple hours here, just a couple hours there. And right now it's only a couple hours a day, but getting it to a point where it is super beneficial to our family, instead of it... I never want it to be a drain on us. And maybe one day it'll pay for a house, and I won't have to do it anymore.

Sarah: It absolutely will. That's the benefit. And that's what I loved as I grew my business with three babies under three, and I started feeling that pressure coming off of having a little more money and a little more money. And it just makes it so much fun. What do you say people out there who are maybe putting off having kids because they're like, "My business isn't there yet"?

Michelle: Honestly, I would say you're going to have less time, which is going to make you more productive. It's kind of like that deadline. It's like the deadline rule. If you have 10 minutes to get it done, you're going to get it done in 10 minutes. If you have three days to get it done, you'll get it done in three days. But it really only took you 10 minutes still, so you could have done it now or you could have done it later. So you'll be way more productive, but you'll also do things that have a bigger value. They hold a heavier weight. They're going to move your needle further, than sitting there for five hours on Facebook and being like, "I liked all those posts and then I posted this and no one liked it."

No one's going to like it if they don't even know to look at your stuff. But if you go out there and you take an awesome picture of somebody and then you share

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that picture and you tell that senior, or you tell that family, "Hey, I shared this and I would love for you guys to share it too." That gives you a little bit more. But you got to go photograph them in order to do it. You can't just take a picture of the wild flowers in your front yard.

**Sarah:** Yeah. Yeah. I'm so glad you're here and I'm so glad to get to talk to you because there are so many people who want to put their business off and just aren't open to getting support, aren't open to getting help, aren't open to doing those hard things. You can grow a business and a family at the same time. In fact, I think it's beautiful, because don't you feel like you are meeting new people because of your baby, new potential clients?

**Michelle:** Oh, absolutely. Because now I'm open into a new market now that I never really had a connection with new moms. Yeah, they were my age, but I didn't even know what to talk about with them. But now we have a common ground that has, I don't have to necessarily be like, "Oh, have you gotten pictures of your newborn yet?" I can talk about other things that lead into what I do and how I serve. So it opens up a whole new door and then being a senior photographer, it gives me access to all of these high school kids because they're all ready to babysit. They're all ready to walk the dogs for me or do those things. And so it opens up a door for me to do that. So definitely a different thing.

But I don't think that having your business wait, ever makes sense. Because right now she needs me, she's taking a nap, but she needs me all the time. But then she's going to be in elementary school. Well, when she's in elementary school, she's going to need me to be part of the PTO and to help with the field trips and to do the classroom days and to do her spirit wear or whatever else. So there's always going to be something, it's just whether or not you make doing your business so that you can do those fun things, a priority or working for somebody else and never being able to do those things a priority.

**Sarah:** Yeah. Yeah. And all of those things feed your business, because you're talking to people and you're meeting people. And so I remember, boy, when I had my kids, I'd get a mom who's in a baby group and then my business was just explode. And then I get another mom who's in a different group and then boom, by referral, by referral. And so really having that baby puts you in a lot of right places and you do have more value of your time because you don't have as much of it. And now your time costs you something because you have to pay for childcare likely, if your spouse or partner whomever is working. But for everybody listening, it's not just, "Oh, I don't need to charge much because it's my time." All of a sudden your time is more valuable.

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Michelle: Oh, yeah. It's worth about \$250 a week, I think is what childcare is right now.

Sarah: Yeah.

Michelle: I'm in Texas, so it's not necessarily the most expensive state, but I know my brother pays a lot more in Connecticut.

Sarah: And you want to make a living. You don't just want to work to cover costs. Everyone else gets paid for working why shouldn't we as photographers? We're creating the coolest thing people can have, which is artwork of their people, which I love.

Michelle: That they get to have for the rest of their lives because it's there. It's not in a hard drive that gets broken in three years.

Sarah: I love it. Michelle, you are right here with me. Well, thanks for being here. Well, first off, thank you for serving our country. We appreciate you keeping us safe. And I'm so proud of the work you've done and the growth, watching you grow into this amazing mom who's still running her business and just going to keep growing. So thanks for sharing your story.

Michelle: Yeah. Thank you for having me.

Hey photographer. It's Sarah again with a quick question for you. Do you ever wonder why some photographers make \$300 a session and others make 3000? I know I did. So I dug deep into what's going on and I wrote a book for you called Worth Every Penny. You can get a free copy at [joyofmarketing.com/freebook](http://joyofmarketing.com/freebook). Inside this book, you'll learn four ways to price your photography and why there's just one pricing strategy that attracts the best clients. What to do when you need clients and why paying for ads doesn't work and what to do instead that's way cheaper. The dos and don'ts of social media, what most photographers are doing wrong that lowers their profits and what to do instead. I'm not sure there's a book on the planet that more photographers have read. 23,124 photographers have it already. So I want you to have it too. Grab your copy of the hard cover book free here. Just pay a little for shipping and handling at [joyofmarketing.com/freebook](http://joyofmarketing.com/freebook).