

WORTH EVERY PENNY *joycast*[™]

Sarah Petty: When I met Tara Cirigliano, she didn't have a photography business yet. She was so new that she hadn't even named her business, or, I think, decided if she was going to make a business. But she believed in her heart that it was possible to make a viable income as a portrait photographer. Within weeks, Tara had not one, but two Julies. Those are clients over \$1,000. Hers totaled over \$1,100 each. Today, you'll hear how this new photographer built her boutique portrait photography business and her income while still learning to use her camera.

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 at joyofmarketing.com/podcast.

Tara, I'm so excited that you are here.

Tara C: Thank you for having me. I'm so honored to be here.

Sarah Petty: Yeah. I love your story so much because so many photographers listen to this podcast and are working in their business just as something they love to do, I think they see it as a side hobby or a fun thing, and they don't stop to consider it as, "Oh, my gosh, this could be a career for me. I could actually make money at this pretty quickly." And so I want everyone to hear your story and your journey

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of how you got from not being a photographer, having a different career, moving cities and thinking, "Oh, my gosh, I'm going to start a photography business."

Tara C: Okay.

Sarah Petty: So where were you in your life before you had that epiphany?

Tara C: I was... Well, it was the middle of a pandemic, it was COVID, and I had been working with a wedding photographer as an assistant, carrying bags and sometimes taking some pictures or trying. I was learning. I was teaching myself. I had always had a love for photography. I had taken a course in high school, which was now years past. I had taken a course in my twenties and I just loved doing it and was the obsessive picture-taker of my family and always took pictures of everyone but I never really considered it as a job because I just felt that weird, "It's not a real job. You can't make money doing this."

Sarah Petty: Yeah. Yeah. What was your "real job"?

Tara C: My real job was, I've had a couple, but most of them were in television production. I was an audience producer for a network here in New York and I bartended for 14 years on the side. I mean, I always had a side hustle and always did little things, all different kinds of jobs, especially as my kids were getting bigger. I have a 12, a 10 and a 6-year-old now. And when I was pregnant with my third, my husband and I decided that we were going to move. I was living in Queens in New York City and that we were going to move and we were going to move home and buy a home where I grew up, which was about an hour north.

Well, that left me without a job and so after that, I still did some of the freelance television production, but I was taking care of a baby and never really found my groove. Of course, taking random pictures of them, but not, again, as a job and I

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fell into working with another photographer who happened to be my cousin and helping them out, but during COVID, I wasn't doing anything. I was home with my kids like most people and playing games and doing puzzles, teaching them from home.

Sarah Petty: Yeah. Yeah, we all got sent home, didn't we?

Tara C: Yep.

Sarah Petty: So you were helping out this family member, doing some backup shooting or second shooting and doing a little bit here and there. At that time, were you like, "Oh, this is just something fun to do"? You hadn't really considered, "Oh, what if I did this?"

Tara C: You know what it was, Sarah? It was fun and I loved it, but the trade-off for the money was never... I couldn't ever figure out how someone could make a living, and I would come home in tears because the things would take me... I did a few mini sessions, shoot and burn, and I would come home and it would take me literally sitting...

There was one, this is a horrible story, but there was one year that I decided, "I'm going to start and try to do this." And I did the mini sessions with her and I sat from Thursday to Sunday, did not leave my living room, literally trying to edit and trying to teach myself really how to do it. And in my head, I was thinking, "This doesn't make any sense. I would never ever have a life outside of this so this is not an option for me. I can't." In that moment, I was like, "I hate this. I can't. There's no way that I could raise my family. It's not fair to me. It's not fair to them." But I did love... Obviously, I loved taking pictures, I loved dealing with clients.

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Sarah Petty: Yeah. When you were sitting there in those three days, do you remember a moment where one of your kids was like, "Hey, mom"? I think those are the things that haunt me where they're like, "Mommy, can we do this or that?" You're like, "No, I'm editing." Did you ever have a moment like that?

Tara C: Well, the worst part about that is I did not have that moment and the reason I didn't was because my husband took my kids to my in-laws for those days because I knew how hard it was going to be for me and that I couldn't have any distractions, like I needed to get this done because it was a Christmas mini session and I had to get them done in time.

Sarah Petty: And the whole time, you're telling yourself, "I hate this. I hate this."

Tara C: Hating it. Hating every second of it.

Sarah Petty: Thinking of your kids and your husband running outside and playing and baking cookies. Oh.

Tara C: Yep.

Sarah Petty: That's brutal. And you're sitting there image after hour after hour and your back hurts and you're like...

Tara C: And not even happy with how I was doing it, because I really was learning and I was just getting frustrated with myself and where I was in my life.

Sarah Petty: Yeah, because you don't have this skillset, maybe, that you needed and no time to learn it because you're like [inaudible 00:06:39]...

Tara C: Nope. I just threw myself in.

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Sarah Petty: Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. So you're building this life and you'd shut the door on photography because you're like, "This is not a career I want. This would never be a career. I don't want to do this. I hate this. This is terrible."

Tara C: Yep. I just didn't have enough hours in the day. There was no way that \$250 every three weeks was going to cut it.

Sarah Petty: Yep. Yep. So what changed that?

Tara C: So what changed that was meeting you. And I couldn't, for the life of me, if you paid me a million dollars, tell you how I met you, except that it came across a Facebook feed literally about a week after I had stopped working with the other photographer, it was still the pandemic, it was September 2020 and I wasn't looking for anything yet. I wasn't in that panicked, "What am I going to do for a job?" I knew that I would have to find a job, but nothing was in my brain. I literally was like, "Okay, it's kind of like a clean slate but I got to... I'm going to go do something, probably get a bartending job, do something in the restaurant industry." Because that's what I had been doing.

And I came across one of the... It was Pain Free Pricing, and I signed up not even knowing if I had seen you before, I don't even think I took it all in and so I signed up for it thinking, "Well..." I had had... Let me go back for one second. I had had moments working with the other photographer where I had said out loud to them, "This doesn't make sense to me. Don't people want help doing this?" The things that you bring to the program were things that I had thought before, like, "Why aren't these things being printed? Why... These people don't know how to do this." So I think something in the Pain Free Pricing to me thought, "Well, let me just do it. It doesn't cost anything, it's just going to cost my time and it'll be fun. We'll see."

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Sarah Petty: Yeah, so that was a five-day free challenge we do maybe once a year where we go through pricing and we talk about all these bigger-picture things of how you make money, but also, like you said, how you serve the clients. So that's interesting that you had that question of, "Why aren't we helping them with this? Because it's kind of hard to do." Right?

Tara C: Well, it's funny because the response that I had gotten at that time was, "People don't do that. That's not what people do." And I've always had that mentality of, "Well, isn't that why you should do it?" Somebody should be doing it, right?

Sarah Petty: Yeah.

Tara C: So I didn't think too much of it at the time, this is all looking back now thinking, but I did that Pain Free Pricing, and I think, during that time, something in me ignited and I was convinced that if it was going to be this different way with supportive people, because I had been led to believe that the photography industry in my area was very negative towards each other and I think just seeing the camaraderie and people helping and being positive about it and the fact that you could do it was enlightening to me and I started to have thoughts that then I thought I shouldn't have been having, like, "You can run a business." "You can't run a business. What are you talking about? You won't even have a business. You can't just pick up a camera and just go, 'I'm going to do this.'"

Sarah Petty: I'm literally laughing so hard. You said, "I started having thoughts I shouldn't be having." And I was like, "Where's she going with this?" And then she's like, "I can't have a business." Which I think that's so adorable because so many people think that, like, "Wait, why is my mind going this way?"

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Tara C: But why? Why do people think that they can't? That's, now, looking back, I'm going, "What made me think that 'Not me.?' " Like it was okay for somebody else, but not me. Because I look at other people and I'm like, "Do they know more than me? What do they know that I don't know? Because I don't feel like this is for me or that I am good enough to do this."

Sarah Petty: Yeah. Yeah. What about the framework? Was that appealing to you, to say, "Oh, my gosh, somebody's done this before me and created a system that I can just boom, boom, boom."

Tara C: Oh, my gosh. That was the key to me. When I decided to move forward and work in a boutique photography business and study under you, I decided that it was this or nothing. I have said it for the last however many years, I've said to my husband, "If I stopped doing it this way, I wouldn't do it." One, because I don't believe in it the other way. And I didn't realize that was the disconnect. I can't stand meeting someone in a park for 15 minutes, "Hi", introduce yourself, leave them and then send them something over the internet and not see them again. Where did all that artwork go? What did they do with it? Is it sitting on their computer or is it gorgeous in their home? That part of it never sat right with me.

Sarah Petty: Yeah. Yeah, yeah. So you started learning the system. So I love this because you weren't someone who had had this big background, you were new even in your editing skills and you didn't have workflow and you didn't have any of those systems, which we don't even really teach, but you have to learn quickly because you're out there getting a client. How did that feel as you're learning the system and we're pushing you out there to go get that client? What was going through your mind in that time?

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Tara C: So at the time when I decided that I was going to do it, I was very excited but very nervous. I still, up until the point of starting the business and doing all that, I honestly, throughout months and still some days, I'm like, "Am I doing this? Am I running a business?" So it was exciting, it was stressful, but I never questioned that it was what I was supposed to be doing. I'm a very person who questions a lot of things and I sit on things too long and I procrastinate, but when something tells me that, "Yes, something about this is good", I usually go for it. And this was in that realm. Something about it said to me, "You were looking for this. You didn't like what you were doing and this is somebody who already did all of it and can show you the way." That whole structure of that made it, the framework of that was amazing to me. It was almost like checklists and I work well over checklists.

Sarah Petty: Well, and it's feedback, right? Because you had to pick a name.

Tara C: Oh, my gosh, yes.

Sarah Petty: Right? You had to get a logo and your brand and all the things, which I love with new photographers because you hadn't changed your name three times and working with different logos, you got to do it right from the first, from the very beginning. Do you feel like that was nice? Because it's scary because you don't know [inaudible 00:13:02]...

Tara C: It was scary but amazing. I don't know if I would've started it without somebody to bounce it off of, because I probably wouldn't have known where to go. I probably would've went into a Word document, wrote my name and started printing at places. Like, that's horrible but I didn't know any of that. I also have learned so much, not only about business, but through learning about business and following other people and being inspired by other people, I've learned so

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much about myself that I almost feel like if nothing else came out of owning a business that that's been worth it. It's really been enlightening.

Sarah Petty: The change in yourself and the skills you've built that will take you into anything you do, which is very cool.

Tara C: Totally. Yeah.

Sarah Petty:

Okay, so you're going along, you name your business, you're becoming this "real business". I say that in air quotes, right? Because [inaudible 00:13:49].

Tara C: Yeah, still hiding, though. I was still hiding from friends and family. Nobody knew what I was doing.

Sarah Petty: Because you were thinking, "If I fail, I don't want them to know." So you thought you'll just do this two-month program in private and...

Tara C: Nobody'll know the difference.

Sarah Petty: Oh, interesting.

Tara C: Yeah.

Sarah Petty: So you're kind of doing it in secret, which I think is cool because...

Tara C: I was. Besides my husband. My husband knew and my best friends knew and they were huge supporters even when I wasn't, but yeah, I was kind of doing it in secret.

Sarah Petty: Okay, so...

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Tara C: It's still a little secret from some people.

Sarah Petty: Yeah. So you go out there and you get a client or two clients. Did you get both of your clients at the same time?

Tara C: So I kind of got one accidentally. I got the first one, one is the mother of the other one.

Sarah Petty: Oh, nice.

Tara C: So yes. The person who I got my first sale from, the sales were in the same night but when I originally had the appointments with them, it was more like, "Well, we're doing this for our family and my mom and dad are just going to be in the pictures." And I said to them, "Well, do you think your mom and dad would want artwork as well?" And, "No, no, they'll probably want like a 8x10 and they're just, we want them to be included." "Okay, no problem." So I never even thought too much about it, but when I met them, they're an adorable couple, and they lived in a house that the grandfather's parents owned and I'm like, "I can't be here." I was at their house and next door, I was like, "I can't be here and not take pictures of this."

Sarah Petty: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Tara C: I was like, "Have you guys ever had pictures taken?" "Nah, not really." I was like, "Okay, sit there on that bench. Do this." Right? And I ended up putting together a little, in the presentation that I put together during the ordering appointment, I also put a collection together of the grandparents. I'm like, "Who could it..." They're so adorable. I was like, I said, "I want this in my house. I don't even know you really well and I would put this in my house." And they fell in love with it. The

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grandfather, who's like 75 years old, said to me as I was doing the appointment, he's like, "Well, we have to have that." I was like, "Yes, you do have to have that."

Sarah Petty: Yeah.

Tara C: They took things off their wall to put it in the location that they wanted it.

Sarah Petty: So you're sitting there in this presentation, which I think is surprising when people learn this system that they always think, "Oh, I'm going to be so nervous and that's hard." Was that a fun appointment where you're helping them place their order?

Tara C: It was nerve-wracking because it was my first one, but it's now very exciting because I know... Well, I think I know that they're going to love them because I've learned about them and I know what they're looking for and I feel like I know them a little bit so I know... You know when you got their personality.

Sarah Petty: Yeah, yeah.

Tara C: So it's exciting when you get to see their face when they see them. So I was excited for this appointment, but there were more nerves than normal because it was my first one but I left on cloud nine because they were crying and loving it and wanted to watch it again and all of that.

Sarah Petty: So over a thousand-dollar order and...

Tara C: And there were two. It was \$1,175 and \$1,169.

Sarah Petty: Wow, so over \$2,200 your first time out. What were you thinking as you left there?

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Tara C: I was thinking that they were going to call me and change their mind. I was thinking that that was a fluke. That's not going to happen again. I was thinking a lot of things. And actually, in true transparency, the one was a little less when I left, it was about \$100, \$200 less because the husband, she knew she wanted something else, but her husband wasn't there so when she got home, I called her back and showed the husband over Zoom and then they purchased the last two 8x10s or whatever things they had to add on for his parents or somebody.

Sarah Petty: I love it.

Tara C: So yeah, I was thinking that that was, "Yeah, great. I did that once. That's not going to happen again."

Sarah Petty: Well, but you still did it, right?

Tara C: I did.

Sarah Petty: Did you come home and tell your husband, "Dude, this weird thing happened. It won't happen again."? What did you say?

Tara C: I was like, "She was right." Actually is what I said. I was like, "It did work."

Sarah Petty: What'd he say?

Tara C: He was surprised. I'm going to be honest. He was surprised. Because he knows the value, but he didn't think people would buy into that because I also come from a family who did everything themselves. We didn't pay people to do stuff. So for somebody to come in and say, "I'm going to put this together for you", even I at first was like, "Who's going to do this? Everybody can do this for themselves." And what I'm learning is, "No. No, they cannot. They cannot do it for themselves."

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Sarah Petty: Or they just don't want to, right? I mean, I have a kitchen and a grocery store and I can go buy all the ingredients, but I still like to go out to dinner and have it prepared and served and done better than I can do myself and I don't have to do the work. And it causes a lot of people stress trying to pick the right art and what size should it be and what it should be framed or not framed. We get better at that and so we're able to help them more than they can just guess on their own.

Tara C: Yeah, and that first time, I was doing a lot of guessing. I had taken some pictures, but I had never framed something for somebody. One of them ordered a canvas, one of them ordered a frame and I was like, "I'm just going to do whatever I know." And I left and I came out and I was like, "Okay, guess I got to find a framer because I just told them I could frame stuff."

Sarah Petty: That is so great. Imperfect action beats perfect inaction, right?

Tara C: Yes.

Sarah Petty: Did it and you learned it and they paid you. You got paid to learn something new, which is amazing.

Tara C: They paid me and they loved it and they thanked me. I've seen them now out in public and they just gush over the fact that they love it. I'm like, it's awesome.

Sarah Petty: Yeah. How do your kids feel about this new career?

Tara C: So my kids think it's the coolest thing ever. When I go to an IPS, which is an in-person sales presentation, they sing a little Julie song. They do a Julie chant for me because that was working for a while and they think it's hilarious so then I'll walk in the door and they'll be like, "How'd you do? What did they buy?"

Sarah Petty: Oh, they do a Julie chant. That warms my heart. That is precious.

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Tara C: And we celebrate after big sales.

Sarah Petty: Yeah. So they're understanding that you're doing hard things. That is so cool to show your kids. How do you feel about yourself and the person you're showing up in the world as since you've embraced, "I'm a business owner. I'm a professional photographer."?

Tara C: I think it took me a while to show up in my community. I was forcing myself, and I still, doesn't sound like it, but I am an introvert and so when I go out, I like to stand away from people and I'm not the first person that walks out and says, "Hey, my name's Tara and I'm a photographer." It took me a long time to actually say that word and now I feel more confident in myself, I feel more confident in my business and my abilities. I know from proven facts now that I can deliver on what I'm promising. The first few times, I wasn't sure, but I said it anyway and I just made it work.

I'm proud of the person that I'm becoming for my kids. They see what I'm doing and that I can... I always wanted to help people and I never knew what my path in life was going to be to do that and now I see how I can do that and I can see people's reaction and it's like an instant... Even just sending clients a little bit of love sometimes, whether it's on a text or on a video message or a note, I mean, the responses are crazy. People are just so moved by the fact that there's somebody, one, behind the camera and that they actually care and they care to give their family an experience that is not... It's above and beyond what most people are willing to do.

Sarah Petty: Yeah. And they feel loved and then they feel confident in the artwork because you've held their hand the whole time. You're not just like, "Pick an image and this is the giant price and good luck." You're giving them so much confidence. So

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you do have a relationship with them, which is what you were craving when you were helping out that other photographer and wondering, "Who's printing these?"

Tara C: Well, the other thing is that you want to help these people and you feel good that they're appreciative. And it's not for everybody, that's the other thing, but I haven't come in contact with anyone who it wasn't for that was negative about it. People still appreciate your effort and appreciate what you're doing and what you're trying to do so I do like that too. I think my initial fear was that this would be received by some people as too expensive and, "How could you possibly charge that if I can go over here and do this for so much cheaper?" And that people weren't going to see the value. But what I'm finding is that most people, whether they actually value it themselves, they appreciate the effort and they find it refreshing for the way that we are conducting business.

Sarah Petty: Yeah. Yeah. Well, I am... Tara, thank you for being here and I'm so proud of the fact that you were like, "Hey, I'm going to do this, and if not, I can still go get a job." Because you'd be surprised how many people sit in that place of, "I have some talent and some skill and I do love this and I want to help people", but they're too afraid to go all in on themselves and give it a shot. Were you the same?

Tara C: Sarah, I used to be that person. And I think... I don't know if it's age or what it is, and I'm not that old, but I don't know if it's age, but I think you helped me to realize this too, maybe in that pricing challenge and through the years is that if you're not going to go in on yourself or believe in yourself, who the heck is? Nobody.

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I can have everybody telling me that what I'm doing is great, but until I'm willing to do that for myself, you're never going to believe it. And let me just say, the community surrounding this whole process has been a driving force for me because they believe in you more than you believe in yourself most days and just push you through and I've met some of the most phenomenal people in my life that I never knew I was missing and I don't know how I've gotten this long without, because they've literally helped me create my new reality.

Sarah Petty: Yeah, and I think so many people are afraid to invest in something that maybe is just a dream, right? When you're investing in yourself, you made a significant investment in yourself and you are...

Tara C: But what's the worst that's going to happen? Maybe it is just a dream, but you'll never know.

Sarah Petty: Yeah.

Tara C: You got to try it.

Sarah Petty: Good point. I think you're...

Tara C: Then at least you can check it off.

Sarah Petty: Yeah, I think people are afraid, like, "I've failed before." Right? So, "Not doing is less painful than doing and failing." I think people think.

Tara C: I do think that, and honestly, I had a moment last week where I was talking to people and going through what we call the seven Bs. It's like the initial conversation. And I had a whole day of a lot of nos. Lot of nos in all things. Two full days, actually, of a lot of nos. And my first thought was, "Oh, man, what am I doing? Am I really doing this right?" And I sat with that for a minute and then I

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was actually telling a bunch of friends who were also in the program with me, I was like, "You know what? This was an awesome day." And they're like, "What?" I was like, "I am obviously doing something. People are saying no to me, which means I'm presenting and I'm talking to people and I'm giving them the opportunity and I'm doing what I'm supposed to be doing as a business owner, I'm working and they're saying no and there's got to be a yes coming because there can only be so many nos."

Sarah Petty: Exactly. And you're getting better, you're going through the process and you're okay with that no, right?

Tara C: Yeah.

Sarah Petty: When maybe, in the past, you'd be like, "Oh, my gosh, if someone else says no, I'm going to cry in the corner."

Tara C: It would've crushed me. Yeah.

Sarah Petty: Yeah. And look at you now. You're like, "I had a great day."

Tara C: Yeah. I know. And I was questioning, "Who are you? What has happened to you?"

Sarah Petty: That is amazing. That is amazing. Well, thank you for being here and sharing your story because I hate seeing people not go all in on this career and this ability to make money when they so easily can and it fits right into their lives, right? It doesn't have to just be a hobby.

Tara C: No, it doesn't. And whether it's this career or any career, if you're not going to try, it's never going to happen. You can't make something happen by sitting on the sidelines.

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Sarah Petty: Yeah. Or guessing, right?

Tara C: Or guessing, or assuming that it's not going to work.

Sarah Petty: Yeah.

Tara C: And honestly, my husband said that to me when I started. He's like, when I took... I ended up taking another program with you and his words when I was worried about money and investing in myself, which is something that I normally wouldn't do, he said, "Well, what is the worst that's going to happen? You're going to be out this money, but you're going to have the answer that that wasn't for you. It's just another path that you thought could work but didn't." And obviously, the opposite happened, which is what you hope for, but you'll never know if you don't try.

Sarah Petty: Yeah. Some people go a year or two, three sometimes in college and decide, "You know what? I don't want to do that." Well, hey, you've got the whole rest of your life. Better to find it out now to change directions and it's never a waste. Investing in yourself is never a waste, I don't believe.

Tara C: No. No, I'm learning that. You're teaching me that and I'm grateful.

Sarah Petty: I love it, Tara. Well, thank you so much for being here. This was fantastic.

Tara C: Thank you for having me and for all of your support.

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Sarah Petty:

Hey photographer! This is Sarah again. Really quick, I wanted to give you the chance to work with me for five days for FREE starting November 7th! You heard me right. I'm hosting a free challenge we call the 5-day booking boost. It's the busy season for portrait photographers. But the economy is more uncertain than we've seen in recent years. This challenge is for you if you feel paralyzed by marketing, always second-guessing yourself by putting it off. Hop over to the 5-day booking boost challenge right now at joyofmarketing.com/bookingboost. That's joyofmarketing.com/bookingboost. You'll get an HOUR of LIVE daily challenge training with me, a printable challenge workbook that will help you find your ideal clients, support, encouragement, and accountability in our private Facebook group. No matter where you are in your photography business, this challenge is going to help you understand the strategy behind finding boutique clients AND understand all the things you need to be successful in consistently getting bookings. Go online to joyofmarketing.com/bookingboost and join this next challenge.