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Sarah Petty: How do you juggle a growing photography studio with a desire to travel more with your family? This year, Chianne Coffman, a student of mine and social media and design coach in my Peak Performance coaching program, designed her boutique life to include road trips with her two kids and photographing clients in her growing photography business. And she still did over six figures. Today we're chatting through how to build a boutique photography business that fits your desire to do more with your family without having to work more or give up on your business goals.

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.

Hi, Chianne.

Chianne Coffman: Hi Sarah. Thank you so much for having me. It's always a pleasure.

Sarah Petty: I am so glad you are here. So I love so much about your story and I know everybody listening has a different story and that's why I love bringing on so many different case studies so people can listen and go, "Oh, I'd like to be like this person." Or, "I'm like that person and they did it, I can do it." But what I love about you is you're not just doing it, you're crushing it. And you have your priorities so straight with your family first, which we're going to get into.

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But, first, I want to start with where you were when we met. You were, in my mind, this super talented photographer, you are a graphic designer, so your work and your ideas were beautiful. And I remember you did a program of ours and you came to the studio and I remember you saying, "I'm not booking clients." And you had this chair or sofa made out of Ivy that you made for a client. You're like, "I had this really great idea." And then they no showed you and I was dying. I'm like, "How could this be happening? This should be a 5,000 or \$10,000 order with all the amazing ideas and everything you'd put into that." So do you remember what that was like when you did all that work for that client and they no showed? I don't know if they ever ended up showing up, but I remember it was hard. They were rescheduling and you had a live living chair.

Chianne Coffman: Yes, I remember that very well. That was back in the day before I really put value on the work that I was creating. I was creating these beautiful things but had no idea that anyone would ever pay me money for it. And it wasn't until I got educated on my own worth and started believing in myself, that that really changed for my business. So no longer am I creating moss covered chairs for \$0.00.

Sarah Petty: Lesson learned, right? Lesson learned. And that's why I say, failure is a good thing if you want to call that failure. But you learned, "Okay, that was a lot of work and I'm not doing that anymore." I remember you were kind of mad, you were like, "That's not a way to build a business. I'm missing something here." And I knew for you that it was small things, right? It was a missing link here and a missing link there. And once you had a whole system and you could plug right in, you could fill those little holes like spackling compound. You go and you fill the little holes and then you can run faster. So tell us your story, where you were and how things changed for you? And then we'll dig into where you are now.

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Chianne Coffman: Okay, perfect. I really come from a background of always wanting to create something new and I love maximizing my creativity. So that is woven into everything that I do, whether it's with my family or with my business, with my marriage, with my friendships, I have always overserved, I'm very generous. And so that was always the foundation. It wasn't really until I got my first Julie that I realized people will pay me for that talent. I started putting value on myself as an artist. I started using words like, "I'm an artist and I'm creating artwork," instead of prints or images or digitals. I started putting words on the things that I was creating. And in the minds of my clients that was valuable, that added value to what I was doing, the language was being reverted back to me by my clients. They started talking about the artwork that I create. And so that little education was a real confidence booster for me and really helped me be confident in saying my prices.

Sarah Petty: Here's what's interesting is I remember you being at my studio and you were considering doing another program of mine and you were so struggling because you're like, "I'm not making any money and I just don't know." You had this great design experience. And I had to say, I remember it was sort of a challenging conversation. I was like, "Chianne, you need this program. You need this program." Do you remember that conversation? Do you remember what made you actually make that investment in a system?

Chianne Coffman: Yeah. Well, prior to me meeting you, have you ever had that feeling that you were created for something more and you're just not doing it and you don't know how to get there? And I've written so many journal entries over the years talking about, "How does this person have so many followers? What is so great about them? Why can't I do that? Why can't that be me?" And so it was just this feeling always, and honestly, when I saw you for the first time, I think I found you on Pinterest and I loved your studio. And I was like, "This is a person that's doing what I want to do." And right off the bat, before I ever met you in person, I felt like

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I already knew you because I related to you so well. And then come to find out as we're friends now that we have a lot in common, our profiles are pretty in common and in line.

So no wonder why I was so intrigued at the beginning. But what ended up happening was I clicked on that Pinterest post and it brought me to the Boutique Breakthrough signup. And my husband and I were running out of town. We were going to Nebraska, and I was like, "I can do this. I'm going to just do it." I didn't have enough in my business account to cover the cost of the class, but I was like, "I'm going to do it. I'll figure out a way. This is it. This is the magic missing key." And honestly, that 30 days was all the hard work I needed to really pull myself into my full potential. So that really changed the course of how I was thinking about where I was going with my business and how I could start the business that I always wanted.

Sarah Petty: Which now it's two months. We've made it twice as long, which was part of the problem.

Chianne Coffman: Oh that's great.

Sarah Petty: People need more support. I think when you got to come here and it was like, "You need more," because I could see that you were so close, which was so fantastic. And now, I mean, you've just taken off. You hit six figures quickly. And you are a coach now in our program, which so has been so fun to watch you go. But I think what intrigues me about you is while you had insecurities and doubts, like everyone else, "Am I worth this? Can I charge this?" And once you followed the system, now you have no problem with what you're charging.

Chianne Coffman: And I think the more and more I found confidence in myself, the less and less I attracted the wrong client. So I really put myself out there in my community, first as a person's friend. I love building relationships with people. And even my introverted studio manager, she also will jump on board and create relationships with people. So just because

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you're an introvert doesn't mean you can't create great relationships. Some of my best relationships are done one-on-one over coffee or a glass of wine or brunch, whatever.

So really, those relationships that I had always been building through, I think I was in business around 13 years prior to coming into this program. And so I had 13 years of relationships that I had built that I had not even tapped into their potential of how we could really collaborate and both be extremely happy with the end result. So the last three years, I actually went from \$20,000 annual salary to \$50,000, \$50,000 to \$112,000 to \$206,000. So I don't know what you call that, but doubling your business that many years in a row was quite amazing. And a lot of learning curve.

Sarah Petty: They call that a gazelle, a fast growing company, which you definitely are. But one of the things that I think you're really good at is we teach the seven Bs of the first conversation. We systematize the things to do. And step four is creating value. We have a whole bunch of ways to do that. And then five is price. And what I love about you, which I hope others can take from this, is that you're quick to learn the lesson because I remember you saying, "Sarah, I did a call and I went through the seven Bs."

But it was like you just wanted to get through them, but you didn't really do them with the intention of making sure the client heard you because then you got to the presentation, you were disappointed with the order, and you looked back and you were like, "Oh, I should have been better about the first conversation. I think you only did that once." And now look at you, leading the charge. And we'll talk about that in a second, but do you remember that conversation and how that affected you and changed you and you realized, "I said it, but I didn't really mean it"?

Chianne Coffman: Yes, I remember that. I think I will always remember that. That was a lesson, again, where you grow through what you go through, you have to fail. It's not a perfect science and you have to fail but I don't think you truly fail until you quit. And that was the key

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for me was that I had to pick myself up off the floor and dry my eyes and go find the next client. That was the beginning. I think in my whole three years of doing your program, I think I've had that happen to me maybe three times. And those were all during the very beginning. That doesn't happen to me anymore because I'm very upfront and I want my clients to trust me to not only create the artwork but to be full disclosure of what the expectation is on both of our sides.

Sarah Petty: Yeah, you don't need to trick them or hide prices or gloss over them. I mean, it's a benefit. And so talk about now, what are your goals in your life with your family and with your clients? Where does all of that fit in now?

Chianne Coffman: Great. Yes, last year or two years ago. So 2021 ended with over \$200,000 for the year and I was exhausted. I don't really understand how some people will take on 365 clients or 136 clients, I'm not that way. And I knew I didn't want to do that. I didn't want to always be busy. So I looked at my portfolio and I realized I do 35 really low sales in this category of my business, say, headshots. And it's just time consuming. You're still having to serve those people at very high levels but they're capped out at a certain amount with the sale. So I pivoted away from that and started putting X amount of time into my families and the people that I could build these relationships with and they would continue coming back for more things and more things over the years. So that was a change in my business that helped me free up some time because I was spending less time on the clients that were the smaller orders.

Because I did that, I was able to serve far less clients in the year. My average sales per order skyrocketed because I didn't have these low numbers lowering my averages. And now I spend a full year with a family, no joke. I'm on the phone talking with them, we're talking back and forth before the photo shoot. I'm invested in them. I'm going to their house and helping them pick out their wardrobes or I'm shopping for them. But I love that. That's the part of this high service that I love. And because I serve a minimal amount of clients a year because I can,

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I'm able to really serve them hard and that keeps them coming back. Every about three years, I get this rotation. And as I keep building those clients and I keep attracting the right clients, that rotation will be a well-oiled machine that eventually... Well, it already has actually worked to where I have a lot of time to spend with my family and my growing kids. So that, to me, is the most rewarding and the biggest lesson.

Sarah Petty: Well talk about your kids and what your kids are at really fun ages.

Chianne Coffman: Oh yes. So I have a 13 year old son who is really competitive in baseball. And, in fact, this last year I took a month off and we got in our RV and we went to Cooperstown, New York. I was so proud of him. He got a play in the 12U tournament there, which is a once in a lifetime deal. And had I had a 9:00 to 5:00 job or had I booked 300 clients that year, I wouldn't have had that opportunity. But here I was able to spend a whole month on the road. We stopped along the way and we made memories together. And I think that that is where I think is where you truly find freedom as a small business owner when you can design a business that serves the people that you love most in this world first, family first. Also last year we were able to take a week and a half off and go to the Black Hills, took the kids up there, they loved it.

I have a seven year old daughter also who is all about road trips because she gets us one-on-one. We're not busy on our phones, and we're not busy on our iPads or anything. We're just being a family. And then just recently we took a month off and we just went through the southwest. And what's the coolest part about this is that my clients are all for it. They're like, "Yeah, that's so cool that you get to take these vacations and go. I don't even want to put anything more on your plate. Let's do my framing appointment when you get back. I want to hear all about your trip. We'll have coffee, we'll catch up on things."

And it's like, "These are the kind of people that I get to be serving and that are my clients are the ones that are all about my personal life coming first." And, again, that's just

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based on the amount of investment that I have in them as well to build a relationship that is sustainable and not, "You charged me \$20 more on this or why isn't my order here yet?" Those kinds of things don't happen with me because I'm so open in my communication always with my clients and I'm up front, "Hey, this art piece is getting delayed in the frame shop because the frame's back ordered." "Oh, no problem. That's okay. Can you still come by for coffee?" And I'm like, "Okay, sure." I still go because, again, it's the relationship.

Sarah Petty: I love that. You're really great at relationships in your community, which you got a big award in your community this year.

Chianne Coffman: I'm so excited, yes. Actually talking about social media, I love to use social media as a tool, but you have to be very careful that it doesn't take up all your time. But I love it as a tool. So I live in Windsor, Colorado, and our downtown chamber is amazing, and they do a gala award show every year. And for the past two years we were nominated for Best Small Business in Windsor, which is pretty awesome. There's over 2,800 businesses in my town. So to be nominated in the top three was an honor in and of itself. And then to be nominated among other women who I love so much, and I know them by name and their contact's already in my phone because we've already built all these relationships, we could all just cheer each other on. It was a wonderful night and I ended up winning this year.

So it was just a dream come true. I said this when I went up for my acceptance speech or whatnot, just about how I was a young girl, I grew up with a dream, I always wanted to own my own studio. I knew I wanted to be an artist. I knew there would always be something really great that would happen in my life, but as a little girl, I was raised by a single mom, we were paycheck to paycheck, we had nothing extra in our budget for anything. So it seemed like an impossible mountain to climb. But then I got to stand up there and I got to prove that dreams are possible. And having that dream and having that innate drive in your own self and being intentional about making it happen can open so many doors for your life. And that's what

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happened with me. And it was an amazing year last year, and I'm so grateful for my community and my amazing clients, my family, of course, and you.

Sarah Petty: Aw, and you. It's so great. We have so many amazing leaders in this program and when I watched your stories and you texted me that night, I knew you were up for that award, and I remember being like, "Oh, this is so exciting," I felt like I was there with you even though I wasn't and-

Chianne Coffman: I streamed it live.

Sarah Petty: Oh, I could have been there with you then.

Chianne Coffman: I streamed it live. That was my social media thing. I kind of got sidetracked, but I did stream that night live because I wanted people to see, "That's my raw reaction. This is happening. It's a dream come true." So anytime you get a chance to stream those kinds of things on your business account, it really pulls back the curtain of who you are as a person and lets people in to see the behind the scenes person that is really experiencing something special.

Sarah Petty: Yes. And I'm sure had you not won it, you would've been just as happy for the two women that you had relationships with who did, which would show a really cool side of you too. So that's very cool. So what is next for you? What's the BHAG, the big, hairy, audacious goal? What's the vision for next step for Chianne Coffman?

Chianne Coffman: Well, I actually am working on forming my own 501(c)(3), and that is called Glow Getters. All the paperwork has officially been filed and I'm waiting for the final stamp of approval. And with that charity, it's a tween empowerment program, but it will also

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one day be for women as well. So through the power of photography and design, I'm able to really boost the confidence of young girls in my community so far up to this point. I have funded it personally through my own business every year. And it's growing to be such a big thing that I really needed to pivot it into a nonprofit so that I could serve more girls in my community over the years. Eventually, I love this program, it's really my passion. I've met so many amazing young girls and it's been a great way to position myself as a leader in my community.

And it has also been a good way to position myself as a generous business owner, willing to give back to young girls. Like I told you before, I was once that young girl that just wanted somebody to believe in me and wanted somebody to be like, "You can do this, let's do this together." And that ended up being somebody that I found when I was 37 years old. And it was you that was like, "Okay, I see you," and pick me up and just give me those missing pieces that could really help me to maximize my potential. So if I'm able to do that with young girls in my community, starting at a much younger age, I am all for that. So that's what's happening this year. I'm really excited about that. And given that through Chey Creative, I take on minimal clients, I have the time to do these kind of passion projects that I want to do.

Sarah Petty: And you have a daughter who's watching all of these things too.

Chianne Coffman: Yeah, she is chomping at the bit, she's seven years old and she's like, "Mom, why can't I go? I'm your daughter." And I'm like, "You have to be nine." It's for my own sanity as well as hers, but I'm like, "I need a couple more years before my daughter's in it." But yes, she's very excited. And there's a wait list to get into it because people love it, parents are gushing over it. There's such a need for something like between empowerment in the world, in your community as well. And every community could use something that empowers young girls.

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Sarah Petty: Yeah, I think everybody really needs it, but I think you and I both having come from when we were young and just how powerful words are, someone is pouring into us. I love that, Chianne. I can talk to you all day, but thank you for coming and sharing your story. And I know somebody here is listening saying, "Wait, what? That's possible. I can spend my time working on my own charity empowering young people? What a dream come true." And there are people doing it just like Chianne. So thanks Chianne.

Chianne Coffman: Absolutely. Thank you for having me. And it's an honor to be a coach in your program and be able to give back. So I appreciate it.

Sarah Petty: I love it. I love it. Thanks, Chianne. Guys, when I first met Chianne, she was taking these amazing images and not getting big orders from them. And just a few years later, she's got a multiple six figure business. She, by choice, is photographing a handful of clients and showing up in the hugest way for her family. What I love about the boutique business model is that you can turn it up and down whenever you want to fit your life needs at the time. Whether or not you need six figures, you can do whatever you want, part-time, full-time, whatever fits into your life. And you can make the business the way you want.

So I hope Chianne's story has inspired you. She's always inspiring me so that you can see what's possible for you in your photography business this year. And, look, if you'd like the help of my team and I building your photography business so that you can have extra money coming into your life and freedom and flexibility to put your family first, there are lots of ways we can help you. So check the links in the show description to get started. And don't put this off, life is short. Time goes fast, especially if you have kids, these years are the ones that it's nice to have the extra money so you can do the things you want. So just know both Chianne and I are cheering hard for you. You can do this.

Hey photographer, I've been dying to share some pretty big news with you and now I finally can. The only three day event in the world for boutique photographers is back this

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coming February 28th, March 1st, and 2nd of 2023. It's three whole days of nothing you've ever experienced, connection, learning, growing, and renewing your passion for your boutique photography business. And the best part, Go Boutique Live is happening online. So no plane ticket or hotel costs, no travel hassles, just you and me and a killer lineup of incredible speakers pouring into you and your business for three whole days. We will be interacting, live, chatting, answering your questions, and immersing you in all things boutique. Not to mention, you get a big box of really cool boutique photographers swag too. Tickets are on sale now, but there are a very limited number of tickets available for the 2023 event. So grab your ticket now at goboutiquelive.com. That's goboutiquelive.com, and I can't wait to see you there.