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Sarah Petty: When Amy Wellenkamp set her photography business up 16 years ago, she made every mistake in the book that limited her income potential. Once her wedding and corporate photography businesses disappeared during the pandemic, single mom Amy decided to go all in on photographing families and seniors. She changed her business model to the boutique model, and get this, Amy had her first boutique portrait consultation in June of '22, and by December 15th, Amy had sold over \$86,000 of her photography in six months, and ended the year over \$100,000. Today, Amy and I are chatting about the changes she made to get where she is today.

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, Amy.

Amy Wellenkamp: Hi, Sarah.

Sarah Petty: Oh, my gosh. Literally, I have been so excited about recording this podcast with you because you're like one of those people in my community that was the silent person out there just crushing it. And then I see this post telling your story about what happened, and I didn't know all of these things were happening, and I was like, "Okay, we're doing a podcast because I have to know how the heck she did this." And wow, I'm just really excited, so thank you for being here.

Amy Wellenkamp: Thank you for having me. I'm honored to be here.

Sarah Petty: Let's just start with your backstory. What's your background with photography and what did that look like?

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Amy Wellenkamp: Sure. I officially got my business license about 16 years ago, and stepped out of corporate America into photography, but yet I was a young mom, and so this wasn't my full-time thing. I wasn't supporting my family with this. It was a side deal, really. And so mistake number one is I didn't set it up to be a full, real-deal, full-time thing that could support my family. And so just along the way, just kept adding more work, figuring out where my strengths were.

Sarah Petty: Let me jump in here, can I, really quick?

Amy Wellenkamp: Sure.

Sarah Petty: What were your thoughts? Did you not need a full-time income? Or you're like, "Maybe it'll grow into that"? Because you said you made the mistake of not setting it up that way. Was that in your mind, you weren't looking at it as potential to make the money or what did you mean?

Amy Wellenkamp: That's a great question. So I didn't need to. My husband and I at the time had just planned on... He was the breadwinner and we would live off a single income, and anything that I made was just extra. But not foreseeing the future, that marriage wasn't going to last and that I was going to need to support myself.

Sarah Petty: Got it. So you didn't have the need, so you were like, "This is fun." So you kind of saw it as a hobby and extra money and not a big deal. Okay. When did that change?

Amy Wellenkamp: It was more of a full-time thing for me when I really launched into weddings, probably, I don't know, 2010 or so, and then I would do some corporate work because that was my background. And then also I have a big dance studio I shoot every year. So I had all these different moving parts that, oh, well, if weddings were good this year, I didn't need to do as many portraits, all these things. But the problem was is that all of the different business models were separate. I was shooting and burning really for weddings, and then the portrait side, trying to have IPSs, but in the middle of the week, I'm still editing weddings and then trying to be a mom and everything else. It just wasn't working.

Sarah Petty: Got it. So were you doing digital or were you kind of a hybrid, on the portrait side specifically?

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Amy Wellenkamp: I was a hybrid. And so several years ago I started listening to you and adopting some of the things. And so I started transitioning into encouraging my portrait clients to buy prints from me and buy wall art, and then I would set digitals as a pretty high price point. So probably only 10% of my clients would buy digitals from me. However, what I was charging for my prints and wall art weren't going to bring me in significant amounts of income, and so I just wasn't able to get over that threshold that I needed to for my time and what I was earning.

Sarah Petty: So how many years did you go that way?

Amy Wellenkamp: Oh, probably, oh, this is embarrassing, eight.

Sarah Petty: Yeah, thinking, oh, next year will be better. Next year will be better. What were you telling yourself?

Amy Wellenkamp: Yes, or just I need to do... Then looking at the corporate model of... Because my background was in art directing and branding, so I could add that to what I was offering corporations, but really that shoot and burn too. And just trying to see where the money was. And I just knew that I couldn't do weddings forever, and in corporate work, it was more and more competitive, where there's a lot more people with less experience than me that were charging less. And so portrait work was really where I needed to claim my space, especially in my area. I live in a destination wedding area. And so where do you live the wedding? I live on the central coast of California, kind of near San Luis Obispo. And so the competition in the wedding photography industry here is huge. However, in the portrait and senior portrait, especially since the pandemic, there's a lot less of us.

Sarah Petty: So talk about the pandemic hit and what happened to your business.

Amy Wellenkamp: So I'd already had started thinking, I knew I didn't want to do weddings anymore, but I hadn't quite made that jump because it's nice to know, oh, I have this coming up on my calendar and these deposits coming in, and that safety net. Well, pandemic hits, so I lost 30% of my business in five days, so that was really a hard thing to swallow and look at. And oh, I'm not essential, and these people that are essential still have their jobs and all these things. And so then rescheduling a couple weddings, the big corporate work that I had of course got put on hold, and so then I was able to just sit and think, "Okay."

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So I signed up for the Boutique Breakthrough again, and I was just in a space where I didn't do it because I think it was the middle of senior season. It was kind of weird, where we could take pictures with masks on and just all of that. And I just wasn't mentally ready to do what I needed to do. Early 2022, I signed up for Go Boutique Live, and I was like, "Okay, I'm going to set aside this time." And I'll be honest, after the first day of Go Boutique Live, I was in a pile of tears and overwhelmed and had a headache. And I was like, "Oh my gosh, can I show up for this again tomorrow?"

Sarah Petty: Why? I'm curious, what were you feeling?

Amy Wellenkamp: I know. I think just like, "Oh my gosh, this is going to take a lot of work." I was scared it wasn't going to work, and I had already looked at going back into the corporate arena, and that overwhelmed me for the job I would need to have, it's going to suck my life away. And so I'm like, "I need to make this work." And I think it was just a greeting process of, "Okay, this has to work." And so the next morning I woke up all full of new energy and I was like, "Okay, let's go." So I signed up for Peak.

Sarah Petty: For anyone listening, yeah, Peak Performers is our 12-month coaching program. So you invested in the two-month program, but didn't really do it. And then you came to our event and you bought the 12-month program. I'm curious, because I'm sure a lot of people are like, "Well, if you didn't do the two-month program, why would you invest in the 12-month program?" So I'm just curious, what was your thought process?

Amy Wellenkamp: I think I was at a point of this is do or die. I need some serious help with my business and being encouraged by just seeing all of the great resources I've already had access to through Joy Marketing throughout the years, and the different marketing and things. Because I came from that arena, I really understand what a value that is, and I didn't have to create it on my own. And to have people walking beside me, I could have questions answered all the time. This wasn't just, "Okay, let's go through this eight-week course. And then fly birdie, fly." I just had a team next to me for the year, where I saw huge amounts of value in that, and I needed to do that for me.

Sarah Petty: So you jumped in, but then again, you didn't do anything for a little while, right? What happened?

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Amy Wellenkamp: Well, actually this time I did. I jumped in, but I did Boutique Breakthrough again, well, for the first time, really. On the books, it looked like I had done it already, but I hadn't. And so this time I was like, "Okay, I'm not missing any of the classes. I'm not skipping anything," and I did it. And so then in the meantime, what I did was I have a little showroom space on my property where I meet with my clients, and I reworked the whole thing. I took out all of my wedding samples, got all new portrait samples with all the Boutique Breakthrough different series, made all my new prices, printed them out. Because my goal was before the senior portrait season started, because that's a really big corner of the market I have in my area for high school seniors, and I really wanted to be ready for this season. I really wanted to be ready the year before, but I wasn't with this new program.

Sarah Petty: Yeah, okay. So you're going through Boutique Breakthrough, which really in our 12-month program, if you haven't done it the first two months, our Boutique Breakthrough, so you're meeting people, you're probably building some connections with other photographers, starting to get momentum and energy, and you're revamping everything. And then what happened?

Amy Wellenkamp: And then shaking in my boots, I got a phone call of a mom that was interested in my photography for her high school senior son. And so I was like, "Okay, here we go." Set up the first phone call, talked to her, and she heard all my prices and was fine. I was like, "Okay." And then she agreed to come and meet with me in person. I did all the 7Bs with her, and we talked about what she liked and kind of planned out the shoot for her son, as far as the different series and things, and that she liked the art book. And she saw all the pricing, and that was great with her. And put down her deposit and picked the date, so okay, she didn't cancel. And then I just keep acting like this is all normal. So we go and meet, we do the shoot, she comes back here. She places I think a \$2,400 order, and then a month later she placed another \$1,700 order.

Sarah Petty: Wow. Wow. This is your first boutique client after following this system?

Amy Wellenkamp: Right.

Sarah Petty: Oh my gosh, that is amazing. So when she placed that order and you added up that first total, were you thinking, "Okay, she's going to cut or she's going to whatever"?

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Amy Wellenkamp: I was pretty confident, really, because we had done all the steps. I wasn't afraid. I was like, "Okay, this is what she wants and I'm serving her. This is her only child. Her husband travels all the time, and this is really important to her." And then she wanted another several prints and everything, another \$1,700. And so then I sent her a gift of a wood box for her prints, her loose prints. And yeah, it was crazy. But in the midst of all this, I had another meeting. I met with her, she placed her order, and right after that, I had another in-person consult. So the dad and a daughter come in.

We had done the first phone call. I did actually two first phone calls with their family, so completely explained everything. But he came in and saw the prices and was mad. And he was like, "You should give me the digitals for this session fee price, and you owe me this and that." And his poor daughter was just shrinking in the seat next to him. But I just had the confidence and the patience and the calmness just to say, "I'm just not for everybody." Instead of letting that just tick me off, I was like, "No, you're just not for me, and that's okay."

Sarah Petty: Oh, my gosh, thank you for sharing that story, because I think people listen to these and they're like, "Oh, she's some magic snowflake, and just magically everything worked for her," but it's never going to be perfect every time.

Amy Wellenkamp: No.

Sarah Petty: And I'm so proud of you because it is at the moment you want to please people. We're pleasers by nature, I think. And it's like, "Okay, I'll do it just for you for this price." And I'm so proud of you for saying, "Hey, it's not for everybody." And they went away and you're fine.

Amy Wellenkamp: Yep, yep. And I didn't let it take over my head space, which I appreciated just in the coaching and the head trash, dealing with that. And just like, no, I'm worth it, and that's okay.

Sarah Petty: So you knew it was coming and you're like, "Hey, this is normal. This happens, and it's not me. We just weren't a good fit." It's kind of like dating, probably a little bit. You're going to go on some dates that don't work out, most people likely, and that's okay. You're just different. He wanted different things than what you were offering. I'm so proud of you for just that quickly... Because a lot of people, the first time they get

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awkward and they give in, and then the next time, the next time. You just knew, boom. I'm expecting this. Not expecting it, but prepared for it.

Amy Wellenkamp: Mm-hmm. I think part of what helps me with that too is I feel there's just an inequity. If I am willing to do this for less so-and-so, but then charge so-and-so a larger price because maybe they're willing to pay, that's just really not fair.

Sarah Petty: Yeah, that makes us feel yucky about ourselves, right? Yeah. Because then you're like, "Oh, maybe why did they..." And you start justifying and becoming a negotiator, which I think the businesses that have a sort of bad reputations are negotiable. Car dealers, advertising space, things that supply and demand a little bit have something to do with. And it's like, we can create our own demand. And if it's not what you want, this is the price. And when people push back ever on price, for anyone listening, my first thing is, "No, actually, it's getting ready to go up, so you're lucky you got in at this price," even if it's not. That's just my go-to, which usually it is, right? It can be, but I don't discount, and I don't go in stores asking for discounts. It's so weird.

Amy Wellenkamp: No. Yeah, it's true. Yeah, I don't like that. I feel honorable when I go shopping and I want to pay full price, and I love what you have to offer, and so it should happen for me too.

Sarah Petty: And if places are having sales, I'll go sales shopping for sure, but I don't go in and ask for a sale price if they're not having a sale. It's interesting.

Amy Wellenkamp: Right. Yes.

Sarah Petty: Okay, so you had this great client and then you had a wrong fit, get in the system and accidentally or whatever, good learning lesson. Then what happened? Because if you hit 80 between what, June, July, August, summer... I remember seeing that it was between August 10th and mid-December were 86, and then you hit 100,000. What did you do in five, six months that just blew you up like that? I'm so excited to hear.

Amy Wellenkamp: Well, thank you. So there was a perfect storm, really. So I was set up to succeed, first of all, because I had a process when I was getting these calls. I took over my Google Business listing finally about 16 months ago, probably, because someone else had hijacked it with some random construction pictures. It was just weird. And so people are able to find me

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on Google easier than before and all these things. And also, I have a relationship with an orthodontist in my area, where for the last 10 years, he gives people a mini session with me when they get their braces off. And so I've had a pipeline and relationships there. So okay, now I have a new system to get these leads that are coming in and take better advantage of them when I am talking to these families.

Sarah Petty: Yeah, because your background is in marketing. You come from marketing, you're an art director, you get design and things. But it sounds like when you overlaid a process for pricing and the sales system, that you have the missing pieces now.

Amy Wellenkamp: Yes, exactly. And it wasn't like going back to college and doing all of these intensive things. I mean, it was two months of Boutique Breakthrough. And then all the follow-up that's been happening with the 12-month program and Peak. And off to the races, and it shows up in my bank account immediately. That's insane. So I'm just so grateful, just that you are willing to share your knowledge with us and coach us and encourage us. One of my favorite lines that you say is that you'll believe in us until we can, that's a paraphrase, of course. But that's just huge. We all need these cheerleaders and we need to believe in ourselves.

Sarah Petty: Yeah, because I think when you're out there alone, you just assume everybody else is making money and there are so many competitors, and I think it paralyzes people from moving forward. That whole paralysis by analysis of whatever it is, and it keeps us stuck.

Amy Wellenkamp: Oh, 100%. Exactly. And I think that's the other thing I... Well, I know it is, of having this community and group of other photographers across the world, is that, first of all, we're not competitors. And so we're able to really share behind the scenes with each other and, "Hey, this is working for me," or, "What do you guys think about this or that?" And to see people's successes and also challenges. And again, not feeling like I'm in this island or it can't happen, but no, this process works again and again, and again, and again.

Sarah Petty: Yeah, I love that about the community too, because I'll teach a lesson or we'll bring out a new campaign and people will take it and run with it and change it and use it for different target audiences. And then groups will form of the pet photographers, and the senior photographers. And

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people who are loving the same target audience, which is so exciting to see. And you guys, you have a small group that meets every week.

Amy Wellenkamp: Yes. Yes, I do.

Sarah Petty: Yes. And I love that because when people come into our program, you're kind of all alone. So this is your instant little family who checks in on you and makes sure that you're just okay.

Amy Wellenkamp: Yes, exactly.

Sarah Petty: And gosh, we have so many different parts of the program. What do you think your favorite part is?

Amy Wellenkamp: I love the organization of the silos, just the whole website where we can go and get resources. Okay, I want to focus on marketing to seniors, and this is a whole funnel of all the senior campaigns, or if I want to focus on pets and get more pets here in my studio. Just the education is there so I can watch it, I can pause it, I can write notes and have a system. I'm a really big systems person. And so I don't feel like I'm out there floundering.

Sarah Petty: Yeah, when something goes wrong, you can go back to the system and go, "Okay, what did I miss?" Or, "Did I do something wrong?" Or, "Oh, I skipped that step, and that's what happened. Boom. Now I know."

Amy Wellenkamp: Right, exactly. Yep.

Sarah Petty: You don't have to just put it on yourself. So your kids now, those little babies that you were having when I was having babies, are they out of high school both of them?

Amy Wellenkamp: They are. So I have two college students. So one goes to university and studies marine biology, and the other one, he lives here with me and goes to junior college and plays golf for them. Yep, so it's crazy. They grow fast.

Sarah Petty: Very cool. So like the world for you now, I mean, it's different when you have the littles, but now what's your dream? What's the big, hairy, audacious goal "BHAG" for you in your business for the next five years, do you think?

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Amy Wellenkamp: It's to keep building and not put a ceiling on myself as far as income potential. It's to have better systems as far as this is how much I can do and not overwork myself in a week, and these are my goals, and go after those goals. And then, oh, I want to take off this time and go visit my daughter at school, and those freedoms. But yet, to continue to build this business, putting money away for retirement and just taking care of myself and I want to buy a new car. Or even the huge blessing was this last quarter of last year, I had a mold problem in my bedroom and bathroom, which was an emergency remodel, but I paid for it with cash.

Sarah Petty: Wow.

Amy Wellenkamp: Yeah, so that was-

Sarah Petty: Imagine that, everybody. Oh, that's so cool. That's so cool. And what you'll find with the six-figure earners in our community is that... We have saying, new level, new devil. But now it's like, okay, how can I make that number working half the time, or double that working the same amount of time? It's always just refining the little pieces, so that you can have more of that travel and that fun and the off-season, being able to do more.

Amy Wellenkamp: Exactly. Yeah. My averages, it's like, "Okay, now I know what my averages are. Let's see how I can improve the process and increase those averages."

Sarah Petty: Yep. Is that something new for you? Did you not used to look at averages? You just got to say all whatever it was, it was?

Amy Wellenkamp: Right, exactly. Yep. I wasn't following all of that. So no, this is exciting to see.

Sarah Petty: It's like playing a basketball game, but not ever looking up at the scoreboard to know if you're winning or losing. You got bills. Bills versus income versus output, which one's winning? And if you don't look at that scoreboard, it's crazy. So I think that's always freeing to learn. It sounds like you've really embraced that and you're feeling confident with it.

Amy Wellenkamp: Yes, yes. I was really excited because I was so busy the last quarter, of course. I was like, "I know I need to tell this story and let you know Sarah and everybody know what's happening over here."

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Sarah Petty: Hello.

Amy Wellenkamp: And so finally I was like, "Okay, I'm going to sit down and I'm going to put all of this down in my little spreadsheet." And I just was like, "Oh, my goodness." Just crying and overwhelmed with joy and just freedom, and I just can't thank you guys enough.

Sarah Petty: Oh, well. I am so grateful for you. I'm so grateful for your story, and thank you for being here and sharing it with everybody today.

Amy Wellenkamp: Oh, you're welcome. Yes, thanks for having me.

Sarah Petty: Absolutely. Guys, Amy had done pieces of the boutique model over the years, but not until she put it all together with the help of our team and our systems, she was able to do over \$100,000 in six months. She never gave up, and I hope her story has shown you what is possible for you in your photography business this year. It doesn't have to be five years down the road, it can be now. If you'd like the help of my team and I in building your portrait photography business, there are lots of ways we can help you. So check out the links in the show description and get started. And like Amy pointed out, I will believe in you until you believe in you. Let's go.

Okay, friend. I'm a little embarrassed to admit this, but I didn't know how to subscribe to a podcast. I know, I know. I'm new to this hello podcast world, but I figure, heck, if I didn't know, maybe you didn't know either. So here's the scoop. If you want to get notified on your phone each time I drop a new podcast, do this. First, if you're on an iPhone, open up the podcast app on your iPhone, type in Worth Every Penny Joycast, and you'll see a tiny purple subscribe button. Just tap it, and voila. Now you'll be the first to know when there's a new episode, and it'll be delivered right to your phone, so you can hit play during your carpool, your drive to a session, or during your workout without having to search for it.

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