

## Simple Content

Season 1 | Episode 8 | Lara Sheldrake

Ann: 0:00

You're listening to Simple Content, the podcast for entrepreneurs, creatives and anyone who dreams of making money whilst doing what they love. I'm your host, Ann Martin, a copywriter, author and content expert. In this podcast, I'll be sharing my own experiences, plus having conversations with some of the world's most inspiring content creators and industry experts. This is your one stop shop for practical PR, marketing, business and self-development advice. Put the kettle on, settle in and get ready to listen, learn and feel inspired. So hello, lovely listeners. Today I'm joined by Lara Sheldrake, the founder of the well-known business network Found and Flourish. Lara, super excited to chat to you today. Please can you introduce yourself to our listeners?

Lara: 0:52

Oh, thanks, Ann, it's so great to be here. So, by way of introduction, I personally am on a mission and have been for at least the last, I'd say, five to six years, supporting founders and business owners to build sustainable businesses and communities that are aligned with their values, which is, to me, the most important thing I've ever done, and I guess the wider mission of the business Found and Flourish, which I set up in 2018, is to eliminate that feeling of loneliness. It's, as you say, a network for women and, non binary people in business, people who have business ideas. They may be aspiring entrepreneurs, freelancers, solopreneurs, running their own business, and they just find business lonely, and we've identified that that's one of the main reasons why there are less women continuing to run businesses. It's a big reason why people end up walking away, right, the feeling of loneliness, that feeling of being under resourced, and so one of our missions is really to close that gender gap equivalent of 1.1 million missing businesses due to there only being one in every three entrepreneurs being a woman. So, for us, community is really key and central to what we do and why we do it, and we kind of offer that in the way of an online community, events around the country. We actually run events in different areas of Europe as well. So it's really lovely to see how the community has grown and evolved and offering people the opportunity to learn in a safe place, express themselves in a safe space and to connect with other people who are going through similar things.

Ann: 2:28

Amazing, what a great introduction. And you mentioned loneliness there. I mean, it's a really good place, I think, to start off, because loneliness is something that I think a lot of our listeners will have experienced at one point or another. It's something that can be quite debilitating in business. I certainly myself have experienced loneliness. I think my postman thinks I'm slightly crazy because every time the mail is delivered, I'm like, hi, how are you? Because it's somebody to talk to, and I think, especially for people listening who maybe don't have a partner, they live alone and they're working on their business

themselves, it can be very lonely, and that's one of the reasons why you set up the business, like you mentioned, and I want to talk about what loneliness means for you and why it was really important to you to sort of ease that feeling.

Lara: 3:16

Yeah. So I've never really felt like I've fitted into normal working environments. I've always been a bit of a rebel. I was really naughty at school, I didn't like listening to authority, and there was always a part of me that felt quite different. Growing up, I've understood that that's probably more about the way my brain works and an element of neurodiversity which I'm embracing fully as an adult now. But at the time growing up, that was something that I didn't really understand and I just felt different, misunderstood. And those feelings kind of followed through into my adult life and into the jobs that I had at the time in the media industry, and so I ended up quitting my job just before I turned 30, with no backup plan, because my mental health basically made a decision for me. I was burnt out, run down, I didn't really know who I was anymore and I remember thinking this is my only option. I just have to walk away and figure out what it is that I really want and need to do in life, and I've always been really purpose driven. So when I find that I'm doing things in my previous career that didn't feel like it was purpose driven, it didn't feed me, it didn't feed my soul and I ended up just yeah, basically being disinterested and pretty miserable. So I quit my job and I went on a bit of a personal journey and tried to work out what it was that I really wanted to do and working with people, supporting people. I studied media and communication at uni and I've always had this kind of flair of entrepreneurialism supporting people in their own businesses, consulting people, I was a bit of a social media marketing whizz. That's something that I advised people on the side of whatever I was doing. So I decided to set up my own social media consultancy and support people on building their online brand and presence, whilst supporting them on things like, maybe hosting events, which obviously contributes towards that wider mission, and that's something that I've been doing throughout my media career as well. So I was running my consultancy, absolutely loved it, thriving, really enjoyed being my own boss and working with people that were aligned with my values and also the people I got to choose to work with. And then I got pregnant. I had my baby boy in 2018, and that was obviously an amazing experience. Three months in, I was getting itchy feet and I was wondering how I was going to make it work, running my business whilst also looking after a tiny human. And so I decided right, I need to join a community. I need to find something that's going to really resonate. I need to join a space where I feel I can share my challenges, meet like-minded people. They didn't necessarily have to be mums, but just people who understood what it felt like to be lonely running a business, and I couldn't find anything that resonated with me. It was either really corporate, really stuffy, their websites were so uninspiring. I remember thinking there's got to be something out there, and I'm sure there was right, but this is 2018. So this is before, I think, this boom of incredible businesses and networks and communities for women and non-binary people or anyone who feels they may be in a minority, slightly misunderstood or just in need of that additional support. And so that's where the idea of Found and Flourish came about, and I

guess, in terms of that feeling of loneliness for me, I am a self-starter. If I want to build a website or I need a website, I will learn how to build it. You know, I was teaching myself how to code and my partner was like you are crazy, just get someone else to do it. I was like, nope. Three in the morning I was still up trying to figure this stuff out. It's literally like the expression banging your head against your desk or your head in your hands at sort of three, four in the morning. That was me running my business, trying to do all the things, and that is where that sense of loneliness came for me. Obviously, being a mum, and a new mum, you're thrown into these feelings of isolation anyway. Throw on top of that, you know, building a business and actually thinking there are more things that you want to do, but you're just not entirely sure how to do it. You lack the resources and you end up just feeling really alone, and I know other people felt that way as well. So for me it manifested in trying to do all the things on my own and then feeling like a failure because I couldn't succeed in everything. And so one of our values in Found and Flourish is you are not an island. And the reason why this is such an important one is because I think it's important to remind people that you are not expected to do this on your own. You're not expected to have all the skills, all the knowledge, have all the resources at your fingertips, know all the people. It's just impossible. And I heard someone say yesterday I think it was Arnold Schwarzenegger on Graham Norton's show. The reason why I bring this up is because he said there's no such thing as a self-made man, because no one has got to the top and no one has succeeded on their own. And it's so true. You need a community, you need a network. It takes a village right. It takes a village to grow a tiny human and have a family, and it takes a community to build a successful business. And so that's how the feelings of loneliness manifested and what brought me on this journey of building Found and Flourish and why that's really part of my wider mission that I think it will always be.

Ann: 8:35

I love that concept of nobody is an island. I love that concept. I think it's so important to surround yourself with people in business who you can send a WhatsApp message to or you can talk to on Facebook or you can send an email to and you know that you'll get that feedback or that conversation, so that you're not sitting at a three in the morning, like you said trying to do your website. Trying to figure things out. And one of the things I tell my clients is the minute that you have budget outsource things. Outsource things that are not your zone of genius, so that you can focus on your zone of genius, so you can focus on what makes you special and get other people to do the things that make them special and they're talented at, because trying to do it all. Now, obviously when you start up a business, there's a bit of that bootstrapping, there's a bit of that just like trying to figure it all out yourself because you don't have the budget. But I think as soon as that opportunity comes, it's so important to grow your network around you. And with Found and Flourish, now it's a thriving membership, so talk to us about how you've developed that community and kept your members on board.

Lara: 9:38

Yeah and thank you, and you are totally speaking my language. That's exactly what I tell my clients and my mentees. You know you need to free up space and time to operate in that zone of genius and if you're finding yourself working in that zone of incompetence where you're just doing things that you're not best place to do, it 100% makes sense to delegate and outsource. And actually one thing that I do say, especially for people on the beginning of their journey who can't afford to outsource, is consider skill swaps. So that's also something that I recommend, because I don't think I could have actually built, Found and Flourish, without those lovely gestures of goodwill and skill swaps that I organised with friends and people within the network.

Ann: 10:19

Interesting you say about skill swaps, because I did that with my first website. Oh, there you go. I got a web designer to build my website and I did the copywriting for her website, so we swapped.

Lara: 10:30

Beautiful collaboration.

Ann: 10:31

Yes, exactly, it's a brilliant way to do it.

Lara: 10:33

How I developed the community. Well, we started out hosting fireside chats, interviewing founders in various spaces in London, which is where I used to live. I now live on the coast, but I was in Hackney at the time and so grateful to have spent that time in London actually, because I don't think I would have had the same trajectory had I set it up on the coast. So we started with these fireside chats, built a newsletter, started to build the following that way, just so that there was like a touch point of being able to communicate with the community as it grew. And very quickly we started to evolve and grow and so the fireside chats turned into panel events and then people were kind of asking if there were meet-ups and something that was a bit more sociable. You know, we've got the panel events to learn from and be inspired by other founders and I think that connection piece was missing. Still, even though there was that connection opportunity within the network, it had panel events. So, anyway, I launched a hugs and wine event, which was an absolute flop. It was so funny. So it was a free event. You could just sign up, register your interest, turn up to this bar and you know we'd all hang out and chat. Didn't quite work out as planned. So I think there was like 25 people who had signed up. Maybe two people turned up because it was in the evening, people are knackered, it was rubbish weather and I just think that it just didn't work. And so I was like, okay, how are we gonna make this work? And so I changed the next one to hugs and brunch and we put it on at I think it was like nine or 10 in the morning, mid-morning the first one, I think we had 10 people come, and then, from the second one onwards, we were literally selling out like 20 to 30 spaces every brunch, depending on what the venue was. There was a real buzz

around this idea of coming together with no egos. You leave your ego at the door. That's one of our taglines. You turn up, you literally greet everyone with a cuddle, like you hug and you talk about what you've been struggling with that week or maybe what you do, and you know what support you're looking for. But I think I've only seen one exchange of business cards. Most people go and they build relationships and these relationships obviously turn into wonderful opportunities within their business. But it's about connecting, and so we noticed a real increase in followers, engagement and interest when we started putting on these hugs and brunch events, which are absolutely brilliant, like, if anyone's looking at sort of running or building a business or community events is such a fantastic way of building that awareness but also providing that value for people to connect in a space where they can come together with these kind of like aligned values and needs within their business. And I think we got maybe 8,000 additional followers over the space of just a few months, with people coming to our events, taking photos and videos, sharing it, their network, then following and attending and, you know, signing up to the waitlist to come to one of our events. And I think one of the ways that we created this and maybe this is getting quite technical and moving away from answering your question, but this shareability element is we always have flowers on the table. We have really nice cards that have like wonderful sayings. Here's one here. This says we only regret the chances we didn't take. Little cards like this, lovely stickers, and you know, people were really kind of encouraged to take photos and tag their friends and to answer your question in terms of how we've grown. That's one of the main reasons, I think and I think one of the reasons people have stayed is because we're really true to our values. We believe that vulnerability is a superpower. So creating these spaces where people can say, hey, I'm really struggling with this and know that they're not going to be judged, creating those environments where people can, as I say, like drop their egos and just come as they are and I think that's quite an addictive feeling when you feel like in business, it's all about ego. And so for a lot of people, they come for the events and they stay for the community and the atmosphere and the environment. And, yeah, over time. So just to give you a little bit of history of how we've kind of grown and how the business model's changed, we started off with events. We started expanding across the UK at the time. We just hosted our first event in Manchester and it was all around how to avoid burnout in business. And then lockdown happened and then we were like, oh my gosh, what are we going to do and how? Because our business model was essentially events and our newsletter. Although we've been profitable pretty much from day one, it was a very kind of slow revenue generator. Right, events, you're never really going to make loads of money. And so when lockdown happened, people were like, how do we stay in touch? And I'd always thought maybe a membership and subscription model would be an interesting way to go, but I'd never really. At the time I really struggled with this money mindset of well, I can't charge people to be a part of this, because that doesn't feel right. And actually the more people are asking for it, the more I realised this is needed and to get over my mindset money sort of money blockers around that and so I started to build a platform and whilst I was building the platform, I put on free events for women to learn how to be confident showing up online on camera, on video, how use Zoom. We had coaching sessions for

people who were struggling with being on their own and, like most people, struggling with that feeling of loneliness during lockdown, and so we were kind of delivering value in any way we could whilst we were building this platform. And then we got everyone on a wait list and then, when we were ready to launch version one, honestly, looking back, it's so cringe. It was awful. It was like a form on our website linked with some kind of membership plugin, and then the community was on Facebook and it was just all very clunky, but we sold out within I think it was like 40 minutes, our first 100 spaces, and then we waited to get some feedback and we you know, it was like it's always a test and iteration process, right when you're building something, and so for us there was never. I mean, we're still improving it now, but, yes, then we opened up the doors again once we had refined it, increased the prices and we've just essentially evolved from there. We left Facebook two years ago. We host our community on a platform called Circle, which is a fantastic community platform. It's away from social media, there's no adverts, it's beautiful to navigate around, the feedback we've had from members have been fantastic, and so now we have everything on there. People can go to our website, but our resources, our video replays, our tutorials, the community space is all on there, and I guess my advice or practical tips I can offer when it comes to sort of building an engaged community and how we've managed to retain people is to keep asking your community like what they need. Have a quarterly survey that goes out, assess what the response is like again, test, iterate your features, the things that you have created for your community, so that you know you are meeting them where they're at at the time. Because, as the world evolves which, oh my gosh, we have seen so many changes in the last three years I've been through so many ups and downs trying to navigate this, like everyone else has, and it's so important to keep your ears on the ground, to ask people how they're feeling and to listen to what your community needs, and so that's what we've done, and it's just been a constant journey of evolution. And we have features like Coffee Roulette, where women can be randomly paired with another woman in the membership to have a virtual coffee. We have various spaces for people to share challenges, to collaborate with other people, to skill swap yeah, and it seems to be working well. It's working very well.

Ann: 18:10

Do you know what? It's really refreshing to hear you talk about the early stages and the iterations and the development, because when people come across you and your business, they'll see the success story, but actually, behind the scenes, there has been events that haven't worked. There's been you up at three o'clock in the morning trying to develop things, and the thing that I really think you've done well is that you've stayed agile and you've developed in line with your community to make sure that you're creating things that they really want. For people listening who don't have a community or they maybe have a small following, how do you recommend that they get that feedback from a smaller group of people that they can use to develop their work?

Lara: 18:48

That's a really good question and I think it's just asking the community that you do have. So when you have a small community, you've actually probably got a more engaged community than someone who's got a really large following, and the benefit of that is that you can send them a DM and say hey, how are you doing? May or may not have spoken to you in a while, but I'm building this thing and I'd love to have 15 minutes of your time. Or I've got this survey. It's just five questions. Do you mind filling it out and, I think, creating those spaces? So, for example, if you don't have a massive following or a big community, but you're looking to grow one, asking people who might not even be in your space, but they're the kind of people you want to attract, asking people. It's like what we were talking about when you asked Jenna Kutcher to come on your podcast. You just asked the question. The worst that can happen is they say no, finding people that you want to attract to this community and saying do you have five minutes or do you have 10 minutes? I'd love to ask you some questions. I'm building this thing and I'd love to pick your brains and maybe, as a thank you, I can offer you something in return. The approach needs to work for you. But ask the question and know that even if you've got 50 followers that's 50 people, probably beyond friends and family it's worth asking the question and saying can you spare a few minutes of your time? So yeah, I hope that's a helpful, actionable tip, because I think we sometimes underestimate the power of the people that we do have in our network and sometimes we completely overlook certain opportunities. So, even if you're on LinkedIn or connected to people and you've got a small following on there, putting a post out and saying, hey, everyone, I'm working on this thing. I'm doing this because X, because it's really important to remember the Y, so tell people, I'm doing this because I want to, whatever it is, and I'm looking to speak to five people who this would be of interest to or who are struggling with the same challenges. So there's lots of different ways you can do it, but putting yourself out there is key and I think feeling the fear and doing it anyway, because you can't and it sounds quite a big statement, change the world by staying comfortable in your own space, your comfort zone. You need to put yourself out there, you need to take risks, even if the risk is maybe no one's going to come back to me. That's the worst that happens. And really, at the end of the day, who is it who said I only know her as Steph at F, being humble, and she talks about it just not being that serious like business. It's not that serious. So put yourself out there, ask the questions, take the risks, because really what is the worst that could happen?

Ann: 21:23

I absolutely agree with you and we had this conversation before we came on about something I always tell my clients to do is just ask, and the rejection is not that big a deal. It's not even a rejection Like. Don't even see it like that. When you ask somebody a question and you ask them for a favour, if they say no, doesn't really matter. They'll have forgotten about it way before you have. And it's the same with social media posts and things, isn't it? People worry about putting things out there, putting their true thoughts and feelings online, but actually it doesn't really matter what you get back, because you're staying true to yourself, you put your own thoughts and feelings out there, you're asking questions, you're evolving and iterating in your business and that's the most

important thing is to maintain that forward momentum. When I speak to people who have memberships, I've spoken to lots of people who have memberships and the general feeling from a lot of people tends to be that they have this ongoing pressure to be online. They have this ongoing pressure to continuously create content. Is that something that you ever feel, or do you feel like you've got used to that as you've gone along?

Lara: 22:24

I think there's an element of being used to feeling like you're running a community and therefore there is a responsibility to show up to some degree, but I think it's also important to remember that boundary is really important. If you want to run a sustainable business, whatever that is, it's having boundaries and understanding what your non-negotiables are. I think tech plays a really big part in this as well. If you've got a platform that allows you to just switch off and go right, I mean, you're gonna check that between the hours of 10 and four, for example, or I've got a community manager doing these things and this is how I will show up when it works for me, because it's really important that you consider all those things. It has to work for you if you're going to run it long term. What's important is, especially when you're starting out, to understand what the value is that you're delivering. So what is the form of content? Is it video? Is it expert interviews? Is it worksheets? Is it you showing up in a sort of a group coaching scenario and then delivering that in a way that feels sustainable for you and manageable? And as you grow, it's amazing to see, like how the community becomes quite sustainable, like self-sustainable. So what we see happening in our community now is members are planning and organising their own meet-ups in different cities, which is so lovely to see, and that's something that we encourage, right. So that's part of our like extended sort of guiding principles. There's an opportunity where you'd like to meet up with people or create a space to share, yeah, your own challenges or experiences or whatever that may be. Please, please, do that. Like we fully support that, and then we help promote it in our community and stuff like that. And so allowing a community to engage with one another and giving them that freedom and space to do that is, I guess, really one of the end goals of creating a community, because it's not really a community unless they're able to connect and talk with one another in that way. And so I think at the beginning, yes, I 100% felt the pressure and I definitely felt like I was getting to a stage of burnout because I wanted to over deliver. I wanted to make sure everyone felt they were getting every single penny's worth of value, and over time I've realised that actually less is more. People don't want to be bombarded with loads of content, because it just means that they feel overwhelmed when they haven't made the most of the content that's available. This comes back to that asking them the right questions piece and knowing what is it they need this month. So we actually create our event schedule only a month or two ahead of time so that we know if something like this comes up. So what's been going on in the world the last couple of weeks? Media literacy is a really important one. So we've got media literacy session scheduled in for people to understand, like how to really be an active participant in media consumption and what that looks like. A journaling session to support people with feelings of overwhelm and, yeah, I guess not knowing really how to

show up in a way that serves them, but the wider global community. And then more practical ones, like asking the expert sessions around selling online and things like that. So I think, understanding what they need and then being really intentional about what you're providing and knowing when enough is enough and knowing, okay, that's up there, now that's on a replay. They've got that worksheet, I'll check in with them. I've got community manager, you know, putting prompts in, encouraging people to engage, reminding them of the value and actually reminding them what's already there, rather than constantly creating new content, maybe repurposing and actually going back to basics, like, have you all watched x, y and z? Have you read this thing? Because it's not about, like, recreating the wheel. It's about reminding people of what's already there and learning how to repurpose, so that you're not on this cycle of constantly producing content and then feeling overwhelmed and potentially burning out from it.

Ann: 26:07

That's interesting. You mentioned about repurposing content, because I think that's something that, especially with the membership, is really important, rather than feeling like every month there has to be a new training or new download or something, actually using the content that's in the membership, because people get overwhelmed. When they get content overloaded, don't they?

Lara: 26:25

Absolutely.

Ann: 26:26

They know where to start, what to do first, that can be really full on. And yet and in terms of overwhelm, I think for a lot of the people you know, the general feeling in a lot of business groups that I'm in at the moment in particular is there's that feeling of, well, there's content overload, there's everything that's going on in the world at the moment. We've come out of the pandemic but people are still sort of processing that there's been a lot, like you said, there's been a lot of change in the last few years and a lot of things for people to emotionally adjust to. Have you sort of gauged that feeling in your community that there is more in the feeling of overwhelm? Has it been something that you've spoken about more in the last year or so?

Lara: 27:04

Well, we do regular check-ins with the community, so it's either a post in Circle, how's everyone doing, how's everyone feeling, what have they got planned for this month? People then share that they're feeling either overwhelmed or a bit frozen in their tracks, like they don't know how to show up for their business because of everything else happening in the world. Sometimes it can feel quite insignificant and it's about kind of understanding what those mindset blockers or challenges are and, yeah, supporting them in whatever way seems right at the time. And for us we run regular sessions. So one thing I was going to say was consistency is also really key here, and what the members really

like in our community is knowing that every month there are certain things that they can log on for and the framework is the same. And so one of our sessions that we run on a monthly basis is called Bossing It Goal Planning, and so every month people get an opportunity to have a bit of a visualisation, reflect on the last month, look at their goals again and really break those down into actionable steps. That really is setting them up for success, not failure, because we can make these big goals and write these big plans, but then we don't actually write the framework of how to achieve them, and so we do that in this session and that's a really great opportunity to hear how people are doing what they wanna do, what they're struggling with. And yeah, I think having the conversations in whichever way, shape or form is going to allow you to understand what the needs are at the time. And another thing, events, meeting them in person. People really open up and can feel like they can drop their guard a bit more. I think when you're just having a conversation face to face, there's not a screen there in some situations. So I think if you can have physical contact with them in some way, that's also a great way just to be like how are you doing? Like what's going on. It's so much easier also to say that one to one when you're in a sort of an event environment, rather than like in a chat or on Zoom when other people are watching. So there's different ways of doing it, for sure.

Ann: 28:55

Yeah, and it's also about saying you know what, if you're having a rubbish day and you wanna lie on the couch under a blanket and watch rubbish TV, absolutely fine.

Lara: 29:04

You go for it.

Ann: 29:05

Absolutely, you do that today and then tomorrow you can try and do something else, and I think it's about normalising that. It's okay to not be productive every single day. I think a lot of people feel this driver that they have to be hustling and pushing and on it every single day, and actually it's okay to have days of rest. It's okay to sit under a blanket with a cup of tea and just even have a few hours off. You don't have to be at your most high performing state every single day, and sometimes people just need that permission. Sometimes, don't they?

Lara: 29:40

Yeah, absolutely. Well-being is key to success and if you are not listening to your body or feeling like you have to consistently show up, that is when you burn out. So listening to your body is so important. So we have mental health check-ins, with a mental health first aider for our community as well, and this is something that we put on because we know the importance of having that space to be able to say I'm not okay and knowing that there's someone there to go okay, it's okay to not be okay and here are some things that you can do to look after yourself. So I 100% agree with that. And one woman I have to mention, Lauren Currie, who runs Upfront, does this in a really lovely way. Her word last

year was grace and she really does approach entrepreneurship with such grace and every message that she has and every post that she posts even when it's around activism and being a seven figure successful entrepreneur it's always done with this like element of grace and softness, and I think it's so important to maintain that when we're in business, because we are bombarded with these messages of hustle and why it's important to be really successful all the time and show up. Actually, it's also really important to just connect with your mindset and your body and to listen to what you need at the time and to do things with grace. And that also means the way that you are giving yourself grace in business. And you're absolutely right, and that's a really important point, I think, because we talk about what it takes to run a successful business or grow a membership and self care really is key if you're in it for the long game.

Ann: 31:16

Self care is such a used term. It's more than just stopping for an hour or two. It's about looking at the wider picture of your health and wellbeing, what you can do to support yourself as a business owner every single day to reach your goals, but in a really holistic way that really serves you as a person and an individual. I'm interested to hear from you actually and in terms of your own day to day routine, what do you do to support your own wellbeing, because I know that you're a mum. You're running a busy business. How does that work for you?

Lara: 31:45

So I definitely don't get it right all the time, because the juggle is real. Got two young kids one at school, one at nursery, pick up times are ridiculous. It is a juggle. So I feel very fortunate that I do have children, so I'm forced to have some kind of routine. And it's funny because I was interviewing Emilie Bellet, who's the Vest Pod, and she was saying that she had interviewed someone who said I actually feel really lucky because the fact that I have kids means I have to take breaks from my work. And it's so true and it was like a wow moment, because I have a tendency to go all in on things and, like I said to you, I could work through the night if I am committed to getting something done. But having kids means I get up and do their breakfast. I always walk to school and nursery with them. I go to the beach, because the beach is just past their school and nursery. So I'm walking, I'm at the beach, maybe take away herbal tea or something, and I'll have that time for me. I'll have that moment of stillness, I'll have that moment of appreciation. And I know it sounds a bit woey, but I really do believe that the practice of gratitude is so important to instill that level of positivity and that feeling of these are the things that I'm grateful for, like, before we start looking at what we're lacking, we look at all the things that we have in abundance, even if that's a safe space, everything going on in the world. I found myself yesterday literally overwhelmed with, like this feeling of gratitude for feeling safe where I live, and it's those moments where you can just kind of tap into your soul and what it is that you need in whatever that looks like for you. So for me, it's going to the beach, it's listening to a podcast, it's going to hot yoga in the evenings, it's seeing my friends that I really don't do enough of. And it was my birthday recently, in September,

and I was like, do you know what? I'm just gonna organise a dinner, cause I've had loads of friends recently moved to where I live, so I thought I'd just get them all together. Honestly, it was the best feeling, just being around people that I loved and I knew and that, to me, was self care. And I remember waking up in the morning to be like I just feel so good. And I think we sometimes overlook like the simplest of things, like calling someone that you love, taking half an hour to do something that makes you feel good. Whatever that looks like for you. And so, yeah, I think journaling is a good one as well. I don't do it enough, but when I do it it's very cathartic and it's almost like a form of therapy without having therapy, so sort of really acknowledge how you're feeling and what it is you need that day or that week. So there's a few things there Getting an early night also. When I do that, like last night I went to bed at 9 30. I had nine hours sleep and with two kids that's quite rare, but it just felt so good, having lavender oil and having a hot bath. My form of self care last month was spending more than I should have done at Lush on bath bombs and body creams and shower gels, because I thought you know what I deserve it. And I'm gonna do it, I'm gonna do it and I'm gonna enjoy it. So, yeah, I think it really it depends what lights you up, I guess, and makes you feel nice, and those are some of the things that made me feel nice.

Ann: 35:01

I've got a new pillow spray. Actually it's a lavender one oh, yeah, nice, and you mentioned lavender there and it's like, honestly, it's the best thing ever. It's so good it's so good, like I've just discovered it, and I put it spray it on my pillow before I go to bed and it's literally changed my life.

Lara: 35:19

It's so true, I got a pillow spray, a lavender one, by This Works from one of my friends, Charlotte, for my birthday. I use it every night and you're absolutely right, I think it releases oxytocin or something. But you lie down and you're like it kind of transcends, it takes you to like a spa and it's just such a lovely feeling. But this is it. Sometimes the simplest of things makes such a difference to your day or your mindset or your wellbeing. So, yeah, I think it's finding what works for you really and really honing in on that and giving yourself the space and time to enjoy it.

Ann: 35:50

Absolutely so. Let's wrap up with some tips for the listeners who maybe want to set up a community themselves, and how they can get started.

Lara: 36:00

So I think the first thing is to understand your why, like why are you doing this? It really helps if you have lived experiences in this thing, and usually that is the case. If you want to build a community, it's because you've had an experience and you want to share that experience with other people who probably have been through something similar. So, being really clear on your why and who this is for. Having a mission, what is the mission of

this community? And it all sounds very basic, but you'd be amazed at how many people aren't clear on this. They grow something by accident, which is amazing, but then they kind of lose touch of what it is they're doing and why they're doing it, which means that you kind of also lose touch on how you're doing it and who you're doing it for, and then the message gets really blurry and people get a bit confused and then things potentially don't grow the way you'd like them. So I've spoken to people in the past who have said I'm just not attracting the right kind of people and that's usually because the message isn't clear enough. And obviously, as a content expert, I'm sure, as you're nodding your head, you agree with this. So, being really clear on the why, the who and the how you're doing it and articulating this. So for me, it's building that no-like trust relationship. The no is showing up, telling people who you are and why you're doing what you're doing. The like is them getting to know you and getting to like you, and the way that they do that is by understanding your personality, your challenges, the ups and downs that you face, you being open about that story. I think people underestimate the power of vulnerability online and whenever someone does say this is my story or this is how I really struggled and this is how I overcame it, the response is so encouraging and I've experienced it myself and I've seen other people experience it. So not being afraid to be vulnerable on this journey, because people relate to people, humans connect to humans and so be human. And then, finally, that last element, that trust element. How can people trust you? And that's obviously by showing up then knowing and liking you, but you also showing how you've had either a previous impact maybe that's testimonials, maybe that's nice things, nice words or it's just showcasing your experience and that lived experience that you have which is the driver for you to be building this community. So if you can kind of nail those three things and do that consistently, you are going to build a community, and an engaged one, because if you are doing those things consistently, that means that they are connecting with you on a regular basis and they're able to hopefully engage with you on that similar ground and those similar lived experiences. That allows you to connect with people on a deeper level.

Ann: 38:46

Lovely. Thanks very much, Lara. Thank you so much for listening today. Before you go, if you've enjoyed this episode or any of the other episodes on the podcast, please head over to Apple Podcasts and give us a lovely review. It really does make a big difference and it helps other people to find us. Whilst you're there, click Subscribe so that you don't miss out on any of our future episodes. If you're unsure about how to do this, just check out the show notes for all the information that you need. Thank you and see you for the next episode of Simple Content.

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