

WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP PODCAST



Episode 33

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Host: Annemarie Cross

Annemarie Cross: You're listening to Women in Leadership podcast. This is episode 33. Hi, I'm your host Annemarie Cross branding communication strategist, also known as the podcasting queen. Welcome back to another episode of Women in Leadership podcast – the podcast that empowers you to reach your full potential.

Despite all of your hard work do you ever feel like you're threading water, not really making the impact or seeing the growth that you'd like to in your business? Now my guest today is going to share her insights and key steps that has enabled her to build her business from strength to strength.

Joining me today is Jess Jones. She is the quintessential networking. She's driven. She's a passionate entrepreneur who thrives on connecting and supporting Australia's regional business women of caliber. As the founder of business women's community Soar Collective and as the startup business coach and speaker, she's transformed the way business owners network with each other.

Soar Collective connects and supports regional businesswomen of caliber through online community, authentic networking events, and practical workshops. On today's show, Jess is going to share how to identify a gap in the market and build a business from it. How to grow an engaged and loyal community as well as some tips on marketing your business. Welcome to the show Jess.

Jess: Thank you very much, Annemarie. What an intro.

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Annemarie: One of the things that we do in this series of Women in Leadership podcast is to share some milestones of each of our guest. So let me do that for you now.

You've got an incredible diverse community of inspiring businesswomen from all over Australia. I think Soar Collective now is in three locations in Victoria and you've got plants to go into state next year. Yes?

Jess: Absolutely. Yes. We've got the list of regions and areas around Australia we'd love to be in and connect with other businesswomen. We're just looking at our fourth location that will probably be launched by the end of the year too.

Annemarie: That's fantastic because I know a number of years ago when I was still working in the career industry one of the things that kept coming up was CDAA which was a group, the career professionals around Australia was saying so many regional areas were not able to tap into the training, the resources that were run in local cities and things like that.

And the same thing, businesswomen/businessmen who are regional Victoria or regional across Australia were not able to really leverage any of these events. So here you've come and you've developed something that enables them to tap into lots of great resources.

Jess: Yeah. That's right. It's one of those things. I think some people go away from the city to escape the rat race for a bit of change of pace and others you know born and bred in regional rural areas. When it comes to starting your own business, there definitely seems to be a lack of resources and funding and events and workshop and connected communities in the regional areas, I mean other areas

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beyond the city. We're just hoping to do what we can to connect as many people as possible and help them build their business.

Annemarie: Thank you for picking up that mantle and really driving that for those women. Also too, one last milestone which we want to celebrate with you is that you had 60 attendees at your first conference for businesswomen Soar Con that was last year. Amazing. Are you running it again this year?

Jess: Yeah. On the 8th of October at Frankston Arts Center. So we'd love to see 100 brilliant businesswomen attend this year.

Annemarie: Fantastic. We'll certainly make sure to put a link on the show note so that you can grab a ticket and come to this year's conference for sure. So let's dive in. I think we've touched a little bit on the fact that when you identify gap in the marketplace, you can build a business from it. I think that's exactly what you've done with Soar. Yes?

Jess: Yes. That's right. I was living in the city myself for many years and running a previous business. I did as many people do decide to have a bit of a sea change and move to the lovely Mornington Peninsula from [0:04:41][inaudible] and had this business previously and the industry I was in was typically quite clicky and quite competitive.

I definitely didn't feel like I was part of any sort of community within the industry when I was Melbourne based. But moving down to an area like the Mornington Peninsula, you know for other listeners that aren't in Victoria beautiful sort of beach side feel.

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Only about 45 minutes from Melbourne depending on where you are and lovely community and within a few months of being there I was setting up coffee dates and trying to introduce myself to those in my industry and just to meet other business owners as well.

I very quickly was welcome into the community as part of the industry I was in and the extended community as well. So I was very fortunate to have that happened and I really noticed the difference between building a business outside of the city compare to building it in town.

Annemarie:

I have to agree. Mornington is beautiful. My husband I will often pop down that way to catch the sunsets and take photos there. It's one of my favorite spots actually. It really is a dynamic community. I follow a lot of the post that you share on social media and you're really up to great stuff. So congratulations with that.

Tell us a little bit about some of the things that we need to be aware of and women who are listening today that will enable them to really look and observe and take note of what's maybe a gap in their current marketplace, because this can also allow them to really niche and fulfill a solution to a problem that currently is out there that they haven't yet really fully grasp. What are some things that we should start to do?

Jess:

I think for myself I was fortunate enough that I noticed it because it was happening to me. I was seeking a business community and contacts and wanting to grow my own network. While there were a couple of offers around the area, they didn't quite resonate with me and I figured I can't be the only businesswoman looking for a particular type of event or workshop that's really suited to myself or my business. That's how it was sort of born.

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From there I was able to do some research and did find other businesswomen saying yup, you know, there are other events out there but I can't attend those times or I can't do weekdays or I have commitments, children, office or retail outlets to get back to. So I can't leave for a brekky or a lunch during the day. There are other sorts of offers that were a bit of a corporate feeling and people didn't want that. You know the networking industry has changed over the past few years for the better I think.

So for me it was really that it was happening to me I realized that there was something missing and identify the opportunity from there. But I think for other people to do the same, the biggest tip I can give is to speak to your people. Speak to your customers. Connect with your community and really take advantage of the tools we have today like social media particularly Facebook and Facebook groups.

There's so many ways now that we can get information from our tribe and go away and put together solutions to their problems. We can ask them in real time what's your greatest challenge at the moment? How can I help you? How can I make your life better? How can I give you more time or more money or whatever it is that your customer or your client is seeking?

Annemarie:

Absolutely. I think both of those go hand in hand. You may identify or someone may identify a gap in the marketplace cause yes it's happening to them. How many times do we hear a story where someone has created a business idea, they've taken it to market, put all of that hard work behind it then to hear crickets. No one really is saying yes to that and that can be so disheartening.

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So absolutely you've got the best feedback from people who are like you and who may also be experiencing that. Something else that I think is very important to recognize is that sometimes there may be other businesses similar to what you can offer or the expertise that you share that you are able to share to your clients.

Yet the way you deliver it is quite unique and quite different from everybody else. The experience that you create and that can often be what really encourages people to get behind you and to say yes. Is that something else that you've also found as well?

Jess:

Absolutely. I mean we live in a pretty noisy age whether there is a lot of competition. There's not a lot that's original based that is outside of the tech industry because there's such a constant boom within the tech industry. There's always going to be amazing apps and ideas coming out of that particular industry that hasn't been thought of yet.

Obviously one day they'll run out. But you know I think with general industries everything is probably being done so you really do need to find a niche within your industry and have a really unique selling proposition. Like you mentioned the word experience; experience is everything. I don't think people put enough time and energy into their customer service experience particularly looking after their current customers.

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Because there's always that need to find new customers to get more sales, more leads. I think people sometimes neglect their existing ones. They're your gold.

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They're the people that can help you drive your business forward and if you look after them, they'll be repeat customers.

Annemarie: Yeah, for sure. Sometimes I think as women and I say this about myself and also the feedback that I get from a lot of our listeners and other businesswomen that I network with. When we look at what other people are doing and they may be competitors, whatever you might call them. People that are offering similar services to ours we can compare ourselves and then often take ourselves out of the running.

Well there are so many other people in that industry. Or, I've just launched something. Guess what. Now I can see that there are 10 other people offering that service. It really is important to recognize what is it about that is unique. Is it the experience, the expertise that you bring, the community you're creating and just how you make people feel inspired and empowered?

That in itself can be huge and it really is to focus. I think I love what you said. Focus on what you really miss about something what your uniqueness is and really look at expanding on that strength as you continue to take whatever it is to market, because that's really what's going to differentiate yourself from everyone else.

Jess: Yes. Absolutely agree.

Annemarie: Let's talk about how to grow an engaged and loyal community. You mentioned that networking has changed for the better. So some of the things that you're talking about today relate to that and is going to support us in building that engaged and loyal community.

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Jess: Yes. Definitely. There was a time when networking events were very sales-y. There was a real masculine sort of energy about them. There are lots of people sort of with the mentality of what is in for them rather than thinking about what was in it for the person they were meeting or connecting with.

It was all about business cards. Talking about how busy you were and how many sales you had or how many customers you had. I think that need for comparison and competitiveness has moved on finally.

Annemarie: Thank goodness.

Jess: Now I think we're a lot more honest about how we are actually traveling with our business thankfully you know. Cause it's exhausting. No one wants to be putting up that front all the time. I think we're fortunate that authenticity is a bit of a buzz word but we really talk about having authentic networking events.

I say to them almost every networking event we hold I will start up by saying you need a bit of on bull approach. It always gets a laugh but it's true. You need to be really honest about where you're at and how you're actually going with your business and where you're feeling stuck and where you might need help.

Because there's not going to be that true connection with anyone else that you're meeting if you're putting on this front that everything is great, life is good, business is doing really well, and making so much money and blah, blah, blah. I think thankfully that has shifted somewhat I think.

There are still some events out there that work that way and that's okay. They're probably serving some people and some particular businesses. But I think particularly as businesswomen we need to be a bit more authentic about where

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we're coming from and how we're doing. In that way as well people can share experience and some skill sets and hopefully we can help and support each other.

Annemarie:

Yes. I know from feedback that people have mentioned similar to exactly what you're saying is that some of those old traditional ways of networking where it is an exchange of business card and let's do business. You know trying to sell before they even really know who you are and what your struggles are. That in itself is exhausting.

I think women we do tend to network slightly differently than men too. I mean we are about the relationship first. I think it's important to get a balance. Because sometimes we can continue networking which is fantastic yet women don't often ask or say I'd love to work with you.

So there's a real balance that if there is a need and you have built that relationship remember to ask someone. Look I love to work with you. What do you think? Because otherwise we tend to I don't want to ask. She can ask me. She knows what I'm doing. Do you find that women you're needing to educate them on their area too?

Jess:

Yes a little bit and I think it depends on the industry that people are in as well. So some are lot confident about that than others. But I think we really encourage collaboration. I think collaborating with another business is a fantastic way to be able to work together and serve two groups of audiences at once. You're benefiting both groups of customers there both businesses.

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Both business owners can network together, can share contacts and share resources and I think that's a really clever way that women can work together without being too concern about the hard sell or...

Annemarie: Yes.

Jess: I don't think it's a resource that we use enough as businesswomen.

Annemarie: I love the idea of collaborating because it enables you build relationships with other incredibly business owners who you would fully stand behind when you're recommending and then vice versa. You know the clients that you're being recommended to work with you are going to be high quality as well.

Let's face it. I'm sure we're not able to do everything for all of our clients. So it's right to be able to tap into other experts.

Jess: Definitely and if you have likeminded audiences and there's a very clear and equal value of exchange then both parties win.

Annemarie: Yeah. Absolutely. I think also too once I heard a number of people saying, you may also believe this to be true, is that when we're networking not only should be looking for potential clients but more so looking for the collaboration partners for the referral partners and people that we can build relationship with just like what you're talking about because that in itself has an ongoing long term benefit.

Jess: Yes. Absolutely. You know I said to some of the ladies sometimes as well that if you are in an event try not to take a business card unless you're sure you're going to follow up with them. If you can't see yourself having any sort of need to work with them and the same for them with your business then I love to be able to go

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away and think about who I know that would benefit from that person's product or service. So I can still then give them something in some way and be able to follow up and say I know this great person who would be a wonderful as a client for your business.

Annemarie: Yes. And everything that you're talking about is so important. It's the intention, isn't it? Intentional relationships, intentional networking, intentional referrals and I think when we really go with that mindset and take that action that's when we really start to build that engaged and loyal community who can trust each other and will certainly refer and share resources.

At the end of the day isn't that much nicer even energetically than working in an environment where people are too scared to share anything because someone might rip off their idea or whatever. That example that you share about some of the inner city networking groups who are highly competitive I just don't even like going to those places because it's like you know I'm just going to find another sandbox to play in because I don't like this one. But what you did you said I'm going to create my own and you did.

Jess: Yeah. It is tricky because you don't want to come away feeling bad about yourself when sometimes you work hard and you feel a bit like yeah that wasn't really my cup of tea or I didn't quite fit in there and you can see people are smart these days and they can see straight through if you're not being your actual authentic self.

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So I think it's better for everyone if everyone just tell as it is and ask for help when they need. But I think you put a good point forward as far as women. It's a confidence factor as well I think. I know that some people really get scared off by having to introduce themselves or their business to a room full of people they've never met before or even to explain what they do particularly if they're pitches aren't perfected.

I know that people panic a little bit and it's confidence thing. I think you need to go to networking event really with a perfect pitch not sales-y but explaining what you do, who your customer is, and what problem or challenge your product or services is a solution for them. You know what you're actually doing for this particular customer.

I think that's an area where people start to panic a little bit just because they're not really confident in their pitch or they have a bit of a fear of being judged as well.

Annemarie: Yeah. That is something you don't want to struggle on when someone say so tell me what do you do. You got the stage and you really want to make sure that what you say engages with that person because you often only get that one opportunity. So lot's of golden nuggets in that. Thank you. Let's talk about some tips on marketing your business.

Jess: For me starting Soar Collective it really did start from scratch because of Facebook. So when I was looking out to see if there are other businesswomen who felt the same way that they wanted a particular event or a networking group set out for them, I started off on Facebook.

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And I went to my businesswomen group and I just jump in there and started to read some of the challenges that the businesswomen are facing. Some of the issues that some are dealing with on a day to day basis. I was having a look at the other events and those sorts of things out here.

And then eventually sort of jump in and ask the question do you any of meet up and are there any events that were we could sort of attend and get to know each other. Cause I think at the time there might have been 600 or 700 in the group and that was two and a half years ago.

I figure there's got to be a lot of amazing women in here we should be meeting face to face. Anyway, there wasn't anything set up. I had about 50 women come back and say yes please it would be great to meet each other. So we had about 12 actually turned up to the first event.

It was really interesting cause it was a fantastic mix. I think just actually getting everyone offline and meeting face to face was the best of part of that you know. There was more connection then that we're meeting together rather than all being on Facebook. So that's how I did my initial sort of research.

And then from there, we've never really besides the old Facebook ad campaign we've never really advertised our events or our community. It's all being through social media and word of mouth referrals which is being fantastic. I really love social media as a tool for marketing and building your business if its use well.

Annemarie:

Yes. I think some of the key things that you've mentioned and I just want to repeat for people who may not pick up on this. You've gotten so clear on the

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needs, the desires, the struggles of your ideal client and you've created this environment, this community that really nurture and supports them and their businesses.

And that is the reason why this continues to evolve and grow and take on almost a life of its own because of the fact that you've taken the time to really make sure that what you're delivering is what people need. That makes it so much easier than everything that you do.

All of those little touch points in the social media continues to really develop and grow there because you've taken that time.

Jess: Yeah. That's right. We're constantly asking our members and the broader community what can we do for you, how can we serve you better, where are you really stuck, what resources can we give you, what information do you need. You know that sort of thing. We're trying to do as much as we can to be able to deliver all of those things and really help everyone as much as we possibly can.

Annemarie: That's a great marketing tip. How do you market your business? Continue to ask really great questions from your clients or your ideal clients because they'll tell you in the answers that they share with you. So often we don't think of even doing that. Do we?

Yet there's this great community that you were sharing that you were able to tap into and through their responses you continue to create that community that they now like and trusting and continue to recommend to others. What would be one last tip that you'd love to share with people today?

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Jess: It's going to be a little bit repetitive. But I really think knowing what your ideal customer wants and needs is the biggest tip I can sort of talk about. That also knowing the answers to the question like what are you stuck on, what challenges are you facing that helps you go away and curate all your content as well.

Annemarie: Yes.

Jess: So you find out exactly what they are then you can go away and you can write blog post on it. You can share helpful articles. You can have social media post. You can create products that they can download and services based around what they actually want.

So as you touch them I think the biggest thing is really knowing what your customer or client wants and providing everything you can according to that.

Annemarie: Yeah. I think that's important. One question I love to ask people because we're doing a bit of a tech thing throughout some of our shows. You mentioned Facebook already. Are there any other tools or software that you just can't live without and has been really quite integral to the ongoing growth of Soar Community?

Jess: Yes. I'm a massive of Canva and I go on and on about how much I love Canva.

Annemarie: Explain to people that may not have heard of what Canva is. What is Canva?

Jess: Canva is in a nutshell its graphic design for non-graphic designers so very easy to use. I'd say that because I've been using it quite a while now. But I remember when I first started using it I found it easy to use. Basically you can create really fantastic designs, flyers, Facebook ads, Facebook covers, Twitter, headers, email,

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newsletter headers. Whatever you like basically that's design you can create in Canva. You can upload your own photos, your logo.

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There's all different element that you can incorporate into your design. It's fantastic. Very easy to use. You can use the whole free version or there is also photos on there if you want to choose some of their stock photos. They're only a dollar each so it's still pretty good. I highly recommend Canva for small business owners who are doing a lot of the things themselves. This will save you a lot of time.

Annemarie: Yeah. I love Canva too and that's canva.com. We'll put a link there. That was actually founded by an entrepreneur in Sydney. I can't remember her name.

Jess: Melanie Perkins.

Annemarie: Yes. Amazing. Amazing. And you know what. When I found that out I'm went yahoo. Cause so many resources we use are US based and I was like yeah an Aussie created this. That's fantastic.

Jess: Yeah and they have some amazing investors get involved as well.

Annemarie: So what sort of goals do you have moving forward for the Soar Community?

Jess: As I mentioned we are looking at a fourth location before the end of 2016 and then hoping to move into state next year. So we've already had women contact us from other regional areas in Australia saying hey when are you coming or can I host events for you. That's sort of things.

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So that's really citing that the need is there and that the word is spreading. Besides that we've got Soar Com in October as we mentioned and a couple of other little things happening on the side. Hopefully some exciting partnerships that we have meetings around in Sydney next week so I can't say too much for now but it's happening. Yeah.

Annemarie: Fantastic. How can people find out more about you?

Jess: The website is soarcollective.com and we're on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram all under Soar Collective. Very easy to find us.

Annemarie: Fantastic and of course we'll put all of the links on the show notes and to go to the show notes annemariex.com/podcast33. Thank you so much for coming on the show.

Jess: Thank you for having me, Annemarie. It's been wonderful.

Annemarie: It certainly has. As I've done over the last couple of shows I'm inviting one of my Microsoft brand ambassador, a fellow Microsoft brand ambassadors to share their tech tip in how we can use technology whether it'd be the Microsoft service and app or process to help us streamline our business.

Now if you're using a Microsoft Service Pro and a favorite app or the way that you're using it in your business, let me know and I'll do a shout out on one of our show. Send me an email at podcast@annemariex.com. Anyway, let's dive into to today's tip.

So today we have Megan lemma Tech Coach HQ with us again. Hi, Megan. Welcome and what tip do you have for us today?

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Megan: I'm doing a series on One Note and got a blog post I've just written for this purpose and it's about how to save your handwriting to text with One Note. So what we're going to do is we're convert, just like you can convert voice to text, you can also convert handwriting to text.

So tip. It doesn't always convert perfectly so be patient. So what you're going to do is you're going to go into your ribbon, which is the bar at the top for those who don't know what the ribbon is in the Microsoft products and you're going to select the draw tab.

Right at the end, draw to type, you're going to draw away. Highlight the section of your text and then into text and it's going to convert. So if it doesn't work, right click on the text and select as handwriting. So there are lots of different options but that's a really good way.

Just like with voice to text, it might not always convert your handwriting cause it might not be perfect. So give it a go.

Annemarie: Just wondering. I know with Cortana and with the audio she will get to know your voice connotations and all that kind of stuff. Is that the same with handwriting or not?

Megan: Obviously over time technology will improve so that handwriting recognition but some people's handwriting is just like doctors and it will never improve.

Annemarie: So in other words increase the readability of your handwriting could be a good choice.

Megan: Exactly. That's my tip for the day.

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Annemarie: Yes. So how are you using that? Just give us some examples.

Megan: Often I need to take quick notes with clients so I have bullet point. So rather than me finding the bullet point making sure it is. And I've also got that listed on my blog post. But I use it just getting or checklist. I just need to quickly draw a checklist, the things, the brain dumps. I don't want it formal. I just want it done and then that's when I would convert it to text.

Annemarie: Yeah. It's a great idea. Sometimes what I do and I'm just thinking as you're explaining that, sometimes I like to do a bit of brainstorm, a mind map with a pen and paper but obviously on the surface. Once I got those ideas, I can then take that handwriting, convert it to text and then flesh out the article even further. So that's a great idea s well. Terrific. Megan, how can people find out more about you?

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Megan: You can go to www.techcoachhq.com.au. You can also find me on Twitter @megsamanda, on Instagram and Facebook under Tech Coach HQ.

Annemarie: Terrific. What we'll do Megan is we will put a link underneath this resource for your blog post so people can certain click across there and read that blog post as well.

Now before we go, just for those of you who are transitioning your business from an hourly based business to something that you can provide programs and packages like VIP days or even home study courses or even three-month to six-

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month program yet you're stuck trying to define your signature program. Why not go and sign for one of our breakthrough round tables. To find out more go to annemarietcross.com/yoursignatureprogram.

That takes us to the end of another show. I know that you've taken lots of notes. Notes are fantastic but go out and put those into action so that you can take your business to the next level. If you haven't already subscribed to our iTunes channel, please go ahead and do that – annemarietcross.com/podcastitunes.

While you're over there leave a rating and a comment because that helps us get our message out into the ears of other ambitious women in business and women leaders. Have a fantastic week. Reach out. Let me know. What did you love about this week's show and what action are you going to take. See you later, Jess.

Jess: See you later.

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