

2024 Women's Entrepreneurship Day Interview Series

Interviewee: Elizabeth Lewis, Brand, Style & Bloom

Donald Jones: Thank you so much, Elizabeth, for joining us for our Identity as an Asset interview series. We've been sitting down with entrepreneurs for the last few months, hearing and uplifting their stories, specifically around how identity has been an asset in their entrepreneurial journey.

So often we talk about the myriad of challenges that we know that small business owners and entrepreneurs face. But we know there's another side of that story, and this conversation is designed to enable you to share that side of your story. I'd love to dive right in and ask you to introduce yourself, and share a little bit about your business.

Elizabeth Lewis: Thank you so much for having me. This is such a wonderful idea for an interview series. I'm Elizabeth Lewis, I'm the founder and CEO of Brand, Style & Bloom, which is a branding and personal styling consultancy. My mission is to help professionals and entrepreneurs get noticed to achieve their vision of success using branding and personal styling as tools.

I started the business back in 2019. I was working at the time as a brand manager for a company that does consumer goods, and a lot of my work involved working with the design team to figure out just the right packaging for our products and kind of early on in my role, I thought, oh my goodness, why do we spend so much time deciding on the design? You know, why can't it be our small team of five, etc.? But as I matured in my role, I realized not every product gets a big advertising budget, so it's important how the product pops on the shelf to the shopper.

I started comparing that to people and thinking that as people we have incredible ingredients and qualities. But if we don't know what they are, how to connect the dots to our vision and then how to externalize those qualities through our style, the way we present ourselves, etc., then we might not achieve the goals that we have for ourselves. So that was the inspiration.

I do that work through workshops. I work with a lot of big corporations, and I'm so happy to also work with Next Street. And I also do one-on-one work. And I also have a clothing line which is called The Collection. It's knitwear that is stylist approved, sustainable, luxury knitwear designed to help you look elegant with ease.

DJ: That's great. Just from your description of the inspiration for your business, it sounds like there is an element of authenticity and being yourself, which really aligns well with the topic of Identity as an Asset. So, I'm curious just to dig a little bit deeper there. In what ways has identity been an asset in how you started your business or in your overall entrepreneurial journey?

EL: I define myself as a fearless, joyful, and creative woman. And these are really qualities that have fueled me to start my business. When I say fearlessness, it's not an absence of fear. I definitely experience fear. It's that realization that my worst case scenario that my fears lead me to develop almost never come true. So therefore I'm able to just fear less, and that enables me to make bolder decisions such as bootstrapping my company. No guarantee of success. That was something that I 100% believed in.

When I say joyfulness, I've always been an optimist and someone who really likes to see the brighter things in life. I laugh loudly, some say too loudly, but I definitely knew that doing the work that I love full time, although a really big risk to go out on my own, would only increase that sense of joy.

And then when I say create creativity, I'm a creative, I'm an artist, and I often felt a little bit stifled in a corporate environment. So that was a motivator for me to look at pursuing my own path and figure out how I could make that happen. And although I definitely learned a lot through my corporate experience and would never, ever trade it, fully being able to unleash that creativity to help others achieve their goals and dreams, their vision, is something that I'm really, really thankful for every day.

DJ: As you think about the future, I'm curious to hear how those identities that you just described will enable you to differentiate yourself in the market or inform the future goals that you have for your businesses.

EL: Going back to those three qualities (I call them superpowers), my fearlessness, I would say, has allowed me to be more bold. That means being bold and reaching out to companies and people who I think can provide value, or I can provide value to or who can help me grow. And a lot of the times it does take courage to reach out, and so anyone who I talk to when I have a wonderful opportunity to mentor, I say "be bold." You have to reach out - just having your website isn't something that people will come to you. You have to reach out to have people know who you are. So that boldness, I would say, has also allowed me to be more aggressive in my goal setting, bold with my vision. And I try to use this quality to inspire my clients and the women who I coach through WE NYC to be more bold in these ways as well.

The joyfulness quality also really helps when times get rocky. Anyone who is an entrepreneur pursuing this journey, you will always have those rocky times that they come and they go, right? But I think this joyful energy is something that helps me get through those rocky times, and it's also a differentiator that people mention as a reason that they enjoy working with me.

And then when I think about the creativity piece, that's something that helps me to continuously innovate. I'm going to be launching a service soon that involves personal branding, styling, and my clothing line, The Collection. That creativity always helps me to, look at the market, see what people want, and then figure out a way to get it to them in a creative, differentiated way.

DJ: That's great. You actually touched on a few different things, there, but I'm curious to hear a little bit about intersectionality and what role that plays in your entrepreneurial journey. You know, we all hold multiple identities, and so sometimes it's interesting to hear how you navigate that and bringing your full to your work.

EL: Definitely. When I think about intersectionality, I really think that it helps me to be more unique and also be uncomfortable. And both of those in a positive light. Of course, I haven't always felt comfortable in every room that I've been in. I've been in rooms where I might be, you know, the only woman, or everyone's more senior than me, etc., but I would say the great thing is that now being uncomfortable and unique have become normal for me. So that really helps as an entrepreneur because you're laying out a new path, and almost by definition, that's uncomfortable.

You're thrown into a lot of situations where you don't necessarily have the answer. You're in a lot of rooms networking with people who you don't know. Depending on your personality - I can kind of shift between being an extrovert and an introvert - that can definitely be uncomfortable. That discomfort, though, I've been able to turn it into another positive quality or kind of a super power.

DJ: I know that you were connected to us, through the WE NYC program, and you mentioned being a coach. I'm curious if you could share a little bit more about how you've interacted with the program and the value that it's brought to you and that you've seen it bring to others.

EL: Definitely. Well, I first discovered WE NYC while I was at Luminary several years ago. I was sitting in a meeting with the founder of Luminary, and she was teaching us about her journey of bootstrapping this amazing company that she's created and that so many entrepreneurs are part of now.

When I got involved with WE NYC, at first it was really through the workshops. That professional development, especially when I was early in my entrepreneurial journey, that continuous learning is so important. But I would say the WE NYC workshops are super, super valuable. The networking, the people who you meet at the conferences, I love that. It just feels really fun and organic.

I was able to become a coach as well. So being a coach, having that opportunity to meet with women entrepreneurs in the city one-on-one is super valuable on both sides. And it's just been really fun to hear about the dreams of so many women entrepreneurs in New York City.

DJ: Thank you for that. My last question for you is, is there anything that you didn't get to mention that you wanted to share in this conversation?

EL: The only thing I would mention is that I really appreciate Next Street's support of entrepreneurs around the country, both the subject matter experts who are helping to develop and magnify the great work you're doing, and those who you serve through the trainings. It's been really awesome to be on both sides of that. So please continue the great work you're doing. We appreciate it. I appreciate that.

DJ: You know, our vision is Boundless Opportunity, and it's exciting to hear it live and breathe through entrepreneurs like you, so thank you so much.