



Simple, with Tsh Oxenreider

Episode 208

thesimpleshow.com

Segment One

Speaker 1: This is Simple; I'm Tsh Oxenreider.

Hey friends, welcome to the first episode in a while where we are back to our usual routine. It was a lovely summer break and series sharing with you my conversations with different women about their good lists. And like last week when I shared a chapter of my book with you, but I am back to chatting with my regular co-hosts and it feels really, really good. In this episode I am chatting with my friend and co-host Crystal Ellefsen. As always on the show, we're talking about what we wrote about this week. I wrote about some of my sabbatical reflections, what it was like to take last month completely off of my work and to step away from screens for a solid month. In this chat I get into both the professional and the personal lessons that I learned. If you're not your own boss, don't shy away from this episode. There's plenty here for you too.

Speaking of which, Crystal is also self-employed, albeit differently than in my line of work. Her posts this week was about the value of knowing yourself really well when it comes to picking the right type of work for you, what matters so much to you that it's a line in the sand versus what you're willing to be more flexible about. As well as if you're choosing to launch your own thing, be self employed, what are your parameters for doing it well, but in a way that suits you best. That's what we get into in this chat, so we'll get right into it, but first a reminder that if the show means something to you, you can become a patron to make it happen. I would love to have your support in that way. There's a lot of expenses in producing this show and I love doing it genuinely. There's real joy in putting something good and lovely out on the Internet, but the costs aren't cheap. If you'd like to take part of it and be a member of the inner circle that puts their money where their mouth is by keeping the lights on around here, head to the link in the show notes of this episode to become a patron, it's really super easy. It only takes a few dollars per month and you get some lovely freebies from me as a thank you. Alright guys, without further ado, here is Crystal and me talking about sabbaticals and self-awareness, particularly when it comes to our work.

[02:16](#) As pretty much everyone knows if you read the blog or listen to this podcast, because I've talked about it enough, this past summer, I took a

sabbatical and that's what I wrote about this week. I thought it would be really good both for me and for those peeking in to read a little bit more about the why and the how and to be honest, I am still unpacking my thoughts. I still don't 100% know what all my takeaways were and are about taking this much time off. But I will say this was the first time ever, I have not worked for a solid month. I took some maternity leave when my third born, Finn, was a newborn because I had had the blog by then. But I would say looking back, I still dip my toe in the waters of work some and it was pretty much always on my mind even as I was doing the newborn thing. This was really and legitimately the first time in 12 years I completely took time away. I have a lot of thoughts, but in some ways they're a casserole of, huh, there's a thought, there's a thought, and I'm not quite sure what the finished product, the baked good is with all the applications. I'm still learning as I go. But I will say that I was surprised at how much some of my personal growth and takeaways and reflections had to do with both an even hand of personal and professional. I am self-employed. I run my own show and I call the shots, but at the same time I got a lot of personal takeaway from this. I would say some of my sabbatical reflections are just as applicable maybe to those who don't work for themselves or maybe even are stay at home parents primarily where you don't maybe necessarily get a paycheck, but you know what it's like to be online a lot. That's what I want to unpack here a little bit.

Crystal: I have a question.

Tsh: Go for it.

Crystal: Can you explain exactly what your sabbatical was like? Were you totally off the internet or were you just off social media and not working?

Tsh: That is a great question because I had somebody ask me somewhere whenever I said that it was back, what did you do with your phone while you were gone this whole time? And it made me realize, oh, they think I literally didn't have my physical phone with me and that's not true. I just purposely used it differently. What I did was for the month of July, I decided to take an internet and screen, I guess sabbath or Sabbatical, and I also purposely did not do any work, be it the literal writing and podcasting that I do, or even the email admin stuff that I do, or even thinking and brainstorming about it that I do.

It was a little bit different because I had led Literary London the last week of June, and that was the last work-related thing I did. In fact, on the flight home from London, I submitted my book manuscript. I bought the however much overpriced Internet that was really slow on the plane was so that I could submit it because my deadline for submitting it was June 30th and it was June 30th.

Crystal: Congratulations. Amazing.

Tsh:

Thanks. That was my final crossing of the finish line before starting my sabbatical work-wise. What was a little bit different is that I flew into San Francisco instead of Austin, so I met my family in San Francisco because we were going to travel this whole time that that's a way, as many people know, that our family likes to reconnect, spend time together and both rest and have adventures.

We basically went from there, spent a few days with friends and then spent our time in the Pacific Northwest. During that time I had my laptop with me and I had my phone with me. I just purposely chose only to open them on the rare occasion that there was just something fun I wanted to do or something personal that I wanted to do. Watching a show on Netflix or looking up on Yelp where we should go eat, that kind of stuff. I didn't not have my screens with me. Practically speaking, I deleted any apps that related to connecting with people, which sounds very like anti-person, but it wasn't. I deleted Slack and email and Voxer, which are tools I use for work all the time. But then I also deleted Twitter, Instagram, I don't have Facebook and a few other ones, I can't remember.

The only thing my phone I really used was for maps for travel or Yelp. For texting and that's about it. It was still a smart phone, I just dumbed it down quite a bit. I really and truly went many, many days. I might've even gone over a week without opening my laptop and I can't remember when that's ever happened, ever. Because there might've been times in the past where I took a break, but I just popped on quickly to make sure things weren't burning down. I had set up parameters in place this time so that I would be notified if something was burning down. But the joke was what possibly could burn down? It's not like I am curing cancer here in my work. People can live just fine without me. I anticipated nothing but Caroline, my assistant, Andrea, managing editor, they would let me know if there was something urgent and of course nothing was urgent.

That's the gist of my sabbatical and I'm gonna get into a little bit about the what, because that was a question my husband Kyle and I actually talked about on the road. What does it mean to be on sabbatical? Like what's the difference between that and just being on a long vacation? I guess for me that was the ground rules of what I was going to do for the month. I was told ahead of time, or maybe I just heard this ahead of time cause I was doing some research on taking a good sabbatical, was to keep your expectations really open-handed. Don't go in thinking I am hoping to be restored in these three ways or find an epiphany about this one thing in my life. They say if you go in, your expectations will probably be shot a little bit. You might feel like it wasn't a quote success when maybe the success needed to be, you need to get a lot of sleep, or you need to just remember what it's like to read paper books and you won't know that ahead of time. You have to keep it pretty open ended. That's what I did.

Crystal: I can imagine that one of the biggest benefits is that mental rest that it takes a while for your brain to come down, especially when work like you do, which is you're constantly brainstorming in the shower and you're never not coming up with ideas, right? Because it's very personal. To truly tell your brain, no, we're not even brainstorming or coming up with ideas or collecting ideas and coming to a place of rest. That sounds both beautiful and challenging just because it's a habit to constantly be thinking of ideas.

Tsh: Yeah. I've told this to Kyle for the past few years now. It's a real challenge for me to make a living from being creative. The only way I can be creative if I'm healthy and well rested. That's just how I'm wired. I don't create good work if I'm not also taking care of myself. There's this weird chicken egg situation of, but if I need to provide for my family, I need to be creative. But in order for me to be creative, it needs to provide well for my family. That's part of the rest of work. Taking that break of intentionally thinking about work was both hard and necessary and it takes some time.

I heard a podcast once where they talked about why a month. Why can't you just take a week or two off and do the same thing? It had been so long for them that they realize they needed at least a week just to even remember what it was like to not work. If you only take a week, sometimes you take that whole time decompressing and then before you know it you have to get back to it. You never really truly get that permission from yourself to completely step away. That for sure happened. The other thing that happened completely unexpected was I got sick the first 10 days and that was obviously a disappointment that was not in the plans, but I was talking with Caroline about this, she wrote a post a few weeks ago that I'll link in the show notes about her four things good list. She mentioned something called the let-down effect because she got sick after London as well and she said that she looked into it and it's a real thing. Whenever your body finally is done doing something monumental like working a lot or doing some kind of epic trip or some event that you've been, I guess looking forward to for a long time or just anticipating when it's finally over. Our bodies can often get sick.

Crystal: I've definitely experienced that after launches. I now just plan where I'm like, I'm gonna get sick after this is over because I just always do. I'm sure there's some adrenaline studies about like adrenaline in the body, but I feel like it's you push forward and then once you're like I can breathe again, your body's like, okay good cause now you need to deal with this infection or something.

Tsh: [11:21](#) I was telling Kyle, I felt like my body was saying, oh we're resting now. Okay, I'm gonna rest my immune system then. It was definitely not in the plan. But the interesting weird thing was it made me rest. There were a good chunk of those days at the beginning where I could not do anything but lay there and

read a book. It was frustrating in some ways, but reality was looking back, I can see how that was necessary for me to truly, it's not that I would have taken on this sabbatical with gusto and tried to adventure my way into it because I was already aware of my need for rest. But I think I was surprised how much my need for like literal physical rest was, I slept a lot. There were many days where I did not really get out of bed and I didn't know I needed that.

I got sick, I got over it, things are fine now. It was just a cold, but it was a really bad cold. It was a big surprise. I will say that I knew one of my agendas I guess for this is, like I said, you're supposed to not have expectations, but I knew one of my agendas was I wanted to be unavailable and unneeded. That was one of the reasons I took off all apps that were related to connecting with people. It's not that I didn't like people, it's that I didn't want.

Crystal: Of course. We know that.

Tsh: At first, I kept Instagram on thinking, I mentioned this in my post about screen time. I kept it on thinking, well, I'm going to just keep up with other people and I'm not going to post, but I'm going to see just what they're up to because it's not that I hate people. I'm going to miss seeing what Crystal's doing or whatever. Then I kept getting DMs and I would just ignore, but then they would nag at me. At one point I just thought, why do I need to keep up with these people? It's not that I don't love them and they know that and I guess that's what I want to get into takeaway wise. It was surprising to me, this is ridiculous. I don't need to keep up with people. I deleted the app and I instantly felt better. It was weird how instant it was. The stress just dissipated another whole level. Wow, just not even having it on my phone to make it an option relieve me that much. That's, that's powerful. I ran across this quote, the first book I completed, I am going to write soon about all the books I read, was this one, I don't know if his name is Jeron Linear or if it's like [inaudible] I'm not saying his name right, but he wrote this book. He's an early Silicon Valley guy who's now somewhat not so much anti-technology, but he wrote this book about 10 arguments for deleting your social media accounts, which is a bit hyperbolic, but he said this thing in a previous work where he said, if I'm unhappy the way digital technology is influencing the world, I think the solution is to double down on being human. While I wasn't necessarily resonating with the, yeah man, I want to completely change the way technology is influencing the world, though I do have some of that. The double down on being human phrase really connected with me. When I read that, I thought, that's what I want to do this month, whatever that looks like, I'm going to double down on being human.

It was weird how my brain worked. The first thing I thought of, the best example in my own life was reading this one little blip from Harry Potter, book seven. I actually have it right here, so I'm going to read it. It's just a short little part. I

remember when I read this part and many years ago, I bawled like a baby and was surprised at how much I bawled at this particular part. Now, spoiler alert, you might want to jump ahead 30 seconds to a minute, if you haven't read book seven and you want to not get spoilers, but at the same time it's been out a while. You just got to deal with this. But if you've read it, you know that Dobby dies and that's a big deal. By this time book seven, Harry, is nearly an adult and he is on his own and they are well immersed in the world of magic and doing everything magical. They're operating, they're using spells, they're confounding people with charms and putting up all these hexes. They're doing all the magic things that one does when one is in this magical world. Whenever they operate to this beach house to escape Malfoy Manor, Dobby dies from a knife from Belatrix. We see this horrifically heart-wrenching scene where Harry is holding Dobby and we as readers are sobbing about his death. There's this beautiful description in chapter 25 where they're talking about how everyone is interacting with each other, where are we, how are we doing? Harry's not saying anything, he's just holding Dobby. Suddenly the first thing he says is this, and I'm going to read this part. He says,

"I want to do it properly." were the first words of which Harry was fully conscious of speaking, "Not by magic, have you got a spade?" Shortly afterward he had set to work alone digging the grave and the place that Bill had shown him at the end of the garden between bushes. He dug with a kind of fury, relishing the manual work, glorying and the non-magic of it. For every drop of his sweat and every blister felt like a gift to the Elf who had saved their lives."

That little blip of a scene that maybe wasn't supposed to mean that much, completely overwhelmed me with emotion because at that point in the hole, big, long saga, I really resonated with Harry. He was so enamored with this magical world that he never knew about. And here we see him in his maturity choosing to not use magic. For me that was a little bit of what connected with me in moving into the sabbatical.

It's not so much that technology is magical or the digital world isn't real, but sometimes it feels that way. This idea of double down on being human to me meant putting down my wand, which is my way to connect with people all over the world instantly or be able to do my work through a screen and just do things like get dirty, figure out where I'm going to go without a GPS. Be completely okay with being in the woods and having no service of any sort and just almost like not letting the world of the Internet dictate time and so that I could pay attention to more the sunrise and sunset of a day. That to me was my more poetic broad desire for my month.

Crystal: I think that sounds beautiful. I love it.

Tsh:

Like I said, they were both professional and personal takeaways and I'll just hit these quickly and then my overall takeaways, which I didn't hint at in my post, but I'll get into here.

My professional takeaways, as someone who is self-employed and works via the Internet largely. My first takeaway was a month really isn't a long time. At first I have felt like it would be a really long time. I was pleasantly surprised at how little a month really is, if you think about it. In the big scheme of things, a month is nothing and people are just fine without you for a month. The Internet goes on, people will continue to argue. People will continue to have grand thoughts about things, put out really good work. I don't need to be part of it for a month. That's perfectly fine.

The second professional takeaway I had was, what's the worst that could happen? Like I mentioned earlier, it's not that I'm curing cancer and so really for me to step away, there was far more for me to gain than lose at this point. Even if I didn't make as much money in July or even if I lost some metric like podcast downloads or followers on Instagram or whatever it is, there was so much more to gain than those minor things that might feel important but really and truly aren't.

The third professional takeaway for me was, practically, this is healthy and good and honestly normal. It's so easy when those of us who are self-employed get into this mindset of hustle or even if we are anti-hustle, we still feel this need to justify our decisions to not work. It feels a little bit like this is special to take a sabbatical or to take this much time away in all the right ways. This is becoming more common than we realize among self-employed people. This is a very common practice among other countries. Those of us that are American, we might feel like we really need to justify why we need to take more than one or two weeks off of work that many, many countries around the world take far more than we do. Just to run through a few. Brazil takes, and these are legal requirements. This isn't just best practices. Brazil gives 30 days of paid leave after a year of employment. Spain, they say that it can never be less than 30 days in a 12 month period. Australia is four weeks paid leave for every year working. New Zealand four weeks after a year, the UK 28 days, Denmark and Sweden, 25 days, France, five weeks paid leave, South Africa, 21 consecutive days of paid leave, etc. You're hearing all these countries where it's three to five, six weeks is perfectly normal. This isn't a special thing. The US has no legal minimum requirement. In fact, we're just one of 13 countries in the world that don't have this. About 74% of us have access to paid vacation time. The average employee who works five years gets about 15 days. That's the average after five years of working. Honestly, 52% of Americans don't take all their vacation time. I'm just saying this isn't to dog us as a country and to elevate these other

countries, but it is to say what might feel weird for us is very common practice. Kyle and I talked about that, okay, this is a sabbatical, but really isn't this also just a very common vacation practice among many countries around the world?

Crystal: But culturally it was harder for you to mentally give yourself permission, right?

Tsh: Right. It was almost like I just had to remind myself, this is okay and good and normal and necessary and many, many people do this all the time and don't even have to justify anything to their bosses. This is just the norm.

Segment Two

Tsh: [24:27](#) There are some corollaries you'll see in my personal takeaways and that's the first one is a month really isn't a long time and so in the same vein, a month away from things like Instagram or Twitter or reading blog posts or listening to podcasts or whatever is not very long. You're not going to miss anything. You'll be perfectly fine not staying in the loop. I knew that cognitively. If you had told me that in June, I would have said a hundred percent amen sister, I am with you. But in practice, it's amazing how much you're aware in your emotional wellbeing and your physical awareness of time and what's around you. Wow. I connect my life to the Internet far more than I realize and I need that break. A month away is nothing. In fact, I was hesitant to come back. I was a little bit nervous honestly, that I would not be able to do this or that it would be hard. Not only was it not hard, I was not ready to come back. I felt a little bit like maybe I could take two more weeks before getting online. Those of you that follow me, you might see that I haven't really been on very much. That's why. I'm dipping my toes in.

Crystal: Did you also stay away from the news?

Tsh: Yes, I did. I had no idea what was going on and that was fine with me. I typically like to keep up with the news. I like to be a well informed citizen, but I realized a few days in it's okay not to know for a month. I think if something were huge enough that I needed to know in an apocalyptic sense, I would find out. The world around me would tell me. I had no inclination of the news for a solid month and I was completely fine. Here's the thing, I jumped right back in just looking at Twitter, looking at my newsfeed and it's like, oh, it's still kind of more the same. I'm sure I missed a few events, but overall there was nothing I missed that I needed to not miss, if that makes sense.

Crystal: Sure. You can catch up on the important things that might be worth knowing in a way that is less connected to the 24 hour news cycle. If you're like, okay, I want to go back and read about that thing. You could catch up if you would like to.

Tsh: That's right. I didn't struggle with the guilt for needing that. But to encourage anybody who's listening that might feel that way, I think it's perfectly okay. And it doesn't mean you don't care about the world if you need to take a month off of staying informed, it's really and truly okay. You're still an adult who cares and who wants to stay informed. Like you said, you can very easily catch up. That stuff isn't going away.

Crystal: I would say that's definitely something that I would struggle with is that feeling of like, is it just that I'm privileged that I'm allowed to do this. I like your point about just because you're taking a break doesn't mean you don't care and it doesn't mean that you're not involved in your community or taking action on things that are important to you. And if anything, taking a break I think could even give you a better perspective because you're bringing down the anxiety or whatever you're feeling about the news, approaching it again in a more calm perspective. That sounds great.

Tsh: [27:33](#) Here's the thing, it is a place of privilege. It's a privilege to be able to take a sabbatical like this. Not everybody around the world, many people cannot take a month off. I 100% own that and acknowledge that. My take on something like that is yes it's a privilege and with much privilege comes much responsibility. Because I have the privilege of being able to call the shots in this way, one of my responsibilities is to make sure I'm better rested. One of the ways I'm better rested is to take a time off from staying informed on the news because I can reengage a lot better and feel a lot more connected to the way the, I don't want to say the way the world works as though I didn't know, it's a healthy reminder I think for a lot of us that are pretty well connected, that the vast majority of the world isn't on Twitter. Most of our neighbors are not keeping up with news and starting up conversations on Twitter about the news cycle. That's good to remember I think for a lot of reasons.

The second personal takeaway is also what's the worst that could happen? There is also far more to gain than to lose. I think I already alluded to that somewhat, like with the new cycle also with keeping up with things like podcasts and blog posts or whatever it is that you like to keep up with, your Instagram feed, it's not going to go anywhere. You'll realize after a few days in that, oh, that's actually not that important. I don't need to always be in the know of everything. Like I mentioned with myself after deleting Instagram for a few days, I don't need to keep up with everybody's summers in that way. It's not a need. It's not a necessity and by taking it off, if I really truly do care when I come back, I can seek it out and be informed in 30 seconds. It's all fine.

The third personal takeaway a little bit different than my professional is I needed to do this for my health and wellbeing. I needed to do this for my relationships and for my emotions. Back to that double down on being human. I needed to

reconnect with who I am as a person. I needed to spend time with the people right around front of me. Technology is really best and it serves its best purpose when it can connect us to the people that matter most to us and for me that's the four other people in my family and we spent all this time together and I could look them in the eye directly and not also be thinking about that one article I read via Twitter or something like that.

Ultimately this month away, I felt so much more gratitude than I expected for both my personal and professional life and it just is the fact that I needed quiet and nature and connection with my people and just space to think for me to realize that gratitude for me to have that take away. I'm not saying it's always necessary, but for this year it absolutely was for me and I'm sure I'm going to keep having more takeaways. Next week I'm going to talk about some of the books I read and I read a lot of really good eye opening books that are going to further give me things to think about over the coming months. My overall takeaways for this that I would say just the application for all of us is we could all do this more often, self-employed or not.

I know there's arguments about whether you can take time away if you are employed and I get that that is a reality for many, many people, in fact, most people listening. There is a podcast out there, I can find it by Michael Hyatt and his daughter where they talk about how it's not as hard as you might think it is as an employed person, but we could collectively as a society benefit from all of us taking this time away.

My other takeaways, I plan to do this now annually now. Maybe not for as long, maybe so, but I don't think I'm going to take a full month away or I could, but every couple of years I'm going to take a full month. I'm definitely not going to wait 12 years again, but at least for a couple of weeks I can easily, easily not be on the internet or screens or connect for at least two weeks. Honestly, even as I'm talking about this, it's like a I can do a month is really okay and I probably also won't couple this with traveling all the time because there was something in me that did want to be home and just enjoy being disconnected while being in my own place and doing things like digging in my own garden and rearranging my own pantry and all that stuff. I probably won't always do it with traveling, but I do plan to do this annually now in some capacity.

The third thing is to say you can't or shouldn't do this really is a fixed mindset. I'm not saying you can do it ideally right away. This is another thing Kyle and I talked about. We've got three kids age nine to 14, this wasn't exactly the ideal dream vacation. We weren't on a isolated Hawaiian island with butlers and cabana boys. We were road tripping, camping, getting dirty, staying with relatives, doing a lot of just makeshift, we can go out to eat because we're eating cheese and crackers, lunch kind of a thing. To say you can't do it at all, it

might just mean you can't do it in the way that's ideal, but you can do it in some other way. Or maybe you can't do it as long, but you can start doing it in some way.

Crystal: I would say that anyone could take, can do some of what you did, even if they're still working. No matter what your job is, you can take a break from social media or something. You could pick something away, a partial sabbath, even if you can't do everything that you're doing. There's so many people that maybe certainly could not afford to take a month off of work, but they could take a month off the news and lots of other things that would still give them a similar sense of rest.

Tsh: [33:22](#) That's right. Actually, one of the books I read that I'll talk about soon, he talks about how in his family,, they have teenagers, they do a one hour a day, one day a week, and one week a year of a screen break. That looks like not just not picking up their phones that looks like literally turning off their phone. Even just one hour a day, they purposely turn off their phones. He says they usually combine it with dinner and the act of just turning it off is more symbolic than anything because it's only an hour, you can just turn it right back on after dinner. But he said it's a reminder you're not the boss of me phone. I thought that was really cool and that was a takeaway for me. You're exactly right. That can be a form of sabbatical that doesn't need to look like a complete break from your life. That can be a partial solution.

The other thing is to say that people need me, like I can't take a sabbatical because I am needed is this weird form of pride. You're saying, and I say you, but this is me that I have struggled with in the years past. Not so much now, but it's just almost saying you're more important than you actually are.

The honest truth is you're not that important. I say that in a really good way that is actually very freeing and life giving and the internet does this weird distorted thing to our sense of importance, whether we work via the internet or not. Even not that I think sometimes we can see other people as more important than they really are because of the Internet with people we follow or whatever it is. It's healthy for everybody to remember, oh, I'm not that important in all the right ways. That person that I follow and care about is not that important in a good way. Smart people take sabbaticals all the time, all the time, and the people that matter ultimately in your life, we'll be glad you did. If you disappoint somebody, ultimately that's okay because that's somebody maybe should not have that much say in your life really. Ultimately those were my takeaways from taking a sabbatical. I am sure I will continue to have more.

Crystal: I look forward to hearing the rest of them.

Tsh: Thanks me too.

Segment Three

Tsh: [37:09](#) Crystal, tell me about what's on your mind, especially after talking about sabbatical stuff related to being self-employed because you are too.

Crystal: I'm self employed in a very different way. You're a content creator and I offer services, basically. A lot of what I was thinking about connects a lot with what you were talking about in terms of sabbatical because one of the things that I was thinking about is how important it is for you to know yourself. If you want to work for yourself, you want to be self-employed, whether that means you're a freelancer or you have a brick and mortar store or you have lots of employees and a big team. It is crucial that you know how you best function. What kind of boundaries work for you and what success really looks like for you. It's so crucial and it's also okay if it's a learning process. You don't have to know all that at the beginning, but you have to be willing to learn and be willing to adapt as you go.

I was brainstorming with Andrea, the managing editor for The Art of Simple, and she reflected back to me and she said, I feel like there's a theme and a lot of what you've written for The Art of Simple about understanding systems so that you can change them or do them yourself or something like that. And she mentioned this quote to me that's often attributed to Picasso, which is "learn the rules like a pro so you can break them like an artist".

Tsh: I have heard that before and I love that.

Crystal: Yeah, I've heard it before too, but I loved the idea of really thinking about it in terms of not just a public facing image of your business, but all the hidden parts of running a business. Of not just like, oh, I'm gonna break these creative rules and my social media content or something. But learning these are how businesses generally operate. Which of those rules am I going to keep? And which of those roles are going to say, actually that's not very important to me or that doesn't line up with my other values or something like that. I really loved that quote and it gave me a lot to think about like what kind of rules am I breaking?

Tsh: [39:25](#) So I'm curious to ask because you are reflecting a lot about knowing yourself so that you can know what matters to you in pursuing self employment. How much would you say you learned on the go? Tell me a little bit about what you knew beforehand and what you learned about yourself because of working. Do you know what I mean?

Crystal:

[39:45](#) Yes, absolutely. I would say I actually knew from a young age that I wanted to be an entrepreneur. When I was 11 or 12 I submitted a business plan to a business plan contest and this was like the internet barely existed. It was a hard paper business plan. I've always known that I wanted to do that. But I've also, I mean there's a lot of things that I would say I've always known I wanted to do this. I've always known I wanted to be a writer. I've always known him to be an entrepreneur, but I didn't know exactly what all that would look like. I didn't have a clear vision for it. I just knew I wanted to do lots of things. That's one thing I really knew about myself. I like to dabble in lots of different areas. I love learning new things. The way that that would translate into business for example, is I love to learn something new. But then once I master it, it's boring to me. In a business capacity, I love to figure out what I think is the best way to do something, create a system and then delegate it. That works really well for me. That whole picture wasn't as clear for me originally other than I was, oh, I love learning new things. That works really well for business and especially the type of service based business that I do where it's related to internet marketing. Things are always changing. The part of what do I do when I get bored, if you will, with it and I don't want to no longer repeat that process and how to train now, I love. I have one employee and she's great and now I love creating a system and then training her in it and then passing it off. I would say initially I was much, I was pretty afraid of hiring and I didn't necessarily see myself as someone who'd be really good at that teaching and training and handing off part. That was something I learned and now I think I'm good at it. I enjoy it. I would say there's things that I knew, I knew I love learning new things, but I didn't know how it all worked.

Other things, for example, I definitely knew I'm very open to risk in terms of succeeding or failing or embarrassment types of risks, but I am not open to financial risk in terms of how it affects my family. Once I had a buffer, then I felt like, ooh, I can invest this money in my business because it's not actually risking anything for my family. Beyond that I'm fine taking risks and I think this is one big picture thing I've been thinking a lot about which relates to what you were talking about and how most of the time, there is that season of hustle where you have less choices and less freedom and you just have to take whatever, unless you've really set financially before you begin. But generally, no matter what your industry is, there's just a season that's just hard and you're just learning and you're often sacrificing a lot in that season. But then later you cross a line where, for you, you can take sabbaticals, you can turn down advertisers. For me it was, oh, I know who my ideal client is and I can say no to people that aren't my ideal client. Instead of just being like, oh, you would have paid me to do something. Sure. Y

Tsh: I would even argue you being able to hire somebody is one of those examples because sometimes we go in with this idea of, this is what I want my business to look like and it might not look like that for three years and that's okay.

Crystal: Yes, absolutely. One of the know yourself things, is what is that pace? Where are the areas? I know someone who would be much more comfortable even risking financially or sacrificing with their family, level of lifestyle or whatever in order to take risks and that would get them out of the hustle sooner. I'd rather sacrifice on hustle longer instead of, those are the things where like you, and this is what I love about it, right? You can choose, you could say, I'm going to set up my business from the beginning so that every year I can take a month off and that is a deal breaker for me. Or you could say within five years I would like to be able to take a month off.

Tsh: Sure. That makes sense.

Crystal: I don't think there's a wrong, there's no wrong answer here, but knowing what does success look like for me and what am I willing, what pace works for me? Am I gonna work five hours a week because my children are young or my children are young so I'm going to hustle now so that I can work less later.

No wrong answer, but what do you really want? Because something I've realized is you'll just be unhappy and frustrated if you don't know what you are aiming for. For me, I think I've realized I had a really clear picture of what success looks like for me in terms of my routine and this is what I'm willing to sacrifice, this is what I'm not willing. For example, I'm willing to work on the weekends so that I can have other types of flexibility.

Tsh: Yeah. It reminds me a little bit of a Seth Godin post I read a few months ago, I'll link to it, where he talked about not following the metrics that you don't care about because it's so easy for us to think, oh, people care about X, Y, and Z in their work. I should too. If you have to step back and it's good to step back and say, wait, just because they care about that doesn't mean I should. Why do I care about podcast downloads when my real goal is this end game? I think that's a good example of what you're talking about too.

Crystal: Absolutely. Another thing that Andrea pointed out to me was you talked about how you don't use social media to grow your business, but that's not really normal in your space and that's such an interesting choice. And I realized, I mean I've known that's been important to me in general where I just don't want to be a content creator about this type of market. This is not what I want to do, what I would be known for. But I know I'm leaving money on the table because of that and I'm totally fine with that. That was a very intentional choice that I made, that's just not how I want to use my time and energy and I'm fine with

that. I'm fine with the repercussions of that. That metric doesn't matter to me. I have plenty of clients. I make enough money, I'm happy. Especially now. I'm very happy with my businesses and I've never used the internet. I've only done word of mouth.

Tsh: I don't want to rabbit trail on this, but I'm very curious. Do you know your enneagram number?

Crystal: I'm a four.

Tsh: Okay. I thought we've talked about that. That is so interesting to me that that doesn't bother you because fours sometimes struggle with, not so much FOMO but always feeling like something is missing. It can be a real struggle to feel like I am doing something not quite right compared to other people in my industry. I love that you are healthy enough to a place where you can say that's good for them, not For me.

Crystal: I definitely have it in other areas but not in that particular one. I think part of that is ultimately, again, for me big picture, I want to do my own writing. I'm working on my novel and so at some point I will totally force myself to use the social media to do that. But I am not using that for my income generating business I always knew I want to be my own patron. That's my perspective on it and having that level of clarity has helped me make choices and then not have that FOMO. I even use this filter when I'm like deciding what emails to read in my inbox. Am I gonna open that email? Does this help me in my next big goal? Nope. I don't even need to read it. Because I have that level of clarity, and I wouldn't say that I always had that, but having that level of clarity now, that decision filter, removing the FOMO, it's really, really helpful. There's practical things about knowing yourself. Am I a morning person or a night person? Do I prefer short term projects or longterm projects that again, it's okay to I think to not know right when you're starting off, but as you go, I think it's so important to think maybe other people in my industry do it one way, but how do I harness my strengths and actually do what is best for me and that really will make me not resent my business or be like, maybe I should just go get a job. That's the other thing. There might be a time and you're like, this is done. This season is over. It's time to move on to something else. If you want to be able to be self-employed longterm, I think you have to be willing to constantly adjust and change and be agile. Not just in kind of the big picture products and services, but in the small things in terms of is this no longer serving me? What do I need to change? Am I doing it because this is what other people do or does it actually support me?

Tsh: [48:56](#) Right. I think you're speaking completely my language and whenever you're even talking about I might use social media for that novel, my mind is like, no, don't do that. Not because it's bad and wrong, but because I like how

you know yourself well enough to know what rules, like that Picasso quote, you know the rules, you are professional at what you do and you're choosing to break the ones that matter to you. I think that has to require self awareness and self knowledge, knowing what not only is what is important to you and what's not important to you, but also what you can handle and what you can't handle. I think that's also, not to get back to the sabbatical, but that's something I learned as well. I'm more sensitive to this than the average person and I am learning to be completely okay with that. I really like your perspective here.

Crystal: [49:48](#) Yeah, we'll see. Even like with the future idea of marketing the novel, I can imagine that at that point I'm going to be so excited because I'm going to have written something I'm really proud of, which is totally different than feeling like I'm like talking about marketing, which I don't mind doing marketing, but I just don't really wanna talk about it on the Internet because it's just not something that's interesting enough to me to be like, this is my platform, you know?

Tsh: [50:16](#) I think that gets into another great thing is whenever you're thinking about what kind of work you want to do, it doesn't mean across all fields of maybe the work or maybe all forever. Perhaps you might be more willing to do X, Y, and Z later in your work or in another type of work when you cross that bridge. But maybe to just think about, I don't want to say only think about the starting point, but sometimes we're so easily entranced by the ideal that we forget that steps one, two and three might just look like this and that's okay.

Crystal: [50:44](#) Absolutely. There are those different seasons and I would say even now, right? I'm in a season, I still have a baby and I can totally imagine that a year from now I might be like, okay, I totally changed my mind. I'm going to do these thousand things and that sounds fun now. I feel like I could do that authentically and really believe I'm adding value. I don't feel like I'm missing out I should have done X, Y, and Z five years ago. I really am just thinking this is what is right for me in this season right now. That could totally change. I love the fact that it can change, that's fun for me, but knowing what am I willing to risk right now? What do I value? What am I willing to let go of? What am I willing to sacrifice? Because I totally think like if you want to get to this place, there are things you have to be willing to sacrifice. Maybe some people can just stretch it out and they never have to do that hustle/sacrifice. I think it should have a limit, but I don't know if it's realistic to be like, I'm never going to hustle. There are just seasons of hustle and that's okay, but it should be, I hope a season where you say, and this is what I'm going to then shift and this is what it looks like for me to make that shift so that I can rest more, have a different perspective, maybe even change my role and my business or niche down or something like that. But if you don't take the time to know yourself and know what you want and what success

looks like for you, you could build this thing that is harder to maintain than a normal job, doesn't benefit you and isn't worth it. It's just more stressful and certainly not simple.

Tsh: [52:32](#) And then you end up almost feeling bitter towards it, I want to say. Something I reflected on this past month was how much legacy matters to me in my self awareness of the kind of work that matters. It's not so much legacy in a hundred years, I hope people are reading my books. It's not that, it's more legacy, like 10 years from now I want to look back and say that I spent my time well and I spent my God given talents and skills well and that I focused on the right thing. I knew that I would have profound regret if 10 years from now, which is when I'm going to be an empty nester. I spent so much more time hustling and spinning my wheels in the wrong gear in my work, caring about doing this latest trend because it can make me a couple thousand dollars as opposed to saying I'm willing to that money on the table because I want to spend this time with my kids that I know is going to go by fast. That's an example for me of how I've come to learn about myself in ways that were surprising that I can get into later. I'm learning a lot about what I plan to say no to moving forward because of this realization about myself in my work.

Crystal: [53:47](#) Love it. [inaudible]

Tsh: [53:59](#) You can find Crystal CrystalEllefsen.com on Instagram [@crystal.ellefsen](#) and keep up with me, I'm on Twitter [@Tsh](#) and Instagram [@TshOxenreider](#) and of course at theartofsimple.net where you can find my writing as well as Crystal's. Head to the show notes of this episode, number 208 at thesimpleshow.com where you can find all sorts of things, links to things we talked about, where you can sign up for my weekly email called Five Quick Things, and as I mentioned at the top of this episode, how you can become a patron and support the work it takes to create the show for just a few dollars per month. The show was produced by Chad Michael Snavely and thanks also to Caroline TeSelle, Andrea Debbink, and my furry intern, Ginny. Thanks so much for listening y'all. I'm Tsh Oxenreider and I'll catch you back here soon.