

MOVING UP THE SPIRAL STAIRCASE TO SUCCESS WITH NATHALIE LUSSIER

Welcome back to another episode of She Means Business. I am so happy that you are here right now because we are joined by the incredible Nathalie Lussier. She's the co-founder of AmbitionAlly and also the founder of NathalieLussier.com. She has so much good stuff going on. In this episode, she takes us behind the scenes and shares with us how she has built an incredible business. She also talks about the power of having a mentor and so much other good stuff. You are going to love it.

Welcome back, everyone! I am so excited right now because we are joined by the amazing Nathalie Lussier. She is an award-winning entrepreneur, international keynote speaker and author who has been making websites since she was 12 years old — that is a pretty cool skill to have. She's also got lots and lots of goodness going on over on her website NathalieLussier.com so definitely go and check that out. Nathalie, thank you so much for joining us.

Thank you for having me, Carrie. I'm excited.

I'm so excited because I did an interview with you back in 2014, which feels like forever ago now. I watched you growing your business. I remember at the beginning when I first started following you, you were focused a lot around having digital courses. I know you still have your courses. It's been really amazing over the past year or so to see you transition to developing software, which is amazing. I have your PopupAlly software to create popups on my website and I just love it all. I'm so intrigued about what behind the scenes has been like for you building your business over the past few years. Before we get into that, I thought it would be really helpful just to give a really quick overview for people listening about what your business is all about.

Yeah. My company is called AmbitionAlly because we design intuitive software for ambitious business owners. We have a couple of different products. One of them you mentioned is about list-building and polite popups — they're not supposed to be annoying to your visitors. You can also do embedded opt-ins and mobile-friendly opt-ins and all that good stuff. We also have membership site software called AccessAlly and ProgressAlly. One of them is a learning management tool so you can do quizzes, progress check-ins and all kinds of cool things that unlock other stuff. The other one, AccessAlly, is more for tag-based stuff. If you have a CRM or an email marketing system that is tag-based, you can do really cool stuff where you can unlock stuff or earn points and credits. That's the outside of the software business. On the inside, we have a team of 7. We have development, we have marketing, and we have all these different people who are doing different things behind the scenes to get everything together and working and out there into the world. My role really is to have the vision for our company and where we're going, the products that we're creating, and also to connect with our audience and make sure that what we're building is what people are looking for. I still do a lot of webinars, writing, things that I enjoy doing and speaking. That's my current day-to-day at this point.

I love it all. It really has transitioned from where it was years ago. It's amazing and I love that you're building such relevant software for entrepreneurs. Especially at the moment, there are so many membership sites around, the gamification and all that kind of stuff, it's just perfect what you're creating. To go right back to the beginning to see an overview of how you got to where you are today, what inspired you initially to go into the entrepreneurial world?

I think that because I started building websites when I was 12, I always had this technology addiction, which is pretty honest. I actually studied software engineering in school. It was great because I got to be an intern at a bunch of different companies. I worked on Wall Street. I worked in Silicon Valley as an intern. When I graduated, I basically had this job offer on Wall Street. My parents were saying, "Go for it. This is great. This is what you're working so hard towards." My peers were going off to their jobs and their job offers. There was just a part of me that was saying, "That's not the right path for you." The part of me that was saying that was always curious about starting a business. I always wanted to start a business. So, I decided to turn down that job and started my first company right out of college. It was a great time to start

because I didn't have a family, a mortgage, or anything like that to worry about, so I was able to just be scrappy and figure things out. That's what I did. I started my first business which I now call my training business. It was all about healthy eating because that was my passion. I had read a ton of blogs about following your passion, so I picked one of the topics that I was excited about at the time. Not to say that I'm not passionate about nutrition anymore, but I just realized it's not my lifelong career, if you will. What I realized in building that business is that I had a lot of those tech skills that other people didn't have when they were starting their companies and their businesses. People kept coming to me and asking me, "Who built your website? How are you doing all these things?" Eventually, that turned into me doing web design, then doing consulting, and then teaching and doing training courses on the topics that I had learned about myself both from the tech side and the marketing side from running my business. Eventually, I realized we're teaching these people how to do these things but it would be even easier if they had a tool to do them for them. That's why we ended up designing software. It happens to be what I call the spiral staircase — I came back to software in a whole new way.

I love that. I also love how your journey shows that you just never know where the path is leading. Sometimes, you just do things that aren't the end. So often people get disheartened when they start something and then they start thinking "Is this for me? It's not for me." They don't keep following the path, the little bread crumbs that help figure it all out and help you evolve and develop something incredible. It's really inspiring hearing where you started and then to think of where you are now from the nutrition blog.

Yeah, and I feel like I learned so much from that first experience. Also, I met great people who are still friends of mine today. It's funny how sometimes, things happen for a reason like you mentioned. You can't always see around the corner. My idea with the spiral staircase is you take one step, you take one step. You don't quite know what's around the corner, but if you trust that you're on the right path and that you'll figure it out as you go along, then you'll usually end up right where you need to be.

Yeah, I definitely live by that, too. Otherwise, I'd go insane. What are some of the keys steps you've taken throughout your journey that have helped to get you to where you are now?

Most of the time when there's a big jump in income or a big jump in success in whatever metric we were using—whether it was list-building or audience-building, customers and all that kind of stuff—it's because I had worked with a mentor or I had gotten really clear on my value, my focus and my direction. Usually, those two go hand-in-hand. I think it's possible to do it without a mentor, but when you get a mentor or coaching or somebody to guide you along your path, it can really shortcut the process. Really early on, I had some great advice from people like Marie Forleo and Laura Roder and people who were in our space, if you will. Just having that guidance early on really helped me find my direction and not over-think things. We have this tendency to second-guess ourselves and be like, “Am I on the right path? Is this the right thing for me?” When I got some of that “Just try it and just see what happens. If you like it, keep doing it. If you don't like it, you can always do something else,” that was very, very helpful.

I definitely find working with people helps you to have the breakthroughs that you need. Did you find that you worked with specific people throughout your journey or people have come along at the right time and have been able to help you? Have you proactively gone out there to find a mentor?

In the beginning, for the first year or so, I would say I was pretty much on my own. Actually, that's one of the things that can be very difficult. If you don't have anyone else who's starting a business, it can be a bit tricky to keep going, focus and feel like you're on the right track. After that first year, I was able to find some mentors that were really helpful. Really for me going from info products and courses to actually talking to somebody one-on-one or even in a group setting made a huge difference. Since then, I have definitely sought out different people based on the business growth and where we're at. These days, I do tend to put myself in the room with other people like me or other people who are a little bit further ahead than me so I can have that stretch opportunity. I think that's helpful at any stage in your business.

Yeah, definitely. Throughout your journey, what have been the biggest things that have really helped you to get your business and your message out there?

I've done a lot of things. I also think it's interesting because the marketplace has shifted a lot. When I was first starting out, there were no Facebook ads. Webinars were actually just getting started; they were all tele-classes, which is funny to think back now. I did a lot of free things, a lot of social media marketing, a lot of grassroots things where I would have other people help me share things and spread the message organically that way. Since then, we've done more Facebook ads. We've done more webinars and public speaking, a lot of things to really get the message out. When I think about it, there are a couple of things that stand out for me when I look back over the things we've done that have really us build our audience and build our community. One of them is to use what I'm now calling the login opt-in. What we did is we built a membership site. We put together a free challenge, which is called the 30-Day List-Building Challenge. It's a course where you get a free video a day for 30 days that walks you through how to build your email list. What we did is we put that inside of our membership site. If somebody opted into it, they could get access and log in and see all the videos. They also saw our other courses and our other programs inside that members' area, which led organic cross-selling. We're not pushing anything. They're just seeing, "Hey, there's this other stuff that I could get. Maybe I should give it a try." That really helped us in so many different ways. It also helped people share and spread the message because inside that members' area, we have all these social media share buttons and we incentivised people to do that. I would say that's a big realization for me. Now, I'm teaching this concept because I feel like once people are logged in, it's a very different experience from a casual browser on your website. That's something that I would say is different from what most people do and also works very, very well.

That's amazing. Even for me today, that's amazing. So many people have membership sites now so it's really cool to hear your experience on that. Thanks for that advice. For me, the entrepreneurial journey is one that has so many highs and lows, so many twists and turns. Has there been anything that you didn't expect to deal with, or amazing things or low things that you just didn't expect?

I would say that when I was first starting my business, it took awhile to really feel confident. When you're talking to somebody about your business, you're like "Hey, this is what I'm doing and it is awesome." We were together but not married yet. He used to pick up different job postings that he thought I might like and slip them to me. He was totally doing it from a beautiful

place and he wanted to support me. He just saw me struggling sometimes —mostly emotionally, right?— and wanted to make me feel better. “Hey, you don’t have to do this if you don’t want to.” That was probably one of those early lows, probably in the first year. It took a little while for him to come onboard with the business. Since then, one of the unexpected highs is I was able to actually get him to quit his job and join my company. Now, we work together in the business. That was definitely not an immediate thing. It took a couple of years to get the business big enough where it made sense financially, and also for his role to make sense with what we were doing in the business. That’s definitely one of the big highs for sure. We just had a baby and she’s 9 months old. We both co-parent at home, which I think is great. We can both take care of her. That’s been a very fun transition, too.

That is amazing. I just love how being an entrepreneur can just allow you to have an amazing lifestyle and have the freedom to do something like that while being really successful and working on your dreams. I think it’s amazing. I love it. What do you think has helped you to be unstoppable in your pursuit of your entrepreneurial dreams?

I really feel like it depends on your motivation. For me, there was definitely a part of me that was rebelling against society and other people’s thoughts of “You can’t do this. You won’t be able to do this.” Part of me is like “You know what? I’ll show you I can do this.” There is definitely a part of me that has that rebellious side. That’s propelled me when I hit those lows where it’s a bit difficult to continue. Also, I think surrounding myself with other amazing people who are doing great things and who are going after their dreams. Once you’re surrounded by other people just like you who are going after certain things, who are ambitious, who are driven like you, it’s so much easier to keep going. When you fall down, if you’re having a bad day or whatever it is, they’ll pick you back up. They’ll help you see that this is just a temporary thing and that there are so many more great opportunities ahead of you. Another thing that’s important for us to remember is we’re at this time and there is so much more time ahead of us. Sometimes, we feel like “I need to have this done by the time I’m 30, by the time I’m 35, or 60” or however old you are at the moment when you’re listening to this. Remember that when you’re an entrepreneur, you’re probably not going to retire. You’re probably going to create new things for the rest of your life. So, you have a long time to do the things you want to do in the world. You have a long time to

create the business, the products and the services and all the things you want to create. That also puts things in perspective for me.

Yeah, I love that so much. Finally, before we get to the lightning round, what would be your top tips for aspiring entrepreneurs?

I think the more you can speak to your ideal customers and figure out what they want, you're more likely to go in the right direction. I think that's something a lot of us get confused on a little bit. For example, just to give you a real case study of this, when I was doing my first nutrition blog, I was writing a lot of philosophical articles that were geared at other people who were geeking out on nutrition. The people who were reading these blog posts were never going to buy from me because they're already advanced. When I realized that, I shifted my writing and marketing and my content creation towards people who were like me a couple of years before then, who were a little bit more in the beginner phase. I wrote something like how to open an avocado and use it in a salad — very, very basic. When I did that, I was able to attract my ideal customers. Things really turned around once I started actually speaking to people who would be willing to purchase and willing to do business with me. I think a lot of times, we're too similar to ourselves so basically, we're trying to market to people who are just like us instead of thinking about people who would be actual clients and customers of ours. Also, we don't really ask them what they want. We assume that we know what they need and what they want, but they might not necessarily be there yet or maybe they're looking for something a little bit more specific than what we had in mind for them. Those would be the best advice that if I could go back and give myself or if somebody were brand-new starting out, that would be super #1 important thing. Once you have that, everything else can really flow from this information.

Yeah, that is so true. That's such a good point. Finally, to end with the lightning round, I've got a couple of sentences for you to finish and then some questions. Are you ready?

Yes, let's do it.

The first one is this: When I face a big challenge, I...

I write it out. Basically, I like to say when in doubt, write it out.

I love that. The next one —actually, I think you just answered this— if I could go back in time to when I started my business, I would tell myself...

I already said it. I would tell myself to keep going no matter what. I feel like that's important and you really can't go wrong with that advice.

True. What is your favourite business tool, resource, book or podcast?

I love this book, it's a little bit older. It's called *Ready, Fire, Aim*.

Oh, I like that.

Yeah, I think it's Michael Masterson.

Yeah, I remember reading that years ago.

Yeah. The ideas from that book stuck with me and have impacted how I do things. I think it's a really good one.

That is a really great book. Finally, do you have a favourite quote?

Yeah, it's a Chinese proverb: "The best time to plant a tree is 20 years ago; the second best time is today."

Oh, I really like that. Thank you so much. Your story is so amazing. I think what you're doing now is just incredible. I love how you've gone full circle and gone back to creating software. It's really inspiring how you've developed things. I really love all your products. Everyone should go and check them out because they're amazing. Thank you for coming and sharing your story with us. I really appreciate it.

Thank you, Carrie. It was great to be here.

Hopefully, you have all loved it, too. If you would like to be in with a chance of winning PopupAlly Pro, which is one of Nathalie's plugins, it's brilliant. Like she mentioned earlier, it's to have polite popups on your website. It's so good — I

have it. All you need to do is leave a comment below on the blog and just let us know what your key take-away from this session is. Also, make sure you sign up below to her 30-Day List-Building Challenge. It is great. Links below to Nathalie's website are there so definitely go and check it out because everything she does is amazing. You're going to love it. I hope you enjoyed this session and I will see you next week for another episode of She Means Business.