

Homeschool CEO Podcast Episode 53

Playing to Win: Going All In with Business with Tonisha Stalnaker

26:10

SPEAKERS

Jen Myers, Tonisha Stalnaker

Tonisha Stalnaker 00:02

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Jen Myers 00:41

Welcome to the Homeschool CEO podcast, the podcast dedicated to entrepreneurs who want to successfully homeschool their kids while running a profitable business. In this podcast, we'll reveal the truth of what it really looks like behind the scenes of an entrepreneur who homeschools and how to make it all work. If you're an entrepreneur who currently homeschools or you want to start, you are in the right place, my friend. With 16 years experience combining entrepreneurship with homeschooling, I'm your host, Jen Myers. And this is the Homeschool CEO podcast.

Jen Myers 01:24

Are you 100% in when it comes to building your business? How do you know if you're all in? Or maybe if we're kind of holding something back? That is exactly what our guest today, Tonisha Stalnaker and I are talking about, even if you feel like, "Oh yeah, Jen. I'm, definitely all in," today's conversation will challenge you to take your commitment to the next level. Welcome back to another episode of the Homeschool CEO podcast. Let's dive in.

Jen Myers 01:59

Alright, Tonisha. Welcome to the Homeschool CEO podcast. I'm so excited to have you here today.

Tonisha Stalnaker 02:05

Hi, I'm so excited. This is formally my first podcast. I'm like really excited.

Jen Myers 02:09

No way. Oh, you are going to be amazing. Alright, so Tonisha, introduce yourself to our audience today, so they know a little bit more about who you are.

Tonisha Stalnaker 02:17

Okay, so I am Tonisha Stalnaker. And side note, I'm happy that I gave the right name. I did a live last year where I gave my maiden name two years after I'd already gotten married. So, there's that. So, let's see. I am a wife. I've been married, technically, I say technically, because we've been together forever. But we got married a few years ago, near Halloween. So, that's when we celebrate. I am a mom to a 25-year-old married lady. And so, every time I say it out loud, it's crazy. And then I'm also a bonus mom to a 10-year-old daughter that I am now homeschooling for the first time. So, there's so many new things that are going on. And let's see, I'm a dog mom. I am a guinea pig grand mom. And I am addicted to horror movies. And I can pretty much communicate and gifs completely if I needed to.

Jen Myers 03:11

Love it. Love it. Did you know I homeschooled our - my two stepdaughters. Yeah, I wasn't sure if we had talked about that. That's, that's one of those weird little things that people always laugh, after being where I am now. And now leading Homeschool CEO, I have all of these weird little nuances that perfectly set me up for success to help everybody that comes along, like in these weird, weird, weird little ways. Like, I never imagined 17 years ago, when we started homeschooling our kids and we had custody of my husband's two oldest daughters that someday I'd be sitting down here, you know, 17 years later with you going, "Oh, yeah, you can totally homeschool your bonus daughter. I did it." There are some rough times, sometimes you gotta fight with the ex. You know, you got to work through different things like, you have to play by everybody's rules a little bit differently. But you totally can do that. So, I love that.

Jen Myers 04:03

Alright, Tonisha, we're going to jump right into something that we talked about earlier that I think affects so many Homeschool CEOs at some point in their business. And it's the fact that so many of us, we play small. We're not all in. It's like we have one foot on each side of the fence going, you know, and we do it in homeschooling and in business. So, do you feel like you've always played all in? Or do you feel like there's a time where maybe you've given less than your all?

Tonisha Stalnaker 04:33

I know that I haven't been all in the whole time. I think I've mentally felt all in as in I was completely all in overwhelmed, but not really all in functionally in my business. And I launched my business January of 2020 after working in recruiting for about 10 years. And I've been working for an IT consulting firm, and I knew I wasn't going to be there long term. But I just finished my masters'. So, my goal was stick it out for another year two, use the bonuses, pay off my student loan. And then by that point, I'd kind of have an idea of what I was going to be when I grew up, start a business and move on. Well, you know, love a good plan and life had other plans. And so, three weeks after I graduated, I got laid off. And the immediate feeling was, well, dang, that threw off my whole plan. But it wasn't a feeling of, "Oh, my gosh, I'm gonna miss this job," or "Oh, my gosh." I, you know, it wasn't any of that. So, I took some time and thought about it and decided to just start a business.

Tonisha Stalaker 05:33

So, I knew that I wanted to start a business mainly because I knew what I didn't want. I didn't want to be - I told my husband, I was like, "I didn't get a Masters to be a recruiter forever. But I didn't get a Masters to be a housewife either. So, I got to figure out something else." So, I knew I could walk into being a recruiter. But I didn't want that. So, I was like, well, thinking of all the things that I've done for friends and their businesses and helping out, you know, I did some Google searching and was looking at different terms. And so, I came across virtual assisting, which I did not realize that was an actual human thing until I did. And so, I started off as a general VA. I started with a couple of clients, because people that knew me had wanted some help. And so last year, you know, I did have some traction. I did have some clients. I stayed busy. You know, and not necessarily productive all around. I was productive in keeping my clients. At least was able to do that. But just more busy work. And then when you added on the pandemic, and I started a business with the idea that she'd be in school during the day, and then I pick her up. And then she was home for virtual school. And that was terrible.

Tonisha Stalaker 06:44

So then, it was the decision of, well, maybe I'll homeschool, which was another thing. But I think all of last year, that imposter syndrome - it was heavy, like 200-pound weight on my shoulders heavy. And then you add pandemic, and then you add all the social unrest, and then you add the election and just negative and crazy, all everywhere. And then you add a business on top of it. So, while here, I was really excited to have the business and I knew I wanted to move forward, here was all the everything else. And it was like it was starting to kind of weigh it down to where it kept me off balance all last year. And I was going in different directions trying to get help. So, but it was like, may get a little bit of help over here. And I'm gonna get a little bit of hope over here. And I can't afford this program, ask a couple questions and go over here. And so, it was like, if there is a word for all the things shiny object syndrome, overwhelm squirrel syndrome. That was all of 2020.

Tonisha Stalaker 07:55

And on top of it, I was undercharging, like I - I jokingly now call it where the year I was broke in business. You know, like, you know, at the end of the year, people like, "Oh, you have a business." "Yeah, I'm broke in business though." Like, that's, that's where I'm living. And that started to weigh on me also. So, it was one of those things where it was like, I knew I wasn't where I wanted to be. But I was so overwhelmed and clouded. I couldn't figure out how to get there. And even the first small step, it was just kind of like by the last quarter of the year, I was essentially taking care of my client. But that was it. There was no marketing, hardly any discovery calls. I think I looked the other day and I might have, not counting the clients that I actually got, I might have done four discovery calls outside of them. The whole year. I think I did two lives. And I did a live event with Kajabi. That was it. That was my marketing for 2020.

Jen Myers 08:52

Wow.

Tonisha Stalaker 08:54

So no, I was not all in.

Jen Myers 08:57

Okay. Wow. Yeah. But you have a lot. I mean, in your defense, you had a lot going on. I mean, you were brand new to the homeschooling. You were - had starting a business that you weren't really expecting. You were all over the place. Super, super common. So, what changed for you this year to make you say, "Nope, I'm drawing a line in the sand. I'm going all in?"

Tonisha Stalaker 09:18

So, a couple of things. Toward the end of the year, I had had a couple of calls, some bookkeepers. And I was very upfront with them. I was like, I know a bookkeeper is a good idea. But I also know that I'm broke and can't afford a bookkeeper. So, I figured I should at least talk to some bookkeepers to kind of give you some insight on when I might be ready for bookkeeper. It's, you know, like the prep work. And so, you know, one of them asked. They were like, "Well, how much money did you make this year or lose?" And I was like I don't even know. So, I looked into my Wave app and they have this cool feature where it kind of shows you what came in and what went out. And I think the difference was \$600. Luckily in the positive, not the negative. I was like, well, the good news is, I didn't lose money. But clearly, I didn't make any either.

Tonisha Stalaker 10:06

And my husband's who's a police officer, I remember him saying, you know, "Tax season is coming and you know, I worked a lot of overtime this year, and you know, between my income and your income with your business, you know, we're going to be like, owe a lot of money." And I was, I remember jokingly saying, "No, I think we're gonna be okay. I got you." You know? And he was like, "Why? From the write offs?" "Yeah, yeah. We'll say that. Yeah. Just no, we'll be fine. We could do our taxes. We're good. Yeah. I don't think we're gonna owe anything. We're gonna get a refund." I didn't even have confidence to tell him what was going on. So, that was flag number one, because we're super like, upfront with everything. And I found myself, like hiding it from him, and just putting on a good face.

Tonisha Stalaker 10:50

And so, I came into the new year, and you come in, and you're like, "Oh, my gosh. New year, new you all that stuff." And it sounds like - I'm not even gonna bother to say that. I already don't feel it. And did that Biggie Your Business conference, and which is the first time I saw you. And so, it was funny. I signed up for that conference and I honestly was just like, "Alright, well, I'll listen in the background while I do some work. They can't see me anyway. I'll do some stuff and see what happens." I had zero expectations.

Tonisha Stalaker 11:21

I don't know if it was just the timing of everything or just the speakers. It was like, person after person, it was like, "Oh, my gosh, that's awesome. Oh, my goodness." It literally hit me. Like, holy shit. I'm not, I'm not doing it. I'm not doing what I'm supposed to be doing. And I don't know if it was just the compounded time of hearing all of those messages back-to-back and hearing people's challenges, and how they overcame the challenges to where I'm like, "What am I doing?" You know, like, I'm smarter than this. I'm not a dumb person. And yes, last year was that crazy. But I've gone through worse and come out, come through better.

Tonisha Stalaker 12:04

So, I just, I really was like, feeling like charged up and kicking myself at the same time. Like I said, it literally hit me like I was almost in tears by the end of that conference, because it was just so many emotions hitting me at one time. Alright, you didn't do what you were supposed to do last year. You started the business. You maintained relationships you did form. And that's nice. But you didn't do anything else, like you know, or somebody who's like, if you're not making money, you're not really in business. It's like a hobby. And so, essentially, I had a hobby LLC. I was just like, I - one of my biggest things is failure. I hate feeling like I've failed and that was what was hitting me was you failed, you know. You failed as a business owner, you failed your family, because I was the breadwinner before I got laid off. I brought in the six figures. And that's been the goal. Now that might not have been the most realistic, year one, especially for somebody who was doing all the things and had no specialty at all. But even so, I wasn't anywhere close to it, you know. And my husband was working extra to make up the difference. And so, all of this guilt was like hitting me. And so, I was like, alright, I have a choice. I can just throw the business away and go get a job. Or I can get a job and maybe do the business on the side. And when I thought about all the feelings I used to have as someone's employee and I was like, "I said, I was not going to do that again. So, I'm not going to do it again."

Tonisha Stalaker 13:41

So, I have failed already. Okay, I did it. So, check that off the box, I have done the undercharge thing, I can check the box. I've seen my books and they brought a tear to my soul, check that out of the box. But then I also looked at the positive. I try my best to find a positive in everything I said. But what I also did was I didn't quit. Even if I wasn't all in, I gave a good solid consistent 62% for the whole year. I also kept all my clients. You know, the only two clients that didn't retain were the clients that I chose not to move forward with because they were wear me down even more than everything else. And that was a decision because that - those were the actually the two highest paying clients I had, but the negativity and the micromanaging everything, I'd made the decision that this is not the business I want to be in because for all this I could be somebody's employee. And so, I looked at the positives that I did have and I was like, so while I might be horrible at pricing and horrible at niching and horrible about making profits right this second, what I'm good at is finding you know, finding relation or making relationships and like keeping those relationships. And my clients were all happy because I did check. I was like, let me just do a pulse check here because I might have them now and they could all quit on me tomorrow. And they were all like, "Nope, you're amazing, we're still happy."

Tonisha Stalaker 15:09

And so, I took that and decided that, you know, I'm gonna focus on that positive and expand on it. So, I was like, what didn't I do last year? Well, I didn't talk to anybody. Little to no marketing. So, I, you know, was looking at all the different things between social media and all of that. And somewhere, I saw something about a coffee chat. And at first, the sarcasm he was like, "Oh, it's stupid." But then I decided to try it. And I don't know, is like, as silly as it sounded... Anyway, I started like putting - writing down the things that I needed to do differently. So, I was like, already figured out what not to do. That was 2020. So, I was gonna make connections, talk to people, and figure out where I could find my clients. And I was going to put 100% in every single day in my business. And it's sounds nice, but it's like, what was that going to be? Like? What does 100% look like for me?

Tonisha Stalaker 16:09

So, I put in a couple of challenges. One, initially, it was to talk to someone new every single day. And that - that was what I wrote down. And then I was like, look at all the things that I've done. What do I want to get rid of? And what do I love doing? So, one thing that was consistent, everybody last year, needed a course or wanted a course. And so, I started doing course, platform setups, and I love it. So, accidentally, I found a niche. So, I was like, write that down. Now does that mean I've scrapped everything else? No. But I still figured out what I wanted to keep, and what I wanted to, you know, pass on to someone else. The other thing I did was looked at my pricing. And I talked to all of my retainer clients and I raised all the rates.

Jen Myers 16:57

Good for you.

Tonisha Stalaker 16:58

And it was great, because it was a, so this is where we started and this is what I charged when we started. And this is what you asked for. And now this is what I'm doing. So, it was a way that I could easily show them the reason why their rates were going up. And I remember one thing, I asked you could you do this, I said, well, that's just it, what I can do whatever the hell I want to do, it's my company. So, if I want to decide to shine shoes, in some part of my business, I can do that. So, it wasn't that I can't do it, it was the - I should have, like, had a conversation with you to course correct the pricing, because you started with one thing and 16 things later, I'm now running your payroll and managing the backend of your business, you're still paying \$500 a month. You know, so having those real conversations with my clients of we need to kind of do something different. And I explained it to them that I'm shifting my business, I want you to come with me. But this is what we're going to need to do. And they were all on board.

Tonisha Stalaker 17:58

But then you know, I did a business plan of how many of each thing is it going to take for me to hit a goal? Like, how many retainers do I need? If I'm going to do VIP days, or done-for-you type days, how many of those do I need a month or a year to hit the goal? And so, I've literally focused on those things, because those are things that I can retain, I can remember, and I can keep working towards every day. So, that's between the networking calls, discovery calls, showing up like this in podcasts. I, you know, we scheduled this one, and then I think I'm scheduled to do four others. I'm doing an IG Live. And if anyone knows me, Live and I are not friends. This face and the hormones and the weird facial expressions, and all of that is awful. But I'm like, screw it. I'm doing it anyway. So, they're gonna get all the goofy faces and the flubbed words and whatever, because this is just me anyway.

Tonisha Stalaker 18:59

So, that's the difference of all in and I like, even though it's been what, it's beginning of March, but not even six weeks since that conference, everything has changed. I had to cut back on that talking to somebody new thing every day. Because I didn't expect it to grow the way it did. Like at one point, I think I had five working calls a day. And so, at some point, I got to do some client work. And so, maybe the Monday through Friday thing is not working. And you know, but I think from mid-January to the end of this week, I've had a call scheduled almost every single day. And I've had at least three or four discovery calls every single week versus the collective 11 that I had all 2020.

Jen Myers 19:49

Wow, wow, it kind of goes back to the thing. You know what got you there won't get you - like what got you here won't get you there.

Tonisha Stalaker 19:57

Yeah.

Jen Myers 19:57

So, you don't want another 2020 year. So, you want to stop doing those things, and you want to do totally different things. And just for everybody who's listening, that's actually how we met, was we got on a coffee chat together. And I don't remember how we got into that, how I got into that loop. But I'm like, let's jump on a coffee chat. And we, and we hit it off. And that's how you landed this podcast was by putting yourself out there and making those networking calls and chatting and also too stating, like, "This is what I want." You know, "I'm looking for referrals. I'm looking for clients. I'm looking for visibility opportunities." And that, that is like the first step of going all in going, whatever it takes. That's what I'm doing. Now, because I want that more than I want to be safe. And stay behind the camera.

Jen Myers 20:47

And I'm with you. I'm with you, Tonisha. I've been at this, you know, going on year two, and Facebook Lives still terrify me every single time I get on a live and people say, "Oh, Jen, you're so confident." And I would say, "Oh, if you could only feel what is going on inside of me." It is not. It is nothing spectacular. I promise. I'm just as scared as the next person. Because I'm an introvert. And the whole idea of like putting myself out there. That's hard. But even talking with you now, I can just see such a difference from like, where you were and where you are now. And like you said, I was at that conference as well. I spoke at that conference. It was put on by Brandy Mowles, a good friend of mine. And I love how you - and that's one thing that she talks about, you know, like defining your success, defining your milestones, where you want to be and then breaking down those action steps that are in your power. You know, you need to talk to X amount of people every month. How many discovery calls you need to be on in order to get this amount of clients every month?

Tonisha Stalaker 20:50

Yep.

Jen Myers 20:55

Alright. So, what is the number one lesson you've taken away from that whole mind shift from going to where you were in 2020 to where you are now is all in?

Tonisha Stalaker 21:52

I would say the biggest thing is just my mindset was not in the right place. But somebody - and it's so funny, everybody has their words and all of that - but I talked to someone and they were like, you know, "You really need to kind of figure out how to speak, listen, think and act in abundance, where you absolutely deserve all the things." And I've been listening, I just finished listening to You're Badass at Making Money. You know, my

husband comes in and he's just like, "Okay, what are you listening to now?" And I remember joking with him. And I was like, he said, "Well, if we get this money..." "No, when we get this money." He's like, "Okay, when." I said, "No, I'm serious. When it happens."

Tonisha Stalnakar 22:33

And I remember a day we were talking about something and he was like, "Oh, we haven't gotten this yet. And you know, I don't know. So, we're gonna have to kind of move some things around." And I was like, "It's gonna happen." I said, "I was just listening to Money Mindset, and we just have to be ready for it." So, he went to the grocery store, and he came back, I was like, "We just got like, \$2,000 deposited!" He was like, "From what?" I'm just saying. I'm just saying, it wasn't expected. I think I found like, 20 bucks my book bag the other day. And every time I see, it's always he's around when I do it. I'm like, abundance mindset, you know? He was like, "It's \$20." I was like, "It's \$20 we didn't know was sitting in that book bag. I'm just saying." You know, so that mindset, not just with money, but with everything. Abundance with meeting new people, abundance with clients, abundance with just my family, all the things. I'm just like, open to receiving it. So, and that has helped with everything else.

Jen Myers 23:30

Ooh, so good. So good. This has been such a great conversation. If you could sit down and chat with one of our Homeschool CEOs who really if they were honest with themselves, they haven't been all in. What would you say to them?

Tonisha Stalnakar 23:46

Why aren't you? You're gonna need to figure out why you aren't and then figure out how you need to get there.

Jen Myers 23:52

Yeah. So, identify your "why". Identify what's holding you back and really what you want. Yeah, so good. Alright, can you should tell our audience how they can connect with you.

Tonisha Stalnakar 24:02

Let's see, I am everywhere. But the easiest is probably my website, www.stalnakervs.com. I'm on Instagram, Facebook, and LinkedIn as well.

Jen Myers 24:15

Awesome. And we will be sure to connect all of that in the show notes as well. Alright, thank you so much for being here today. This has been fantastic.

Tonisha Stalnakar 24:22

Awesome. Thank you so much.

Jen Myers 24:25

All right, friend. Let's have honest conversation. It's just you and me right now. Have you always been 100% in when it came to growing your business? Or has there ever been that tiny little time where maybe it looked like

you were committed on the outside, but deep down, you might have been holding back even just a little. I've been there too. So, there is no judgment here. But let's make an agreement with each other. For the rest of 2021, let's promise ourselves that we are going to commit to giving 100% of everything we do, including growing our business. It's time for us to level up. Deal? Alright, if you made this deal with yourself today, I want to know about it. So, send me a DM on Instagram and let me know, "Hey, Jen, you know what, maybe in 2020 I wasn't 100% in. But from here on out, I'm leveling up. I'm giving it all I got, and we're gonna do this together." I'll talk to you soon.

Jen Myers 25:35

Hey, friend, I just want to say thank you so much for tuning in today. If you loved what you heard, please be sure to head over to Apple Podcast and leave a review. I really appreciate it. And for more information on connecting with other homeschool CEOs, just like you, be sure to check out our website at www.homeschoolceo.com and as always, Team Homeschool CEO, you ladies inspire me. Thank you for always showing others what is possible. You guys are awesome. See you next week.