The Modern Editor Podcast – Episode 1:
Welcome to The Modern Editor Podcast

Tara Whitaker: [0:03] Welcome to *The Modern Editor Podcast*, where we talk about all things editing and what it's like to run an editorial business in today's world.

Tara Whitaker: [0:17] Hello and welcome to the very first episode of *The Modern Editor Podcast*. I am beyond excited to be here and am a little bewildered, to be honest, because I had this idea for a podcast—I think it's been about three years now—and at the time of this recording, it's July 2022—so, gosh back in 2019—and it took this long to get here. So, that is why I am thrilled to be here.

Tara Whitaker: [0:46] I'm so excited you're here tuning in. I thought for this very first episode, I would just give you a glimpse into who I am. You know, a brief introduction of myself, where I come from, and my editing experience. Sort of why I started this podcast, what's the whole point of this, where I came up with the name *The Modern Editor Podcast*, and what exactly is a modern editor? And then what to expect in future episodes and see what you can get out of this podcast and see if it's something that you would like to tune in to (which, I hope it is), so we're just going to dive right in.

Tara Whitaker: [1:20] I'm not going to give you my life story. I don't know if anybody wants to hear that. So, we'll do a brief introduction, and we'll start out in July 2010. I was in my last corporate job, and I started a book blog. I needed a creative outlet. A college friend let me know about book blogging. I was hooked and fell in love with it. And that's how I got my whole introduction to the publishing industry and editing and the whole idea that this could be something I could do for a living. And so, I started my editing side hustle in October of 2012, and I took it full time in February of 2013. So, I am coming up on a decade almost in business, which, again—wild—but here we are.

Tara Whitaker: [2:09] And in those ten years, I have done a lot of a bunch of different things. I have read the slush pile for a publisher and did reader reports all the way through down to cold reading. I've edited fiction (multiple genres in fiction), multiple nonfiction genres, websites, social media content, blog posts, travel guides, and even a cookbook. So, my experience has been all over the place. In the last few years, I've been focusing on copyediting and proofreading, mostly for mystery, thriller, suspense, and romance. And I did forget to mention that when I first started out, my focus was on romance—both adult and young adult. So, that's sort of been my brief, in a nutshell, editing journey.

Tara Whitaker: [2:59] Fast-forward to 2020, and we all know what happened in 2020. We all sort of had a—I don't even know what to call it—a reckoning time period to reflect. I had wanted to help other editors for a long time, and for many reasons, I just hadn't done it. Scared, imposter syndrome, you name it. And in 2020, I thought, you know what, no more.

Tara Whitaker: [3:27] So, I started a group coaching program where I took a small group of editors from launching their business from scratch. And then, that morphed into

what is now the Freelance Editors Club, which is a support, education, and accountability group for freelance editors. And in that time, I also became a coach, a business coach in particular—and I know that that term/title can bring up some thoughts with it. Most likely, because a lot of us have had a yucky experience with a coach—life coach, business coach, what have you.

Tara Whitaker: [4:07] But my approach is a bit of a hybrid, a little bit of a different take on it. I kind of combine the basic elements of coaching, which is a lot of asking questions, and, you know, helping you unearth answers that you already have; you just need help getting them out. But then, I also take my years of editing and business experience and sort of consult, I guess—or, you know—answer specific business-related questions, which is not technically coaching. But it's my kind of coaching, which is definitely what I use for the people in my Freelance Editors Club group.

Tara Whitaker: [4:46] So, here are just some random fun facts about me. I am Team Oxford Comma, and I am Team Oxford Comma because of clarity for the reader, which we will talk about later. I know AP [Associated Press] says no. CMOS [*The Chicago Manual of Style*] says yes. I'm Team Oxford comma. I have participated in the Goodreads Reading Challenge since 2011, and I have hit my goal one time. I'm not really sure what that says about me, but there you have it.

Tara Whitaker: [5:18] Here are some fun foods that skeeves me out: the strings on bananas, the innards of pumpkins (thanks to my kindergarten teacher for making me stick my hand in that pumpkin—scarred me for life), and the liquid that sits on sour cream and yogurt. Yuck! Don't like them. And my favorite TV shows, in no particular order, are *Veronica Mars*; *Friday Night Lights*; *Murder, She Wrote*; and *Schitt's Creek*. I know, that's quite the list, but that is just a little bit about me, what I'm all about. We will, of course—you know—talk more about my experiences later on in future episodes. But for now, that gives you a good glimpse into who I am and my background.

Tara Whitaker: [6:05] So, why are we here? Why did I start this podcast? I started it for a few reasons. One, I love podcasts. I love listening to podcasts. I love learning and being entertained from podcasts. And I noticed, when looking for podcasts, there were a ton specifically for writers, authors, the self-publishing process, entrepreneurs, and business marketing. You know, sort of these broader business topics, but there were very few that were specifically made for editors. And again, at the time of this recording, I found three. Which doesn't mean that others don't exist. I just—I scoured the Internet and podcast platforms, and I could only find three. And only one is currently active. So, I found that I wasn't finding podcasts that were made for me, for my business, and I wanted to fill that need. So that's one reason.

Tara Whitaker: [7:15] The second reason is one of the things in my business that I focus on and that I hold very dear is this notion of making editing and the industry and publishing more accessible to more people. There's always been a gatekeeping element to it—only certain people are able to break through. And I'm not all about that. I'm not a fan. Don't approve—0 out of 10. And I thought that a podcast is a great way of

sharing information and knowledge and starting conversations that are more accessible to people and is also free. You know, I'm very much in line with finding knowledge, expertise, and people who know what they're talking about and consuming their free content in order to get to know them so that I can decide if I want to learn from them. And I thought this was a great way to do that because, again, I am an avid podcast listener. I love listening to people share everything they know, and I wanted to be a part of that.

Tara Whitaker: [8:26] And, sort of connected to this is, when I started my business, I really craved networking and a community where I could openly talk about things that just didn't seem like they were talked about a lot. And we're definitely gonna talk about rates. We're definitely gonna talk about marketing. We're gonna talk about ethics. We're gonna talk about a lot of those things that I just couldn't find when I started. And we're gonna—again—I'm gonna talk a little bit more about this with gatekeeping. I want to bust down the gate. I don't think we have any room for the gate. We never did, but we especially don't now. Let's get rid of it, and let's talk about the things that truly affect us, our businesses, and the industry as a whole. So, those are the real three main reasons why I started the podcast.

Tara Whitaker: [9:16] Now, why did I call it *The Modern Editor Podcast*? I'm going to be honest with you, I am not a strong namer—I mean—I have the Freelance Editors Club. My business is Tara Whitaker, Inc. So naming is not my strong suit. However, where I came up with this and the whole modern editor term concept—what have you—is, again, when I started out almost ten years ago, the industry looked completely different than it does now. There are still a lot of things that are the same that can and should be changed, but it's really transformed.

Tara Whitaker: [9:56] Again, when I started, there seemed to be this heavy, heavy emphasis on editing skills, grammar rules—you know—spotting typos, finding errors. It was all about wielding your red pen and just slashing everything up and down. I know, that's metaphorical because we use Track Changes now, but you know. Editors are sticklers for grammar, we have perfect speech, we have perfect writing skills. We look down our noses at anybody that makes a typo, blah blah blah. I thought that those stereotypes were getting better, and I think they are to a degree, but I'm a little surprised whenever I hear one of those stereotypes come through, even today. You know, we're a bunch of nerdy bookworms who—you know—are out to just point out everything wrong with a piece of content. And, of course, there are editors out there that do that.

Tara Whitaker: [10:55] But a modern editor does not. A modern editor embraces change. We put our relationship with the client, with the author, at the very top. We know that the style and voice of the author will always be more important than some arbitrary grammar rule some old white dude developed centuries ago. We wanna make sure that things are clear for the reader. That doesn't mean, "Oh, my goodness, you can never end a sentence with a preposition." Or "My English teacher told me in tenth grade that you should do it this way, and that is the rule, and I will never change." That's not a modern editor.

Tara Whitaker: [11:48] And also, a modern editor is someone who puts community over competition. Thank you to Natalie Franke for that. We freely share knowledge with each other. Again, no gatekeeping, none of this whole—you know—I have declared myself the Facebook editing group gatekeeper, and whenever someone joins a group, it's automatically, "Well, what skills do you have, or what editing certificate do you have? You have to do this, and you have to do that." And while, you know, we can talk about that later, where there are some things you do, of course, need to do in starting your business. It's this whole mindset that we only allow a certain few to have this knowledge, and only those certain few are allowed to disseminate that knowledge to other people. That's not a modern editor. It's just not.

Tara Whitaker: [12:41] A modern editor also puts professional and personal development high up on their list. We are all human beings, and yes, we all own businesses. However, again, when I started, a lot of it was so focused on editing skills that everything else fell by the wayside. And I'm talking about things that some people don't even associate with business, and I certainly didn't. Mindset, money, fear, imposter syndrome, boundaries, values, ethics, morals. All of those things are so important when starting a business, but we skip over them. We tend to skip over those because, quite frankly, they're more difficult to manage and work through, you know, to face. We instead say, "Oh my gosh! I need a website. I need a logo. I need to pick the perfect font that goes with the perfect brand color palette, and I need to find clients."

Tara Whitaker: [13:38] I get it. I was there, too. But that's not how we do it in a way… If you want to have a successful and sustainable editing business, you have to talk about these things first and get some of these things straight before you can even consider how to find clients, right? So, that is my definition of a modern editor, and to go along with that, you know, a modern editor is not someone who is going to say—*Well, this is the grammar "rule," and that's just not the way it's going to be, doesn't matter if that's the author's voice, doesn't matter if it matches the genre, this is the rule, it is set in stone, and I will not budge*. Yuck. Again, we're not a gatekeeper. Modern editors are not gatekeepers. We're not squashing someone's excitement right off the bat by asking them if they've been able to finish a multiple $1,000 editing certificate first. We are helpful. We're supportive, and we guide them in the right direction.

Tara Whitaker: [14:48] Now, I will say this because I have heard when I talk about this, I've had someone say—you know—well, we're ruining the English language, and by ignoring all the rules where—you know—it's the downfall of mankind and—you know—blah blah blah. First of all, no, it's not. In particular, the English language has evolved and grown and changed since it began. I mean, if you haven't read the book *Highly Irregular*, I highly suggest you do. It's so fascinating about the English language. It is going to continue to change. We're not disregarding grammar. We're not saying that it's okay to misspell every other word or, you know, not care about editing. That's not what we're saying.

Tara Whitaker: [15:39] What I'm saying is that modern editors accept the fact that there are multiple ways that people can express themselves with language, and nobody's way is superior to any other person's way. No matter what history says, no matter what some

arbitrary grammar book says, no matter what some dude said, again, hundreds of years ago. There are multiple ways of communicating. There are multiple ways of using language, and there will continue to be new ways of doing those things. It's fascinating, and it's amazing. And we ride with that change. All right, so that is what a modern editor is for me, and that is why I called it *The Modern Editor Podcast*.

Tara Whitaker: [16:28] So, what you can expect in future episodes, and why you should tune in is that we are going to have conversations and discussions that dive into multiple aspects of business, multiple aspects of editing, personal development, the industry, everything. Okay, this is not a podcast to tune into if you want to learn about how to use a comma. I don't envision any grammar lessons like that. That's just not my forte; I don't know if I would like to do that over a podcast. That's not what's going to happen here.

Tara Whitaker: [17:08] We're going to talk about business, mindset, coaching, how our values and our ethics dictate how we run our businesses, trends in the industry that we're seeing, current events that are applicable to editing, publishing, working with authors, etc., and marketing strategies. We're gonna do guest interviews with other editors and other professionals. We will talk about editing and best practices—you know—and things of that sort without diving deep into spelling and grammar and such.

Tara Whitaker: [17:47] These episodes—I say this now; hopefully I can stick to it, but—I envision them to be less than 30 minutes because I'm a big proponent of not wasting your time. Time is a nonrenewable resource. We will never get it back, and I don't take that lightly. So, if you are going to take the time to tune in to the podcast, I want to be absolutely sure that it is of value to you. So, it's either gonna be super informative and/or super actionable. I want you to be able to take what you learn, take what you hear during this episode, and apply it directly to your life, to your business immediately.

Tara Whitaker: [18:27] So, that is what to expect. That is what *The Modern Editor Podcast* is all about. I hope that gives you a good glimpse into what I'm envisioning for this space, what to expect, and gets you excited about what's to come. And I'm just, again, thrilled to be here. Thank you so much for tuning in, and until next time, keep learning, keep growing, and know that you've got this.

Tara Whitaker: [18:59] Thank you so much for tuning into today's episode. If you enjoy *The Modern Editor Podcast*, I would be so grateful if you left us a review over on iTunes. And as always, you can head to tarawhitaker.com to connect with me and stay in touch. We'll chat again soon.