The Modern Editor Podcast – Episode 12:
5 Things I Wish I Had Known
When I Started My Editing Business

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. I'm your host, Tara Whitaker. Let's get to it.

Tara Whitaker: [0:18] Hello, and welcome to another podcast episode. We are going to be diving into another ten-year business anniversary episode. So, in the last episode, which was number eleven, we talked about the best and worst things (I thought) about freelance editing. So today, we're going to talk about five things I wish I had known before I started my business. Now, this episode is for everyone to listen to. But it is particularly important for those of you who are thinking about starting an editing business or are probably in, like, your first year. So, we're looking at the, the newbies here, so to speak. This will be particularly helpful for you. And this just goes into more of my mission to be more transparent about the industry, about being a business owner, you know. Sort of taking back the curtain—pulling back the curtain—getting rid of the mystery and the unknown, and just giving you more of a[n] inside look into what it's like to run your own business. And I will say hindsight is 20/20—you know—some of these things—you know—I wish I had known but might not have been completely possible to have known. So, I am grateful for the lessons I've learned. But if by sharing these, I can alleviate at least some stress and anxiety for just one new editor out there, I will be thrilled. So, this is not an exhaustive list. Like I said, we're just going to go into the top five that I came up with off the top of my head. But we're going to just dive right in.

Tara Whitaker: [1:55] So, the first thing: I wish I had saved more money. Now I touched on this again in episode eleven, but I wanted to reiterate it here. Background: I was very privileged ten years ago, and I had a partner who I lived with who could cover the majority of our household expenses while I built my business. Sidenote: that partner is now my husband. And I also had no major health issues then, so I could get the bare minimum health insurance. You know, we all know in the US what health insurance is like. So, I recognize that I definitely had a lot of privilege going into this. Even so, I had no clue how much my income would fluctuate at the beginning. And I had a little bit of savings, but an extra cushion would have alleviated so much stress. And, again, I know having, you know, this massive savings nest egg is not an option for everyone. But my recommendation is to save as much as you are able to. If that's $5—great. If that's $500—great. I mean, anything you're able to save is going to help you, especially in that first year when you just don't know what your income is going to be like. I mean, you could start your business and just—whoo!—fly and be raring to go with the income, and that is great. But you could also have, you know, some ebbs and flows, which is very common in the freelancing world. So as much of a cushion as you can with the resources you have, I would definitely recommend.

Tara Whitaker: [3:35] Number two: I would have lowered my expectations for myself. And I don't necessarily mean this as a negative reflection of me. But I definitely went

into owning my own business with some unrealistic expectations. And they weren't, you know, stretch goals or pushing myself out of my comfort zone a little bit. These were, like, way too far. So, for example, I was like, *well, I'm in control of how much I make, right. So, that means I'm just going to blow past what I made in my full-time job in my first year of business*. Heh! Now, I'm not saying that's not possible. And, of course, it's going to depend on what you made in your full-time job, if you take, you know, if you start your editing business as full-time or eventually take it full-time. But for me, for the amount of money I was making at my full-time job, to just go from a side hustle from five months ago to full-time—that was ridiculous. Living in the city of Chicago, like it just wasn't going to happen. And I was way too hard on myself when I didn't know things or things didn't come as easily to me because owning a business was completely new. I had always been an employee. I was taught how to be an employee through my schooling, which is very common again here in the US. And that background, totally bit me.

Tara Whitaker: [5:06] So that was number two, but I'm gonna go with a 2.5 that goes off of this. I would have given myself more grace and time to learn. Because I did expect to be "good at business" right away. You know, I—that's a whole 'nother topic with mindset. But if I try something and I'm not good at it, I want to give up right away because I think it should be inherent. I should know how to do this. Of course, that's not going to be a thing when you're never—when you've never been a business owner. And again, going from employee to business owner is a big mindset shift. And I had no clue what I was getting into. So current Tara wants to just pat past Tara on the head and be like, *It's okay. You're going to learn; you're going to make mistakes; it's going to be okay.* But you're going to learn. And this is why I focus so much on mindset at the beginning of your business journey. Because many of us have been employees, and we go from employees to business owners, and that comes with a very big shift. I preach it to my club members; I preach it to my coaching clients. You know, again, more than toxic positivity, it's really switching that mindset for responsibility and accountability and finding your support system. And all of that is so, so key when you're first starting out. So, I [would have] lowered my expectations, but at the same time, I would have given myself more grace.

Tara Whitaker: [6:35] Number three. Now, this one surprised me. This one I had not seen talked about anywhere. And I don't know if I have now either, or—it's probably been talked about. I just haven't seen it. I wish I would have known how much my reading habits would change, like my reading-for-pleasure habits. Because when you read for work, reading for fun can start to feel different. And it really did for me for a very long time. And I'm talking years. I don't have an exact timeframe, but if I had to guess, I would say it took me a good three to four years after I went full-time to get back into a reading-for-fun groove. Because if I was reading all day for work (reading a book), and I finished work, the last thing I wanted to do was keep reading. Like, my brain could not function with any more words. So, I watched a lot more TV; I did a lot more crafting; I would try and listen to audiobooks. Sometimes that would work. But still, I just could not get into stories for a long time. And I was really concerned that I messed myself up for reading for fun for good, like, that I ruined my favorite pastime by turning it into a business, which I think is a legitimate concern. And again, not something I've seen

talked about. And I think for some people, it might be, you know, something that they don't get over or figure out, and it might affect their reading forever or as long as they're in business. Thankfully, mine, you know, I got out of that funk.

Tara Whitaker: [8:17] Like I said, it took a few years, but I got back into a groove. And I just had no clue. I did not think of that at all. I thought *I love to read, and I get to read while I'm getting paid*—obviously, there's more to it than just reading, but—*heck yeah! Sign me up.* Without ever realizing that it could affect my reading. And I will say, because I edit books that I love to read, that made it even worse. Because I couldn't, like, the books that I go to—my romance, my mystery, my thriller, my comfort reads—I couldn't go to those because I was doing that all day for my job. But I will say, it went away. I am okay now. But just be aware that that could be a thing. And if it is, you know, there are some things that you can do to try and get yourself out of the rut. It totally depends on what kind of reader you are. You can try different genres, you know, you can give yourself a time limit or try something new. I tried them all, honestly, and I just needed time. I just needed my brain to get acclimated to reading for actual pay. So, keep that in mind. It could, it could be a thing you have to deal with, but it is something that you can manage.

Tara Whitaker: [9:40] All right, number four: I wish I would have focused more on networking. Now, part of the appeal of freelancing to me, both back then and now, was that I didn't have to people all day. I wasn't in a cube anymore, surrounded by everyone eating and chewing and clipping their nails. And I don't even want to go into all the other things that I saw working in an office. And I was thrilled that I could work from home by myself. But I think I took it to the extreme and went borderline hermit. Like, I retracted way too much. And freelance editing does offer solitude and less peopling; however, we are still human beings. We still need human connection in whatever way that is—virtual, in-person, whatever format. We need people; we need others. And again, this is, you know—what I teach and what I coach is basically, like, all of the lessons learned going through this journey by myself. Because I now teach that relationships are crucial, because they are! And I realized they were when I retracted so much from people that I needed some help with networking and getting new clients, and just forming friendships and professional relationships. So, relationships are key. You can be alone; you can edit in solitude. Those are great things about freelance editing, with the caveat that you're still going to need to interact. You're still going to need people in whatever capacity that looks like for you—whatever is comfortable for you, you know, whatever format. But you're still going to need people. So, I wish I had known to not retreat so much. And I could have been building relationships from the very beginning that would have, you know, most likely helped me in the future.

Tara Whitaker: [11:43] And number five—the last one. I get a little heated on this one, so I'm going to try to keep it reined in a little bit. But I wish that I would have ignored the gatekeepers and the negative people that were in the Facebook groups that I was part of. Now, this is not a blanket—*all Facebook groups are terrible*, or *all editing Facebook groups are terrible*. There are good ones out there. No—and I'm not calling out anybody specific. We're not about that here. But I touched on this in the very first episode of the podcast. It's why I started the Freelance Editors Club. It's why I started coaching. It's

why we're here today. It's because there are so many unofficial gatekeepers who attack newbies as soon as they express interest in our industry. And a natural habitat for that is these Facebook groups because they're free; anyone can join them. You know, it's often a new editor's first interaction with the industry. And, of course, they're coming in excited. They're coming in, you know—and they let—sometimes they let their excitement, you know, they skip the group rules, or they, you know, don't search for posts, which we know. We just get excited. And we ignore that. And I have just lost track of how many times I've seen someone new post in a group. You can tell they're pumped—they just discovered editing; they know that they can do this. And all they're met with is just slammed with a million questions about, *Well, what training do you have?* And *Did you work at a big-five for 85 years first?* And *Do you know how to do this?* And *Well, just because you have an English degree doesn't mean you're a good editor* and just something along those lines. And you can see with every answer and their response, they—their excitement just completely deflates. And that just ticks me off. No wonder our industry can get a bad reputation for being stuck up and rigid and rule-following and all of that. Because instead of being encouraging, these women—and yes, I'm gonna say this—99% of the time, they are white women. The cynicism just comes out, and the gatekeeping begins, and it is just frustrating.

Tara Whitaker: [14:10] I actually had this happen to me when I first started out. I joined some of these Facebook groups, and I posted, and it scared me to ever post again because I got pounced on. So, I am now an official lurker. Granted, a simmering, bitter one. But it made me become a lurker because I didn't want to get pounced on. I didn't want to get judged. And I am just on a mission to change that sort of welcome into the industry. I'm not a fan. I don't like it. I wish I would have ignored those people in the Facebook groups. Full stop. Would not have let them rain on my excited parade. I would have looked for other places, other supportive groups out there because they do exist. But those initial reactions made me think that it was the industry as a whole when it's not. And that's why I get so irritated about this. Because just like any industry, there are yucky people, and there are awesome people. And it's just unfortunate that a lot of people get the yuck-ohs at first glance when they just start.

Tara Whitaker: [15:20] So if you're listening and you're not a new editor, take this to heart. Remember what it was like when we were new? And how we wanted to be welcomed? And we were just so excited to have found our people. If you're going to answer a question, whether it's a Facebook group or some other platform, just remember that excitement and try not to, you know, pee in their Cheerios or whatever the saying is. Like, be supportive; be encouraging. Welcome them into the industry. This is why our industry has some issues—some issues—lots of issues with diversity and the gatekeeping and all of that. And this is such a simple way to help knock that crap off. All right? Welcoming and encouraging and supportive, not gatekeeping. And yuck. No yuck. We're not about the yuck here. All right?

Tara Whitaker: [16:15] And on that note, that is the top five things I wish I would have known when I started my freelance editing business ten years ago. Again, it's all hindsight. And I'm, I'm glad I learned all of these lessons. But I hope it helps just one of you out there thinking about starting a business. Maybe it makes you a little less scared.

Maybe it helps reassure you that there are people out there who are ready and willing to help and support and encourage you. And we need more of that in the industry. We need enthusiasm. We need excitement. We need support. This is a fantastic industry to be in. It's not, you know, like I said there are yucky people in any industry—we are not letting them paint the entire industry. There are amazing, incredible editors out there. So, find those people. And if you want to find those people, I highly suggest reaching out, and I can get you in touch with some amazing people because I know a lot of them. Not only in the Freelance Editors Club but just people I've met over the years that are incredible. So, let me know if you want a supportive group as well. You can reach out to me tarawhitaker.com. I'm always on Instagram @taramqwhitaker. And the next episode, I'm going to be wrapping up this business anniversary series about the lessons I've learned along the way. So, stay tuned. And last but not least, I'm going to change up my line here this week in honor of Kristina. So, shout out to Kristina if you're listening. Are you ready? Until next time, keep learning, keep growing, and know that you've got this, or, if you don't got this, that's perfectly okay too! Take care, everyone.

Tara Whitaker: [16:34] 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.