**The Modern Editor Podcast – Episode 18:
How Choosing A Word Of The Year
Can Help Your 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. Welcome to today's episode. We are going to be chatting about picking a word of the year. Or, in my case, words of the year—plural—because I have a really hard time picking just one. So, if you're like me, it can be words of the year, too. But this time of year, which this recording is happening in January of 2023. This topic comes up a lot, both at the end of the year and the beginning of the new year. And I'm a big fan of choosing a word of the year, but I have found that it gets a little bit lost in the hype. And it doesn't get properly explained on how to effectively pick and implement a word strategically and in a way that's in alignment with your goals. So, I think it's really important to talk about that piece that's missing. Because if you want to put in the effort of choosing a word of the year, let's make it be worth your time, right? So, we're going to talk a little bit about my experience with choosing a word (or words), what I've learned over the years in the process, and then I'm going to show you how you can choose your own word (or words) in a way that is intentional and that's actually going to help you and your business.

Tara Whitaker: [1:44] So we'll start off with sharing a little bit about my experience. So, when I started picking a word of the year, it never had any real, real intention or thought behind it. And I really wish I could remember when I started doing this. I only have a record of it from 2020, but I know I did it before then. So hot tip: if you're going to participate in this, I suggest making like a list or a large list of all of your words by year, so you have them in one place. But going back to picking them before 2020, it wasn't really well thought out. It was more like I was just ticking a checkbox of something I was "supposed to do" at the end of the year. Everybody was talking about it. I wanted to be included. You know, so I did it. And shocker: when I did that, those words never really held any meaning for me throughout the year. And I never really looked back on them or used them in my day-to-day life.

Tara Whitaker: [2:48] So after a while, I got to the point where I thought, "Okay, this is ridiculous. Why am I even doing this?" So, in 2020, I started getting really intentional about it. And I'll share with you the words that I've picked in the last three years, just to give you an idea of how these words can guide you in your life and your business. So, in 2020, I chose "community." Which, we all know what happened in 2020. And I was really craving the community that I did not have when I first started my business. And also, in 2020, I kind of had that realization that a lot of people had where I sat down and had a good talk with myself to figure out what I actually wanted to do in my business and what I wanted to do moving forward and decided that I was going to do a group coaching program that morphed into the Freelance Editors Club. So, I really took "community" to heart in 2020.

Tara Whitaker: [3:51] And outside of business, of course, I really focused on it with what we could do community-wise in 2020 with Zoom and—you know—FaceTime and everything possible to really—you know—keep in touch with people during a very difficult time. So then, in 2021, I chose "intentional" as my word. And this was based off of 2020 and how I started the Freelance Editors Club. And I knew to a point that it was going to be difficult to build a community, and I wanted to be very intentional about what I focused on, what I did in building that community. And oh my gosh, it was so rewarding and so worth it, but whoooaaa, is community-building hard and takes a lot of emotional labor I didn't expect. But having this word really helped me stay on track with my overall goal of creating a safe, inclusive environment for freelance editors.

Tara Whitaker: [5:00] So now, moving into 2022, this is where I went a little rogue, and I chose three words because I couldn't, I couldn't decide on one. So, I had "bloom," "alignment," and "movement." So again, we're basing this off of years past. I had built a really intentional foundation to my business, and especially the Freelance Editors Club. So, I wanted to bloom from that foundation or grow or flourish (those were both in the running, too) and really dig deep into growing where I was at. This included completely revamping my website. Not only the design, but I hired a copywriter to completely rewrite the copy. I hired a stylist that took me shopping for clothes and then did a full-on photoshoot so that my pictures were actually from this decade and were professionally done. So that was all done based off of "bloom."

Tara Whitaker: [6:04] And then I also wanted to make sure that I stayed in alignment with my goals because I have a habit of trying to do too much. And sort of have the habit of throwing spaghetti at the wall and just doing too much and trying too many things rather than taking a step back and observing and analyzing and figuring out what my next step is. So, I really wanted to stay in alignment with everything that I had worked toward the past few years. And then "movement" is self-explanatory. I sit at my desk way too much in the same position, and I just needed to move. I needed to get on my bike. I needed to go out for walks. I just wanted to move my body.

Tara Whitaker: [6:48] So now we're up to this year: 2023. But before I dive into that, I wanted to share the lessons I've learned from choosing those words over the past three years. It's very difficult, in my opinion, for me to come up with a word or words that actually mean something to you without first coming up with your purpose and core values and your big goals. And I know that's a lot. And those are some big things. But when I tried to choose a word of the year without those things in place, that's when things didn't work. When I didn't put a lot of effort or thought into choosing the word, when it was just that tick—you know—in the checkbox. When I started diving deeper and figuring out the big picture and how these little daily, weekly, monthly activities all add up to those big things, that's when the word of the year really became a focal point in my business without it meaning to. Like, I didn't go into this thinking, "Oh, this word of the year is going to be a huge help with decision-making. It's just some fluffy, you know, superficial word that supposedly encompasses everything." But to a point, it actually does for me and my business. So, take this how you will, you know, maybe it's not as important to you and your business. That's totally fine. But it has turned into something that I really put a lot of effort into. And it really helps me with my business.

Tara Whitaker: [8:24] And I've also learned that when I choose these words, they have to feel good. And they also have to feel a little uncomfortable for me. Because when they feel uncomfortable, that's when I know that I'm stretching myself. I don't want it to make me panic or freak out or make me want to crawl in a hole. But I want to feel a little bit uncomfortable. And I'll tell you which word makes me feel uncomfortable this year, but in 2022 it was "bloom" because that meant that I had what I needed in place. No more procrasti-learning, no more procrasti-planning. I had what I needed, and I had to trust myself to move forward. And that was uncomfortable. And I actually realized during a coaching call with my lovely coaching client, club member, and friend, Neva from Otherwordy, when she was in a coaching call and asked how I made decisions about what to invest in financially in my business, which was a fantastic question. That's when I realized that my word of the year is really what helps me make those big decisions.

Tara Whitaker: [9:40] Like I said, in 2022, I revamped my website, both design and copy and did the photoshoot. Those were big financial investments and time, but they were so stinkin' worth it. But those were all based off of "bloom," which is wild to me that I made those decisions. But such a great thing when you put all of the effort and time into choosing these words that are really in alignment with what you're going for and what you want to do in that year. They're, they're my filter or my—what do I want to call it—touchpoints on how I make decisions, what I spend my time on. And I'm going to keep doing it because it's super, super helpful.

Tara Whitaker: [10:30] So now let's talk about how to pick your word of the year. Now, like I said, this is a—this is an important part of my business. I do spend time on it, but I'm not spending, you know, weeks in total, right? Like, this is not meant to be something that takes up a significant chunk of time. But it does, in my opinion, to be worthwhile, it does take a little bit of time. So, I'll share the words that I picked this year and how I picked them to give you a little example of how I came up with these. So again, we're going with the rogue three words instead of one. And my words this year are "presence," "visibility," and "efficiency." So, "presence" is my big overarching word for my life—life, personal, business, everything. And basically, what that boils down to, honestly, is to get off my damn phone. That's what it boils down to. So, if I am with my kids, I am not on the phone. If I'm watching a TV show, I'm not on my phone. If I'm reading a book, I'm not reading five pages and then checking my phone. I am being fully in the moment with whatever I am doing. And that has gotten really difficult for me because I'm so used to multitasking and always being on. So, this makes me a little uncomfortable. Two of these words make me uncomfortable—this is one of them. And it's because I know I really need to work on it. So that's my big overarching one.

Tara Whitaker: [12:04] And then the other two are really more focused on business. So, "visibility" is the other one that makes me uncomfortable because now I don't really have a good excuse to not get myself out there for my business. I have a website I'm incredibly proud of. I love my photos—they represent me, what I actually look like right now. You know, my website copy completely showcases my thoughts, my mission, my vision, what I'm for and against. There's no reason for me to be in the shadows. So, I need to get myself out there. I need to be a little more strategic with social media. I want to attend more live events and conferences and meetups when it's safe. You know, I

want to have more—or—more—*any* podcast guests on my podcast, which is in the works. But I also want to go on other people's podcasts, which means I need to pitch, which is terrifying. All of that goes into visibility. And all of that is definitely uncomfortable. But that's the good signal that it's the right move for me right now.

Tara Whitaker: [13:11] And then the third word is "efficiency." So again, with all of the stuff I did in 2022, the big things were very front-end things like customer-facing things—you know—people would see my website and my pictures and all of that. Now, I desperately need to go back and fix my back end—fix those systems and processes. I already have invested in Dubsado. I'm going to be setting that up this year, getting more automations in place. And again, this goes back to presence, right, because if I have things more streamlined, and I'm not doing so many things manually, I'm going to have a better chance of staying present in whatever I'm doing. So, these all tie together to complete the words of the year.

Tara Whitaker: [14:01] Now how to choose your own. This is not a difficult, complicated process. But it is going to require some thinking and might require some deeper thinking depending on what you've done in the past or what you've done for this year. So, if you haven't already, I think the one thing you have to do before this is to create your goals for the year. And I know that's hard to do by the year. If it helps, do it by the quarter. And we're only talking about like one or two big goals here. We're not talking about 75 things and a to-do list. Just those really big things you want to accomplish overall, and then look and see if there's a common theme to them. You know, with my website and my photoshoot and all of that, that was all—it was all cohesive in that it was my outward-facing presence, my online presence, what I was putting out into the online space. See if there's a theme for that. There might not be. That's fine. But if there is, that might give you a little more direction on choosing a word.

Tara Whitaker: [15:08] So get those big goals in place; write them down. And again, these can change, too. Remember, this, this—nothing is set in stone. I've changed my word— I know I've changed my word during the year; it must have been before 2020 because, again, I can't find a record of it. But change your word, change your goals. Nothing wrong with that. So, once you have those big goals written down, bust out the thesaurus. We know what a thesaurus is, editors. Google "word of the year lists." Google words, adjectives, adverbs, whatever, whatever you want. And just starting—starting—start jotting down words that resonate with you.

Tara Whitaker: [15:47] And this list could be ginormous at first. I use a sticky note, like a big sticky note, and I'll write 'em down. And then over the next few weeks, I look at 'em a lot. I say 'em out loud. I share 'em with friends, family—you know—my husband. And then, if something isn't resonating, I'll cross it off. And I'll do that for a little bit. Maybe— I didn't time it, but maybe a couple of weeks to narrow it down. And I've narrowed it down before and then started again. So, it's not a strea— or a linear process; it can be a little bit all over the place. But do it to the point where whatever you choose, whether it's one word or five words or whatever, just make sure they feel good. Say them out loud. Do they make you a little uncomfortable? Do they give you some hope? Some motivation? See how they make you feel.

Tara Whitaker: [16:43] And then when you decide on them, write them down everywhere. And I'm not kidding. I have a whiteboard next to me at my desk. I have them written out in big letters at the top. I have a photo frame that I use as like a monthly whiteboard for my monthly goals—I have it, have them written on that. Sticky notes. I have them in Trello in my business board. Look at them all the time. So, if you write them down and then forget about them, you might as well not even do this whole exercise to begin with. You've got to remind yourself of them and refer back to them. So, if you do a weekly recap, a month-end recap, a quarterly recap, whatever the case may be, implement this into that recap. And keep it in mind whenever you have a decision to make or want to invest in something.

Tara Whitaker: [17:34] So if you see a course you want to take or some software you want to buy, go back to those words and say, "Is this in alignment with my word of the year, my overall theme, my big goals?" And help you make that decision. I can't tell you how many times I look at this whiteboard during the year. I look at it all the time. And it has made me not buy things because I get the shiny object syndrome. And I see something I think I want or need. And then I take a step back and take a minute and look at those words and go, no, this is not the right time. It is a super cool product, course, whatever, but it's not in alignment with your big goals this year. And you move on. It's so nice to have that touchpoint. I cannot even tell you. Until, like I said before, you can change your words. I don't want this to be this end-all-be-all, choose your one word that encompasses your entire life, and that's it. Let's not take it that seriously. Choose one word, choose as many words as you want, and change them up when and if you need to.

Tara Whitaker: [18:45] That's it. That's my speech on word of the year. I am— I just love the whole practice. I hope it helps you learn more about the intention behind it, how to choose a word that's right for you, and most importantly, how to incorporate it into your life and business so that it's actually effective and not just a checkbox. I think it's a super, super powerful tool when you use it in a way that is in alignment with you and those overall goals. And I love hearing people's word or words of the year, however many you have. I really do. So, if you have a word or words and you would like to share them with me, please tell me. I love hearing about them. You can always DM me on Instagram @taramqwhitaker, or you can email me at hello@tarawhitaker.com and just share your words. And honestly, I'll probably add them to my list for future reference. I love a good word of the year. So that's it for that. Until next time, keep learning, keep growing, and know that you've got this.

Tara Whitaker: [19:57] 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.