

## The Modern Editor Podcast – Episode 29: Running a Business During Tough Times

**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 there. Welcome to today's episode. It is so good to be back. I'm still playing around with a podcast release schedule that works for me and my schedule right now. So, I think I'm going to be doing this about once a month-ish for the time being. But if that changes, I will let you know. So just letting you know what to expect, at least through the rest of 2023.

**Tara Whitaker:** [0:43] And heads-up, I've put an E-explicit sign on this episode, because I have a feeling there are going to be some swear words thrown in. And I want to make sure if you don't want to listen, or if you have little ears that you don't want to listen, that you have a heads-up on that. So, what I'm going to talk about today is something that I've had on my mind for a while, and I've almost talked myself out of recording this about twenty times today, but we're just gonna go for it. It's a little vulnerable. Hopefully, it's, hopefully it works out. But I guess we're just gonna see, right?

**Tara Whitaker:** [1:21] And the question on my mind has been, How in the hell do we run an editing business when the world is in so much turmoil right now? And I'm coming to this from an immense place of privilege. You know, I'm a white woman living in the United States, which of course has its own things, but it's, you know, there's a lot of privilege there still. So, this is not a "Woe is me," or "Wah, Tara's having a rough time" kind of a talk. I think it's more an acknowledgment for all of you out there, who are running businesses, and quite frankly, just moving through your days and weeks. And knowing that it's, it's pretty tough right now. And I'm going to share some of the things that I'm doing to try and help me move forward every day. They may or may not be helpful. I'm not going super deep, because I am not a trained therapist. I have my own therapist who is amazing. So don't think that this is going to be some sort of therapy, because it is definitely not. That would be incredibly irresponsible of me. But I'm going to share what I do, just to try and reconcile doing a job and running a business while everything is going to absolute shit.

**Tara Whitaker:** [2:42] As always, there's no one-size-fits-all approach. We all come to this with different experiences and backgrounds and privileges and all sorts of things. So, take what works for you and leave the rest for sure. And I think, while I'm feeling very vulnerable right now, I do think it's very important to talk about things like this, because we talk about starting a business and it's "Oh, how do I get clients?" and "Are my editing skills up to scratch?" and "Do I need a website?" and all of this stuff, but then the whole mental health piece often gets skipped or ignored. Even now, even though we've gone, or we've come a long way with talking about mental health, it's still not talked about enough. And as freelance editors, we wear all of the hats in our business. And we have to learn how to manage those hats without crushing ourselves under the weight of said hats.

**Tara Whitaker:** [3:35] So, like I said, I'm going to share a few things I've been thinking, what's been going through my head lately, and share those little things that I'm doing to try and get through the day. So. I'm also not going to talk about specific things happening in the world right now. Honestly, because there are too many. And the point is not to talk about one particular thing or issue that's happening, it's just this overall kind of vibe of the world right now. It's rough out there. And how do we run a business? How do we move through our day?

**Tara Whitaker:** [4:11] One of the little things that I think about and remind myself of is we are all part of communities. We're all a collective, whether you think of that as your family, your neighborhood, your city, your country, you know, whatever community that is for you. We are all tiny, tiny pieces of that. I am— I and you are not expected to single-handedly change something. That's, I mean, not impossible. But, you know, in order to fix things or in order to do things we have to come together as a group. So, while I can feel helpless about a lot of things, I remember that I can control my thoughts and emotions and I can control my actions and I can try to take action on the things that I think will make a difference and create the positive change I want to see.

**Tara Whitaker:** [5:07] And I don't say positive as in toxic positivity. *Oh, everything's sunshine and great.* And you know, *just find joy.* No, fuck that. Sorry. No. I'm just not. But what I can do is I can find little, tiny slivers of joy, or express tiny little gratitudes during the day, because that's the, that's what I want to send out into the world. Yes, a little woo woo. But that's what I want. You know, Mr. Rogers said, "Look for the helpers." I try and look for the helpers and things. Some days, that little sliver of joy is, you know what, I woke up today. My lungs are breathing. I have clothes on and a roof over my head and I'm not hungry. Like, that—those are great. Those are great things to be thankful for. You know, my shirt feels nice. It's fuzzy. It can range by the day. It can range by how I'm feeling. But I try and find some little, little piece of joy.

**Tara Whitaker:** [6:07] And especially for editors. I wanted to talk about this because something specific happened that you all might relate to—part of it. Without going too down, too far down a rabbit hole, a few weeks ago, my daughter's school went on a soft lockdown. That was my first experience with that. We never exactly learned why. But we suspect it was related to bomb threats that were happening in surrounding libraries because of, you know, people wanting banned books. Lovely times, right? So, I got the text message while I was working. I obviously hauled ass to the school. You know, everything was fine. I don't think the kids realized what was going on, which was good. But then when I got back home, I was like, I still have to finish some work up because I'm on deadline. And I just sat at my desk thinking, "This is not normal. How in the flying fuck am I supposed to focus on anything when I just went and picked up my daughter from a soft lockdown." Like, who gives a shit about commas? Who cares if that sentence is, ends in, ends in a preposition? I don't care. This matters—this does not matter. Doesn't matter at all.

**Tara Whitaker:** [7:19] I wasn't in a good place. Clearly. There are some things that happened behind the scenes with you know, talking to my therapist, and, you know, working through some of those things on my own. But if you've ever had that

thought—maybe I'm the only one, I don't know—but I just could not figure out how, what I do on a daily basis, matters when everything is so bad. And I went back to that community. And that, yes, while you know, “Does the Oxford comma go there or not?” might seem trivial at the moment compared to things and, you know, it kind of is, yeah. But it is the collective work of people, editors, writers, authors coming together to help communicate and preserve the written word and make things clearer.

**Tara Whitaker:** [8:07] I think we can all agree that communication right now across the board is a little bit lacking. And if we even want to go further down that, which you might buy into this, you might not. But we know how preserving history and words matters. The words we write today, the words we edit today, will exist in some form or fashion in the future. And so, while that one comma might not make a difference, what we do as a whole does make a difference. We're preserving words for future generations. Think about the stuff that we read now—that was preserved hundreds of years ago, and longer. Is it— Am I going to change the world with a comma? No. Do I care enough about literacy and everyone's right to information and the magic of books, and how that, how books are honestly, such a form of escapism when everything is on fire like it is right now. That's what makes me remind myself that this is why I do what I do. It does matter. It is important. I also donate locally and nationally and internationally. I amplify voices, volunteer in my community, I start small, I do lots of other things. But specifically to editors, I remember that there is a point to this. There is a reason behind this. It might seem silly or trivial, but collectively, it makes a difference. Hopefully that made some sort of sense.

**Tara Whitaker:** [9:18] So, if you've got any of these feelings going on right now, maybe one of those will help you try and deal with them. Finding those small slivers of joy, expressing gratitude, you know, tell someone you like their shirt. Tell someone their hair looks good, tell someone their kindness makes you happy. Something. Remind yourself you're in control of your thoughts and emotions. Take action how you're able to with things that you care about, you're passionate about, in whatever way that looks. And as an editor, remember that you're helping with communication at a time where it is more important than ever that we use our words, edit our words, write our words, and they make a difference. They make an impact. And sorry, AI, you're not going to cut it right now. We need humans, period.

**Tara Whitaker:** [10:39] All right, that was my short-and-sweet episode. I'm honestly feeling real vulnerable right now. So let me know what you think. Let me know if you have any of these thoughts, if you're going through anything similar. Just know that if you do, you're not alone. We'll, we'll figure this out together. Again, as a community, as a collective. I certainly don't have the answers, but I'm hoping that it can help in some small way. So, in the meantime, take care, hang in there, keep learning, keep growing, and know that you've got this.

**Tara Whitaker:** [11:16] 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](http://tarawhitaker.com) to connect with me and stay in touch. We'll chat again soon.