



## EP277\_Sarah Petty

**Lisa Nichols** 00:03

Chromosomes, little strands of nucleic acids and proteins are the fundamental genetic instructions that tell us who we are at birth. Most people are born with 46 chromosomes. But each year in the United States, about 6,000 people are born with an extra chromosome, making them a person with Down syndrome. If you've ever encountered someone with Down syndrome, you know that they are some of the kindest, most joyful people you will ever meet. They truly have something extra.

My name is Lisa Nichols, and I have spent the last 24 years as both the CEO of Technology Partners and as the mother to Ally. Ally has something extra in every sense of the word. I have been blessed to be by her side. As she impacts everyone she meets.

Through these two important roles as CEO and mother to Ally, I have witnessed countless life lessons that have fundamentally changed the way I look at the world. While you may not have an extra chromosome, every leader has something extra that defines who you are.

Join me as I explore this something extra in leaders from all walks of life and discover how that difference in each of them has made a difference in their companies, their families, their communities, and in themselves.

If you like this episode today, please go to Apple Podcasts or wherever you listen and leave us a five-star rating.

I'm delighted to have Sarah Petty on the show today. Sarah is the founder of the Photography Business Institute, a bestselling author, and a podcast host. So, welcome Sarah Petty to the Something Extra Podcast. I'm so delighted that you were able to make the time to join me today.

**Sarah Petty** 01:53

For sure. Thanks for having me.

**Lisa Nichols** 01:56

Yeah! We won't get into it, but I know you're a little bit injured right now. So, you could have definitely said "Oh, I'm not feeling up to it, Lisa." So, I appreciate you making the making the time. But you know, we were connected by our really dear mutual friend Basima. Dr. Basima Williams, Sarah. And I think maybe you connected. I believe if I'm recalling, you connected through your daughter's through their daughter, Olivia and your daughter through volleyball.

**Sarah Petty** 02:29

Yeah, yeah! Olivia transferred into my daughter Grace's school. And they were teammates this year. And I got to know Basima, which was just fantastic.

**Lisa Nichols** 02:41

Yes! Well, and then she immediately told me, "Oh my goodness, Lisa! You have to meet Sarah, she is so amazing." And I immediately fell in love with you Sarah because I guess Basima had talked to you about maybe our daughter Ally, who has Down syndrome. And you know, Ally is one of these people that she brings joy to everybody she meets me. I say when Ally walks in the room, the joy meter goes up. The next thing I know, we're receiving joy necklaces. And so, that was just so thoughtful and sweet of you. So, I immediately just fell in love with you because I could just tell you're, you're my kind of person so. But you know, we got a lot to talk about today. You're the founder of Sarah Petty photographer, you are over you, you also were over Joy of Marketing that, that company, you're New York Times bestselling author, we're gonna talk about your book. You host the Worth Every Penny Joy Cast Podcast, I've listened to several of those episodes. You're the mom of three, the wife of Joseph Petty, who's an architect. Sarah, that is a lot. That is a lot girl that you're doing. But you seem to manage it really well. And you're helping a lot of people along the way.

**Sarah Petty 04:01**

It is a lot. Thank you. Yeah, but I think you know, I don't know. I was raised by an entrepreneurial father and just really was raised to believe like, you can build whatever life you want. And I think I've spent my whole life trying to not fit into a box of, you know, going to work at corporate and then retiring 50 years later, and not being at all my kid's things. And so, I just made that deal with myself when I was young that like I'm going to do everything I want to do. And it's not always perfect. And it's not always balanced. But gosh, it's fun.

**Lisa Nichols 04:35**

Yes! Well, I was gonna ask you because I didn't know that your dad was an entrepreneur. So like, before we dig into everything that you're doing today and kind of that journey. Take me back to how you grew up. Now, did you grow up in Rochester, Illinois, or is that where you grew up? Okay.

**Sarah Petty 04:51**

Well, actually, I was born in Iowa, and my dad, both of my parents were teachers. They didn't get degrees in teaching, but back then, there weren't enough teachers. So, he got hired in auto tech and moved to town when I was a year old. But he was a mechanic, he fixed cars. He was a car guy. And started, he was teaching at the community college and fixing cars nights and weekends in our driveway. And the neighbors complained. And so, he rented one bay of a little gas station. And that's all she wrote, right? It turned into two and then three, and then he bought the building. And then when he retired before he retired, he built a 17 bay, state of the art service facility. So, he was an entrepreneur and a teacher, both which is what I kind of feel like I am I'm doing it, but I'm also teaching it and so, I think I'm a lot like him.

**Lisa Nichols 05:39**

Yeah, that I love that. And you, you really grew up watching him take those risks. And, you know, sometimes that can be really scary. And we'll talk a little bit about that. Because it is a risk, you know, coming out of something that maybe seemingly in corporate America, maybe more stable or whatnot. But again, I think, you know, it really comes back down to joy. I think, Sarah, and you have to kind of ask yourself, what, what brings me joy? And I love the name of your marketing company. But tell me now, I know that you were a star volleyball player in high school. So, did you play all sports or was volleyball your sport?

**Sarah Petty 06:20**

Yeah, I played all sports in high school because I did grow up at this small town, Rochester in Illinois. But I did play volleyball in college, I knew I wanted to play volleyball. I'm over six feet tall, which most people don't know. And they're surprised when they meet me. They say, "Oh my gosh, are so tall." But I played at the University of Memphis, we were Top 20 in the country, and I had amazing teammates, and we had an amazing, amazing experience. But also knew, you know that a life of sports isn't realistic for women, there was no pro career. So, I always knew that that would end. And so, it's been fun going back through that with my girls now, who are, you know, college athletes are my baby's, the last one, but I have three, three kids. And we're down to the last one in our last semester. So, it's been fun.

**Lisa Nichols 07:03**

Oh, my goodness. Well, and I just love there's so many companies, Enterprises is one here, Enterprise is a client of ours, rent a car. And they when they are recruiting, Sarah, a lot of times they will look for people that have played sports. And, you know, give me your perspective on that. I mean, what do you think, playing sports and especially competitively like, you know, you because you did go to University of Memphis, which I think is a D-1 school for volleyball, what, what kinds of lessons do you believe that it that it taught you that really show up today?

**Sarah Petty 07:39**

Yeah, I think there are two big things that stand out to me. One is the discipline you have to have. Because, you know, if you don't make the grades, you're leaving. So that's kind of your job. Like we would leave every Wednesday for a trip, and we get home late Sunday night. And so, I had some teammates who couldn't, you know, they would get nauseous on a bus or a plane. And so, they really struggled to get the work done. That wasn't me, I could work anywhere with little light, and I was good. But you really learned to manage your time and juggle a lot of things. And the second thing that I think it really teaches you is that sort of tenacity. You know, failing, you fail constantly when you're in a sport in front of people, everybody's watching you. And so, get halfway through the game and go out, this must not be my day, like you fight until the end.

And you know, Joy of Marketing, that you mentioned was my company. We've rebranded as Photography Business Institute because we teach mostly photographers, well, all photographers now but realizing that, you know, we're an online company, and so we might have an activity that happens and then the internet goes down. I remember the day a couple years ago, Facebook literally went down. Yeah, you like can't just go, oh, we quit when you, you have all this ad budget and everything that helped get you there, and the team it took for six weeks to get you to that day, and then

something goes wrong. So, you have to just pick up and keep going. And you know, the public criticism that you take when you're putting yourself out there in a company. I mean, you get that when you play sports people boo, people cheer for the other team. I was a female college athlete. So, it's not like we had a lot of haters, but I mean, you're probably Cardinal fan, I would guess.

**Lisa Nichols 09:24**

Absolutely.

**Sarah Petty 09:25**

They are mean, they're yelling the meanest things that these pro players so I think it teaches you that, that thick skin as you're building the tenacity, just tenacity and resilience, really, they kind of go together.

**Lisa Nichols 09:35**

Yeah! Those are great, great lessons that honestly carry forward with you no matter what it is that you do. But when you went to the University of Memphis, you got a business degree and then an MBA from University of Illinois. And we've already kind of talked about this, but you started your career in marketing in corporate, you start at Coca-Cola, and then you went on to, to an Ad agency but where do you think the love of marketing came from, Sarah?

**Sarah Petty 10:02**

You know what? I always loved marketing and advertising. I love to creative ads that got people's attention. And make got people excited about products. So, I always thought I would start my own advertising agency. I loved being in business, I had watched my dad do it. And when I got that job at Coca-Cola, it was super entry level. I was right out of college, and it was right place, right time kind of thing. And my boss had played pro football, he won a national title with Joe Montana at Notre Dame. And so just coming right out of college sports, like, we just really hit it off. And it was an amazing experience until it wasn't. And he got promoted. And there was so much in corporate I worked so hard there. And I felt like I was just a cog in this really big wheel. But I did fall in love with branding. And I think that you mentioned our book *Worth Every Penny*. I think people overlook the power of a brand.

And I really learned that at Coca-Cola. I had big fat binders on my desk with the rules of Coca-Cola, Diet Coke, Diet Cherry Coke, and the colors and how their fonts were to be used and how they weren't to be used. And, and I really got that in my blood, they always say we bleed Coca-Cola red, but a brand. Because your identity when you're in business, and really even as a person, is what you look like, right? It's your logo, your colors, its, its whatever people see. But your brand, is really how people feel about you. And if you're changing your logo and your colors and your style and everything about you, that's when people can't connect with you. And they don't trust you and like you and believe in you.

And so, starting my career at a company like that just definitely impacted everything I did in my career. Because from there, I had a couple little things. But I went to an ad agency where we were marketing companies, all different kinds of companies from price driven pizza, to an upscale women's clothing to a day spa to pension fund software. And we would always start with the brand like, are you being consistent? Do you have a strong brand and do people know who you are and what you stand for? Because if you've got all these mixed messages, which a lot of times small businesses do, because they, they are like, focused on what they do, not getting the right font or being super religious about sticking to the brand rules in the brand structure. And so, we did a lot of work there. And that's how we got our clients really great results, because you can't build a strong brand on a weak identity.

**Lisa Nichols 12:36**

That is such a great point. And I think to your point, I think that a lot of people just don't really know who they are, really for, you know, especially small businesses, you know, it takes a while to really understand who you are. But, you know, we're going to talk about that a lot. Because you talk about this boutique, kind of firm and boutique filter that you use, and especially there, you've got to differentiate yourself. Because, you know, I mean, Sarah, remember reading something that you had said, were a boutique firm, you can't make a lot of mistakes. A bigger box, firm, you know, bigger box brand, you can make a few mistakes, and it does it, it can kind of it just kind of go unnoticed, but not when you're a smaller boutique type, firm. And so, I really want to talk a lot about that.

But so, you did that you learned some great stuff. I did, too. I started in corporate America learned so much so grateful for that time, before Greg and I hung out our own shingle almost 30 years ago. But I want to talk about when you made that decision to jump into your own thing. And I know that you know you were a little bit overworked. Had three, I think three babies, you know, and then was like, "Oh, my goodness." And I think was it 2000, the summer of 2000 that you decided, I think you were pregnant with your twins, and then decided to jump onto the entrepreneurial wagon.

Tell me about that journey. How did you start? What were you feeling at the time? What was your impetus for that? Talk about the journey.

**Sarah Petty** 14:22

Yeah, so I was pregnant with my twins and spent the year in the hospital like 18 of my 33 weeks. I was giving myself shots every day. It was just this whole thing. So I when I had them, I finally got them into the world. I just had two amazing parents. I wanted to be a hands-on parent. And I had been doing photography for fun. And we tried to do part-time at the ad agency, but it wasn't serving our clients. It wasn't serving anybody because when you're their marketing arm you need to be available and I wasn't in a part time capacity. And so, we decided I said "Hey, let me help you get someone trained and, and I will get them taken care of." And then I'm just going to do this photography thing for fun. While I figure out what's next, we had these preemies. And I thought, well, I'm just, you know, like marketing, surely this can't be so hard. And if it fails, I'll do something else.

And so, I just price \$75. Digital wasn't a thing yet. And I was giving everybody the proofs. And I was getting referred. And it was amazing. I was getting all these clients. And then a couple, it's probably a couple months in, I sat down when I had a client reschedule, and I was doing the math added up, you know, paying bills, like, "Oh, awesome, I paid all my bills, but there was no money left." And I loved a good job with benefits and vacation and all the things. And I said, I'm not working these kids lives away. I remember the day I was sitting there rocking them. And I thought, I'm not going to like send them off to college and go where did these 18 years go? And I realized, okay, I have to do something different. And that was I opened my first studio, two weeks before 9/11 in 2001.

So, I spent that year kind of getting. I got this little bitty studio, had bars on the windows, nothing fancy. I mean, opposite of fancy, really, I didn't really think it was gonna make it. But I really want, I was having so much fun, and my husband was supportive, and we lived within our means. And we had a little window of, like, I'm gonna give it a go. I wasn't going to stay in pain for a long time and suffer and do it wrong. So, I invested in myself, which I think is the best thing people can do. Like, somebody out there knew how to do this. So, I started traveling, back then, the internet was a baby, you couldn't just buy an online course. And I would go study with someone who's winning all these awards only to find out they were a great photographer, but had no idea how to make money. I did that a couple times. But I got enough to put together a model that worked.

And then, in like 2002-2003-2004, that's when digital came into play. And immediately, digital cameras became available for everyone. Really nice digital cameras are now affordable. And what's interesting is that while most businesses compete with cheap because there's someone who's always going to do it for less. And photographers, we are now competing with free because everyone has a nice digital camera. Now look at the iPhones in your pocket. They're amazing.

So how do you build a business that competes with free? That's what I was looking at. And it's funny because, within a couple years, I was named one of the most profitable in the United States by our National Association. And people were like begging me, How did you do it? And how did you do it? So, we put this little eBook online, it was like 20 pages, and it was called *The Boutique Experience* explaining what we were calling kind of the boutique business model, right? Where you don't compete on price, where it's a better experience where it's custom, and you spend more time with people and you're selling artwork instead of digital files. And we had like 10,000 downloads in a couple of weeks. And we were like, we should write a book. I think this needs to be a book. That's where *Worth Every Penny* was born. Because you can compete with free, you really can.

**Lisa Nichols** 18:02

Right, for sure. Yeah. And I want to talk about that. Let's talk about it a little bit. And then we're gonna take a quick break, and we'll get into your podcasts and some other things. But the book is called *Worth Every Penny: Build a business that thrills your customers and still charges what you are worth*, that's the subtitle. So, I hope that our listeners will go out there and grab the book. It's a great, I've got it on my Kindle. But you know, one of the things that you say in there is you just said it, just counting pricing is not the only way to compete. And, and you also talk about, and you certainly did this, you made a business, Sarah, out of your passion. So, the photography was a passion. How did you make a business out of that? Tell me, because you talk a lot about this boutique filter. And you know, tell me about that. And really, how does that boutique filter when you really understand that? How does that kind of inform everything else you do in terms of your pricing and, and you know, the customer experience all of those things?

**Sarah Petty** 19:11

Yeah, so let me give you sort of an analogy that I think everybody can, can understand. So, on one end, like if you're hungry, you could pick a fast-food restaurant, right? You could drive through, you can get it quickly. You can, it's not going to be very expensive. And you know what you're getting when you drive through McDonald's or Arby's or

Hardee's, right? It's not that best meal you've ever had. I mean, the French fries are good. Come on, Let's not lie like they might be the best food ever.

**Lisa Nichols 19:40**

There is something in there. I think you want to eat more. I do believe that.

**Sarah Petty 19:46**

Yes, but it's not as high as food quality. As I said, think of a locally owned Steakhouse in your market where the owner is there and there, they're getting farm to table ingredients for the recipe. So, like the salads were grown that that week, so you have the freshest most seasonal items. And you might go in and you might have a glass of wine and you might have an appetizer and you might have, you know, be there for a couple hours and laugh and have fun. You might have a dessert. When you get that bill, is that bill going to be higher or lower than the bill at McDonald's?

**Lisa Nichols 20:22**

Absolutely higher.

**Sarah Petty 20:24**

Higher. And you know what? You're okay with it.

**Lisa Nichols 20:27**

Right.

**Sarah Petty 20:28**

Because you're like, Wow, that was that was the best evening we had with grandma and grandpa, all the grandkids and we celebrated somebody's birthday. And it was like the fireplace in the glow. And we got some pictures. It was so fun. And, but everything has to be consistent from the, the kind server who comes over and says, "Oh my gosh, I want to share with you what the what the chef created this week." To how quick and attentive he is. And he's offering extra things. Save room for the dessert because it's something you've never tasted before. Like is that salesy? No. And then compare that with McDonald's where you go up and now you don't even talk to a person you plug it in there. Like those kiosks in the McDonald's, you have to touch the grubby mat and figure it out yourself. And then, they if you're driving up a hand sticks it out the window and gives it to you like completely different experience. And it's not just the food it's every part of the experience and every decision that goes into the two things from the menu to the service to the, to the final product, right? You order your steak medium rare or well done. When you go to McDonald's is it really even meat? I'm not sure. I'm being honery, but.

**Lisa Nichols 21:45**

It's true, though. It's true. And every parts curated I was at, I'm just gonna give a plug wasn't planning on doing this, Sarah, but it will give a plug. I was at a CIO event last Thursday night at Stone Soup Cottage in Cottleville, Missouri. They're very close to kind of in the St. Charles area ever, just what you're saying in every single aspect, you know, they, they farm to table, they grow their own produce and things like that, you know, on the farm, and oh my goodness, but yes, I mean, big, big difference. And you talk about, really, the boutique bliss. It's the boutique bliss. So much, so much good stuff there. You know, in, in we already kind of talked about branding, but you said, You know how branding is really the brand is how do people feel about your organization, your firm when they think of you? I mean, this can be people have personal brands too, correct, Sarah? Yeah, it's, and so you've, you've really, with what you're doing with the photography, I mean, you're really, you know, focused on that boutique, boutique brand. Let's I tell you what, I've got a lot more than I want to talk about because I want to talk about your podcast and a little bit more about the book. And then I want to talk about something that you and I both share. I know you're a big one-word person. And I want to talk about that and what your one word is for this year, and why that's important. But we do need to take a quick break. And we'll be right back with Sarah Petty on this Something Extra podcast.

**AD 22:01**

In business, the tendency is to seek out partners who are bigger, faster, stronger. When it comes to IT, you should be looking for smarter, faster, better. That's just, what you'll find with the talented technologists at Technology Partners. Our experts develop custom solutions to tackle your most complex challenges, all to simplify your processes in the smartest, most efficient way possible. The time to be swift and nimble starts now. Go to [technologypartners.net/solutions](https://technologypartners.net/solutions) and see what's possible.

**Lisa Nichols 24:01**

So, welcome back, everyone, to the Something Extra podcast with Sarah Petty. So, Sarah, we've been talking a little bit about brands. And you know, one of the things that you, you know, say is that, you know, with the boutique, you

have a smaller budget, you have a limited reach, and lower frequency than say like, a Coca-Cola, right? So, you know, what are some of those things? What are some of those practical things that you can do as an organization or as a small boutique firm to really get your brand out there and to show that consistency and show the difference? What's the differentiator?

**Sarah Petty 24:41**

Yeah, I think you know. We have to look at what our advantages are by being small. So, if you're looking at a big ship if they want to turn it's like a big deal to check to make a turn in corporate. It's a big ship, and it moves very slow. And we're small we're like a little boat, we change the flap on the sail, and we're going a completely different direction. And so, we can, we can build one on one relationships. We can make things happen quickly, that gives us an advantage. And so, looking at that and looking at how can we, you know, partner with other local small businesses. How can we reach our target audience and really thrill them. You talked about the place you went the other night that was gush-worthy. If you would have gone and it would have been, you know, plastic tablecloths and paper plates, and nothing amazing in the experience. You would never have brought it up, and you've probably brought it up to multiple people. And then you need a meeting in that area, you're going to think of it because you had such an amazing experience. And so, we kind of look at that filter of what can we do that makes that one client gush on us? We don't have to make the whole world gush on us. Coca-Cola does, because they need to sell soft drinks to a lot of people every day. Yeah, we don't as a photographer, how many clients can I even serve? So, I'd rather serve fewer clients at a higher level and get and have them gush on me and refer their friend and their friend. And that's what I've done for 25 years. And figure figuring out how can I how can I be gush-worthy? Like it's really not that hard. How can I be gush-worthy?

**Lisa Nichols 26:19**

Yeah, that's good. Well, and you talk about in, in, we kind of had a sidebar conversation about delighting, delighting your customers. And we want to delight all of our, we don't want, we want everyone going away as an ambassador. As a every client can be a, your virtual Salesforce, Sarah. But, to your point, you may not be able to do that for everyone. And if you really, and I know that our listeners in their own businesses could, could do the analytics on their revenue, and probably 80% of their revenue probably comes from 20% of their clients, and not to discount anyone, and we want to pay attention, everyone. But that 20%, we really, really need to take care of that 20%.

**Sarah Petty 27:13**

Yeah, it's funny, because I think as parents, we feel strongly like, we don't love one of our children more than the other, we don't have a favorite. So, I think when we get into business, it's like, well, I have to love everyone who gives me any money, because they're a client, and they should all be loved, right? And then you realize, but actually, 20% of them are more valuable. They just are.

And what I've done for years, here's an example, is a lot of people might throw in a little extra something when they're delivering their order, no matter what business they're in. And I was like, You know what? When they get their order, they're already excited. They're or looking at their artwork in their images, so I don't include something extra with their order. I wait until the end of the year around the holidays, when it's an emotional time of year, and they're sitting around by the fire with their family, right? Anytime I can attach my brand to an emotion that anchors that emotion into my brand. And so, we create holiday ornaments. We've done different gifts over the years, but our holiday ornaments are the favorite. We put an image of their children or their family or their dog, whomever on the front and our logo with a little holiday greeting, either Merry Christmas or Ho-ho-ho or something cute each year. We package it beautifully. And we mail it to them with a personal note, right? It's not just some factory thing. I can't stand that when I like growing up. I like when I was ever in the newspaper, senators would laminate it and send you this preprinted thing and I'm like that is so not personal even as a good I knew that. Was it like you're almost there, my friend, right that note, right? Yes, putlove into it. And so, I again, I do it over Christmas.

**Lisa Nichols 28:56**

That's awesome, Sarah. I can see people I love, I did a post about my executive assistant, Jenny, is amazing. Every year, I get some sort of handcrafted ornament from her. Yeah, and it's that visual, right? And the thing is, they're going to put that ornament on your tree every year, Sarah, and they're going to remember, "Oh, it's been a long time since, or I've got a child that's got a wedding coming up, or I've got a graduation, or new baby in the house, or whatever." You know, and they're gonna think of you. I think that's brilliant. I love it.

**Sarah Petty 29:30**

Yeah. We are going, oh, look at little baby bird when she lost her teeth. I love that and, and, and it's unexpected. My birthday is a week after Christmas. So again, living my life lessons here, but it was like Merry Christmas, Happy Birthday, and it's fine. I'm not being an ungrateful punk, right? But, like, that's what you do when you give a gift with the order that they're getting. It's sort of like, why not give it like wait a few weeks to be like, ah, here's a little birthday

thought or just thinking of you. But when you bundle it Merry Christmas, Happy Birthday, Happy Valentine's Day, Happy St. Patty's Day, put them all into one, right? But that extra thought goes so far with people. I come back from the holidays, and I have voice messages, or now with text, you know. I get texts of people like sending pictures of their family, they're so grateful. And you know, then, then it parties in conversations are happening, my name happens to just come up. And that's how it should work, right? That's gush-worthy.

**Lisa Nichols 30:22**

That's awesome. That's awesome. So, for our listeners, think about what that unique thing is in your business. You know, it may not be a, it may not be a Christmas ornament, but it can be something, again, that's attached to your brand, which I think is really wonderful. Well, I want it you've got a podcast. I want our listeners to go out and, and follow you on the podcast. It's great. I think it drops every Tuesday, Worth Every Penny, Joycast, with Sarah Petty, and we'll put that in our show notes. But tell me more or tell our listeners, rather Sarah, about the Photographer's Business Institute. And the URL for that is photographersbusinessinstitute.com, but tell us about that. Tell us about your peak performance coaching students. What do you, what are you doing with this Photographers Business Institute?

**Sarah Petty 31:17**

Yep, yep. Yeah. So, you know, I always have coached photographers. And for years I did like, by the, you know, I'd have a program, of course, I put everything I knew into course, and then I would just sell it for whatever price. And certain people would get it. And they do it step by step, and they get massive results. And then other people would be like, "Oh, you know, it was a marketing course." For example, I got, you know, 35 leads, but nobody books. So, it didn't work. And I'm like, no, no, marketing's job is to make the phone ring like what? Why didn't they book? Like, what did you say to them? And so, then I created, like, a selling course and then a pricing course. And I realized that it isn't about information. And we know this more than ever with Googletopia, right? and YouTube University like you can get information everywhere, anywhere. It's at the click of a Google. But it's about so much more than that. Because what happens if we're on our own and we're trying to do something new, we're trying to grow a skill set, we do a few steps. And then we're like, if it doesn't get us the exact result in the exact way we say, "Oh, it must be because I'm not good enough or I don't have a degree or my XYZ skill." In our case, photography isn't good enough. I didn't have a degree, me personally. I wasn't trained I was the marketer, right?

And so, I had all of this, we call it head trash, we just send all of our students little head trash cans to keep on their desk, my fellow recycling symbol on the side, right? Because we all have the head trash just keeps coming back in a different voice. So, we did a couple of years ago, I'm like, I'm just gonna put a group of students together, and I'm just going to coach them one day at a time, do this one thing, and then I'll give you the next thing. And then I did it live. And I realized, okay, that part, I need to tweak it. And I kept changing it and massaging it until every student who did the work could get the results. And it became a class it went from one month to two month and it's called boutique breakthrough now. We do it in cohorts, every, it's a two-month program, we offer just a couple times a year. It's under the Photography Business Institute.

And then we also, after that people were like, we want more. So, we have an advanced program called Peak Performance Coaching. But really, and then, we actually have an earlier program for people who are like, I have a camera, and I'd like to make a little money never made \$1 It's called Camera to Cash. That's like \$30-50 bucks a month, it's you know. They're all in ranges based on they're always going up in price as everyone's prices should be. But it's a slower pace, little like little baby program.

But those are the three things we have. And for me, it's about, you know, building a business that allows you to work hard and make a living, but also put your family first. My dad was able to do that my mom was a stay-at-home mom, and I wanted to do both of those things. And I saw these women in the corporate world who were standing at the water cooler, yes, back in that day. And they're like, I can't go to my daughter's dance. And I can only go to two things a year. And I'm thinking, what? You know what, I get that kindergarten, you know, Q, and U got married, for my kids, you know, they stay married queen, quick, they get married in kindergarten. It's like the biggest deal. And there were, like, five parents there. And two grandparents, and it broke my heart. And so, that's what, that's why I'm so passionate to help photographers every day.

So probably someone listening here knows someone in their life who's been dabbling and convinced themselves that they're not good enough to charge, that is not true. We have, I have one gal who was a hairdresser, and she came in our program and was getting multi \$1,000 orders two months later because she wanted to photograph these beautiful girls. She was doing their prom hair and they didn't know where to go. And she's like, I can learn this and she came and learned it. And I think it's neat because you know, a lot of businesses have a high barrier to entry. As a photographer, if you have a nice camera, you know, you can learn these skills. Our courses are, you know, boutique

breakthrough's around \$4,000. And then the peak is about 15 a year, \$15,000. It's an annual program. But, you know, if you compare that to college, college doesn't necessarily teach you how to make that money back right away. Our students do it while they're learning. It's not just a teaching, it's because I think it's easy to get stuck in learning mode. So safe, but they're, and they're getting support, and we give them a safe place to land.

**Lisa Nichols 35:31**

Yeah, yeah! Learn by doing, and you're making money along the way. I mean, that's wonderful, right? And I love that you're doing this in cohorts, Sarah, because you say, you know, you will get better results when you are with others. And you're working alongside, in fact, you can do harder things as you're doing them with other people. And so, I think that that is really good. Well, I want, I want to hop into this, and then we will. I've got a little lightning round for you. And then we'll talk about something extra. But I listened to Episode 190 of yours on your podcast. And you said instead of doing more, it's really about doing fewer things better. And so, for many years now, you have picked out your one word for the year. I'll just go through real quick. In 2020, it was "Simplify". And I love that you chose that in 2019. Before, we had this shutdown, right?

**Sarah Petty 36:35**

Yes! World simplified for us, right? Everybody stay home this year.

**Lisa Nichols 36:39**

Yes, and so yeah, so that definitely. I love this, in 2021, you pick the word "Lead", and you said, you know, you wanted to be the best leader? What? What came out of that, in particular, because this is a leadership podcast. Was there something, Sarah, by using that filter, that word for the year to kind of be your guidepost? Was there something that came out of that that was kind of like an aha, in terms of how you started leading?

**Sarah Petty 37:07**

Well, you know, the, we had our first event in early 2020 and launched this bigger coaching program. Had 50 people sign up, we were like, "This is amazing, it's going to be a great year," and then the world shut down. And so, I had to lead. I just felt tremendous pressure, you know, to lead these photographers, even though back then my word was still simplify. But as we got to the end of the year, we were adding people. I was adding staff, I was adding people, and everybody else was cutting back.

And I realized that going from a smaller little business with just a few employees to a bigger business, we've hit the Inc. list three years in a row, we're gonna hit it again, you know, the Inc. 5000 fastest-growing companies like I'm having to, like you get to a point in business where you realize like, you can't do it all. And I've always been pretty self-aware of, like, what I'm good at, what I'm not good at. And if I don't, if I'm not good at it, I typically don't like it, and I want someone else to do it. But when growing quickly, you have to you have to build that leadership muscle, because what work to get you here can't get you there. We've all heard that. And so, I didn't want to create a mess and have it all implode. And I knew that as the captain of the ship I needed to become, I needed to grow into that leadership. And I love leadership. I love team sports. You know, I played team sports. And so, I love a well-run team. And I love being the captain of the team too, because I get to set the culture, and that's amazing.

**Lisa Nichols 38:32**

Yes, well, and it's not a one and done, Sarah. I mean, every day we, we can learn how to do it better. right? And I think that that's I think that that's a lesson in and of itself. 2022 it was "Become" - love that 2023 "Nourish" because you kind of, you said you went into the serve mode during the pandemic, and the years after, it's like, okay, I gotta, I gotta take care of me. I gotta, do some self-care. Was there anything in particular that you that you kind of focused on with self-care?

**Sarah Petty 39:08**

Well, it's funny that you talked about Dr. Williams because, like, I met her as Basima, like my friend, my daughter's friend's mom. And then I realized what she did, and I had been taking courses on nutrition, like that was the place I am not I don't like doctors. I don't dislike doctors, but I don't like just throwing medicine to fix what's wrong. Like, I'd rather be preventative, like with my all my girls and their broken bones and muscles, like you can do rehab or you can do prehab, and I want to live to be old and healthy. And so, a lot of that nourish was nutrition and health, and supplements, and, you know, so I've been working with her actually to get all the tests to find out what I need. You know, you hear all these little influencers saying, "Oh, get this supplement. It's great like, but is that what I need?" And so, I'm really being intentional about what I'm putting in my body, and it feels great.



**Lisa Nichols 40:00**

For sure, yes. And, and just as we are all unique, our bodies need unique things. And so, we'll put that in the show notes to a big plug for Dr. Basima Williams, because she can help you. She can run through that and do your blood work to figure out really specific to your, to your body and what your body needs. I love it. Your word for 2024 is "Fun".

**Sarah Petty 40:26**

I know, I know. I told somebody that, and they said, I can't believe your words, "Fun". Like you're always fun. And I said, you know, I do value fun. But I feel like, you know, I'm at an age in life where some people retire. And it's like, I don't ever want to retire. Like I love what I do. I'm making change. I'm influencing the world. But I think sometimes I get annoyed with the things I don't like to do, you know, running errands or whatever. And it's like, why can't I just make the decision that, like everything I do every day, I'm gonna put through that filter. So, I love teaching, I love running my business. But like there are always things that we don't like that we have to do. And that's part of being an adult. That's really where the word fun came from.

**Lisa Nichols 41:07**

Yeah. Well, it just having that word as your filter. Even when you go into those things, Sarah, I think it makes you more aware how can I gamify going grocery store, whatever the case may be. And we'll try to find this and put it in the show notes. But I was looking because I'm a big one-word person to or a mantra, in some cases. Some years, it's been more of a mantra but Fast Company has an article out there called "Why Should You Select One Word to Focus on All Year?" A couple of things here, "The word itself is not what is so powerful, powerful, but the time that you take to choose it", the time you tried to choose it. "Through the process of selecting the word, you come face to face with your values and identifying the things that will help you move forward to where you want to be." So that's I do believe that you kind of you know, and I've heard different ways of doing this.

For me, you know, faith is important to me. I pray about it. What is that word? Sometimes it's a gap that you see. But just, just, you know, do kind of a word dump, you know, is what I've heard you, you know, take, take, and do a word dump, take the top 10 that really resonate with you and kind of you had talked about before an emotional response. Because if there's some sort of emotional connection or emotional response there, it's probably something that really is going to be probably, you know, maybe one of the word that you choose, because obviously, there's something inside of you that where you're like, Yes, I need to focus on that more. But I love that it really kind of becomes a guide for your actions, your thoughts, and even a filter in your decision-making. Really, you know, Sarah, I think, you know, is this gonna help me on your become, is this going to help me become the woman that I'm aspiring to be by accepting this maybe board position or whatever, whatever the case may be? So, I love it.

**Sarah Petty 43:13**

Or letting this person go, right? Like, it's not all good, right? It's, it's taking, figuring out how to tackle the challenges that are hard through the word that, that you know, you want to focus on. So, it's yeah, is faith your word for this year?

**Lisa Nichols 43:30**

No, it's resolve. Resolve is my word for this year. 2021, it was love more. Because, you know, if we're really to love, how do we love people better? And that can be our family, that can be our, you know, the people that we work with every day. So yeah, so we'll have another conversation, maybe about, about that. But I've got a little lightning round for you. I know your favorite color is orange. And I wore it for you today. And you have it on your fingernails. And I see. Yes, your fingernails are orange, and I see your vase back there is orange, Sarah, so why, oh, look at all the orange? My goodness, why orange?

**Sarah Petty 44:08**

You know, orange is just a happy color. And my high school colors were orange and navy. And then my kids ended up going there. And so, always, I had orange, I just always bought orange. And so, it never was a choice to me. It just was when I built my company. I'm like, it's gonna be orange. And orange is happy, and strong, and confident, and you can't have a bad day if you have a bunch of oranges in it, I feel like.

**Lisa Nichols 44:31**

I love it. I love it. What about a favorite mantra or aphorism? Do you have a favorite mantra that you may even say to your kids?

**Sarah Petty 44:41**

Yeah, kind of was inspired by Zig Ziglar saying the more we help others get what they want, the more we get what we want. It's shorter, and we say it in our community every day we lift as we climb, right? We don't have to wait till we're at the top of the mountain to then help others like we lift as we climb, and we'll all get there, better and faster.

**Lisa Nichols 44:59**

Yeah, that's something else you and I have in common. I'm a big Zig Zigar fan. And then, Tom Zigar, his son, took over The Zigar Group. And so, lots of great mantras from him. So, what about what's, what's your biggest thing? And we've already kind of talked about self-care. So, you're working with Dr. Williams. Is there anything that you do? Like, do you run? Do you, you know, have a Peloton? I mean, what do you do for self-care?

**Sarah Petty 45:26**

Yeah, yeah, we have all the equipment in our business. My husband is an architect, and we share a building. So, every year, we buy a new piece of equipment. So, we have all that we the treadmill desks. I do have a little knee injury from a little skiing snafu a week ago. So, right now, I'm not doing anything. But the other thing I'm really focusing on is weights. You know, after 40-50, as we're getting up there, evidently weights, just not even crazy, heavy weights. But lifting weights is really important, and stretching. Starting to get to that age where it's like, oh, like things don't move the way they used to. And I don't want to be that person who can't stand up without going, oh, you know, person.

**Lisa Nichols 46:03**

Stretching is so important. In fact, fitness coaches that I've talked to say the stretching, if you do that properly, it will save you sometimes from the injury, you know, so very important. What is your best piece of advice for a budding entrepreneur, Sarah?

**Sarah Petty 46:21**

Invest in a mentor. Truly, my kids do it with their own money. There's someone out there who's figured it out. So, don't beat yourself up that you're not figuring it out, like, get a second job, trade, do whatever, like cut back on expenses so you can pay for it because, like, Why do you think you can get there? Just why relearn the lessons, I guess, that they've already learned? Like, just pay their pay for speed. That's what I like best advice to anyone.

**Lisa Nichols 46:48**

Pay for speed. I love that. I love that. Well, one more question. And we're gonna talk about something extra. What would you tell your younger self?

**Sarah Petty 46:58**

Just keep going.

**Lisa Nichols 47:00**

Keep going and have fun along the way.

**Sarah Petty 47:04**

Just keep going and making the same mistakes, right? Like, I wouldn't change anything. Think I am who I am because I had to learn some lessons. And I hopefully did.

**Lisa Nichols 47:13**

That's great. Great advice. Well, so Sarah, something extra, you know, and I love that you like even girl, I don't even know if you meant to do that. But you're like, yeah, the little something extra that we do, you know, is this ornament. But what do you believe is that something extra that every leader needs?

**Sarah Petty 47:33**

Yeah. For me, I feel so strongly that the leader's job is to set the culture and live it. I know, when I was building my career, I would go at the ad agency, I'd meet with clients, and they'd have their man have their, their mission statement on the wall, and it was all framed and pretty. And then you get into the business and be like, okay, that that's not really consistent with what it says out there. And we, when I first started, or, you know, as I was going, I made some mis-hires and had to let people go, and it was hard, and it's exhausting to have turnover. And then I invested in someone who specialized in helping us create a culture, our core values, which is like our rulebook, and then how to reinforce it. So, we hire for core values first, skill second. I think our shortest-term employee is like 9 years, we have a couple that we've just hired, but like we have 9, 12, 15, 18, 22. Like my team, just we get the right people and, and they know the rulebook. You know, culture isn't a right or wrong. It's not a black, I mean, it's kind of isn't black or white. But it's like, this is how we go, like we're one of them is we, we move faster than a speeding train. Because we're an online business, we can get an idea and get it to market really quickly. And we had hired a contractor who was a retired teacher and just wanted to, like, slowly dabble. And we kept pushing her, and she eventually broke and just had a complete meltdown on us. And we felt terrible. And she felt terrible. What we realized that it wasn't anybody's fault. It just was never in alignment.

**Lisa Nichols** 49:09

Yeah, that's a good point.

**Sarah Petty** 49:11

Yeah, so when you're picking a spouse, right? Like, they love to go and travel and don't want to buy a house and settle down, but you do, like it's not right or wrong. So, when you're the leader, if you can get clear on what's important to you, then everybody knows the important things, right? And you go, oh, my gosh, you dropped you dropped this, and you put that upfront, and you followed our core value. Great job. And what's really cool, and I see this in the leaders that we have a leadership program now in our program for our students to send into leaders. They're using those skills with their family. I mean, what the more, the merrier. Isn't that a core value to teach our daughters and our sons? But you know, I remember being a girl in junior high and feeling left out or like, should we invite this person or not? Like if your core value is the more the merrier, you're powering your child when they're in a situation when they don't know what to do. Boom, the more, the merrier. Hey, why don't you all come, right? I mean, then you're empowering people to make a decision without panicking or not being able to make the decision because they have like a rulebook of what you stand for.

**Lisa Nichols** 50:17

Yeah, such a great point. I love it. Well, Sarah, this has been so much fun. I appreciate you so much being on the show. I cannot wait for our listeners to learn from you and go follow Sarah. She's got a podcast, go get the book. I've got it on my Kindle. And yeah, I really hope you have some people reaching out to you. And thank you so much for sharing your wisdom today.

**Sarah Petty** 50:43

Oh my gosh, thanks for doing this podcast and putting so much joy and awesomeness in the world. And I appreciate you so much for having me. Thank you.

**Announcer** 50:50

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