

PODCAST TRANSCRIPT

Episode 10. Staying true to your values with Cass Minchenberg

In this episode:

- Why being honest, personal and ethical are core business values
 - How to improve your confidence and overcome business challenges
 - Why it's important to have a business plan and how to get started
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Episode 10. Staying true to your values with Cass Minchenberg

Intro: Welcome to the Women in Wellbeing podcast where we make business simple for women with a passion for health, healing, and happiness. I'm PJ Ann Aguilar, and I'm so thrilled to have you join us. Together, we learn from inspiring, successful women in the wellness industry.

PJ: Today's guest is Cass Minchenberg, founder of Brooklan Tree, an all-natural and organic range of skin and baby care products. She trained as an Aesthetician in French beauty techniques over 30 years ago and continued to work within the beauty industry her entire career. She has been the owner of two beauty salons before creating her own beauty range, Brooklan Tree. She has a passion for skincare and a desire to offer a natural organic range that is cruelty free and safe for anyone.

Cass, welcome!

Cass: Hi PJ. Thank you so much for having me.

PJ: Thank you for being here. So, as our first question, can you please briefly share your personal journey and what led you to the wellness industry?

Cass: Sure. Sure. I guess it all started when I was a teenager and I was given my first pack of Revlon skin care, which back then wasn't natural at all. Even though it wasn't natural, it got me hooked on skin care. I can still remember to this day the aroma of that pack. It's surprising how things just stay in your head.

When I was about 17 years old, I trained as an aesthetician at what was called the Beauty Institute with Madam Wanda. That was in French beauty techniques. I continued to work with her in the salon for a few years later, which was good because this was where I was first exposed to making skin care products. She made her own products, so she made a cleanser and masks and moisturisers, and so I work with those. It just gave me a little bit of idea of what you could do with skin care.

When I was 20 years old, I decided to open my first salon, which unfortunately was a partnership and it turned out to be a negative experience, so I ended up selling that. I decided just to work as a bit of a freelance beauty therapist. I worked in several salons, which worked really, well for me because I got to work with lots of different skin care and learn about different techniques, etc.

In 1990, I opened my own salon. This was my own salon, not a partnership, and during this time I was a sales representative for a now well known skin care company and was instrumental in introducing into South Australia. This is where I first started also creating my own products. I made myself a waxing spray and a lotion just to use in the salon. I wasn't selling them, just using them in my treatments.

I had this salon for a few years, but it became really very demanding as clients just wanted me to work on them, and I couldn't take a break. I got really overwhelmed. So, I decided just to sell it and take a bit of a break.

I was lucky enough then to get the opportunity to work in the health food industry, and I became manager of a health food store. It was wonderful because I learned a great deal about natural supplements and different healthy alternatives out there. I also managed to study aromatherapy and massage, and found a love of essential oils, with their amazing properties, which was great.

In the late 90s, my son was born and during this time, away from work, I had to think about my future. I decided to pursue my lifelong passion, which was skincare, natural skin care and skin care that was cruelty-free.

So now, here I am today. I have over 50 products in my range, and I'm enjoying every moment of it.

PJ: Oh, my goodness. I didn't realise. I love, love Brooklan Tree and I didn't realise the journey that led up to it. That's quite a varied range. Cass, thank you for sharing.

I'd love to ask you from that. How have you overcome some of these business challenges? Just hearing you now talk about your journey, there's been quite a range of ups and downs, from going to partnerships and then walking away, starting up a business and then walking away again. What is it that's helped you push through despite whatever life throws you away?

Cass: I think starting a new business is really exciting but once the novelty wears off, you tend to think, "What have I done?" Then suddenly, you're thrown lots of challenges. You get lots of positives which is great, but you also get negatives and a lot of those negatives, you just feel like running away, and I guess, I might have with a couple of them.

But I felt like that, I've really learned the hard way. Because of becoming overwhelmed, I was tending to lose my passion in things, I really had to sit back and re-evaluate things and look at what I can improve on. I really discovered that in the beginning, you just have to take baby steps which are really, really important. It won't happen all at once, I tend to be one of those people that I just want all to happen right there and then. And it really doesn't need to, which is good.

Cass:

I've actually grown naturally to love these challenges, and instead of being discouraged by them, I look at the lesson to be learnt in it.

PJ: That's really great to hear. It gives us a bit of permission, myself and the listeners as well, that it is a bit of a roller coaster, isn't it, this journey into business?

Cass: It definitely is, some things just pop up that you never expect them to, and it is really hard sometimes.

PJ: And your career has spanned a few decades. How has your own confidence and approach in business changed? You first got into it quite early, still in your late teens, early 20s. Looking back now, how do you think things have changed for you on a personal level, the way you approach business and you approach challenges that come your way?

I just think that it's hard sometimes just to step away from it and just look at the bigger picture because sometimes you just tend to get caught up in that smaller picture and everything that's happening. And at the beginning, being young and naive and not knowing a lot about the beauty industry, that was really, really hard. But over the years, I've learned a great deal about it, working in salons and then working on the business.

I've been lucky enough with business advisors. There's lots of business advisors around, and there are a lot that are free as well, which is great. So, if there's something I'm not sure on, I just contact them and ask, which is great.

PJ: So, you're based in Adelaide in Australia. Are these government funded advisors, or you've sought out these services yourself?

Cass: Some of them are government funded and we have Business SA here in South Australia. I don't know if the other states have that, but there are lots as well.

In the social media, there are so many different groups that you can talk to. There are also groups of business owners. There are lots of different ones. Those around that have meetings and you can be part of the group. So, there's lots of different ways to approach it.

PJ: And that's great to hear that even someone such as yourself who is quite successful and has been doing this gig for several years and to hear you say how important it is to always have that support. Then, the mentoring and business advice, it's something that you still find helpful today.

Cass: Yes, it definitely is. I don't know what I would have done without them. So, it's fantastic. Just to give you the ideas and just different ways of showing it, I believe it's really, really important as well to have a business plan when you're first starting. It's really, important because you tend to have so many thoughts going round in your head and that can become overwhelming as well. So, the first thing I would really recommend is to write a business plan.

PJ: Now, is that something that you've developed? I mean, you've started a few businesses now, but say for example, for your most recent and your current business, Brooklan Tree, is that something that you developed yourself or did you do it with a guidance of a business advisor?

Cass: I did work through that with a business advisor. There are different ones on the Internet that you can download and add your own bits to it, but I did it with a business advisor. So, there are different options. You don't need to see somebody about it, but it does help sometimes as part of the initial setting up.

PJ: And is it something that you've gone back to, as you've grown the business and expanded it? I know a few women who are just starting out. There might be that fear or that block in terms of how a business plan might lock them into a certain direction.

Cass: It does, and I ought to say it's quite a big thing to do as well, but you can write it down on one sheet of paper, if you want. Just scribble a few ideas down, and it's a matter of doing it and sticking to it as well, and working through daily. Write yourself a daily list and work through it bit by bit, because once again, you have thoughts in your head, you have too many things coming in and it's hard to organise them. So, things like that are important. You don't need to make it too involved.

PJ: I think this is important especially for those women in the industry that are just starting out. They might just have an idea and looking at what are the baby steps, like you said. If I can just ask one more question about business planning, what do you think are some of the key things that women need to have in a business plan? Like you said, it could be something that you could write in a page, or it could be quite an extensive document. What would you think would be the core things that women would need to put in their business plan?

Cass:

Right. I would definitely... before you really start the business plan is research your business and that can even be at the beginning of your plan. So, your competition or your local people who are doing the same things as you, so you could start out with that and just do a lot of research on your intended product or service that you're going to offer.

Yes, business plan and then you can just work through, and you could set yourself a goal in three months' time, that you want to be selling this amount of products. Then, you write down which ways you're going to do it, so whether you're going to sell at market stalls or go out and approach other businesses or go online.

And then, you can break all of those down. Say, for instance, the online, you can break all of them down and look at different avenues of where you're going to go online. And then you can break all of those down, it's really basically setting yourself goals, whether they be a month, a week, or six months down the track.

PJ: That's great. Thank you for that, Cass.

So, I'd love to hone in a little bit now about what you do in your range. I love the look and feel of Brooklan Tree. It's enticing, yet it's presented with simplicity. Can you please share a little bit about the inspiration behind your own business and your branding, and how important was it for you to personalise it?

Cass: Sure. I think my inspiration has come from a few different directions, but one of the things is being honest. I have a desire to create a range that was real and offered exactly what it says it did. Unfortunately, there are no strict laws out there, for how natural - natural products really are, which is not good.

I also have a big love of animals and I'm saddened by the unnecessary testing that's done on them for skin and haircare products. I don't think natural products need to be tested on bunnies, and so much of that still goes on. Even to export to China now, it needs to be tested on an animal. So, I won't export to China. I've had lots of offers but I won't do that because of that reason.

Another inspiration was affordability. As a young mum, I didn't have a huge amount of money to spend on skin care. So I knew that I could create a product for half the price, so I found a bit of a niche there. That's really important, trying to find a niche market.

But my biggest inspiration would be my three kids. I have Brooke, Dylan and Christian. They're all now teenagers. I wanted them to grow up knowing that there are healthy, ethical options out there. They've known Brooklan Tree their whole lives. They've helped with packaging, labelling. They are also my human guinea pigs. So, my products are tested on my kids, my family and friends.

Brooke, my daughter, she works with me at various training sessions, different stalls and things that I have on. She knows the range inside and out. She also knows all the codes, which is really good. So, if I tell her to get an RFS off the shelf, she knows to go get a Restore Facial Serum, which is great.

As my kids were the biggest inspiration, I decided that I wanted to keep it personal, and so I named the range after the kids. Brooke, she gets the main part. She gets the starring role, and the boys share L-A-N part, but they don't really care because they don't really care about having their name on a skin care range.

I chose the logo of a tree and the word tree because to me, a tree represents growth, renewal, and most of all, family. So that was really, important to keep it personal and keep it family oriented.

PJ: That's lovely. I love that you said they've just grown up with Brooklan Tree. So now, they're in their teen years, how have you built the business around them and I found that juggle between your role as a business women and your role as a mother? How have you juggled that over the years?

It has been quite challenging. It's in the early stages when with Brooklan Tree, when I started, I was still doing beauty therapy and I was doing it from home. So, it was good opportunity then to start testing my products and giving out samples and it just grew from there. But it wasn't uncommon for me to have been doing a waxing and having kids knocking on the door and all that.

A lot of my friends and family and people that I knew that didn't care about that. But it has been quite a challenge. I'm lucky I have a husband that supports me in that, and he was so good with the kids when they were younger, he will actually look after me if I have something on. But they're at the age now they can look after themselves which is fantastic.

PJ: If you wouldn't mind sharing, so today, I think that's great that I didn't realise that your daughter was quite involved in the business. Do you have any other staff, or you've kept it between you and your daughter mostly?

Cass: Mainly between us. If I need anyone to help me, I do call in people. I have people that come in and mainly family, which is really good. And so I do have helpers as well if I need. But, yeah, it tends to be... Well, Brooke does help me a great deal, which is fantastic. She's good. She knows the inside and the out, so it's fantastic.

PJ: That's awesome. She's almost the face of Brooklan Tree, isn't she?

Cass: She is. She is.

PJ: That's wonderful. You've launched not just a single product but an entire range, I believe. Did you say there's about 50 products at the moment?

Cass: Yes, at least 50 There might be even more.

PJ: Congratulations on your success. Can you tell us a little bit about these products and how you've built the business in a sustainable way and some of the advice you might have in terms of women who are looking to grow their business?

Cass: Sure. Well, I originally started just with one product which is called Instant Manicure, and that's an oil salt scrub. I just went out and I started going to some salons and introducing it to them and people were starting to purchase. I was getting really good feedback and that product actually still remains today. I call it my signature product. It's used in a lot of salons and day spas and just by customers as well.

I decided back then whether I was going to do a complete whole range of skincare or just focus on the hands, around the hands. But I just really feel that I wanted more out of it. I wanted to have the whole range. I wanted to have offer. And I need it, I could do it.

So, I do have products right through from face cleansers, body products and the baby range as well that has been well accepted. Lots of organic ingredient and it's just so gentle and calming. I also have customers who have severe skin problems as well, so they tend to buy the baby products because they're unscented or they're quite gentle on the skin.

Cass:

With the sustaining the business, I believe in being authentic, as I said before – being standing by what you're actually saying. I believe that Brooklan Tree wanted to always be ethical and pure. I think that's what keeps customers coming back, which is so important for my businesses future.

I love the earth. I love all things natural, and I always have, so I'm continually looking at minimizing things like waste. All my packaging is recyclable. I don't refill products. We just recycle the recyclable. The reason being is just that by the time you washer and sterilize it and everything, that's not good for the environment either. So, I tend to find that's the way I think that's better.

My ingredients are all sourced from ethical suppliers as well. I also make sure that I have certificates of authenticity and where they actually source from, as well, that they're ethical.

Also, all my packaging, all my mail orders and packaging that I get in is usually recycled. In it comes and out it goes again. Somebody might get a box with a bit of a sticker on it or something. But I just think that's important, instead of me throwing it at the bin, I might as well send it on its way again as long as it's clean and suitable.

PJ: That's really inspiring. You're really putting your values to action and showing leadership that way as well.

Cass: Yes, yes. And then, I guess there's the other thing with having a sustainable business as well is the money side of it as well. So, things like asking suppliers for bulk discounts – don't be afraid to ask for a discount or looking at ways on saving but not cutting on quality because the quality is important as well.

I think that's why people do come back as well because they're getting good results, so they like the feel of something on their skin. And your approach to them as well – they always say the customer's number one, and they are. The ones that you have, they're the ones that you need to pamper and treat well, and they'll always come back.

PJ: Actually, you just made me think of another question there, in terms of your clients, do you have a lot of... What's kind of the balance between new clients or putting effort into marketing for new clients versus that effort to focus on repeat clients?

Cass: Yes, I think the biggest thing for me has been with word of mouth. A lot of new clients come from somebody who's recommended my range. Or somebody has seen my product in a home. But it is important to look for new clients as well, and very, very important for that, I do use a great deal of social media. I'm constantly posting on there. I find that Instagram works, well. Facebook, your posts don't always get to everybody that might be on your Like list. But I'm finding social media is great as well.

I've been lucky enough to have a few articles featured in local papers as well, and this doesn't cost me anything. I have also paid for ads in magazines, but I haven't had a great deal of success with that. I tend to look for the ones that don't cost anything. There are also heaps of posts out there as well, so it's a matter of just putting yourself out there and just to keep doing it, putting your name out there, keep putting it out so people remember, because there is so much, especially in the beauty industry, so much competition out there.

PJ: And is there any particular rules – maybe not rules – considerations that you have when you are out there, talking about yourself, talking about your product. How do you convey those messages, without kind of doing too much of sales pitch? What's your approach that you think has been successful in attracting the right clients?

Cass: I worked really, hard on basically sharing the range. Or also sharing and talking about the toxic chemicals out there as well. I was always told to make yourself the guru of your craft or whatever you do. But make yourself the guru. So, you need to know it well. You need to know inside out and I think that's taken me... At the beginning, it was quite hard because I didn't have the confidence in my products. I was scared to actually tell people about them because I was afraid of getting negatives back, and it's taken me a long time to be positive about them. I mean, everybody gets negative payback. I do get that as well, but the positives tend to outweigh that, so that makes it so much better.

So, I do lecture and do sessions over South Australia as well. So, I'm always educating people, which is fantastic.

PJ: That's really interesting. So, are these speaking events, workshops that you're saying, are they ones that put on yourself, or do you go and attend existing events?

Cass: No, I do normally get invited to different things, and when I can do them, I definitely will. I do sometimes will put on workshops myself if I have people who were interested in hearing more about it. But I do actually get invited to some as well.

PJ: That's great. I think that just goes to show how important public speaking is and despite that, what is it they say, people fear public speaking more than death.

Cass: Yes.

PJ: And yet, it's so effective, isn't it?

Before we kind of wrap up, is there some advice or tips you might have for women who there's still a little bit of fear in terms of putting themselves out there. But how can they work towards improving their public speaking and seeing some of the benefits from that? What are some of the key things that they can start with?

Cass: I would suggest to just stick to smaller groups, and make sure you know your craft well. Always have notes too, there will always be some things you don't know of can't remember. (mental blanks) I sometimes will say, notes, I 'm. I'm sorry, but my mind's not what it used to be. I can't remember. I have these notes." Some people really don't care. They're happy to... And it tends to make it a little bit more casual sometimes as well.

Public speaking is scary, and I've been doing that since I was quite young, and I still get very nervous when I do it. But I think once you start talking, and if you do note well, it makes it so much easier.

Another thing good is to ask people do they have any questions because that tends to make people interact with you as well.

PJ: Yeah, that's an excellent point. One of the things that I love from my experience in public speaking, even though like you, I still get very nervous, but just that immediacy and you're there serving a purpose. You get feedback and you get to understand what your clients and what the community, what they want and what they need, and what kind of information that they're after.

Cass: That's right. It's the only way to discover what they're after. It's perfect because it's personal. You're there with them. So, it's different to speak in somebody over the phone. You do can see each other as well, which makes it so different and people can relate to you more, if they're physically speaking to you face to face.

PJ: Yeah, it becomes a conversation, which essentially that's what marketing is, isn't it? It's a conversation with your clients.

Cass: Yes, that's so true. I do tend to go to lot of different marketing groups with people as well, which is good. So other business owners, and that's really great, because I like networking evening or an event, that's a great way because you tend to make friends as well and there's other people you can rely. Yes, that's really, really great. And they tend to share as well to other people about your range and it goes from there.

PJ: Yeah, exactly.

So Cass, where can we find out more about you and Brooklan Tree?

Cass: I'm always happy to answer any emails, if anyone wants to email me. My email address is on the website. You can send me a personal one, so it's cassandra@brooklantree.com.au. Brooklan is also spelt with a Brooklan, L-A-N. Also, my website, there lots of new information on there. I'm continually putting new information on there, and that's just www.brooklantree.com.au. Then, I also have Facebook and Instagram, so all those links are on the website as well.

PJ: Cass, thank you so much for your time, for sharing so much about your journey and all this awesome advice.

Cass: That's my pleasure. Thank you so much for speaking with me.

I'm PJ Ann Aguilar and I'm so thrilled you're creating the business of your dreams!