

Hello everyone and welcome back to another episode of the Your Next Best Step podcast. I am your host Theresa Cantley and I'm super, super excited for this episode. Not just because it's episode 80, but because it's episode 80 I decided to have a special guest on, which I'll get to in a moment. But I am actually on vacation with this special guest. We are on vacation and we are celebrating all kind of things. And I thought since it's episode 80, we were sitting here and I thought, with everything that's going on in the world, all the struggles that people are facing between COVID, between all the social injustice that's been happening and how we are trying to birth this new world and create amazing changes in this world. And when you're trying to create change it takes a lot of resilience, it takes a lot of getting back up time and time again. And I know working with people one on one, working with small business owners, I've talked to so many different people about the challenges that they're facing and the feeling of can I keep going? Can I do this? Things are so hard and so frustrating. And being able to navigate through all of these changes.

So I wanted to bring on today, again since it's episode 80, I can't believe I hit 80 episodes. Holy moly. But I wanted to bring on the person that is the epitome of strength, the embodiment of a beautiful soul as well as someone who has resilience beyond belief. So I wanted to introduce, I've talked about her before many times over on the podcast but I wanted to bring on my best friend, Vanessa, who was also my business partner and has been my mentor. She was my first mentor, my first business mentor. We have been through so many ups and downs together and I wanted to bring her on because talking about beating the odds and getting back up and being resilient, Vanessa has beat the odds, not once, not twice, not even three times. More than that. She is a cancer thriver. She is an amazing person and I wanted to bring her on the show to just talk about beating the odds and never giving up, no matter what. So Vanessa welcome.

Hello.

You're only my second guest. Dennis was my first guest. Dennis was my first guest, actually, was Dennis on twice? Dennis might have been on twice. So you're my second guest on the podcast. Isn't that amazing.

Wow, what an honor.

So let's talk a little bit about, man, we've known each other for what? 25 years? 20 years?

Probably. It's at least 25.

At least 25. And man, we've had quite a journey.

Yeah we've worked together in corporate America and we went out on our own and did our own business.

Oh man and when we had our own business we went through so many different ... Because at first it was online then we went to the first brick and mortar store and then we went to the second brick and mortar store, then we went to the third brick and mortar store. But yeah, it's been quite a journey.

It has been.

Tell my listeners a little bit about you.

I've been in a number of different businesses. Right now I'm just on my healing mode because, as Theresa said, I have cancer. But I have one son, who's getting ready to get married and my husband and I are very good best friends with Theresa and her husband and so we travel together and vacation together and do a lot of things together and support from Theresa and Dennis has been part of what's helped me be a survivor. Be a battler, if you will, of what's been going on in my life. But I've also been

watching other people develop. I've seen Theresa's business develop and very proud of her and what she's been going through.

Thank you.

Right now I'm just focused on my health, which has been hard to do but I just have to keep picking myself up and saying I've got to stick with this. And between my husband and Theresa and Dennis I have a lot of cheerleaders.

And a lot of people who buy lots of baked goods too.

That's right.

To help.

They're trying to fatten me up.

So in 2016, Dennis was diagnosed in 2015 first, my husband. And then in 2016, out of nowhere, this came.

No history of it in my family, although it does turn out I have a [inaudible 00:06:16] mutation that set me up for having pancreatic cancer. And it was 2016 I was diagnosed, I had surgery, major surgery and Theresa was there for that.

I was. And your husband, I remember, when you were in recovery and you came in and all of a sudden I'm watching, she's laying there and she's coming out of it and it was mega surgery. And we're sitting there and all of a sudden I'm watching your blood pressure drop. And she's fine, she's talking to us, no big deal and I'm going what the heck is going on? And I'm like, "Wait, Mike, something's wrong with the ..." your husband was laying on the line.

On the A-line that was in my arm.

Get off of that.

Yeah. Meanwhile, Theresa's like hello, everyone. Wait a minute, something's going wrong here. It figures.

So in 2016 you had that mega surgery and then you had mega treatment.

Yeah. I was actually involved in a clinical ... Well I've been involved now in two clinical trials but the first one was right before my surgery and then during my chemo treatments. And the chemo treatments were brutal, really brutal. And I remember feeling ... it's hard not to feel bad about yourself when you're in the midst of that. At the same time, it's almost like it's on autopilot. It just goes, you just have to go with it and I had a lot of support, which really helped, particularly from Theresa and Dennis. And you just find yourself. You don't even know yourself at some times. You're just like okay, I'm just going along with this. I have no choice. But after the chemo I had radiation and then I was off of all of that for a while because everything was clean. So in 2017 I actually had a pretty good year that year.

Yeah, we came down here to the shore in 2017.

We did.

And you were on the school board and you were doing the foundation. Vanessa is very, very big into helping underprivileged kids and just kids in general to make sure that everybody has a chance to get a good education.

Yeah, I was on the school board for 12 years, although right now it's scary what's been going on in schools.

Yeah, with COVID and everything. But yeah you had gotten back to that new normal.

Mm-hmm (affirmative). Yes.

And starting to do things. And like I said, we came here. You guys actually went to the Caribbean. We did. We did that at the beginning of 2017. That was for our 30th anniversary. 30th wedding anniversary.

Yeah, big 30. But I remember a lot of the conversations that we had about during that period, the realization of what really was important and what were the things that we focused on that really weren't important. And I think that focus of how precious life is and how you need to just celebrate every moment. I know we have a fly flying around here. And I remember looking at you and saying, "Holy mackerel," that is nice to sit at night after we would come see you and stuff and I remember we would sit and we would drink tea and just talk about just how strong you were.

And it's interesting because I didn't feel strong but going through that, anybody going through that has to be strong. You can't give up and you can't be afraid. You have to just plow forward. And my doctors, I also have excellent doctors at University of Pennsylvania and I can't thank them enough either because they really ... And at the end of 2017 I started to not feel well again and in early 2018 they found another tumor and I had to have major surgery again, which was even harder to recover from. I had complications with that. And so that was a bit of a set back. Two surgeries was-

Back to back almost.

Yeah. That was difficult.

What was the thing that kept you thinking I'm going to get through this? And that future focus.

It's interesting. You just think about other things in your life that are taking place and that you're going to see them. I wanted to see my son get married, which hopefully I will be seeing soon as he's engaged.

The whole COVID thing.

I know. He's due to get married in April 2021 but we'll see if that takes place. It will. But because I wanted to see the future and see what was going on, I just put aside thoughts of not being there.

I can't imagine how hard that is.

And I had a lot of support. I definitely had a lot of support, which makes a huge difference. My friends, like Theresa and Dennis, they would just treat me like I always was. There wasn't anything, as if there was nothing different going on. Even when I had to wear head scarves and I looked like a gypsy lady.

But you rocked it. You totally rocked it.

I don't know about that. But you don't think about ... You try not to think about what could happen, you just think about what's in the future. And as long as you look to the future and keep positive about the future, you kind of just get through what you have to get through. You just ride the wave, so to speak, and come out the other side. And just always count on coming out the other side, not thinking that you won't come out the other side. And it can be hard to do but it also makes a big difference.

I remember something that you told me, because I'm paranoid of the ocean, which I've talked about as well. And one of the vacations we went on, we were going snorkeling. And Vanessa's husband lied to me and told me, I said, "We're going to be by shore, right?" And he's like, "Oh yeah, yeah." Meanwhile the boat drops us off in the middle of the ocean and I was freaking out. And I remember Vanessa yelling in the water, "Throw her a noodle. Throw her a noodle." And I remember saying to her, because you have vertigo.

Oh yeah.

And I have vertigo. And I remember saying to Vanessa, "How did you get over that fear?" Because when you have vertigo it can be super debilitating. And I remember saying, "How did you get over that fear and be able to go on boats or go in the water or do this?" And I remember you saying to me you have a choice in life. You can either let those obstacles and those challenges prevent you from experiencing the most amazing things, or you can say, you know what? I'm not going to let that stop me, I'm going to just keep going because I want to see these amazing things and I want to be able to experience all of this. And I think about that all the time. Every time I get afraid of doing something, I always think about what you said to me.

You power through.

You power through. And I think there's got to be some kind of element in there, or maybe that's what you were thinking as you were going through all these different things. Because we went to Ireland in 2019, so 2018 was you went through that second surgery and the complications and more treatment. And then in 2019 we decided to go to Ireland. But then you had another-

I had a CAT scan that showed that I have a couple of tumors that had metastasized from the original tumor itself. So I ended up having to have radiation again, which I'm still battling a little bit of that. But there is an element of powering through that you just have to do. It's like, I remember when I was much younger, before I had my son, I used to have to travel a lot for work when I worked. And I hated flying. I absolutely hated flying. But when it came to be vacation time, I just had to basically say to myself I'm not going to miss out just because I don't like to fly and I hate flying. I'm going to just power on and power through it. And eventually when you do that enough, you find out that you can do it. You absolutely can do what you didn't think you could do. And that has a lot to do with my cancer recovery.

And right now they're treating my cancer like it's a chronic illness and that's basically what it is. That's how I look at it. And things are stable right now so I just have to put on some weight.

And that's what the baked goods are for.

Yes. Thank you [inaudible 00:17:38] for all the scones.

And The Crust and Crumb for the amazing breakfast cake. So if you had to give advice, because there are people that listen to this that potentially have cancer, or are going through a chronic illness or just having a difficult time, because the other thing that I suffer from, and I know you've had periods of it, is anxiety. So what's the best advice that you could give someone, based on your experience as far as being resilient and continuing to go and beat the odds when they're stacked against you? What advice would you give to somebody?

I would say back to the powering through something. If you can get yourself to power through something, you will learn about yourself that you can do things you never thought you could do before. So you have to persist, you have to constantly trust those around you who care about you the most, you have to trust them and you have to just say, you have to have resolve. You have to say I'm going to do this. And once you do it once, it gets a little easier to do it time and time again. And you learn a lot about yourself and you learn that you can do things that you had fear about. You can do it and then all of a sudden you want to do it more. Not that I want to do cancer treatment more, but you find out that you can get through things that you never thought.

I never thought I'd get through two major surgeries. I was always like, you hear about people having a surgery that takes eight hours and you're like oh my God. Who can get through that? Well guess what? I got through it.

Twice.

Yeah. And it made me feel stronger about other things I had to do. It is persevering and just getting yourself over that first hump. Once you're over that first hump you learn a lot about yourself and you can take on other-

Challenges and things that come your way.

Yeah. Exactly.

And you had a great call with the doctor today that you're doing great. Everything's stable and good.

Everything's stable. Right now I'm on my second trial drug, which seems to be doing a lot for me so that's good. And it just turns out that I can't say no to anything that occurs that has to do with my treatment and I just put all my faith in my medical crew and my friends. I put all my faith in my friends too because they're always looking out for my best interest.

Absolutely. And I think when you have good support, and I talk about that a lot on the podcast, you need to surround yourself with really good people, even if it's only a handful that you can count on one hand. But I think that also, from an energetic standpoint, you pull from their energy. Plus also just keeping such a positive mindset about stuff. Because people sometimes think that positive mindset means that you have to be happy all the time and it doesn't. It just means that things can totally suck but at the same time you know you'll get through it.

So I have a couple questions for you.

Okay.

So what is your favorite memory, funniest memory of stuff that we've done over the years?

Oh my gosh. Well let's see. There've been so many I can't even begin to ... Some of the most fun things we had is when we used to go to New York to the gift show to buy inventory for our shop and we were in New York for a couple of days and then our husbands were meeting us up in New York and we were standing in the street outside of the hotel waving them down and a taxi is backing up into us. And literally he's running us over.

I'm like, "Hey, there's Dennis. Ow. What's going on with my leg?"

What the heck is happening. I'm like why would we stand in the street? What made us stand in the street to do this in New York City, of all places?

That is one thing. Going to New York with you, I learned a lot about Vanessa can drive anywhere. She scares the bajesus out of me because she's just whipping around. But I would never be able to do that. But just learning all about how to get through New York City and the smells, remember?

I'm like, "Theresa, don't look down. Just keep walking, don't look down." It's not good.

Now Vanessa's husband, if I can ever get him on the podcast, he is quite a character. And Vanessa's husband, Mike, he actually was my boss. That's how I met Vanessa. That's how I met my husband, too. And Vanessa and my husband have known each other way longer because you guys used to work together at Pit Care.

So speaking of Mike, what is the thing that you love about him the most? I think I know what your answer is going to be but what is the thing that you love about him the most?

Well, I don't know if I can say there's one thing. I think there's at least two things. One is he's very resilient. He doesn't fade easily. So he's resilient. He basically just takes charge of if I start to not feel well he basically helps me and it's like ... He makes it very reachable to get through hard times. So he's very resilient that way. And the other thing is that he makes me laugh. That's one of the reasons that I married him. Although now I'm like I think he's five sometimes.

Did you just hear him coming in? I thought uh oh.

Here he comes, I know. I'm like how old are you? Are you five? Sometimes the humor is a little ...

Yeah and his laugh. Oh my God, his laugh. I was on the call yesterday with a client and they were like, "Who is that laughing? That's quite a laugh."

Oh yeah.

All right, last question, what is it that you're most grateful for?

I'm most grateful for being alive. I mean, right now, given what I went through and given what normally happens with people with pancreatic cancer, many people have told me I have beaten the odds.

You have.

And like I said, I don't know what, because I do know a couple people who did die from pancreatic cancer since I was diagnosed. And I just was lucky enough to get things done in a certain time period and in a certain way that it's been four years and that's a long time for somebody with pancreatic cancer to get through. And right now I have no reason to think that there's not going to be four more years, at least based on what my doctors say today.

Could be 40 more years. Because we've got lots of living to do.

I know. And that's true. We do. We want to go back to Ireland.

Oh yeah. Go to Ireland and Scotland. I had my whole travel list and I said, "Vanessa here's where we're going. Here's all the places."

Exactly.

So we have all that to do plus you have grandchildren to look forward to.

I do. I hope to.

Yeah, you're going to have grandchildren to look forward to. We've had so many laughs over the years and so many amazing memories.

I can think of so many funny stories. Driving places.

Driving places when we worked in corporate together.

Oh my God, driving to Atlantic City one morning for a conference or a meeting and hitting traffic and all of the sudden me having a panic attack and Theresa's driving shotgun. And I'm like I need one of my tranquilizers because I'm having a panic attack and one of the partners calls her on the phone and she's like, "I've got to go now." Click. He thinks we had an accident.

And they thought we were laying in a ditch and they kept calling and I wasn't answering. Oh my gosh. So see, we have like 40, 50 more years to go.

Yeah. But trusting yourself, trusting yourself is a huge thing.

Yeah. And a lot of people can't do that.

And when I get down about that, that's where my husband and my friends really come in. That's the resiliency part.

Yeah. Because you don't have to do it alone.

And that's been evident for me.

Well thank you. This has been an amazing chat.

My pleasure.

I wanted to share your story because I think, like I said, you have been through so much, even prior to this, just things that have happened. And just watching you and learning from you over the years how to be resilient and how to be strong and how to trust yourself and not worry, and I'm still working on this, but not worry about other things and just focus on what's going to be right for you.

And that's true. You do have to stick for what's right for you and don't let people divert you from that. People will try.

Yep, they will. They sure will.

But this has been amazing. And we just decided to do this on the fly. I wasn't even really sure what the hell I was going to talk about. Sorry for cursing. But I wasn't really sure what I was going to talk about. I was like I have these couple different topics and I was sitting there and we were like, "Oh, Vanessa. I could interview you." Because your story is so powerful. So, so powerful. And I love you more than anything. You have been my best friend, like I said, my confidant, my mentor and I am there for you all the way, no matter what happens. And right by your side.

It goes both ways. That's why you got the noodle.

Yeah, that's why I got the noodle. And now I can snorkel. Even though I snorkel in circles and I laugh just like you do.

It scares the fish.

It does scare the fish and then my husband swims away from me and Mike swims away from you because we scare the fish.

Exactly.

All right. Well thank you so much, Vanessa. If people want to support pancreatic research, I know there's an organization that you're ...

Pancreatic Cancer, it's called PCAN, Pancreatic Cancer Association, and I forget the last one. But PCAN is basically the acronym. That's the major organization that supports research and there's a ton of research actually going on all over this country for pancreatic cancer. And then there's also just individual ... Like University of Pennsylvania, they're doing a ton of research on pancreatic cancer along with Johns Hopkins and [inaudible 00:31:08]. So any of those organizations, supporting them is also important.

Awesome. Awesome. All right well maybe we'll have to do another show. We'll have to do another episode and we'll bring them in while we're here because we're here for a couple weeks. But anyway, thank you so much for joining me today.

My pleasure.

And thank you everybody for listening. Next week I actually have another guest coming on and a little nervous about it but stay tuned for more information. But thank you again, Vanessa and I love you and I'm so excited to be here with you for vacation and stuff.

Thank you.

So anyway, until next week, have a great rest of your week and everybody stay safe, be healthy and talk to you soon.