

Hello, my friends, and welcome back to the Your Next Best Step podcast. I am your host Theresa Cantley, and this episode that I'm bringing to you this week is a little bit of a different episode. And I wanted to share this with you as a big part of my world and the struggle that I've had for the past couple of weeks to create and to connect back with my audience based on something that had happened. On February 22nd, three days before my birthday, my 45th birthday, I received probably one of the worst calls I've ever received. It was from my best friend and business partner, Vanessa Good. It was from her husband telling me that Vanessa had passed away that morning, early that morning.

And at that time, my husband and I were down in Florida, we had gone down to actually have my mother-in-law's funeral. She had passed several weeks before and with COVID and just how things are, I guess, in the State of Florida, we had to wait to actually have her burial. And we also had made the decision because we were so honored and humbled and blessed to have been part of Vanessa's son's wedding, February 6th, so we wanted to make sure that with COVID happening and everything that we were healthy and that everything was good and we could attend this wedding. So, and it was the most beautiful wedding. They wanted to make sure because it was Vanessa's biggest wish and biggest thing she wanted to see was her son get married, which is why they ended up doing the wedding in February and so that she was able to see that.

But the news of Vanessa's passing was a shock. At that time, I felt like I had just been, like my whole world came crashing down when I heard those words from her husband early that morning. And it just made me think of so many things, especially since her funeral is actually at the time of this recording, it's actually, this is a Wednesday, and her funeral is actually on Sunday. So, and I will be delivering a eulogy. And I've been, since Vanessa's passing, I mean, I've struggled with and have had so many different emotions. And grief is one of those weird things. And I've talked about this on the podcast before, but grief is one of those things that's so weird. I don't know how to explain it because you just go from one emotion to another, to another, to another, and every single person grieves in so many, I mean, in different ways.

I know I've read different things about the process of grief and what people go through, and I got to tell you, every single person is different. And I'm looking at my notes for the eulogy, and I wanted to talk about some of these things that remind me of Vanessa and what the type of, or who the type of person that Vanessa was and how she embodied all these things. Because I think it has a lot of parallel to what we go through just in life, I mean, parallel in life. I mean, it just reminds me of what we go through in life as human beings, as well as trying to really move our purpose and our ideas and things that we want to do forward. And the struggles that we go through and the lessons that we really need to learn to get to the other side of those struggles so we can keep moving forward.

And I am not immune to those struggles. I've had them numerous times, myself. I'm a Pisces and I am one of my hardest critics, my biggest critics. And I'm also very emotional and have struggled over the years with really not being so hard on myself. And Vanessa was one of those people that would, we were always the yin to the yang to each other and she was my sister. She was my best friend, she was my soulmate friend. She was my mentor, and just meant the world to me. I think, having a friend like that doesn't come very often in life. When you find a friend like that, it really is a true blessing from above. But wanted to talk about this, because one of the things that I really realized, and Vanessa actually said this to me numerous times, especially recently, was centered around that our legacy isn't about, and it's never about what it is that we do in our daily lives.

Your legacy is not that you are a manager of a store or that you are a business owner or that you're an accountant. It's not what you do, but rather who you are and the actions that you take, the decisions that you make that are centered from who you are at your core, and that's what ends up becoming your legacy. And when we look back, I mean, Vanessa was a school board member. She was my business

partner. She was a mom, she was a wife. She ran the education foundation in the district. At one point she was a paralegal. But those were all things that were a part of her, but her legacy really came from the grace and elegance that she presented every single day, her humor, her fierceness. She was a badass, she was an activist and really fought for what was right and fought for justice. She was loyal, she was so brave and courageous.

No, I mean, there were so many things, not just battling her cancer, but so many things that we had gone through and she had gone through throughout her life, and she just always showed up with so much courage and bravery. And I think one of the biggest things with her is that she was true. She knew who she was, and there was no way ever that she would let someone else tell her who she was. And when they tried to, and I witnessed this numerous times, and when they tried to, that fierceness would come out and she would really dig in and say, "Oh, no, you don't get to determine who I am." And I read a quote yesterday or not read a quote, but I heard a quote yesterday on a podcast I was listening too, which I wanted to read, because it just reminded me so much of her.

And it also reminded me so much of what we go through in life, just as human beings and what the human experience looks like and what it does to us, but also as people who have taken that leap of faith to believe that they can make their ideas become a reality. And this quote that I heard was, "Walking through the world with your light on, isn't always easy. You'll face critics, fears, and your own self-doubt, but it's worth the risk. Your critics don't get to decide who you are, you do." And I thought about this when I heard this podcast and I was like, I had to keep going back and rewinding it because it was so amazing, but it really embraced the things that she always really fought for.

And she did face a lot of critics. I mean, she faced a lot of critics because she challenged systems and she challenged ideas, she challenged people. Was she afraid? Sure, she absolutely was. But she did it anyway because with her and her philosophy was, you can either let that fear take over and you end up doing nothing, you end up fighting for nothing. Or you can be afraid and do it anyway, and experience the great fullness of life, experience making a difference, experience doing things that would change other people's lives, not because you wanted to be famous, but because you knew it was right. You knew that you wanted to make the world a better place, better than you found it.

And that was what she completely embraced as a person, as a friend, as a soulmate friend, as a soul sister, was that whole being of really knowing who you are and really saying to the people who want to tell you, or try and tell you that you can't do something or that you aren't capable of doing something or that try and control who you are and put labels on you. She was definitely that person that said, "Oh, no, the only labels I'm going to put on me are going to be the labels I put on me, and nobody else is going to dictate that for me." So, I thought about this and I just thought about, because I've just been thinking about so many different things and thinking about even how to move forward after this great loss in my life. I mean, this is someone I spoke to almost every single day.

As she got her cancer progressed, and there were many days where she didn't feel well, I ended up bugging her husband, but trying to understand how to keep moving forward and how to keep doing life with me here and her up there. And as I've been writing this eulogy and I have this book and I have so many notes about who she was and things that she did, and really what embraced the spirit of Vanessa. I thought to myself, and I was so blessed to know a person like this, but a lot of these things that we struggle with on a regular basis, being an entrepreneur, being just as I said, just going through the human experience, we so often let external circumstances, circumstances that most times we have zero control over, and people dictate who we are, what we believe and what's possible for us.

Instead of looking at it and saying, "You know what? I am limitless. I am fearless. I am me." And saying, "I know I can do this." Is it going to be easy? No. Are you going to face critics and haters and people who think your ideas are silly? Absolutely. But when those things happen, that's where I've learned,

especially over the past, roughly a little over a week, those are the times that you really need to lean in even more. When there are times when someone is trying to fight against something that you know is right, you know that what you're trying to do is going to benefit the greater good. It's a purpose higher than yourself, and people are coming out of the woodwork, telling you why you're wrong, those are the times that you need to lean in even more and move forward with it.

The times when people tell you, you're too much, you're too loud, you're too this, you're too harsh, your too, whatever it is, those are the times when you need to look at yourself and say, "Am I hurting anyone, my hindering, my own growth? Am I holding myself back?" And only you can answer those questions. Just as people used to say that Vanessa was too vocal or Vanessa was too... I forget what some of the people in the township used to say during school board meetings, but it was ridiculous, but she didn't let that bother her. And she actually said, "You know what? The fact that I'm getting this reaction, I'm going to keep going with this mission because this mission is for the greater good. And if people can't see that, that's not my problem, that's their problem." And that's exactly what she kept doing.

She was very, very passionate about helping underprivileged kids, underprivileged teens in the district to make sure that everybody had access to a great education, to technology, so that every child, every teen has the ability to achieve their biggest dreams, whatever they are. And Vanessa fought hard for that. And it sounds really ridiculous that she would get criticized for it, but she did, and some of the decisions that she made as a school board member. But my point is, is that if you look at yourself and you look at your business, and if your business is struggling or you're trying to do something and it feels like it's not happening, I want you to take a step back and look at yourself and say, "Where am I holding myself back? Where have I been afraid to be me, to be exactly who I am, to be the person that I've always been meant to be that is going to make this world a better place than you originally found it?"

Ask yourself, "Where have I been holding back?" Putting out a different idea, a new, maybe even, if your business has been struggling and you look at it and say, "It's time for an investor. It's time to see if we can get some investment money, because we can't make these big dreams happen the way that we're going. So, maybe it's time for an investor." And looking at that and figuring out why you've been dragging your feet for so long. I would put money on it that a lot of this stuff has to do with fear, whatever that fear is. And there was a story that I learned about what Vanessa thought about fear. And again, it had to do with me snorkeling and I'm paranoid of the ocean, not because I can't swim, because I can swim, I'm a very good swimmer, but because of what's in the ocean.

And that was when she said to me, "You have a choice. You can either let that fear prevent you from doing the things that you really want to do and experiencing new and amazing stuff in life, or you can lean into that fear and do it anyway, and just trust that everything's going to be okay, and be able to experience some pretty amazing things." So, looking at your business and looking at what you've been doing, where are you hindering your own growth? Where are you preventing moving your own dream forward? I mean, over the years, I've talked to a lot of different entrepreneurs, whether I've worked with them one-on-one or people in different masterminds I've been in, or even just friends of mine. And I've talked to so many people and I hear them fighting for their own limitations, giving me every reason why they can't or won't move their dream forward. They don't even realize they're doing it.

And listening to people, and especially recently listening to some of my clients, it's that feeling of that you almost want to hold yourself back because you're afraid of your own success. You're afraid of your own ability to move things forward because of the reaction of others or because of the work that's involved or because of whatever. But I'm here to tell you that you really need to lean into that and to use, or really get connected to, I should say, really get connected to who you are at your core, who you really are, and maybe you've been showing up as somebody that you're really not. Maybe you've been

showing up as somebody who is guarded and somebody who is very proper and somebody who needs to have it be perfect before they get it out into the world, and maybe that's not really who you are.

And I heard this in the movie Mulan, that if you're not true living your truth, if you're not living your truth and being true to yourself and who you really are, then you will die as somebody you're not, never experiencing all the things that you could experience if you really were just yourself. So, take a look at your business, looking at things. I mean, as I said, this is a bit of a different episode, but I've been learning these lessons myself over the past, like I said, little over a week, losing this amazing, amazing woman who made such a huge difference in my life. And just thinking about what she really embraced and how that impacted me and how that really made me the entrepreneur that I am today.

I mean, there were so many times that I prayed for a miracle. I prayed for her healing. I prayed for so many things to help her, and in the end, I couldn't. And at that moment when she passed, I felt like a part of me died with her. But what I've come to realize is that from that grief and from that sorrow and from that sadness and from that piece that I lost, there is a piece inside me that has always been there. And I've even had that fear of really stepping into who I am and who I've always been meant to be, the person that Vanessa always encouraged me to be more of, and that part of me has broken wide open. And I know that she is there, she is a part of me, and she is always with me, helping me to really have that piece move forward and stepping fully into being that person. That person that is fearless and limitless and has all these amazing ideas, and all these amazing things that I've been wanting to do for so long in my business and just in life in general.

And I was always so afraid that I couldn't do it or what if people don't like it, or what if people don't agree with me. And here's the deal, you can be afraid or you can lean in and experience even more fullness. So again, as I am moving through this and trying to figure out how to move through this, I wanted to share this with you and just remind you, it's good to be a disruptor. It's good to be a change-maker for good. It's good to speak your truth and live your truth to be deeply passionate about making this world way better than we found it. And only you can make that decision to really step fully into that.

So, the last thing that I want to leave you with is something else that I heard in this class that I had to take, and it was the day that I found out Vanessa had passed. But this quote just has stuck with me and I wanted to leave it with you, which was, "Know your why then fly, girl, fly." Or, "Know your why then fly, guy, fly." So anyway, I hope you have a great rest of your week. And I'd remember, it's good to be a disruptor and it's amazing to be a change-maker for good. So until next time, take care, be well, and I will be talking with you soon.