

Adversity is something that doesn't ever go away. Doesn't matter how big your business gets or how small your business is. It doesn't matter how much money you have in the bank, it doesn't matter how successful you are, it never goes away. And believe me, I have faced my fair share of adversity in my lifetime from being a heavy child to dealing with cancer and illnesses and to getting married and divorced at a very young age and being completely in debt. But the adversity that I want to talk about right now is the adversity that a lot of local businesses are facing in light of or with everything that's happening with costs rising, inflation going up, and the things that we are experiencing in our economy.

Entrepreneurship is not for the faint of heart. It is not. There are always going to be hurdles that we have to get over. There are always going to be challenges that we have to get over. And if you think that there aren't, if you think that becoming an entrepreneur is all of a sudden going to give you this magic bubble around you, this magic golden bubble that's going to protect you from any adversity because now you're an entrepreneur, that is totally incorrect. And if somebody told you that, they're completely wrong. In fact, we face more adversity as entrepreneurs, and particularly as local businesses because we rely heavily on, as local business owners, we rely heavily on the community around us. We rely heavily on local people in our community or communities next to us to come in and keep our business afloat really. We rely on people coming into the business on a regular basis, people frequenting our business.

And if you're lucky enough, I don't even want to say lucky, but if you spent the time building your online presence, your digital presence, then you also have people who can come in to your virtual world, to your digital world to buy from you. But again, most local businesses rely on that community surrounding them to keep the business afloat. And when there are mass layoffs from larger businesses, when people are laying people off, when people are cutting their spending, when there's a lot of fear that's being put out there about money and lack of it and what's going on in the government and costs going up, and you hear about \$7 eggs or \$7 a dozen, that starts to create a lot of scarcity out there and it creates a lot of adversity.

But I'm here to tell you that we never know when adversity is going to hit. Never. We don't have a crystal ball that can tell us when there's going to be changes in the economy or when war is going to happen or when there's going to be a natural disaster that happens. We don't have the ability to make those predictions. We don't have control over what's going to happen, but we do have control over how we react to it. We do have control over what we do with that adversity when it literally comes knocking at your door, whether it's something that happens in your life like sickness or death, someone's passing. I mean, this past Christmas, we had two of my family members pass within two weeks of each other. Crazy, right? But we don't know when life is going to throw us those curve balls. We don't know when life is going to throw us curve balls in our business.

We don't know when the next challenge is going to happen. One day chicken could be the topic with the avian flu and the price of chicken is going up. And then the next day the price of chicken goes down and the price of eggs go up. And then the next day there's something happening with produce, and then the next week you have something happening with dairy. And if we get all caught up in what those adversities are, we won't be able to get out of our own way.

Back in 2015, when my husband was first diagnosed, he had an earache and went to a ENT. And she said, "Oh, I don't think it's anything." And she said, "but let's do a CAT scan." And as soon as they did the scan, his neck and everything lit up like a Christmas tree. We don't have control over any of that. We don't have control over anything that's going to happen. I didn't have control over that at that time. And I could have let that adversity completely take me down. And let me tell you, it was... I mean, it was scary. And I remember driving over after the appointment, going to our store, and saying to Vanessa, "I don't know what I'm going to do if my husband has lymphoma." He didn't have lymphoma, he had another type of cancer but it was just... In that moment I said, "You know what? I want to have control

over these next things, and I just have to have faith and put one foot in front of the other and keep going. Just keep going. Keep getting back up."

We had no idea that in 2008 that a recession was going to completely hit. We didn't really understand what the impact was going to be until it actually happened. But during that time, the business that I worked for, we launched a private label refrigeration line and took it from zero to 2 million in the most down part of the economy because we were fulfilling a need that someone had. I started my retail business in 2008 with Vanessa when the economy was at its lowest and people thought we were nuts, but we did it anyway. So you can let when this adversity literally comes knocking at your door... I have a client who in one month had a pipe that burst in the ceiling, had a sewage pipe that burst, had a gas leak three times, had the gas company come out three times to fix it. And he could have let all of those adversities completely take him down, shut down for the day, and said, I give up. But no, no, because what's more important is what do we do, how do we react to these adversities that are coming our way.

And with everything that's happening right now, we have no control over what's happening tomorrow. But we do have control over how we show up today, how we show up as local business leaders, how we show up as brick-and-mortar business owners. And most important, how we show up as people, how we show up as CEOs of our business and CEOs of our life. Are we going to completely have all of the circumstances that happen to us determine what our next steps are? Are we going to let all of these circumstances that are happening to us determine what we're capable of? No. No, because when we do, we give up. So instead, we want to look at that adversity, recognize it that we're having a challenge here, and instead looking at it and using it to propel us forward.

How can we solve this problem in a different way? How can we look at things in a different way? How can we make things without eggs because eggs are so expensive? I mean, whatever it is. How can we budget differently so that we can afford these raw materials that we need for our business? Because we can't give up. Because when we give up because of adversity, we give up on the community. We tell the community that we're giving up. We give up on our employees, and we give up on ourselves, and we give up on our dreams. So instead, looking at that adversity and saying, I'm just going to put one foot in front of the other. I'm just going to say, you know what? Okay, what's next? And try and do the best that you can do with what you are given right now.

Do the best that you can do to find lower-cost items, to find different ways that you can reach your customers. Maybe it's going back to old-school mailings. Maybe it's incorporating more digital items into your business. Whatever it is, always looking for the solution. Always looking for the learning and the lesson in it. 2022 for me was filled with a lot of challenges, a lot of challenges. And I wasn't going to let that impact what I [inaudible 00:10:20], instead... And it took a lot. It took a lot of really digging deep. Instead, I said, you know what? I know I need to change some things, and I know I can't let these circumstances determine what I'm capable of. I can't let other people determine what I'm capable of because the only person that knows what I'm capable of is me.

So I'm here to ask you, with the adversities that are going on right now, are you going to let these adversities completely take you down, or are you going to take those curve balls and hit it out of the park and take the adversities that we're all going through right now and say, how can I show up as a strong leader? How can I show up as the person who is going to keep my doors open and going to find ways to be more visible online or be more connected to my customers? But only you can determine that. So I hope that you can vow to not let adversities completely take you backwards. I hope you do what I did. And what I continue to do is to look at that adversity and say, yeah, it stings. It stings for a little while, but not let it completely take you down.

I hope that you will vow that when that curve ball comes your way that you're going to hit it. You're going to take your bat and you're going to hit it out of the park and you're going to keep going and keep

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making a difference in this world one customer at a time, one employee at a time, one service at a time because local businesses are what keep the economy moving forward. They're what keep a community moving forward, and they're ultimately what is going to keep this world moving forward.