

Navigating Life's Storms_ Insights from Family Law Warrior Elise Buie_ Esq_- with Intro

[00:00:00] Hey everyone! Today we are talking with someone that really needs no introduction if you're in the law firm owner space. My, my friend, family law attorney, and now consultant, Elyse Bowie. You are so many impressive hats, it's crazy these days, Elyse. Oh, I don't know about impressive hats. Yes. So, if you know, and like Elise, it's probably because she runs one of the most impressive law firms in the country.

It could also be because she's a lawyer. If you're in like a Facebook group or community with other lawyers, she's like on your short list [00:01:00] of the ones who are always engaging, always kind, but also can be very direct with her thoughts, which is super appreciated. And in a lot of ways, you might not see it coming from her face, but she can be this

Powerful belief shifter in the law firm case of what is actually possible. At least you have gone through so much with your business and your personal life. Um, can you quickly bring us up to speed? Like, how do you, usually introduce yourself, your firm, your background to new people? That's actually an interesting question.

Um, I probably don't have a usual. The is my bottom in the CliftonStrengths. Like the elevator pitch depends on the elevator. Oh, a hundred percent. Like it depends on if I've got a cocktail in my hand, if we're going, you know, to a [00:02:00] meeting, if we're going to a dinner, Absolutely. So, that being said, consistency is not my strongest suit.

Um, I mean, people who don't know me at all, I mean, I am, I came from New Orleans, I grew up my whole life in New Orleans, went through Hurricane Katrina, evacuated, did the whole, I mean, kind of drama filled, you know, evacuation that meant first we're going to Georgia for a year, then Minnesota for five, I'm divorcing, then I'm getting remarried, moving to Seattle, I've got four kids, he's got two, we have a blended family of six, they're all young adults now, so we're empty nesters, had to build up a firm, have an ex that wasn't really into the whole idea of like, you know, we're Paying for these kids together kind of thing.

So I had to like really step up and I was like, I need to like figure out how to earn money quick. I got four kids barreling down on college. Um, so I started the law firm truly to pay for my kids education. I mean, at [00:03:00] the time I had four kids just, you know, elementary through secondary school. And they were in varying private schools in Seattle, had one looking to go to college at Smith, um, in Massachusetts.

And so, I mean, I started doing, you know, running the family law practice to be able to do that. And so I, you know, have done that, gotten everyone through school. One did decide to quit. And so he is not in school, but, you know, working and doing fine. Off my book. So, you know, that's a win to me. And, um, and so, you know, we have built the firm.

The firm's been in existence for nine years, and it really grew a ton over COVID. I think we had been virtual before that. We started in, um, 2015. virtually because my husband's work requires a ton of travel. He gets to go all over the place. He has the coolest job ever. He manages oceanographic research ships, which is kind of cool.

So everything's on the water. [00:04:00] But, um, so we started the firm virtually so that, you know, the kids and I could travel with him and do things. And that became like a real kind of value proposition when COVID hit, because I had been running the firm virtually already. And so that kind of turned into its own little side hustle.

People wanting to know like, how in the world do I do this? Like, how do I, you know, get my firm operationally virtually? So, um, You know, then during COVID, it just kind of grew like gangbusters. Again, I think a lot of people were leaving firms that were not virtual, you know, they were having a harder time.

So we grew precipitously during COVID, lots of lessons learned, lots of mistakes that I made. I mean, mistakes. So, you know, had to really dig in, learn, grow more, look in that mirror. And now we are, we are pretty just flowing along. Obviously the world [00:05:00] happens, stuff happens. Who knows what's going to happen later today or tomorrow.

But, um, right now we operate with probably about, I don't know, 45 people. Between employees, contractors, um. And, and we, and the firm operates very well on its own in the sense there's a leadership team that runs the office. Um, I have some involvement for sure in the firm, but nothing like, you know,

historic, I mean, nothing like, you know, those 80 hour weeks we all have worked.

Sure. And your law firm was your first business, right? It was. Yep. So you, like myself, and I'm sure a lot of attorneys. listening and watching, you said, let's do this thing. And then you were like, Oh, wait, what, what's going on here? And at the same time, though, you [00:06:00] do seem very numbers driven. Oh, big time. I appreciate this idea of, um, and I know this can be true for a lot of people, a lot of business owners.

But your story really resonates of this firm needs to be profitable from day one because the whole purpose is to pay for my kid's college. Um, it can be hard enough for a business to make revenue, let alone profit. Right. Um, and you talked about how there were, were problems that you've experienced. Cost.

Sure. Maybe better language there. Um, was

one thing that. I talk with a lot of people about is this idea of as the business grows, there can be all kinds of reasons where you underpay yourself or you're tempted to leave more money in the company. [00:07:00] When you started with that really prioritized value of wanting to pay for your kids, um, did that, did that make it any easier or harder to like ensure that profitability and take out?

Owner pay to make sure that you were covering costs, you know, that is such a great question. And no one has ever asked me that. And so I have never thought about it, but Joey, you're dead on because I had these crazy bills and I had crazy bills. I mean, I had, you know, Smith was like 80 grand a year. I had a kid at the university of Denver.

I had a kid in boarding school, like 65 a year. I had another one in private school in Seattle, like Like I'm talking large bills for four kids all in private institutions. And you're exactly right. The fact that I was paying those bills and you know, it's interesting now that I'm thinking about this. It allowed me [00:08:00] to do it because it wasn't coming to me.

Do you know what I'm saying? Like I was doing something in my mind at least for my children So I was paying for their school. So me pulling that money out Didn't have the same like money story stuff that Because this is so interesting. We're talking about this because after I stopped paying for them, I was like, Hmm, what am I doing with this money?

Like, do you know what I mean? And then I was like, Oh, Elise, are you being greedy? Like, should you have this money? You know what I mean? And. And so it is, I mean, and that's become like, I still work on that. Literally. I just talked to my own coach yesterday about this, where I'm like, you know, trying to deal with the issue of like, just being comfortable.

Making sure our firm runs on solid percentages so [00:09:00] that it is always healthy and that healthiness protects every single person who works at my firm. Do you know what I mean? Like, running a firm with healthy numbers is a safety thing for everyone. And those healthy numbers include a total owner benefit.

That is a. You know, standard kind of industry standard number. Like it shouldn't be too high and it shouldn't be too low. You know what I mean? Like, and so, um, I definitely have grappled with that a lot. I mean, because I've spent my whole life funding. Other things. Do you know what I'm saying? Yes. Yes. Yes.

And that reminds me too. My, my team has experienced this. I'm seeing it more now that I'm able to see like the insides of other law firms more as important as it is to have like permanent. Profitability that you're planning for, [00:10:00] it can create a lot of stress when the frequency on that is like every week or every month.

We have to make sure that we're profitable because there can be high months. Low. Um, are you at a point where if a certain week or month isn't profitable, there's some kind of pressure relieved there because you're, you're gauging profit at a longer term level. Oh, are you looking for, you know, every month needs to be profitable or else there's an issue?

Well, I I must put out there. I'm super type a so I mean I look at it weekly and um, You know, we because we're still a billable hour firm. So I mean, you know, we run weekly, because I am of a, I personally, you know, this part of my own money story, like when I was dirt poor, I didn't like surprise invoices at all.

Like when somebody sent me something that I didn't [00:11:00] expect, I mean, it could be a major thing, you know, where I was looking at. How do I put food on the table for my kids? How do I pay for football equipment? You know, like it was a big juggle. And so we still bill weekly. So we see what's happening, you know, very consistently, but we operate with a 13 month.

Rolling forecast. So I mean, I can look at a 13 months and if I know at the end of 13 months, it's all gonna, you know, wrap up and be fine. I'm fine. You know, like we build up cash reserves and things so that and I have a whole system. Our office closes 3 weeks. It's really closer to 4 weeks out of the year with 4th of July.

Most of the whole Thanksgiving week. And then, you know, Tough couple of weeks at Christmas. So we save for that throughout the whole year, those payroll, you know, around those closures. And so even though it's a little bit just mental in the sense that I know [00:12:00] that money is allotted for those payrolls, you know, when the, the payroll is down, just seeing that money, you know, rise up every week cause I'm saving for it every single week, you know, gives me a sense of, Of less stress.

Do you know what I'm saying? Like if you look at two, 300, 000 sitting in the bank, just growing all the time, you know, and then I have to use it. Obviously when the, those weeks come, I have to dig in and use it to pay those things. But it definitely relieves the stress of it all, you know? And, um, so we do stay, I would say we, I mean, if we ever had a month where our numbers were off, I mean, Even more than like 3%, I would be like, kind of like, whoa, what is, what are we doing?

Like, I would be digging in. I mean, I feel very strongly as the owner. And I mean, competition is like really high on my CliftonStrengths. [00:13:00] And so I compete with myself. Interesting. Oh yeah, it was a problem for sure. But I mean, I compete with myself constantly. I mean, my financial team jokes all the time because I, I mean, like to tell you, we are dead on, like with our forecast, I mean, our revenue numbers were something like 0.

03 off for the first quarter. Do you know what I mean? Where in our expenses were like even less off, like we are dead on on what we're doing. So, I mean, we, We run this firm very tightly based on numbers and data and we understand our data and we pull levers to, you know, keep us where we need to be. Yeah, I think a lot of lawyers, when they start to hear about the firm that you've grown, it can sound like a relatively big firm compared to where they might be at now.

Um, I'm [00:14:00] curious when, when you look up into like, Where your expenses can go versus of kind of in house solutions and like training a team from the bottom up to help with something versus working with an agency or a vendor where you're probably paying more to get something done, uh, in terms of tightening, knowing your type numbers and, and having a leaner firm.

Do you have any tips on like when to. Outsource to that vendor or that agency and when to and keep it in house. Well, I mean, again, because we are so data driven, like, you know, to me it becomes an issue of what have you allotted for that thing? So like marketing is a great example. I think people can spend a lot of money with vendors and various things we are We do not have a high marketing spend.

I mean, [00:15:00] very low, actually. I mean, we're at 5 percent of our gross revenue and marketing spend. So we are lean in that regard as well, in the sense that we have a high referral business, you know, that we get, which helps. Um, and, uh, you know, I guess I don't know all the reasons, but I think, Because a lot of people will, at least in my opinion, they'll throw a lot of money at the wall.

I call it like spaghetti on the wall and they don't know what is happening. That doesn't work in my little forecast. Like in my mind, you don't even know what good is supposed to look like. Right. In my forecast, if I'm throwing money at the wall, which of course I've done, we all have done it. I can tell you like what has been the ROI of that spaghetti on the wall.

And you know, if it is not, if it doesn't work, I'm going to pull the plug on it or I'm going to, you know, tweak something. Elise, I love the way your brain works. [00:16:00] I, and we can circle back to this. I think that you're a really good. Example of someone who I think has both strong visionary and strong integrator tendencies, which just makes you a very unique kind of business owner.

And to an extent, I, I see that in myself as well, but I think that you are incredibly numbers driven. Um, at the same time, I tend to like, and do like girl math. quite a bit and then force myself to like actually look at the numbers. And about a year ago, I was talking to a marketing agency, good reputation, and they were like, Hey, it's, it's going to be 5k a month minimum to work with us.

Plus a 5k a month minimum ad spend. And I was like, why wouldn't I just work up to a 5, 000 minimum ad spend myself and then my team can just learn lessons around what's broken and how we can fix things. Yeah, I mean, that's a lot of money. Like, [00:17:00] Yeah. Well, to have, to have that amount of money go towards something where you're not really seeing, okay, to what extent are they fixing or improving?

And I mean, I, I, if it works, it works, they've got good clients, but in terms of making sure that you're lean, I was like, Oh, a lot of people, I think, invest in

marketing because they don't want to do it wrong. One thing that I've learned in working with various coaches and making my own level of mistakes is like, Let's put the ego to the side and be willing to make mistakes by doing stuff ourselves and then learning metrics really are that matter.

Well, and I just think you have to, I mean, because if I'm going to spend 10, 000 with some marketing, you know, like agency and the ad spent. I mean, I am going to know absolutely that I am getting an ROI on that. That makes sense. And I mean, that's at least going to be a three time ROI, if not [00:18:00] greater for the numbers to work out.

I mean, clearly if the numbers work out, you should do it every month. I mean, you're literally just printing money. Do you know what I mean? And, but if the numbers do not work out or you cannot track the numbers well enough, you know, with your system where you know, in fact, they're working out. I mean, it, you might as well just be burning your money.

And like, I'm not a fan of that. So you don't want to burn your money and you also want to be numbers focused. So here's the question for you. And I hope that for the law firm owners that are tuning in, that they appreciate this question because I've learned to appreciate this question. As a firm that gets a lot of clients through referrals,

we all know that there's, there's not that like add lever to let me do this. And then all of a sudden I'll get [00:19:00] referrals. What are the, what are some metrics that you're tracking closely? Uh, if we want more referrals, then let's do X, Y, Z. I mean, that is a great question. And this would be an area I would say, I don't have a great answer in the sense of, We, I look at referrals as part of what I would call brand marketing, you know, just getting out there in the world doing things.

And for me at least, you know, that is part of just who I am in the, you know, as far as like sharing resources with people, being somebody who will talk to somebody. Like the other day, there was that. You know post in the lawyer on the beach group and silly old me, you know, it's like oh dm me You know, i'll be happy to talk to you I mean 50 Dms later i'm like, okay.

How many zooms can I do? [00:20:00] But do you know what? I mean, but I also realized that really appreciate the whole idea of like helping each other and like bringing value to people for no other reason than to help them not be so stressed. And so, you know, as I'm reaching out to those people or, or having those meetings, you know, you, you just, you're building a referral network.

Do you know, like just, Constantly. And I think that the more we can do to support each other, support the profession, support young attorneys. I mean, it just benefits everybody. And I think that, you know, part of my day every day is how can I add value into the world for nothing? Like for, you know, Like, I'm not looking for a thing.

And it guys, it's crazy. I know how maxed [00:21:00] out Elise with is with her time, and yet she's still one of the most engaging members in all of these Facebook groups. Everyone's like, Elise, how do you find the time? So the fact that you make the time for it just speaks volumes about you. Um, just to, to clarify before we move on, are there any KPIs or metrics that you are tracking that are around referrals?

I don't think so. I mean, just the numbers. I mean, we track, you know, the numbers and the percentage, but, um, I don't, I mean, we have KPIs. We have so many KPIs in our office around unreasonable hospitality. So, you know, cause our office is very focused on unreasonable hospitality. And so, you know, we have KPIs around like getting reviews and KPIs around, um, again, unreasonable hospitality to clients, but unreasonable hospitality to team members.

And, [00:22:00] um, you know, and that's all part of, I think, the firm culture, which helps build referrals. Like if you have people on your team who are happy with their work environment, they're likely to bring in people, you know, and their friends and neighbors and whatever. And, um, but we don't have, um, And possible rain is going to correct me, but I don't think so.

I don't. Come on, Raina. Well, no, that's, that's nice to hear. And I, I didn't have any expectation around that question, but I think it, it makes sense that there isn't a particular number that you're tracking on referrals, but you're just, it's almost like a pre lead gen activity where you, you do it because you want to, and there is an inevitable correlation.

Absolutely. I mean, I just think the more people as a law firm owner, you can get out [00:23:00] there in the world and have people know that your firm exists and that what you care about. And, you know, one of the things that I care so strongly about is, you know, positive co parenting and not bringing, you know, all this craziness to co parenting.

And so, You know, I get referrals from judges, commissioners, you know, other attorneys who are like, Yeah, can we, you know, send them there and maybe, you know, this family will, you know, be told some really hard, blunt facts, you

know, like about how can they, they do this so that they are really putting their kids needs first.

And, um, so, and obviously I can do more. I mean, there's no doubt I could go out there and do more things and, um. Do more brand marketing. I mean, that's an area that I kind of beat myself up about that. I don't do enough. And, um, and so, you know, like, I surely am not an expert on this. I mean, [00:24:00] I could absolutely do more.

I mean, my team is harassing me constantly. They're like, at least could you do a video? I'm like, I hate video. Don't make me do a video. I know I get it. Um, but you are doing things Well, in so many areas, and like I said, there are so many attorneys looking up to you when, when we think about the people who might be tuning in as law firm owners, or maybe just business owners in general, and looking to you for help, let's talk about the fact that you now have this consulting company.

And we chatted a little bit before we went live about you not loving the title coach. Can you tell us more about that? Well, I like to think of myself as a consultant, but, um, cause you know, when I think of a coach, I have this vision of, you know, you sit around and you ask all these questions like, you know, why, why, why?

Like it's this whole, whereas I [00:25:00] definitely am more like, okay, I want to know what is your vision? What is your personal vision? What is your professional vision? So we are going to dig way into vision. And once I know what that is, I'm like, okay, we are ready to rock and roll. That is where we start a hundred percent.

Cause how can I know how to help somebody if I don't know where they're trying to go? And does that, is that usually an easy conversation for someone? Like where they just know that stuff? Oh God, no. No. Oh no. I can't imagine. Oh, no, we are reading vivid vision. I'm having people read Cameron's book, vivid vision.

I'm having them do vision exercises. Like I'm making them go to hotels, spas, you know, go get in your kayak all day, like whatever it takes. So they are like getting out of their normal comfort zone and. They are really thinking and dreaming. I send everybody a journal. I just love these beautiful [00:26:00] journals and I monogram them for them, you know, so they'll get a journal and they'll have a place to really write and think and really dream.

I mean, I am, you know, that CliftonStrengths, my first one is ideation. So, I mean, I love to like think about things and come up with ideas and, um, but once they know their vision, It's simple then. I feel like that. It is so simple because then every single question that comes up, you ask yourself, is this moving me toward my vision or away from my vision?

It's just that simple. I know that you've got a dozen or so clients without picking on one in particular, just kind of painting broad strokes. Can you give some examples of Strong business vision, strong personal visions that you've helped clarify and shape or maybe even, I [00:27:00] mean, yeah, you have people who are, you know, working in their firms and they're just kind of trudging along, but I mean, what they really want is to like, you know, bring empowerment to an entire group of people and, you know, their firm is going to be there to fuel the their desire to like, you know, help maybe a group of women be able to start their own businesses in other developing countries or things like, do you know what I mean?

There's so much stuff out there that people are wanting to do and accomplish So inspirational to me to work with people and really help them figure out. Cause I think so many of us, we think of our vision as, Oh, I want to make, you know, 2 million a year. No, that's not your vision. Like, do you know what I mean?

Really digging in and figuring out like what, What motivates you? Like, where do you see your spirituality [00:28:00] in three years? Where do you see your relationship with your partner in three years? Where do you see yourself making an impact in the world in three years? Where do you see your sexuality in three years?

You know, where do you see all these things that, yeah, your 2 million firm might play into it, but that is not your vision for your life. Blah. Well, again, we were saying before we went live, you talk to so many attorneys who are overwhelmed to the max, 80 plus hours. At that level, a vision can just be to get up high enough to believe.

Is that something that you, that you see where like their vision is so much more than a single place where they can say, I do here. This is that. [00:29:00] Can that be a hard conversation? It, it can be, but it's a needed conversation because when you're in the 80 hour grind, that is when you need your vision, because you need to know that those 80 hours you're putting in are working towards something you really, really want, not something that you think you should have, not something that somebody else has decided for you is your vision, I mean.

And you know that I mean how many lawyers are lawyers because their parents wanted them to be lawyers For me like and I I mean and I mean that's you know That works for some people like, you know, they got into it or whatever But I mean that doesn't stop you from dreaming and I mean I think about like what I mean and you can't see it But like I have vision boards on my wall.

I do one every year and If you were to look at my vision board, I mean, all [00:30:00] that stuff has come true. Every darn thing on this vision board. I mean, and it's kind of funny. Cause recently one of my kids came in here, um, into my office when we were out of town and he commented, he's like, I have made fun of you and your vision boards for years.

And he's like, and I looked at those and I was like, well, damn, this actually all happened. And he was like, you know, I probably need to back off my, my making fun of you. It worked for you. Are you willing to share any examples of what's on the board? Oh, sure. I mean, just things like, you know, I mean, one, I see a lot, imagine a life without stress, like that was a huge thing for me to get to a place where.

Every day is kind of spacious and it's not stressful. I'm not doing things that I suck at or that, you know, are not me in my highest self. Um, I mean, there's, you know, a house on the [00:31:00] water where I'm looking at a boat in the mountain. I mean, I am currently looking out the water on the right and see the picture on the left.

Do you know what I mean? Um, I mean, the one thing that is on my vision board that in my mind, it hasn't happened, but, um, I mean, he probably doesn't know it. There's a picture of Oprah with Ariana Huffington. I really want to meet both of them. So, so if you have any contacts, I will work on it. Um, cause I just, I love the two of them and it's a cute picture of them together in their PJs reading books in bed.

I'm like, I would love to read books with Oprah and Arianna Huffington. That's so cool. So in your experience, whether it's yourself or with the lawyers that you've helped, what makes this a hard exercise? Us being honest and us getting still enough to hear and to pay attention to what, what [00:32:00] we want, and then to accept that we want something just because we want it.

It's hard to do that, especially as you know, in a, in a positive light, this legal community is all about serving others. And so it can be very, it can feel very selfish to be like. Who am I to really prioritize this stuff that I want to want

something? I mean, I have been practicing wanting without justifying why for years, you know, and like, and it is hard and it is, I mean, I struggle.

All the time with the idea of greed and selfishness, you know, cause I'm like, why, why can I have a life that isn't filled with stress and angst? Like, why can my life be a life of ease? [00:33:00] Yeah. And, um, and obviously we're all meant to have a life of ease. Do you know what I mean? Like it doesn't, there's no nothing in the world that says we're supposed to have lives that are like stressful and hard.

But the thing is stuff is going to happen in everyone's life, you know? And and we just it's a matter of how do you deal with it? How do you view it? I mean the so many people fight reality and have this like I don't deserve this struggle and I don't deserve this and this is wrong Okay And I try to really flip that and be like, this is what it is.

What good is going to come out of it? How can I learn from it? How is this going to make me stronger and really not fight reality? Because I mean, you know, raising six kids and I can assure you there were problems, large problems. And, but who has [00:34:00] time to like, You know, get all down in that. It's just like, all right, let's figure this out.

How are we going to move forward? And it's, there's just so much mindset work that needs to go into, you know, I think a lot of what we do as law firm owners, as leaders of our firms, you know, You know, all of this stuff is so powerful. And of course I love diving into this stuff with you. It can also be very divisive and polarizing.

And there is a big population that just shuts off mentally when we start talking about this stuff. And I'm curious if, if you've had that. experience as well, where the deeper that you go into entrepreneurship and the vision boarding and other stuff, the more you lose people that aren't [00:35:00] interested in this thing, or that maybe think differently of you because you're leaning into these things.

Um, you know, I, I don't know the answer to that. And I don't know that I care about the answer to that in the sense of, I mean, I am who I am. And I mean, I can only be me. You know what I mean? Like, I would suck if I tried to be something else. I would not do it well. Um, and so, I, I mean, you know, it just doesn't matter to me at all.

I mean, and I don't know, that might sound kind of bad. I don't think it sounds bad at all. I think it's, I hope that people like hearing it. Because.

It's, it's always like not cool to be into things. And usually the coolest people are the ones that don't care what people think. And so I think that you are one of those examples [00:36:00] of like the popular kids in this community where it's because you don't really care what people think about you that makes them so attracted to you.

Yeah, no, I hadn't given that any thought. I mean, Yeah, I, I just, I don't have a lot of time to care. I mean, I actually don't, it's not my job to care what other people think. Is that something that you feel like you've always had or? Oh yeah, definitely. Or going through an experience helped with? No, that is, I mean, I've been like that since I was a kid.

Like I was really bad at, you know, being in a click or whatever. Like I was always that kid that floated around, was friends with all the different clicks. I didn't really care about, I mean, I just am so like me, like I just never fit great into a box really good. Do you know? And so it's just [00:37:00] been kind of who I am.

And, um, and I just really think. I mean, how can I, how can I care about what anybody else thinks? I have no control over that. Do you know what I mean? It has nothing to do with me. Like, you know, That's a healthy way of looking at it in terms of your own vision. Like, yeah, you've got the firm that you're still building.

Um, can we talk a little bit about the consulting company and your vision for how you want that to grow? Yeah. Well, it's something, obviously it's a little like work in progress. Cause I started it like in the middle of the night one night when I was like, I'm just gonna, you know, do this and see what happens.

But, um, my team wasn't totally thrilled with that little plan I had, but they're getting used to it. And, um, um, I mean, my real vision for that right now is mostly figuring out. How can I [00:38:00] help more people really imagine their lives without stress, you know, and bringing down their, their stress by helping others learn how to, how to really operate their firms based on numbers.

You know, so that they're not having their stomachs involved in all this. They're not like up at night, you know, worried about whatever. I mean, I definitely get up at night. I get up at night, I pull up my forecast and I'll be like, Hmm, this is off by 5%. And then I'll send a note to somebody and I'm like, Notice this off by 5%.

Like, what do we think this is? How can we fix this? You know, I'll get my, my snarky accountant answer. That's like, at least that's not very statistically significant, you know, at your revenue level. I'm like, yes, it is. That's 5%. We, we goofed. Yeah. Um, but, you know, like really learning to operate it [00:39:00] based on data, you know, then, It really just changes the whole game because it becomes very, I guess, I love numbers.

I love math. I, you know, I thought I was going to be an engineer when I was younger. Um, and so it just becomes like very much, it's easier to run for me when I can look at numbers and, and look at things. Oh, yeah. Well, and again, I feel like you're such a unique human being on all of this. I think it's especially important if you also have a law firm that is very referral based because so many of the referrals that we receive are because people know like and trust us.

And if we, if we aren't numbers driven and more detached than things not going the way that we want them to can feel very personal. Sure.[00:40:00]

Yep. Well, and I definitely do my best for sure to take my feelings of personalness out of all things. So good. All things like, I mean, I try really hard to just Accept like whatever is happening being like that's kind of interesting, you know, like what can I learn from I mean just this morning we had something and an attorney was like, oh my gosh, blah, blah, blah.

And I was like, I was like, it's all good. I said, people are people. She was kind of like, it's pretty stressful. I'm like, it's really not. I go, it's kind of comfortable that they're just doing their people thing and. We know that to happen. She was like, okay, if you're not stressed, I'm not stressed. And I was like, good.

That's great. And, um, because there's only so much you can control. And I think taking things [00:41:00] personally, that's exhausting. Like, Oh yeah. I mean, that's now I must say, like, I don't, I mean, I am a big mirror Turner. Like I look in the mirror and ask myself, like, What did I not do? What system did I not build?

What system did I build bad, you know, that let this happen? What, you know, what part of the hiring did I have a part in that I shouldn't have? Like, maybe I'm, you know, I have to own so many of the problems, you know, like all of them in the office where I'm like, whoopsie, that was me again. And, you know, but, you know, That to me is different than taking it personally in the sense of I mean, I am definitely owning it.

I'm trying to figure out what I can do better, how I can tweak it. Um, I kind of mean anything. Yes. It's that judgment piece. It's that I [00:42:00] don't have judgment around. That I messed up in the sense of I'm not like, Oh my gosh, you know, this is horrible. And I mean, I'm just like, okay, I did it again. You know, mistake 800 this week, um, you know, and it's like, okay, how can we fix it?

And maybe this is something I stink at. So I got to delegate it because, I'm not the girl. So what does the typical day in Alisa's life look like now? Now it's a lot of consulting clients. Um, it is, you know, I get up, I usually do one really early. I love working with East Coast people because they humor my early wake up.

So I can meet with somebody at 6am my time here and it's 9am their time. I kind of love that. Um, so I usually am doing at least. Two or three consulting clients a day. You know, I do leadership team meetings, um, with my firm, mostly just one a week on [00:43:00] Tuesdays, and then I meet with my COO probably a couple of times a week, depending on what's going on and if she wants to meet or not.

Um, and you know, then just like kind of like big relationships, you know, like if I'm thinking about something or, you know, maybe I'm vetting some vendor that, you know, I've sent a bunch of clients to, or, well, I mean, I don't know, just, you know, I, I call those like big relationships. Um, and then I do spend time every day, you know, like I said, trying to bring value just to our little world of stressed out lawyers.

And is that like, You literally put time in your calendar. I'm going to go into every day and do X, or is it just throughout the day? You'll do it when you have time. Both. It's on my calendar as a block every day. Like I wake up in the morning and I often do that. And then I have time just randomly, but then I also will save things.

[00:44:00] I'm pretty meticulous about, I'll save something. Like if I see somebody who's kind of really struggling with something or whatever, and then I'll reach out to them privately and just be like, you know, Do you want to hop on a zoom or what can I do to help you? Or, you know, like if there's a resource I can give them or, um, just try to help people in that regard because boy, do I know, you know, as I've been coming along, I mean, there have been so many people who have been instrumental in my life.

Feeling good, secure, you know, happy. Like I think of Ryan McKean, I mean, he has been such an important part of like my little world of, you know, just

being able to check in and be like, whoa, this is some wild stuff that I have caused. Or, you know, and just having a few people who have been really powerful supports to me [00:45:00] through the years.

I always want to be able to return that favor to others because I think what we're doing is kind of wild. It really is. Oh. And before we start to wrap up, I always like talking about VAs on the show when I can. Sure. As with most things, you do such an impressive job with building out the VA side of your company.

Um, what would you say to people who might be on the fence about bringing on their first VA, or maybe they've been burned by a type of teammate before, and so they're reluctant to get started with a VA? Get off the damn fence and do it. I mean, there's no question. Every single owner. I know needs a BA period end of story [00:46:00] and they need multiple.

I mean, it is wild the impact VAs will have on your ability to get out of things that you're not good at, and to be able to just elevate your entire firm. I mean, and my VAs are regularly working now with my consulting clients because, I mean, I can't build all the things or know all the things, but I'm like, Oh, I know what we need.

And so, It's pretty powerful when people see what can be done and how a VA can help you with accountability, with data, with research, with, I mean, all the tasks. And I mean, Joey, you have an amazing, like a hundred tasks a VA can do kind of list that is so powerful. And I mean, I don't even know. I mean, we probably have 10 [00:47:00] VAs right now, maybe.

Um, it's. And I mean, I could hire 10 more tomorrow and keep them busy. It's crazy how much of a secret weapon they've turned into with our firm and in firms that we've helped people with. Um, and it's, it's funny that you mentioned even the, that list of a hundred tasks, because for over a year, I was reluctant to put that resource together because I knew that people would want it if I promoted it.

But I was afraid that if people just saw a list of 100 tasks, it would make them not take action on hiring and they would, they would just be like, Oh, how could I think about delegating X and Y and Z. And so I hope that the list is useful. And I want people to know, like, the goal isn't. within a week to start delegating all hundred of [00:48:00] those tasks.

We put those in a certain order. Um, actually I love that this topic is coming up with you because I think one of the first things that you can easily delegate to a

VA is having them just help you manage your numbers. Completely. And I know that there are lawyers drowning in work that just want help with marketing with client work.

And I, and I get it, but there is such a value add To saying, hey, teammate. Yes, there are more typical types of tasks that I can assign you. But let's get really meta here. Yep. And how can you start tracking certain things that are happening in the company so that you can have that as a reference for later?

And literally, by knowing those numbers and that data, that then allows you to go do the hire you need for whatever [00:49:00] else you need, because now you know it's also by the tracking. And I was telling somebody this, this morning, and It's stunning to me. It took us a while, I mean a long while, to really nail down our labor efficiency.

You know, we're a billable hour firm, so we deal with non billables, billables, discounted hours, all these things. So I knew there was a leaky bucket in our firm on this, you know, the labor efficiency side. So we've done this whole thing where we call it build on invoice and that's a, an hour build at your normal rate that goes on an invoice.

I cannot make my attorneys track collections because that's on me. Like am I, Am I managing trust accounts, right? Am I, you know, doing ar properly? You know, all that. That's a, an owner thing, but they can control what's going on in invoice. So by tracking all this non-billable time, you know, billable time, discounted time, we can [00:50:00] see in that non billable time when I'm looking at my billing engine, if we've got a huge amount of non-billable time.

That is all delegatable work. Like that should not be on my billing engine. So we can go in and decide what are all those tasks? What needs to be delegated? What team members do we need to do those tasks? We saw in a four month period year over year, like if we look at a four month period last year to this year, It was a 400, 000 leaky bucket.

Wow. That is a fair amount of differential. And that is a lot of hiring you can do to pull tasks away from people. I want my billing engine to do only that which is billable. You know, I mean, I say to my lawyers all the time, I only want you to do that which requires your law degree. If you [00:51:00] are doing something that does not require your law degree, you are not the person that should be doing it, period.

And so like being able to hire a VA who can track all that, keep the data, help us see, you know, how those improvements are coming. And I mean, it has been, I mean, not only powerful to like getting people so they have a better life work integration because they're not focused on non billable work. It has been allowed us to like bring more value back to the firm, like pay higher bonuses.

And do you know what I mean? Be able to do things. And so, I mean, VAs are, I mean, they are, they're not my secret weapon. They're my known weapon. Like, you know, they are amazing. I mean, and I keep two. Full time people, one VA, one EA, you know, who's [00:52:00] based in the U. S., completely busy just with me and my tasks.

Like, it's kind of a joke that I get up really early in the morning, so I need somebody who's, you know, awake at 4 a. m. Pacific time because I'm like, oh, hi, it's morning, you know, and I'm ready to go. Um, and I mean, the impact that has on my ability to sleep. To do so many more things. I mean, yes, like, I mean, I'm right now managing an entire home renovation in New Orleans, but I'm not managing it.

Do you know, like somebody else's managing and I get a report, I get a, this room, all the stuff has been bought, you know, this room we're waiting on these two items. You know what I mean? Like I get this whole little breakdown, but I mean, I don't have to like, you know, call the West Elm and be like, my chair did not arrive.

Well, and again, [00:53:00] there's, there's a, there's so much money mindset to that of who am I to not do that stuff myself? And what, what could it mean about me? Uh, delegate that out. You're smart and strategic because my hourly rate is way far above me sitting on hold with West Elm to discuss the delivery of my chair.

Like it is, I mean, it is simply a strategic decision. You know, I think people have to read Buy Back Your Time by Dan Martell. I mean, so good. Oh, I mean, I read it. I listened to it. I watch YouTube videos. I mean, it is, and I try to teach everyone on my team. Like, I mean, we offer that service. My, my concierge service to everyone on our team.

I'm like, stop, like calling around car dealerships, trying to figure out, you know, where you can bring in your [00:54:00] car to get, you know, a new transmission, like have to do it. Related point. This makes me think about the potential for AI. Oh yeah. Are you leaning in more and more to like what AI can do? Oh, big time.

Scare you? Not at all. Really? Not at all. No. Well, there's actually a company that works with small businesses where they, and they say it's like a sandbox. They create. chat GPT in a sandbox so you can put in your private material. Like I can put in my data, my financial data into this chat GPT in my sandbox and it will help me.

And, you know, run even more like, so there's, there's resources out there. Like if you are scared of the, you know, the bigger picture, which of course is lawyers, you know, firm stuff [00:55:00] you have to be careful of, but like personally, I mean, I use it, I mean, the other day I was on a plane and I said to Doug, I'm like, Oh, I'm supposed to do a presentation, you know, next week.

And I was like, I need to do that. So I literally pulled up chat GPT. I put in all this stuff. And so I got a framework out. I sent it to a VA. I was like, can you like fancy this up and get it back to me now? Will I need to tweak it? Of course. But did I just get 80 percent of the job done in seven minutes on a plane?

Yes. It's just, it's so crazy how helpful it can be. And it's, it's making just that idea of, of getting back your time completely much easier. I mean, I think of a I as like it is my friction bulldozer. There is no more of a lease like looking at a screen or at least thinking something and being like, I don't [00:56:00] know what to do.

It, it, it goes into chat GPT. I don't care what it is, but it is my friction bulldozer. It starts me on everything. I love that. I could talk to you for the next, like, three hours. It would be exhausting, though. No, this, this is exactly the type of conversation that lights me up. I hope people that are tuning in enjoy this.

I mean, can't someone get to have Elise in their ear for a while? It's a very powerful thing. Elise, any final thoughts in terms of, if people are hearing this, and whether they know you or not, like, Oh, Elise is going to help me now? How can I learn more about that? Currently, can people take any next steps to learn more about what that could look like?

I mean, they can just email me, you know, um, at EliseB at EliseBuiFamilyLaw.com or I mean, they can message me on social media. [00:57:00] Um, but I mean, you know, for us, probably next steps. I mean, I'm thinking about putting together a group because I think a group of family law attorneys could probably be a really, really helpful thing so that we can really dig in and help firm owners.

Get out of this. I mean, the stress I see, it's not okay. I mean, like, I don't think any of us went to law school thinking that, you know, we could be 20 years in 30 years in, and we are literally stressed every single day. And if you haven't picked up on it yet, at least is definitely not one of those consultants out there.

Who immediately puts up a paywall between you and herself. So please feel free to reach out to her, message her, email her. Um, [00:58:00] I, I would hope that Elise, um, will, uh, stand behind whatever steps she has. But I want you guys to know, like, Elise is one of the most approachable, accessible people I know in this space.

And I know how much it would light her up to receive a message from you. If you'd like some support. Yeah, absolutely. And I appreciate that, Joey. I mean, that is something that is really important to me. That's one reason I've been doing this one on one is because I want people to know that they can reach out to me completely off schedule and whenever, because that's the thing I think that I love the most is when somebody is on the ceiling.

I'm like, text me, like I will hop on a call and we will get off the ceiling. Like there's no reason to be on the ceiling. You know what I mean? Like we will bring it down and we will have some plan of what you need to do. And I mean, that is what I think has been, I mean, so helpful to me [00:59:00] through the years is because I'm kind of bold and I would just reach out and be like, yo, this is a problem.

I need help. Do you know what I mean? And. I want people to be able to do that and know that somebody who has been there, who has made every mistake in the book, you know, like can actually listen to them without judgment and be able to help them pull it off the ceiling so that, you know, they can go to their family dinner that night and not be completely freaking out.

Gosh, well, so much love is being sent your way, Elise. Thank you for all that you do. Oh, thanks. Everybody, thank you for tuning in, and I'll see you next week. Thanks, Joey, for having me. Of course.