

92. Sustaining Innovation with Stephanie Cartin – Episode

Transcript

Leah: Welcome to Her Story of Success, a podcast featuring stories from influential women, trailblazers and business leaders who have defined and pursued their own versions of success and fulfillment. I'm Leah Glover, Hayes, CEO, and podcast host of Her Story of Success women's business and media collective.

Today I'm excited to introduce you to Stephanie Cartin. She is the co-founder and co-CEO of Socialfly, a social-first digital and influencer agency in New York City. She's also the co-founder of MarKid, a marketplace app where parents can buy and sell kids' gently used items, and she's co-host of Entreprenista Podcast. Stephanie has also appeared or been featured on Bloomberg, Forbes, Entrepreneur.com, Refinery29 and Cheddar TV. She has been the winner of the Smart CEO Brava award and the winner of a Stevie Award for women-run workplace of the year. She sits on the boards of Million Dollar Women Fund, Neonatal Comfort Care Program and Cornell Entrepreneurship Advisory Council.

Wow. That is a lot. Welcome, Stephanie. We are so excited to have you today!

Stephanie: Thanks so much. I'm excited to be here.

Leah: Absolutely. So since I've met you, I've been excited because I feel like you're now a mentor for me. You've started a social media marketing company, you have a podcast, so I'm really excited to kind of dig into how you got started and maybe some advice that you have some for other entrepreneurs that are listening in.

Stephanie: Sure. So Socialfly is a social media marketing and influencer agency. So we specialize in creating social media strategies for brands, and then executing those strategies that we create on behalf of the brand. So we're doing everything from strategy, content creation, influencer marketing, paid media. We have an entire team that's dedicated to these services for the clients that we work with.

Leah: Awesome. And what size clients are you working with? Like what's your maybe smallest and largest?

Stephanie: Yeah. I mean, our clients really are all across the board. We do tend to work with larger clients now on a retainer basis, but we do have some clients like funded startups that are just starting out and they're in need of a social media strategy, they'll hire us to do strategy work. Sometimes clients will reach out to us specifically because they just need an agency to be able to run their paid media campaigns or run their influencer marketing programs. The majority of our clients, though, are working with us on a monthly retainer. And that can range from \$10,000 a month on up, just depending on what the level of work and service needs to be.

Leah: Awesome. So, yeah, how did you get started? I know that you and your partner have written a book and you've been featured on all these things, but how did that really get started for you?

Stephanie: Yeah. So I feel like I've just always been an entrepreneur from as far back as I can remember. You know, I think I got my first taste selling Girl Scout cookies at the age of seven when I was a brownie. And I still remember what it felt like to be recognized as a top seller. And I just realized, "Oh, you can find things that are trending and you can make money by selling them." So from there, you know, I moved on to friendship, bracelets and beanie babies and pugs, and I was always finding ways to build a business around things that were trending.

So starting a social media agency really came naturally to me because that was how I have been my entire life. So when I was in college is when Facebook first launched, and I was a sophomore at Cornell, and Facebook was only introduced to the Ivy league colleges when it first started. And I remember thinking, this is going to change everything I'm learning about in my marketing courses and in my business courses. I didn't quite know how back then, but I just always stayed on the forefront with everything that was happening with social media.

So fast forward, I graduated from college. I was still obsessed with Facebook, but was now working in corporate America. And I had a lot of friends who were starting businesses, and because of my background in sales and marketing, they started coming to me asking for help with sales and marketing strategies. And I started telling them, "You know, you really have to start using social media. This is going to be the way of the future." So I started putting together these social media strategies on the side of my full-time job and quickly realized that it was not just an after work

activity, it could be a real business. So Courtney, my business partner and I met through a mutual friend who was also an entrepreneur, named Susie, shoutout to Susie. And we became fast friends and realized that we both had opposite skillsets. We both had a passion for social media. I was already doing some stuff on the side, so we decided to partner together.

So Courtney and I were working nights and weekends working on some client projects on the side before we said, "Okay, if this is going to be a real business, we either have to go all in and do it or not do it at all. So after 10 months, we quit our corporate jobs on the same day, May 4th of 2012. And we handed in our two weeks notice and we never looked back. And that Monday we got to work, found a couple of really incredible interns that summer, and they helped us grow the business. Initially, when we first started, we bootstrapped. So we never raised any money. We've grown and scaled our company organically. And yeah, now we've been on the Inc 5,000 list the past few years in a row. So it's been a wild, exciting ride.

Leah: I love it. Let's talk a little bit about what that journey felt like, because I know a little bit of your story and I kind of want to get there about the struggles that you've gone through personally and how that affects business and how you show up. So in those early years, what did that look like when you got started?

Stephanie: Oh my gosh. So I was 26, 27 years old. Courtney was 23, 24 when we first started our business. So neither of us were married, we had no responsibilities except to be able to pay our rent and have food on the table and take care of ourselves. So we really had nothing to lose by starting the business. Courtney will tell you she had in her mind, "I'll give this three months. If this doesn't work, I can always go back and get a job." But in my mind, I'm like, "This is going to work." I didn't even think that way. So I just knew we would be able to, with our grit and hustle, we would be able to make it happen. And look, we were both very young, very naive in business. We didn't know what we didn't know. And we just were so excited to be starting this business. And I think our passion and energy really shined through, especially when we were, you know, joining networking groups. And I was going out to, you know, these networking meetings at 7:00 AM in the morning. And I had all of this energy and was just so excited to meet people and tell them about our business and grow the business. So it was definitely a different time in both of our lives. We've both really grown up in this

business. I feel like we were babies when we both started. And then, you know, I went on to meet my now husband, who I met actually right around the same time that I met Courtney. So, you know, Courtney has been there as I've, you know, dated my husband and then got married and then went through our struggles with fertility and then my complicated pregnancy, and then now being a new mom. So it's been a journey personally over the years. And like I said, we really grew up in, in business.

Leah: I love that. I do want to talk about one of the things that I admire about you two, is the fact that, and you have to in the social media, but I love that you two, I feel like are always innovating. You're always looking at the next thing. So a kind of two folded question on this. I know you're also the co-founder of Markid, and so I want to talk a little bit about what it looks like as a business owner to start another business or venture within your own company, because you also have *Entreprenista* podcast, you've created physical products, now you have a book. So talk to me a little bit about what that looks like growing your own brands within your company, or starting something outside of your company?

Stephanie: Yeah, absolutely. And I can give, you know, a lot of tips and advice just based on the learning lessons from doing this. Because Courtney and I say like, we're addicted to being *entreprenistas*. It is, we always have these ideas and there's so much that we want to do. And I feel like, you know with ideas, they're a dime in a dozen. And everyone has really great ideas, but it all comes down to the execution. And there's also only a certain amount of hours in a day to be able to accomplish everything that you want to do. So ideas are great, but you just have to start to make things happen. If you just let those ideas sit on paper and don't make anything happen, you know, it's not going to go anywhere, sitting on paper. So execution is definitely key. So when we started *Socialfly*, I've really always been this like big idea person. I always, like I said, I'm on the forefront of what's trending, what's going to be next. And I feel like because of that, it's almost like I can see the future. I see what's going to happen. And it typically does happen, but a lot of times we're like too early, because we're always on the forefront. We know what's going to come next. And sometimes you don't have to be first to market. You can see what other people are doing and then learn from that, or what we've done, we've done just a lot of testing and learning. So as an example, when we started *Socialfly*, and a few years in Facebook Live first launched, and we started a Facebook Live show right away, we're

like, "We're going to test this out. And if this works, you know, we'll share this with our clients." We've always been innovators with our own marketing for Socialfly, because we want to be able to try things out first and be able to present that to our clients.

Leah: I love that.

Stephanie: What ended up happening and why we then launched *Entreprenista* and the podcast, because of the success of our agency, Socialfly, we had so many female founders that were reaching out to us every single week, wanting to go out for coffee, wanting to pick our brain, wanting to get advice, and I'm the type of person, I like to help absolutely everyone, but we quickly realized if I were to go out to coffee with everyone that reached out, we would not have time to run our core business, which was Socialfly. So Courtney and I started thinking, you know, "How can we do this and help as many women as possible, but do this at scale? And not just share our stories, share the stories of all of these incredible female founders and women business leaders who are growing these incredible businesses or are leaders within these organizations and create really great rich content for these women that we can now easily send out links to people's episodes of the podcast, and again, they don't have to hear our story over and over again?" So we launched the podcast in November of 2018. And it really just took off, you know, from the moment we launched the first episode, and I think for a few reasons, two big reasons. The first, we own a marketing agency, so we knew how to market the podcast and built a really great community. So that helps. And two, we were creating this really great content and these stories of these women who were absolutely incredible and people genuinely wanted to share them because it's such great content. So when we started the podcast, it was really just this, you know, passion project. We wanted to do this to help women and, do that at scale, but it turned into what's now a business. So probably around the time when everything first happened with COVID towards the beginning of the year, we had surveyed our audience and they were sharing with us they just wanted more. The podcast was great, but they wanted it better, more resources, more information, more content. So we got to work building out our new *Entreprenista* website, and we had brands reaching out to us, they wanted to reach our women business owners and leaders. So we started putting together packages to be able to help these B2B companies who want to reach these women. And Courtney and I had to think, you know, this is now a business. It's not just a podcast

and content. So we've now turned the Entreprenista Podcast into Entreprenista Media and set up a whole separate company. And the process of doing that, you know, was similar to when we started Socialfly. But now we just had a lot of, we had many years of experience and a lot of learnings from doing that. So, you know, we started a new LLC. We had to of course, reach out to our accountant, do new paperwork, deal with trademarks. A lot of those logistics there.

Leah: Oh, all the logistics on starting a new business. I love that. How does it take away or add to what you're already doing? And I know that you have a business on the side too. So what does that look like? How do you split your time or be able to do all of that?

Stephanie: With Socialfly, we've really scaled our business now. And in terms of what my role and responsibility has always been at Socialfly, it's been business development and marketing the agency. Well, we have an incredible leadership team and Caitlin on our team, who's been with us for six years, who has been working under me this entire time on the new business side is now running all new business and marketing, and I've been able to now focus on Entreprenista, so I'm really running with everything with Entreprenista and growing the Entreprenista brand while Courtney is still leading finance and operations and the day-to-day of Socialfly. And then Katelyn on our team is now overseeing all sales and marketing. So I've been able to almost scale myself out of the day-to-day to be able to then focus on Entreprenista, and then as you mentioned, a couple other ventures as well.

So my next tip is time-blocking and setting different hours of the day for different projects that you're working on, and making sure that everything is time blocked so you can stay very organized and focused. We just started using a new project management software called Asana.

Leah: Yes. That's what we use. Love it.

Stephanie: Yes. Which has been game changing. We just started using it, and that's been really helpful as well. So you can really see what everyone's working on and what's on everyone's plate when certain things are, you know how much bandwidth people have? So yeah, project management and time blocking when you are involved in different ventures is important. And then like I said, Courtney and I always

have all of these ideas, but you need people to be able to execute them. And there's only a certain amount of hours in the day. So finding really great talent and people who are even smarter than you and can do more than you can do. I would say don't be shy to invest in the right talent. That's going to help move your business forward.

Leah: A hundred percent agree. People are like, "What are you, how you do that?" And I'm like, "I hire people cause I cannot do all the things by myself."

Stephanie: Yeah.

Leah: Let's talk a little bit about the innovation piece too. I know that COVID probably hit your business, maybe not since you're in marketing, but it probably hits some of your client's businesses. So, and you all are based out of New York City, you had an office. So, what did that look like once it started happening and how did you (A) deal with it, but then (B) say, "Okay, we're going to stay positive and innovative and continue to grow." I mean, you've grown your business through this. Not just survived, but have been thriving.

Stephanie: Absolutely. I would say having a positive mindset and outlook in any type of situation is key to getting through absolutely anything. And it's in my DNA, I think it's in Courtney's DNA, we're problem solvers, and we try to find and make the best out of any situation.

I will take you back to March, which was probably, definitely a traumatic time for most business owners, because there was just so much unknown about, of course the virus about what was going to happen in everyone's business. And I remember just being very, very scared personally, and for our business, because as a business owner, I'm responsible for all of our incredible hardworking employees that we employ.

I'm also responsible for the marketing for all of these brands that are trusting in us to create their strategies and execute them. And then I also have my family, and I'm responsible to keep them happy and healthy and safe. So when everything happened in March, it was definitely very traumatic. I feel like I had just been through a very traumatic year the year before with everything that happened to me personally. And here we go again, but I did learn a lot from my ability to stay calm

and positive, going through my traumatic fertility and pregnancy experience that I think really helped me deal with all of the uncertainty and unknown with COVID.

So in March, like so many businesses, we closed our physical office, and then we quickly had to pivot to become a remote workforce, again, like so many business owners. So it's definitely not easy. We were making decisions every single day. We were having calls with our accountant, with our business attorney and really leaning into that circle that we have always trusted. Something that I also did at the time was I set up a weekly agency owner check-in call with our other partner agencies that we've worked with for years. So I set this up right away. I remember I said to Courtney, I'm like, "I should, we should set up just a reoccurring call with all of our like close entrepreneur, business partner friends and agency partners." And we all helped each other. And we problem solved. And we talked about things that were going on in our businesses and how we could help each other. So that was something that I looked forward to every week, because it was like, you know, having our own support group.

Leah: Oh, that's huge. I mean that, and that's what I wanted to ask too. I mean, I think that you and Courtney are very fortunate that you are partners because you do have complimentary skill sets and you probably are able to have that great relationship. And I'm assuming that you get support from one another also. But do you also, outside of her have your own mastermind group or a group of CEOs that you can talk about things with outside of her?

Stephanie: We have a business coach, Leslie, who we've worked with for years now. And Leslie used to be the Vistage chair because we were also in Vistage, which if you're familiar with that organization was a wonderful organization. So I was the member of that group. So every month I was then connected to all of these other CEOs, and we would talk about, you know, our business challenges and we would all help each other. We've been part of several groups, similar to Vistage. And one of the first groups we became part of, originally, it was an under-30 CEO group back when we first started the business and now we've all grown up together. So it is not that anymore. But that group was called Strategic Exchange, and it used to be an in-person breakfast meeting in New York city every single month. And now it's a virtual zoom meeting every single month and we call it, you know, business support, business therapy, that's what a lot of these groups become. But having Leslie as a

business coach has been so incredible for us. I mean, having a business partner, it's like a marriage, and you know, there's definitely ups and downs. You know, communication is so key. And there's going to be times that you have conversations that are uncomfortable or things that you have to talk about that it's like really hard to talk about. Like God forbid, something happens to one of us. Like you have to have an operating agreement and have all of these things in place when you have a business. So Leslie's just been so helpful to help us with that communication and with decision-making, and I highly recommend a great business coach.

Leah: I want to dig into two things. One, I do want to dig into the business coach and how you chose her, what that relationship looks like. Cause people like me, I'm in the process of considering what does that look like to hire a business coach? But the other thing is, then I want to dig into, what are some of those hard times you've had as a business owner with a partner, because there are some scary conversations, you know, have you ever talked about bringing on an additional partner or if you were trying to expand the business or what that looks like? But let's start with the business coach. Like what does that relationship look like for you and what made you decide to get a business coach and why her?

Stephanie: Yeah, so we met Leslie, I think it was someone in our BNI networking group that we were in when we first started our business had introduced us. So we met Leslie, and I think we just kind of knew instantly, like she was just, she was just awesome. You know when you have that connection and you click with someone, and of course she had the recommendations and the credentials, and we just felt really comfortable with her. She also had previously owned a PR agency, so she really understood our business. So that was really important. So we're talking, we're going back like eight, nine years I think. And I can barely remember yesterday. So, I think we did Vistage for about a year. And then I think we hired her after that to stay on and do a coaching with us. And then there was a period of time where we weren't doing coaching, and then we could really feel it, like when we weren't investing with her and spending at least an hour or two a month, you feel the difference. Having those check-ins with her is amazing. So when everything first happened with COVID, we made sure that we had those regular check-ins on the books, and she helped us with our whole move and everything to Florida. You know, we said to Leslie, we want to

figure out what's most important to us personally and professionally and make a plan to do that. And she helped us work through all of that stuff.

Leah: Wait, so did you move to Florida or just Courtney?

Stephanie: We both did.

Leah: What? Ok, let's talk about that. So COVID hits you're in New York city and you, you change your life. I do want to get into the conversation about your family and some of the struggles that you had, because that's a topic that come up a couple of times, and maybe let's start with that, and then we'll talk about the move to Florida. Cause I have been following you and your little girl is one of the cutest things I've ever seen in my whole life. Like she is so sweet and so precious. And I think knowing the story of how she, she got here is even more inspiring. But share with us a little bit about, you know, you've had this company for a while. You've been married for a few years, and when you started trying to have kids, maybe what was that like in the beginning of trying to have kids and then, and then what, what happened with your fertility journey?

Stephanie: Sure. So, I mean, as far back as I can remember in my childhood, I always knew that I wanted to be a mom. I feel like that was my life's purpose. And I always said I wanted to start a business and work as hard as possible so I can be in control of our future and our financial picture as well. And I just never wanted to sacrifice the time that I would be able to spend with a little one.

So my biggest fear in life was also always that I would not be able to get pregnant, or I would have difficulty getting pregnant. So when that actually became a reality, it was extremely hard. When we first started the business, something I didn't share is that I was actually diagnosed with MS right when we first started Socialfly.

Leah: You were young.

Stephanie: Yes. Yes. Very young. 27. I just turned 27. I got diagnosed the week of my 27th birthday. And I will say that going through my experience with infertility was a lot harder for me than being diagnosed with MS. Because as I said, all I ever wanted was to have a family and to be a mom. And that was my life's purpose. So my husband and I started trying to get pregnant a few years after getting married, but something

that I had done because of my health history, I went and got genetic testing, just to be sure that we had, you know, no issues. That initial tests came back and showed that I was a premutation carrier for something called Fragile X, which is actually only passed down from the mom. So it didn't matter if Greg matched that. it could get passed down. So we ended up going to a reproductive endocrinologist that a friend of mine had referred me to. And at that time I didn't have any friends who had done IVF. I had one friend who had done IVF. And she's the one that referred me to her doctor. I didn't do any research. I didn't look up anything online. Like just very not, it was just not like me. I was just going on her word. You know, she had two beautiful children and used this doctor, so that was my doctor. So we go to him and he shares, with this condition if you do IVF, you can do genetic testing of the embryos ahead of time and be certain that it won't get passed down. And then I had started to do some research and met with another genetic counselor and found out that the chances of it being passed down were so low with the second testing that we did, that we decided that we would just try to get pregnant on our own. And I didn't want to have to go the IVF route if we didn't need to. So now we try to get pregnant for about a year and nothing happens. And again, I didn't know much about getting pregnant or all the ins and outs of everything, you know, you know what you you're told in what high school, you know, if you have sex, you can get pregnant, be careful. Yeah. But it doesn't really work that way.

Leah: Then you find out it's like only like between one and three days a month.

Stephanie: Yeah. So we go back a year later, we go back to this doctor and he was like, "Oh, you're back." And I remember right away, Greg was like, "I don't think this is the right doctor for us, the way he spoke to us, the way he is like this isn't right." But in my mind, I was just so desperate to just believe that this doctor could help us have our family. And again, I hadn't done any research. I was just going on the reference of one friend, because I hadn't seen anyone talking about fertility or infertility on Instagram or on Facebook. It wasn't a couple of years ago as open and as large of a community as it is right now. So fast forward, because I mean, this is probably a three-hour podcast for the whole story, which happy to do a whole separate episode on the

Leah: Maybe we should. Absolutely. I mean, you know that I'm suffering from that now, and I'm very interested in this conversation, because your life affects your work.

Stephanie: Yep.

Leah: And so I think this is so important for anybody listening. That is, even if it's not infertility, something that you're struggling with personally, that is so important.

Stephanie: It was so hard. And, you know, going through, with doctors and all of the appointments and the blood work, and you're just waiting for calls to find out what your blood work is or what your, you know, how many eggs you have or how your lining is. And your life is just based around all of these numbers and phone calls and emails from the fertility clinic. And it's another full time job. And I was very lucky in the fact that I own my business and I didn't report to anyone and have to like, explain where I was in the morning. I mean, I told our staff and people knew what I was going through because I that's just how I am and I share, and I believe that's important and that's how we build community and support. But I know, you know, I have friends who are, you know, hiding it from their employers when they're going through this. And that is just so, so, so hard.

And when we were first going through everything, I hadn't publicly shared what I was going through on Instagram or on Facebook yet, because I was so, like the trauma of going through this and just wanting something so desperately that you can't control, you can only control a part of it, was so hard. And then I met this woman. Her name is Andrea Syrtash, and we met through Facebook and Facebook groups. And she has a company called Pregnantish, which is a website that shares all of these stories of all different types of people that are going through fertility complications. And we met, and I started reading these articles and I said to her, I'm like, "Thank you for creating this platform. Like I finally don't feel alone, because I had felt so alone." And she said to me, "You know, I would love to share your story and what you're going through with our audience. I think people would really relate." Because I said to her what I said to you, you know, my MS diagnosis was easier for me to deal with and going through infertility. And so we did a whole piece together on Pregnantish, and that's when I publicly shared what I was going through. And that was towards like, sort of towards the beginning of my infertility journey. We had just done a couple of IUIs at that point, we hadn't started IVF. And then I started publicly sharing through social what I was

going through, because I was like, "You know what? If I can help other people by sharing my journey and my experience, like there has to be a reason why I'm going through this," and I'm the type of person that just wants to be able to help, as you know, as many, as many people as I can through my journey and experience. But what ends up happening was, if I had not shared what I was going through in my journey and experience, I would not have my daughter. Because of social media, I was able to meet other women who were like, when I was diagnosed with something called endometritis, I had women reached out to me that shared the right protocol that they were on, because the antibiotics that I was given didn't work. I was connected to certain doctors that ended up figuring out certain things that were going on. And then once we had our very complicated pregnancy, the same thing. Molly's here because of these incredible women that I met through Facebook and Instagram.

Leah: That's a really good point that, you know, sometimes when you share something that's difficult or hard, it's through sharing that you get what you need to get through what you're going through, right? To like make it to that other side. And I mean, I can't imagine the healing that you went through and experience, and also that other people got to experience through hearing your story, because to your point, sometimes when you know you're not alone, it's not that it doesn't hurt, but there's just this level of understanding. And I shared when, you know, when I went through my miscarriage, I think because I had had so many people share with me their experience, and my mom had had a miscarriage, my sister, my sister-in-law. I knew so many women that had gone through that and that went on to have children, that it helped me understand that this wasn't the end, right? Like, I mean, it still hurt, and it was still awful and there was still like a hundred percent complete devastation. But it didn't make me lose hope. Does that make sense? So I love that you shared. So as you're going through this journey, what did it look like as the CEO? Like, do you have any experiences, like you just had a bad visit and then you have a meeting or something like how, how did you deal with the heavy work stuff and important, like running your company while you're going through the hardest thing in your life? Because the journey was a long time. How long did you go through that?

Stephanie: It was, it is not easy. It was a couple of years. So it's several years in business from fertility to then getting pregnant, then having this very complicated

pregnancy. I was on bed rest for 17 weeks, six at home 11 in the hospital, so I was out of my office. And then Courtney was obviously running everything on the day-to-day, and I was working from home and then working from the hospital, which of course put a lot of pressure on Courtney and on the business. And that was really hard. But you know, when I was going through all the fertility treatments every month, just having the, you know, bad news every single month when I wasn't pregnant, one month after the next, but I just kept having hope and a positive attitude. I'm like, "Okay, it'll be next month. It'll be next month." And just focusing on going forward. But I had to compartmentalize a lot, you know, I would be at the fertility doctor in the morning and then be at my office by nine o'clock and just go about my day. Obviously, there were days when I'm staring at my phone, waiting for waiting for my phone to ring from my doctor, waiting for an email. And it, you know, it can be distracting, but I also had a business to run and clients to serve and a business partner to be there for two and my team to be there for it as well. So just staying positive, and I think running a business prepared me to go through a really hard time with infertility, because I feel like you have to manage so many moving parts and you have to, you know, be very organized, um, and you know how to deal with disappointment. And then going through my complicated pregnancy, then prepared me to deal with it business during this time for COVID. So everything kind of just comes full circle.

Leah: And it comes in waves. I feel like

Stephanie: Right.

Leah: I love that you can see the correlation between what you went through and how it prepared you for what you're in now. And so I would love to know what you've gone through with COVID and being a business owner. What do you think that you're prepared for next?

Stephanie: I genuinely feel like after going through my very complicated pregnancy, I can pretty much handle absolutely anything. I just feel like I know how to problem solve, to stay resilient, to stay positive. I just genuinely believe there's a solution for absolutely everything. I don't take no for an answer. I just try to figure out how, how to make it happen. There's always a solution. You just have to be resourceful and figure out what that solution is. And if you don't have the answer, that's okay. Someone else

might have it. You just have to put it out there and ask. And I always have hope. Like I genuinely believe people are genuinely good people, and you surround yourself with good people, and you hold on to hope and a positive attitude, and you can get through absolutely anything.

Leah: Oh, I appreciate that. We've got a few more minutes and I want to wrap up talking about maybe what failure has felt like for you, because you are a super optimistic person and I am too. And so I think sometimes it's easy to be like, "Oh, well, she just has a good attitude. She doesn't let anything bother her, get her down." Or maybe you haven't really felt the sting of failure because you started your business, you had customers right away. It doesn't sound like you really had any valleys or like really hard things. So can you share some of like the failures and what that felt like and did you lose confidence?

Stephanie: Oh my gosh. That's another whole episode. Courtney and I have been through so so much. And you know, again, the reason we started our podcast is because we want people to learn from all of the lessons that not only we've learned, but all of these business owners have learned, because running a business is definitely not as glamorous as it looks on Instagram, because you can follow any entrepreneur, and professional photos and all of the wins, but there are some low, low, low, lows. And I would say some of the hardest things that Courtney and I went through, like I said, I was on bed rest for 17 weeks. Courtney was now running this business and the day-to-day of the business with our entire team. And I couldn't physically come into the office. That was a really hard time for both of us in different ways, because for me personally, I'm going through this traumatic time personally, and we didn't know what the outcome of our pregnancy would be and if Molly would be okay. And I also had this guilt of, I can't be in our office and in the day to day and helping Courtney, I could only do what I could do from my hospital room. So, you know, that was one really challenging time. And we learned a lot from that in business. And as I mentioned before, about making sure, you know, you have an operating agreement and what does happen if someone can't work for a certain period of time, or God forbid something tragic happens to someone, like you need to have these things in place for your business and contingency plans, which we didn't have all of that in place. We now do. We had an operating agreement. We just hadn't really talked about, you know, what happens if one of us can't work for a certain

period of time. Now, look, I was still working. I was just working remotely from my hospital bed, but I couldn't be in the office. I couldn't be in person doing meetings and doing things to help there. So yeah, I mean, after, after Molly was born, we then had those conversations and we worked with our business attorney to update our operating agreement, to figure out what that looks like. And those can be, you know, tougher, uncomfortable conversations, but they're important. And you should have those in the beginning when you are first starting a business. So that way you just can have plans in place and look, you can't plan for absolutely everything. It's not possible, but you can definitely do your best. And we've had ups and downs over the years, of course, like with employees and with clients and so many things. I mean, I feel like there's just learning lessons every single day.

Leah: Yeah. With the employees. I know that's something that every business owner has dealt with. What was maybe the hardest lesson that you learned about having employees or hiring or firing?

Stephanie: People always said this to us. No one is ever going to care about your business as much as you are, as much as the founders are. Of course, there are employees who are incredible superstars, who, you know, will like live and breathe your mission and your company, but you can't expect your employees to work at the same level and have the same commitment as you do as founders. And sometimes that can be hard, because as type A founders where we're just go getters and want to surround ourselves with people who are like us, not everyone's like that. And just, you have to be okay with that and find what people's strengths are and give them the opportunity to do more of what they do really well.

And then investing in your employees is something that's just very important to us. I did work in corporate America before we started our business and I took away a lot of really great, positive learnings from my experience at some big companies. And then I also took away some things I would never want to have happen at our company. And we've just made a very conscious effort to be sure that we are always investing in our employees, making sure they know their career path and feel valued. It's just very important to us.

Leah: What does investing into your employees look like for you?

Stephanie: Sure. So over the past few years, we give our employees a learning budget every year. So if they want to take outside courses to be able to learn new skills, that can help them with their work. We also, especially now over the past year with COVID, we've invested in a coach for our team. We are always of course, checking in our employees, making sure that they feel like they're learning and getting to that next level and feel valued. And now virtually, we're doing a lot of different types of events too, to keep everyone together and keep that family like bond going at least with what we can do over zoom.

Leah: I love it. That's great. I love the learning aspect. I've done that for, right now I just have some 1099s cause I don't have enough work to have full-time people, and they each have other people that they work with, but that's one of the things I'm like, "Hey, if there's something that you're wanting to learn, that's going to benefit my company. If you learn it, then you know, that's something that we'll pay for through the company, because it would help you do your job better. Like, what is it that you're trying to, skills you're trying to gain or things that you're trying to learn? I definitely love that.

Well, any other guidance or advice that you have for women entrepreneurs that are trying to grow their business? I think a lot of women that listen to this have already started their company. Maybe if they've been in business for a year or two, like what are the things that you can help with maybe on a marketing standpoint, in today's age of, what are some of the things that you would suggest as a business owner of a marketing company?

Stephanie: The first thing is that there's going to be so many learning lessons and ups and downs in business. And if you believe in your mission and your business and see a path forward, don't let some of the hard times get you down and stop you. I like to encourage people to write down all of these learning lessons, because it's so easy to get caught up in the day-to-day and to forget. So just start and don't give up, keep going. There's so much opportunity that is out there for everyone. And even in hard times, like what we've all been going through this past year, there are ways to pivot and to change your business and make it even better. So finding a path forward is, is always possible. We bootstrapped our business, as I mentioned for Socialfly when, when we first started, and that definitely came with a lot of challenges

and hurdles. Something that we did realize several years in is that we wish we had invested in senior talent sooner. And we were always reinvesting back into the business, and we didn't pay ourselves a market salary for many years when we had first started Socialfly, but we started growing our team from the bottom up instead of from the top down, and looking back, that's something that we wish we had invested in senior talent earlier on, we think that would have helped us. And the value of having a network of other founders or entrepreneurs, people that you can talk to and lean on, especially during challenging times. When COVID first started, and we got a whole group of our agency and our friends together for a weekly call to be able to brainstorm, to be able to help each other. Having that support is so important, especially for solo founders who don't have a co-founder. To feel like you have that community and support is so important. And again, that's another reason why we have this entrepreneurial community now because we're all able to be there for each other and help learn from one another and help support each other.

Leah: I love that. Well, I appreciate your time today. I have just two more questions that I always ask one, where can we find you on the socials and the internet? And then the last question I'll ask you is how do you define success today?

Stephanie: Oh my gosh. Okay. Great question. So you can find me personally on social media everywhere at Steph Jill Cartin. That's on LinkedIn and Facebook and Twitter and Instagram. And then we have a few company accounts and I'll just list out all of the Instagram handles. So for Socialfly we're @Socialfly. For Entreprenistas we're @entreprenistas on Instagram. And then we didn't talk too much about Digicards, but Markid is our app for pre loved items for baby and kids, and that's @hellomarkid, and Digicards is @hellodigicards on Instagram.

Leah: And how do you define success today?

Stephanie: Oh my goodness. How do I define success today? Well, I have always said this to my husband, success is really different for everyone. And you have to define it in order to eventually feel like you have achieved it. To me, I define success as waking up every single day being excited about what's next, my life personally, and professionally. And I already feel like I have created the life that I've always wanted to have. I know there is so much more that's ahead and things that I'm excited about,

but I do wake up every day, excited and happy. And to me, that's, what's important to me and how I define success in my life.

Leah: I love it. I feel like we're sisters from another Mister. I'm just like, I think I'm older than you, but I'm like, I just feel like maybe I'm your big sister. But I just, I enjoy you. I love what you're doing. Socialfly and Entreprenista and Markid. And I just appreciate you spending your time and being a mentor to all of us. So thank you, Stephanie Cartin!

Stephanie: Well, thank you so much.