

S2: E179: The Identity Shift From Business Owner to Thought Leader

Hey there, and welcome back to the *Make Your Message a Movement* podcast. This is your host, Tiffany Neuman, and I am so excited for this episode because it's going to be very juicy.

One of the things that we don't often think about or talk about in branding and business—at least at the level that we need to—is why being visible and doing the "right thing" doesn't always lead to the opportunities you expect. Over the last few episodes, we talked about visibility and how being seen doesn't necessarily translate to sales. We talked about what happens when someone finds you—that moment they're quietly deciding whether you're the right fit—and then we went a layer deeper into what it actually costs you when something in your brand experience isn't aligned.

If you've been listening to the show and thinking, "Yes, this is exactly what I've been feeling, but I couldn't quite name it," this is the piece that brings all of that together. If you're new here, hello! This episode stands on its own, but I invite you to listen to the past few episodes if you have the capacity.

At a certain point, it stops being just about strategy. At my core, I'm a brand strategist, but there's so much more at play. It stops being about adjusting the headline, refining a message, or trying a different approach to visibility or a new platform. It becomes something much more foundational: it becomes about who you're being in your business and whether that actually matches the next level that you're stepping into.

We all evolve; that is an ongoing human experience. We're consistently striving for that next level. Some of us strive really hard—that was me in the corporate world. Now, I've learned it feels much better not to work so hard. But no matter your approach, we all want to do the best we can.

Think about it like building a house. It was designed for one stage of your life, and then you realize you've outgrown it. At first, it works. Maybe you bought it when you were single or newly married. Over time, you make small updates—you paint, you rearrange things. Maybe you have a child or a dog, so you turn the guest room into a nursery. For a while, that's enough. But eventually, you reach a point where no amount of rearranging solves the problem.

Perhaps you have a second child, or you bring on a roommate. This is where the structure itself wasn't designed for what you're now experiencing. That's what this moment in business often feels like. There's nothing wrong with the structure—it's not unlivable—but what you built was designed for an earlier version of you.

I experienced this myself. For most of my career, I worked behind the scenes helping big brands like Adidas and Burt's Bees get their products in front of the masses. I was doing high-level work and was known as an authority in that space; people looked to me for trend predictions. It was the life I dreamed of, but I wasn't visible myself.

When I started my own business, I kept that behind-the-scenes mentality. My job was to shine the light on my clients. It worked at first; I got clients and referrals because I knew what I was doing. But there came a point where I felt something needed to change. I couldn't rely on just a referral here and there. I wanted to speak on stages and help people make their message a movement, but I wasn't ready to do that for myself yet.

I wanted to be known—not from an ego standpoint, but so it wouldn't be so hard to get clients. When you are seen as an authority, people automatically refer you and book calls because you're a proven resource. Looking back, I was still operating from a "business owner" identity in a season that was calling me to "thought leadership."

When you're operating as a business owner, the mindset is: "This works well enough," or "People get what I do." There's nothing wrong with that, but when you aspire to be a thought leader, the standard shifts. Your brand must match the caliber of the work you're actually doing. This shift isn't always comfortable because it requires you to ask: "Does this represent me at the level I'm stepping into? Am I creating IP (intellectual property) that positions me as the expert? Am I developing a 'Category of One' brand?"

In the age of AI, this is especially important. I made a joke recently that I can't take anyone seriously if they have a program named "Create Her" (with the C and H capitalized), because I've seen that same name a hundred times and know it came directly from ChatGPT.

To be a thought leader, we need to start internally with our identity and pull out our own IP. We all have unique IP within us, but it's often hard to mine because we're too close to our own work to have an objective view. Most people are great at their work, but they find it difficult to codify.

For me, things changed when I stopped thinking about visibility as something to increase and started paying attention to how I was being experienced. I stopped asking, "How do I get more people to see this?" and started asking, "What happens when they *do* see it?" More eyeballs on something subpar or misaligned won't help.

The shift is never about hustling harder; it's about becoming clearer, more trusted, and positioning yourself for the opportunities you dream of. That's when things opened up for me. I went from being unknown to being featured in *Forbes* and *Entrepreneur*, and receiving consistent requests for podcasts and stages like Podfest.

Those opportunities weren't created by overextending myself; they were created by coming into alignment, giving myself permission, and shifting my identity. If you aren't stepping into the authority and energetics that go along with your message, it won't convert the same way.

Once that identity shift happens, your decisions, standards, and boundaries change. You're no longer okay with "good enough." You start to see your brand as something that needs to stand on its own in rooms you aren't in yet.

If you're working on a book, aiming for bigger stages, or launching a higher-level offer, you need to be seen at a different level. In my upcoming Authority Gap Workshop, we are going to identify exactly where your authority gap exists and what needs to shift so your brand reflects your true caliber.

Over three sessions, we'll walk through where your authority is being underestimated and how your positioning needs to evolve. This identity shift doesn't happen in isolation; it happens through awareness and guidance. I've helped hundreds of clients with this, and I'd love to support you.

The workshop is part of the *Brand Clarity Series*. It is normally \$197, but for this community, I'm providing a special page where it is only \$47 to join. If you're ready for bigger rooms and bigger conversations, this is where you align yourself to step into them. I'll put the link in the show notes.

I can't wait to work hand-in-hand with you to craft your authority. You don't step into the next level by waiting; you step into it by taking action to become unmistakable.

We'll see you next time, and hopefully, we'll see you soon at the workshop.