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You're listening to the Tiny Course Empire Podcast with Cindy Bidar. This is episode number 34, and today we're talking all about the lessons that I've learned on the way to 500 members, some of them were not so easy for me to learn. Stick around, I'll tell you all about them.

Welcome to the Tiny Course Empire Podcast, a weekly show dedicated to helping you launch and grow your digital course business. Even if you don't have a big team or a six-figure ads budget, we'll help you design smart systems, take consistent action and achieve massive success on your own terms. Now, here's your host, Cindy Bidar.

Hey! Welcome back to the Tiny Course Empire Podcast. I am your host, Cindy Bidar. You will find show notes and recommended resources for this episode at TinyCourseEmpire.com/34. If you're new here, welcome to the show, I am super excited to have you join us, and if you've listened to a few episodes, welcome back. I am glad to have you here as well. Whether you're brand new or you've been with us a while, be sure to hit the Subscribe button so you don't miss any upcoming episodes. Coming up next week, I have a really special episode where I am hosting my first ever interview guest. I've never done that before on this show, and this is not really an interview show, but it's a really important message, and I can't wait for you to hear that so be sure to hit the Subscribe button because you're not going to want to miss that. But that is next week.

This week, we're talking all about membership sites, and if you are new here, you may not know that I have a membership site, it's called Six-figure Systems. And earlier this year, we hit a huge milestone in that program, and we welcomed our 500th member to the site, so I'm super excited about that. It's something I have been working towards for the past three and a half years, very consistently, always aiming for that number. And I'm really excited to have reached that and I've gotten some questions, I talked about it inside the site, inside the program, I've talked about it on our Q and A calls, and I've had some questions from people asking me how I got there. And honestly, how I got there is really pretty simple. It is all about showing up consistently.

Now, you guys know I talk about being consistent all the time, I think it is the number one skill that any business owner can have is just to show up consistently. And by consistently, what that means for me is consistently creating new courses, I create and release a new course, it has been every single month, now we've branched out, we're doing some workshops within the program, we're also

releasing additional courses, I've got some other things in the works. But the point is, I am consistently releasing new content to my members to keep the value up. I consistently show up for live calls, we do twice a month, live Q and A calls on the first Thursday and the third Monday of every single month, and those calls happen without fail.

I can remember one time that I cancelled a single call and it was when my dad passed away, so I think I can be forgiven for that, but otherwise those calls happen. My members know that those calls are going to happen, they're on the schedule and I will be there for them. So showing up consistently in that way is really important when you're trying to build a business. Also, consistent branding and style, and that means that all of my courses look like my courses. People look at them and they know immediately, that is from Six Figure Systems, and that goes for content as well. And my voice and the way that I show up for people, it's all very, very consistent. And what I talk about is also very consistent, people know who are in Six-Figure Systems, know that I'm not going to talk to them about how to start an Etsy shop, I'm not going to talk to them about how to run Facebook ads, I'm not going to talk to them about how to publish books on Kindle. I don't do those things. And my customers know that, my members know that and they know exactly what to expect from me, and that's exactly what they get. And that includes being real about what it takes to grow a business. My customers, my members know that I am not there to kind of blow sunshine up their skirt and say, Oh, all you have to do is push this button and you're going to make a million dollars in 35 minutes.

It doesn't work that way. You have to show up consistently, you have to put the work in, you have to put the time in, you have to put the effort in, and all of that will pay off, but it takes time. There is no easy button, and my members appreciate that I tell it like it is. It may not always be what you want to hear, but it is the truth, so that's how I show up consistently for my members. And I believe that it is that showing up consistently that has really led to the sales that we've had and to the membership that we have in two of those 500 and growing members, and I'm looking forward to continuing to serve them in that way. I'm really looking forward to continuing to grow the membership into continuing to showing up consistently for them every single week. So that's the how of it, but honestly, what I learned along the way is way more important because those lessons feed into how I continue to improve the program, and the more it improves, the more people I can help thinking about this today. I can look back and I can spot the things that I've learned, and if you have a membership site or if you're thinking of starting one, you would do well to keep these lessons in mind too.

So the first thing I learned, and I learned this really early on, is that more is not

better sometimes, and especially with membership sites, sometimes with courses, but truly, truly, it happens with membership sites more often, is we want to just add more. We want to create more meetings we want to have a bigger forum, we want to create more content, we want to add a private podcast, and we want to add private blog posts, and we want to have live meetups, and we want to add all of these things. But what really happens is your customers, your members just get overwhelmed with all that there is inside, and this is something that we continue to struggle with within six figure systems, if I'm being honest. We hear from some members sometimes who say, there is so much in here, I don't even know where to start, and that's probably true. There's 50 plus courses and there's toolkits, and there's hundreds of hours of Q and A call replays and just all kinds of resources in there for you if you are looking to build your online business. But it's a lot. It is a lot to take in.

So if you are considering starting a membership, and this is something I wish I would have done early on, is thought more about this instead of adding more. Just be really strategic and really intentional about the content that you do add, do you really need to have weekly meetings, do you really need to have a forum? Will it serve your members or are you just going for that thud factor, are you just going for that, look at this big box of stuff you get, isn't it exciting? If you're going after that, then you're probably not serving your members well, so be super intentional about it. This is something that I wish I had done from the start, is just to be more intentional about what I included in the membership.

Because here's the thing, you can always add more to a membership, especially if you've got something like a monthly membership happening, you can always have more resources to that, but it is very difficult to take things away because you have sold people on that bunch of stuff that you are offering, and if you try to take it away down the road, then it just looks bad and it can cause your ongoing members to not be very happy with you. So more is not always better. Start with less, start with what Pat Flynn would call that minimum viable product and build up from there. And that's something that I wish I would have known from the beginning.

The next lesson I had to learn was to accept feedback, and by accepting feedback, I mean to accept feedback even when it's not what I want to hear, and even when I think people are wrong. Years ago, I used to work with a business coach as her virtual assistant, and I remember one time she invited a group of people to come to a focus group to tell her all of the things that they thought were wrong with her membership with her group coaching program. And I remember thinking at the time that she was really brave to do that because it can be really intimidating to invite people to tell you what they think you're doing wrong or what is not working

for them. And I have since learned that in business, you really have to do that sometimes, and I have invited focus groups to meet with me and tell me what they think could be improved in Six-Figure Systems too, and it is really valuable information because we're seeing things from the inside, I'm seeing the membership from the inside I built it from the ground up.

I know every single corner of that membership, I know where all the links are, I know where all the buttons are, and know where all the courses are, I know how they're organized, I know everything about it. But somebody else who is a member who may be just joined doesn't have the insight that I have and asking for and accepting feedback from them helps me improve it in a way that I can't do. With all of the knowledge that I have about it, I'm too close to the subject and I cannot see the fault, I can't see the gaps, I can't see the places where it's confusing or where it doesn't make sense to people, or where it could be more clear.

So asking for that feedback and being open to receiving it and being open to thinking about things in a different way, not being so emotionally attached to the way that I've done something has been really helpful in changing the membership. Especially the content that we create and the way it's organized, it's been really helpful in re-arranging that kind of stuff so that it's more valuable to the actual members and not just the vision of what I think it should look like, right? So being able to accept feedback even when it hurts, and even when it doesn't make sense to me, and even when I think, Well, that's really nonsense, it should be this way. That's been really important. It's been a really, really big lesson for me, and I think it's helped me in other ways as well.

I also had to learn to ask for help. Now, I mentioned that I built that website and that members area all on my own, literally me, even my husband helping me, he helps me out now he handles all of that stuff. I haven't done anything with any membership site or website code in probably a couple of years, because he does all of that, which is amazing. But when I first built it, it was all Me, I did it all. So being able to ask for help and getting someone else to do some of those things, to take some of those things off of my plate has been really valuable. But it's really hard to do, it's really hard to turn over something that you've worked so hard on to turn that over to someone else, or to trust someone else to do it the way that you want to do it. Even when I turned over audio editing to someone else, it was really hard for me to let go of that project because I'd been doing it on my own. Not that I was doing it really well, but I'd been doing it on my own, and it was hard to let go of that project to let somebody else take over, let somebody else who could do it better than me. Just do it and run with it and not micro-manage them. So learning to ask for help has been a huge, huge lesson for me, and it's something that I continue to have to work on and continue to have to learn.

I also learned that user experience matters more than what I think is right or good or makes sense. Probably the biggest example I have of that is several years ago, a friend of mine said to me, she was reading a blog post, not one of my blog posts, but she read someone's blog post and she commented to me that she had downloaded a PDF version of the blog post, and I thought Who downloads a PDF version of a blog post to read later? I just read the blog post and I move on, and that's what everybody does because of course, I'm everybody, right. I'm being sarcastic there. I'm not everybody and you're not everybody, and some people do download PDF versions of blog posts to read later, so on a whim, I bought a little tool called Post Gopher, It's a little plug-in that you'll find on my blog at CindyBidar.com, and what that does, is it allows you to click a button and download a PDF version of whatever blog post you happen to be reading, and I will tell you what - I get so many comments about that little plug-in. People just love it, they think it's amazing that they can download a PDF version of a blog post to save for later or to read later.

This is not something I would ever do. I see this plug-in on other people's blogs from time to time, I never use it, I never download a PDF version. If I want to save a blog post for later, I have a tool to do that, I use Evernote to do that, but even that is rare. But just because I don't do it, it doesn't mean it's not valuable, and that was a really hard lesson for me to learn. We think that everybody is like us, that everybody does things exactly the way we do them and that our way is right, and if we think that way in most things in life, right, but we especially think that way in business, we think that the way that we do things, or the way that we think about things is the right way and that everybody should comply, and it's just not true. So pay attention to your users, what are they asking for? That was a big lesson for me. What are people asking for? And how can I accommodate them? Because just because something doesn't make sense to me, or it's not the way I would do it, doesn't mean it's not what people want.

Another lesson I had to learn is that I am not the right choice for everyone, and that's okay. I am not the right teacher for everyone, I am not the right coach for everyone, not everyone resonates with the way that I teach things or the way that I speak or my personality. And that's okay, and you likely have people that you don't listen to or don't want to learn from because they don't appeal to you. There are some really big names in the online business space that I can't stand to listen to. Not because they're bad people, or not because they're bad teachers, or not because they don't know what they're talking about, just because their personality doesn't mesh with mine. I don't like listening to them, I don't like learning from them, and there are people in the world that don't like listening to me too, and that's okay. I'm not right for everyone. Everyone gets to make their own choices.

And it's rarely personal, and I had to learn not to take it personally, and you should too.

Another lesson I learned is to stop reinventing the wheel, stop making it so hard to get things done, learn from people who have gone before me and take their advice to heart. They've done the hard things, they've worked out the processes, and I can learn from that and you can learn from that too. And I hope you will. I have a long history of preferring to figure things out on my own, I don't like to read directions, I don't like to watch videos to learn how to do things. I really have a strong preference for just digging in and making it work myself. I just want to roll up my sleeves and get to work and figure it out, but that's not always the quickest or the best way to get something done. And over the years, I have learned to take a step back, learn from other people, and skip over that reinventing the wheel phase. It saved me a ton of time and a whole bunch of headache and frustration. So learning to stop reinventing the wheel has been a huge lesson for me.

And along those lines, I've also learned that it doesn't have to be hard, and I don't have to work so hard at it. And I'll tell you what I mean by that. Years ago, when I was a virtual assistant, I was of the mentality that if I wasn't working, if I wasn't producing something, if I wasn't actually punching widgets, then I didn't deserve to get paid and then I shouldn't be earning money for my work. I didn't want to charge people, for example, for meeting time or for kind of thinking or brainstorming time. And a lot of times that was what they wanted to pay me for, they wanted to pay me for my insight into different areas of their business. But I had the impression that if I wasn't actually cranking out words on a sales page or words in a blog post or putting software together, that it wasn't worth getting paid for, and I made it much harder than it had to be. And really, business doesn't have to be hard. A lot of times what you are getting paid for in your business is not the number of widgets that you crank, but in how easy you make it for other people to achieve what you have achieved. So learning that it doesn't have to be hard, was a really big lesson for me as well.

So that's it. Seven lessons that I have learned on the way to 500 members inside Six-Figure Systems. I learned that more is not better. I learned to accept feedback even when it's painful. I learned to ask for help. I learned the user experience matters more than what I think is right or good or the correct way to do something. I learned that I'm not the right person to teach everyone and that that is okay. I learned to stop reinventing the wheel. And I learned to stop making it so hard to be successful.

Now, I'd love to hear from you. I want to invite you to head over to TinyCourseEmpire.com/34 to find the show notes and all of the resources I've

talked about here. And while you're there, leave me a comment, I would love to know what lessons you've learned in your business. Did you learn something unexpected about your customers or yourself, tell me about it, I'd really like to hear from you.

And finally, if you're enjoying the show, would you do me a favor and leave me a rating and review over at Apple Podcast or wherever you're listening to this show. That helps others find us. And of course, if you have a friend or a colleague who needs hear this episode today, go ahead and send them the link, it's TinyCourseEmpire.com/34. Have a terrific day, everyone, and I will talk to you all again next week.

If you like what you hear on the Tiny Course Empire Podcast, you're going to love all of the courses and workshops and support you'll find inside Six-Figure Systems, that's my monthly program where we dig into online marketing for regular people like you and me. We don't do big launches, we don't have the big headaches and we don't have the big expenses that come with them. Instead we focus on creating repeatable, sustainable systems that continue to grow over time, and that don't suck up all of our energy or require a 10-person team to manage. You can come see what we're all about at SixFigureSystems.com, and I'll see you on the inside.