PLEASE NOTE: This is a machine transcription. Some punctuation and spelling weirdness are to be expected.

Way back in 2011 when I was kind of first dipping my toes into the online marketing world, I had two things really working against me. The first thing was I didn't have a clue what I was doing like I didn't know anything i didn't know anything from anything. And all the same marketing advice was being shared then, as we hear now. Create content, start an email, list create a product to sell that your audience needs and wants.

It's all good advice. I don't know how to do any of it. And my other problem was that I didn't have the money to buy courses or to hire a coach. So I was kind of stuck i had to figure it out on my own. This is episode 141 of the Tiny Course Empire Podcast, and today I'm going to tell you exactly how I did that and how you can do it too.

Hey, it's Cindy, and thank you for spending a few minutes of your day with me.

You'll find the show notes and the recommended resources for this episode at TinyCourseEmpire.com/141. While you're there, be sure to download my Clear Framework. This is the blueprint that will take you from no business to six or even 7 figures as a digital course creator. Don't let the simplicity of it fool you. This is a powerful action guide. All you have to do is follow the steps. If you're new to the show, be sure to hit the subscribe button new episodes drop every Monday morning.

And next week, I'm going to tell you all about some of the dumbest mistakes I've made in the past 13 years as an online business owner. That's when you're really not going to want to miss. But that's next week. This week is all about how you can get a PHD level online business education without paying those PhD level prices so let's get started. If you know me, then you know that I started my online career as a freelancer.

I was quite literally a Jane of all trades i did all the things. I started out writing content and copy in niches like silver jewelry and cruises and even online marketing. Not too long ago on Cal Newports podcast, he mentioned that the best way to become a better writer is to write for someone who is paying you. Now, he was talking about books and book publishers, but the same is true no matter what area you are freelancing in.

The best way to find out what you're doing wrong and to improve what you're doing is to get criticism and critiques from someone who is paying you. And that's true whether you're writing or designing or doing technical setups like I was. There's nothing like practicing in front of a paying audience to improve your process. Now, I wasn't just a content and copywriter as a freelancer either i also managed projects for online business owners and membership site owners. I handled help desks. I wrangled technology. I learned nearly every online platform, from Aweber to Infusionsoft to Kajabi.

If my client needed it, I was willing to dig in and get it done and I did that for more than seven years. I met a lot of amazing people who are still my friends today, and I earned a lot of money while doing it. And that's maybe the best thing about freelancing as a learning tool is getting paid to learn. Not only that, but there's nothing quite like getting an up close and personal behind the scenes look at how

a successful business runs. I learned how a proper funnel works by watching my clients build them. I learned how to be a better email marketer by watching my clients run their email marketing systems and paying attention to the results that they got.

I learned all the techie bits that I needed to learn by being invited to dig in and see what was going on in systems that were so far beyond what I had previously had access to. I also asked a lot of questions. I was never too shy to speak up and say, why are you using this platform instead of that platform or why are you taking this approach to this funnel instead of this other approach that I've seen people do? Or why are you running ads to this audience instead of that audience? And I was lucky my clients were more than willing to talk to me about these things and share their insights with me.

And that just gave me a really, really top level education in online marketing. Now you might be thinking, OK, Cindy, this was you. How can I put this to work in my business i'm not a freelancer. And I'm certainly not suggesting that everyone should go out and start freelancing. But if you are willing, it is a really good way to learn how an online business works. If you think about it, you've been doing this your entire life. You learned how to cook by hanging around in the kitchen and helping out when you were a kid. You learned how to be better at your career by doing the work on the job and learning from the people around you.

You learned how to golf or play pickleball or knit by watching the people around you, by hanging out with people who were already doing those things. So if you need to learn something specific to grow your business, consider offering your services as a virtual assistant or a freelancer to get an inside look at how those systems work. You can also look for opportunities to volunteer or to become an intern for someone else who is already running the kind of business that you want to run.

Or maybe you can partner in some way with someone else. Maybe you want to write a book, but you have only ever written shorter pieces and you're not sure how to organize a book or put it all together. Maybe you can partner with someone who has already written books. You bring your expertise in your niche, and they bring

their experience with putting an entire book together.

Or maybe you want to learn how to run an online community more effectively. Maybe you can volunteer as an ambassador or a community manager for somebody who is already doing that. One of my friends volunteered in a community that she belongs to, and she was able to make really great connections among other leaders in this niche and to also learn the insurance and outs of running a large community and it's really helped her to further her career and her online business. Ok, but let's just say freelancing, volunteering, internships, not for you.

What else can you do? Well, the number one thing that I'm going to recommend is that you simply pay attention. One time several years ago, I was walking a client through setting up a webinar funnel. The page flow kind of confused her she didn't really understand how you got from the opt in Page to the thank you page to being on the webinar itself. Now this client had come to me through a webinar, so I asked her to think back. She found my opt in Page.

She put her name and her email on the form. She clicked the subscribe or the the join link so far so good. I asked her what happened next. She didn't know. She didn't know if she'd seen a thank you page or received an email she wasn't really clear on how she even ended up on the webinar, how she got the link or got the date put in her calendar all of it was kind of a blur, and it hadn't been that long ago it hadn't been weeks or months prior it was just the previous week.

So what that told me was that she simply wasn't paying attention when she signed up for the webinar and I'm not going to say that's her fault i'm not here blaming her for not paying attention. We're all in such a hurry to download the thing, sign up for the webinar, access the course, whatever it is. We are in such a hurry that we are not paying attention to how we get from point A to point B. And that's what I'm asking you to do. So if you want to run a webinar, for example, go sign up for a bunch of webinars and pay attention to the user flow.

If you want to host a summit, sign up for a summit and pay attention to the pages and the emails that you receive. What's the layout like what's the flow? What do the

emails say what do they link to what's the process? If you want to set up an upsell funnel, buy a product that has an upsell and pay attention to the flow that you see as the customer. This is a version of something that is known as reverse engineering, which is simply looking at a process or a system and working through it and seeing how it achieves the results that you get or the outcome that you get at the end.

How does it actually work? In other words, it's putting on your detective hat and paying attention step by step so that you can figure out how a system works. If something's more complicated or you want to know exactly what tools are used, then you can use something called Built with.com which is a website where you can go and drop a URL in and it will tell you whether or not that site is built with WordPress or Squarespace or Wix or something else. It will tell you you know who is managing the countdown timer that you see on the page. It'll tell you what email marketing platform is being used. It will tell you what video host is being used.

Will tell you all the information you need to know about that page. You can also look at the page source and sometimes figure out from there what tools and systems are being used. One time a client of mine found a webinar that Amy Porterfield had hosted and she really liked the page setup she really liked how the webinar was set up and the workflow that was that it was being used. So we went and we looked at the page source and we were able to see just from the code on the back end of the page that Amy was using a tool called Webinar Jam.

So my client went and bought Webinar Jam and we were able to set up something very similar just by looking at the back end of the setup, looking at the page source, finding the words Webinar Jam, It said it right on the page was super easy to to put on my detective hat and work that out and get her set up in a similar way. And that was all because we paid attention to what another business owner was doing. Now, there is one last piece to the puzzle here and if I'm honest, this is where a lot of small business owners really dropped the ball. There's so much insight and so many things that you can learn just by paying attention to what you see in the world around you, but that doesn't actually get the job done.

You have to actually do the thing. You can't just learn it. In fact, I would say that it is impossible to truly learn anything until you actually do it. You can't learn by reading you can't learn by studying you can't learn by watching other people. You can only learn by doing. You have to get out there and do the thing. You have to dig in, get your hands dirty, put the work in, build the pages, and watch them fail. A lot of times you have to watch it fail. And then you get up and you walk through the process again, and you figure out where it went wrong, and you fix it.

Up until now, whether you've taken a course or you've reverse engineered a webinar setup, you really haven't learned anything you may have a checklist or a list of tasks to do, or a list of pages to build, but until you actually do the thing, you really haven't learned it. So go and do the thing. Will it be frustrating? Yes. Will you want to give up? Maybe but I will tell you this, looking back, I'm really glad that I didn't have the money to buy courses or to pay a coach when I was just starting out. Because having to learn it on my own, having to figure it out, having to reverse engineer things, having to dig in and justice do it when I didn't really know what I was doing has made me a Better Business owner.

I have better problem solving skills i will never be at the mercy of someone else because I can fix almost anything that breaks in my business i can fix almost anything that goes wrong i'm never at the mercy of a team member who I can't reach or support staff for a platform that is being unresponsive. And because I'm a course creator and a coach, and you probably are too, let's address one more question that you might have. No, I am not saying that you should never buy another course or hire another coach.

There are some things that you can't learn just by paying attention and reverse engineering what someone else is doing. Things like strategy, for example, can't be learned just by paying attention. I could see the tools that Amy Porterfield was using to run her webinars, but I couldn't see the strategy behind how she promoted them or how she converted webinar attendees into clients. Those are the kinds of strategies that she teaches in her paid courses. You also can't see the behind the scenes pieces that make a business run. There are elements that have no public facing parts that you will never see no matter how closely you pay attention.

An example of that is of course I took a few years ago about how to set up an Evergreen annual recurring automation sequence in Convertkit, now called Kit. I could watch all the emails come in, but I couldn't see what was triggering them. I didn't know how she had that set up, so I took a course to learn how she did it. So while there is a lot you can learn just by paying attention and through trial and error, there are always going to be some things that you want to pay for a more in depth training on.

The good news is by paying attention, by building the foundation through what you learn with your detective skills, you'll be in a much better place to invest in those higher level courses and coaching programs. Ok, now I want to hear from you. Drop me a comment below and let me know how you are going to use these strategies to get past a hurdle you've been facing in your own business. And could you do me a favor, if you've enjoyed this episode and you have a colleague or a friend who could use business building advice, would you send the link to them please? That is the best way to help the channel grow and to keep new episodes coming out every single week.

That's it for me this week i will be back next week to share all of the dumb mistakes that I have made in my 13 plus years online. Have a terrific rest of your day and I'll talk to you then.

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