

Tiny Course Empire Podcast Episode 74: 7 Hard Truths I've Learned About Running an Online Business

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

That Facebook reels algorithm knows me so well. I can seriously get lost in there for hours. Just watching people tackle these huge home improvement projects with amazing results. You know the ones I'm talking about, right? They do it all in like 90 seconds, and. If I'm not careful, I can start to think that those projects really are as easy as they look.

I could build a custom wall in my basement to create more closet space, right? I could make my own ceramic tiles to spruce up my front porch. Maybe I could even gut my kitchen and rebuild it from the floor up. I mean, why not? Other people are doing it so I can do it too, right? In a lot of ways, those home improvement projects remind me of how people talk about starting an online business.

They're a highlight reel that makes the entire process look easy and fun, but they don't tell the whole story. They don't show me the 12 pieces of crown molding that they wasted because they cut it wrong. Or the 17 trips to Home Depot that they made for more supplies. They don't show the unbelievable mess in the rest of the house while the kitchen remodel is happening.

And trust me, I know about that one. And they definitely do not show how tired and sore that poor woman was after crawling around laying tile on her porch for three days. And honestly, maybe she wasn't tired and sore, but I sure would be. The point is there is more to every story, whether it's about framing in a new closet or launching an online business.

There are things that you do not see and things that you will never understand until you do it for yourself. This is episode 74 of the Tiny Course Empire Podcast, and today I want to share seven hard truths that I've learned in the past 12 years online because it is true that running an online business can be profitable and fun, but it is also a whole lot of work, and you might find some unexpected pitfalls along the way.

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Hey, it's Cindy, and thank you so much for spending a few minutes of your day with me. You'll find the show notes, the transcript, and recommended resources over tinycourseempire.com/74. While you're there, be sure to hit the subscribe button so you don't miss a single episode. They drop into your podcast app of choice every Thursday morning.

Now let's get on with those seven hard lessons learned hard truth number one. That I discovered early on is that you can't only do the fun stuff sometimes you have to do what you have to do. So for example, you might have to have hard conversations with clients or with team members. You definitely have to pay your taxes.

You have to show up for scheduled meetings, even on the first day of spring, and all you want to do is get outside and enjoy the weather. That's a personal bugaboo for me. Brooke Castillo over at the Life Coach School podcast says that life is 50 50. Half of it is good, half of it is bad, and that is exactly how it's supposed to be.

Otherwise, you won't be able to appreciate the good parts. If all you ever do is the fun stuff, then pretty soon the fun stuff won't be fun anymore because you can't

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recognize it when you are in it. To enjoy it. There's nothing to compare it to, but so many times in the online business world, we're being sold.

The idea that we can just. Enjoy our business, that we can do the things that we really love to do, that we can spend all of our time creating or spend all of our time working with clients or spend all of our time designing planners or even spend very little time working and spend all of our time outside enjoying that wonderful weather, right?

But that's not the case. Your business will not always be fun. It just won't. It can't be. Yes, you can arrange your schedule, so it can be more fun than not, but you're going to have to embrace the kind of sucky parts too, because those exist as well. Like I said, you do have to pay your taxes. You do have to have hard conversations.

You do have to manage your bookkeeping. You do have to do all of those things that you didn't really sign up to do in the beginning. But it's those things that make you appreciate the fun things even more. So that's hard. Truth number one, you're going to spend some time. Doing things that you don't love to do, and that is to be expected down the road.

After you've been in business a while, hopefully you'll do fewer and fewer of the things that you don't love to do, but at least in the beginning, you're going to spend a lot of time doing things that you don't necessarily enjoy doing. Learn to appreciate them. Learn to embrace them anyway, and you will be much more successful in business.

Hard truth number two is related, and it's that you can't outsource all of the things that you don't like. Early on in my virtual assistant business, when I first came online as a technical and marketing virtual assistant, I would oftentimes have. People come to me and want to outsource everything to me.

They had a great idea for a business. They knew what they wanted to do. They were passionate about something and we'll talk about passion in just a minute. But they were passionate about something. They enjoyed something, but they didn't necessarily want to do the technical stuff. They. Didn't want to do the hard work.

They didn't want to learn how to use their membership software. They didn't want to learn how to use their email marketing software. They didn't want to bother to understand their website. They wanted to outsource all of that and, I'm going to say that's not going to work. That's, I've never seen that work successfully.

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You have to be able to do your own work. You have to understand how your business runs. You'll be much more successful when you do. I've told the story before of the company I worked for before I came online. It was owned by a couple of gentlemen and they each had college-aged kids and every summer those college-aged kids would come to work in the factory and they didn't come to just do busy work.

I. They came to the factory and they ran machines. They drove trucks, they loaded trucks. They were doing factory work, and I thought that was so weird. These kids were wealthy. They could have been spending summers at the lake with their friends, but instead they were putting in long hours out on a hot factory floor in August, loading trucks.

I thought that was really weird until I. Became my own boss and I started seeing how other business owners operate, and then I realized that was really smart because it was important for those kids who were going to own that business later to understand how it worked. They couldn't just. Operate from that owner's suite way up in the front with the plush carpeting in the private parking.

They couldn't run a business successfully from that place. They had to really internalize how the business worked, and the best way to do that was to work in the business for at least a little while. Once I came online and I started working with successful entrepreneurs, I learned that that's how they operate as well.

I once worked for a business coach who was earning millions of dollars every year, and she would, for example, ask me to design a. Landing page for her, for example, and she would come in and she would redesign it. If she didn't like what I did, she would put it together herself. She would connect all the pieces, connect the landing page to the email marketing platform, schedule her emails, format, her emails, all of that stuff.

She could do all of that stuff herself. She didn't do it because it wasn't the best use of her time, but she wasn't not doing it because she couldn't. She understood how her business worked and it made her. A better business owner, it will make you a better business owner too. So don't try to outsource everything right from the start.

A good rule of thumb is that if you are going to do something over and over again, if it is a. Critical part of your business, like managing your website or sending an email or building a landing page or building a sales page. It is a very good idea for you to understand how that works. If it's something that you're only going to do

one time, and it is not an ongoing project, like for example, if you are going to connect your email marketing platform to your landing page builder, right, there's an API that you have to connect.

You can outsource that, that's fine. You're never going to have to do that again. You don't really need to know how to do that. But for things that you need to do over and over again, it is important for you to understand how those things work so that you can. Better train your future, outsource for your future contractors so that you can better understand how your business runs so that you can jump in and take over if necessary, in a pinch or so that you just don't get taken for a ride so that you don't, don't get overcharged when you do want to outsource something, because if you don't understand how those things work, then it's really easy for somebody to take advantage of you or to.

Do something that doesn't make any sense to do it wrong, and then you're left stuck with something that doesn't work the way it's supposed to work because you didn't understand it in the first place. So take the time to understand how your own business runs. Yes, even the technical stuff, you can do this, I guarantee you can figure out the technical stuff.

If you need to stop telling yourself that you're not technical or that you don't understand it, or that all you want to do is the fun stuff like we talked about a minute ago, and you don't want to have to deal with any of this stuff, it is important to you as the business owner that you learn how your own business runs.

I highly encourage it, so that is hard. Truth number two, you cannot simply outsource all of the things that you don't like.

Hard. Truth number three is that monetizing your passion might just turn a hobby you love into a job that you hate. Following your passion turns it into a job. And I want you to tread really, really carefully before you do this. There's a story in the book, the E-Myth Revisited, which I highly recommend everyone reads, but there's a story in there about a woman who loves to bake pies.

She baked pies with her grandmother. It was a great memory for her, and she really enjoyed baking pies until she decided to open a bakery and then suddenly it wasn't so fun anymore. I really enjoy baking sourdough bread. It's one of the things that I do on the weekend. I really love the process. It, it fits with my personality so well, and I so enjoy pulling that loaf of bread out of the oven and seeing how beautiful.

All it is and cutting into it and smelling that sourdough. It's just amazing. And my husband likes to tease me that we should start a bakery, and I always remember that story. There is no way that I would enjoy baking sourdough as much as I do now if I had to do it for a living so hard. Truth number three is that maybe.

Monetizing your passion is not what you want to do just because you love to do something. Just because you love to garden or you love to cook, or you love to knit, or you love to dance or you love to train dogs, doesn't necessarily mean that you should turn that into a business because you might find that you don't love it as much when it is what you do for a living.

When it is a requirement to do it instead of just a fun hobby. Hard. Truth number four is that every business sells something and you must get comfortable with selling to your audience, or you're honestly not going to be in business very long. I used to tell people when I worked at, uh, when I worked in a factory and I was the purchasing manager, I used to meet with salespeople all of the time.

I've told you that story before, and I used to tell them that if I had to work in commission sales, for a living, if I had to support myself that way, that I would starve because I just wasn't comfortable with commissioned sales. Then I discovered that once I owned my own business, that was literally my job.

I was a commissioned salesperson person if I wasn't selling. To my audience, then I wasn't making any money, so I had literally given myself the job of becoming a salesperson, and I think that's something that a lot of people who get into business are not necessarily comfortable with. I certainly wasn't comfortable with it in the beginning.

I had a really hard time telling people how much I was going to charge them for some project, or how much I charged per hour as a virtual assistant. Had a really hard time saying those words. But as a business owner, it's something that you have to get over. And I will tell you that it gets easier with time for sure.

The more you do it, the easier it becomes. But if you hate sales or if you tell yourself that you hate sales, or if you tell yourself that selling feels icky, you're going to have a really hard time being profitable in business because. Businesses make money. That's what they do. If you're not making money, what you have is a hobby, and that is not the same thing.

So if you want to be profitable in your business, you have to get comfortable making offers to your email list. You have to get comfortable making offers to.

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Potential clients that you might be talking to on the phone. You have to get comfortable pitching yourself to podcasts to be a guest on, or you know, pitching yourself to potential clients on social media or asking for the sale on social media.

You have to get comfortable doing all of those things because that is the only way you're going to make money. Nobody else is going to sell for you. You have to be the one to do that. So if you hate sales, You are probably not going to enjoy that aspect of your business, but you need to get over it. You need to just practice it and become the best salesperson for your business because every business sells something.

Every business makes offers. Every business has buy buttons, and that is just a fact of life. So that is hard. Truth number four, every business is in the business to sell something. Hard. Truth number five is that learning is not the same as doing. Don't get them confused. I see a lot of people who spend a ton of time watching webinars, listening to podcasts like this one buying courses, and they.

Feel like they are doing something important in their business. They've learned a new, you know, a new strategy. They've learned new ways to get email signups. They've learned new ways to run paid ads. They've learned new ways to build sales pages. They've learned all of the things, but they're not actually doing anything.

They're not actually implementing anything. Lin Terry from Click news.com has an expression. She says There's a time to learn and a time to earn, and I really admire that about her. She has said that for years. I've heard her say that repeatedly, and I really, really admire that because it is so true. If you spend all of your time just learning, you're not.

Giving yourself any time to actually implement what you've learned. You're not giving yourself any time to actually benefit from that. So for everything that you purchase, for every webinar you watch, for every course you take, for every book you read, for every podcast you listen to. Make it a point to find those things that you can implement, those tasks that you can add to your task.

List those projects that you can create to get the benefit from the things that you are learning, because that's how your business will grow. So before you sign up for that next webinar, or for that next course, ask yourself if you've fully implemented. The last thing that you learned before you spend the money to do that or before you spend the time to do that.

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So that's hard. Truth number five is that learning is not the same as doing. Now that hard truth might sound pretty strange coming from someone who sells courses about starting and growing an online business. After all, I want you to buy my courses, right? But the one thing that we really focus on inside all of my courses and inside my [six Figure Systems program](#) is the action taking part.

I don't want you to just watch the videos. I want you to do the things. I want you to implement what you learn. That's why six Figure Systems members have direct access to me through the member forum and on our live calls so that they can get answers to their questions and keep the momentum going. I'd love for you to join us so I can help your business grow as well.

Visit tinycourseempire.com/join to start a seven day trial for just \$7, and you'll get instant access to all the courses, but more importantly, You'll be joining a community of like-minded small business owners who understand the value of implementing what they learn and who take action every single day to achieve their goals.

Come join us tinycourseempire.com/join, and we will see you on the inside. All right. Hard truth number six is that no tool will make you more successful. And this is for all of the sellers of shiny new tools out there. You know the ones that I am talking about, the new membership software that you just have to have the new email marketing platform that's going to make everything easier, the new.

Ads tracking tool that's going to make sure that you're not wasting money on ads. All of these new tools, and especially the new AI tools that seem to be flooding the market today, none of these tools will make you more successful. None of them are the magic bullet. I'll tell you a story. When I was, uh, when I was in high school.

I wanted to be a writer. That was my big goal. I wanted to write fiction and in some ways, I've turned out to be a writer. I don't write fiction, but I write all the time. It, it is my job. So I have achieved my goal of wanting to be a writer, but when I was in high school, I thought that the way to become a writer or my path to success as a writer was just to have the right tools.

I convinced myself that I couldn't possibly be a writer because I didn't have a word processor. This was before computers even, right? We had . Dedicated word processors. They looked like electric typewriters and they had a little bit of memory in them for your great book that you were writing or whatever, and they had a, a little eight line screen.

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Maybe some of you were as old as me and you can remember those. But I was convinced that if I just had a word processor, I would unlock the key to being a successful writer. And you know what? I didn't. I bought that word process processor. I spent a lot of money on it. And I never wrote a single word of fiction because I didn't have the consistency to sit down and write every day, which is what it takes to.

Write fiction for a living, right? You have to write, and I didn't. I hadn't built that consistency. It didn't matter what tools I had without that consistent action taking, without consistently implementing what I knew about writing, I was never going to be successful, successful writers. Can do so with a pad of paper and a pencil.

They don't need a fancy word processor. Successful business owners can be successful with the tools that they have. They don't need that fancy new membership software. They don't need that. You know, exciting new ad tracking software, they can be successful with the tools that they already have. So hard.

Truth number six is that no shiny new tool is going to make you more successful, develop the habits that successful business owners have, and you will be successful with any tools that are available to you. It's not dependent on that latest, shiny new thing. And finally, hard Truth number seven is all about marketing and the people who are making you some really big promises.

You've seen them. They've got bold headlines that claim that you can make \$30,000 in a weekend with no website and no list and no experience. Well, here's the truth about that. The real reason. That some people can make \$30,000 in a weekend or work two hours per week, isn't because they've discovered some magical solution.

They have not discovered something that, you know, nobody else knows that they're going to sell you for \$17 on a on a dime sale. It's because they have put in 60 plus hour weeks when they were earning next to nothing. Let me rephrase that. The real reason that some people can make really good money really quickly is because they paid their dues.

That expression is just as true in online marketing as it is everywhere else in the world. You do have to put the work in, and in the beginning it will be really slow. I remember the very first website I ever built was designed to earn money from Google Ads traffic. Remember, back in the day, you could actually earn a good living using, you know, just, um, affiliate websites and Google Ads traffic.

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It was possible to do. And I put up this website, it was all about flowers. I didn't know anything about flowers, but I put up this website about flowers and I put some Google ads on it, and pretty quickly I earned a few cents, and I knew at that point now I wasn't making real money here. Right? We're talking less than a dollar.

I had earned, but I knew that if I continued to do what I was doing, those pennies would add up. And that's what has happened to these people who claim that you can make big money in a weekend. They have. Built up their expertise over time. They've created their systems over time. They've put in the effort that they're not then showing you, right?

They're not showing you that they've already built a list of 50,000 people who are ready to buy from them. They're not showing you. That they've already got traffic sources in place. They're not showing you that they already have a team of people to help them. They are claiming that you can do this with no effort and nothing involved, and it's just not true so hard.

Truth number seven is more about being realistic in your expectations and. Not falling for the stories that you can get rich really quickly online. I'm not going to say that never happens. I, I suppose it's, it's possible that some people could really, you know, kind of fall into a gold mine with, with little to no experience, but it is rare.

You do have to pay your dues. You do have to put the effort in at the front end when it feels like nothing is working and you're not making very much money at all. But I promise you that if you keep going, if you keep remaining consistent, if you keep implementing what you've learned, You will find success.

I truly believe that everyone can find success in the online business world. If they just stay focused, remain consistent with their efforts, and keep implementing what they've learned, you will make it too. Just maybe not in the first weekend that you're online. All right, so those are my seven hard truths.

Number one, you can't only do what you want to do all of the time. Sometimes you have to do stuff you don't love. Number two, you can't outsource everything right from the start when you don't know even how your business is going to run. Number three, following your passion turns what you love into a job.

Number four, every business sells something and you need to get comfortable with making offers to your community, or you're not going to be in business very long. Number five, learning is not the same as doing. You have to do more than you

study. You have to implement what you learn. You have to show up consistently and put the effort in.

Number six, shiny new tools are never going to be the answer to your success. You can be successful with the tools that you have. And number seven, the real reason that people can make a bunch of money in a weekend isn't because they've discovered some secret you don't know. It's because they put years into building the foundation.

That's your first step. You have to build your own foundation. I'd love to hear from you. Come over to tiny.courseempire.com and let me know in the comments what hard truths you've learned about running an online business. And if you have a friend or a colleague who could use this advice, go ahead and share the episode with them.

I would be grateful if you did have a terrific day, everyone. I'll talk to you all again next week.

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systems that lead to
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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