

Welcome to the Online Business Lift-Off Launchpad, Hi everyone my name is Trudy and I just want to talk today about how being an entrepreneur and a small business owner is not all sunshine and rainbows and when your just getting started out and been around the block a few years, you actually need mentors that are going to tell you what it's really like. They need to tell you how it is, raw and real.

Now I was fortunate enough to have a mentor like that when I was getting started, his name is Rumi Shivaz and today his going to be joining me and we're going to be talking about some of the challenges his faced in his entrepreneurial journey and how relationships have helped him through some really tough times. We talk about resilience, the fact it's possible to fail and then succeed. So I hope you'll join me as Rumi and I talk about what his doing now, what his been through and how resilience is really important in the entrepreneurial journey. Lets welcome Rumi

Rumi Shivaz:

Rumi Shivaz, always been a software guy. Migrated to New Zealand in 1988 from Sri Lanka after about five years of programming experience under my belt. Spent that year working for a company called Steel & Tube, which was pretty awesome. And then I got bored and then worked for IMB New Zealand for seven years on the software side, starting from programming team lead, project lead, and travelled a lot. And then that's when I saw the opportunity to export software from New Zealand.

Rumi Shivaz:

I started my first company in '97 and ran that for six years. Crashed it big time with a huge amount of debt, like \$2 million in debt and about 18 staff. I've gone through receivership, I did survive that in some magical way, and then did some work for a few other organisations. And then I bought the company that I own 80% of shareholding now, which is a data analytics and visualisation company, insights thing. Yeah, so that's 32 years of New Zealand in three minutes.

Trudy Rankin:

That's a very, very quick summary of an enormous amount of experience and living, yeah. Just for our listeners sake, Rumi was one of the people who helped me when I was getting started with my business and was willing to give me a lot of time and advice, at a time when I was actually really, really struggling and I've always really, really appreciated that. We share things back and forth over the internet that we think will help each other, and at one stage, Rumi sent me a clip to a video that he had recorded, basically talking about resilience. And resilient is one of things that Rumi is, because if you listen to that very short summary that he said, there's a tonne of hard work and effort and ups and downs in that time period. Rumi, do you want to maybe just recap for us, just an overview of the way that you focus on staying resilient and what you do, to do that?

Rumi Shivaz:

Wow. I'm writing an article called Bounce Backability, I don't think there's a word like that in the Oxford Dictionary. See, I always say that it doesn't matter how well we plan our lives, shit happens and now we got a monumental scale shit happening, and how can ... I think being able to basically differentiate what you can control and what you can't.

Rumi Shivaz:

One of the best examples of that was when my first company failed in 2003, there was a guy who was like a mentor for me from PwC, he was really good, John Selby. He said, "Listen, there's so many things will come to your head saying that if I'd done that, or if I'd done this, we could've had a different outcome." But he said, "Create two boxes in your head. Every thought that comes to your head about the last company, your crash and failure, put it to the old box and let your accountant and the legal team handle that, and you think about the new box."

Rumi Shivaz:

I told that story many times to a lot of people. That helped me hugely because going back to that 2003 crash, I was almost like a coma, I think I slept for about two weeks and just a total blank, not knowing what the hell to do. But ultimately, you have to get up, you make a living somehow, you don't have a choice, right? In a way that's the big thing. I think if we have choices, sometimes easy options, we'll take that.

Rumi Shivaz:

The last five months was tough business wise, and I wasn't sure whether I could keep this company I was running, and again that's about five and half months of riding that uncertainty, in a way. And people say, trust yourself, things will be okay, all that is fine, but when you are in that period it's quite hard to believe that. I suppose, for me, what was driving me is if I crash this company and my choices were not very palatable or not desirable. Going and working for an organisation like a sales guy and having to report every week about your pipeline, that didn't appeal to me. And then the other end of scale, go and drive a bus or go work in Bunnings for example. Both those things, while they were okay jobs to do, didn't really feel that that's the best way I can make a contribution, I suppose.

Rumi Shivaz:

So yes, I don't know how to explain that, Trudy. I think one of the things I learned is, that I talk about, is somehow trying to control that downward spiral of emotions, and not easy, not easy at all. And so last five and half months I learned a lot as well, so I'll be talking about it quite a lot.

Trudy Rankin:

One of the things that you've done ... Well, there's a couple of things that you've done. You haven't just been sitting on your backside, you've actually gotten out there and you started talking about things that matter to people and to yourself, and you've also started a podcast. Do you want to talk a little bit about that and how that came to be?

Rumi Shivaz:

Yeah, so about August last year, there was a guy who approached me and said he would like to interview me. I knew his podcast was about one hour long and like two halves, and said, "I can't imagine anybody who'd want to listen to me speaking for an hour, it sounds like such a stupid idea," but I agreed anyway. That was recorded in August last year, but for some technical reason, it never got published until January this year. And then my daughter listened to it and she said, "Dad, start your own thing." And then I was going through all our business advice, I was struggling, but I decided just to follow that seed of an idea, just not think too much, and I just went ahead with it.

Rumi Shivaz:

So if you ask me why I was doing it and how I was doing it, I didn't question that at all. I said, let's just go and buy some kit from Workshop and just get started. I reached out to about three people and said, "Listen, I have this idea. I will like to do it, but I don't know whether it will ever see the light of day, so if you're happy to be my guest then that will be awesome." So three people agreed and yeah, that is awesome.

Rumi Shivaz:

But I still didn't have a reason why, but I had a theme, the theme is called Jump Out of Bed. So I reach out, I probably identify people who are making a living by doing something that they absolutely love and also working in a team that they are loving, and also whatever the work they're doing has got meaning as well. So I looked for that all three combination, so that is kind of qualification criteria to say who I would like to invite on this.

Rumi Shivaz:

But recently, about couple of weeks ago, I was thinking about and said, I have a friend of mine called Jeremy Brantford. Jeremy was a Wellingtonian and he was in technology, like a sales guy, when I met him, like business development guy. But he was such a talented man, he was a creative guy. I mean, I could send him a photograph, which ... I do portraiture for fun. So I could send him a photograph and tell him, "I need a headline for this or the title." He'd come up with something absolutely brilliant, just absolutely brilliant.

Rumi Shivaz:

He had that creative talent, but none of the employers, none of the people he worked for recognised that talent. They put him in a basket that he was forced to do stuff that he didn't enjoy doing. And yeah, he never managed to get to the floor to do his full potential lifework and he took his life about three years ago.

Trudy Rankin:

That's a shame.

Rumi Shivaz:

And now I think about it and I said ... So the whole purpose of the podcast is that when I look at it, around, people are earning good money. I mean, all you need is I think, Australia and New Zealand standard wise, \$67,000 to pay our bills, cover our mortgages and stuff like that. So a lot of people are earning a lot more money than that, but they are totally stressed out and not doing work that they enjoy. I can't control that, I can't change that, but what I can do is I'll just invite people who are doing some awesome work, for two reasons, one is around my own. I'm 57 now, so Jeremy when he took his life he was probably 60 and there're a lot of us reaching that age wondering what the hell to do next, and not being very happy or fulfilled about work.

Trudy Rankin:

That's right.

Rumi Shivaz:

And on the other end of the scale I watch my daughter, Charlene, she's 26, and some of them are in organisations that they don't really want to be, because there's still the old corporate structure driven on profitability and shareholder gains, rather than anything else. So the whole purpose of it is, I interviewed some young people that are really not going down that path, going and doing something that feels close to their heart. Probably earning maybe 20, \$30,000 less than what they could earn, but really making a difference. So the podcast is really to showcase that, and as an example saying there are options.

Trudy Rankin:

Yes, and I think that's really, really important, especially ... I don't know. You say you've been interviewing younger people, but there must be some older people who have also been able to find and do things that they love. But the challenge I think is that given what's happening with coronavirus and the economy shutting down the way it is, and it's going to continue to shut down for a little while, what would you say if somebody was wanting to want to jump out of bed to be able to go to work, but they have to put food on the table in this environment?

Rumi Shivaz:

Yeah, tough one, Trudy. No, I think it is tough, that's priority number one, and you almost don't have a choice. So yeah, in a way, it's a system failure in a way. Why can't we create workplaces that people can enjoy, it doesn't matter ... Yeah, it's a question I don't know how to answer.

Trudy Rankin:

I suspect most people don't know how to answer it, because we keep on getting these workplaces that are the ... They seem to morph into these corporate behemoths where it changes from being about the person and then moves into being all about the business and the bottom line.

Rumi Shivaz:

That's right.

Trudy Rankin:

So yeah, it's interesting. So I guess, certainly, there must be something there though about people taking responsibility for themselves and doing something about their situation if they find themselves working for an organisation that's either stifling them, putting them in a basket or a box, or basically limiting their ability to shine and add value.

Rumi Shivaz:

Yeah, true. So there's two sides to that really, so if I go back to Jeremy, we could say he didn't find a place that he could do his best work, but he always a positive, energetic guy and I think the word ... He was always optimistic, but he never managed to find a workplace. So probably the time that I'd known him over 10 years, he worked for about four organisations and none of those organisations identified his talent.

Trudy Rankin:

Yeah. So can I ask you a question then? Based on your experience with running businesses and also working for organisations, what have you either done as a business owner or experienced as an

employee that helped you with either you helping your employees, or you helping yourself to have that kind of work experience? Anything that stands out?

Rumi Shivaz:

I think the biggest thing is not ... We don't know from an organization's point of view how much you actually need and how much you want, and wants are endless, right?

Trudy Rankin:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Rumi Shivaz:

So, when I acquired this company I kept it very small. I said this is all I need to earn and then create an environment that are only employing a couple of people, and also being selective about the customers we work with, and keeping all the overhead structures down and keep a simple business, but almost like having a KPI about stress, keeping the stress low. And a key component to that is having good customers to work with, because when the customers are stressed out, they pass it onto the team.

Rumi Shivaz:

I had to get rid of quite a big customer for us who was causing a lot of stress for us and that was scary, but I'm glad we did that. Yeah, otherwise, I think as a business owner, if we can focus on that side, saying okay, can get to a position where you can choose the customers you're prepared to work with and that changes the ball game significantly, rather than having to do work to ... Yeah.

Trudy Rankin:

Yeah, absolutely. Hey, I'm just going to stop for two seconds, to see if I can stop these things coming through. Let me just ... I'm getting quite a lot of clicking coming through and I'm pretty sure it's me. There we go, let's see if that helps.

Trudy Rankin:

So I guess to maybe just come back to what you were just saying, designing would be the word I would use, using your ability to design the type of business that you want. That's for you, and then what about for your team? Obviously, with the example you've given around stress, it's about making sure that you choose your customers wisely, which I find fascinating because when you're just starting out a business, it can be very difficult to say that I'm going to choose my customers, because I need to have every customer that I can because I need the money. But I think many business owners soon learn that the stress, the anxiety, worry and frustration is just not worth it, when you've got a customer that's not a nice customer to work with. Are there any other things that you do for your employees to help make it a job that they want to jump out of bed and come to, every day?

Rumi Shivaz:

Because we're a small team, we keep things pretty simple, so it's a lot autonomy. I think there's a great book from Dan Pink called ... I think I can't remember the title of it. I can see the book, but I can't remember the title. He talked about the ... Once we had to pay a market rate and take that salary question out of the equation, and then it becomes autonomy and mastery, being able to have the freedom to do the projects. So I think for me, I kept it very simple like that.

Trudy Rankin:

That's kind of interesting. Do you want to talk just about that whole mastery component a little bit more?

Rumi Shivaz:

I think it goes back to that 10,000 hour thing people talk about. There are things that if you keep doing as a professional, whether it's a musician playing, learning an instrument, or in my case, trying to make a living out of as a sales guy selling software, but coming from a software development background. All of sudden, coming from a technical background as a developer and then having to make a living out of as a sales guy, it's quite a big transition point because if you talk to lots of people, the technical people, they absolutely hate the sales side of it all, because the skillset is quite different. It's about having to ask for money, ask for business, and having to make calls, and writing proposals, and all that stuff.

Rumi Shivaz:

So easily, I would say 10 years for me was trying to figure out all that, and learning from lots of mistakes, and learning from books and YouTube, and wherever I can learn. And even for my guys, having that freedom to use whatever technical thing they would like to use, and keep the end game of having to deliver a service, but having the freedom to explore.

Trudy Rankin:

And I think that, especially for the sorts of work and the type of people that would tend to work in your business, or the type of business that you have, that actually is really, really important. Something from my perspective as an ex-CIO and working with lots of people who are into IT, tech support, software development, and things like that, that autonomy and that ability to learn new things was probably the thing that mattered the most to them, which I think was really, really interesting.

Rumi Shivaz:

Yeah, I think if you're a services' company, one of the things that we did was kept our utilisation low, didn't have a huge dependency on very high utilisation to keep the company going, because that creates lots of stress and that doesn't give you a lot of time for lateral thinking, just reflection, all that kind of stuff. So that's what I try to do, try and not to overload, but round about like a six, 70% utilisation.

Trudy Rankin:

Yeah, that's kind of interesting because I'm just thinking about my experience and stuff, and that can be really, really difficult to do when you've got enormous pressures on a small team to deliver the goods and the budget's not there to bring on new staff, that can be a problem, that'd be a real problem. So I'm just thinking out loud here, what would be the couple ways that, in that kind of a situation, that you could still help people feel as though they've got some control over their situation, I guess?

Rumi Shivaz:

Yeah, I don't know. I mean, services, normally people go on time and material work, but we have fixed-price things. So we took the risk and most of time we got it right, once or twice you're going to get it wrong, but that means you can have good margins.

Trudy Rankin:

Yeah. So just out of curiosity, because obviously I'm fascinated by how we can, as small enterprises, modify what we do or change our approach as necessary to deal with what's happening in the world around us at the moment. We're sort of in, as people keep saying, uncharted territory and it's just fascinating to me looking around and seeing what's happening, and sort of fascinating from a horrified fascination point of view, is the number of organisations that are suddenly going, "I'm in a bricks and mortar situation, I need to get online as fast as possible, how do I do that?"

Trudy Rankin:

So if you think about your experience in terms of having to pivot several times in your life, and in your business as a business owner, in order to meet changing situations, what would you say to people who are in this current situation where they're going to have to pivot or get online somehow? What would be the first couple of things that you would suggest to them that they do or think about?

Rumi Shivaz:

Probably the hardest one to do is managing the anxiety because there's lots of unknowns. And people can say things will be okay, all that stuff, I think that is probably the toughest one, because when the brain goes into that mode, it creates a lot of fear, and any decision you make when the fear is the dominant emotion is not going to be a good decision in the long-term. So I think being able to somehow put that aside. I found that I just went and helped as many people as I could, even my mind was going crazy. One thing I could do was just call somebody, make a connection, pay somebody some money, even if it is some busker on the street. It's the little things that I do because there's always somebody worse off than you, right?

Trudy Rankin:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Rumi Shivaz:

So, that's an act that ... During the last five months I was going through quite a lot of anxious time, whether I can save this business or not, but I thought what I had control. There were a lot of things I didn't have control on, but I had control is that something that I could do, so the podcast was born during that period, which is quite a ... It did not make any sense at all, it totally defied logic, why would I want to start a podcast when my business was in serious trouble, but I'm glad I did.

Trudy Rankin:

I think it's going to be valuable and useful to other people

Rumi Shivaz:

Yeah, I tell people, Trudy, that I didn't smile for five months, 15 days and 14 hours. The last time I smiled was in Nafew in Greece, with my daughter, in September last year and then on the 11th of March at 4:30 PM. But now that period has ... Riding that, I almost feel like a pilot of a passenger aircraft that's had to dodge so many bullets and thinking should I pull the parachute and jump out, but then can't because you've got responsibility. When do you cross the line? Not so much conflicting advice. And that was excruciating I think, conflicting things saying I'm sailing pretty close to the wind. And you have a responsibility as a director as well, so financial responsibility and then The Companies Act responsibility,

all of those things were just spinning my head like hell. So anyway, I'm glad to be alive and in a stronger position really.

Trudy Rankin:

Yeah, especially given what's happening with the virus and everything like that.

Rumi Shivaz:

Yeah.

Trudy Rankin:

And going through anxious moments and as part of that, you do what you have done, and as I said, you helped me a lot when I was getting started and you're just that sort of a person, you just help people. And I'm sure that you do that whether you're going through anxious times or not. But as you were reaching out to people and doing various things, you mentioned earlier when we were talking about the way that you found this other crowd that's acquiring your business was through a connection. How did you get connected with the guy who connected you to your new team?

Rumi Shivaz:

I think I met Grant about 10, 15 years ago, I can't remember. We met at a BNI function or something like that, and we just stayed in touch, Trudy. We never did any business with each other, but we just bumped into each other from time to time at Chamber of Commerce, or some networking event, or something like that. So it's just that I was fortunate he managed to make that connection at the right time when I needed some help. But one thing I do though, I reach out. I reach out and ask for help, because it's easy to get ... Yeah, that I have learned to do. Some people-

Trudy Rankin:

[crosstalk 00:47:23] ... Oh, go ahead, sorry.

Rumi Shivaz:

Sometimes people struggle with it. I said listen, there's no point suffering alone. I also believe that at the time of your greatest need, help can come from the most unexpected sources, and I've always believed that. When I look back, my life, on all the critical moments and the 11th hour, the help I need that came from a place that I never ever expect to happen. So having trust that that has happened a number of times and this time will be the same, but you'll doubt it as well. Okay, it's happened three times, is it going to happen this time?

Trudy Rankin:

Yes, but it just seems to me like there's a huge amount of I guess ... I'll rephrase it a little bit. Having those relationships and maintaining those relationships over time, you said 10 to 15 years, that's a long time to maintain a relationship where there's been ... You can be good friends, but there's never been any sort of work done between the two organisations, but that was what allowed you to get in touch with this other crowd. So maybe talk just a little bit about the value of relationships, because you do, you do reach out to people a lot. What's the value of relationships in your life and for your business?

Rumi Shivaz:

I tell people that I'm a connector and a broker. I look at an idea and I say, okay, for this thing to happen, what kind of a technology do we need and who are the people who can do this? I almost live my life collecting people, and at maybe 10, 15 years later that may be an opportunity. So for our business, two years ago we got a new client and that was through a connection that I have had with another business consultant that I've known for a long time. Every two years we'll meet, just for a coffee. He will talk for 55 minutes and I get to talk for five minutes. I never got any business out of him, but two years ago, bang, here's a piece of work.

Rumi Shivaz:

And there's a funny story as well. I always wanted to do business with a Maori organisation, but it took me 20 years to crack that. And that only happened about 18 months ago. It was like ... I thought, Jesus man, I would never. I tried so many times and got very close sometimes, but it never turned into business and I thought I'm not going to do this bloody thing before I die. But through a strange coincidence that happened as well, we did some work with Maori Tourism and Simon Phillips. So yeah, I suppose tenacity, persistence pays.

Trudy Rankin:

So you basically set yourself the goal of working with a Maori organisation. Do you set goals for yourself?

Rumi Shivaz:

It was never a goal, it was an intention.

Trudy Rankin:

It was an intention? Tell me please the difference, because the way you're telling your story, it didn't sound like there were much difference.

Rumi Shivaz:

No, Trudy, I don't know, I think that I struggle with the whole goal thing.

Trudy Rankin:

Why is that?

Rumi Shivaz:

For me, I say if I put an intention and I put it out to the universe, and at the right time, the stars align and if it is meant to happen, it'll happen. I hate the idea of the whole goal setting thing.

Trudy Rankin:

Is that because it locks you into a certain course?

Rumi Shivaz:

I think there's not only ... Okay, all right. So some people are very much goal driven and it works for them, but I say that's not the only way to do it. It's like a business plan, right? Some people swear, say

you have to have a business plan, I say no you don't. So I never had a business plan. Never in one of my businesses I had a business plan. There's a rough idea in my head and I just follow that gut, but I never had a formally produced business plan. And some of the people look at me and think I'm mad, but yeah, for me, the intention and trusting that if you keep doing the right things ...

Rumi Shivaz:

This is a great story. This is a great story, it reminded me. It's about money in a way. It said there's two ways to look at money. One is, you can look at it as butterflies. One way to do is to go out every day with a net and try to catch some butterflies. But then you catch some and you put it in a cage and somebody will open the bloody cage door and it's all gone. And it said, rather than doing that, chasing butterflies, you start to grow a garden. You do little by little, and over a period of time, the butterflies will come. Some will come, some will go, but it's always they're there. And it's a much more holistic way of making a living.

Trudy Rankin:

I really like that analogy. That is a fantastic analogy and it makes sense to me as well. So that's probably a really good place for us to bring this to a close. So as you move into the future, obviously all the best to what you're doing, how would people get in touch with you if they're interested in getting in touch?

Rumi Shivaz :

Just google Rumi.Shivaz. Sorry, no dot, just Rumi Shivaz and you'll find me.

Trudy Rankin:

He'll find you? And what about on LinkedIn?

Rumi Shivaz:

So it will be ... Yeah, put my name, R-U-M-I. No, there's no dot, that's my Gmail address, that's an email address. Yeah, Rumi Shivaz and you'll find me on LinkedIn, probably the best place to find me.

Trudy Rankin:

Okay, all right. All right, well, thank you so much, Rumi, I really appreciate it. I appreciate your words of wisdom and I know they're hard-won and sometimes hard-spoken, but they're really valuable to other people who are either going through or facing similar situations at this point in time, so thank you very much.

Rumi Shivaz:

It's all right. Thanks for having me.

Trudy Rankin ([54:51](#)):

Oh cool. Thanks, Rumi. For being so open and transparent for sharing your trials and tribulations that you and other entrepreneurs have gone through when trying to build a successful business. I got really excited when I heard about Rumi's new podcast Jump Out Of Bed, I've been listening to it and I'm really enjoying it. I'll put the link to his podcast in the show notes and I highly encourage you to go out and listen to it.

I hope you enjoyed this podcast episode and I'd love it if you went out and subscribed and leave a review and share it with people you think it will help. I hope you have a great week, take care and all the best.