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One thing is for certain, if you're in business long enough, you're going to hit some kind of disruption that is outside of your control. It could be weather related, it could be something like a flood or a tornado, which seems like those are happening more and more. It could be a health issue with a family member that you can't ever see coming. Or it could even be a worldwide pandemic. If you've ever found yourself worrying about how you're going to keep your business going when everything around you seems like it's falling apart, you're in the right place today. Just because your life is in chaos, doesn't mean your business has to suffer. Let's chat today about three ways your photography business can survive any disruption, while at the same time, you can say yes to your family whenever they need you. Stick with me.

The real question is how are portrait photographers like us able to run a profitable business and still put our families first, without selling digital files for cheap and working all the time? I'm Sarah Petty, your host of the Worth Every Penny Joycast. I went from a stressed out overworked mama with three babies to being named one of America's most profitable photographers without working my kids' lives away. Each week, I'll show you how to find and serve boutique portrait photography clients in a world where we compete with free thanks to everyone having a digital camera in their pocket. Take the first step to adding more joy and profit to your life by downloading your free photography business tools at joyofmarketing.com/podcast.

I want to start by sharing a few disruptions that have been thrown at me during my time in business. If you've listened to previous podcasts, you've heard that I got a hold of my studio, my first studio, took possession of it, and fixed it up all summer. I had my major grand opening on August 30 of 2001. I opened my first studio two weeks before 9/11 in 2001 and that was coming right off that whole dot com market crash, where all the dot coms were failing. The market was so insecure and freaking out and it wasn't good, but I didn't really know any different. I had these babies at home, I wasn't paying a lot of attention to the economy, even though obviously I knew what was going on. But because I did certain things, my business got through it. Same thing in 2008-2009, when the housing market crashed and the economy,

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again, took a turn for the worse. Because of how I had structured my business and the target audience and the fact that I was boutique, I was able to survive that.

One of the hardest things that I was able to survive, hopefully I can tell this story without getting emotional, but my dad was just my inspiration. He was an entrepreneur and taught at the college level and he was amazing. He suffered from congestive heart failure. As it progressed, I'm in a smaller town, I always tell you guys I'm in a cornfield in the middle of Illinois. The doctors here, we have a great, great heart center, but they said, "Really, this is it. There's nothing we can do for him." We kept thinking there's got to be something. I have an awesome sister-in-law who gets the healthcare system way more than me and she said, "Let's take him up to Chicago. It's about four hours away. I know they can help him. They're a bigger city. They do more of this."

So we went up to Northwestern, love that place, and they were able to put in a heart pump. It's called a ventricular assist device, not to get techie on you, but it basically goes in and it like operates like it's pumping your heart. They often do it as a bridge to a transplant, but he was older and they said, "Look, you can live many years with this device." He was healthy every other way so he qualified for it. They put this device in and it was like he was 30 years younger, it was insane. But the challenge was, every time something went wrong with that device, either he had a health issue, he fell once, we couldn't take him to our local hospital because they couldn't service that device. He was airlifted once in a helicopter, he was rushed in ambulance, we took him. It was crazy, but it was just what we did.

We got over five bonus years with my dad, but it was really a challenge because we would go up there, my brother and I, and sometimes it would be for days or weeks. We didn't want to leave him alone. We would pass in the night, he would go north and I would go south. He is also an entrepreneur running my father's business. Truly, I don't know that my dad could have made it through that situation if we were not able to be there with him. It was an amazing time and I wouldn't trade it for anything. My baby, who's the youngest grandchild, was seven when this all happened. When he did die, she was 12 or 13, and you're a totally different

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person when you're seven versus 12. She remembers him and she wouldn't have ever remembered him if he would have died at that original time when in town they said there was nothing they could do for him.

But I was able to run my business from up there. I always talk about family first, but I pride myself on never, ever, almost never ever, rescheduling clients. I don't just reschedule, I don't reschedule clients. I don't tell them I have a sick kid. I've rescheduled probably five times in 22 years. I remember once driving to the emergency room with a kid, calling a client, but I don't reschedule things. When I say family first, that doesn't mean I run a sloppy business. It just means I run my business around my family, okay? I just want to make sure to get that point in there. But I was able to go up there and do my work and I would reschedule clients. I'd come home and I would shoot, shoot, shoot, shoot. I would go back. I would come home and I would present, present, present, present. I kept my business going.

We wrote the book, *Worth Every Penny*, practically from my dad's hotel room. Our hotel room, oh my gosh. It was not a hotel room, but it felt like a hotel room. We knew every hotel within three miles of that hospital and we got to know them really well there. But I couldn't have done it if I wasn't an entrepreneur. I'm so grateful for that time because you can't go back and you can't change it. He wouldn't have been able to survive all the things that he had to go through, so I feel so grateful for that.

Right now, we're all in this coronavirus struggle together. It could be that, it could be a health risk. It could be whatever that pandemic or that next disruption is, but I get it right now. We're all stuck at home, for the most part. We have fear. We now have moved to fighting politicians on the media and the polarization of all the different media people, because they want to get ratings. Some are fighting one way, some are fighting the other, and it creates fear and anxiety. It's insane. I've had students who have gotten through the Hurricane Katrina. We've had floods and hurricanes and tornadoes all over the country, and so I get it. It's hard. It's always hard. It's going to be hard, but we have to know that if we want to keep our business, not just alive, but we want to be able to thrive and get through these things. We

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know they're coming, they're coming again. This isn't going to be the last time. We have to figure out how to use the time now so that our business can weather the storms in the future.

I believe photography is so important and we're so lucky to have this as a career and we're able to build the life however we want it because we are entrepreneurs. But look, with that said, right, it's easy to say let's plan for these things, but it's hard when your kids are at home and they're not in school. We can't hire childcare. They're whining, they're fighting. There are more messes, more laundry, sharing the computer. Some of you are having to move homes, you're displaced. Your spouse or partner or significant other lost their income. It's uncomfortable. I always say, we grow the most during times of discomfort. That's when we grow as people, that's when we expand who we are, when we get uncomfortable.

I had the realization when corona hit, it occurred to me looking back on all these years and all the things that I've gotten through without even thinking about it because you don't have a choice, is that we can build a business that can withstand the hurricane. Just like people on the coast, they build homes that they know can withstand hurricanes because hurricanes are coming. Pandemic, we don't know, this might come back. It might not, but if it doesn't, something else is going to come our way.

The good news is that the photography industry, we're not like the airline industry or the hotel industry. As a photographer, we can insulate ourselves against times like this, but this is one of the reasons the boutique model is so important. Warren Buffet said, "You don't know until the wave goes down who is wearing a swimsuit." I love that quote because everybody thinks, "Oh, all these photographers are the same. They're all doing the same kind of business," but the thing is, I really believe that the shoot and burners who are just out there competing on price, and if that's you, I hope you're really listening extra right now, because you're not taking the time to do the things like putting on a swimsuit so when the wave goes away you know that you have clothes on.

Here's the reason. Customers that go to people based on price, they're typically price sensitive, right? They're going to go to the people who are the cheapest, and even more than

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ever, those consumers are going to be looking and shopping on price. They're the ones who are most impacted and affected right now by everything happening in this economy. When you compete on price, being in a down economy, you're going to struggle, because there's always someone willing to do it cheaper. There always is.

The thing about it that we do as boutique, we create art work that makes people feel amazing. They look at their walls and they see their family and it gives them goosebumps. People are looking for happiness right now. They're looking for healing. After this coronavirus disruption, I predict that boutique photographers are the ones who will help people. We're the ones helping the people in the market who have disposable income and need to heal. Think about it. Travel plans are canceled, concerts are canceled. Those season tickets people used to buy to events are canceled. There are people who have money to invest and money to spend right now. There are, it's not everybody, but we can't serve everybody.

Here's what I know about business, and I learned it from flying in a hot air balloon. I'm horrified of heights. I had to have a glass of champagne first because I was thinking, "How can I do this? I hate heights. I'm getting in a hot air balloon," but I was with a bunch of entrepreneurs and they're so risk tolerant. They're like, "Come on, Sarah," so I jumped in with them. We were flying and it was beautiful, it was amazing. It was in San Diego and the sky, the sun was setting. We were enjoying each other and it was absolutely fantastic.

We were getting ready to land and before I even got in the hot air balloon, I'm quizzing the pilot, "How long have you done this?" He's like, "I've done this 30 years, never killed anyone." I'm thinking, "Okay, well, that's a good little pitch you've got there." But I thought, "Okay, right. He's good at this. He knows what he's doing. This is easy for him." As we're getting ready to land, I had total confidence in this pilot. I had already quizzed him, I knew he knew what he was doing. He's walkie talkie-ing to the guy on the ground and a wind started to come in and a dark cloud came in and the little basket we were in was shaking. I started to get nervous and I'm looking at him and he's talking faster and pacing around the basket. They're changing the plans and they said, "Nope, there's a tree there. We got to go this way. We got to

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do these different things." We landed beautifully. It was a little bumpy, but we landed in an open space.

I was visiting with him after and he said, "No two landings are the same," but he said, "All the experience we have is what teaches us how to navigate this and how to get good at the storm and landing in a storm," because they never go up if there's a storm, but storms come in. I thought, oh my gosh, that is totally like business. That's what we're doing. We're learning how to land a hot air balloon over and over and over again. That's why it's important for me to always be shooting in my studio because I want to be teaching photographers what I'm doing and still be doing it. It's easy for a hot air balloon guy to retire and then get out of practice on how to run that hot air balloon. I want you to put on your hot air balloon pilot hats, because let's get a plan so that you are ready for any disruption that comes your way.

The thing is we can make more money, but we cannot make more time. Let's take this time as a gift and get our head in the game and be proactive with how we're going to bubble proof our business. One of the things that I make a practice of is not giving energy toward an outcome I don't desire. Write that down. We do not give energy to an outcome we don't desire. Instead, we're going to take advantage of this time, and I have three things I'm going to share with you about how you can get your business ready to weather any storm.

Instead of shaking in the corner crying, I want you to do these three things first. Again, we can't make more time, so we're going to take this time to learn a new skill. It's hard enough to find time learning when life is happening, but now that we're on a life pause, this is such a great time to grow who we are because we're where we are because we're who we are. Let's grow who we are, this is a great time. Whether it's Photoshop skills, or lighting, or retouching, or how to make composites, or learning how to sell in person, how to attract the right clients, how to fix your pricing, there are so many things you can learn that you don't take time to learn, even if it's picking up a good book and refreshing on certain skills that you have.

I'm a lifelong learner. It's one of my things that guides me. It's like I have to have air and I have to be learning. It's funny because I didn't love school. I loved the classes in school that I

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loved, but I didn't love the memorizing and regurgitating. I liked learning and doing and applying. Hopefully, if you were that person too that didn't like school, which I'm not surprised if you're an entrepreneur and you're a creative that you didn't like sitting in chairs, memorizing and regurgitating, so you're in the right place.

Number two, build relationships by helping others. I know you might be thinking, "Oh my gosh, but I'm suffering. How can I help anyone? I have nothing to give." Well, I want to share a story about Des Linden. She's a marathon runner, which running a marathon is so much like being in business. This is not a sprint. We don't come in and discount and attract cheap, price-sensitive clients. That's not how we build a sustainable brand. We're not running a sprint, it's a marathon. This is a long-term investment in what we are doing. This runner, she trained so hard. Her goal was to win the Boston Marathon, this was in 2018. They took off running and it was rainy and yucky and her stomach didn't feel good. She just felt like when she took off, like, "I don't have it in me. I don't have what it takes to win this marathon."

Her teammate, Shalane Flanagan, needed to stop to use the Porta Potty. I mean, running a marathon is lonely so these guys stick together, kind of like running a business, right? She said, "Hey, Shalane, let me know what I can do to help you because this isn't my day. Let me just be your pace car." When Shalane stopped to use the restroom, Des stopped with her. Then they had to catch back up to the pack, right, which is never fun. You know you have 26 miles ahead and you have to sprint or work extra, use extra energy, to catch up with the pack. But she was like, "You know what? I'm going to do that to help her."

It was raining and it was yucky weather and there were tons of people ahead of her, but she didn't know, because she couldn't see that they had all dropped out and she was in the lead, until she got to the very end, where she won the Boston Marathon. It gives me chills to even tell that story because she didn't even realize, right? It distracted her. By helping someone else, it distracted her from her own pain that she was in and she was able to get her groove again, right?

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Instead of sitting there and feeling sorry for yourself and sitting in your suffering, in the suffering place that you are, get out there and take the emphasis off you and go help someone else. Before you know it, you're going to look up and you're going to be right back in the race. It's the law of reciprocity and it's a real thing. You help others and it's going to come back to help you in some way, shape or form, whether it's a teammate, another partner that you can meet.

Here's the thing, right now in this pandemic, there are entrepreneurs, other business owners, who you maybe have been trying to meet and you haven't been able to meet them because they've been so busy. I know as photographers, we partner with business owners a lot. Suppose you want to partner with a dentist to create and raise money for Operation Smile to create smiles. Dentists aren't working a lot right now and they're in transition, so this could be a great time to reach out and say, "Hey, how can I help you?"

Number three, fill your marketing tank. What are future marketing activities that you never have time for? I know for me, I always do a creative holiday card. I do a fall mailer, but I was do it after Labor Day in the fall, to my entire database. I do a senior mailer or some kind of senior activity. Guys, the Class of 2020 is suffering right now. Sit down and see and think about how can you serve the senior class when things open up. It's an opportunity that's brand new that's created itself that's something that you can do to put awesomeness out into the world. I just know, for me, marketing is one of those things that often gets put to the back burner and there isn't enough time to get it done. So I would say, fill that marketing tank. Go figure out what marketing activities you want to do that can help you later. When the holidays come and you have your holiday card, you're going to be so thankful to yourself.

Again, learn a new skill, build relationships with other business owners by helping them, and fill your marketing tank. Here's the thing. If you manage your business right, you keep in a positive head space, and you work like a hot air balloon pilot, you can be prepared for any unforeseen storms that head your way. If you're in business long enough, they're going to

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happen to you, they just are, so we might as well learn to navigate the bumpy weather and the wind and the storm and the disruption that we're in right now.

My first studio opened 12 days before a terrorist attack on our country, so I had to learn quickly how to pivot and how to survive. Sometimes we're forced to make short-term choices that we don't do in the long term, we may need to pause, but the economy is always going to recover. Those of us who have a plan, we don't have to wait for the economy to recover, okay? We just don't. I want you to always remember what I said earlier. We can always make more money, but we can't make more time. This time is a gift. The question is, how are you going to invest your time right now?

Hey, photographer. Everybody likes to learn about themselves, right? I know I do. If you've been in a rut late me and feeling burnt out about your business, I want you to know this. You're probably just operating under the wrong business model. Like Einstein said, if you judge a fish by its ability to climb a tree, it will spend its whole life believing that it's stupid. That funk you're in, well, it's probably not you after all. You're just trying to climb a tree with fins. What business model fits your personality? Well, I created a five-minute quiz to help you find out. Head on over to joyofmarketing.com/quiz and take the What's Your Photo Biz Soulmate Quiz, and be prepared to have some serious insight dropped on you. I don't want you to waste one more single second feeling like anything less than the rocking photographer superhero that you are, so go to joyofmarketing.com/quiz and take the quiz right now. I guarantee you'll learn something that'll change the way you see your business and will give you something positive and inspiring to think about all day.