FAQ MARKETING LOGIC

ARCHIVE AUDIO INTERVIEW

Donna Kennedy

Guest Interview Transcript



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Donna Kennedy

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Donna Kennedy Interview

Editor:

Today's guest is Donna Kennedy, an Irish entrepreneur, business mentor and coach who spent decades helping founders build profitable businesses that actually fit their lives. She's known for blending smart strategy with mindset, leadership, and helping entrepreneurs grow sustainably instead of just chasing burnout. She's also the author of many books, including DECISION: The Gateway to Your Unlimited Potential, and has a new book, which we'll talk about during the interview.

She's all about turning ideas into momentum and actually getting things done. Donna, it is great to have you with us.

Donna Kennedy:

It's great to be here.

Editor:

Let's start right at the beginning, shall we? Could we take you back just to the start of your entrepreneurial journey and what led you there?

Donna Kennedy:

I guess I was an entrepreneur at five. I started my first business, selling brooches. I really was always interested in entrepreneurship without realising that I was an entrepreneur. I had a very difficult past, and at a part of my life it was very, very difficult, but I turned it around. And as many people who have successful businesses and go on to help others through leadership, many people have had a rough start or they've had humble beginnings. Because there is a point where you get to have desperation, and that desperation is a catalyst for building something better.

Editor:

Absolutely. It must be one of those things where you've got a determination in you because of your past. Did you always want to run your own business, Donna, or is this something that you fell into?

Donna Kennedy:

I've always had an entrepreneurial spirit. What I mean by that is, as I said, when I was five, I used to sell brooches. At home, we had this pillar on a wall, and I used to sit on it with a little Fisher-Price record player, and I thought I was a busker. I was going to make all this money. Then at Christmas time I made and I sold yule logs when I was 12 and Christmas wreaths. So, there's lots of different things all the time.

I'm interested in people in particular and I'm interested in creating things. I'm known for a phrase, "Let's give it a go." Anything that happens and I look, okay, well that could be interesting. And then if I really love it, well, why not make money from it? And it's always a win-win, so everyone... I guess it's a little bit of an adventure. It's a journey of fun and everyone makes money.

Editor:

Certainly is that. What did those early years teach you about business and also maybe some of those things that you still use today?

Donna Kennedy:

Definitely that business is all about people. Especially in today's age, people try to sell product, and they focus so much on the product and on the glitz and the glam and all of that kind of thing. But really, businesses are built on relationships long term. If you think of any restaurants that you've ever been to, you've probably been to it because somebody has recommended it more so than just seeing an ad in a newspaper or on social media.

So, recommendation is probably the best form of accelerating your business and your life. But I think that comes very much from recommendation, people, and building relationships.

Editor:

As I mentioned during the introduction, you've written multiple books. I think just before we came on, you mentioned that the latest book that you've been working on is book number nine.

Donna Kennedy:

Yes, it's my ninth baby, so I'm able to say I'm delivering this into the world. It's all about action. It's when there's only plan A and that involves into action.

And many people find themselves giving, I guess, procrastination, hesitation, and they say, well, if it doesn't work out, then I'll just do plan B. I guess sometimes people sabotage themselves, it wasn't going to work out anyway, and this kind of thing.

Whereas if you have literally one plan, it's plan A, and you make it work. To do that, you have to have action. Again, social media can be responsible for it a little bit. But there's a lot of not-solid stuff out there at the moment, which are things like you wish for it and it'll happen, or you have the law of attraction only and it'll happen, think about it often enough and it will happen. Which is true to an extent that there are universal laws, but personally, I believe that you also have to have action as part of that.

So, you have to visualise it, you have to have the vision, you have to have the passion, determination. But if you do nothing, nothing happens.

Editor:

The book is out now. Where do we need to go to check out the book?

Donna Kennedy:

You can get it on Amazon. You can also get it on my website, which is donnakennedy.com, or if anybody wants to email the website and ask for details, it's info@donnakennedy.com.

Editor:

Perfect. You talk a lot about building success that's sustainable. Maybe you could just give us some overview of what that means in practise.

Donna Kennedy:

It's long term. There's a lot of people who build businesses. They have the vision, but they don't do the things that they need to do to get it started, but importantly to maintain it. And when things get tough, which they always do in any business or in your life, people can often... I suppose fail is a bad word, but they just stop. They give up. They don't push through the obstacles. They blame themselves, criticise themselves, say things like, as I said, "It won't work anyway.", or such and such, "A person said it wasn't going to work out, and they were right."

If you want to be sustainable, you have to be prepared to know that the fact is there will be obstacles, many. It's like life. You have to go through those obstacles, go over them, go under them, do whatever you have to do to get through them. And when you do, it's worth it. If anybody looks back to their entire life and anything they've ever got a result... That could be getting 10 out of 10 in a spelling test, so it doesn't have to be anything monumental... there were mistakes, many mistakes made to get there.

I think sometimes we can criticise ourselves a little bit too much and be too hard on ourselves, when really it's just about you can say to yourself, "That was a mess-up. We won't do that again, but what did we learn from it?", or, "That actually really worked.", and then look at that equally. It's all a kind of trial and error, but a calculated one at the same time. And give yourself a break.

Editor:

I think that many entrepreneurs as well, they are their own worst critic, and that can also manifest itself in so many different ways. I know that you believe in self-motivation. I mean, you've written nine books, so you have to be motivated to be able to do that. What drives you forward, Donna, and what tactics would you share with our listeners so that they could do the same in their life?

Donna Kennedy:

I would say don't wait for motivation. I certainly wasn't motivated at the beginning, that's the truth. People often ask me about confidence as well. Motivation, confidence, determination, they're words, and they actually mean nothing in a tangible sense. They're states of being. And any state of being is open to change, it fluctuates from moment to moment. There are plenty of people who will tell you they're motivated all of the time. They get up at five o'clock and they seem to run on nothing, and then they sleep for three hours. That is ridiculous and not maintainable in the real world.

I would say don't wait for motivation or anything that links to that. You have to realise that you're going to have to do it anyway. There will be days where you don't feel like it, and there will be days where it's easier to pull the duvet over your head or when it's easier not to get sociable or go to an event. But to

make it happen, you need to. And importantly, I think for people to scale it back a little bit, the small steps are the most important steps, and the steps that are calculated are the most important steps.

Whereas when we look at social media and we see people who seem to be so successful and they have everything, all of their good pictures go online. Very few people put up the bad pictures, so we have a very false perception of what real life is. But I can tell you, there's a lot of... Everybody gets up with hair like a bird's nest, unless you don't have hair. Everybody. We all are the same type of people, we just do different things.

I think it's just about when you are more authentic, when you're real about things, you don't have to have the facade. I guess maybe that's one of the lessons that I learned. There is a strength in vulnerability, it's not a weakness. But people run from the vulnerabilities and they run from things that maybe don't look good on social media. Or if they've got a bad day, they don't let other people know about it, because... Or if they're not busy. If you meet somebody and you ask them, "How are you?", they'll normally say, "Oh, busy." Busy doing what?

Editor:

Yeah.

Donna Kennedy:

I don't want to be busy. I want to be enjoying my life. So, it's setting up systems that work and that means being authentic. And if you've got a bad day, so what? You're not going to mull over, you're not going to moan about it. But at the same time, you have to acknowledge life for what it is. It's up and down, it's every way. And then it's just creating systems, creating processes, creating good relationships, as I said, and surrounding yourself with the right people.

And really importantly is keeping your mindset right. Your mindset is the foundation for everything, in my opinion. Everything. You can have the best strategy, you can have the best qualifications, you can be the most skilled in an area, but if you don't have mindset at the foundation, it will collapse 100%.

So I would say to people, focus on your mindset first and everything else will fall into place.

Editor:

Do you believe that business should be fun? A lot of people take it so seriously, but you come across as the kind of person that actually wants to embrace the fun side of business as well.

Donna Kennedy:

I don't want to be miserable. I certainly want to have fun in my life. I'm known for a phrase, "Live fully." Again, that comes from... I spent 20 years in a very difficult place, so I know what it is. I know what the opposite is, and it's certainly not one that I choose. And I really value time. I think if we value time more, we would be very selective as to what we do with it and who we share it with, and importantly, to have fun, but also to have meaning.

Life needs to feel meaningful. It needs to feel full. It needs to feel that you're living according to your values of what's important to you, being around the people who are important to you. Otherwise, what's the point? To impress people on social media or to do whatever it is that you feel impresses people? For me personally, I prefer to do things that I really love to do, rather than just to be busy for the sake of it or to pretend.

Editor:

That's amazing. You obviously are an inspiring person in so many ways anyway, and the fact that you have written so many books, and I know there's been a change in your personal life in the last couple of years as well with getting married and so on.

Donna Kennedy:

Yes.

Editor:

In terms of the support that you receive from your family, how much has that been inspirational for you?

Donna Kennedy:

Huge. You're not always going to receive support at certain times. I have a huge family, but the reality is, every single... If you even take siblings, for example, I have seven. Every single one of those siblings have lived a different life. They've been with their parents at different stages of their parents. They've walked in on a specific chapter of their parents' life, if that makes sense. So, no one of those siblings have lived the same life. Your family are going to have a certain level of understanding. Not all of them will know how to support you, and then there's your personal traits. I would say don't rely on family support, but it is nice when you get it.

My mother and my father in particular were very good to me. Many people know this anyway, but when I was seven, I was raped, and I became anorexic as a result. And then later on in my life, I developed epilepsy as a result of a car accident. So, there's a lot there to be supported with. I had fantastic parents. They stuck with me 100%, for sure. I can imagine, now a parent myself, it would've been really difficult. But people I thought would support me didn't support me.

You have to remember that you can't rely or expect other people's support, because ultimately it comes down to you creating your life, you having a good mindset, or you creating your business. Ultimately, it comes down to what you do. Many people blame the world, and I could blame the world as well, but blaming other people or other things or your advantages or disadvantages, where you grew up, it doesn't help the situations at all. It's more important to focus on what you do want.

Editor:

You've been through so much, as you just touched on. Resilience is the word that seems to spring to mind when you talk about this. I know that that's one of your key teachings when you're working with businesses, business founders, entrepreneurs. For people who perhaps are listening to this and thinking, okay, I want to be able to take my business forward and show the same kind of resilience as you, Donna, what would you say to them?

Donna Kennedy:

Number one is stop comparing yourself to other people. It will take half the battle out of it. We look at other people on social media, in our neighbourhood

and everywhere else around us, and we say, look how good they're doing. If you look at everything, any behaviour, look at it or read it, any book, or listen to any podcast, you'll always find that the number one thing it comes back to... If you peel it away like an onion with the layers, the number one difficulty that people have is feeling good enough. That comes from, in my opinion, when you're born, you know that you need to survive in the world, and the way you do that is you're being accepted, and therefore we do everything we can to be accepted.

Rejection is the number one fear. They say fear of public speaking, fear of death, but it's actually rejection, if you take all the fluff out of it. In fact, they use isolation in some countries as a form of torture, because people know that we want to be accepted by people. And because we want to be accepted by people, a lot of our behaviours, a lot of our resilience, a lot of our mindset is based on what other people think of us and how they view us. So, the first thing I would say is stop comparing yourself to people. You have a version of their lives that you see. You don't have the whole picture. And you're comparing yourself to the best bits.

I do think that you need to definitely, every single day, look at your mindset and keep yourself physically well. But mentally, physically, emotionally, and spiritually for some people, it's really about checking in. Every two months, I still do it, years and years and years later. I only did it last week. It's an exercise that I have that I actually track where I'm at in each area of my life. Some of them are not going to be wonderful, but if I know the areas that aren't wonderful, I can then improve on them.

That keeps you on your toes, it keeps you in check. And when you're regularly tracking, say, "How am I doing in that area? How am I feeling in that area?", any little improvements, you can make them before they become a disaster. For resilience, you have to take care of yourself, otherwise you're running on empty, you're on half battery. That's where people fall, is where they have a weakness in certain areas, and normally those weaknesses are to do with either mentally or physically.

When you look at it, when you really look at it, most people have the skill to do what it is, and if they don't have the skill, they can learn it. If they don't

have the context, they can get them. The fluffy stuff or the surface stuff really isn't what keeps you resilient. What keeps you resilient is checking in on yourself regularly and doing it with authenticity and being honest. When I work with people, when I mentor people, one of the first things I'll do is I'll do an analysis of their life. Some of them are like, "Why are we doing an analysis of this?" Because it's the most important thing.

You can have an amazing business and you can have a horrendous marriage because you're so focused on one area, or you could have an amazing business and your health is in dire straits because you're focused on one area. Whereas if you can look at your life as a balanced overview and say, "What's important to me? Who's important to me? And where do I need to consistently improve?"... There will be areas that will always, without a shadow of a doubt, be vulnerable. There'll be areas that at certain times...

For example, during the whole COVID thing, you found a lot of people became very vulnerable, and all of a sudden they didn't know what to do. Suicide rates went through the roof, businesses collapsed, because people were so focused on one area and they forgot the rest. Divorce rates went up in England by 122%, according to one law firm in London that I researched, just to see where people are at at that time. So, your mindset is huge, and making sure that you take care of yourself. When you do that, that is what resilience is about. Resilience is not about skill or strategy in a business. That's execution of skill.

Editor:

Yeah, I was going to say, let's drill down into that a little bit more, if you don't mind, Donna. In terms of self-care, obviously you talk about keeping your body healthy, your mind healthy, also your business healthy, your relationships and so on. Maybe you could just give us a few practical steps, maybe some of the things that you've done or that you've taught other people to do to put them in that best position.

Donna Kennedy:

The important thing, first of all, is clarity and what it is that you want. And then you have to break down strategies that will get you there, but you have to do it in bite-sized chunks. And for that, you need clarity, not just on an

overall, this is what I want, or this is the kind of business that I want, or the kind of life that I want. It's this is what I want, but what do I need to do this week, and then what do I need to do every day? And do those daily steps while keeping the big vision there.

Clarity is very important, because if you don't have clarity, you're really muffling through and wading your steps through the dark and figuring out as you go, which really isn't going to create success short term or long term. You'll get lost. So, have the clarity at the beginning. That means looking at what is important to you. What is it that you actually want? Your business is a vehicle for living your lifestyle. If it's the other way around, you're going to be a very unhappy person and probably broke.

So, the clarity is huge, assessing what someone's values are, assessing your goals and making sure the goals are yours, they're not based on other people's standards and what other people feel that you should or could do. Also, looking at your interests and making sure they're incorporated into your goals. Looking at the people in your life, the ones that you want to stay in your life and saying, "How is this going to work for me?".

For example, when myself and my husband, we decided we were going to have our son, I knew was pregnant very early on. I decided I still have my goals, but I'm going to achieve them in a different way, because I wanted to be there in the morning with my son. That was just my choice, and I know not everyone is in that position. But I was not going to be able to achieve my goals in the same way as I would've before, so I had to adjust and say, "He's now important to me, so how can I achieve my goals and include him and include my husband and include everything else in my life?".

That means sitting down on a regular basis and getting clarity around those, and also doing a little review of who's in your life and whether they add to it or whether they are dragging out of it. A lot of the time we can spend are on people and things that really have nothing to do with our goals and valuing time. So, I would look at where is somebody putting their time.

They might be very surprised as where they put their time and how much of it, that if they use more constructively, they could claw back hours in a day, and then have many of those hours doing things that they absolutely love, getting

focused on the actions that matter, not just every action. There's certain actions that will make a difference, and there's certain actions that will just... They're fine, but they're additions. They're not really going to make you a successful business or life.

So, there are many things, but a lot of it is getting very honest with yourself, not criticising yourself or judging yourself. It's honest for the sake of making it raw, making it brown to getting it crystal clear on what you want, and then making decisions the way, right as you go along and assessing those decisions. Is this for my greater good? Is this for the greater good of my business? Is this still the direction that I want to go in?

Every 10 years, people will review their life because there's milestones. When you hit 30, when you hit 40, 50, and any other age that you want, people will naturally review, because there's another zero there. They'll naturally review, is my life the way I want it now? If you think about when you were 10, when you were 20, when you were... You're probably still young, so we just won't go any further. At each 10 years, there would've been different questions you asked yourself, and importantly, different priorities. If I asked myself in my 20s what did I want, it's very different to what I wanted when I had my son at 32.

These are the kind of questions that people need to ask. Having a pause every now and again is a good thing. It doesn't mean you're lazy. People have that you have to be constantly on fire, you have to be constantly doing something and busy, and if you're not being a superman or a superwoman, then you're not good at business, which is absolutely untrue. The most successful entrepreneurs that I know, they've all got balanced lives. Of course, there are a few that don't, but they're going to be miserable, whether they're wealthy or poor, regardless.

But the ones with happy lives, they're not out there being crazy people being busy. Other people who are very calculated, very much... They know who they are and they delegate where they need to delegate, and they're clear about what they want and they value time. I can't stress enough how important it is to value time.

Editor:

I think it's amazing as well. That whole work-life balance thing, as you say, is so important. Obviously everyone is busy, but you are super busy, Donna. You've got a business to run. You've got family commitments. You've got all the distractions, if you like, that everybody else has, yet you run a successful business, you do webinars, you do seminars, you've got courses, you've got books.

I think the first book I read of yours was DECISION: The Gateway to Your Unlimited Potential, which is a really inspiring book, and I think it's a great introduction to who you are as well. I know time is getting short in this interview, but maybe you could just tell the audience a little bit about the book and how that came about.

Donna Kennedy:

There's certain things that you need in order to create a result. Whether you are somebody to be an aspiring Olympian or whether you're somebody aspiring to have a great business, there's certain things that you will have to do when it comes to decision. For example, you could be at a crossroads and you may be completely confused. What do you do in those moments of confusion? If you are having to make decisions and you happen to have an environment that isn't necessarily supportive of what it is that you want to do, what do you do in those moments? If you don't feel motivated, if you don't feel energetic, what do you do in those moments?

The particular book was written after... It was actually after COVID. I found that a lot of people were at crossroads. Obviously, when you mentor people, they tell stuff privately to you that they wouldn't to the public. But a lot of people were at crossroads because their careers had to change. You'd be amazed at how many people couldn't use a computer effectively enough to make a business. There were lots and lots of people at home, and they were suddenly at a crossroads, and what do I do now, so that period of indecision.

When people are in that period of indecision, they'll do a couple of things. They'll either run away because it's ultimately a perceived threat in your mind. They'll either run away or they'll freeze or they'll fight. Many people froze and they just didn't know what to do. When somebody freezes, sometimes I always step in and I say, "Okay, I understand it. It's completely normal. But

now let's look at what you need to do in these moments. "Getting that clarity and having that plan is so important.

And then making the decisions that are authentic, for example, making decisions, as I said, with valuing your time, it's a complete review. That's where the book decision really came from, was because so many people were confused and they were lost. The book action, I guess, was from that. Because then when people make decisions, then they need to create a plan for clear action. People would generally enter a situation, a goal, something that they want to have happen, they'll enter it with always I'll have a plan B in my back pocket in case it doesn't work out.

But what if you didn't have a plan B? What if you only had plan A? Your actions would be a lot more purposeful, and they would be a lot more intentional. This is, I guess why so many people, when they have humble beginnings, they don't have a plan B, so it has to work and they make it work. You will find that when people are in the most desperate situations, that's when they get faster, that's where they get stronger, that's when all of their ideas come out of their head. That's when suddenly they prioritise and decide I don't have time for that, I have to do this now. That really is about taking those actions. So, action really is the follow on from decision.

Editor:

Donna, it's absolutely fascinating. It's lovely to meet you. Again, for anybody who wants to find out more about you and also the nine books that you've written so far, where do we need to go to do that?

Donna Kennedy:

If they go to donnakennedy.com, and as I said, I'm always open to connecting with new people, so don't be afraid to send me an email or add me on socials and send me a message. I'm also open to new opportunities and seeing what happens next.

Editor:

Amazing. Donna, thanks again for your time today. It's been an absolute pleasure.

Donna Kennedy:

Perfect. All right. Have an amazing day.

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