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00:16

Hi, I'm Andy Laporta. Earlier this year, we were caught up with many other businesses who found that the pandemic hit them very hard. My business is speaking at live events, and they just dried up completely. So with many others, we were scrambling to change our business models are find new ways of generating income, while all the time seeing our balance edge closer and closer to that dreaded overdraft limit with a bank and the government, we're giving grants and support to businesses of all kinds, but it seemed that we were always left behind until the bounce back loan came along. And when that bounce back loan came along, we were able to apply and we could see that we are already seeing some promising results from the changes, we'd introduce into the business. And we knew that that loan would tide us over until those changes really started to impact. But then we got a letter from the bank. And it just simply said that because of some information that they had found out, in looking at our application, we were being turned down for the loan, no explanation beyond that. No right of appeal, no information about who we could contact, it simply said, Because of this, your application has been cancelled. It was brutal. And it really hurt us hard. And I did a lot of research. And everything I looked into told me that there was no reason for us to be turned down. I wrote to the bank CEO, and I wrote to my local MP. And I pushed and I pushed and I pushed until we got that decision overturned. And we got the loan that bridged us through until the transition could start to impact our bottom line. Now, I'm not sharing that. Because I want you to feel sorry for us, we've just experienced a record quarter. So things have turned around for us. And I'm not sharing that to have a gripe at banks or the government for supporting the pandemic. I'm sharing it for a different reason. And the reason I'm sharing it is the in all of the conversations that you've had over the last nine months, in all of the engagements that you've had with clients, and suppliers, and business contacts, those

people have been wearing a mask. People that I was dealing with, didn't necessarily know what was happening behind the scenes. They were just talking to me about normal business. And what we're used to doing is showing our best side to our public. So making sure that people see that we look strong, that we look independent, that we look in control of things,



03:06

I might be delivering a presentation with everything seeming rosy and positive, but in the background, scrambling around wondering whether we could keep the business going forward. And throughout the pandemic. So any people that you will have dealt with will have been in that position, whether they were worried about the survival of their business, whether they were worried about the survival of their job, whether they were thinking they were going to be furloughed next week. Maybe it wasn't them they were worried about but a friend or a family member. And it might not have been about economic security, it may have been about health, I spoke to a lot of people at the beginning of the pandemic, who were really worried about the system, the impact on society as a whole. And that was really impact impacting their emotional well being. behind those masks. We all have our struggles, the pandemic has really brought that to light. But they're there all the time, is just be more sensitive. Right now. During lockdown. We walk around, and we asked people, how are you? And how's business. And we get that typical response in the classic British response is the British image con wheel where people say How are you? And we say I'm fine. I'm fine. I'm fine. I'm fine. Thanks. We're not great at sharing how we really feel and what's really happening. So when people ask How are you? How are you responding? Are you telling them you're okay? And if you are, are you really okay? If they ask how's business, how are you responding? Are you telling them it's great is going well? Are you Are you truly opening up we condition to show strength But by showing strength, we turn away support. We don't answer people when they ask how we are. Because we think they're being polite. They're not really interested. But in fact, we're lying to them. And we're lying to ourselves. If we say we're fine, but we're not. A strong network is not about sales. It's not about referrals, they can help you, and they can support you in your role. But that's not really what networks are for. networks are there to support. And yes, referrals and sales may be part of that. But the support for everything that we achieve in our business is all around us all of the time. But we need to be able to tap into it. And we can't tap into it. If we spend our whole time wearing that mask, and masking the truth about what's happening. A few years ago, my business was really struggling. And I'm a member of the professional speaking Association. And I went along to a meeting of the professional speaking Association chapter in Thames Valley in Redding, just outside London. And one of the sessions there was a workshop run by a speaker called Steven Houghton Burnett. And Steven issued everyone with a questionnaire before the session started, and we just

had to fill in our answers. And then during the session, he went through the questionnaire and asked just for a show of hands, to see how people have responded. And two of the questions related to our businesses, one was to our speaking business, and one was to our non speaking business. And each question was the same. How would you describe your business at the moment, and it gave four options, it would say growing, stable, it's new, or in decline. And Stephen went around the room and asked for a show of hands, people put their hands up for each answer. So he said, Have you answered it's growing? And people put their hands up? And he said, Have you answered, it's stable, and people will put their hands up? And he said, Have you answered that it's a new business, and people put their hands up, and he said, Have you answered it's in declined, and nobody put their hands up. They were liars in that room. I know, there were lies in that room. I was lying. My business was in decline. But I didn't want to share that with that community. And yet, this was a community, I call my tribe, a community I've been a member of since 2003, I came over 10 years at that stage, a community full of friends and people who would support me. And yet when I was going to those meetings, and they were saying, how's business, I was saying, it's fine. We do this time and time and time again, Steven, who who ran that session, a year or so later wrote a blog on LinkedIn, saying I'm broke, but not broken. And he talked about the fact that it made a lot of money in tech, but it lost it all. But he had hidden it from people.



08:06

And hiding, that hurt hiding that damage has really hurt him psychologically. worrying so much about his ego had damaged relationships with other people. And my fear is that we're doing this all the time, we're not letting people in to help us, we're building walls, so that we look good. But those walls, those defenses are damaging us, and damaging our connections to other people. And that's the cycle that I really want to encourage you to break under this topic of just ask. I made myself a promise. After that Thames Valley meeting, I said, I'm gonna turn this business around with the help of other people. And then, when I've done that, I want to deliver a presentation at the annual convention of the professional speaking Association, and encourage my tribe to open up. And I did that in 2016. And the speaker before me was a good friend of mine and the co author, with me of my second book and death came third guy called Peter Roper, while we were writing in depth came third. Peter, unbeknown to me, was in the process of going bankrupt, and he didn't share at any time. And he said in his talk, that he was running on empty, and all the time that we work together, he would turn up with a bright countenance, and a smile on his face. And yet he was struggling. And I would love to have helped him, but I couldn't because he never told me. While I was going through this recognition of the challenges I was facing, I bumped into a fellow speaker at a private member's club in London and he

asked me how things going on, I found myself answering him honestly. You know, to be honest, very, I'm struggling at the moment. And he looked taken aback for a second. He said, what will What's happening? And I explained, and he said, I had no idea, how can I help. As a result of our conversation, he gave me two referrals over the next couple of weeks, he'd never referred me before. And when I discussed this with him, he said, I never thought you needed it. That help is out there for you. But if you don't open up and let people know, you need their help, they won't know how to help you. And in fact, if you present this strong, powerful image of a successful business, when the opposite is actually true, not only will they not know how to help you, and not know that you need the help, they may think that actually helped might not be helpful at the moment. Because you seem like you've got everything in hand, we need to have a trusted network that we can communicate honestly to, we need to understand why we stop asking for help. Why do we prevent ourselves? And is it me? Is this a handful of people? Is it everyone? And from the conversations I've had, this challenge is very widespread. So why do we wear capes and pretend to be superheroes? Instead of being honest with each other? I think there are a number of reasons I think one of the driving reasons, is a fear of looking bad. In all of the research I did for my book, a common theme was the need to not look bad to look strong to seem powerful, to show that we've got it all together. That came out time and time again. And in Stephens blog on LinkedIn that I mentioned earlier, broke but not broken. He talked about how his ego was the key component that stopped him from opening up and sharing with our network. We see this all the time on social media. In my book, I interviewed my 21 year old niece about her generation, the millennial generation and, and their struggles being vulnerable. And she talked a lot about the driver of social perfectionism, something that came up more than once, in my interviews for the book, we want to present the perfect face on social media, the constant stream of selfies for every selfie you see on Instagram, or Facebook, how many pictures have been taken and discarded because they weren't quite perfect. And that sums up the culture that we're in right now. Showing the best possible face to the world. I think that's changing.



12:48

I think the culture is shifting. Bernie Browns books and TED talks on vulnerability over the last few years have really started that shift. And we see time and time again. Now, conversations with sports stars and entertainment stars, talking about their insecurities. We've even had Prince William and Prince Harry talking about how they felt after their mother died and the various insecurities they felt over the years, is very publicly, even to the point of making bbc documentaries on the topic. So I do think that culture is shifting now. But it's still not quite right. Coupled with this culture of an increased acceptance of vulnerability is an increased talk of resilience. And I, I think the to live together. And actually vulnerability helps you become more resilient. Because if you're vulnerable, you're

more open to other people's support. And with other people's support, you can be more resilient. But it's not even always seen that way. Resilience is sometimes seen as I'll cope, I'll get through this, and can actually be counterproductive as you turn away support. So we need to understand that vulnerability is a strength, not a weakness. And if we can really embrace it, then we'll get so much more support than then we're allowing at the moment. We don't ask for help. Because we don't want to look weak. We don't ask for help, because we don't want to be a burden to other people. Let me just ask you this. If someone you really like and trust turns around to you, and asks for your help, and you're able to give them that help. How does it make you feel? If you're like most people, it makes you feel good. It makes you feel rewarded if you know that you've helped them. And yet we don't ask people for help, because we don't want to be a burden to them. When in fact what we're doing, assuming we're right, asking the right people for help is with denying them the pleasure of helping us So let's just reframe that and turn it around and give people pleasure by asking them for help. And we don't ask for help, because we assume that people can't or don't want to help us. We don't assume, let them make that decision. just grow a thick skin. So if they say they can't or won't understand that there are many reasons why they might say that. And if you've asked the right people, people who with whom you have a trusted, strong relationship, you're going to be at the bottom of that list of reasons why they wouldn't help you to grow a thick skin. Make it okay and communicate that it's okay to say no. But be willing to ask for the help. Anyway. To do that, and I've just touched on this. We need to manage where and when and with whom we share. I'm not suggesting that you walk out on the street after watching this this presentation, and approach the next person obviously at social distance. And say, I want to give you pleasure, can you help me? It isn't about approaching strangers. There's there's an element where unburdening ourselves to strangers is a release. But generally, I found in the research for my book that people feel more comfortable being honest with people they trust. So create a close, strong network around you, of people you feel comfortable approaching. And people you feel comfortable asking for their help people who won't judge you, people who will keep confidences, and people with the experience, the expertise, the different perspectives, the different way of thinking, where they can truly help you doesn't necessarily have to be someone within your team or within your business very often, it helps to have someone who can be objective, and where it doesn't get too political when you share openly with them. But really understand who is around you in your close, trusted network, who can support you and understand what makes that work. being authentic. And having integrity is absolutely key, you need to be able to truly open up and speak from your heart and not hold things back. And that's why this trusted network is so important. Having trust reliability and receipt reciprocity, people who know that they can trust you, they know that if they give you advice, you'll take it seriously, it doesn't mean you'll implement it, that's down to you. But you will seriously consider it. And if you do implement implement it, you will give them feedback as well you'll you'll involve

them in the process. And they know that they can turn to you in exactly the same way they may not have to. But they know that if they reached out to you, you would respond



17:46

and commitment and accountability. I think that makes such a difference when you can go back to people and they will say have you done what you promised you would do. You may not take their advice, but you will commit to take action. And you will explain why. And they can turn around to you and hold you to it. If you can put that all in place, then suddenly, people will be happy to support you. So you have the network. You know the foundations that go into it? Are you actually using it? And are you reaching out to people who can support you, I you can do this informally, and build a network of people that you can just pick up the phone to and ask when a need arises. But it also helps to have that formal support around you. And my formal support comes in two forms. I have mentors. So I have mentors, both of speaking and for business. And with them, I have a formula arrangement and we meet on a regular basis, they going back to what I just said they hold me accountable for what I'm going to do. And it keeps me focused and committed. And the beauty of having a mentoring relationship is that it makes me focus before each meeting on what I need help with. I'm not leaving it to chance and I'm not leaving it to the last minute I have to turn up with a challenge, ready to address. And it's exactly the same in the second format I use, which is mastermind groups.



19:14

So I have two mastermind groups, again, one for speakers and one for people in general business. I'm surrounded by people who I trust. And that trust has been built up over a period of time. We operate under Chatham House rule, which means that what's said in that room stays in that room same and mentoring and it means that each of us can be truly authentic and completely open and we have shared from the heart in each of those groups. And we hold each other to the account, we challenge each other. I was in one mastermind group which failed and it failed because people weren't willing to be truly open. And we need that openness in order to truly make it work. So whether you surround yourself with people who are just happy to help you when you need it, or whether you surround yourself with people who will formally be there to help you, the key is to be willing to reach out and ask for the help and the support when you need it. In that period, between when I identified that I wasn't asking for help, and my commitment to speak at that conference, someone that I knew well, through my networking passed away. And I went to his memorial service. And at that memorial service, person after person after person stood up and shared their memories of him. And they shared what a wonderful,

generous person he wasn't everything focused on his generous nature. They said that whenever they sat down with him, he was always to seeking to understand how he could help them. One person flew in from Africa for the funeral and the memorial service. And she said that he had flown out to Africa at his own expense, to help her set up a charity. Someone else flew in from America. And I particularly remember his comments, because he said, I still know don't know what he did for a living. Because every time we met, he only ever asked about me. I found out a couple of days later, how he died. And he'd taken his own life. And he'd done that because of money problems. There was so much money in that room, and there was so much love in that room. And if he'd have reached out to that network and asked for the help and support that he needed, it would have been there for him. But I don't know what stopped him. But for whatever reason. He didn't. And the outcome doesn't just impact him and his family, but everyone who loved him, everyone who cared for him. You see, by not asking for help. And by suffering because of it. We don't just hurt ourselves, we hurt the people around us. We've got the support we need around us. We need to allow people to provide that support. I started out by telling you about our struggles at the beginning of the pandemic and our failure to get the bounce back loan. As I mentioned, we got the loan, eventually the business has turned around. And we've had a very successful period. But it's not been without its challenges. And throughout that time, I've known when to reach out, seek support and ask for help. That help is around you all the time. It's in your family, it's among your friends. It's among your colleagues, your clients, your suppliers and your general network. But it's down to you to understand the help that you need. Where the best that the best place for that support is who will offer it and then reach out and just ask Thank you