

EPISODE 6

[INTRODUCTION]

[00:00:01.1] ANNOUNCER: Welcome to the Creative Empire Podcast. Each week, Reina Pomeroy, the life and biz success coach and Christina Scalera, the attorney for creatives are taking you up close and personal with successful influencers in the creative community and tackling your biggest business hurdles. Their mission is to help you, creative entrepreneurs, think beyond your daily biz so you can make the brave decisions that build your Creative Empire.

[INTERVIEW]

[00:00:32.2] RP: Hey guys, it's Reina here with Christina and today on the Creative Empire Podcast, we have Abby Grace of Abby Grace Photography and Abby Grace is an international wedding photographer for the old school chic couple in love and she's based just outside of Washington DC, just like me where she and her husband, Matt, work alongside with one another and she loves all things France and gets to travel throughout the year to satisfy that craving. Super jealous.

Weddings were how Abby got started in the industry but she's stayed in it because she's an incredible teacher and loves sharing what she knows with a fellow creative and if you have Instagram stalked her like I have, you know that she has taught all across the country at different conferences and workshops and when you hang out with Abby for more than five minutes, you'll know that she is the ultimate movie and song lyric referencer, which is super impressive.

Abby Grace Photography's mission is to run a business that enables a life that they want to live and to enrich and extend the life of any given marriage through photography. How beautiful is that, right? We're so excited to have you here on the Creative Empire Podcast Abby.

[00:01:35.7] AG: Thank you so much for having me. I'm really, really excited to be here. I can't wait to chat with you guys.

[00:01:40.3] RP: Yay!

[00:01:40.7] CS: Us too.

[00:01:43.0] RP: So we wanted to start this conversation off with a topic I know you're super passionate about, which is "the gentle no". Can you give us like a quick synopsis of what that means and what that means for you?

[00:01:54.9] AG: Yeah. Okay, so I have been in business for about six years at this point and we learned pretty early on that the word "no" was actually a huge asset to our business rather than taking a lot because I think as creatives, we have this tendency to view our talents as "subject to subpoena" like, "I want you to do your art for me, or I want you to do your thing for me," and we don't have the ability to say no because it's art.

I learned pretty early on that that's actually not the case. My art and my work is best consumed when I am working with people that I really jive with or when I'm doing work that I really am passionate about and so rather than someone saying, "I'd like you to photograph my family," and me having to say "yes", I have the ability to say, "I don't actually photograph families. I photograph anniversaries and weddings, and because I am not very good at that, I love to pass you on to someone else."

And what we realized was that by saying "no", I think the fear as creatives is that saying "no" is actually limiting and a damning word, that "no" is bad or we equate "no" with negativity but "no" is actually a word that can lead to freedom because when I say "no" to photographing things that I don't love, I can pour that same energy into the things that I'm really good at and ultimately, the things that grow my business.

And ultimately, at the end of the day, like Reina you said at the beginning, our desire is to run a business that enables a life that we love instead of a life that is governed by our businesses needs and so "no" is a word that helps us to walk that line and that balance. "No" can mean saying, "I don't want to shoot this particular kind of work," and "no" can also say, "You know what? I am not going to work on Sundays because that's my Sabbath. I take that day for family. No I'm not going to meet with you and your mom to talk about your wedding on Sunday

because that is my day off,” and so “no” allows me to do more of the work that I love but it also allows me to lead more of the life that I love.

[00:03:30.7] RP: Totally, I absolutely love that and I think so often people are scared to say “no” at the beginning because that’s their income, where they’re scared that their next client isn’t going to come, right?

[00:03:42.7] AG: Yeah.

[00:03:43.1] RP: What’s that been like for you or any of your clients?

[00:03:46.3] AG: Yeah, so the first time that I have actually said no to a client it was face to face and I was having a consult like, “Should I shoot your wedding? Should I not? Let’s get together a little bit,” and I was like, “If you could rate the importance of your wedding photography on the scale of one to 10, what would that look like?” And she said, “It’s a five,” and I was like, “Man, that is really depressing for me.”

Everyone has their priorities, that’s totally fine and photography wasn’t at the top of her list and that’s okay but I’m a super passionate and zealous person and I only want to be working with people who are also really excited about their wedding photography and so I was so scared but I remember telling them, “You know what? I honestly don’t think that I am the best fit for you. I think that there’s another photographer out there that you guys would be really, really happy with. And I know that ultimately, you probably wouldn’t be satisfied with the product that I produce for you so let me help you find someone else that could do that.”

And they were really grateful and it was really freeing because it helped me see that I am not saying no purely out of selfish ambition. It’s not like, “I don’t want to shoot your wedding, you’re not good enough,” or, “I don’t want to photograph your family you’re not good enough.” Or I don’t want to do whatever it is I don’t want to do because there’s a problem with you or because I’m lazy but what ended up happening was that weekend that I didn’t book for that client that rated it a five out of 10, I book for two other weddings for couples that are really excited about working with me, who are really excited about their photography. So it just went to show that saying “no” and taking the risk of saying “no” to that one couple actually opened the door for

twice the amount of income for work that really fulfilled me. I know there is this sphere of like, “Oh my gosh what if I say no and this is the only opportunity that I was ever going to get.”

But Reina, one of my favorite things that you’ve said in the past is there is more where that came from. Generally saying “no” to one wedding client or saying “no” to family pics, I am using family pictures as an example, but whatever kind of work it is that you don’t want to do typically isn’t as limiting as you think it’s going to be. Because there is power in specialization, when you can be known for something that you’re really good at instead of being a jack of all trades like Tiffany Farley is an incredible example. Tiffany does family with motherhood portraiture.

[00:05:48.8] RP: It’s beautiful.

[00:05:50.9] AG: It’s exquisite and Tiffany doesn’t photograph — I don’t know if she photographs whole families, but she doesn’t do weddings, she doesn’t do seniors and some people could say, “Well you are really limiting your income potential by only shooting motherhood.”

[00:06:01.6] RP: And she does all black and white and square pictures.

[00:06:05.9] AG: Yes, she only shoots in square format, which is another thing that people could say, “Wow, that’s so limiting. You only photograph that — what does that even do? Like you shoot in Instagram? I don’t understand.” But she’s known for that. We’re talking about this right now because that’s something that is Tiffany’s work is known for. Emily Ley is another good example of someone who is not a jack of all trades.

Emily has several different types of stationary and design that she has her hands into but they are all geared toward one type of person and that’s either a creative female entrepreneurs or female entrepreneurs who are also mothers and one could come to Emily and be like, “Well you’re limiting your potential. You could also be doing wedding invitations and corporate design and logos and branding,” and Emily’s like, “That’s not what I’m good at, and that’s not where I am going to make the most of an impact and the place that I make the most impact is by speaking to young new moms who are also trying to balance family life with their creative business,” and Emily Ley is incredibly successful. Her Simplified Planner, [inaudible] every time

she releases them and what could have been potentially limiting has actually becoming a huge strength of hers because that's what she's known for.

[00:07:16.4] CS: Yeah.

[00:07:16.6] RP: Christina just got to meet her.

[00:07:18.3] AG: Oh did you really? That is so sweet.

[00:07:20.4] CS: Yeah, I'm actually at the National Stationery Show right now so like I was saying earlier, if my audio is awful is because I'm on the less sensitive microphone not to pick up all the ambulances every five seconds here in New York. But yeah, she is just amazing and just so warm and welcoming in person.

She gave me a hug and I was like, "Oh my gosh, you don't know me but I love you," and yeah, she really has capitalized that market that she has created for herself. It's like this preppy mom that wants to have a beautiful, simple life but things are chaotic and she does a really good job of peeling back that veil and showing people like, "Yeah this is possible to some extent, with the help of organizational planners which I am here to provide for you."

I am at the National Stationary Show and I see a lot of different planners and I'll just be honest, I see a lot of planners that look confused and things like that just different stationary stuff and I think that's because they are trying to serve everybody and all audiences. Meanwhile, Emily Ley is one of the first booths that you can see when you walk in to the right and it's this huge booth. She's modelled it to look like her office. She is doing super well, she was super nice to just allow me in because I'm not a buyer but yeah, I mean just super successful and has really done a good job not only aesthetically and she's done that with the help of a team who were there.

I think people don't really know that. They think it's all her, which she obviously is like a huge driving force behind that but yes, she's done a really good job not only of creating a brand and of aesthetic, that is her and uniquely her and for her audience but I think what's made her so successful as well is that she's cultivated a whole team around that who's then been brought on to help drive that mission forward, which is really great.

So I totally understand what you're saying. I can think of so many businesses that have just skyrocketed after they've declared a niche, after they've stopped saying yes to every wedding that came their way if weddings weren't their thing, after every person who said, "No, I am not going to speak at this or that or the other thing," and it's really hard.

I'm wondering Abby if you could just take us back to what of that first year of photography look like for you and then maybe, quickly isn't fun, but maybe if you can give us an overview of what each subsequent year look like. Because I think when people are starting out, it's really easy for them to kind of they hear this podcast and they say, "Yeah, I'm going to declare a niche," and then they bumble around. They're not really confident in that niche or they don't really know how to go after their ideal client or they don't even know who their ideal client is.

How did you pair down and what did that actually look like in practical terms for you moving forward from, "Hey, I'm a photographer for everybody," to now a very specific kind of style of shooting and a very specific client that you have? I know you talked a little bit about that with the one client that you said no to face to face, which is amazing. I'm so proud of you for doing that face to face because that's not easy but maybe just walk us through the years there a little bit.

[00:10:17.2] AG: Yeah, sure. I started off as an apprentice. In 2010, I shot weddings under another photographer and spent that whole year just learning the ropes and then 2011 was my first year of taking weddings on my own. I shot eight weddings that year and I took anything else that came my way, except for families. I never really wanted to shoot families. I did seniors, I did engagement sessions for anyone that wanted to contact me.

I said "yes" to everything because I thought that that's what I was supposed to be doing, that I wanted to leave my corporate job, but I didn't know — I just didn't know how to get there. So I was like, "Well obviously the answer is to say yes to everything so that I can bring in as much money as possible to leave that much sooner," but that conversation with that couple on, I think it was in February of 2011 was super eye opening.

[00:11:02.7] CS: That was what? Like your second or third year of business then?

[00:11:05.3] AG: So that was my first full year of shooting. Yeah, it was my first full year of shooting the weddings on my own. Maybe it was even 2012? No, I think it was February of 2011 and it was just really freeing first of all. I was like, “Oh I want more of this.” First of all, now that I know that I’m allowed to say “no” to people, when someone sends me an inquiry it’s not a subpoena for wedding photography.

I don’t have to say “yes” to them, what would it look like to start to implement that in other areas of our business? Because I know myself and I know that there are some photographers out there and there’s some business owners out there who are happy working for anyone. They love what they do enough that it really doesn’t matter what the work is that they’re doing as long as they’re doing the thing that they love.

The guy who I learned under was like that. He didn’t care who’s wedding he was that he’s shooting, where it was, who was it for, what the wedding style was, he just loved photography enough that if he was shooting one, he was happy. But I am a very passionate person and it’s either all or nothing and if me and the couple don’t click, I know that it’s not going to be a good experience for me and it’s also not going to be a good experience for them.

So I decided pretty early on that that was going to benefit the both of us and I also came to the conclusion that if I am going to work as hard as required to own a small business, that I want to do work that I love. I don’t want to work 80 hours a week for people that I don’t even like or doing work that I don’t even enjoy and so, in realizing that my connection with my couples and my connection with the work that I was doing affected the work itself that was produced and the enjoyment level of just my job in general, I made the decision early on in 2011 to stop taking anything that didn’t jive with what I was that I wanted to be shooting if I wanted to be shooting.

So in 2011 was eight weddings, 2012 I think I shot 19 or 20 weddings and 2012 was the first year that I started to get those brides that really clicked and it was like, “Oh my gosh, they get it. I want more of them,” and so taking those brides and deconstructing like, “What is it about them that I love? What is it about their events that I love?” Because I didn’t know what it was. It was just something about these four brides is working really, really well and I want more of them. I want their friends, how can I start to tap into that?

[00:13:17.8] RP: Yeah, what was that something? How did you figure out that something?

[00:13:21.3] AG: Yeah, it was one of those things where you look at it in terms of what looks like a random scattering of people. “Okay, here are my 20 brides for 2012 and here are the four that I really connected with. What do these four have in common?” And pulling that and what it ended up being is that there were all having classic weddings. They were all really excited about their marriage more so about their wedding.

Most of their weddings were like on the higher end. Not higher end in the sense of hundreds of thousands of dollars but they were a bit more luxury than what I was used to do or classic like they want barnyard weddings with mason jars and burlaps or anything like that. So starting to draw the line between these connections helped me to piece together like, “Oh, the reason I love these weddings so much was because they all had these four things in common.”

When I realized that, being able to start chasing after that type of bride in particular, there was also a transformational conversation that I had with Mary Marantz of Justin and Mary and she helped me pull out the fact that I — so I had a brand in 2012. It’s funny on this podcast you guys can’t see me doing quotations things with my fingers. I used quotations around the word “rebranded”, and I had come up with this cooler, cuter version of Abby Grace that was like, “Maybe if I make a brand and a website around this, it will become a self-fulfilling prophecy and I will become this cooler cuter version of who I am right now.”

And all that ended up happening was I started attracting these brides that were having weddings that — it wasn’t so much about the weddings as it was about the people and I was attracting people that they were — something was missing. I was attracting 20 cute brides that were having DIY weddings in a barn with mason jars and burlap because that’s why I thought I was supposed to want because the people that I followed and that I looked up to, those were the kinds of weddings that they were shooting and so I was like, “Well obviously, I need to embody that as well.”

But there was this level of dissatisfaction that I couldn’t put my finger on and Mary was like, “Well here’s the problem. It seems like you’re trying really hard to be Marilyn when in reality, you’re more of an Audrey and you’re seeing this disconnect because you are trying to cater

to Marilyn Monroe brides, but if you are an Audrey at heart, if you were a classic, if you love the little black dress and pearls, you need to embrace that and if that's really where your heart and your passion lies and that's who you are at your core, of course you're not satisfied with the types of brides who don't also identify with that."

[00:15:37.3] RP: It sounds to me like Mary really got down to the core of the shoulds and I need to's and people expect of me that I'm hearing from you. She hit the nail on the head there.

[00:15:49.5] AG: Yeah, Mary is brand guru.

[00:15:51.6] RP: Super insight.

[00:15:51.7] AG: She's incredible. She has the power to look at things and be like, "Hmm, this is what I hear you saying but this is what's actually going on," and that was also another. I feel like I had five or six "aha" moments in my business over the past six years that had been defining turning points and that was one of them, when I learned to stop projecting the, "I should, I should, I should," or, "This is who I think I'm supposed to be, or this is what I think I'm supposed to want," and learned to really start asking the question, "Do I actually want this?"

I know I'm supposed to shoot destination weddings because it's a status symbol and that's what other people want to do but truth be told, shooting weddings in the Caribbean doesn't really align with my brand. I love it, it's fun, I love going to the Caribbean, who doesn't? But for five days of work for a wedding that I really can't use anywhere in my portfolio, is that actually something that I want or do I think I'm supposed to want this?

Is this just like an industry buzz kind of thing that if I think that I use it, it will land credibility in my brand or is this actually something that's going to fulfill me or going to be good for my client or is going to help push me into the path that I want to go with my business? And if the answer to that was "I'm not sure" or "Probably not", we generally try to turn it down.

[00:17:02.5] RP: I think that you have so much experience under your belt of saying no that it probably feels a little foreign to you to go back to your original mindset of like, "I had to, I'm supposed to," like the subpoena stuff. If you have to give yourself advice from day one Abby, if

you go back to that moment and know all the things that you know now, what would you say to yourself and what encouragement or advice or hard truths would you give yourself?

[00:17:30.3] AG: Yeah I think a lot of it comes down to looking at who you really are as a person and I know that that's sounds really vague and feel goody but I had no idea who I was when I first started out. I allowed all of these other things that I saw other people are doing to project on who I was and when I married my husband Matt five and a half years ago, I'd like to think that I had an inkling of who I was as a person, but really I had no idea.

I didn't know what my style was, I didn't know the things that I valued and it was just because I'd never really spent time thinking about it and honestly, I think a lot of it came down to I spent so much time paying attention to what other people are doing that there left no time for introspection and no time for really pushing it through that sieve of, "Do I really want this? Do I really like this or is this just the kind of stuff that I think I'm supposed to want?"

I think photography really helps to bring that out of me because photography was one of the first things that I really wanted not because someone else told me that I was supposed to, because someone else told me it was good at it and I thought, "Well I guess I should probably do this." It was the first thing that really grabbed my soul and really pull me forward on its own. Going back to the question of what would I say to myself, gosh, that is such a good question!

Probably just encouragement and first of all, stop paying attention to what everyone else is doing. I know it's hard and I know that at the beginning that's where you learn a lot. When you're learning to play the guitar you don't just start making up songs on your own at the beginning. You play other people's songs and you learn how to do the guitar by learning what other people have done.

But if that's all you ever did, you'd never really be a master guitarist. You'd only be really good at copying other people have done. So yes, there's wisdom in having people that you follow and looking to leaders in the industry and admiring their work but at some point, there has to be a diversion from that and if all you ever do is imitate, you'll never going to find satisfaction in what you do because all it ever is, is imitation.

I guess the encouragement to sit down and stop paying attention to what everyone else is doing and really take a second to focus on — not a second. Take a lot of time to focus on yourself and not in a self-centered way but just focus on what is it that brings you joy truly? What is it that brings you joy? That kind of thing that if you could do it without ever getting paid for and you would still do it.

Then just the ceasing to follow and study as many people's work as I was trying to study because I think that there did come a point — I mean there's not a lot of satisfaction in that. For me there was a lot of — there was a lack of enjoyment in my own work after a while because it was like, "Hey, this looks like a picture that so and so would take," and it's great and beautiful and that person's work is beautiful but there's just not a lot of joy in only recreating what other people have done.

[00:20:12.3] CS: Sure.

[00:20:12.5] RP: Totally, love that answer.

[BREAK]

[00:20:14.5] ANNOUNCER: Are you enjoying the show? It would mean so much to Reina and Christina if you'd take two minutes and head to our iTunes and leave a review. It doesn't take much time but it helps them bring you more value packed content.

Back to the convo ladies!

[BACK TO INTERVIEW]

[00:20:30.7] CS: Yeah and it sounds to me that mentoring is a big facet of you helping you find your style and what you wanted to do as well. We have talked about this before on the podcast but mentoring is an investment. It's an investment that people are scared to make. How did that help you?

It sounds like Mary was your mentor and you had some other apprenticeship type relationships that helped you along the way. What role would you say mentoring played in helping you find your look, your style, your client? And do you think that expedited the process or do you think it would have happened on its own?

[00:21:04.0] AG: I know it definitely expedited the process. First of all, creatives tend to be pretty scattered anyways and so you've got all these bajillion ideas buzzing around your head and you're like, "Well I can do this, I can do this, I can do this," and mentoring was a funnel. "Let's put all of that crap into a funnel and the thing that comes out at the end is the pure version of what it was we started with."

So mentoring was helpful because it was helpful to have someone else say, "This is what you're telling me but this is what I think is really going on." Or, "Hey Abby, have you ever considered the fact that you're really good with this. People really seem to be responding to that to you," just an outside unbiased perspective of my social media, my work, my blog, that kind of thing and I have done a few mentoring sessions over the past few years, which has been really great but I think one of the other really helpful things is having an industry buddy and someone that you can call and bounce ideas off of.

During, I guess it was 2011, 12, 13. One of my best friends at the time was also a photographer, and we lived five minutes from each other, we are on the phone every day and sometimes it's just like, "Hey, I got this e-mail, I'm not sure how to answer it. This is my inclination of how I'd like to answer it, what do you think?" And her being able to point out flaws in that area like, "Hey Abby, your e-mail sounds really harsh. I would soften your language a little bit."

Even just that, helping me to identify it like, "Okay Abby maybe you shouldn't write e-mails when you're angry, or when you're worked up," or whatever reason and also her saying, "Hey have you ever thought about this? You're really good at this and I see that people are identifying this kind of behavior or aesthetic with you and maybe that's something you want to think on." So mentoring was a huge part of it but so is having an industry buddy that's this unbiased, outside perspective of myself.

[00:22:47.7] RP: Just to see outside of you, yeah.

[00:22:48.9] AG: Yeah, exactly.

[00:22:50.5] RP: Totally. I have a question about if you went back to your original self and had to teach yourself how to say “no” more, because it doesn’t actually sound like “no”. You are not saying, “No I’m not going to take your wedding.” That’s hard. But what does that actually sound like?

[00:23:07.4] CS: That’s a great question.

[00:23:09.4] AG: Yeah, most of the time it sounds like me just saying I am not available for their wedding day because I don’t think that the best, just from experience, I think it’s better to gently say to someone like, “Hey, I am not available,” than it is to say, “I don’t want to shoot your wedding and here’s why,” because ultimately brides can be a little bit sensitive about that kind of thing.

No matter how purely you intend it, they may take it personally. I’ve had that happen before and so I used to be like, “Yeah, tell people why you don’t want to shoot their wedding.” But now I’m like, “You know what? It’s probably just best if you don’t,” and if they really want to push it and really want to ask why, you can explain but I think at the outside, it’s just easier to say, “I’m so sorry I am not available for your wedding date.”

I don’t believe in lying. I don’t believe I’m saying I’m booked because that’s not true but when I say I am not available, it means I’m not available for you and again, if they want to push that, I’d be more than happy to explain like, “Listen I am a really passionate person and I do my best work when there’s a 100% chemistry level with my clients and I know that you’re not going to be happy with what I can give you and I would love to help you find someone that would be.”

I try to avoid that stage of things again because I’ve had that not work out very well and someone get really offended and really hurt and I want to prevent that because I obviously don’t want to hurt anyone’s feelings but when it comes to not quite that level of things like, “Hey, will you shoot my family session?” Or, “Hey, will you come photograph this corporate event?” I just

say, "I'm really sorry, I don't offer that kind of photography. I really only photographs weddings and anniversaries. I love to refer so and so."

It's nothing personal and I e-mail that short and sweet like, "Oh thank you so much for your interest. I actually don't photograph corporate events. Or I don't actually take on families because I specialize in weddings and anniversaries, we don't photograph families. We'd love to refer you to this person and this person and this person. Thank you so much, bye." And there's nothing personal about that. I just don't do that type of work. It's like going to a contract lawyer and be like, "Hey, can you litigate for me in a divorce court?" And they're like, "I don't do that type of law." It's nothing personal, it's just that that's not something that I specialize in.

[00:25:04.8] RP: Totally, love that and I see that often with graphing designers too. They want to specialize in branding and then they're asked to do wedding invitations, and they're like, "Okay." Or, "Can you do a book cover for me?" "No, that's not what I specialize in," right?

[00:25:18.1] AG: And we let other people put these expectations on us and we think that we're going to disappoint them if we say no and really, it's just business. Nobody else is going to take this personally as you are most likely like, "Hey can you design this book cover?" "Oh, I'm really sorry, I actually specialize in branding. I'd love to refer you to so and so." "Great, thanks." No one is going to be like, "Can you believe the nerve of that graphic designer not to design my book cover."

You may get the odd client that reacts like that but that's not every people anyways and truthfully if they'd react that way, do you want to work with them in the first place? Gosh, I can't remember who I read it from. It was a couple of weeks ago that I read something really good about how we allow other people's expectations project on us and somehow we make ourselves feel like we need to provide for those expectations even though that's not anything I ever promised anyone in the first place.

If someone comes to me after a wedding and they're like, "Where are my prints?" And I'm like, "I don't provide prints in wedding packages. You have the digital files. You can order prints on your own if you want to but that's not something that I provide." Instead of the reaction of, "Oh gosh, I probably should have provided them prints. Let me order you some prints." That was never a

spoken thing. That may have been your expectation but that's not my promise. I don't deliver that kind of thing.

And freeing yourself from just deciding to take a step back and say, "Those maybe are your expectations but I am not going to allow your misguided concept however how well intentioned it may have been, I will not going to allow your misguided concept direct how I do my business because it's my business. I appreciate your input or it's a good thing to consider whatever it is you're asking me for but unfortunately that's just not how I desire to run my business."

[00:26:54.1] RP: Totally.

[00:26:54.3] CS: Yeah, that's a really good thing to put in your contract too. Sorry the lawyer in me is like, "Yes, expectations."

[00:27:01.2] RP: I love that in me so. Yes, that's so important especially for people starting out, they don't even know that should go in a contract, right?

[00:27:07.7] CS: Yeah and really, unless it's illegal, there's really a lot of things that you can put in a contract. If your contract doesn't include prints or something like that and it's not in there, it says, "This is what it includes. It doesn't include anything else, so if you have questions ask me." It's a lot easier to go back in that contract with that client and just say, "Sorry this is what you signed and oh look, you initialed right next to it see?"

It's a lot easier to tell that conversation than to just say, "Oh man, yeah. I guess I'll just get you those prints," and rush and try to find a printer that Prints Well is really good, but anyway, yeah I think that's also a good thing. I think client education is also a big thing. I see a lot of people confusing their contracts and their client education in this area so they try to throw everything into their contract.

When maybe it's a little more appropriate to have these conversations like you're having Abby and educate your clients ahead of time and like, "Hey, this is what I specialize in. This is what I do. This is what I don't do," rather than to have a 50 page contract as well. So I love that you're so proactive in dealing with your clients. Can you talk a little bit about, don't feel like you have to

reveal any proprietary information or anything, but can you just talk a little bit about what it's like when a client first inquires with you?

You don't have to walk us through the whole process but what do you do initially? Do you start to weed them out in that e-mail or do you not offer some of them even like, I guess you do an interview or consultation or do you just have "the gentle no" in the beginning or when does that gentle no come depending on who it is? Because obviously, I know we have all gotten e-mails where it's like, "Oh this is someone I don't want to work with."

[00:28:42.3] AG: Yeah. Generally, the whole concept behind "the gentle no" is it's not always the word "no" as it is a roundabout way of saying that and I think as females especially, I read an article a couple — maybe it was last week? I read too much — that talked about how women, we struggle at being assertive in a sense. Like if a woman and a man were sitting on a board conference and someone asks for, "Hey can we add this to this agreement that we're both signing?"

A man might be more likely to say, "No, that's not possible," whereas a woman might be more likely to say, "Oh I'm really sorry but we actually can't do that," and so as women, we tend to apologize for things that there's a desire to take a softer approach and that's generalizing but I think that's where "the gentle no" comes in to be helpful because that's not a, "No, you cannot have that." It's a softer way of saying it.

For me, sometimes that softer way of saying "no" is just saying I am not available. Let's say there's a couple of venues that I just had really unfortunate experiences at or I just don't really want to work there like let's say a bride is having a barn wedding and she's having mason jars and burlaps and she tells me that in her inquiry form, because I do ask for venue information in the inquiry.

I would just reply back, let's say she's getting married in one of my, "I do not shoot there" venues, I just reply back by saying, "I'm so sorry, I'm not available. I would love to refer you to so and so, or so and so," and trying to make sure that I give them a strong referral for someone who's style is similar to mine and so that way, they never have room to get offended. There's not like, "What do you mean you won't shoot at my venue? What's wrong with my venue?"

It's not the bride, it's nothing personal, it's just maybe that venue isn't the kind of I don't want to be shooting in or the staff there was really unfriendly or whatever it is. So I do start to weed that out with that initial contact form. We I also love saying no just in the sense by presenting what it is that we do shoot heavily. We are actually in the process of transferring over to, I'm a Showit user which is an amazing website platform.

We're switching over to Showit five and we're doing some pretty heavy tweaks in terms of how we're presenting my work and my personality. One of the things that we're working on is really showing the ideal, ideal Abby Grace couple and so a bride who's having a barn wedding and is featuring mason jars and burlap, will never see that on my website because I don't want to invite more of that.

It's the whole concept of "show what you want to shoot. Show it is what you want to do" and people who aren't in lined with that will hopefully just naturally fall off because when a client is looking at a website, they want to see evidence of the kind of thing that they want. So someone who wants super saturated, really contrasty, grungy, gritty wedding photography is not going to find that on my website.

I don't offer that and so generally, I would hope that if they don't see that on my website, they're going to assume, "Well she doesn't offer that," or, "I'm not the type of client that she typically works first of all. I'll go find someone else." So "the gentle no" and the sense of you turning them away before they even inquire because they're not even seeing what it is that they're looking for in your website so they assume you are not a good fit.

[00:31:40.9] RP: Yeah, so don't showcase the things that dilute your message and you were talking about the Caribbean weddings. Yeah, it's fun to do it, but I'm not going to ever show that in my portfolio because I don't want that to be perpetuated. I love it. Christina and I try to do our best here to really show off sometimes we make mistakes, sometimes we are vulnerable not to ask you to be super vulnerable with us but is there an instance where you said "yes" when you probably should have said "no"?

[00:32:10.8] AG: Yes, absolutely.

[00:32:12.3] RP: That you would like to share with us.

[00:32:15.4] AG: Yes. I'm just trying to think of the best example of that. Gosh, that's such a good question. I've got a couple of clients that I said "yes" to that I really shouldn't have and every single time, I ended up paying for it in sense of like feeling sick every time I answer my e-mail from them or just the general interactions, there wasn't a level of appreciation there. I think maybe some of the best examples are work done for other vendors like someone who e-mails me that's like, "Hey, I like my team mates new headshots, how much would you charge for that?"

And I'm like, "Oh, you're a vendor. I won't charge you. It's free," and I have done that a lot and every time I get really frustrated with myself because not only am I not being compensated for what I'm doing, but I don't even like taking headshots. Why do I keep agreeing to do that? So I mean that is generally the best example, is saying yes to people who I feel like are expecting my services for free, which is again, going back to that thing of like allowing what we think other people's expectations are to dictate a way that we do business and so as a photographer, I've never had to pay for headshots. I always trade with other friends.

So I'm like, "Well they're in the wedding industry, they shouldn't have to pay for headshots either. They're probably not expecting it. When in reality, they may have a budget of several hundred dollars that they're willing to pay me but I'm just like, "Oh no, no, no. I'm guessing you're expecting it for free, so I'm not even," — because my fear is I don't want to be rejected. I don't want to say, "Okay yes, I will do your headshots that will be \$500," and then them being like, "Oh can you believe Abby Grace quoted us \$500 for headshots?"

When in reality, they'd probably just be like, "Oh okay, we can't afford that. Never mind, we'll find somebody else," and then, I ended up doing this work for free, which I don't even like doing and not that there's not appreciation on the other side but it's not a good business decision. If I'm doing work, work that I have spent six years cultivating, work that I have been paid by everyone else for, why wouldn't I get paid for something like that? You know what I mean?

[00:33:58.9] RP: Totally and like what you are saying about getting sick about answering your e-mails and stuff like that, when you have an emotional attachment, whether it's good or bad, I feel like no money is worth getting sick for.

[00:34:10.8] AG: No, absolutely because Mary Mirantz again, phrases it so well. She's like, "If we have 29 ideal clients for a wedding season and one non-ideal client and that one non-ideal client will suck the life out of you and steal the joy that you get from the 29 other great fits. Like maybe it's the person that writes to you after the wedding that's like these pictures are great but did you have more photos of blah or blah or blah or blah?"

Or e-mailing you a year later when they haven't done their wedding album to tell you that they had a problem with something. Generally, the ones that weigh you down and it really does steal the joy. We dealt with this last week. A client that I was again interpreting their lack of a response over e-mail as something really negative but not to say that they weren't an ideal client but we've had an incredible wedding season so far.

This one client had been asking me about something that I didn't get on my wedding day and being so frustrated over the e-mails that I was receiving and just the fact that I felt like what I was doing hadn't been appreciated or there hadn't been any grace that was extended to me and a day later, I got another e-mail from another satisfied bride who I think the subject line was like, "I'm dying, figuratively speaking, and in the best way possible."

And then this e-mail with copious amounts of praise like, "We love these photos. This is literary my favorite thing that's ever been on the internet. We love the blog post, we love everything," and I'm like, "Well that's a great e-mail but this other client over here is not happy," and it's like, "Abby that's one of the best e-mails you could have possibly received. Why are you letting this not all that big of a deal issue with some other client steal your joy from someone who's thrilled with what you do?"

[00:35:50.9] RP: Totally. It's so much easier to put emphasis on the things that really drain you when we should be focusing on the things that are just uplifting and the things that we — the reason why we're in the business that we're in, right?

[00:36:04.8] AG: It was Katelyn Holland I think of School of Styling who wrote a really good blog post a couple of weeks ago on the Rising Tide Society. She had launched this online course and someone about the course wasn't satisfied with it and wrote her to tell her that they weren't satisfied with it and I don't know how many people bought this course but it didn't matter how many people bought the course.

It was the fact that this one person wrote to her and said, "I'm not happy with this," and she let that person take that success away from everything else that she'd done and I mean we encountered this earlier this year. We launched a practical wedding workshop live and we had almost a hundred people that purchased the course that were thrilled with it and it was the two e-mails that wrote with problems and one of them was a really small thing.

The other one was a little bit more not serious but a little bit more frustrating and I let those two people steal all of the joy from all of the success. We made a killing on that launch and that was that launch was — and I don't say that to toot my own horn, but I say that because that launch was the thing that enabled my husband to come on and work with me as my business partner and rather than celebrating that success and that triumph, I let this one e-mail pull me down.

I let her steal my success and I let her steal my joy and I don't think she meant to do it intentionally but it's just because we're so invested in what we do personally as creatives, there's this tendency to let other people dictate how we feel about ourselves and that was the point that I loved about Katelyn's blog post of like, "You can't let other people dictate how you feel about your business. There are these truths about your business that will always be true but if someone is attacking you on something that is not part of those truths you need to let it go and that was really helpful for me to read."

[00:37:44.7] RP: Very good. So should we ask any more questions? Do you have anymore?

[00:37:50.4] CS: I don't have any more questions. No, I feel like I've learned so much from you Abby. Yeah, it's been really great talking to you today and just hearing your perspective and your concept of the gentle no and hearing you elaborate on that a little bit more because it's this kind of thing that I have been hearing about from you and it's just great to connect with you in person.

[00:38:12.7] **AG:** Yeah.

[00:38:13.2] **CS:** On Skype.

[00:38:13.7] **AG:** Thank you guys so much.

[00:38:14.7] **CS:** Yeah.

[00:38:15.4] **RP:** My take away here today is get clear on you and then once you're clear on you, stay true to you and then fend off all those others that don't fit into what your mold is, what your truth is.

[00:38:31.6] **CS:** Right.

[00:38:32.7] **RP:** And I think that that takes courage.

[00:38:34.0] **CS:** Yeah, find your supporters. It sounds like it's a common theme here that people are working alone and then they find their supporters whether they hire them as mentors or they marry them as husbands or whatever it is. Call it that friend, whatever it is for you. So find your supporters and have them there when you get those e-mails that are like, "Ugh".

[00:38:55.0] **RP:** Yeah, that is awesome. Abby, how can we find you around the inter webs?

[00:38:59.2] **AG:** Yeah, I'm on Instagram under @abbygracephoto and my blog is Abbygraceblog.com.

[00:39:06.9] **RP:** Perfect. Well thank you so much for being here. We loved having you.

[00:39:10.6] **AG:** Of course, thank you guys so much for having me.

[00:39:12.9] **CS:** Bye.

[END OF INTERVIEW]

[00:39:16.9] ANNOUNCER: Are you ready to build your own empire? For more information, show notes, downloads, and tips on how to do it, head to www.creativeempire.co where you can find out more about this week's episode and the two lovely ladies behind it all, encouraging you to build your own Creative Empire. If you enjoyed this week's show, it would mean so much to Reina and Christina if you could take two minutes to go to iTunes and leave a review. It's a little thing that makes a big difference for the show.

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