Ep #282: The cost of complexity

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With Your Host

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I Am Your Korean Mom with Simone Grace Seol

Ep #282: The cost of complexity

Hey, I'm Simone Seol, and *I Am Your Korean Mom.*

I'm going to show you that it's entirely possible to track your people to your business and creative pursuits, and turn your marketing experience into one full of pleasure and marketing-gasms, just by being yourself. Let's go.

Let's talk about complexity. Complexity is a dimension of business that I think is really under discussed. People don't really talk about it, and yet it is this factor that I see literally sinking businesses every single day. Okay, not literally. To literally sink something would require water, but there is no water. Figuratively, it sinks businesses every single day.

A lot of the times, people talk about what's going to work, what doesn't work, what's going to make you money, and they rarely in all of this accounting they think about complexity and what a big consequential factor this is. They don't think about the cost of complexity.

In this episode, by the end of this episode, I want you to be an effective thinker about complexity, so that you can make good decisions that serve you, right? The reason that complexity is extra sort of tricky, is because the cost of complexity isn't something that people think about, talk about, or notice at first. It's the kind of thing that sneaks up on you.

You make one decision that adds a tiny bit of complexity to your business, and you think, "Oh, this is not an issue. It's nothing." And then you make another decision, that also adds a little bit of complexity, and you think, "Oh, that's no problem, I barely noticed. It doesn't matter. I can do it, no problem."

And before you know it, opening up your calendar gives you a feeling of dread at the pit of your stomach. You hate your business, you hate your life, and you're like what the hell went wrong? The answer is, things got too complex and you hate it. It became too heavy for you to want to carry.

Let me tell you something, complexity is not inherently bad or evil, it is just a cost that you bear; money is a cost. You pay a price for a thing. You

spend time doing a thing; time is a cost. Complexity is a cost. Spending money on something isn't inherently bad. Spending time on something isn't inherently bad, in and of itself. But every time you incur a cost, you want to ask yourself: Is it worth it?

The same way you watch the way you spend money. Or at least, ideally, you should be watching the way you spend. You want to watch the way you spend complexity, as well. Because there's only a finite amount of complexity you can add to something before it starts to crumble under its own weight, or it starts to get very dysfunctional. Is it all adding up in a way that's giving me a satisfying return?

I've only spoken about this abstractly until now, and I'm going to give you a concrete example. There's conventional business wisdom that goes around a lot, that says you need to have a bunch of products that are at different price points in your "product suite."

So that people can move from the lowest price to the highest price and there is something for everyone at every price point. Whatever their budget is, right? So, you should go and create a bunch of products at a bunch of different price points.

Now, that sounds eminently reasonable. A lot of people go around pitching this idea. Makes total sense. So logical. Sounds like excellent business advice. And it totally might be for some people. But consider that creating a product suite like this from the get go, where there's multiple products, multiple prices, adds a level of complexity in your business that wouldn't be there if you only had one product at one price. Just one thing you're selling.

A lot of people hear this and they just get bogged down in trying to create all these different products, trying to sell all of them at the same time, talking to each different segment of people who are ready to buy and all these different price points. And then, upselling the people who bought one thing into another thing, and then taking care of their customer experience for all the multiple products and ba-ba-ba-ba.

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This is a fuck ton more work than just selling one thing, minding one thing, strategizing for one thing, problem solving for one thing, taking care of customers for that one thing. Making one thing truly great so that it stands above the competition.

This multiple price point product suite, it sounds great on paper, but in reality, for you, is it worth it with all the costs of that built-in complexity? I'm not saying the answer is no; for some people, it is worth the complexity. And for some people, "You know what? It's actually not worth it."

Consider this, every decision you want to make to add something to your business, whether it's an employee, a contractor, another offer, another price point, another scheduling system, another ad campaign, another payment option, another service delivery method, another type of clientele, another feature to your product, another bonus offer, another goal, another this or that.

Know that with each addition, the work involved isn't just what appears on the surface. Each thing you add is not just going to add what it appears to be, but it's going to add an emotional load that you're going to have to expend. It's going to add an administrative load. A lot of people don't think about the administrative load of things.

It'll add the load of unseen potential risks, and what it will take to manage and mitigate those risks. Everything comes with its own universe of unseen complexity. And all of this adds up.

I have sold many, many different products, at many different price points; everywhere from $7 products to $20,000 products. I have made over $10 million in the past handful of years… I'm just giving you my creds… I have hobnobbed with many other entrepreneurs with all kinds of business structures. Including ones that are very different from mine, who are pulling income all across all the ranges, including, say, seven figures.

And let me tell you this universal truth, almost everyone underestimates the cost of complexity almost every single time. When it comes to calculating

and accounting for a complexity in advance, it almost never happens that someone was like, "You know what? We made things too simple; we could have had more complexity." No, no, no. That's not how it works.

Almost every time this pops up it's always, "Oh my God, we didn't know things were going to get this complicated. We didn't know we were going to have to account for this or that. I didn't realize this other thing. There are all these other layers of work we didn't know. It's kicking us in the ass, and we are taken aback."

Know that the time that you're spending trying to make the complexity of something work, trying to fit in all the pieces and do all the work that the complex thing can run well, is time that you're not spending on helping people and doing good work. Which is why I shake my head and feel so bad every time I see an early-stage entrepreneur, who hasn't even really honed their thing yet, create very complex business structures because it sounds good.

It's logical on paper, but their attention is being dispersed in 100 different directions. They're working so hard feeding this complex machine, while this isn't really moving forward at all. Complexity is the reason that even though I have big dreams of reaching a lot of people, I just refuse to hire more than two employees. I have the same people that I've had for years.

I'm aware that every minute that I spend managing someone else, is one minute that I am not spending being with my own creativity and serving my people. I hate that, it makes me feel resentful. I began my business in the first place so I can be creatively free. And if I'm taken away from my creative freedom, that, to me, there's no point. That's the most important thing to me, right?

Complexity is the reason that, again, I don't have a "strategic product suite." I kind of create what I want, when I want. And when that's done, I do the next thing that feels fun. I only ever sell one thing at a time, because that's the simplest thing for me. I mean, I have a bunch of things that you can buy

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that are pre recorded, on my website, but I don't usually actively sell them as part of a funnel, pipeline, or upsell anything.

Because why? It's not because that's bad, it's because doing that creates complexity in my business that, to me, is not worth it. If you want to see what I've enjoyed creating in the past, you can check it out on my website. But for the most part, what you get when you see me is me talking about what I'm doing now. I always just want it to be, "Here's what I'm doing now. Here's what I'm doing now. If you want to see what I've done in the past, you can check it out. But here's what I'm doing now."

Complexity is the reason that I didn't start a sliding-scale pricing system until my business was very profitable and very secure. I knew that it was very mature. I knew that before I wasn't ready. I wanted to spend all my time and energy getting really good at what I was doing and helping people, and doing all that with a very simple pricing structure that kept things very simple at a business level; just one on price point.

Because ultimately, I knew that that is what would allow me to help the greatest number of people, have the greatest amount of impact, and down the line give me the greatest flexibility. I was right, for me. I'm not saying that's right for everybody, I'm saying it was right for my journey.

Finally, the thing I gave up because I don't want more complexity, which kind of still makes me a little bit bummed out, honestly, is that complexity is a reason that I don't have a merch store. Let me tell you, we have fantastic merch. We could have had fantastic merch. I love merch. Me and my team, we designed the cutest sweaters and mugs with my fun quotes on them. We even have a custom Oracle Card Deck I created.

I mean, I created a lot of stuff. We did this, in the first place, for fun for ourselves. We gave a lot of it as gifts to my former mastermind clients. I just love, love, love the idea of having a full-on Simone merch shop, where you can get really cute stuff that's funny and empowering.

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But guess why we decided against it for the time being? We're a small team. It would have added a dimension of complexity that is not compatible with what we can do. It would have added administrative, emotional, financial, customer service complexity that is simply not supportable for us without hiring more people.

Even if hiring more people would have made sense, in terms of numbers, which, whatever, that's a whole different discussion. Even if we could break even, or even make a profit, with hiring extra people taking all that in, managing the whole operation and managing the extra hires on top of everything we are already accomplishing as a team, it just didn't make sense for us.

So, I just gave you some examples of things that I gave up, or rather am not doing. I choose not to do, because I want to keep things at a certain level of complexity that really serves my priorities. I just want you to know, I really want to emphasize that I'm not telling you these examples as if they are the right option. They're right for me.

What's right for you might be the opposite of what's right for me. And what was right for me, based on my desires and values up until now, might change in the future, because I grow and change as a person. In fact, they probably, definitely, will change in the future, right?

So, please don't take this as 'Simone says this is bad, this is good. She doesn't do this. I shouldn't do this.' That is not-not-not-not-not the point. It just happens to be some examples where I think I've gone against the grain of what a lot of people think is a good idea, because I am being mindful of where it's worth it to me to pay the cost of complexity and where it's not.

I want you to reflect on the same for yourself, even if you end up with different conclusions than I did. As you do so, keep in mind that humans are almost always inclined to *underestimate,* and not overestimate, the cost of complexity.

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So, I know this whole episode kind of sounds like me yelling at you to not add complexity, to keep things as simple as possible. And yeah, if I'm being honest, I do have an inclination and a bias towards simplicity. I am kind of a minimalist, that's true.

And yet, I do realize that some things are really worth the complexity. There are things that I could make simpler, but I won't. Because it's worth it to me to go the extra mile and deal with the extra load. Because that's what it gives me, and the people I serve in return, is worth it.

Sometimes I make things more complex, and I'm like, "You know what? I'm so glad I did that. It's extra work. But it adds so much of what I want. I got a good return on that complexity." And sometimes I try something and I ended up downgrading the complexity, because I realized I thought that was going to be worth it but turns out it's not.

What I want to tell you at the end, is forget what other people tell you is a good idea. Forget what other people are doing, because a lot of times we see people are doing this other thing, and it seems to work for them, "Why isn't it working for me?" You don't realize that you're not actually looking at the behind the scenes of what other people are going through.

"Successful businesses," people who look like they have all their shit together, everything's working out for them, they crash and burn every single day. I'm just saying. Or they're anxious and miserable behind the scenes, and something they're doing is not sustainable.

So, don't be so sure when your brain offers you the thought that all these other people are doing this thing that's working for them. Because you really don't know. You really don't know. Again, just because someone else is doing something doesn't mean that you want to deal with the complexity that comes with that.

What I wish for you is the courage to say, "You know what? Not for me. The other way works, as well." Just because some other people don't want to deal with the complexity of doing something; they say it's inefficient, they

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say it's not worth it; doesn't mean you shouldn't. If the results are worth it to you, then it's the right thing for you.

My highest wish for you in the end, is a business that feels, that is designed to be custom tailored to your happiness and your thriving. I hope these thoughts on complexity helped you to think through things, so that you can make better fit more confident decisions for yourself. And don't forget, whatever you decide now, you can always change your mind later. It's not a big deal. Business is always just a series of experiments.

I hope you have a fantastic day, and I'll talk to you next week.

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I got countless emails from folks who downloaded it, saying, "This free resource is worth more than all these courses I paid thousands of dollars for." So, what are you waiting for? Go grab *The Simone Starter Pack.* The link is in the show notes. I can't wait to see what amazing results you'll get from it.