

Ep #141: The 5 Percent Pledge with Sarah Kennedy

Full Episode Transcript



With Your Host

Simone Grace Seol

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Welcome to *Joyful Marketing*! I'm Simone Seol, and I teach you how to get your life coaching practice fully booked without having to pay for ads, buy Instagram followers, or complicated sales funnels. It's not rocket science and you can do it too. Listen on to find out how.

Hey friends. If you're like me, you want to know that your business is a force for good in the world. And if you're like me and my clients in fact, that's not a nice bonus to have. It's essential.

Having powerful belief in the good that your business is doing in the world, it's going to make you show up to your business differently. It'll affect the energy with which you show up and market, it's going to make you stand up differently as a coach in the world who changes the trajectory of people's lives and as a thought leader.

And what I'm saying right now applies to you, whatever stage of business building you're in. I don't care if you became a life coach yesterday, or I don't care if you've been a coach for 10 years. If you're a coach, you're someone who changes the trajectory of people's lives, period. You're a thought leader, period, today, simply because other people are already looking to you for guidance on how to think, how to live their lives.

As for me, one part of how I actively live into the ideal of my business being a force for good in the world is by making a set amount of monetary contributions to causes I care about, directly out of my business earnings.

My client Sarah Kennedy sparked an amazing idea about how we can all participate in that, and she and I are going to have such a juicy, enlightening conversation about that, that you're about to hear. But first, I want you to know that this episode is for you.

I don't care if you're making hundreds of thousands of dollars, or if you haven't made a cent in your coaching business yet, or if you're somewhere in between. And plus, I don't even care if you even have any interest in financial philanthropy at all because let's be real, there's so many ways to help, so many ways to serve the world, and giving money away in

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charitable contributions is just one way, arguably not even the best way in all circumstances.

However, this episode isn't really about giving away money. It's about how you think about your business's role in the world and how you become a loving and responsible steward of the resources that are at your disposal in your business. Financial resources just being one of them.

And it's about how you and your business can become a bigger channel through which the change you want to see in the world can flow. So I invite you to think about all of that as you listen to this episode, wherever you are in the business.

And take away something, some thoughts, some suggestions, some ideas, some ideals that can inject so much more meaning and purpose into your business today. So without further ado, here's my conversation with my client, life coach Sarah Kennedy about the five percent pledge and what it means.

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Simone: Hi Sarah.

Sarah: Hi, it's so nice to meet you.

Simone: We met way before but we're meeting for the first time on Zoom. Could you please introduce yourself and tell us the story of how we ended up being in this room together, recording this podcast?

Sarah: Absolutely. So I'm Sarah Kennedy. I am a coach for LGBTQIA+ youth parents and supporters. And I came to you because you changed my life in the most unusual way and it came when you posted about donating 5% of your revenue of your business to causes that change your life.

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And one day, I just happened to cross a post about the amount of money you had donated to The Trevor Project. And it wasn't just the amount of money, although I admit that blew me away. It was the fact that that post spoke directly to me because my family had been in a crisis a year - about a year prior to that.

And while I had supports in place for my child, I didn't have adequate supports in place for me. And The Trevor Project was near and dear because I called the crisis line. And they just did an amazing job with me, of working with me as the parent and supporter in a way that was unbelievable.

And they did such amazing follow up and I knew that the money that people had given had been exactly what had been my support. And when I read it was you...

Simone: Sorry, can you just pause and explain what The Trevor Project is?

Sarah: So The Trevor Project supports LGBTQIA+ youth in any form of education. They have a crisis line. They have all sorts of supports and educational supports in place. So I knew they had a crisis line because I had just used their educational materials before.

And I called it randomly when I needed help that day. And knowing that it was volunteer supported and donation supported, when I read your post, it was as if you had actually supported me. And not even known it. And so I reached out and I was just in awe of what you had done.

And then the second part of the story came when I had the privilege of being present for the last five days of my mom's death. And while she had end stage Alzheimer's and wasn't able to talk back to me, her spirit was 100% there with me and I was able to converse with her spirit so openly.

And for some reason, I brought up about the spirit of my business and that exact post you had shared. And in that moment, it was as if she said, "Well, that's exactly what you're supposed to do, Sarah. You're supposed to give

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5% of your revenue now on to The Trevor Project and to businesses that are near and dear to your business.”

And I reached out, I was like, oh my gosh Simone, the spirit of your business just communicated through my mom to the spirit of my business. And that's how we connected.

Simone: I just have goosebumps all over.

Sarah: It was amazing.

Simone: And when Sarah - she messaged me privately and told me this and I said we have to do a podcast and talk about the fact that we both took what I am now calling the 5% pledge. I have to give a shoutout to Rashida Bonds - here's what happened.

So I decided at some point last year, I don't remember exactly when it was. I think it was either November or somewhere around November. Maybe a little bit before. Actually, I'm not sure. Late last year. I decided that I am sick of being the person who is waiting to become the philanthropist.

Because I was like, oh, I would love to do that when. And there was always a future point when it would be a good time for me to step into - I have very conflicted feelings about the word philanthropist and I don't actually - not even sure I want to use that word.

Just being somebody who actively contributes with money to causes that she cares about in the world. And that goal post kept moving. It never felt like the right time and I kept coming up with endless excuses for why some time in the future would be a better time.

And it seemed - I came up with really justifiable, believable, convincing reasons why I had to wait when I was making no money in my business. And then I had really good reasons why I was making five figures in my business. And then I had new really good reasons why I should wait when I

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was making six figures. And then I was on the verge of making seven figures and I was like, okay, how long are you going to do this?

There's always going to be a "good" reason why the future would be a better time to give. And I was like, I'm sick of being this person. Now. It happens now.

Sarah: Mine was a particular amount of money. I was like, well, I can't give anything what she's giving so mine wouldn't be but a drop in the bucket. And then I realized, but if I was a drop in the bucket when I called, I was so important to them and they treated me with such respect and honor. Every drop in the bucket I add is a drop. Any amount, even five dollars. Every amount matters.

Simone: And I think that is also a thought that is such a sneaky convincing story that your brain tells to put you on - to take you off of the path that you want to be on. It's like, who are you to make this contribution? It's so little, it doesn't even count, you're not that significant, you won't make that much of a difference, those kinds of thoughts.

I definitely had those thoughts as well. It's like, well, what's five dollars, what's \$15? I'll give when I have a big chunk of money to give and it really feels like you're doing something. There's always a reason why the future is going to feel like a better time.

So I got sick of myself, I was like, I'm going to get over my own bullshit. So I decided for every month from now on, whatever my monthly revenue is, I'm going to donate 5% of it to a cause of my choosing. And ever since then, I have kept true to my word.

I have donated 5% of whatever the monthly revenue is and it's ranged from, I don't know, low four figures to \$30,000, \$40,000, depending on what I brought in in my business. So the first time that I was trying to make the donation, I was like, I don't even know who to donate to. What to donate to. Because I obviously had causes that I cared about but I was like, I got to start doing this research.

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So I put out a request on my Facebook saying hey, if you have - I come from a non-profit development background so I'm very - I like to think of myself as being very choosy when it comes to choosing where to donate to because I really want to know that my dollar is going to make a difference.

So I said hey, if you have personal experience with an organization and you know that an organization is well run and you know they're really making a difference and you really believe in them, please let me know because I'm researching what organizations to donate to.

And there were lots of super fabulous suggestions and I ended up actually taking - donating to a whole bunch of them. But one of them was suggested by Rashida Bonds who is also a coach for parents of - I'm not going to get all the letters right. LGBTQIA+. She's so amazing.

She alerted me to the amazing work The Trevor Project does with transgender youth who are at increased risk of suicide, all the horrible things, you name it. And I said okay, that's a cause that I care about, the health of our transgender youth. So I gave money and that was what - I have to thank Rashida and that's what Sarah saw.

Sarah: Yes, and it changed everything. It didn't even dawn on me that I could do it at that time when I saw the post.

Simone: What were your thoughts at that point? That's not for me or?

Sarah: No, my thoughts were a few things of that's a coach I want to hire because she's got her values in the right place, and that was before I had even joined your program. But I also looked at the amount of money and was like, wow, I don't know that I could ever give that much money, so I don't know that it would make a difference.

But then there was the moment that came next was oh my gosh, whoever worked with me, she could have even paid their salary if it was a salaried person. I'm going to do something like this someday. But like you said

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earlier, it was definitely someday. It didn't dawn on me at that moment - the idea didn't come that it was available to me.

Simone: And I wanted to record this podcast with Sarah because I want to offer you, if you're listening, the idea that this is available to you. It does not have to be thousands of dollars, it does not have to be - it literally - every dollar counts.

And I want to kind of talk about my own - I don't want to call it philosophy but my own thoughts. My T lines that go into my own 5% pledge that I intend to keep up for as long as I'm in business. And here is why.

It's not because I think money solves everything. If only that were true. Money does not solve everything. I cannot solve all the problems in the world by throwing money at it. But money can help a lot. And I know that because I was in non-profit development.

Not all problems can be solved by money but a lot of problems can be solved by money. And if I can help to lessen the load through contributing some of my money, that's worth it. And what was really important for me to let people know is that for me, it's very important to not give money, not to donate money from a perspective of being a savior.

Like oh, there's these poor people and I'm going to swoop in and I'm going to give them my money and they're all going to be better and good for me. That is - I'm very wary of that because I know that kind of mindset can create more damage, create more harm than good. And that's not something I want to participate in. I'm not here to save anybody. I'm not under the illusion that anybody needs saving. And that's not something I'm interested in.

This is what the 5% pledge means to me. To me, the reason that I am able to make money and have the business that I have today is because I have so much privilege because I live in a world that supports someone like me being able to do what I do. So I am healthy in mind and body, I am safe, not just physically but I have freedom, I have the freedom to speak my

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mind, I have the freedom to run a business the way I want, to make money the way I want, to speak my mind, and to take up space as a woman.

I have the right to participate in the democracy I live in. I have the right to clean water. I have access to clean water, I have access to plenty of food, I have access to housing. Without all of this, I would literally not be able to have the business that I have. And I did not do anything to earn any of this.

It was just given to me because I had won the genetic and geographic lottery. I was born at the right place at the right time. And to me, that's the simplest explanation of why I owe the world. Because without the world being set up the way it is where it's very advantageous to me, I would not have the business I have, which means everything to me.

So to me, to live in a functioning democracy and basically economically sound society, I paid tax to the government and I'm happy to most of the time. And to me, to be able to have the business that I want, I think of the 5% pledge as me paying taxes to not the government but to the world. It's on me to support a world where people are safe and healthy and have the opportunities to thrive because without those things, I would not be able to do what I want to do.

And to me, it's a signal to myself, it's a contract that I have with myself to remind myself that I am interdependent with other forces in the world, that I'm not doing my business in a vacuum. It's not because I'm so amazing and I'm so brilliant.

Okay, I am amazing and brilliant, but also I'm part of this giant multi-layered web of forces and people and causes and projects and forces of nature that conspire to enable not just my business but our industry and everyone who benefits from it.

So I receive so, so, so much from my business. I receive so much from everyone who I am connected to through my business, including you Sarah, including all the listeners. And it's just one - the 5% pledge is just

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one tiny, tiny way that I remind myself of my commitment to other people on planet Earth.

So that's how I think of it and it's very important for me to articulate this, because otherwise I think there's lots of ways of thinking about giving money and philanthropy that are very sort of, like I said, saviorism-like. It's very condescending to other people for lack of a better term and kind of - just makes it be about something other than just our mutual commitment to each other. You look like you have thoughts.

Sarah: Beyond the level of commitment, I 100% agree that it's a level of commitment. It's also an overwhelming statement of gratitude for the abundance that's coming in for us. And for these organizations and just their existence alone to me was a statement of gratitude.

I have in the past given money from what I call a grubby space to other organizations. But this - I wrote my first check last month and I felt like this ooze of gratitude just all day long. And I did it via check versus online because I wanted to have a tangible feeling with it.

And it did. It was just this overwhelming sense of gratitude for the people and the organizations that exist outside of myself that support not just me but my people and other people that I don't even know are in the world. I felt so interdependent and connected to all of them in a way I didn't even know was going to happen.

Simone: Isn't that such a beautiful feeling?

Sarah: It was amazing. I cannot wait to do it again.

Simone: Nobody tells you how good it feels to give. Because I had same rush of gratitude and this incredible feeling of being connected to humanity. That's why I think donating - to me, it's such a selfish act because it makes me feel so good. And it makes me feel so abundant.

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Sarah: Yes. And I think in the spirit of business building, in that abundance, I only build my abundance so that I can build others abundance. And it just becomes this beautiful cyclical thing of greatness, of I can provide more, I can be of more service, and they can be of more service, just by the fact that I wrote a check and how simple it was and just such a simple act but so fulfilling both personally and business-related.

Simone: 100%. What I teach in Joyful Marketing is learning what it's like to really be in a loving relationship with your business, to have your business be something that you truly love and care for and nourish. And I think when I took the 5% pledge, I started to love my business so much more. Because I felt like my business was truly a reflection of my values and the work I want to do in the world and how I want to make a difference.

And that happens because if you are like me and Sarah and you care about the world, which I'm sure you are if you're listening to this podcast, that's a tangible measure of signaling your love for the world. And the place that your business takes up in that world.

And it's how much love your business is emitting, so that's why - let's say you made \$100 in your business this month. Then \$100, what's 5% of that? Five dollars, just imagine what it would feel like to donate those five dollars not because you think those five dollars are going to save the world, although it might, but because it's kind of almost a ritualistic, symbolic act of the place your business takes up in the world and this idea of your business being a force for good.

It is going to bring you - put you in touch with so much of the gratitude that Sarah was talking about, so much of the abundance. The wonderful feeling of being plugged into this flow of the movement of energy in the world and the movement of resources.

Sarah: Yeah, it's a beautiful thing. I know this month being the second month I have taken this pledge, when I got my first client payment I was so excited. Usually it's oh, what am I going to do with this money, or this is

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what I'm going to do with it. Immediately I wrote on the wall, I have this much to give.

And it was so good because I felt such love for even my client that had paid me in such a different way. It was such a different relationship all of a sudden and I cannot wait to see what builds from it. And gratitude for you for coming up with this idea and being willing to publicly share it.

Because a lot of times we don't publicly share that we give and thinking that there's some sort of shame in telling others. But the more that we share that we are doing this, the more - the point is that more people will do it and we all just better ourselves and better our world together.

Simone: 100%. I'm so glad you mentioned that because that's something else I want to touch on. When I first thought about the 5% pledge, I debated long and hard in my own brain about whether I wanted to make it public, whether I wanted to share it with my people that I'm doing this.

And here's the conclusion that I got to. The worst thing that can happen if I do share about this, the worst thing in terms of what my brain was fearing, my brain was like, the worst thing that can happen is that people judge you and you come across like somebody who's like, look at me, I'm so virtuous, and people think you're being a savior and people think you're being a showoff and people think that you are being tacky because you're not supposed to talk about money, the left hand know what the right hand is doing, goes against all kinds of principles in my mind. That's what my brain was thinking.

So that's the worst thing that can happen. People have thoughts, you have thoughts, and you experience negative emotions. And I asked myself, what's the best thing that can happen when you share this? And I thought, hmm, I think here's a possibility that it might encourage other people to do the same who already wanted to do it. They would take it as a permission slip.

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Like oh, Simone's doing it, maybe I can do it too, maybe that's the nudge that some people need to do what they've already wanted to do. The best thing that can happen is I make giving a norm in this industry. The best thing that can happen is that more people start asking themselves questions like, hey, where do I want to give? How do I want my money moving through the world in a way that creates the kind of world I want to live in?

All these wonderful things could happen if I share about this and all the bad things that can happen is just me being afraid of other people's opinions. And I was like, okay, now I know what to do.

Sarah: And they're going to have their opinions no matter what. And my thoughts came from when you shared it, it gave me permission to share it too. Because I felt like, well, I'm going to give it a totally different level at this point in my business. But my level matters too. So I'm going to share it so that I escalate the work you've begun so that everybody knows that it's available to them too.

And I have to share with you that when I shared it with my children, my son who works at the grocery store was like, well, I'm going to do it too. So it was like, wow, how young can we start this? Apparently, it's 16. So it became even more special as I saw you can share and it does grow in just small five dollar amounts.

Simone: That is so, so beautiful. That fills my heart with so much joy. And another thing that I want to tell my listeners is that listen, why 5%? I don't know. Could it be 10%? Could it be 2%? Of course, sure. So don't get hung up on the number and I would like to encourage you to make a decision about how you want to give.

Maybe for you it's not money. Maybe you give your time. Or maybe - there are times when you really need every last dollar for whatever life circumstance you have and I don't want this to be a thing where you're like, you're doing it wrong if you're not in a position to give.

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Sometimes you're not in a position to give and you get to have that, you get to own that. That's legitimate. So I'm not creating this hierarchy where it's better if you're doing this and you're less enlightened or you don't care about the world if you don't. That is not what I'm saying at all.

Everybody makes decisions for their own selves, to reflect their own values, about how they want to be a force for good in the world. And at the same time, I'd like to encourage you to ask yourself what would be - if I were to do the equivalent, if I don't want to do exactly the 5% pledge, what would be the equivalent of that that I want to do in my way, that would be a way of me putting my money or something else where my mouth is and signaling to the world and signaling to my own self that this is where my commitment is. So I encourage you to really take ownership if you're interested in this idea but you don't want to do exactly what Sarah and I did, to make it your own.

Sarah: Yeah, absolutely. Beautiful. I know after I first used The Trevor Project for crisis line, after we had made it through our crisis and it ended, one of the things I did to give back was I went back and signed up to take a volunteer training and volunteer for them.

Because at that time, my thought wasn't that I had money available. But now I see the benefit of both. And that's what works for me. But I think all of us are called in some way, especially as life coaches, as people that want to better society, and help evolve our species. Let's take something and create something special because we all have such unique gifts. I'm just so excited to see what people create out of what they choose to donate from.

Simone: Exactly. I could not agree more. It's what we do. We are here to literally evolve the human species. We are here to help lessen the suffering in the world. We are here to be helpers and I think this is just such a powerful way you can do that outside of just pure coaching, which also does all of those things, also helps in all the ways.

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Yeah, 5% pledge. I am so, so thrilled to have the opportunity to talk to you and to feature you on my podcast and feature your story. And I hope that if you're listening, if this was the permission slip you needed to take your own 5% pledge, do so. Post on social media, #5%pledge. Let's just decide it's going to be a thing now and let me and Sarah know.

Listen, if you are debating about it, I encourage you to also ask yourself what's the worst thing that can happen and what's the best thing that can happen. And I do believe that you will - the math will be weighed in the direction of you giving. So Sarah, you mentioned what you do but tell us who you - who should reach out to you for help and how they can find you if they want to work with you as a coach.

Sarah: I help parents and supporters of LGBTQIA+ youth. Not just in crisis but just through any of the challenges that come naturally with parenting and supporting our youth. Because we have a very unique experience. And people can find me at www.sarahkennedycoaching.com or on Facebook.

And I always tell people I answer every email and I love to connect. It's just wonderful out there. So just connect with me. Find me there and I'd love to connect with anyone.

Simone: I will link to you in the show notes and will also link to The Trevor Project. And it's funny, you know I'm pregnant right now and I was like, if my kid turns out to be LGBTQIA+, I know who to go to to ask for parenting help.

Sarah: Absolutely.

Simone: Alright, thank you so much for being here. Again, let us know about your own 5% pledge and I'll talk to you later.

Sarah: Thank you for having me.

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