

Speaker 1: [inaudible]

Speaker 2: Hello and welcome. Thanks for joining us here on another episode of the founders forum, really excited to dive in today because our guests are going to kind of bring a new flavor to the conversation, just in terms of the products they built and the communities that they've cultivated. So without further ado, let's just dive right in. Uh, Amanda, why don't you go ahead and introduce yourself and your business first. Hi,

Speaker 3: Thanks for having us. We're so excited to be here. Um, so I have a community for moms where we connect women to the mom, friends that they need and the licensed experts they can trust for support on their journey of motherhood. And if you want to join us, you can find us on the app store or Google play totally for free

Speaker 2: Over to you. Hi,

Speaker 4: I'm Lynn Johnson and Sarah is, um, my co-founder we're co-founders of West 10th. The West 10th is a marketplace. That's connecting you to the home-based businesses in your town from local home florists to home bakers organizers. We're trying to make these invisible entrepreneurs that exist all around us. More visible, easier to access, easier to work with.

Speaker 2: Fantastic. Sarah, does that concur with your take on this? I agree with everything when Ben happy to be here today. Fantastic. Yeah. Well, thank you all for joining us. And if anybody's checked out the previous episodes, they know this is just designed to be a conversation. Uh, folks are just like a fly on the wall as if we were all having virtual coffees or beers together. Um, so yeah, we appreciate your time today. I thought what we could do is maybe go back to the beginning and think about the early days of when you were validating, uh, the idea for both your respective businesses, what was kind of the Genesis story and maybe what was the first step that you took to take action on the IDX? You know, that's usually a really big bridge to get over, so, uh, feel free to jump in. Whoever's inspired first to kind of go back to the Genesis story.

Speaker 3: Sure. I'm, I'm happy to, um, I'll try to keep it to like 30 seconds. Normally the founder stories are like 30 plus minutes and you know, they're always full of crazy ups and downs. Um, I mean, ours is no different than I think most entrepreneurial, you know, uh, ventures it's full of ups and downs. So some is really high in some is really low, but we're really are started very organically. We weren't out looking, um, to be big tech, um, entrepreneurs, but, um, basically we got a phone call in the middle of the night from my best friend who was hysterically crying and an emergency room next to her two year old child that unfortunately he just received a new medical diagnosis. And then through the next couple of weeks, we really watched her spiral using words like loneliness and depressed and anxious, where she had never used before really deep words.

Speaker 3: Um, and we all knew it was the catalyst of what was going on in her journey of motherhood. So I'm married to a technologist. Who's now the CTO of social mama and he basically was obsessed with I'm going to find her a tool that will match her with women, um, who also have children with the same medical need. And we're gonna, you

know, show her the light at the end of the tunnel. And when it didn't exist, he became obsessed with creating it. I said, no. So it started with him putting together a PowerPoint presentation and presenting it to me at the kitchen table still said, no. Um, but I promised him I would do a competitive analysis for him since marketing was, was my background. It was something I was very comfortable doing. And we just realized quite quickly that this wasn't just moms that have children with unique medical needs. It was all moms that 85% of moms felt lonely and unsupported. And then we came up with a matching tool that would help moms get that support and, you know, ups and downs. And then here we are a couple of years later and, you know, getting movement and it's exciting.

- Speaker 2: That's fantastic. What were some of the substitutes? So there was no real direct competitors for what you wanted to build, but what were some of the substitutes that moms were using, I guess, to try to fill that gap.
- Speaker 3: Yeah. And they're still using some of those substitutes and that's, it's a really interesting question. Um, because we're constantly being asked, like, how are we different from a Facebook group or Reddit page? We're different in so many different ways. And I do not see them as direct competition. Our goal is not to get you off of Facebook or off of Reddit by any means. Um, but there's, there's two things that we do really differently. So first of all, we are one-on-one friendship matching. So the mom comes on, she creates a profile and there's a compatibility algorithm that shows her women in her area and we help facilitate that friendship. Um, so it's really about introducing you to new people and that's not quite how most of the normal social media today works. The second thing is, is that we have licensed vetted experts that are on our platform.
- Speaker 3: So OB GYN, doula mental health therapists that exists to keep that mom shaming and judgment as low as possible and mitigate the misinformation that we so often see in a lot of social networks now. So when you add those two elements, it makes us so different. Um, but people are still going to places like Facebook groups to try to find mom friends. I'm not sure how well it's it's working. Um, but it does work for great things like neighborhood pages. That's a great example of where, um, I think that's a good resource to go to
- Speaker 2: Fantastic, uh, Lynn or Sarah, whoever wants to jump out. I'd love to hear about kind of the early days of West 10th. What were some of the initial inputs, sparks, uh, things that made a real, so
- Speaker 4: West hemp is the basis of it is we say we're connecting you to home-based businesses. But what we know is there's 30 million women in the United States alone who don't participate in the traditional workforce. And if they're, most of them are leaving to give care to their families while they're gone, they give amazing care to their families. They uphold our communities. They work for free in our churches, in our nonprofit organizations, in our schools. And we do them a huge disservice by not really providing them good ways to onboard back in traditional work when, and if they're ready, um, which women as a whole become really financially vulnerable in this country. So I started my career out as a finance professional, Sarah and I both did Sarah left finance. I

stayed in it, but it was just immensely concerned about the gender wealth gap, where women only own about 32 cents and financial resources to every dollar that men own.

Speaker 4: I knew that a big reason for this was because women jumped out of the workforce. And like I said, they do amazing things while they're gone. And then we repay them by giving them no options to regain financial stability, women Intuit, this, they know this, they know they have needs for flexibility and that the marketplace isn't valuing their skillsets. So millions of women in the United States are starting businesses from home. They are taking the skills they developed in the home and starting businesses that serve their communities from those skills. So they know they're fantastic bakers. They start a home baking business. They know they're fantastic at organizing family vacations, you know, so they start doing that for the families and friends around them. And right now the only place for them to advertise those businesses is really in social media, um, where there's so much noise and was very difficult to find them.

Speaker 4: So we built this platform so that we can aggregate these women, make it easier to find them to work with them, put money in their pockets. And so that busy families like mine could easily reach out to them, not have to sift through social media and noise to find out, but reach out to them and bring their talents into our own homes. Um, so that was the Genesis of West 10th. And Sarah, do you want to, I want to hand it off to Sarah to tell you her story about how she got involved in why Lynn

Speaker 3: Texted me one day. I think it was her first day of graduate school. And I was like, do you want to build a company? And I was like, I'm in, we had no idea what we were going to do. Um, and when Lynn kind of came across this in her research, um, I love this idea. Um, I've had too many friends who have stepped away and have had a hard time getting back into the standard workforce and not find the flexibility that they need. And their options are really, really poor it's. They can go into an MLM. Um, they can just volunteer in their community or, um, they're turning to, to creating their own, um, business from home. And so I loved like, Oh, we can help bring them to life. But I actually had a personal side, uh, uh, to the stories when I grew up, my mom was a stay at home mom and she actually had her own home-based business.

Speaker 3: And, um, she ran it for a couple of years and then kind of lost access to where she got her marketing list and this was pre-internet. And so she actually had to shut down her business. And, um, if, if West 10th would have existed when, when she was around and, and growing that business, she'd still be around today. Um, and so I just, I saw a lot of value. My mom, um, wanted to contribute to our hustle's income. She needed the flexibility and she was pursuing something that she was passionate and really good at good at. And I, I just was like, we've got to find the women around us who are doing it and, and make them visible to their community

Speaker 2: Growing in both cases. I think you both really do good job of paying attention to your surroundings. So whether that be a friend in crisis or just the macro trends that you're noticing or something you're reconciling from your childhood, it's just that paying attention to where the problem is where the pain is, but then also taking that next step of actually really taking action on it. So that's one thing I wanted to ask is both of your businesses rely on some way, just in terms of like a critical mass, they rely on there being

enough people already adopting it for it to be valuable. So like, how did you get that started? Like, what was the first step for you to get an interest whist or whatever it took to kind of getting to that critical mass of users to make this thing valuable, whether it be vendors or, you know, other moms that are trying to look for support. Amanda, let me go over to you. Like, what were some of the first steps that you took to get that momentum of the rock kind of rolling down the Hill as it were?

Speaker 3: Yeah, I'm trying to think back. It feels like it was so long ago that we had to start them. I mean, it's, it's hard, right? Like it's, it's not, it's not easy. And even when you have, um, a larger community, then it's, you know, retaining the community and trying to get the network effects of the community. And, you know, so it's, I, I'm not sure anything's overly really easy answer for that. I think for us, we were really lucky that we have a population that is already looking for a solution to their friend lessness and don't have a lot of options to go to it. So a lot of the moms that are on our platform are the moms to be, are finding us through natural search. So they're going to the app store and they're literally searching in the search bar, like an app for, for friends.

Speaker 3: So in the beginning it was really natural. It was at one mom found us, we happened to be in the app store. Then she told three friends, but, but that's really what it comes down to is when you don't have the marketing dollars. Um, and even when you do have the marketing dollars, you of course want that perfect mix of unpaid and paid acquisition, but it's really about getting your network to recommend you to three more people plus. Right. Um, and, and we really do work on that a lot. And now what we're starting to move into now that we're bigger than we have some, um, some real traction is working with companies like, like Sarah and Lynn's company where the product market fit is so similar because like the whole time they were talking about the Genesis of their story, that is the conversation that happens in our app every single day, right? Like every Sunday mom's like I had to leave my job. I need income. I don't want to go to an MLM. So being able to connect them with companies like Sarah and lens, it is that full circle partnership with kind of helping the community grow, but also helping the company grow. So that's really, we're moving into now.

Speaker 2: I just want the record to show that if a West 10th and a social mama partnership comes from this podcast, it happened here. I'm pretty sure. Yeah. Amanda got

Speaker 4: It. That aligns with both our businesses and really the missions behind them too. So

Speaker 3: Yeah. Well, you know, when you talk about moms at all, and I think when you start to look into the issues in motherhood in our country, like the, like the top thing that comes up is the inequality of the ability to gain wealth. Like it all comes down to that. And every mom, founder that I know, and by my mom thought, I mean that she is a company that's in the mom's space. We all talk about that. Like, it is the, it's the underlining of all of our businesses. I'm not sure we all start them to fix that problem, but it becomes one of the problems that our companies end up addressing.

Speaker 4: Yeah, absolutely. So for us, we know that micro business or micro entrepreneurship is one of the few ways that's available to women once they've left the workforce and we make that decision. So, um, dichotomous, you leave or you stay, and it's hard to, once

you've made that decision to leave, it's hard to undo that decision. So you really are left with very few options for wealth generation and, and yeah, we want to support the ways that are left to women besides like needing complete societal change, by the way, like we're working on our piece over here.

Speaker 2: So I guess both of you are also, you know, relying heavily on this community aspect, whether it's, that's the centerpiece of, you know, your business, you know, connecting people with one another, or you're developing this, you know, new, modern, main street community. And as it were with West 10th, right? So it's like community is the, is the golden, you know, objective that everybody wants to hit, but nobody really knows tactically how to do, uh, or there's a lot of confusion around how to do it. So like, when we think about things like engagement, you know, what are some of the things that you guys did really well and maybe things that didn't work out so well to getting that initial engagement and you can define engagement, however you like, it could be people reaching out to one another to establish a conversation, or it could be inquiries to one of the home-based businesses, but you know what I'm talking about, right. That initial kind of traction with people interacting with one another and creating value for one another or some things that worked well. And what are some things that, uh, that you tried that maybe didn't work? So,

Speaker 4: Yeah. I'll Sarah, do you want to start? Yeah. I think we have

Speaker 3: Several different ways that we're building community. And I'll talk about one and then maybe when you can talk about like the conversational commerce piece of community that way, but, um, within our platform. So we have sellers, we have these women who are running businesses and we're building community through providing them not only like networking events and providing a way for them to meet each other, but we're layering it on with education. And so we're bringing them together and filling in those educational gaps of what they need as a micro business and providing them a safe space to share what are their challenges, what are their success, and actually bringing them together to teach each other. Um, they, we typically have an expert amongst, um, the group, um, that can help solve one another's problems. And we're finding that that community is really important for building our, our marketplace. And it only helps provide better businesses and better sellers on our platform, but it also, um, helps us bring additional people to our platform because they hear about it. They talk to their friends about the support that they're getting. And then it's just kind of this flywheel of more and more people wanting to join us. But I think it's not just a networking event. Those are great, but you're bringing them together and they're, they're sharing common experiences and being able to help and uplift each other. And that's really what makes that community special.

Speaker 4: Yeah. And I'll say, I'll add to that. We're also trained to, besides our seller community, which is so important, which would Sarah alluded to is we're trying to create community between buyers and sellers. So local is a big part of our value proposition. We're trying to help you see these invisible entrepreneurs that are in your community. And what we built was our MVP was really meant for more service type businesses or goods as a service, you know, get a custom themed cake from your neighbor or have a home organization. Cause we thought, you know, we didn't want to compete with Etsy. It

turned out that we have a lot of people who want to sell goods on their, on the marketplace to their local community too. So we ended up accepting goods, but we just kind of stumbled on this really interesting insight and trend was that, um, what people, what our customers enjoyed most was not only were they buying something locally, that they were getting to know the people on our platform, because we hadn't built a shopping cart.

Speaker 4: We hadn't built this passive experience. We can build this experience where you needed to contact them and collaborate. And so our customers found, Oh my gosh, now I have my pottery person. Now I have my Baker in my community. Now I have that person who can come help organize my garage once a quarter. I have a person. So we felt like our customers are building a team. And so our product is going to continue to, even though we're making it easier and easier, we're going to continue to rely on what we call conversational commerce, where you actually get to know the people that you're buying from and create relationships with them. So that's another part of our community. That's important.

Speaker 3: That's awesome. I feel like everybody in my app needs your product and we make, we definitely need to collaborate every day. I'm explaining why MLMs are not the right tool

Speaker 4: For 99%. Exactly. And we have deep compassion for women who join MLMs because the, the fact that there's so many majority of the sellers for MLMs are women. That's, uh, that's a symptom of the problem, the greater problem of lack of opportunity. So we love them, but we want to steer them to alternatives, positive alternatives. So such a good point.

Speaker 5: Cheers, Josh, to jump in, like in terms of like, um, entrepreneur, maybe this is for Lynn and Sarah, like for entrepreneurs who maybe have started their business for the first time. Um, are you guys getting feedback on how the platform has kind of empowered them in a way it feels like there's also a kind of this empowerment element to what you guys are providing that, you know, um, is it also not just what's selling goods and services, but, um, goods as a service, but it also feels like there's a lot of, uh, instilling positive change from like, um, empowering people to, you know, be their best self.

Speaker 4: Yeah. I mean, we definitely are addressing a small confidence gap, right? Like when women leave the workforce, we kind of actually helped them to feel like they have no skillsets. All of us. We know that that is absolutely not the case and the places that they have, where they can list their business on Facebook and on social make it seem like it's just a hobby. You know? So our feedback is when we get people who are in the early stages and they're on our app, they all of a sudden start to feel like they're legitimate business owners because we display them that way. And we talk about them that way. We don't say things like mompreneur, we don't say things like side hustle. We say you're an entrepreneur. Yeah. So we legitimize their business in a lot of ways. And then we're just a support system for them to answer questions. And we connect them to other people who are running businesses. So they get a lot of confidence that way. That's really good.

Speaker 3: And I think to that, that that point is they can charge market value for their services. So when you're just casually, my neighbor is asking me to do something or someone asks you on Instagram. It's really easy for them to be like, can I get the friends and family discount? Like you're always discounting to get their business. And here it's like, no, I can find people who really value my services at like the market rate. Um, so that, that helps them.

Speaker 2: That's really good. It's interesting. I like that you call it the confidence gap and I'm not sure if the confidence gap ever goes away completely for a founder at any stage, but there does seem to be that kind of like price of admission where people feel they're waiting on permission or they're waiting on feeling like they have the credentials. And we all know that you'll never feel like you have all the credentials needed to jump out and do what you're doing. Um, what advice would you have for any entrepreneurs who are listening to this? They may be women. They may be men, but like they might be in those early stages of feeling like, Hey, I don't have what it takes to do this. I have the work ethic and the ability to work hard, but I don't know that I have the credentials. Like, what was your encouragement be to that man or a woman who is, who's kind of on the front end of wanting to launch something. I

Speaker 3: Mean, none of us have the right skills to do it. You, you figure it out, right. That's, uh, that's the founder job title is you, you mess up and then you figure it out and then you do it right the next time. And then you try to give back to other founders so they don't have to mess up as bad. Right. At least I think that's what we all kind of strive to do. Um, but I think I had this fallacy that the imposter syndrome, which is like the name we give it, obviously like, um, quite a bit it's, it's referenced as the imposter syndrome, but I really fooled myself into believing, like I would fake it till I made it. And then the imposter syndrome would go away, but it never goes away. You just get to a bigger conference table or a bigger stage.

Speaker 3: And then you just feel just as much like an imposter as you did on day. One of being like, what does VC stand for? Like you, you know what I mean? So like, you think you're not going to have to fake it till you make it, but, um, you, you do. And I think as, as I've gotten into those bigger stages, all that I've learned is everybody else feels the exact same way like that. Like the person doing a keynote to 7,000 people, he was doing it to 5,000 people the day before. So everybody feels like that. And, and I will tell you, women are worse at it. It is in general. I find women founders unable to own that and move forward. And we have to do a better job as females to be like, listen, we are the right person to do this. And finally, I'm at the point now where like, I know that whatever venture capitalist, I'm talking to whatever, um, potential partner that I am, the one in the room that knows the most about my industry, my product and my customer, and that there's nobody on the earth that knows a better than me. And that's, I think what you have to own. And when you get to that point, like you are the right person, it takes time.

Speaker 2: I think we can end right there. And that was a solid episode. That was really well said from, from both of you. Um, one thing that, you know, gets a lot of the headlines, right? And the attention are the growth moments and the moments where, whether they're margin scale or small, these inflection points where you just start to get a lot of traction, you know, whether that be user growth, installs transactions, however you're measuring

it. Can you think back to some of the times where you've started to have those spikes, they could be recent. They could even just be early wins that were small, but what led up to them? What were they and what led up to them? Uh, and I guess, how did that inform maybe your path to growth moving forward? I just want to get to those first chemo with, I guess, recess bike.

Speaker 4: Yeah. I can speak to this a little bit. Like our, one of our first key inflection points, uh, was just like the days and weeks where we all, all of a sudden started to see more people using our platform that we didn't know then that we did personally know, and that took longer than we thought it would. And it was a really nice moment, but we're still in this moment of anxiety of always like, okay, well, we got to that milestone where there's more people that we don't know using them than we do know, but, um, now it's, there's bigger growth goals and like, how do we meet those growth goals and how do we make sure that what we did last month, we improve on this month and get more people moving. Um, so I mean, one of our early inflection points was just that when we saw, you know, strangers using the app, which hallelujah and, um, and another inflection point for us was when we needed the fundraiser. And we had some press around that. We saw a spike and usership go up then. Um, and then recently we just kind of had a small, organic inflection point. It felt like where things just started to come a little bit more smoothly, where they're still very, very hard, but there, it just eased up by about 2% and we're like, okay, something's happening. We got to keep it going and make sure next month it eases out by another 2%. Um, but those have kind of been the inflection points for us.

Speaker 3: Yeah. It's funny because I think a lot of the times the inflection points that make me excited are done very privately. So like, it's great when you're in the wall street journal and everybody sees it, it's this big deal. And they're like, you made it and it's exciting and it's incredible, but like, no, I actually made it when I refined my cat for the first time. Like when I understood exactly what that customer acquisition cost. So it was like, for me, that was the moment more than getting into wall street journal, but nobody sees those moments, um, besides you, and you know, obviously some of your leadership team and whatnot, but I think it's about trying to own both, um, and appreciate them and like celebrate the wins. Cause that's another thing I think sometimes it's hardest to really celebrate it. Cause we all live in the future of our product versus our customers who live in the present of our product.

Speaker 3: So I think there's always this psychological gap that happens. Um, and I'm trying to really appreciate both, like I will say like Lynn, the best part I have to agree with you is that turning point of when you're like, wait, I don't know that woman, or like, wait, how did she get here? And how did she find me? Oh my God. And she wrote us a nice app store review. Like how does Marina even know us? Like that's still to this day, even years later, like nothing makes me happier than waking up and finding five positive reviews that I went to bed. Not knowing about still the best part of my job.

Speaker 5: Yeah. We touched on it earlier. I thought I want to go back to it, but we talk a lot about like, um, imposter syndrome and things like that. What, if any, um, from, uh, Josh and I have talked about it over the years around like founders, uh, mental health. And we talk a lot about that internally here at EmberTribe, but you know, maybe you could all speak



to a little bit around, um, if any, you know, support system or structure exists within your own communities and, and how that helps you as a, as a founder. Um, uh, I think a lot of people have this idea that, you know, everyone's just kind of going at it alone. Um, but what they don't see is all the people kind of in the background, you know, helping support and, and have helped them along the way. So have you guys had much experience with that or maybe, and maybe even if it has been lonely or has been, uh, you know, something kind of a struggle in that way, maybe you could share something about that?

Speaker 3: Well, I can start, um, first I think having a co-founder is always a really good idea. I don't know how you do it just being a solo CEO. So, um, that's one recommendation. Um, and then we were lucky we did a Techstars program, um, last summer and we were kind of enveloping into an amazing community of peers who were kind of at the same stage. We were also introduced to other mentors and advisors. And so we feel like our community has grown exponentially over time. It started out really small and then things transpired where now we have quite a large community where we feel like if we have a question, we can find someone who can help us. And that's really just critical because we face a lot of questions that we just don't even know where to start or are really conflicted and just being able to have that community. And then I think the last part is I, I think having a therapist is great having a third party, just to be able to talk to about all the different stress that you have because your work life is just a sliver of it. Um, so I think having professional therapists that are all also great too.

Speaker 4: Yeah. There was a time before, um, Sarah joined was able to join full-time where she was kind of, uh, advising us, but not full-time yet as a co-founder. And that was a lonely, lonely period for me, I will say. Um, and also because it was at the very beginning where I knew this needed to exist, I knew we needed to build it. I had no idea how, and I also didn't know how hard the journey would be. So, um, when she came on full-time, uh, that was, uh, a real turning point for me as mentally as a founder. Um, she's the kind of co-founder who, when we had a pitch meeting and we were in our fourth pitch meeting and they said no to us. And I came back to her and said, we got an email. And they said, no, she'd be like, Oh, they're the worst. They'll just regret it. Don't worry. Instead of being like, what did you do wrong? You know? Um, so that was a turning point for me, was having a co-founder that I've had a really long history with and I just trust immensely. Um, and then also just say family, I mean, we've had both of us immensely supportive families. Sometimes they've believed in our product more than we have in the diet and the times when it's been hard and that has been incredibly important and amazing. So

Speaker 3: Same, I mean, it's, so whenever women come to me and they want to start, especially if it's like scalable tech, I'm always like, you have to go find a co-founder like, go forward if you want on your own. But like it is, I don't know how anybody does this without a co-founder. Um, I have one she's not here on screen, but I do have one. And like Lynn, I started it by myself. And I remember the turning point when we brought her on for my emotional sanity and for the company's growth. Um, and then we're, we're, we're also a tech star company and I get that Techstars acceptance rate is really low and that some people listening to this, they might be trying to get into some like a Y Combinator, but there's, they're startup hubs in most big metropolitans founder Institute has a lot of

amazing programming there's Facebook groups. So you just have to find that, that, that niche for yourself, of other similar CEOs or heads of products or, you know, creative directors, whatever you are and find them, um, cause you have to have those mentors to lean on. Or, I mean, really, I think that you'll break if you don't have them truly.

Speaker 2: So in many you referred to the, the Techstars network as being like a, you know, a bonus for finding different players in the team. But I would love to hear from both of you, if you have thoughts on just what goes into a good co-founder search, like, what should you look for? Do you want to get the person who's closest to you? Like, what are some, I guess some ways maybe you'd find those people, if somebody is not in an accelerator and maybe like, what's the, I guess internal mental model or framework, it doesn't have to be that defined, but like your operating system for making that decision, like what, what goes into that?

Speaker 4: That is a super good question. And I think the answer is honestly different for every founder and their story, right? So for me, bringing Sarah on and I'd had someone who I, who was an early co-founder, who ended up leaving and really, she was a terrific human being, highly capable, lots of work ethic, but the driving force just wasn't there. And her personal circumstances just didn't really allow her to continue, um, where Sarah and I were, we've known each other for years and years. Um, there's a lot of trust. We've also been able to like put ourselves into a situation where we could take the financial risk for at least a little bit of a T of time. And so, um, being able to share that financial risk with someone with another co-founder is just really big. Um, and to, you know, not take it on just yourself, that was big for us.

Speaker 4: Um, and I think that something that's been important to us is we have complimentary skillsets, but we, so they're not the same, but we really are in sync about like, why we're doing this and who we're trying to serve. We don't have different wildly different visions for the company. Does that make sense? There? They may not be exactly the same, but we're in sync on so many things and that that's been important in our founder relationship. Um, yeah, so I don't exactly know how you just go out and find that, but I think everyone has relationships in their life that match something like that. And, and they should lean into those.

Speaker 3: I mean, it's a marriage, a family relationship is absolutely a type of marriage. And I think you have to go into it like that. So you could talk about things like, can you not take a salary for a couple of years? Is that a make or break for your family? Do you want to have children? Do you see yourself doing this in 10 to 15 years? What would an exit look like to you? Like those are real questions. And I think it's like the difference between, you know, when you're dating and you're looking for something casual versus marriage, I would assume that, you know, when you're on your first date, if you want to be married by the end of the year, it'd be a very different first date than if you were, you know, 18 and looking, you know, to go to college and move in a couple of months setting, you have to think of it like that. Like this is a marriage and you have to have really tough conversations in the beginning and it's okay if it doesn't work out, but maybe figure it out before you do all the paperwork. That's

- Speaker 2: It, that's a great quote right there, figure it all out or do the paperwork. I totally agree. And I think Linda, your point just about having alignment around values, like that's something that I've seen go really well and go really poorly like TJ and I, ours are very similar in that respect, right? We share the same values for our team, for our families, for what we want to accomplish with the business. Um, but I've seen other teams too, where it's like, if they don't have, even if you have the slightest misalignment at the co-founder level, it just gets amplified and more ambiguous and confusing as you scale the team. Cause that's small misalignment at the top creates like a much wider gap as you, as you grow your teams. So that's really great point.
- Speaker 4: There's just immense amounts of stress and pressure put on the company and on you. So anything is amplified, you know, the good and the bad
- Speaker 2: Totally. One thing both of you have mentioned is just the good fortune of having Ben mentioned and news outlets, like the wall street journal Forbes and others in tech tech crunch, I think was something that both of you guys have been in. So like that's obviously it's celebrated, it feels like you've made it. What are some of the tactical, I guess, piece of advice you could give founders that are trying to get that placement, get that feature. And cause obviously it had a great impact, you know, as you were, as you were growing. So did you hire a PR agency? Did you just position? I mean, was it investor network, like how'd you guys go about getting the coverage?
- Speaker 3: Yeah, I mean, ours really has been a combination of three things I would say. Um, so the first is I do have an amazing, um, PR um, organization that I use. They're, they're fabulous. She's a crazy go getter, which I love about her. Um, but we really started as friends first. So it was not like a, a paid PR relationship work. I gave her X amount of dollars every month with X amount of ROI expected. Um, so I think the fact that we really believed in each other's missions as, as like companies helped us really grow, um, we're really like, you have to constantly be networking. Like I get picked up now, um, by national publications that I assume just discovered me, and then I'll find out a couple months later, like I'll meet that journalist at something and she'll be like, Oh yeah, well actually, you know, I, I saw your press release from three years ago.
- Speaker 3: I was like, Oh my God, like that networking actually produced something years later. So I think the old school sales technique of like somebody has to see you 10 to 20 times before they really start listening is very true with PR. So you have to build those relationships and continue them going. Um, some of it's been through using Meltwater, which, um, you guys smell look into Herro H a R O is a great way to get story pickup. What really, it all comes down to just networking over and over and over again. And it takes a while for most networking relationships to return. And then, okay, press releases. You have to know how to write a release. You need someone to push a release. That's like baseline one-on-one you can do it yourself or hire a firm, but that is somewhat of a necessity, I think, to get picked up.
- Speaker 4: Yeah, for us, we hired kind of a freelance really, really part-time just a few hours a month person to help us get that press release up and help us like identify a media target list. Um, it still, it took months and months. And really, we ended up just leveraging a lot of our investor networks and saying like, we need contacts at some of these places. Can

you please look into your LinkedIn and see who you can get us in contact with? And that yielded some relationships with some journalists, but I'll also say, I just want to caution, like PR is great. And then the, the coverage we've been able to get has been really building a foundation of credibility for us. So I think it is necessary to get some coverage, but that didn't necessarily turn into sales because a lot of these publications aren't exactly zoomed into our target audience.

Speaker 4: Um, so I just caution, like don't put all your eggs in one basket around PR like get what you need to get and experiment and see if it's helping you with your targets. Um, but like organic and other means like are worth your time. Just as much as PR is. So like put it in your strategy bucket, but like maybe don't think that the world revolves around PR or think that just because someone got PR that their company is growing like crazy. Cause that's just like, we've realized that too, is that nothing's a guarantee including PR so

Speaker 3: You're so right. Lynn, I've always been surprised where at the beginning I was surprised that large press wouldn't equal large acquisition or conversion, but it really often doesn't, it matters for credibility for other things, but I'm so with you on that, we've seen the same thing. Yeah.

Speaker 2: Yeah. That's great. You got to find a way into the bucket of vanity metrics, right? Uh, things that they may have some indirect value for your ultimate goal, but are mostly just the most front-facing thing that people see and respond to. So whether it be a large round of investment or a PR mention or whatever might be that's great. So I guess as we're kind of winding down the conversation, I'd love to just get super granular, super focused and tactical. One thing that we found from all the founders we work with is that your lifetime learners, you're always finding new ways to get training or to get advice or to, to learn something. So what are some of your favorite tools for that? It could be podcasts. It could be books. It could be mastermind groups just to name a few, but what are the ways that you continue learning besides falling on your face and getting up again that you could share with other people?

Speaker 4: I like that you mentioned falling on your face and getting up again, Josh. Yeah, that's it. We continue to learn that way despite our best efforts not to do that. Um, I mean, really, I think we look for one-on-one mentorship at this point. Like we've listened to all the podcasts. We listened to how I built this. I know never listened to that podcast because I just realized that so much of the nitty gritty is missing from those stories. And they're all success stories. Of course. So, um, you know, we've, we've read books, all the books that have been recommended to us, we are sitting now in clubhouse and listening to clump house and still the most valuable thing for us is one-on-one mentorship. So we reach out to our, when we know we have a skill gap or we have an immediate need reaching out to these networks that we've built up over time and trying to find someone to just sit down with us for an hour to ideate. And we lean on experts like your firm, Josh and TJ, the people that are working with us at Ember Tribe to say, what about this? And thinking about our audience, or what about this? And thinking about how we grow, we lean on people. Who've done it. Um, and for us that's still the most effective thing, to be honest with you.

- Speaker 2: So I, and a quick follow up there, how would you approach a mentor? I mean, just even very, very specifically, like what's the email that you're right. It's cold to that person. Or do you ask for an introduction? Like how, how do you take that first step to kind of seek out that mentorship?
- Speaker 4: Oh, introductions. So we, we look to the people that we know who are highly invested in our success, whether that's investors or people through Techstars that we've met, or just people in our past relationships who support us. And we say, we think you might know someone who's doing this, um, either connect us to a specific person, or can you just think of someone that knows this? Like, can you think of someone who knows about, um, digital marketing, right? And then they connected us to you guys to Ember Tribe. So, or CA or we need to hire, we know that product market fit is our most important goal. We need to hire a product person, Sarah and I can't lead product anymore. Um, first of all, are a couple of our investors know or our, our product people. Can you tell us who like what this person should even look like? First of all, just sit down with us for half an hour, tell us how many years of experience you think they need. Tell us what are the channels that we should go to look for them. Um, so it's, it's looking at our networks and saying, does anyone in our network either have this skillset? Or could they know of someone that has this skillset? And could they sit down with us for a bit? And some of those have turned into more formal relationships, but yeah, that's what we do.
- Speaker 2: It's really good. And for anybody who's saying, well, that's great, but I don't have that initial network. So I'm starting from ground zero. I just want to recommend a shout out to grow growth, mentor that IO and there's platforms like it, where you can go very, very niche with your need for expertise and find something many of them are actually willing to just jump on for free, um, but you know, pay by the hour or whatever it might be. So if you're looking for that initial spark, I'd also recommend platforms like that to find people. Um, but Sarah, Amanda, like what are some of the other tools and resources, I guess, beyond mentorship that, that you're tapping
- Speaker 3: Into. I mean, finding those, finding your really early cycle, if you're very early, cause I'm assuming that's more kind of, who's going to really want to know the answer to this. Like you need to find people that want to work with companies that are in the ideation stage. So like what are the right accelerators or mentor groups or hubs that exist that work with companies that are ideated or very close to that, because those are the people that want to work with you in your stage. I think it takes us all time to realize that like this works based off of your stage, like whether you're looking for an investor, a mentor, a partner, a customer, it has to do with your stage. They maybe you don't realize that, but that is what it tends to be. Um, but Alice is an awesome tool if you're kind of new to starting out.
- Speaker 3: They're incredible. Um, I know before I mentioned the founder Institute I think is really good if you're kind of early. Um, and I do agree, I do agree with Lynn that like the, how I built this and the masters of scale that they really do leave out a lot of the difficult parts. But I do think it's good when you're early to listen to those, but just keep in mind, like Lynn was saying that like they do often leave out the really tough parts. So just keep it as like inspiration. And there is a lot of little golden nuggets that are dropped in those conversations because you might hear them say something like, Oh, you know, our

turning point of product market fit was when we hired a digital marketing agency. Well, that could be gold for you. If you didn't realize that a relationship with somebody like Ember Tribe can help you understand how to refine your product market fit.

Speaker 3: That wasn't something I knew years ago. I, um, I know it now, but so there's good things that can come from those podcasts as well. I think. And then I think, I would say don't, don't forget about your peers within your same space. So, um, find people who are in marketplaces, they don't need to be exactly what you're doing, but for us finding other people who are trying to grow marketplace, um, there's so much information out there and you can spend so much of your valuable time just searching and reading and going down rabbit holes that really aren't going to help you talk to your peers here. What's helped them. They probably sorted through some of that information too. And you guys can share and learn from each other and get headed in the right direction. Brilliant.

Speaker 2: It's a great place to end. I just want to thank you all for your time. You've been really generous with your time, but your advice and kind of your openness. And I appreciate that. I know the listeners and whoever's watching this will too. So yeah. Thank you all a fantastic job. And we will have links everywhere around this episode on where to find you and connect with you. Um, but thanks again, and we hope that we can, uh, do this again sometime soon.

Speaker 4: Josh, can I just put in a plug for, um, everyone listening? Can you go to the app store and download social mama and West 10 please?

Speaker 3: And give us our view. If you like us now,

Speaker 4: Just give us a positive review, no matter what, like please pull the early stage companies like ours. So thank you for having fun.

Speaker 1: [inaudible].