



channel mastery

151: Cassie Abel, Women Led Wednesday

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Kristin:
podcast.

All right. Welcome back, everybody, to another episode of the Channel Mastery

I'm so excited to introduce my guest to you today, Cassie Abel who is a founder of many things, but she's on the show today to primarily talk about Women-Led Wednesday, which is coming up here in the latter part of November 2020 for number three. First of all, congratulations on that. Can you give my amazing audience a bit of background on you and guide us through your career and how you got to Women-Led Wednesday?

Cassie:

Yeah, absolutely. I've been in and around the industry for a long time. I worked at bigger brands in communications, in marketing positions. I was actually in-house at Smith Optics for a number of years, which was my absolute dream job here in Sun Valley, Idaho. When the brand relocated from Sun Valley to Portland, Oregon, I was forced to make a really challenging decision, whether to stick with my dream job and move to Portland and leave my heart in the mountains once again, or stay here in Sun Valley and figure out what the heck to do with myself next. As many people know, a lot of mountain towns don't have an abundance of opportunities for career career-driven individuals.

That led me to launch White Cloud Communication, which is a PR and marketing consulting business; which I have wound down a little bit as of now. Through that, I also launched Wild Rye, which is a women's mountain apparel brand dedicated to crafting beautiful and technical mountain apparel for women and focusing on inspiring confidence through well-fitting apparel and welcoming more women into the outdoors.

Kristin:

That's awesome. Well, give us your website for a Wild Rye because if you are a woman and you love riding your bike, you have to check out this fun, inclusive brand. I mean, your product nailed it in terms of fit, and it's the only shorts that I ride in these days.

Cassie:

Yeah. Thank you. Thank you. That's our goal. We design for women and only women at this point, so the goal is to fit a woman's body as much as possible. You can find Wild Rye and on wild-rye.com or at REI, Title Nine, Backcountry, and many specialty retailers across the country.

Kristin:

Ah, that just almost makes me a little teary. I mean, I remember when you sent me my first pair of shorts three years ago? When did you launch it?

Cassie: August 2016. We just hit our four-year mark.

Kristin: Good for you. Congratulations. That is no easy lift. Great job on that.

Cassie: It's not without its major pain points along the way.

Kristin: Right. Tell us about Women-Led Wednesday, Cassie. I'm super curious to share this with our audience for so many reasons, especially in 2020, as I think our minds are all opening up to being more inclusive and welcoming to so many more communities, whether it's people of color, whether it's women; women who are also a person of color, et cetera. Tell us about your vision behind this? I think it's so, so important. This is also in its third year, so you've been super busy.

Cassie: Yeah. This is one of those wonderful unpaid passion projects that I worked really hard. Really good at finding those unpaid passion projects. Women-Led Wednesday came about... Honestly, it was just over two years ago. I was talking with my now former business partner and we were trying to figure out when we should launch our holiday sales. We felt that Black Friday was too much about consumerism and mass consumption and that didn't feel right for our brand, as we're dedicated to sustainability and shopping ethically. Cyber Monday didn't feel right. Just felt like we were going to get lost. Small Business Saturday felt more like a brick and mortar holiday. I was talking to Katie and I was like, "There's got to be something for women-led brands. There's so much momentum behind women in leadership. It's all over the media. There has to be something out there."

I started Googling around and nothing. Absolutely nothing. That led me to understanding a little more about where Small Business Saturday came from, where Cyber Monday came from. Small Business Saturday was a completely manufactured holiday American Express in the wake of the recession in 2008.

I don't know. I mean, I don't have American Express budget or women power behind me, but I was like, "Oh. Well, let's just create it. We can do this. There's a need. There's a lot of women-led brands out there that want to talk about the fact that they are women-led because as people continue to shop more consciously, it's an important thing to consider."

I launched Women-Led Wednesday, I guess it was 2018, and just threw an email to anyone I could think of who either founded a women-led brand or might know of other women-led brands. It started as a Squarespace website where I was manually updating everyone's information on a daily basis; a lot of tedious busywork, but it was super well-received. Enter year two and I poured some financial resources into it. Now we have a really robust brand directory that enables brands to tell their brand story right there on the Women-Led Wednesday website. Images, links, website, founder, bio, all that information that you want to review to learn about a brand. I've gotten ahead of myself and not really spoken about the actual holiday. The holiday occurs on November 25th, 2020. It's the day before Thanksgiving, every year. The idea is to elevate women

in leadership through collective purchasing power, so encouraging the public to vote for women with their dollars.

Kristin: I love that. We were talking really briefly before we hit record about why 2020 is more important than ever to get this word out. I do want to come back to the directory, we glossed over that. That's actually a very, very important part of this story, so we'll come back to that too. Paint the picture for us. Why now? Why is this so important in November of 2020?

Cassie: Yeah. I mean, I've been reading like anyone else... more women are leaving the workforce than ever before. After the last five or so years where people have worked tirelessly to get more women and just C-suites and you know, to become board chairs, that's all going to be erased with all these women leaving the workforce. This means there are going to be fewer women in leadership. There are going to be fewer future female leaders. That's a mouthful. 2020 has been a blow to our society for many reasons, but it's a really big blow to women as they're leaving the workforce for a number of reasons. A lot of it has to do with family responsibilities and homeschooling and extra pressures that have come from the pandemic and everything else that 2020 has offered us.

Kristin: I love how you say offered as if we can take it off the plate, but you're absolutely right. I think there's another wave of the virus kicking up, but the bigger wave is for women, like myself, who have kids. I mean, thankfully, my kids are not little anymore, but there's a lot of people that that's a hard stop. They can't really stay at work. There's a big shift happening. Everybody knows it, just like you said. Everybody reads the same stuff it seems, but there's a huge shift for people being remote, et cetera. That still doesn't solve the problem. It may solve the problem for people like us when we first moved to our little mountain towns, if the world had been in this place, would I have had to have worked at the Durango Herald and been freelancing to other jobs while I was trying to make it work when I first moved here? No, I could have brought a job here.

We're seeing our town, I'm sure you are as well, off the scales with newcomers coming in, like, "Get me out of the city." That doesn't solve the problem for the people at home caretaking their kids. I do realize that in partnerships where there's a male and a female, they're both all hands on deck, but in most cases, the mom is the one who has to suck it up and deal. Whether that's a child's preference or whatever it is. I think it's a really important thing to bring up; erasing five years of hard-fought work is a major deal, okay?

There are companies that have invested millions of dollars and there are initiatives, there are perceptions that have changed, there's so much that is in a good direction, the arrows are pointing in the right direction. What you just described, I think, is a little bit of a sucker punch that nobody saw as part of this. I think it's really important that we elevate what you're doing with Women-Led Wednesday to really make sure that this message gets out this year.

Cassie: Yeah. The goal is really to support these women-led brands so that they can grow because there's also massive inequities in funding. I mean, these women-led brands are more apt to welcome women returning from time at home back into the workforce

when the time comes for them to return. It's super important. On the cutoff mom note, I'm a new mom. I had a baby less than a year ago, and so I've quickly discovered how challenging that is. We've been in a COVID hotspot. I had COVID, our nanny had COVID. We've had so many times where we've been forced to stay home and care for our little guy. It's been a blessing in many ways, but also really, really challenging to get the work done. I'm fortunate enough to have an equal partnership. I'm fortunate enough to have childcare that's consistent as long as she's not sick herself, but that is not the case for most of America.

Kristin: Right. Yes. Well, I'm so glad that we're talking about all of this and bringing visibility to it. You're an expert at creating visibility with your background, what are some of the biggest traction wins you've seen with Women-Led Wednesday so that we can throw out some, "Here's how you get behind this?" Ultimately, the way we can create a simple turnkey bridge to... Whether it's an ambassador, a brand, whoever it is that that can bring lift to this, I want people to know how to do it. That will be in the show notes. We'll make sure we pull this out of the transcript and highlight it to make it as easy as possible for everybody.

Cassie: Yeah. I mean, I think the biggest traction has been all the brands buying in, and the idea is that every brand is promoting that they're a part of this. It's taking the mindset that, "A rising tide lifts all boats." These women-led brands are cross-promoting the initiative across their own channels and bringing visibility to all these other women-led brands as a result, so that's number one. Number two is, "Follow, like, share Women-Led Wednesday @womenledwednesday on Instagram. If there are any journalists listening to the show, I'd love to chat. I'll be honest, I'm a professional by trade. I'm really good at selling other people's products and stories. I'm not so good at selling my own.

Kristin: Let's sell this one.

Cassie: All right. All right.

Kristin: We have great people, but point being is you have a great product, and people just revere that you're like, "Oh, and she founded Women-Led Wednesday." You just really got a great appeal and people want to support you. I know that my team will help get the word out on this, but go ahead. Sorry.

Cassie: Thank you. I really, really appreciate it. I mean, just encourage the people around you to shop women-led on November 25th, and really the other 364 days a year too, but especially on November 25th this year. As we talked about earlier, there's a massive brand directory on womenledwednesday.com that tells all these women-led brand stories. If there are other women-led brands listening that would like to join us, if you're a consumer products brand or have a shoppable brand, join us because the more the merrier. It's free. There's no reason not to.

Kristin: Yeah. Tell us, it's not just the active, outdoor lifestyle or outdoor rec, is it?

Cassie: No, no. I mean, we have beauty and wellness and fashion... It's not intended to be an

outdoor specific initiative. It's meant to unite all these industry towards a common goal of creating a more gender-balanced economic landscape for everyone.

Kristin: That's fantastic. I also want to touch on another thing that you did research around in the announcement for year three, which will be linked in the show notes. According to a BCG analysis report by Harvard Business Review of the 25% that do seek funding investments in companies founded or co-founded by women averaged 935,000, which is less than half the average of the 2.1 million investing companies founded by male entrepreneurs. That's a stat that I was not aware of. We're bringing visibility to women-founded businesses and that in turn will enable them to grow through sales, obviously, but it also sounds like there's a component here around seed funding, as well. Is there anything that you're providing through the directory resource-wise around that? Or is there a place we can point people to for more information on that?

Cassie: More information on fundraising?

Kristin: Yeah. In terms of if there are people listening who are wanting to support women-led brands.

Cassie: That's a good question. I don't necessarily have an answer for that one today. There are a lot of VC funds out there that are specifically interested in providing funding for women-led brands. Jesse Draper just wrote a whole medium article, I believe, on the fact that really hammering home that this is not a charity. These businesses are going to return your investment. I've been following her and listening to her research a lot. She's a VC out of Silicon Valley.

Kristin: I'll definitely link up with her too.

Cassie: Yeah. There are a lot of organizations like Ladies Who Launch and the Female Founders Collective, and IFundWomen that do talk about that a lot and do provide resources. They've all been really great partners to Women-Led Wednesday, as well. We all offer different things, but those are definitely the folks you're going to want to look up to get more resources on fundraising.

Kristin: Okay. I know I took a little bit of a left turn there, but I just thought I'd pick your brain and you just named several great examples. While you maybe didn't have the answer to the first part, you brought in even more, so thank you. It says that you're welcoming all developed consumer product brands, meaning they've launched, they're creating revenue, they have product to sell.

Cassie: Yes.

Kristin: Nationally accessible retailers. Does that mean Women-Led Wednesday...That's the tie into the retailer supporting them? Or are you talking about women retailers specifically or both?

Cassie: Again, the retailer should be female-founded. There's an e-commerce website called

Confidence, which is a lifestyle women's e-tailer that sells a lot of women-led brands, but they don't actually produce a product themselves so that's what I mean by that.

This year we added non-profits and travel products, so any brands that offer those are welcome to join us. In addition, I should clarify that Women-Led Wednesdays for all women-identifying individuals, and that has always been the case. It just becomes a mouthful. It's easier to say Women-Led Wednesday as is.

Kristin: That's awesome. Well, I want to say a huge, huge, thank you. I will definitely be sharing says, "Our mission is simple: support women in leadership." I just want to say I'm getting on my soapbox here. I'm up on it.

As we're coming through the end of 2020, which so many of us have been looking at longingly for a long time. We're not through the pandemic. We all know that. We're through the election. It's too soon to see what's going to happen in terms of traction around whatever, but point being is leadership that is more well-rounded and reflects who the consumer is, is more important than ever. Consumer behavior has changed in this span of months, more than it ever has in our working lifetimes, maybe ever. I'm not sure.

This is the great accelerator, okay? Cassie has come to the table with a solution to try and keep the acceleration going on developing women in leadership. There is a very scary trend happening that is out of our control from the pandemic and the recession and everything else around women leaving the workforce, which is going to create a gap and a black hole for women in leadership. I just want to state, again, we actually have a bit of a crisis moment here, and creating visibility and traction around this is more important than it ever, ever has been. Every brand, you know this as well as I do, is clamoring for its authentic cause, social impact, social justice. They're all looking for something that makes sense for their brand. Honestly, this is an initiative that can tie into all of them.

It may not be right for everybody, but I will say Women-Led Wednesday and what you stand for is something that could fit into any brand, social justice, or social impact initiatives. I just want to say, check out the website. It is womenledwednesday.com.

Cassie, thank you so much for putting your heart and soul into everything you do, but for such a time as now, we really need this resource that you have been shepherding along. My goal is to just explode this with you this year.

Cassie: Thank you, Kristin. I really, really appreciate it. It really does take a whole village to get this thing mobilized. I'm fortunate to be surrounded by such a great village. Hopefully, that village just keeps growing, and hopefully, we'll be reaching everyone someday soon through Women-Led Wednesday.

Kristin: If anyone can do it, I think we are two people who could bring some good traction there.

Cassie: Yeah. Absolutely.

Kristin: Thank you again. I really appreciate your time here today. Again, everybody, check it out at www.womenledwednesday.com.

Cassie: Thank you.