

Thought Leaders
BUSINESS LAB

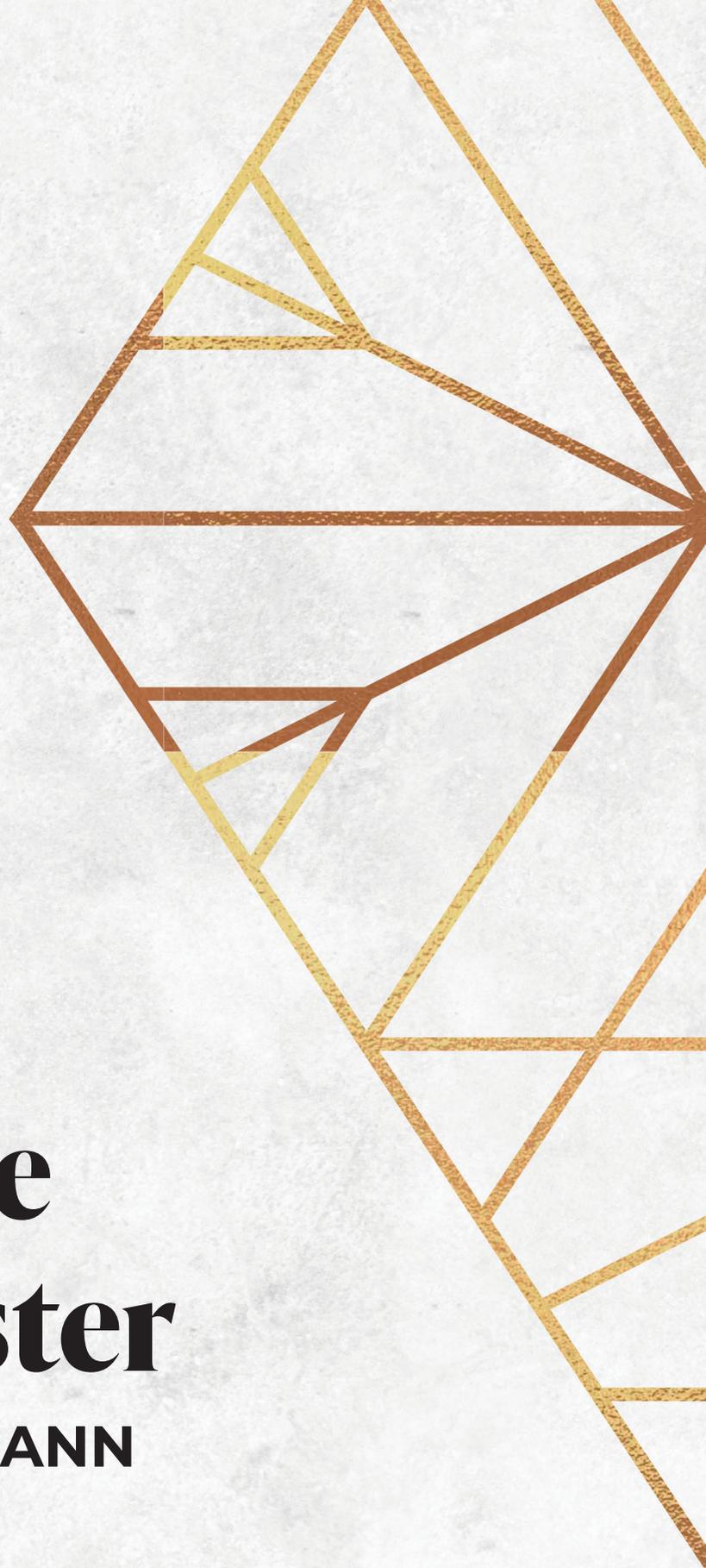
EPISODE 241

Taming the Tech Monster

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Building a business is a crash course in personal development

▽ Anke Herrmann is called the “tech monster whisperer.” But she wasn’t always a tech-y person.

She was living in Australia during the 1990s where she stumbled into a career of software development through the urging and support of colleagues.

Coming from Germany, she was surprised that she could make a career in something she hadn’t studied at university. She loved the Australian attitude of “we don’t care how you learnt it so long as you know how to do it.”

Despite her initial resistance, she learned to love the industry.

▽ Afterwards, she moved to London, travelled, fell in love with Spain, and quit her job in London to live in Spain making flamenco dresses. But you can’t take the geek out of the girl so she still did websites and stayed up-to-date with tech things.

Over time, people would ask for her help on tech things.

▽ When she burnt out with her sewing business, she pivoted to helping people turn their passions into businesses.

She used her experience to create a philosophy that people should be aware that building a business is a crash course in personal development.

The things we find easy are often the most overlooked things

▽ People often overlook the things that are easy for them. They think that because it’s easy for them, it’s easy for everyone else.

▽ It took a while but Anke eventually realised that she could help people overcome a hurdle called overwhelm, not just with tech things. She’d seen it many times. People have great ideas but when they sit down to do it, overwhelm sets in.

Information overload. Going down rabbit holes. Open one little door and you feel like you opened a can of worms. Solve one problem and three others show up. People experience these and they stop moving forward.

Anke approached the problems by looking at the deeper elements like the strategy, the intention behind the overwhelm, or what got the person into the tech mess in the first place. Through this new endeavour, she wrote her book, *Taming the Tech Monster*.



What is it that makes tech difficult?

▽ Sam, like other people, had great ideas when she first started her business. But tech stressed her out. Unlike other people, she didn't just walk away from diving into their business ideas because of the tech.

▽ The answer to the question “what makes tech difficult” has two parts:

— **Beliefs and expectations.** These are the classic beliefs and high expectations that people accept as truth. Anke has made it her mission to educate people into breaking free from these beliefs. For example:

— **“I’m too old for this. Tech is for young people.”** Anke defies this belief because she got into the industry late in life. She also knows many young and old people who don't have a clue about tech. So, tech simply has nothing to do with age.

— **“I’m a woman so I’m not technical.”** In the Eastern bloc of Germany and Russia, women take around half of the engineering spots at universities and jobs in the industry. It was only when Anke went to the West that she realised some countries perpetuate this myth.

— **“If I’m male and young, this will be easy.”** There are many men who haven't got a clue. Sam pointed to her youngest son as an example of someone who defies this belief.

— **“I’m crap at Maths and Science.”** and **“I’m an artist.”** Anke tells people she's creative too but she's still good with IT. She has also analysed that at least 80% of her numerous projects require work that is not technical. So, even if you don't like the tech, the tech part is so tiny that you shouldn't hide behind it.

— **“It's too complicated.”** Tools have come such a long way from the early days. In the 1990s, there was only DOS. Now, the majority of tech stuff is designed to have an interface with “normal” people in mind. So, anything you need for your business does not require you to have an engineering or IT background.

— A hidden layer of complexity that no one talks about and makes people feel stupid.

Limiting beliefs hold you back

▽ Beliefs can be detrimental to your life.

▽ Sam shared that she kept telling herself that she's not tech-y. She would compare herself with friends who are great with tech and feel uncomfortable when she could not understand what they were talking about.

She realised, though, that her tech knowledge is actually above average and that by holding on to her belief, she was holding herself back.



When she had her epiphany, everything changed. She believed that she knew what she was doing. It was as simple as that. She now breezes through tech stuff, for the most part.

▽ American entrepreneur Marie Forleo advocates that everything is figureoutable. Anke believes this applies to tech as well.

For example, if you buy a new washing machine but can't figure out what the buttons do, you don't say, "I don't like washing machines. Take this thing away."

You will either test out the buttons and see what they do or read the manual first. Whatever you choose to do, you will work off the assumption that you have what it takes to figure out the new appliance.

▽ Normal online tech tools that businesses need are no more demanding than a new appliance.

If you use them with the thinking "okay, let me just figure this out", you will figure it out.

▽ But what happens is people immediately panic when confronted with tech. They will say, "There's an error." But when asked what it says, they will say, "I don't know. I just closed it." They won't even read the error message.

▽ If you can break through or at least challenge your limiting beliefs, you can change everything around.

Don't jump four steps ahead

▽ You often see this question on Facebook business groups: "What CRM do I need?" This is a ploy to make business owners buy many tech products. But, more often than not, you don't need a lot of tools to effectively run your business.

▽ People also love to ask "what's the best..." questions. They ask because they really don't know or understand these tools. But by asking the question, they just open up a can of worms and overwhelm themselves with a list of 100 tools that others recommend.

▽ To know what you really need, Anke advises slowing down and taking a step back. Don't jump four steps to tech when your first step isn't clear yet.

For example, don't focus on what the best microphone is for your podcast. First, you have to answer why anyone would want to spend their time listening to you ramble? Until you answer that question, you don't need to worry about the tech part of the podcast.

For your business, don't spend your energy looking for the best online platform. Even if you have the modules, be clear on who your ideal client is or what experience you want for your customer or logistics like payment.



Start with what you want to create and reverse engineer the results you want to achieve

- ▽ Design all the details first. This is true for a podcast, online shop, online course, membership, or any business.
- ▽ Think of it this way: if you want to build a shelf, you go to a hardware store. But if you're new to carpentry, it's not a good idea to go to the store without a shopping list and a clear idea of what you want. Otherwise, you will be overwhelmed by how many types of materials and tools there are for shelf-building. It will be hard to choose the right material or tools for you. You can't even ask for help because how can store clerks help you if you don't know what you want?
- ▽ This analogy can be applied to business as well. Really understand the outcome you want to achieve then reverse engineer the process. It's about choosing the specific tech to fit what you want to achieve.

So, get clear on what you want to create and iron out the details of your foundation. After that, you can determine the functions you want from your tech tools. For example:

- if you don't want to overwhelm your customer with too much information then you want a tool that drip feeds information
- if you want to offer a payment scheme then choose a platform that has that function
- if you want a community element, there are platforms that are strong in that area while other platforms don't have it at all

Use your "shopping list" of requirements to guide you on what to look for.

Then, search online for the latest tools based on your needs. You will see that some platforms have what you need while others only have a few. There are also platforms that are not relevant or beyond your price range.

When you compare prices and specifications, you will be able to shortlist the platforms to about three. Create trial accounts for these top picks to check which ones you can work with and then make a decision for the best platform for you.

- ▽ Another tip: do not go for higher prices right away if you haven't sold anything yet. Relegate these nicer tools to your "nice to have" list that you can buy in the future.
- ▽ Overwhelm is moving too many steps ahead. So, bring things back. Talk about the very first thing about your business. Do the needed action before thinking about the next step. Get clear on the questions you want to ask then you can work on the next step.



“What looks like a tech problem never is”



Most of the consideration, planning and figuring out that you need to go through to create your business has nothing to do with tech. At some point, there will be some software you need or an account to set up. Sometimes there will be an error message. Or something will not work the way you think. But these are minor parts of the whole process



Anke has seen people during her group sessions visibly tensing up or becoming anxious when an error message pops up or something didn't save for them. But, if it was the tech causing it then everyone in the class should receive the same message.



An error message is the result of something not going the way it should. The stress comes from what a person makes of it. Many people think:

- “Oh boy, this always happens to me, I must be so stupid”
- “I hate not knowing”
- “I hate being out of my depth”
- “I hate feeling stupid”

Not all software is designed to be super intuitive. Sometimes you have to do a specific sequence to get it to work or it has unusual terminologies. But it's just a tool, until you think it has something to do with your capacity, capability or ability to figure it out. That's when it becomes stressful. But that still has nothing to do with tech.

You need to realise that it's not the tech that you hate, it's the negative feeling or behaviour that you associate with the error. When you feel stressed, take a deep breath and say, “I'm the one that's driving this thing. I've done something that's a little bit odd so let's go back and fix it.” This mantra will help you focus on action (what needs to get done) rather than on the emotion.

How do we know what tech to implement and what we need to search for?



If you're a total newbie in the tech world, you won't even know what's available to you. So, you won't know what to even look for.



Anke has a story that's a perfect example about not knowing what's available to you.

When she started her sewing business, she put her sewing machine on a computer table and had a manual rotary cutter that her mum bought. Things turned out disastrously. The computer table vibrated so much she couldn't sew a straight seam. The rotary cutter needed sharpening all the time so it was inefficient for sewing clothes that have a lot of ruffles.

One day an experienced dressmaker visited her and laughed at her work process. The lady advised buying an electric rotary cutter, which Anke didn't know existed. When she bought the tiny inexpensive tool, her sewing time was cut in half.



So, when you don't know what you don't know, Anke advises using your sense of frustration to check if there's a better way or tool to do something.

Ask the right questions



Some people have a tendency to go down rabbit holes and search for solutions to secondary problems instead of focusing on finding the solution to the basic problem. Here are three stories that illustrate this point.

— Someone once asked Anke, “What’s the best way to compress a video?” After probing a bit, she learned that the client had conducted a Zoom call and wanted to send the recording to all the participants.

But the file was too big so she jumped to this secondary problem and began looking for a way to compress it.

The client should have focused on the initial problem: how to send a Zoom recording via email. If she had searched for a solution for this, she would have known that the easiest route would be to upload the video on YouTube and send the link to the participants.

— A client for Anke’s sewing business once asked her to make a dance skirt that was narrow until the knees and then would flare out. If this design was executed, the client would be unable to move at all.

After some questioning, the client actually wanted a skirt that would not make her look big or fat on the stage. This basic problem had a whole range of solutions like cut or fabric or colour that did not involve any drastic designs.

— A friend once asked Anke for a hairpin. When Anke said she didn’t have any, the friend was about to go out when Anke asked why she needed it.

It turned out that her friend had broken her key and a bit was stuck in the keyhole so she wanted a hairpin to pull it out.

Anke said she had a tatting needle that would do fine. Her friend asked what a tatting needle is (it’s a needle for lace-making).

If her friend had asked the right question from the start, the problem would have been fixed earlier. If Anke had not been curious about the real problem, her friend might have gone to a whole bunch of people before getting a hairpin.



Sometimes you will not know that you are headed in the wrong direction. And if it’s not your expertise, the “solutions” you come up with are probably not the best solutions. Also, when you find these “solutions” you miss out on the options that you don’t know exist because you’ve gone down a different path.

So, before you Google something, ask yourself “why?” at least three times so you are clear on the main problem. Then search for a solution for the main problem, not the secondary ones.



Taming the Tech Monster

- ▽ Anke's book goes deep on the limiting beliefs that people have. It also guides you through the process of how to figure out the tech.
- ▽ One important part of the book includes tips on how to get help. Not everyone should turn into a geek or a programmer. But you have to understand enough to take ownership of your business. Some don't own their domains or do fear-based outsourcing. Even if you outsource, you still need to know enough because you're the one shelling out the money.

At least know what the tech pieces are and why they're there so you don't get taken for a ride. It's common in the tech industry for companies to make customers become dependent. So, you end up paying extra each time you want to change something small like a headline on your website.
- ▽ Knowing also makes you a better client to someone. If you don't know the tech, then you might have huge expectations from the people you outsource to. So, when things don't turn out the way you imagined it, then drama could ensue.
- ▽ Having a learner attitude is part of being an entrepreneur. Also, you have to understand all parts of your business so you make conscious decisions.
- ▽ Delegating does not mean you turn over all of your jobs, thought process, knowledge, and education to someone else. If you have ongoing projects, at least know the basics of how it works and how long it takes so you don't have unrealistic expectations. Education is a smart place to be.
- ▽ Tech isn't as hard as you think it is. Remember the tips from Anke to move forward with your business while using the right tech tools.

Resources

[Everything is Figureoutable by Marie Forleo](#)

[Taming the Tech Monster](#)