



Sound Financial Bites 077 - Bella Vasta Episode Transcription

“I think that everyone should have a coach.”

Bella Vasta: I cannot deny the need and the want to coach and pour into people's lives, and give them hope, and tell them that everything's great, that there is light at the end of the tunnel.

Welcome to Sound Financial Bites, where we help you with bite-sized pieces of financial and life knowledge to help you design and build a good life. The knowledge that has been shared from stages at conferences, pages of national business magazines, and clients living across America, our host, Paul Adams, now brings directly to you.

Paul Adams: Welcome to Sound Financial Bites. I'm your host, Paul Adams, and I am so glad to have you with us today. We hear back from you as listeners that you're doing all kinds of things while you listen to our podcast, and today, we're bringing in a totally different kind of guest to just shatter some of the existing mindsets you might have about what you do inside of the business that you currently work at, or what you do inside of your business.

What we're going to be talking about is how, with an extreme degree of focus on a very specific market, you can actually create a business that leads to the life that you want. You see so often, people think, "Well, I've just got to build a huge business," but if instead, what you think about is, "I just need to build a business that's going to take care of the life that I want," it changes where you begin to look.

Bella Vasta, I met earlier this year at Social Media Marketing World, and Bella has a podcast, and when she told me who her podcast targets, I was blown away. It's specifically petsitting businesses. So specific, it's not dog-walkers, it's not pooper scoopers, it is petsitters. She's designed a business all around that, she's designed a podcast all around that, and in that domain of people, she is the coach and the authority when it comes to coaching people who have petsitting businesses.

You're going to hear a bit about her journey, what brought her to where she is today and what she does as a business. My hope, as you hear this, is you're going to start to hear how you don't have to have some huge enterprise, you don't have to have something that everybody would look at and say, "Wow, that is a really amazing kind of business to have." All you have to have is a business and career that produces the outcomes that you care about as a part of you designing and building a good life.

Bella, it's so good to have you on Sound Financial Bites today, and I'm so, so happy that you could be here to just share with our audience what you've been up to and just what the journey's been like as a small business owner growing, and making sure that that lines up with the life that you're working to build, instead of what so many people do is just drift into a bigger, bigger career. So, welcome to Sound Financial Bites.

Bella: Thanks for having me. I'm honored to be here, Paul.

Paul: If you can for our audience, I mean, you've got such a great story of both you've had a business that you started, like many people started a business, out of necessity, or because that was what was in front of you, like drifted into it, you then had a crucible event in life that put you



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“You’ve gotta know yourself and you gotta be true to yourself. And then you gotta believe in yourself.”

in the position where you said, "I need to reinvent what I do for work," which then landed you where you are now where your work is designed around your life. Perhaps you could just kind of start sharing with our audience a little bit about that journey, and I'll probably bob in and out with you asking you a few questions to go deeper.

Bella: For sure. When I was 22, I had transferred colleges back to actually live with my parents, and when I was a junior going to college, my parents thought it would be a good idea to give me a curfew. Well, of course, I didn't like that, so the first opportunity that someone gave me to sleep with their pets and pay me, I was ready to pay them. I had no idea that that happened.

That was back in 2002, so I started doing that, and you fast-forward a couple years later and I graduated, and my parents are telling me I need to get a real job, so I did. I went to Paychex, I got hired, I worked there for two weeks before I had a "family emergency", and ran out of the door and never came back. I realized that I wasn't really cut out to work for someone else. I didn't like someone else telling me what to do. I really didn't, actually, at the end of the day. So, I decided I wanted to make this petsitting thing work, and so I just started hustling. I made a lot of mistakes. I looked at what everyone else was doing at the beginning and tried to copy them until I realized that what really mattered is what I wanted, but I was in my 20s, Paul. I had no idea what I wanted. All I knew was that, eventually, when I did become a mom and a wife, that I didn't want to also have this company.

That was kind of the goal in the back of my head my whole time, but I got married late. I got married when I was 32. It took me that long to find my Prince Charming, and it was actually on Match.com. But, before all that happened, because I'm getting a little ahead of myself, in 2007, my business got a lot of notoriety. I applied for a national award given by a national organization in our industry, and they gave me the Business of the Year award, and that led to a lot of people who had petsitting companies themselves calling me and say, "How can I do what you do? How did you get this award? What's your secret sauce?"

I started talking to people on the phone for a very long time, like two hours at a time, and although I was really excited by it, I was also overwhelmed and they were too. So, I soon realized, again, trial and error, that I needed to kind of make lesson plans, like what teachers do. So, I made some lesson plans and I started talking to them again, and then I started getting tired again. Then, I realized I'm saying the same thing over and over and over, because at the end of the day, there's only so many problems that petsitters have. It's not rocket science, it's not brain surgery, it's not like some new technology is out there. It's kind of the same thing.

So, I started doing downloadable products and that brought me to about 2012. From 2012 to about 2016, I was doing both of those at the same time. I was working on more downloadable products and trying to do the petsitting company. By that time, I had grown to about five or six employees, and then the crucible happened.

Paul: Just as a quick pause, big deal. I mean, in a world where petsitting companies are typically a person, and they've got their schedule, and that's it, but you've grown a petsitting company into five employees is no small feat.

Bella: Thank you. Yeah, it's more common these days for people to have many employees in their



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“There’s these building stages that must happen, but if you build it with intention then you’re never working a day in your life.”

half-million, quarter-million-dollar businesses now. They're so lucrative that the tech companies are getting involved, like Rover.com, and trying to get a piece of the action. But, it definitely was -- the industry itself started in the late '80s and was still really in the infancy stage when I was developing mine.

But then, in 2012, I did meet my Prince Charming, and on 1/4/14, January 4th, 2014, we got married, and we had a honeymoon baby, and three months into my pregnancy, I was told that something was wrong. I was told that she wasn't growing and that she wouldn't survive. It's a true testament to God, because there's this unanswered prayer thing we've all heard about. My prayer was always, "Grow, grow. You can't sustain at 12 ounces," which is what she was born at. That's like a Coke can, a soda can, an inch shorter than a Barbie doll. She ended up being 10 inches. I kept praying, "Grow," and if she grew, she would have died, because her body couldn't have sustained.

But, Paul, going through all of that, obviously, I was on bed rest. I had her at six months. It was 28 weeks, five days. You know, first three months was like, "Yay, I'm pregnant, but no one knows and I'm not telling anyone, and I'm not showing," and then the minute I started showing, it was disaster, it was tumultuous, and I was on bed rest, and going through a lot. So, I had this coaching company that I was doing online that no one knew what was going on, as the woman typing behind the company, right? The petsitting company, luckily, I had staff. If I did not have staff, all of that hard work would have faltered. It would have crumbled. I could not be out there doing anything, you know? But, I could run it from my bed, and that was a big turning point, Paul - a big turning point.

Once Olivia was born in July, only six months after conception, we spent the next six months in the hospital. So, from July 2014 to December 2014, I was in NICU next to her probably for about 10 hours a day. I'd get there in the morning when all the doctors would round up. I was dealing with my own stress and all kinds of stuff from the situation. But, again, the whole time, both businesses were running, and we ended up coming home in January 2015, and after the dust settled about a year later, because we also had nursing in our home, and oxygen, and all kinds of stuff, lots of doctor's appointments, realizing, "Oh my gosh, what did we just go through?" once the dust settled, I stayed true to my original vision, Paul, of I wanted to sell the company.

It wasn't because of Olivia, but it was just fulfilling my own desire. It was a season in my life that I had that business and it taught me and introduced me to everything I have now, and I'll always be grateful, but as God may have it again, I put it on the market and it sold within two weeks. I am proud about that and wanted to share that because the person who bought it believed in it because of the numbers, because I had the right profit margins and labor costs, and could show that consecutive growth, and that I didn't need to be a part of it in order for it to happen. So, essentially, I had proof of concept.

Paul: Yeah, having grown a business, put yourself in a position where you marketed it well, hired employees, trained them properly, had a situation where, unexpectedly, you had to be gone for an extended period of time outside the business and the business was still standing and sellable, I would say that that is a pretty strong test case.

Bella: I thought so, and I was so excited, and I had a little bit of a blessing in a way because I



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“I find that people either do one of two things, they become a dictator or a pushover.”

already had this coaching gig, if you want to call it, going on, and it wasn't like I just dropped the company and then I was like, "Oh my gosh, who am I? What do I do?" I was still able to be around my people. I was still continuing on what I was doing and I just decided to vamp it up so that I could put all of my working energy on it when I wanted to work and do the things that I love to do, which is like marketing. I also feel like God's really placed a gift of being a cheerleader for people on me, and that's why I cannot deny the need and the want to coach and pour into people's lives and give them hope, and tell them that everything's great, that there is light at the end of the tunnel. Because, at the very end of it, my daughter proves that all day long.

Paul: Only because our listeners are probably -- if I don't ask this, I'm going to get emails. How is your daughter doing now?

Bella: Incredible, Paul. She actually turns 3 this summer, or turned 3 this summer, and if you saw her today, you would have no idea. She starts preschool in August. She's running around, she's giggling, she's so lovable, she's off her oxygen. She has a couple developmental delays, like she won't necessarily build blocks, but Paul, she can count backwards from 20, she knows her shapes, her colors, "Octagon, hexagon, cylinder." I mean, she's very smart, she's very analytical. She's like a programmer mind.

Paul: What a blessing. Now, through all that, you've now stuck with Jump Consulting, and Bella in your Business is the podcast. That is the primary business driver now, right, for you?

Bella: Yes, exactly. I made my mistakes and whatnot with Jump at the beginning, Paul. First, it was the downloadable courses, which is fine. Then, I thought, "Well, maybe if I can get 100 people in a webinar every month, I could do it," and I tried that for five months, and that was spinning my wheels. That's a lot of hustle. Then, I had my coach, because I think that everyone should have a coach. If anyone out there is looking for a coach or a mentor, I think you need to ask them who's their coach or mentor, or how do they feel about having their own coaching, because you have to be a product of it and you have to be a learner. You can't be a teacher all the time. You have to be a good student.

I was listening to a lot of people and a lot of people were telling me to go with a membership site, and I've actually done that before and didn't like it. But, I figured out how to put my own spin on it. I love doing marketing, I'm very creative, so I figured out a way to do a package where people enter in my program six months at a time, petsitters, and I provide them with all the marketing materials that they're too busy to do, and it's all with their branding and specific to them. That's been a huge success, and like yesterday, I sat down and worked a whole bunch and it didn't even feel like work, and it's just lovely.

Paul: For your audience now, what I think is kind of amazing is you've taken your accomplishments and then been able to package them together in a way that adds value to others either people in coaching one-on-one with you, people as a part of your marketing group that they pay to be a member of, or products that I kind of see sprinkled throughout your website -- I mean, it makes total sense that somebody would come out with the offer, but if I would have sat back as a way that somebody could build a business around a life that's going to work for them, design and build a good life, would come from having petsitter employee manuals and training handbooks available online for such a relatively niche -- not relatively. It is a niche



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“The only person that’s ever going to tell you can’t is yourself.”

business that I would imagine there are not a lot of people out there who have had success in it that are now coaching it.

Bella: You're absolutely right, and I think the lesson that your listeners can learn is that you've got to know yourself, and you've got to be true to yourself, and then you've got to believe in yourself. Because, if you don't believe in yourself, no one else is going to, and I wouldn't have been able to do all of this if I didn't have a lot of self-reflection going on. We all have our niche, our like unique thing that we like to do, and if you can figure out a way to -- and this has happened over the years too. You can't just say, "I like to have a pet rock, and I'm going to start selling pet rocks." You have to build a community around pet rocks, then you have to establish yourself as an expert around pet rocks, then you can start manipulating all of that. There's these building stages that must happen, but if you build it with that intention, then you're never working a day in your life.

I've even niched it down a little bit more, Paul. In January, the tail-end of this story is that after all the trauma I'd been through, I had severe PTSD and post-traumatic depression, and I was living off of caffeine and sugar, taking naps every day, brain fog to the point my husband would say something to me in the morning and I'd be like, "What?" and he's like, "We talked about it this morning. You really don't remember?" and I'm like, "No." My memory was shot and I'm like 34 years old. That's how bad it was, and I had an opportunity, and I took it, and I started working out every day, and I started eating better every day, doing meal planning and prepping. I joined a community of people that were doing it, and Paul, it's changed my life the past six months. I've lost 28 pounds and 22 inches or whatever.

But, that doesn't even matter. The part that matters is that every morning, I wake up and I empower myself, I believe in myself, I do something that I didn't think I could do. So, how I niched that down more is so many pet sitters are just like me. They're moms, they're isolated, they're entrepreneurs, they're driving around in their car all day taking care of pets or managing their staff. They're not home for dinner and breakfast, because that's when the pets need to go out. They're sleeping over other people's homes, so they're eating out of their car through fast food.

What I've done is I've created a community inside of my pet sitting community where I help inspire them and show them how it's easy to eat healthy and it's easy to pour into yourself, and the results that have come of that are just they're so rewarding to me, because people I've coached a year ago have said, "I can only now start using the stuff that we worked on coaching last year because now I am well."

Basically, this is applicable to everyone listening. You have to be well within yourself. People call it self-development, people call it believing in yourself. You have to be strong. It doesn't mean your business can't survive without you being strong, but it can't thrive and explode without you being strong. Does that make sense?

Paul: Absolutely. We even watch it with clients in what they go through, how many people we've worked with over the years where they've got really, really high income for a time, and then they end up with adrenal fatigue or some other major concerns that could happen to them physiologically, and on the backend, if they've saved a lot of money, they will use a lot of that wealth and it will be depleted to take care of their health, because they, without realizing it, were just running a deficit. It wasn't a balance sheet deficit in the typical term of a balance sheet, but



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there was this health side that they continue to dig a hole in.

Bella: I love that. Well, I don't love that it happened to them, but I love the way you're putting this into perspective.

Paul: Yeah, and the thing that my wife and I talk about is this idea that one of the things we have to do is, not only for our sake, the people that we care a lot about, we need them to take really good care of their careers and their money, because if they don't do that, when we get to age 65, and the stats are now that if you're real healthy at age 65 and married, one of you is going to make it to age 95, like over half the time. Like, a lot of the time, people are going to live past age 95.

That means these families that we're building deep relationships with, raising our children alongside their children, going through our careers together and challenges, they might not be able to be around us at 65+ if they don't have these things handled. But, that's the same thing for our health. Somebody could take good care of their money and be on the backside, and if they've got a bunch of extra weight on them, when you're in your late 60s, you just can't go on a long hike with your friends if you're carrying around that extra 40 pounds.

That's the thing that my wife and I have really tried to key into is understanding that not just for ourselves, but for folks around us. I love that additional niching down, and I think what blows people away still, and we're getting used to, we're so used to the fact that the traditional business models require that you be in a retail center, or that you have an office, and people are going to come from a certain proximity around you versus you can get to the extent that you have an offer that's specifically to pet sitters and a deeper offer that's specifically to pet sitters who have concerns around their health. That would have been impossible even 20 years ago.

Bella: Oh yeah, for sure.

Paul: But today, you can run a profitable and successful business with that degree of niche, and I think that, for our listeners, if there's somebody who's thinking about jumping into small business ownership or there's somebody that's an executive somewhere, or they're an existing business owner, that's thinking, "Man, this seems so broad what I'm doing and who's my customer?" I think you're a great example of somebody that got really clear on who your customer is, and are there these kinds of businesses in other countries? Do people engage you around that?

Bella: Yes. I have friends, and colleagues, and people I help in Canada, in Ireland, in the UK, in South Africa, in Australia, the Philippines, believe it or not. People are everywhere because, at least in our industry, pets are becoming more and more like family every single year. But, I think, when you look at it from the outside, it looks like I tried to niche it down, but I kind of didn't. I just really followed my heart and what I really felt like God was leading me to. God's going to open the doors that need to be open, and he's going to close the doors that you're not supposed to go through.

Sometimes, we look at those doors we're not supposed to go through and we're trying to force them open and wonder why it's so hard. I just really feel like if people can really self-reflect -- like right now, my personal development, I would say I'm learning how to be a better leader and a



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delegator, because the bigger I grow with Jump Consulting, the more project managers or virtual assistants I need, and it's not always their fault. Like, you give someone a task to do and it comes back not what you wanted, well maybe you didn't send the message right. Maybe you weren't a good delegator, maybe you didn't articulate exactly what you need. They heard what you needed the way they heard it and gave it back to you.

There's always constant self-reflection and looking back inside of yourself to see how you can get better at it. In fact, I think it's actually going to be a class of mine soon because a lot of petsitting business owners are trying to figure out how to be better leaders of their staff, how to motivate people, how to keep them going. The surface level says, "Just pay them more money and they'll stay," but that's not really true. When you're with caregivers, that's different. They're doing it for different reasons.

I think leadership and just always learning about, "What am I not so good at, and why am I not good at it, and is it something I want to learn how to be better at if I can? Will it help propel me more to do more things that I love to do? Yes? I don't want to do this project. I need a project manager to take care of it so I can focus on doing what I want to do." Do you know what I mean? So, it's really looking at yourself.

Paul: Speaking of the looking at yourself and that reflection, what would you say is the thing that, for most business owners, they're getting launched, they're starting to make money, they're hiring their first employee or two. What is the hardest thing that they deal with that you help them with, and how do you help them with it? So, if somebody's listening to us and they're just stepping out in the small business ownership or they're currently an executive and they're like, "I'm going to go buy a business or I'm going to go launch this idea I have on my own." What is the thing you see them most struggle with during that kind of key transition from, "I'm doing it all," to, "Other people doing it"?

Bella: I think what happens is when we're thrust into this position, we feel like we need to know it all, and we feel like we have to be perfect at it, and we feel like we have these people looking at us expecting us to be well-articulate, give directions well, be a good leader, all this stuff. But, I think if you can just - and I do this all the time with my team - look at them and be like, "Guys, I don't know how eloquent this is going to be, but this is kind of what I need to do, this is what I need to happen. I'm not sure how this all works, but I need to work with you and I value your ideas."

Ultimately, they know that I'm the one that makes the decision, but admit that you're just starting this whole thing out. You're just learning how to become a manager, how micro or macro a manager you want to be. You're just learning about them, and what they like, and how they like to receive information, and that their opinion is really important to you, and you want that feedback so you can be a better leader or team player for them. If you open yourself and make yourself vulnerable like that to the people that are around you when you are just hiring that first person, I think that goes a long way.

Now, that being said, you want to have boundaries. You don't want to be a pushover. You don't want it to be like a collective, "So, what should we do about this client?" You are the person that makes the decision, but you have to allow them to understand that -- I find that people either do



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one of two things: they become a dictator or a pushover. So, I think just by being open and admitting when you're wrong, "You know what, Paul? I'm so sorry. I did say that, and that was my fault. That was a lack of leadership on my behalf. Let's try this again, but this way," and I think if you say that to people, they'll really start respecting you and wanting to work with you.

Paul: I like that. I like that a lot. I've got one parting question that I want to leave our audience with as we wrap up today, but let me give some context for our listeners what I want them to hear in your answer. I didn't prep you for this one, so hopefully this goes okay.

Bella: That's okay, my favorite kind.

Paul: As you listen to Bella's answer, here's the thing that I want you to think about, is that if you have an idea and you have something that you think you could build into a business model, with good help and coaching, there's probably somebody out there who has done it or could show you how to do it, because I think about the stay-at-home spouse that maybe kids are starting to go to school, or somebody who has decided to partially retire and may want to do something else, if somebody walked into you and said, "Bella, I want to get coached in how to effectively run a petsitting business. I like pets, I don't know anything about it, but I've lived in my town for five or six years," what kind of money can that person make in actual profit in just building a business that's not grinding, that's not them working 80 hours a week, but when they plug into somebody with a knowledge set like yours, what could they do and still have like a good life and working 20 hours a week, and they don't mind investing some money and having some employees?

Bella: You're not talking like the first year, right?

Paul: No. Imagine the first year, no matter what, is where you're sinking money in.

Bella: It all comes down to your goals, your pricing strategy, and all that stuff, but I'm going to tell you that making \$100,000 a year is not unattainable at all. I have a lot of people that are doing that. It just comes down to the decisions you make and how much you try to fight the process. I hate to say it, but the wheel's already been invented, and for some reason, people try to go against the wheel so many times rather than take the wheel and put their own stamp on it and then keep wheeling. Do you know what I mean?

Paul: Yes, yes, and one, I think that Bella and I had a chance to meet at Social Media Marketing World this last year, and we were just both sitting around the table with a bunch of podcast hosts, and Bella has a great podcast, I love the name of it: Bella in your Business! And you can also find her at JumpConsulting.net. I just don't want to forget to mention those, and you can find all of that in the show notes.

But, the thing that, for me, was so interesting being at that conference, and I think you saw it too is like, "Wow, all the ways that people have decided they're going to bring value to some community and they've actually been able to make a living out of it," and some of it, like you being one of them, Bella, I was just amazed that like I would never have thought what I was going to bump into was somebody who built systems, and structures, and products, and manuals, and coaching specifically for people that owned petsitting businesses.



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Bella: It's so true, Paul, and I was just listening to a podcast the other day. I think it was with Mike Stelzner, maybe, and there was a guy doing exactly what I do, but he does it for pizza shops. That's the thing, you guys. You got to just understand. Take an inventory of what you've done in your life and what you were really happy doing in your life and create a community around it, and once you create that community, then you can manipulate it. That's what it comes down to. It's really that easy.

Paul: I know the context by what you mean by manipulating that community is the same way that a physical therapists manipulates our legs so that our muscles aren't as sore, or it is that ability to be able to come in, solve issues for them, get them headed the right direction, and doing so in a way that they're willing to transact with you so that you can have the life that you want. When I heard your story, Bella, and everything you went through, and the ability to say, "Petsitting was --" well, the default thing was Paychex, and you said, "I'm out."

Some people go through that, "I want to get out of here," but they just do it for another 20 years or 30 years. One, you didn't do that, two, you drifted into petsitting initially, and now before you're 40 years old, you have designed a business that works around the rest of your life and allows you the time you want to spend with your family and your clients, and now only working with people that you love to work with. I think, so often, for our audience, that gets lost that that's even possible, because if they're grinding away in corporate America right now as they listen to this, maybe a very focused and highly-driven culture. You don't have people to your right and left on a daily basis that have built a situation like yours.

Bella: Yeah, you're definitely a product of your environment, and I love that you brought corporate into it. I know we're out of time, but that's my next venture. I realized through all the trauma that I've gone through, but through the rising of the phoenix, if you will, that I have a lot that's been placed in my heart to share with people, and my speaking career is starting, and I'm traveling around and speaking, and would love to just inspire audiences anywhere that will give me a microphone. Again, it's looking inside yourself, finding out what you want to do, and taking the leap and doing it. The only person that's ever going to tell you you can't is yourself.

Paul: Yeah, very good. Well, thanks so much, Bella. I appreciate you being here today. I know our audience has gotten a lot from this. If you want to get ahold of Bella, reach out to her, you can reach her at JumpConsulting.net, or check out her podcast, *Bella in your Business!* Have a great rest of your day, and as always, we hope this has been a contribution to you in being able to design and build a good life.

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