

Sam Laliberte

Anastasia MacLean: Welcome to the Three Selves Podcast. I'm your host Anastasia MacLean. Join us as we chat with fellow Western alumni who've engaged in the often messy, but ultimately rewarding, undertaking of discovering their true self in their life's work.

Today's guest on The Three Selves podcast, Sam Laliberte advised entrepreneurs at Western's entrepreneurship center and then became an entrepreneur herself. Sam is the founder and host of Freedom Lifestyle, an online community and podcast series that embraces the shift towards flexible work. Sam maintains that mindset is everything. She explains how job security can hold you back, while failure is a necessary part of the journey, and her conviction that self-doubt is the single biggest threat to our businesses, our jobs, our lives and our happiness.

Anastasia MacLean: Sam, it's so lovely to have you here today and to be chatting with you.

Sam Laliberte: Thank you so much. Yes, I am joining you from Whistler, Canada. I'm doing some work this morning, and then this afternoon, I'll be skiing.

Anastasia MacLean: Okay, well, we're going to keep you from that exercise. We're going to exercise your mind and your spirit a little bit here. So, when you graduated from Western with your Bachelor of Management and Organizational Studies, what did you see yourself doing career wise? Did you think, "Oh, I'm going to be an HR in a big organization" or something along those lines?

Sam Laliberte: I was really fortunate during my time at Western. I got really involved with the Entrepreneurship Center that was just starting out, for those alumni listening who were back there at Western, around 2010, 2011, 2012, they might be familiar with Bizinc, which was the name of the Entrepreneurship Center then. So, I was starting to explore opportunities to actually work for Western and work for that entrepreneurship center. And I didn't know where that was going to go, but looking back on it now, that is when I started to think about, "okay, I actually want to be an entrepreneur", but first I started having to work for the entrepreneurs. I had to, like, see other people my age building businesses, and then I was like, "Okay, I think that's what I want to do next". So that's where I was headed right after graduation.

Anastasia MacLean: And what did you learn from that experience, seeing all those other entrepreneurs that maybe you didn't expect?

Sam Laliberte: I think it just forced me to rewrite a story that I realized I had in my head, which is that you have to go have a traditional career for 10 years or a period of time to make the connections, to build the skills, to have the reputation, and then you can take the leap into having your own business and being an entrepreneur. And I realized in that moment that I'd been carrying

around this story and just thought that that was the path I had to take. But then seeing people who are younger than me, because, of course, the people that come into Bizinc. were maybe first year students or second year students. Doing it now, that's really what I learned, is that age is kind of a number, and you can really start a business at any age based on some factors that I'm sure we'll get into today. So that was the biggest learning.

Anastasia MacLean: And when you say that you had this story about how, “Oh, you have to do another career for 10 years”, is that something that you think you would internalize from other people telling you that? Or where do you think that came from?

Sam Laliberte: Yeah, I think there's this general sentiment. It's definitely changing now, especially with the internet and with social media and us having access to so many other young people, Forbes 30 Under 30, like there's so many ways to celebrate young people building businesses and being entrepreneurs at a young age. But prior to that, I think there was this general attitude of quote-unquote paying your dues, right? Putting your time in, starting from zero, being that lowest on the totem pole in an organization and having to work your way up and earn your respect through time. And now the idea of earning respect through time has kind of flipped it. It's really you earn respect through action, and if that action can be done in your first year from graduation, why do you have to wait 10 years, this arbitrary time to earn it? So I think it was just that general attitude. If I go a level deeper, I watch my mom start her business in her 40s after having a more traditional career first. So I'm sure that was also part of it, watching a role model do that at that stage of life. So I think it was so important that I had that opportunity to question that and see a different way of doing it.

Anastasia MacLean: One of the things I recall that you pointed out about the kinds of entrepreneurs that were at the center was there were only 20% female entrepreneurs there at the time, and that that, amongst other factors, really influenced your decision with a couple of fellow entrepreneurs at Western to start your own business. Tell us about that.

Sam Laliberte: Yeah, when we were doing the Entrepreneurship Center at Western, we were really reliant on government funding, we had some grants to test the project. This is back at a time where, if you can believe it, there wasn't any resources for students who wanted to become entrepreneurs at universities, really anywhere across Canada. It was seen very risky. Universities really wanted to support job seekers who would get stable, amazing careers. And we hadn't seen a lot of examples of young entrepreneurs take off yet. And as part of our government funding, we had to report on these stats. So okay, how many people did you see? What were the demographics? What were the ages? And of course, what is the sex of the person that came in? And so when I would see that number over and over again, you couldn't ignore it. It was right in front of you. Whether I actually observed with my own eyes, maybe not. When I saw those numbers, I was very motivated to even question that story of like, why is that happening? And I

think that's kind of like, what sparked the idea of, well, why aren't more women doing this? And then I actually met, for my very first business Ezzy Lynn which we'll talk about, my two co founders had come into BizInc., they each came in with different business ideas for support, and then we all met and kind of ditched those original businesses and came together and built something from scratch, the three of us. And I would say, being a female-led team was very motivating for us, and at the forefront of our messaging and making it an empowering business for other females watching.

Anastasia MacLean: And were you doing this while you were studying?

Samantha Laliberte: No, I had graduated at that time. I think it was a side hustle while still working and then eventually became the full-time thing.

Anastasia MacLean: I think that's really important for people who are looking at ways to, sort of, dip their toes into doing something else if where they're at right now isn't where they necessarily want to be. To keep up what you're doing, that pays the bills and keeps things sort of grounded and try out other things that may be more passion led and then make that sort of gradual transition if it works.

Sam Laliberte: Yeah, I think that's great advice for the general population, right? I think it's the safest bet. You don't want anybody to put themselves in a really negative situation over taking that leap so absolutely. Starting as a side hustle, making sure that you aren't impacting your ability to pay your bills of course makes sense. I would also say, though, that security of a job can also hold people back. It can also work against you, where you're like, "oh, that paycheck is so comfortable. I've got a good thing going on here, these amazing benefits, these amazing perks". And I can also see people stay too long in an organization or a job that isn't making them happy because of those comforts. So I think, yes, you definitely don't want to put yourself in a position where all of a sudden your business has to pay all your bills, or else you won't be able to get groceries, because then you're not going to make rational decisions, right? You want to really create from a place of inspired action and calmness and strategy, not survival. But also, if you're somebody who really needs that kick, then I think that is something that you should consider, is maybe you do need to take a leap where you say I'm going to do it for one year, and if it doesn't work, then I can always go back to the job market. So, I think it really depends on the person to be honest.

Anastasia MacLean: So, it really requires some self reflection, some real dedicated time to just thinking about, you know, where you're coming from, and what kind of person you are, and what, what motivates you. For some people, it's because they lose their job and then they end up doing something else. But that, you know, that's not necessarily everybody's path.

Sam Laliberte: Exactly. And I think we're in a time right now where the job market has been really unstable and unfair to a lot of people. A lot of people have been laid off or lost their jobs over the

past few years. This is also the time where a lot of businesses get built and a lot of people, for the first time, realize what they're capable of. And so that's also true, right? Is maybe you need this time in your life to be like, "Okay, now really is my moment", and I've seen so many entrepreneurs thrive by taking that moment when they've kind of were pushed into it a bit, myself included at different periods.

Anastasia MacLean: So, when you were a child, did you have that sort of sense of, "Oh, when I grow up, I want to be a..." was it entrepreneur?

Sam Laliberte: It wasn't entrepreneur, no. I think in high school, I hadn't done much work on introspection, reflecting on myself, the idea of what are my values hadn't really ever come up like the way I could name my top values right now and why they are and what triggers me, and all that work that you can sometimes do if you're interested in personal development in high school, I would think I was, like, a little bit more vain and superficial, you know? I just wanted to fit in. I wanted to be cool. I wanted to dress well. I remember reading fashion magazines, and I wanted to be in that world. I was from a small town, and I just remember dreaming about being in big cities, New York, LA, and I think that was honestly really driving me in that headspace. And I think that just speaks a lot to that piece of really understanding who you are and building a career for that. Because I went on a path that didn't end up making me happy or that wouldn't have actually been satisfying, because it wasn't really reflective of who I truly am when all the noise is kind of muted.

Anastasia MacLean: So the business Ezzy Lynn, which was fashion related and socially conscious, the decision to close that after a few years, what did that teach you about running a business but co owning a business and understanding how, when you do have co owners, when you are that team, you know, sort of the compromises that you need to be prepared to make?

Sam Laliberte: Absolutely. I think when I look back at that time of Ezzy Lynn, sometimes I wonder what could have been, because I feel like it was so genius, and it really was a brand that was coming at a time where socially conscious businesses were just starting to take off, and we had a lot of amazing elements at play in terms of our partnership with the World Wildlife Fund, three ambitious women leading the brand and a dedicated cult-like following customer base. And ultimately, we ended the business for a few different reasons, but I think one thing that I really learned from that is it doesn't have to last forever to it have been meaningful or a worthwhile business or a success. Like, even though that only lasted three years, I consider that to be a huge success in my life journey. I mean, I gave myself a paid job for three years. With our partnership with the World Wildlife Fund, we adopted thousands of animals and really supported wildlife conservation work. And I learned a lot of skills about having a business with other people and what role I play in all of that. When it comes to making decisions with your co-founders, that is, that is so tricky. I think something that really worked for us is there was three of us, so we just had this rule of majority wins. And so, whenever we would be like, "Oh, should we do this?" If two of us

said yes and one said no, the conversation was done, we were doing it, and we were able to make decisions so quickly. You were also able to validate whether your idea was a good idea, and the speed that we had, I really, now that I'm a solo founder, I miss that. I really miss just having my best friend in the room to be like, "I kind of had this crazy idea, what do you think?" And her be like, "Heck yes, let's do it. Or Sam, I don't think that'll work". You have to be in your head a lot more as a solo entrepreneur and trust your own decision so I would say there was a lot of positives of that dynamic. But ultimately, it's not just your business. And so, we were equal shareholders, we each owned a third of the company, and so if you didn't all align on the vision of how the company was going to go and scale, that's not your decision to make anymore. And we decided to, rather than one of us run with it in the way they wanted, to just close it and have it be this chapter that was completed in the way that we all agreed to and all moved on from our lives after that. Which made me realize that okay, even though it was more fun to have it with partners, I want to have a business where I can really lead it and call the shots.

Anastasia MacLean: So, before we get to that, you, at one point, had what you considered a dream job, then the dream job fell through. So what sort of happened with that?

Sam Laliberte: Yeah, it's so funny even the term dream job, right? Like I think about so many phases of my life, and when I think about my career journey, I'm 35 now, I graduated when I was 21 or something like that so let's call it 15 years of being in the workplace, and, you know, making my own money and generating income, and so many times I was drawn to opportunities that would allow me to have the life I wanted to have right now. And I still think that's true today. So at that time, the dream job was one that would allow me to go live in San Francisco, California with a boy, also from Western, and all I wanted to do was be there, work in tech, be part of that cool energy of up and coming technologies and startups and all the stuff that I had become so engaged with at Western and the Entrepreneurship Center, I really wanted to be on one of those rocket ship rides where it's just such a fast, growing company. And that really was the dream. So I had the opportunity to move there and go do that. And then unfortunately, in the final moment that dream got taken away due to visas and paperwork, and it was a really difficult and upsetting ending. I had already quit my job for this company, so you can just imagine the drama and the heartbreak, both romantically, but also now being like, "Okay, I am now unemployed in Toronto, and I'm now starting from zero again in terms of how am I going to get there?"

Anastasia MacLean: So, can you give us a bit of an idea of what you think, in terms of what you did, your personality traits, whatever it is that really got you to where you are now?

Sam Laliberte: I always think of that graphic that they show of the journey someone goes through, I think it's accepting bad news. So first stage was definitely denial, anger, sad. Went through all of the motions, and then at some point I accepted, okay, this opportunity is now gone, and I still want to be there, I still want to go to California and make this move so what is the solution here?

And starting to get resourceful. So I started to just repeat the process that I had just done. I'll reach out to more companies; I'll do what I know. I'll go interview, I'll go there, I'll get all the offers just like they came last time. I'll just start the process over. So I did that. But of course, that takes several months. I now had no severance or anything, I'd quit my job. So, I had bills to pay and so when you think about this moment right, when this moment comes for you to maybe take the leap, do you take it or do you kind of wallow in a bit of the victim mindset? Which can happen to us sometimes. This was my moment to get resourceful. And so, I thought, okay, until I get this next job offer, how can I make some money quickly? And that is when I actually took on my very first freelance project. And it happened very serendipitously. I ran into a former employer, we caught up quickly, he had known I was going to California, I told him it wasn't working out, and on the spot, he said, "Hey, well, we actually have this one-month project we could use some help with. Do you want to just, do you want to just do some work for us for a month? You can do it from California, it's just an online computer job, you know, go visit your boyfriend, go spend a month there". I said "Wow, that sounds perfect". One month of pay, I'll go to California, I'll work, I'll keep interviewing, I'll figure it out.

Of course, once I realized this world of freelance, all of a sudden when I started interviewing again, nobody wanted to work with me. No one wanted to give me second interviews, they could just tell my heart wasn't in it. I had already realized that there was this new path, that this was my moment to be that entrepreneur again, have that life that I had already had a taste of with Ezzy Lynn, knowing that I truly am somebody who wants to lead and have a business and call my own shots and create something. It felt like the moment was coming back, and I just kind of leaned into it and I think it was a bit of the world working in my favor, and also me just leaning into the opportunity and saying, "Okay, this is my chance". So that's how I started into the world of freelance and working for myself again and doing remote freelance, working from anywhere.

Anastasia MacLean: So, tell us about the Freedom Lifestyle, then this incredible project and organization you have, and some of the common traits or beliefs or attitudes among the freedom seekers that you've worked with that others can apply and learn from in their own careers.

Sam Laliberte: Absolutely, I would love to. This all started at the same time of this journey. So it's a really great moment in a story where I received my first freelance project, and really that started to open my eyes to the idea of working remote on a more casual basis. This is back in 2017, so COVID hadn't happened, remote work was not mainstream. We really just had travel bloggers, like those were the original digital nomads, those were the original people working from their laptops that you would hear about that had these amazing jobs that allowed them to work from anywhere. And it was still very, very new, this idea of remote work. And so when I decided, okay, I think this could solve a lot of the things that I needed to have solved for me, I said, "Well, I have a lot to learn". And one of the ways I decided to learn about it was launching the Freedom Lifestyle

Podcast. I figured I'm going to find five people who have this lifestyle, who can work on their own terms from anywhere, I'm going to uncover their story, figure out how they did it, and by the end of the five episodes, I'm gonna just follow one of their paths. I'll just do what they're doing. I'll just take what I need. It was very selfish, in a sense, but sure enough, the podcast took off like right away. I realized that I was not alone. There was a lot of people who shared this value of freedom and flexibility. Of being able to have scheduled freedom, decide what hours they work and where they work from, location freedom, financial freedom, being able to make as much money as you want. I think those are like the three keys to the freedom lifestyle is, schedule, freedom, location freedom, financial freedom. And I realized I wasn't alone, and that is truly what started the movement, is even though I started to figure it out for myself, and technically didn't need to keep interviewing people, I thought, okay, let's see how far I can take this. Let's continue to learn, let's share my journey and really report on what I'm learning as I go in real time, and take others with me on the journey. And it's 2025 and I have, you know, still podcasts coming out this year, and it's something that I'm really proud of, because it really speaks to building a life on your own terms, and understanding that everybody's terms are going to be different. So it's as much of an inner job as it is, like external action, which I find really interesting.

Anastasia MacLean: I'm intrigued by lessons you've learned about monetizing services, because a lot of us, we don't like, nobody likes having those awkward money conversations. And you came up with that really cool campaign, that \$20 for 20 minutes. So tell us a bit about that switch for you, from giving it away to recognizing your value and ensuring that that was respected by others.

Sam Laliberte: Yeah, I'd love to. I did a podcast episode about this called "How to Get Paid to Give Advice", because you're so right. When you are someone who is known for sharing information freely and having a personal brand that really showcases your results, people naturally want to know how you did it. Like success leaves clues. People want to know if they can follow your path. People want to skip the line, I call it, where, rather than having to do all the trial and error, I did, hey, I'm just gonna take all of the lessons and just get to that stage you're at overnight. So I understand, of course, why people want advice, and it was something that I was always doing for free, whether on the podcast or just talking with anybody. But at some point, yeah, I had to get more serious about my revenue streams. And to your point about negotiating, I am honest. Every job I had had prior, I didn't negotiate my salary. I think I only had three maybe legitimate jobs, other than being an entrepreneur, where I was made an offer and I just accepted them. Like I didn't even know that that was something I should negotiate. I didn't grow up in a family where my parents talked to me about money, talked to me about the worth of my money, were there for me to ask for advice about how I should negotiate. Women weren't talking about this openly. And those things were all in my control. But the truth was that it wasn't something I was thinking about, I was more just accepting it. So the money stuff is something I really had to work on as an entrepreneur. And even hearing \$20 for 20 minutes, I mean, some people would

think, Oh, I would never give away 20 minutes my time for \$20 and, you know, maybe I wouldn't, wouldn't do that anymore either. But it was such a great start to shifting this narrative that, yes, I'm available, but there has to be some exchange of value in that. And that's how I initially started it. I said, will people pay to book a call with me instead of just book a free call or, like, offer me lunch, or offer me a coffee? Like, can I actually get paid for the knowledge that I have spent, now years, learning and understanding, becoming an expert in and going through this journey of the trenches and the ups and the downs. Is there value in this? And so that was my initial test. It was during the pandemic when everyone was trying to get creative with revenue streams. And it worked. I don't remember the stats, but let's call it, maybe 20 calls booked in the first month, and several people wanting to rebook another call and another call and another call. And I think that had to happen for me to really take this seriously, like I can be a consultant, that I can be a strategic advisor, that I can be a coach. That I can be more than just someone who's really generous with my story, that it's actually legitimate and people will pay for my advice.

Anastasia MacLean: And what did you do with any of the pushback that you got?

Sam Laliberte: Yeah, it's very awkward. I can think of still some conversations today that still haunt me, a little bit of friends who were really off put by that, who just wanted to chat, and I had to say, "Oh, this is actually a service that I'm offering as a paid service right now. And if you want to book a consult call, here's a link to do that". And I think it was a matter of having really great people in my life that I could talk to when I was feeling that uncomfot. My husband played a really big role in that. Being in the next room for me in the pandemic, both of us working from home, and me just saying, "Oh my gosh, had this really awkward interaction with so and so", and him just saying, "No, like, stay true to it. Look at all these other people who have booked." So I think that really helps build your confidence is knowing that, okay, maybe two people thought you weren't worth \$20 for 20 minutes, while 20 people had no problem paying that, and then booked again and again and again. And so just knowing that you might not be able to sell everything to everybody, some people might not expect it or respect it. But I also think that that's changing, and I feel like, similar to the remote work movement, I'm also playing a role of helping move that needle and helping change the dialogue around that and I think that is changing five years later, where people now reach out to me and say, "What is your fee for a call", versus, can we just hop on a call and I pick your brain. That could be because I keep putting podcast episodes out about it, but I feel like things are changing.

Anastasia MacLean: Have you paid a price on some level for pursuing what we think of as your true self? What is on purpose for you? Has it, has it cost you anything along the way? Did it cost you some friendships when you said 20 minutes for \$20?

Sam Laliberte: I mean, if my closest friends couldn't afford to chat, I would speak with my friends, of course. You want to make your knowledge accessible to people who need it. So, these aren't

like my close friends, you know? These were friends I was willing to lose if I had to, and I kind of did, to be honest. I can't even really think if we've, these two people that reached out, I can't think if we've even really engaged much since then, so probably.

I think, in general, people just standing by their worth and not being people pleasers or overextending themselves or doing things they don't want to do and having boundaries, that is uncomfortable for other people. It is hard when someone puts up boundaries against you, and like I'm triggered by that sometimes too. But when you stand up for yourself and create your own boundaries, you give permission to other people to create their own boundaries and stand up for themselves. And I want to live in a world where people are doing things because they want to, and people are living lives that are true to themselves. And I think on a scalable macro level, like that's the world I want to live in. And so I have to walk that talk, even if it's uncomfortable. But yeah, losing relationships, I would think, is a big one. I would also say just past job experiences where I had a couple corporate roles at the very beginning of my career, and being myself, it didn't work. You know, I didn't fit into a traditional corporate mold, and there was a period of time where I really felt like I would have to make significant changes in who I am in order to be successful. And I'm just so glad I didn't have to do that, because I would have just been so unhappy having to wear these different masks all the time. Like I truly feel like I get to show up as my authentic self when I open my laptop and talk to a client, or when I'm talking to my husband or a friend, like it's, it's the same. I'm living an authentic life, and that's one of my values, so yeah.

Anastasia MacLean: I was going to flip it around and say, okay, so what are the benefits of pursuing this passion filled existence, but being yourself, being authentic, being true. And when you said, you know, I'm so glad that I didn't have to do that, it's not that you didn't have to, it's that you made that courageous choice not to. You just decided that that's not who you were, and that's not what you were doing anymore. And that took a lot of courage to do that.

Sam Laliberte: It really did. And I think also just having a this abundance mindset. I know that term gets thrown around a lot, but like truly believing that there are so many opportunities out there that are not even in your awareness that could be coming to you at any moment. We so often get stuck on just what we know and what we see is available, and so we think that that's all there is. But as soon as we say no, this is actually what I'm looking for, this is going to be the type of role, the type of environment, the type of lifestyle that if I'm being totally honest, is how I want to live and how I want to show up in the world. And believing those are out there, I think that mindset is so important because there are. There really are roles and jobs and opportunities out there where someone's not going to give you 20 pieces of feedback of things that you have to change about yourself to be successful here. If you're constantly being asked to change all these things about yourself, I don't know, is it worth that struggle? Like there are ways that you can pivot and lean into something that someone's just gonna love who you are, right? Even in dating! Like we

talk about that in dating, that becomes so normal. Of just saying you shouldn't have to change too much of yourself for a romantic partner. There's going to be someone who's going to love you as you are. That's also true about work, as an entrepreneur or as a job seeker. So, just not like settling for a place that's going to make you veer too far off from who you actually are.

Anastasia MacLean: And for those of us who aren't looking to start our own business, so people who are, as you say, job seekers as opposed to entrepreneurs, how can those people bring an entrepreneurial mindset to their work, even when they're working for someone else, so that the work really aligns with their values and goals?

Sam Laliberte: Well, first of all, know what your values are. I think everybody should know what their top three values are. There's so many ways you can do that. You can get live coaching from someone, you can take courses, you can just do exercises on your own but really understanding what you care about. A coach recently told me you can tell what your values are when you think about the things that upset you and the things that really trigger you. And I felt like that was such an interesting take on it, because usually you think about, oh, here's the things I like, but when you think about the times you get really upset, really triggered, something that really makes you mad, it's usually because one of your values is being interfered with, and I thought that was a really unique way of looking at it, and that's very true for myself. So going on a journey to really figure out what are your values, so that you can figure out how you want to live.

And then, of course, in terms of work projects, you kind of got to put yourself out there for things and advocate for yourself, even in a workplace. If there are opportunities you want in your company, if there's ideas that you have, a lot of the times, we have to actually ask for them, whether you're a woman or a man, you have to kind of raise your hand and advocate for yourself. You don't need to have a personal brand that's all over social media with a podcast and a book and a blog. Of course, that's an amazing way to have yourself stand out but just even making it known, here are the things I'm interested in, here are some ideas that I have and putting those out there and asking for those opportunities. I think that is what an entrepreneur does. An entrepreneur like goes after and creates opportunities. And so if you want that mindset at work, then that is actually what it's about, is advocating for yourself and asking for it versus just waiting for it to come along.

Anastasia MacLean: You've said previously that in so many cases, failure and achievement are just two different paths that lead toward the same successful outcome. What did you mean by that and how has your career reflected that statement?

Sam Laliberte: I think that's a mindset. I mentioned my age previously, I'm 35. There have been dark periods of my life, right? There have been really painful moments. I've had relationships that I've ended, I've had, you know, childhood things to navigate, I've had careers where a boss just

hated me, right? Like, I've had some difficult moments, and I wouldn't change any of them. All of that had to happen for me to get where I am today and I like where I am now. And so that's really what that speaks to, is failure was part of the journey to get to where I am today, because I had to learn those lessons. Each of those moments of uncomfortability taught me more about myself. About what I like, what I don't like, what I'm willing to tolerate. And also, where I might need to pivot and lessons for myself. Like I'm, you know, I want to be myself, but sometimes myself isn't, you know, always that great. There are definitely things that you need to change, so don't think I'm all about just showing up in your raw self at all times. Sometimes you need to learn where maybe you've overstepped something and be honest with yourself, and all of that was part of my failure journey. So that's what it comes down to, is it had to happen.

Anastasia MacLean: And is it ever a good thing, in our career life, to be vulnerable?

Sam Laliberte: I only want to be in relationships and environments where I can be vulnerable. I'm an emotional, vulnerable person, so for me, yes, that comes naturally for me. I don't know if everybody needs that, but I know for me, when I think about those times where I didn't feel like I could fit into a workplace, it had to do with being vulnerable and being emotional. I wanted to be honest. I wanted to cry sometimes if something really painful had happened, and not be judged about it, and not be seen as somebody who was weak or too emotional, as if that's a bad thing. So I actually think that's funny that you use the word vulnerable, because I think being vulnerable early on in my career was rejected, and it was part of me realizing that I don't want to have to hide that part of myself. Like I love, that I'm emotional, it makes me great in so many other ways, and I need to be around people who respect that emotions. There's a range of emotions, and I'm mostly going to bring the positive ones, but if I bring the vulnerable, sad, expressive ones, I hope that that's okay.

Anastasia MacLean: Some people, when certain things were rejected about them in say, the workplace, the lesson for them would have been okay I can't do that, I can't be that, I can't show that. Whereas you said, Oh, you've rejected that, but that's actually fundamentally part of who I am, so I have to be somewhere else where that is embraced. Not a lot of people would have done that. I'm thinking of, particularly, when people hear a lot of no's. If you, Sam had gone to someone early on in your career and said, "Oh, I'd really like to do X". And if someone said, "No, that'll never work. No, you can't do that". It's not turning a no into a yes, but taking that feedback and saying, "Thank you, I hear that, and I'm going to do what I'm going to do anyhow".

Sam Laliberte: Absolutely. I think it's just remembering that it's one person's opinion, it's one data point. But our job, if we're really going to change who we are based on feedback that we're receiving from somebody else, you owe it to yourself to get more than just one data point. Try to really understand, is this a problem? Is this thing about yourself, this behavior, this action, this attribute, is it truly holding you back? Then, okay, then maybe you want to change that. But so

often we just let one person's opinion completely throw us off and set us off course. Like I talk to people who have been starting businesses, and I say to people, be really careful who you share that dream with, right? Not everybody is going to be ready to be your cheerleader and encourage you to do something that's unknown or unfamiliar, like you have to really be protective with those ideas and dreams when they're new and they're raw and they're vulnerable, because self doubt, I really believe, is the biggest threat to our dreams, our businesses, our jobs, our lives, our happiness. It throws us off. If we're not confident in ourselves we're never going to take the action to actually do what needs to be done. So yeah, if people are giving you feedback, how many people is what I would say? And are other people in your life giving you different feedback? Like, let's collect a little bit more data before we decide that you truly have something that's holding you back.

Anastasia MacLean: So there are some questions that I ask all of our guests, and one of them, I've asked you a couple of them along the way, but another is what we call a series of ones. So the first is, can you describe something that you did that you learned the most from and are grateful for?

Sam Laliberte: The first things that are coming to mind is taking jobs that didn't allow me to be myself, right? That's been a theme that's come up here. And so, one of my first jobs was very corporate. Like I'm talking, people were wearing complete full suits in the office every single day. I mean, you're interviewing me right now, I'm a pretty casual type of person, so even how I dressed felt like such an outcast, and a mistake I made was trying to fit in, trying to change that about myself. And I mean, I was so young, I don't regret doing that, but I think I even have visceral memories of being in the mall and shopping and actually having to ask an associate's help for what to buy. And I think that was just so reflective of just how far off I was from what was going to truly make me happy? So that's what came to mind.

Anastasia MacLean: And is there one person who's had a profound influence on you in your career journey?

Sam Laliberte There's so many. The team that was involved in starting the Entrepreneurship Center. There's three people in mind that all worked at Western who really believed in me as a youthful person who had never started a business before, who thought I would be the perfect person for that role. And they really advocated for me so many different times when we were trying to get funding and it was unclear if my job would stay. Fighting for that, advocating for me, believing in me when I wanted to start a business on the side while still working there. Accommodating that, figuring out a way how I could still have my job while still growing this other thing. When I wanted to move to Toronto, how could I still have my London job, and I got to take the train in a few days a week. I think the staff, honestly at Western in the Entrepreneurship

Center: Jordanna, John, Ian, all those people were just so amazing at advocating for me and believing me when I was so young and had no proof other than just complete potential.

Anastasia MacLean: And is there one risk in particular that you've taken so far that's had a significant payoff?

Sam Laliberte: There's so many I feel like I'm taking risks all the time. I would say recently, in my business, you get to a point where first you just want to get paid to have the life that you want to live, right? Maybe I want to be able to travel six months a year. I want to create my own schedule. I want to have uncapped income. It's like check, check, check, I worked so hard to make that happen. But then you do another check in, is how do I feel doing this type of work? And it's a really privileged place to even get to that point of your business where you can start saying no to opportunities or ending contracts or saying no to business, and that is something that I've had to start doing over the last two years in order to level up, in order to attract even more aligned opportunities. But that is always scary. It's scary to turn away money, and when you're an entrepreneur or freelancer, the whole thing is, like, you can make as much money as you want, you can work as much as you want. Like, there's gigs everywhere, there's projects everywhere so it's up to you to discern how much you want to work and the types of opportunities you want to work for. So that's been, like, a risk journey I've been on, and it's been paying off. It's been, it's, it's only worked out. So that's the next phase.

Anastasia MacLean: Are there specific things that people can do to get past an inner dialogue or mindset that is, you know, sort of wanting to keep people on the straight and narrow, wanting to keep them in some work that is safe and not venture out and explore other opportunities. You know, be it family or friends or work colleagues. I know when I decided that I was no longer going to be doing a full-time job, I had people who I really loved and was really close to who just freaked out. So how do we get beyond those kinds of influences? What specific steps can we take, or what kinds of things can we tell ourselves that are true and authentic to get around that, to get past it?

Sam Laliberte: Well, I'm sorry that happened to you, but it looks like it also worked out for you. So great job in sticking with it and overcoming those who didn't believe in it, and maybe who caused you to question for a second, "Hey, am I making a mistake?" because it worked out, and that's amazing so that should be celebrated. It's all mindset. I mean, everybody's looking for the overnight success trick or tell me how to do this, hold my hand. What are the steps? Where do I buy the business domain? What type of industry? What do I price it? All that technical, strategic stuff you can find that on the internet, there's so many resources. None of it even matters if you don't do the mindset work. It truly comes down to that, is like, really believing in yourself and believing that this is possible. My mantra for it is, focus on what can go right, then what can go wrong. And as much as you bring yourself through the rabbit hole of like, well, this could happen, and this could happen, this could happen, this could happen, and you stack all of your fears. Okay, sure.

Do that and like, really follow them. What is the worst case scenario? Imagine it. What would you do? You'd probably be fine for the most part. Or maybe your worst case scenario is just so far off you even hearing you say that you're like, Okay, that's not gonna happen. But if you're going to do that, allow yourself to dream of what if it did work like? What if my idea is right? What if this was the change that changed everything? What if this was my moment? And live in that potential, live in that excitement, live in that optimism, because you have to. If you're going to do something daring, brave, whether it's as an entrepreneur or even as a job seeker, there are going to be ups and downs so you have to find a way to recommit to your dream over and over again, even when a struggle comes up, even when somebody doubts it, even when the market doesn't respond the way you want to. You have to recommit to it and be excited about it and believe it's possible. That's what it takes. It really does. It's such an inside job.

Anastasia MacLean: A lot of people have difficulty in setting boundaries, personally and professionally, but if we just take a look at it in our work lives. Especially if someone, say, doesn't work a traditional Monday to Friday, nine to five. It's difficult to turn things off, to not always be available, to not always be working, even when they're supposed to not be working. What kind of steps can people take to adopt a mindset of establishing professional boundaries and communicating them in a way that's gracious but also is respectful to both parties?

Sam Laliberte: Yeah, boundaries with clients or with anyone. There's such an art to it. I think the first step is knowing, what are your boundaries? What are you willing to do? Some people are cool with taking a call at 11pm at night, or hopping on a quick call over the weekend. I know a lot of people who are happy to do that because they want to take the middle of the week off, where the ski hill is empty on a Wednesday all day, where on the weekend, all the nine to fivers are there. So like, I'm happy to work on the week, I'm happy to make that trade off. And that is, that's amazing. That's about you realizing what are your boundaries and what are you willing to do. So if you're going to enforce boundaries, you need to know that you get to decide what they are. You get to kind of make that criteria. So the first step is always actually knowing what's important to you, and not just, Oh, someone has this email reminder saying "I will not respond to any emails past 5pm" maybe I should have that boundary. Do you care? Is that a problem for you? If that's not and that's something you're happy to do, to go above and beyond for clients, then do that. Like I think it's just as much about going above and beyond, when you don't mind to do it, as it is about putting up your boundaries when you know this thing will actually, energetically, really upset you or interfere with your life. So, I think it's the balance of both. What are you willing to do to delight people, and what do you not want to do? And ideally you have a mix of both, because I do think a lot of service-based industries, it is about relationships. And we know that some people can be off put a little bit if you have too many boundaries. So, I always give that with a grain of salt.

Also figure out how you can go above and beyond and do that, because it helps make up for that, and people appreciate it. And then I think just being firm with it and gentle, I feel like I always make it about my personal life, so I don't want to have calls over the weekend. Personally, my husband has a very busy Monday to Friday job. A lot of my friends are not available until the weekend. So on the weekend, I'm just so excited to spend time with them. And so for me, I'm not willing to do that. And so I'll just say something like, you know, the weekend is the only time for me to spend with my family. I really try to protect that time. And once you go personal, people can't really be like, your family's not that important. Like, let's just talk, right? So I think just leading with your personal life, people tend to respect that it seems.

Anastasia MacLean: Is there anything, Sam, that we haven't talked about in terms of specific steps that people can take if they're at a point now saying, "I would like to make a career change, but I'm not really sure what to do or how to do it so I'm feeling kind of paralyzed."

Sam Laliberte: I think getting a coach, right. We live in a time where education has evolved so much in terms of the different things you can learn on the internet. You can really get a coach for like anything now. You can find someone who is truly an expert in that, and I feel like having that sounding board, somebody who can help guide you and facilitate that transition is truly priceless. As part of my journey of becoming a freelancer, I did that. I saw a career coach who played games with me to help me figure out what my values were. Let's go through all of the past experiences you've had. What were the projects that made you the most excited? What were the things that made you most frustrated. We like truly did a timeline all of my past experiences, and I really benefited from having that systemized approach to what are the themes in my life? What are the things that have consistently brought me joy, excitement, energy? Who really am I? And what does success look like for this next phase of my life, and how can my career be the thing I leverage to have that lifestyle I want to have. And I think just talking it out with somebody is so helpful because if not, you're just analysis paralysis and you're in your own head. So if you're that person, you're probably still in your own head and not doing it, or you're already taking the action. Some people don't need to talk it through, they're just going to start doing it. But if you are that, talk to a career coach, do the exercises to really collect those patterns so that when you go take action, you're confident. Because if you're taking action and you're not actually confident in where I'm going, I'm like, "Oh, this job sounds kind of cool and like, I can see myself doing this", you're just kind of floundering around, and you're not bringing that level of confidence, security into those opportunities that I think the job market really needs. Like, they really want someone who feels like it's a oh my god yes on both ends. And I think you can only have that if you know what your oh my god yes is. You can only bring that energy, that convincing energy, if it's true and it's authentic. So yeah, get a career coach and really try to get clear on what will make you happy.

Anastasia MacLean: Thank you so much for chatting with us today. Sam, it's been very enlightening and super inspiring.

Sam Laliberte: Thank you for having me. Thank you Western. I a huge moment in my career was actually going to Western. That was the start of me becoming who I am and starting to show up the way I want, and not care so much about being cool and fitting in, but instead just being myself. So I'm so, so grateful for Western it's played a huge role in finding a husband and building an entrepreneurial career. So yeah, I'm have a lot of pride of being a Mustang.

Anastasia MacLean: Awesome. Thank you so much.

Sam Laliberte: Thank you.