

Wichita Chamber Business Accelerator

Episode 112

Audra Dinell

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Don Sherman: [00:00:00] welcome to another exciting edition at the WCBA Powder, of course by Evergy. First, thank you for listening. Don't forget to like us. Love us. Sheriffs, follow us. We truly appreciate you checking us out in the house today. The [00:01:00] thread E.

Ebony Clemons-Ajibolade: That's what's up. Hey, Audra.

Audra Dinell: Hi there.

Ebony Clemons-Ajibolade: How are you?

Audra Dinell: I'm really good.

Ebony Clemons-Ajibolade: Hey, Audra.

Audra Dinell: Hi, You're not the third wheel. We're all a part

Don Sherman: Oh. Yay. Aw shots. Audra,

Audra Dinell: are you too?

Ebony Clemons-Ajibolade: we are. Well, I think we're good. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. We're happy that you're here joining us today for this conversation. So tell us a little bit about who you are and what you do.

Audra Dinell: Sure. Loaded question. So I am Audra Dinell, founder and CEO of the thread. I'm born and raised here in Wichita, graduate from No High, so lots of Okay. Oh, are you must be east?

northwest.



Ebony Clemons-Ajibolade: really irrelevant,

but

Don Sherman: both barrels. Got it.

Audra Dinell: Yep. Okay.

There's a lot of great, great people who've graduated from North that I'm

circling back to and meeting in my adulthood, and went to, which went to Wichita State and KU for my degree.

Worked in marketing here for a couple of years and then got moved to Fort Collins, Colorado. Married my high [00:02:00] school sweetheart before that and we moved on to Fort Collins, Colorado. I was definitely one of those Wichita people. I was gonna say Wichita women who was eager to broaden my horizons and get out of town.

And Fort Collins, Colorado was calling my name the mountains and. Craft beer scene and all the fun that was to be had there. And then we had our first baby

he is six and goes to Hyde, so he's a U S D 2 59 kid. Very proud of that. And I was working at ad agencies during that time and got recruited to go work in Honolulu, Hawaii. So we made the move from Wichita to Fort Collins, packed up our life once again, shipped it over.

The ocean and landed in Honolulu and this was 2017. And I, I was working in the role of vice president of a small agency out there and had our second baby decided not to go back to work and wanted to be an entrepreneur and had sort of dabbled in entrepreneurship before [00:03:00] I'd started a social media agency in 2012.

And my father's a serial entrepreneur, so definitely. You know, saw a lot of that. So it took some time. Took about a year stayed home with my second baby, did some contract work, tried to decide what I wanted to do with my life, and COVID hit the idea for the thread was born in the middle of that.

And so then in 2020 sold everything essentially and circled back and moved back home. So I boomeranged, I'm a boomerang.

That's me in a nutshell.

Ebony Clemons-Ajibolade: yeah, I mean like from Colorado to Hawaii, back to Wichita. That's so cool. All of the places that, you know, people are like, oh, I want to live there. I need to get there. Exactly. Exactly. Decided, you know what, been there, done that. And there's something about

Wichita that I need to where I need to

Audra Dinell: Isn't that cool? I mean, I get that question all the time. You know, why did you come back to Wichita? And I'm like, no, that's the wrong, that's the wrong way to say that question.

You know, I absolutely loved living in Fort Collins, Colorado, [00:04:00] by the mountains, and there's just such beauty there. And of course, Honolulu was a dream.

Don Sherman: Was it hard to leave Honolulu?

Audra Dinell: It was harder to leave Colorado. I will tell you because, , the challenges of living on a remote island are real.

You know, Amazon Prime is like seven to 10 days.

yeah.

Okay. Let's just start there.

Ebony Clemons-Ajibolade: That's a problem. That in itself that is a problem.

Yeah. Pack up and let's go home. Yeah.

Audra Dinell: But we, yep. We love, we did love living there. But what I love about being back in Wichita is just the ease of living. And I say that in the best way because when you don't have to worry about the logistics of your trip.

To target, for example. You can spend that energy on things that you actually wanna spend that energy on, like creating businesses, doing good with your community, investing in your family and yourself.

Ebony Clemons-Ajibolade: So

2020, the pandemic hits and you're like, I'm about to start a business.

Audra Dinell: Right.

Ebony Clemons-Ajibolade: Talk to us a little bit about that. Like, it

Audra Dinell: seems like a good

time.

Don Sherman: I've heard the [00:05:00] story, but I want to hear it from you.

Yeah.

Audra Dinell: Oh, you've heard the

story, you've read the story. So, at that time I was in that year gap where I was trying to figure out what I wanted to do. I'd been working in marketing for 10 years after getting my degree in marketing and enjoyed the field, but knew that it wasn't the thing that was bringing me alive anymore.

And when Covid hit in Hawaii, things were really strict. At one point the beaches were shut down. I think this was for like two weeks. So you couldn't even go to the beach. You could swim in the ocean. And so every day, my husband and I, we had a little thousand square foot home in Hawaii and we had two kids who were three and one.

Think, just think about that. Just let's, can we have a moment to pause for that, please? And at about three o'clock we'd go to the beach every day and walk across the sand that you weren't allowed to like park in and go into the ocean because they couldn't restrict you from swimming in the ocean. and I was thinking about, what is it that I have to give to the world? If I was my most audacious self, what would I dare to do? And I thought about this experience that I had with the Y [00:06:00] W C A in Honolulu, where they brought together 20 high level female leaders and put us through a nine month program.

It was called the Patsy t Mink Leadership Alliance for Women. And I thought, I wonder what Wichita has, like that we'd already started to get our wheels churning on.

should we move back to our hometown? This is not something we discussed before, but with kids in the pandemic. And we thought, you know, should we move back to our hometown?

And so it just kind of clicked. We were literally in the ocean overlooking one of our favorite beaches when I thought, Hmm, I wonder if Wichita has anything like this. So that's kind of

Ebony Clemons-Ajibolade: that's how it how it

happened.

Don Sherman: happened. What was, I'm sorry, I, what was the name of the course again? Pass

Audra Dinell: Patsy t Mink.

Patsy T.

t mink. Patsy t Mink. Yep. She is.

One of the first Asian females in government, and I should be able to talk about it more eloquently, but she has a leadership center in the Y W C A in Honolulu, and I was a part.

that,

wow.

Ebony Clemons-Ajibolade: That's [00:07:00] pretty cool. So tell us exactly what does the thread do? What do you do? That's great. You did all these wonderful things that, man, does Wichita have this, do they bring women together? What am I gonna do? And so what did you land on and what do you do?

Audra Dinell: So I looked around and there was a lot of great. We obviously have a lot of great leadership organizations here and a lot of great organizations for women, but I didn't see anything exactly for ambitious professional women who are leaders, and I am totally a KLC fan and adopt their philosophy of leadership.

It's an act and can be done by anyone, anywhere. And so what we do is we bring together female leaders for a six month program. So we run two a year. We're on cohort four right now. We start cohort five in April. Thank you. And we put them through workshops where we connect with other high level female professionals to come in and talk about topics that they are experts on or knowledgeable on.

They have mastermind groups within our six month [00:08:00] program. They get mentorship, so it's this container that these women can go through to develop whatever they're looking to develop in themselves. So some women come in really wanting to sort of. Those are the words they use level up in their career and get to the next place.

Some have soft skills like confidence or emotional intelligence that they're like, I, these are what I wanna build on, these are what I wanna work on. But what we find most often is women are just coming in to have community of other women that they can talk about their challenges with and have them cheer them on when they're going for something risky and big in their lives.

Ebony Clemons-Ajibolade: So what is the mastermind

Audra Dinell: Yeah, good question. So out of the 30 women that we take in each cohort, they get paired in down into six women pods. And what they do is they have an hour at the beginning of every one of our workshops where two women have hot seats. So it's essentially peer coaching where.

You know, you come in one day and you have a hot seat and you get this time to talk about your

challenge, sort of get different [00:09:00] perspectives from the women in your group. So since it's a smaller size of group, you're able to be more vulnerable. It's a big deal to walk into the thread and be able to take your mask off and say, there's a lot of amazing women in this room and I'm one of 'em, and I've got real challenges and I'm gonna talk about them here.

I'm not gonna bring the tidied up bow version, but I'm gonna talk about the real messy stuff.

Ebony Clemons-Ajibolade: Yeah. No, that's, that's pretty awesome. And so this is going to be your fifth cohort that's going through, that's gonna start in April.

Audra Dinell: Yeah.

Ebony Clemons-Ajibolade: And how does a woman get involved? Like how do we find out and as a small business, as a manager, how do I get some of my employees

Audra Dinell: engaged?

Sure. So you can go to our website. We have a really quick and simple application process. Small businesses and large businesses, they can support their women by offering the investment in financial resources and time. The cost is \$2,995 for the six month experience, and then we meet twice a month from nine to.

So essentially it's about [00:10:00] one full week of professional development within that six month time period. So as a manager you can identify these women and give them the opportunity to go through something like this. And I said earlier that everyone sort of comes in for a different reason. We're always encouraging the women to, you know, be someone who gets what you come for if you came to build your professional community.

Make friends, make colleagues here. If you came to increase a certain skill or if you came to just take this space to figure out what's next for you or where you wanna grow. We just encourage them. . We're giving you this container and this space. Make it yours, make it your own. So we'll have we work with a lot of really great leaders in the community who put their people through the program for various reasons.

Mm-hmm. , Don.

Don Sherman: Excellent. If you shared this, my apologies, but how did you come up with the name?

Audra Dinell: Okay, that's a great question. I did not share it.

Okay. So the thread is, I will tell you the truth. [00:11:00] I spent money on marketing and branding right up front because with a marketing background, I knew how important it was to

create a solid brand.

I wanted a name that felt like it could be carried. And wasn't hyper local. So the thread really refers to the common thread that we as women have in some of our shared experiences. So no matter how different we are, how different our goals are, how different our challenges are, I guarantee you we can find a common thread in our experiences and that's something to build off of.

Don Sherman: Excellent. And you started in 2020 ish?

Audra Dinell: Yeah,

20. Yeah. Filed for my LLC in August of 2020. Our first cohort started in March of 2021.

Don Sherman: Okay. You've been an entrepreneur for three years. How do you know if you're successful

Audra Dinell: When I first started this business, I 100% started because of the passion I had for learning about ourselves, growing ourselves professionally.

I had a [00:12:00] passion for women and the specific challenges that they might face, internal or external. And then also I started it really honestly as a side hustle. I came to the market and thought, you know what? I'm gonna start this as a side hustle. Make some money to put a down payment on a house.

And luckily I had a mentor a friend's husband reach out to me. We got to connect and he said, you know, Audrey, this could be bigger. You could make this a side hustle if you want, but this could be a real full fledged thing. And so he kind of helped me notch it up and dream a little bit bigger.

to answer your question, passion time.

So time autonomy for me as an entrepreneur is a huge part of that success. I've got two little kids, as I mentioned, and a husband and passions outside of work. Even though honestly, at this point, I'm like, what are those passions outside of

work? Like, let's be real. yeah.

So having that time, autonomy, and then of course financial stability, financial freedom is another piece of it.

So those three pieces, passion, time. [00:13:00] Money, those are all successful. Okay. What makes an entrepreneur successful to me.

Don Sherman: Excellent.

And where are you located?

Audra Dinell: We're downtown, so we have an office on St. Francis, and then we host our workshops at various locations downtown. We usually have a home base for about a year.

We are transitioning out of the Hudson. They've been a great partner for us Yeah. For the past year. And we'll be at Mud House for the next year, which is right there at Douglas and Washington.

Yeah. Excellent.

Ebony Clemons-Ajibolade:

E yeah, that's pretty cool. I'm excited. About your organization and all the women that you are helping. Quick question for you, and it may not be quick, but what scares you?

Audra Dinell: Honestly,

things I do every single day. I recently got accepted as a fellow into the pipeline program, which is an organization based outta Kansas City that supports entrepreneurs in the Midwest. that scares me. It scares me to walk into that room. But I kind of thrive off of the things that scare me. [00:14:00] And that's sort of, I guess the magic, the peace in me that I've really developed is when I feel that fear.

I know I have to take action. When someone asks me to do something scary, I say yes. So honestly, I mean. So many things I do on a daily basis, growing my team, having people depend on me in, in that way. Mm-hmm. to em, employ them. Those are scary.

Ebony Clemons-Ajibolade: How many employees do you have?

Audra Dinell: So I've got two team members in addition to myself.

Ebony Clemons-Ajibolade: Very nice. So it started with you and you've grown in the last couple years with and added the two team members, right? Is that Yep. nice. Yeah.

Don Sherman: Very nice. One quick Is there anything that happened in this three years that just threw you I didn't see this coming.

Audra Dinell: The way the thread was received.

Honestly. I mean, Mo moving to the market, I just thought I was honestly so scared to even

launch it. Even like that first Instagram post was like, oh my gosh, I just feel naked. I'm so out there. But I kept going [00:15:00] back to my intention. I'm doing this because of my experience, because of the experience I had in another market that helped me gain the confidence to step out on my own, to pursue whatever entrepreneurship was gonna look like for me.

So I just kept going back to that and just going back to the intention that I was starting from and thinking, gosh, well, if no one gets this, at least I know I'm doing this, you know, from my heart, from the right place, from that passion.

Yeah. And then the way it's been received has blown my mind time overtime again.

Don Sherman: That's a great story. So when you're marketing guru, so when you put that first Instagram post out there, how did it feel to get it recognized and you knew you was onto something. I mean, how, I know you were surprised, but how did it feel?

Audra Dinell: I think it still feels scary. I mean, every time I do anything publicly or share just a vulnerable sliver of what's happening

It feels scary. So how does it feel? I mean, my gut feels [00:16:00] tight, my chest feels fiery, you know, that's how it feels in my body. So yeah, there's just a healthy dose.

Honestly, it feels like courage. Right? Because when you're doing something and you know you're gonna do it, even though you're scared to do it, it's like that's, that's courage.

And so that's the word I would identify it with the most.

nice

Ebony Clemons-Ajibolade: courage. Excellent. I like that. Well, friends, it's time to hear a word for our sponsors. We'll be back with more from the thread.

Ebony Clemons-Ajibolade: Welcome back friends. We're here with Audra and we're talking about the [00:17:00] thread. We just got done talking about some of the things that you're afraid of or that brings you a little bit of some, a tense belly, but mm-hmm. , but confidence is the word that we got out of that. And you having the confidence to move forward and then helping other women and our communities move forward with confidence, right?

So,

I've known you since you've moved back and we've run into a, in a couple circles, but can you talk to me a little bit about coaching intensive? I don't know a lot about that.

Audra Dinell: Yeah. So one thing that is developing as the base of the thread has grown. You know, we started out with our six month program. We now offer an alumni program so that women can be involved in a much lower level resource wise. Throughout their career. And then we started doing events called, this Is Her and doing just special experiences. We do 'em a couple of times a year. Another arm of the business that has [00:18:00] started is internal programs. We're working with some really big partners here in Wichita to develop internal programs for the women in their organizations. A new arm. I say all of that to say a new arm of the thread that we are working on right now is a coaching arm. And I recently had the privilege of going through Kansas Leadership Centers Coaching Intensive, which was an absolutely amazing experience. It's for people who wanna be coaches. It's for internal employees.

Coach as an element of what they do in management, and I'm wrapping it up actually this month, but couldn't say enough good things about the way they've run that program. So that's a new arm of the business that we are going to be exploring here starting in March.

Ebony Clemons-Ajibolade: All right. Well, I am happy to hear that you're wrapping that up and now we're gonna offer something new from the thread.

Always. Always

Audra Dinell: that the fun thing about entrepreneurship, right? You start out with this idea and then you sort of just listen to your [00:19:00] market and see what do they want from us? What can we provide? Like what are we uniquely qualified and gifted to offer that is, is a whole or is needed? So, coaching is gonna be another one of those things that we're gonna experiment with.

Ebony Clemons-Ajibolade: I love that. And so who in this community or just, or nationally do you take inspiration

Audra Dinell: from?

Hmm. Well, in this community, there's a ton of awesome entrepreneurs. I will say my dad definitely is one of my first and foremost mentors. He's a serial entrepreneur here in town. Gosh, Mary Billings, Stacy Ward, Latin, Elizabeth Farha Angela Green. Heather Giesen, all of these women who are either slightly ahead of me or even on my same timeline. Jordan Walker's another one from Bonfire. Just so many amazing women who are building cool things with their giftings. They continue to inspire me locally. That's

Ebony Clemons-Ajibolade: that's pretty awesome. And all the people you just named are so amazing as well as you are real, pretty [00:20:00] amazing as well.

And we appreciate all that you do for the community and the work that you're putting in. And it has to feel good to see your baby, right? This, the thread just really mature and give life to

others.

Audra Dinell: That feels amazing. That's definitely the most rewarding part. We've had several women say, you know, this changed my life or this changed my path.

Or just being in community with other women in the thread has have given them the confidence to go take that leap of faith, have that conversation with their boss, start their own business. So one hands down, I. That's the first time I got a comment like that, . I went home and told my husband, I was like, oh my gosh, you'll never believe this.

Right? And so that sort of, I, I know you asked a question earlier, Don, that's, that's what feeds it. That's how I knew it was working because an experience like this worked for me and helped me become more of who I am and getting that feedback. I mean, we get so much feedback from now. We have over a hundred women in our community, and so getting that feedback of how.[00:21:00]

They're utilizing the threat and how the threat is supporting them through different exciting challenges or risks that they're taking or phases of their life. I mean, hands down, like that's such a gift.

Ebony Clemons-Ajibolade: Yeah. And you know, last thing before I, I turn it over to Don, you talk about, you know, helping the women who come through your organization, but internally you do some really cool things, right? You guys, you, you allow your turn. Well, I'll let you to tell your story, you know, but what's the culture that you've set for your

Audra Dinell: team?

Yeah, I mean, we're a family first. Culture 100%. I only work with Women who are, or people in general who have that drive in themselves. They're self-motivated. So, you know, we have an office, but we often do work from home.

We have sick kids. I mean, we have other things we're juggling. So we have just created this really cool family first culture. We pivot very easily. We're a small team, but one of our team members just y. Just yesterday was saying they love how well we pivot. One person is sick, the other person takes the lead.

[00:22:00] So I worked for a boss at one point who's, I swear favorite phrase was butts in seats,

Oh gosh.

and so basically we're creating an anti butts in seats culture, if

there is such a thing. Yeah. But yeah. Thank you for recognizing

that.

Ebony Clemons-Ajibolade: Absolutely. Don.

Don Sherman: I think I got an idea, but please tell us who is your ideal customer.

Audra Dinell: Yeah, professional, ambitious women. entrepreneurs, small business owners, women who work in corporate America who are looking for a community of other like-minded women. And I say like-minded in the way of, they don't have the same opinions of course, but they are go-getters and they want more from life and they're holding a lot of things.

They could. really go-getters in their twenties. Alexis Scott is someone who comes to mind. She is just like an amazing entrepreneur. We've also had a woman in her sixties [00:23:00] who I, you know, decided at that point in her life, she was going to maybe potentially think about switching careers or switching something.

But our bread and butter is really women right there in the middle of that who are not maybe the most. In their careers, but who have had some success, had some traction, and are looking for their community and just like a space to stop all the noise for six months, well, not six months, but for time throughout that six months, and just focus in on themselves and think about strategically and intentionally.

All right, what's my why? Who am I? What do I want? What strengths do I have? How am I going to use those? What does this look like? because we move so fast, right? I mean, it's very hard, even myself included, to take time to, to sit down and do that kind of thinking and learning.

Don Sherman: Excellent. And so you've been doing this for three years now.

What, how could Wichita's ecosystem improve [00:24:00] better serve

Audra Dinell: You know, I'm not quite sure. how it could improve. But I will say one thing that I love about Wichita is they support their small businesses. So I'm gonna actually say one way it could improve is when you're considering outsourcing to someone regionally or nationally, first maybe look in your market because Wichita is such a gold mine.

And we even, like, this is a super easy example, but Amazon versus love of character, right? It's so easy to order or watermark books, it's so easy to order that. Book on Amazon when watermark will order it for you. And that money stays here locally. So for us, we've had large organizations come to us and say, Hey, we want you to put together a program for our female leaders.

They could go anywhere for that. They've global resources and they chose to work with us. So that's a way that we can continue to improve the ecosystem here for small businesses.

Ebony Clemons-Ajibolade: Love that.

Don Sherman: Excellent. Shout out to Sarah. One [00:25:00] more question. , I keep saying this. It's amazing. You've only been around three years,

Audra Dinell: Not even three,

right?

Don Sherman: even three,

Audra Dinell: two and a half.

Don Sherman: Yeah. Okay. We'll go with 2.5. So

what's

happening in the next five years organization that

you can share?

Audra Dinell: Yeah, that's exciting. So our model that we're working towards is licensing thread chapters throughout the Midwest region. So my goal in the next five years is 20 chapters in the Midwest of the thread.

So again, like we're in early stages of getting that kicked off and it feels audacious to share. That is the vision and that's what we're working towards. So that's one of the big things I see in the next five years. I can see, I mean, gosh, there's so many other things. None that I, oh

Ebony Clemons-Ajibolade: my gosh, that's

Don Sherman: huge.

Audra Dinell: oh, well thanks.

Don Sherman: 20 chapters. Wow. That's pretty darn

Audra Dinell: How

about I come back in five years when it's actually 20 chapters and

we say, pretty darn

Don Sherman: probably be done kicked me

Audra Dinell: of this

Don Sherman: the podcast [00:26:00] by then. But Ebony will still be here harassing people, but yeah. Oh God. Let's do that in five years. It's a date.

I think

that's all I have.

E Yeah, it's

Ebony Clemons-Ajibolade: time for some word association.

Don Sherman: Oh yeah. She's looking at me saying, okay, what's she

Ebony Clemons-Ajibolade: doing? Gonna add a few

Audra Dinell: What

Don Sherman: I'm gonna give you one word. You gimme one word back. That's not wrong cuz it's your word. Are you ready?

Audra Dinell: I I am as ready as I'll ever be. Leader,

Hmm. Anyone

Don Sherman: Success.

Audra Dinell: individualized

Don Sherman: college.

Audra Dinell: Optional.

Don Sherman: Failure

Audra Dinell: Required.

Don Sherman: entrepreneur.

Audra Dinell: Hmm? The lifeblood.

Don Sherman: hero.

Audra Dinell: Oh my gosh, that's such a hard one. I'm just gonna say my dad.

Don Sherman: Okay.

Excellent. [00:27:00] Vacation

Audra Dinell: Hmm. Required

Don Sherman: right .

Failure

and vacation

required ,

Wichita.

Audra Dinell: Hmm. Home

Don Sherman: Wichita, regional chamber,

Audra Dinell: Also home,

Don Sherman: family,

Audra Dinell: also home.

Don Sherman: fun.

Audra Dinell: Needed.

Don Sherman: Okay,

last but not least, gotta tell the truth. Beverage.

Audra Dinell: Oh, red wine.

Okay.

Ebony Clemons-Ajibolade: Very nice.

Don Sherman: Yay. Excellent.

It's

truly a pleasure talking to you. Thank you for coming on the show.

Ebony Clemons-Ajibolade: Yes, it's been wonderful.

Audra Dinell: you both.

Ebony Clemons-Ajibolade: you guys. Absolutely. Well, friends, we've come to the end of today's segment. If you would please make a comment, make certain that you share this with someone who might find value, and until next time, peace.

[00:28:00]