

Wichita Chamber Business Accelerator

Episode 145

Sarah Leslie

Don and Ebony: [00:00:00] Welcome to another exciting addition of the W C B A, powered, of course, by Evergy. First, thank you for listening. Don't forget to like us, love us, share us. We truly appreciate you checking out. In the house E we have Leslie Coffee Company. That's right. Hi, Sarah.

Sarah Leslie: Hi Ebony.

Don and Ebony: So glad you were here. I was just sharing, not too loudly, cuz Don will try to like show up.

But your patio is one of my favorite places to be in the morning, having little coffee. Let's. See. What's that address again? I need to know where to find her, where she, when she can be found. So Leslie Coffee Company, duly noted. You got it. Continue. So Sarah, tell us who you are and what you do.

Sarah Leslie: Well, my name's Sarah Leslie, and I'm a owner and barista at Leslie Coffee Company. We're located in Delano. We opened at the end of 2018, so it'll be four years around Christmas and we're a coffee shop. We serve coffee from companies all across the country and we have food.

A kind of small food menu. I wouldn't call us a restaurant. we're definitely a coffee shop, but we do toast and we make biscuits. We make biscuit, sandwiches and pastries. So, but yeah, I think our main focus is coffee. And the thing about coffee shops, is there places where. Coffee shops serve a lot of purposes for people, a place of course, to get coffee, but also a place to study work on your computer.

Meet with friends, meet, have a business meeting, go on a date. So coffee shops are places where people can come together. And kind of mix, I guess the word for it is a third space, right? It's not work or home, but it's another type of public place.

Don and Ebony: Third space. Nice.

Sarah Leslie: So community and being part of Wichita, part of Delano is really important to us and yeah.



Don and Ebony: Yeah. I mean, all of what you just said is like incredibly true, cuz I've done all of those things in that space. Other than date, my husband hasn't taken me there on a date, but there's still time and there's still

Sarah Leslie: Yeah, he could.

but I, I really love it because like you get such a diverse crowd in there, which is so neat.

Sarah Leslie: Yeah.

oh, go ahead. Sorry.

Sarah Leslie: Well, I was just gonna say we do. Yeah, I think we do, A lot of people drink coffee and even people who don't drink coffee, I mean, we have tea, we have other stuff. So I think as opposed to like a bar where, you know, there might be an age limit or people are there more to actually drink, like coffee shops can also just be places where people hang.

Don and Ebony: Yeah. Mm-hmm, , they're just hanging a lot of times people are just literally hanging out reading, playing games sometimes, you know, it's just a, it's a really fun atmosphere. One of the things that I really appreciate when I come in, you have a refrigerator there.

Sarah Leslie: That, yes, we're a host of the, I C T community fridge project. And we started hosting the fridge in 2021. So it's been a year now that we've been a host a little over a year.

Don and Ebony: And what does that mean? Could you tell our listeners what that entails?

Sarah Leslie: The well it's important to me that people know that the fridge is not my idea or my project.

It was founded by Tajana Stalker. and the fridge there's several fridge locations in town. The I C T community fridge project is a grassroot, mutual aid organization and their mission, their value, their driving force is that everybody eats that anybody should have access to food. And so the fridge, we accept donations from anyone.

There's a list of [00:05:00] things that you can't donate. But for the most part, we take anything that's like unopened, prepared in a commercial kitchen or from a grocery store, and anyone can take anything they need. You don't have to show an ID or have there's no requirements to take. So give what you can, take what you need.

Don and Ebony: When I first saw you guys put that in the shop, I was like, wow, this is really great. Makes me love it even more. So you've been in business since 2018. And in between that time, there was a little thing called a pandemic. That happened.

Sarah Leslie: Yeah.

Don and Ebony: So talk to us about how you, you know, have come to the other side of that, because you know, there we were, in some murky times, the doors had to be closed and then we could do only patio and now we're back inside.

So what did that look like?

Sarah Leslie: We opened the day after Christmas, 2018. So really 2019 was our first year in business. And it felt like we had a lot of momentum at the beginning of 2020, like, wow. Things are kind of working out like maybe, maybe this is gonna be okay. And like, I could, I could start paying myself. We could, this is like a viable business.

And then. When everything started to get canceled and closed down in the middle of March. And we closed for, six weeks in April into May. And then when we re when we reopened, we were doing to go only, and we stayed that way for a whole year. There were other businesses that made different choices.

Doing indoor seating and distance. And it was really important to me that the staff didn't feel like they were at risk of getting sick at work. And there was no real way for me to completely take that risk away. But to me, it seemed like the best thing to do would be to do takeout only. So that's what we did.

And what I said earlier, coffee shops were a place where people can come together, sit, meet a bunch of strangers, right? The whole concept of a coffee shop is kind of like COVID was we weren't supposed to do that.

Don and Ebony: Yeah. So it was the opposite. Right,

Sarah Leslie: So that really was tough and we didn't have a ton. Of cash that we had, you know, in the bank to really get us through.

So, you know, luckily the payroll protection program and stuff like that helped us through and really just kinda had to rethink the business almost entirely and just be creative and do whatever we could. At the worst point we were down to. Six 30 to one 30 as our hours. So we did a shortened schedule. I had two teams of people so that if one team went down, the other team could cover and we worked three or four, nine hour shifts a week.

And we only ever worked with those people. And we. Luckily we had customers, I think who chose us as the business that they were like, I'm gonna go here and make sure that this place doesn't close, cuz I'm gonna go here every day or two times a day or buy gift cards. You know, whenever I have extra money and we were able to make it through, but.

It got close. I called my accountant and I was like, I think I'm gonna run outta money. Do you

think you can help me figure out when? And we ran the numbers and it was like two weeks away

Don and Ebony: Mm-hmm.

Sarah Leslie: So, but you know, you're, you're really in the unknown. And then when we reopened indoor seating, we were so busy and I had no.

That really surprised me, but I guess what happened is that people were waiting.

Don and Ebony: They were,

Sarah Leslie: And they were excited to come back and support us when they could. And I think that people really appreciated that we stuck to our values and, you know, stuck with the masks. Didn't do the indoor seating, even if it meant they couldn't come.

I think a lot of people saw that and that meant something to them.

Don and Ebony: I would agree. I would totally agree. So what made you decide that you wanted to start this coffee business?

Sarah Leslie: Well, I was a, have been a barista since 2006. I started being a barista when I was in college in New York city. And, you know, once you get one job, it's easy to get another. And I found that I really loved coffee and working in coffee shops.

I volunteered a lot for the Barista Guild and the especially coffee association. Especially with their [00:10:00] professional development programs, their barista level one and level two certificates. And I was a credentialed instructor for them. And then

Don and Ebony: I, I'm sorry, go back.

That's okay. You started off just, you know, in college and I need a job, so I'm just gonna go work at the coffee shop and then it moved from just working at the coffee shop to like instructing and become certified and now owning a business

Sarah Leslie: Pretty much. Yeah. I mean, that was 2006 was a long time ago. So I've made a lot of cups of coffee between then and now,

Don and Ebony: just a few.

Sarah Leslie: But I think volunteering for the barista Guild and being a part of that organization, I think was a big step up for me to see, well, the person.

That really got me into it was Anne Nylander. she lives in Seattle and she actually doesn't work

in coffee anymore. But being a barista is really a craft. You know, it's not, I think a lot of people see it as an entry level job that is kind of like a counter service worker, expendable, replaceable, but it is not, it, it really takes a lot to be able to manage.

Making drinks to the high standards that we have and doing everything else that you're doing. And not every, not everybody takes it seriously, but I met Anne and I was like, wow. Anne is like really serious about this. And I was like, you know, I guess I could be serious about this too. This could be my career.

And so I just kind of got more into what she was doing with the Barista Guild and. Things have changed now with their education program. But at the time it was like, if you had enough skills, if you could pass the test, then you could volunteer as an instructor. You had to take this instructor development class, but then you could teach.

So I kind of like taught my way into the certificates. And then, yeah. And then, yeah, I just worked. At a bunch of different coffee shops. I worked as trainer and regional manager.

Don and Ebony: On the coast,

Sarah Leslie: Mainly in New York City. Yeah.

Don and Ebony: Then you, what year did you come back to Wichita?

Sarah Leslie: I moved back in 20 16, 20 16,

Don and Ebony: Okay. And then two years later, you're like,

Sarah Leslie: Two years later,

Don and Ebony: I'm gonna do it on my own. Well, I'm thankful to the lady who showed you how to be serious.

Sarah Leslie: Because

Don and Ebony: I never knew that there was a Barista Guild. I mean, right. That's number one and you're right. I think it takes incredible like skilling craft to, you know, create.

The perfect, you know, brew or, and the little designs. How do, I don't know how you create like a heart or clouds and I mean, that's artistry at its best.

Sarah Leslie: Yeah. It's well, it's called latte art and yeah, it takes, it does take a lot of practice to get right. And you have to steam the milk just right. And then you have to pour it just right. So

Don and Ebony: I mean,

Sarah Leslie: it takes time. Yeah. Yeah.

Don and Ebony: So what makes the, what makes the color darker and what I take it? The milk makes the color of the liquid lighter. I mean, when you're doing these designs, how you, what makes it darker in certain places? How does that

Sarah Leslie: Well, I think, I guess you're talking about contrast, like the difference between the dark brown of the crema and the white of the milk. And so, as you pour, it's important to like you pour from a pie at first, so that you keep that dark crema, that coffee color.

And then when you wanna start your design, you get close really fast. And then you get just white, so you don't get any of that in between like milky color and yeah,

Don and Ebony: That was pretty cool.

Sorry. That was really good. I'm impressed that she could interpret what you were talking about. I know. Yeah. Cause I was really lost on that. Yeah. Designs and people's spaces and all that. No, that's pretty awesome. I just have one question before we go over to the break. How do you define success?

Sarah Leslie: That's a good question. I guess I've been thinking about that a lot recently I do a lot of yoga and I was reading this meditation book and the message was about self study and saying, give up hope. That hope is an illusion that is distracting you from reality.

And it made me think about the coffee shop and how a lot of times. When I think about the business, all I see is the things that we aren't doing well enough, the things that I'm not doing, that I should be doing, the things that the staff isn't doing, that they should be doing. And like also, I think there's this push to think about like, what's next, you know, what's, what's your next move.

You're [00:15:00] doing good now, but what are you gonna do next? And reading that kind of made me think that maybe the coffee. Is right where it needs to be right now. Like what if our goal was to just keep doing exactly what we're doing now and just stick with it and see where it goes. I don't know if that answered your question.

Are we successful now or not? But I mean, We're paying the bills and I'm able to pay myself a little bit and

Don and Ebony: That's big. That is huge.

Sarah Leslie: and I think that for the most part, people like us, we have a loyal following and we're still finding new customers all the time. So.

Don and Ebony: Wonderful. That's the perfect answer. Thank you for sharing that. Well, Francis

time to hear a word from our sponsors, we will be back to hear more from Sarah Leslie in the Leslie coffee company. Welcome back friends. We're here with Sarah Leslie in the Leslie coffee company. And we are just talking a little bit about her business and some of the challenges she's overcome and her time as being a master certified barista. Now I'm like interested. I may like pick up a shift so you can teach me how to become a barista.

But so speaking of like, you know, joining your team, what is the culture like in your, your establishment?

How would you define that?

Sarah Leslie: Well, I think that one thing that not everybody thinks about when they open a business, especially a coffee shop, is that you become a boss, which I think is a really important, really important job. It's really important to me that people feel like I am a good boss. Which is really hard to measure yourself by that stick because it's hard to keep people happy sometimes.

But I think that because I have so much experience in coffee and I still work floor shifts with my staff and I do all the jobs, you know, there's a lot of cooperation and mutual respect. And I think like, I understand how hard the job is or like what the challenges are.

Don and Ebony: Mm-hmm and

Sarah Leslie: I hope that my baristas appreciate that and I think they do.

And just try and focusing on recognizing that they're my primary stakeholder group in the shop and keeping, keeping them happy, listening to their feedback, and also just respecting the work that they do.

Don and Ebony: by,

Sarah Leslie: Paying them the best that I can and providing a lot of opportunities for them to grow in the coffee shop, but also as human beings is important.

So I guess the culture is just about just hopefully celebrating them, respecting them and trying to. They don't all have to come in and say, coffee's my number one thing. I wanna be a barista, but if they're interested in it enough to learn it and they wanna, you know, meet people and be part of the community, then that's good.

Don and Ebony: So if someone wants to come in and you said coffee's not their number one thing. Right. And they say, but I'm really interested and they fall in love.

what would be some advice like to, if, if you have young ladies who's thinking about opening their own coffee shop, making impact in their own little part of the community, what are some of

the steps to doing that?

Sarah Leslie: the,

Don and Ebony: Well, Think

Sarah Leslie: if you can work as a baristas, somewhere first is good because, you should know if you like it and you really have to like it, cuz there's not a lot of money in it. so you have to find joy in the actual work. And I think, I don't know, I, for me, an important piece is that.

People don't have to have experience, I guess is what I mean when I say that when they come in to apply that I'm happy to give them the skills. Cuz I think sometimes in coffee that has limited us and who we hire because we're only hiring people who've already gotten in the door and then we end up with people, we end up with not enough diversity.

We end up with the same group of people. So, and then I think other advice would be to just. You know, think about the boss that you would wanna have, I guess is what I think [00:20:00] about when I'm struggling is like, what would I want my employer to do?

Don and Ebony: You know, a couple of months ago I was hanging out at mark arts at a Chamber event.

And lo and behold, they announced that Leslie Coffee Company won the Small Business Award. And I seen Miss Leslie roll up to the stage. And, how was that feeling? How was that? That's pretty. That was pretty cool. It was a packed house too.

Sarah Leslie: It was, you know, I was really shocked I really didn't think that we were gonna win and then we did win. And then I cried in my acceptance speech and I felt like such a goofball, but, you know, I don't really think of myself as a business person or as an entrepreneur.

I think about myself as a barista. So to win a small business award. To me that was meaningful validation that, you know, maybe I do know some stuff mm-hmm even though sometimes I feel like I'm faking it, you know, like that. Yeah. That maybe I, maybe I am a business person after all.

Don and Ebony: You're located in Delano, help people understand exactly where Delano's not your dad's Delano anymore. Delano. No, Delano's popping. He's popping over there. So where is, where are you at?

Sarah Leslie: At Douglas and Walnut. So Seneca,

Don and Ebony: Seneca. Okay.

Sarah Leslie: And then Walnut is one street East

Don and Ebony: Mm-hmm.

Sarah Leslie: And we're on the

Don and Ebony: on the Northeast corner.

Sarah Leslie: We're on the Northeast

Don and Ebony: Yeah. Yeah. That's I know where you okay. And people already, always outside. Yeah. yeah. Drinking. Yeah. Or eating or whatever they're doing.

Sarah Leslie: Mm-hmm

Don and Ebony: Mm-hmm okay.

That's where you at. That's good to know. I'll stop by now. Oh my gosh. You know? Yeah. and you can teach me how to make. Brown and white coffee thing. You are gonna love it. I don't know if she's gonna teach you that, but she would love for you to stop by how will.

Sarah Leslie: We do teach classes if you wanted to take, yeah, we do. We do an espresso class and a latte class and a coffee brewing class.

Don and Ebony: Now is that, oh, I'm sorry.

Sarah Leslie: We, well, the next latte class is a week from today, but I think it's sold out, but.

Don and Ebony: Oh, of course. Latte art, but you have to take one like a beginner's class of first or no, you.

Sarah Leslie: No, you can come with no experience. Yeah. You can just come take a class.

Don and Ebony: Is this on your website? Like how do we find out about.

Sarah Leslie: On our website. Yeah. Yeah.

Don and Ebony: Is it on social?

Sarah Leslie: I hope so. Maybe I didn't put them on Facebook. I'll go put them on Facebook and then yes, it will be on social

Don and Ebony: All right. That's cool. I'm definitely gonna sign up for that. That would be a, you know, for all of our listeners who are business owners as well. Firing or side hustlers. I mean, this is a great, like, fun activity that you could do with your team as well.

Right. Team building activities, and

Sarah Leslie: Yeah, we could, we have done that. Yeah. I think we've done that before for a company where we did like a team building.

Don and Ebony: Sorry, Don, I just kinda, that excited me. You hijack, just like normal. It is what? No. last question for you. You've been around four years. If my math is right.

Sarah Leslie: Just about almost okay.

Don and Ebony: Next five years. What's that gonna look like?

Sarah Leslie: Well, Delano's gonna grow a lot, I think, in the next five years. And I, I'm glad that we're there and we're established and hopefully, hopefully community will continue to grow and thrive and change. But I don't know. I think that. At some point, I think Delano, there's kind of like not competing interests, but there what I see with the fridge and with the community that's in my coffee shop and what I see with all the new development is like, how are these things gonna integrate?

And everyone's gonna be here together.

Don and Ebony: Yeah.

Sarah Leslie: Yeah. And that, I think that's gonna be an interesting challenge and I hope.

Don and Ebony: that.

Sarah Leslie: I hope that it goes the way that I want it to go, or I hope that people can see the way the coffee shop exists, that it is possible to be a space for everybody. And not just for, you know, one subset or, you know, I think I don't, I'm excited about the development and I think Delano is cool, but I think it's cool now.

I think it's still gonna be cool if we get new stuff, it's not cool because of the new stuff, I guess, is what I mean.

Don and Ebony: And to be able to keep the cool factor of her that, you know, so the unique thing that makes Delano Delano don't let it change just because the other outside new things are coming in.

Sarah Leslie: Right? Yeah.

Don and Ebony: Excellent. Nicely put, think it's time for a little word association. Yeah. I give [00:25:00] you one word to gimme one word back. That's not wrong, cuz it's your word? Are you ready? Sarah? She's ready. that's too funny. Leader.

Sarah Leslie: Oh no, I'm already doing bad.

Don and Ebony: No, Nope.

me.

Don and Ebony: That's a good one.

Okay. Success.

Sarah Leslie: Peace.

Don and Ebony: Nice college.

Sarah Leslie: Fun.

Don and Ebony: Mm-hmm yeah, it was it's a good time. Nevermind. We'll keep. Failure.

Sarah Leslie: Failure. closing.

Don and Ebony: Entrepreneur.

Sarah Leslie: Anybody.

Don and Ebony: Wichita.

Sarah Leslie: Home.

Don and Ebony: Vacation.

Sarah Leslie: In September.

Don and Ebony: Oh no. Wow. As a planned. Yeah, exactly. hero

Sarah Leslie: Mm, my parents

Don and Ebony: Fun.

Sarah Leslie: Mm. A walk.

Don and Ebony: Walk. Okay. Family.

Sarah Leslie: My son.

Don and Ebony: Wichita Chamber.

Sarah Leslie: People. Nice people. Friends.

Don and Ebony: I can guess what this one would be, but you can tell the truth, especially if it's not, apparent beverage.

Sarah Leslie: Coffee.

Don and Ebony: I try to get her to go there. and that's where you go. Excellent. You know, Sarah, thank you for coming through.

Sarah Leslie: Thank you for having me.

Don and Ebony: This was pretty cool. gonna learn how to do that. Gonna take a latte class. What's you call it again.

Latte art latte. art. I mean, if you can't remember latte art for caps, but I take your I'm just gotta point there.

Latte art. Sarah, we appreciate you being here. Thank you for spending time with us.

Thank you so.

Of course, of course friends, thus stand up. Today's show. If you will please like us and share us with people that, you know, please let us know who you wanna hear from next till next time. Peace.