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## CTRL+CLICK CAST #33 – Whitney Hess on Humanizing Business

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**Lea Alcantara:** You are listening to CTRL+CLICK CAST. We inspect the web for you! Our special guest today is Whitney Hess and we're talking about humanizing business. I'm your host, Lea Alcantara, and I'm joined by my fab co-host:

**Emily Lewis:** Emily Lewis!

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**Emily Lewis:** Today we're talking to Whitney Hess about humanizing business. Whitney is a user experience and personal development coach. She is the owner of Vicarious Partners where she coaches business leaders on how to more mindfully and compassionately design their products, their companies and themselves. Many of our listeners may already know Whitney through her blog, formerly Pleasure & Pain and now [whitneyhess.com](http://whitneyhess.com) where among other topics she advocates for empathy in both business and life. But she also co-hosts the [Designing Yourself Podcast](#) which delves into the topic of you architecting your life and designing the person you truly are. I'm so excited to have you on the show, Whitney, welcome.

**Whitney Hess:** Thank you both so much. It's thrilling to be here.

**Lea Alcantara:** So Whitney, can you tell our listeners a bit more about yourself?



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**Whitney Hess:** Sure. I noticed that when Emily was doing my introduction, she said, “User experience and personal development coach.” [Laughs]

**Lea Alcantara:** [Laughs]

**Whitney Hess:** So I'll explain the “and.” I have been a user experience practitioner for the last decade, but a couple of years ago, I realized that designing products can be all for naught if we don't take time to design organizations.

**Lea Alcantara:** [Agrees]

**Emily Lewis:** [Agrees]

**Whitney Hess:** So I started trying to figure out how to do that and eventually found my way to coaching and realized that there's a lot that coaching can bring to the user experience practice, and so now I am still working within the realm of user experience, but with a personal development angle, and that explains the “and.”

**Lea Alcantara:** Aha!

**Emily Lewis:** So what actually is a personal coach?

**Whitney Hess:** Well, I think it's a misnomer that I even call it personal development because it really is both personal and professional. There's really no line between it, but essentially, people come to me when they're at a crossroad in their career or when they're feeling stuck in their current job or their business isn't going the way that they had expected or they're trying to develop a user experience practice within their company, but they're not getting the buy in that they believe that they need from their superiors, or they are having challenges managing their clients. There is a variety of reasons, but it's rarely because they don't know how to draw a wire frame.



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**Lea Alcantara:** Right.

**Emily Lewis:** [Laughs]

**Whitney Hess:** Or develop a front-end interface, it's often a sort of struggle with something that's happening interpersonally, either in interaction with people that they work with, whether it would be a peer or someone who reports to them or someone who they report to, or it's a struggle that's happening internally, and so I try to help them uncover what that is and then create better habits that allow them to shift their perspective, shift the way that they've been working and achieve what they really want.

**Emily Lewis:** Now, you went through like a complete education program. You've got actually certified as a coach, right?

**Whitney Hess:** I did. We worked in a field where there is no certification required to practice what we do, right?

**Emily Lewis:** Right

**Lea Alcantara:** [Agrees]

**Whitney Hess:** I mean, there are certifications exist, but it's not as if you can't get a job without one the way a plumber or an electrician or an accountant or a lawyer has to be licensed or certified to do their work. In the coaching field, unlike in technology, they actually recognize those certifications much more. It is not required that you be licensed in order to be a coach, but when it comes to working with senior executives at a particular level, there's an expectation that you're certified because it demonstrates a credibility.

**Lea Alcantara:** Right.



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**Whitney Hess:** It demonstrates that you're adhering to a particular set of competencies that you are looking to develop and certain ethical guidelines. So when I started looking into coaching, I realized I wasn't going to get very far high up in the organization if I wasn't certified, and I found a program that certifies that I felt was in line with my values. It was a year-long program that I started in June of 2013 and finished in June of this year, and it's thrilling to have that behind me. It was incredibly rigorous far more than I expected going into it, but I'm glad that it was.

**Lea Alcantara:** Has it already impacted your consultancy business in a positive way?

**Whitney Hess:** It is a complete change in my business.

**Lea Alcantara:** [Agrees]

**Whitney Hess:** So almost immediately as soon as I completed the certification, I had a renewed sense of action and agency, and I shifted all of the services that I offer from consulting to coaching, and how I'm defining that is consulting is having people outsource their problems to you for you to solve, whereas coaching is helping them solve their own problems.

**Emily Lewis:** Oh yeah, I like that distinction.

**Lea Alcantara:** [Agrees]

**Whitney Hess:** So I don't solve other people's problems anymore.

**Lea Alcantara:** [Laughs]

**Emily Lewis:** [Laughs]

**Whitney Hess:** [Laughs]



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**Emily Lewis:** Well, you mentioned that in order to get to I guess the senior levels in an organization, having this certification was important, so can you talk a little bit about who your clients are? Are they always the senior levels in an organization? Is that the best place to start?

**Whitney Hess:** Definitely not. They are one of my audiences, and in fact, when I started on this journey in March of last year of 2013, I was more convinced then that I would need to work at high levels of the organization than I am now.

**Lea Alcantara:** [Agrees]

**Emily Lewis:** Oh.

**Whitney Hess:** I learned a lot over the year plus, and so yes, they're one of my target audiences now, but they're certainly not my whole business. So I have different streams of work that I do. I work with individuals who as I mentioned earlier are at a career crossroads or feeling stuck, and they come to me privately, and they're my clients. It has nothing to do with their business. I'm not employed by their company. I'm not being paid by their company anyway. Then there are people who come to me because they have recently been identified as someone who can lead a new user experience practice in the business. So let's say they're a visual designer or they are a front-end developer and they've been dabbling in user experience. Maybe they've taught themselves. Maybe they did something that was UX oriented at a previous job, and the people that they work with have taken notice and have said, "You know what, go for it. Let's create a practice here." Now, they're finding themselves having to build a team, having to formalize the practice, having to be more strategic and they're shifting from a maker to a manager, and they've never really managed people before.

**Emily Lewis:** [Agrees]



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**Whitney Hess:** They might find me through my blog or over Twitter or through a referral and they realize they need me, and then they have to pitch it to their superiors and the company ultimately engages with me from a day to day standpoint, it's that new director of user experience or what have you that I'm interacting with. Then thirdly, there's the VP of design or the head of product or the head of marketing or the founder/CEO of a company that is trying to create an organizational shift towards being more customer-centric or up-leveling the user experience practice that they already have, or what have you. There's a variety of different things, and they're engaging with me at that much higher level and I'm working with them more as a strategic partner to identify lots of areas of opportunity in their business to grow, and in that case I'm finding more often than not what's giving me the credibility to not just establish or strengthen their user experience practice but to also create some pretty significant cultural change within the business is that background in coaching that I have and the certification definitely helps.

**Lea Alcantara:** Well, what's interesting is, throughout this conversation, obviously, Emily and I know you from the tech sector. Since making this shift the past year, are you finding more opportunities that aren't specific to, say, user experience or front-end developers or designers? Are you dabbling or coaching in other corporate sectors?

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**Whitney Hess:** I assumed that my audience would be other user experience practitioners, people who are aspiring to move into user experience, either recent grads or people who are trying to make a career change.

**Lea Alcantara:** [Agrees]



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**Whitney Hess:** And that's definitely the majority of my client base, but every now and then I get someone who does something totally different, who just happened upon my site and feels as if we are philosophically aligned, regardless of the fact that they don't do user experience and I don't do what they do. They just feel like our principals are enough of a match that the process that I used in my coaching would work for them. It resonates for them, and I don't really have to know how to do what they do in order to guide them towards identifying what's getting in their way and creating new habits to make a change. So I'm finding that I am expanding but it's happening more naturally than anything I ever intended.

**Lea Alcantara:** Interesting.

**Emily Lewis:** So as I mentioned in your intro, you are passionate about putting humanity back into business. What does this look like? Like you mentioned just a second ago that you might have some clients that want to improve their customer service, is that an example of having a more – and I don't know if this is the right word – but a more humanistic approach to running a business?

**Whitney Hess:** Absolutely, so let me try to give you an example from a current client. Let's say you run a design and development shop. I know a couple of people who do that.

**Emily Lewis:** [Laughs]

**Whitney Hess:** And for the existence of your business up until now, you've really just been an outsourced vendor. So maybe you're focused more on the implementation and companies come to you when they have at least a design concept, maybe even a finished design and they just say, "Build this," and you build it. As a result, the company has grown based on people who can implement technology solutions. It's been very focused on taking orders from the client and producing results.



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But then the business gets to a point where they're tired of taking orders, and they realized that when they position themselves in the market as a production shop, that that's how they get treated.

**Emily Lewis:** [Agrees]

**Whitney Hess:** That they aren't actually strategic partners with their clients, that they don't have long term relationships, and they're not helping to develop new ideas because the client thinks of them as extra sets of hands rather than a giant brain and they want to figure out how to shift this. How do they get more ownership over the design? How do they get more ownership over strategy? And so they start to try to move earlier and earlier and earlier in the product development process, and where they eventually land is like, "Well, we've got to get more visual design skills. Oh, what we really need is the user experience skills." So they start conducting user interviews or usability tests. They start doing the methods, but they're still finding that that isn't quite enough to shift in their client's minds at least what it is they can offer.

**Emily Lewis:** [Agrees]

**Whitney Hess:** More likely than not, it's because internally to the shop, they're not used to thinking about their customer's problems in the same way as a company that has a user experience practices that's integrated into everything they do. Maybe they're more used to thinking about technology solutions than they are empathizing with the end user's needs, and so it isn't just, "This is how you do user interview. This is how you do usability tests." User experience isn't something you do. It's a way that you are.

**Emily Lewis:** [Agrees]

**Whitney Hess:** It's a philosophy that you hold. It's a set of principals that guides your decisions, and we have to help people who are making those decisions, like this is the component we're going to use



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on the page and not see that as a technical decision or as a functional decision, but to see it as a human decision. That that extra click could change how well someone is able to do their work, how much money they make, how well they're able to provide for their children, and these may not be things that their team thinks about on a regular basis. So if that's not internal to the way they operate to their mindset, then they're not going to necessarily be able to have that significant impact on their client and partner with them in that strategic way. So that's what I mean about bringing humanity into business. It's to help people recognize the impact of their work to help make them more empathetic, to help them collaborate better with one another, to help them see who they serve as a whole human beings, not just nameless faces, pieces of data that show up in their web analytics tools, and it's all of those pieces of the puzzle that I'm trying to explain and advocate for and encourage when I'm working with my clients.

**Emily Lewis:** So it's a way of thinking, a way of approaching the work that you do instead of looking at it discreetly as an end product or an end result and thinking about the effect it has.

**Whitney Hess:** Thinking is just a small piece of it.

**Lea Alcantara:** [Agrees]

**Whitney Hess:** It's a way of thinking. It's a way of feeling. It's a way of acting. I think it's a way of being.

**Lea Alcantara:** Well, for me the way I seem to interpret it is, as a web designer/web developer, we get these website issues or problems and sometimes some of us would just take a look at it as in like, "Okay, put the buy button there or let's just put everything together so it looks nice." But not enough perhaps people are thinking about, "Well, what's the point? What is the end goal of the site in



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general, and how does this part of the puzzle fit into that entire thing, and how does it enhance people's day? Like why does the business even exist? Why are you providing?"

**Whitney Hess:** Yeah. [Laughs]

**Lea Alcantara:** Do you know what I mean? Like why does this business exist? Why are people choosing your service or your product over others? Those kinds of things, and this one buy now page or buy now button, that's just a part of that overall idea.

**Whitney Hess:** Yes.

**Lea Alcantara:** So if you actually understood the why in like, "Why is this successful? Why is this particular business person pursuing this particular solution in selling it?" Then if you understood that and you understood their customers, then as somebody with the skill sets we have like HTML and CSS, design, we can make suggestions on the implementation, not just take an order saying, "Put the button over there." [Laughs]

**Whitney Hess:** Yes, and the key to what you said is why the business even exist.

**Lea Alcantara:** Right.

**Whitney Hess:** Most people who run businesses don't think about that every day because running a business has so much busy work involved. There are so many moving parts that you're just focused at it.

**Lea Alcantara:** Right.

**Emily Lewis:** [Agrees]



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**Whitney Hess:** You're looking at the business one centimeter away from your nose day in and day out. Part of what I do is come in and help them to reconnect with why the business exist in the first place.

**Emily Lewis:** Right.

**Whitney Hess:** What problem are they trying to solve? What change are they trying to create in the world?

**Emily Lewis:** Right.

**Whitney Hess:** And for whom? Not everyone.

**Lea Alcantara:** [Agrees]

**Whitney Hess:** Everyone is not a target audience.

**Emily Lewis:** Right.

**Whitney Hess:** Who are they really trying to serve? What problems are those people really facing? What do they truly need? How do they really feel? And finding that overlap, that sweet spot between the user's needs and the business' objectives and by setting that up from the beginning, it gives all of the work that the business does greater meaning.

**Lea Alcantara:** Right.

**Whitney Hess:** So when you're putting the buy button on the page, yes, that it would be visually pleasing and that there will be good page balance and negative space and good contrast between the colors and sizes and good hierarchy of information. All of that is still very true, very relevant, but it has such a deeper meaning because you understand by enabling someone to purchase this, you are



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supporting their business in this way, supporting their job in this way, supporting their family in this way, that you're truly helping another human being.

**Emily Lewis:** Right.

**Whitney Hess:** Because to me, all a web page, an app, anything that's digital that we create, all it really is, it's a conversation between a company and a customer. It is just facilitated by the technology.

**Emily Lewis:** Right.

**Whitney Hess:** What kind of conversation do you want to have? The company that I try to work in, the companies that I surround myself with, that I try to help are companies who want the conversation with their customers to be, "How can we best serve you? How can we make your pain go away? How can we get you off of the computer faster so that you can get back to doing what you really love?"

**Emily Lewis:** [Agrees]

**Whitney Hess:** It's unfortunate in our society that it's like using the tech is the end. It should be the means to an end, not the end itself.

**Lea Alcantara:** Right.

**Emily Lewis:** Right.

**Whitney Hess:** And reconnecting people with that, reminding them of why they exist and who they serve and infiltrating all layers of the organization so that that's felt and internalized so that people have much more meaning when they're doing the work that they do, that they can think more strategically about their decisions. That's ultimately what I believe the overarching purpose of user



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experience is, and I'm using coaching as another mechanism to get in and to help them to recognize that.

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**Emily Lewis:** So you mentioned that having more of the being, the feeling, the thinking, the acting, all of that, having to be more focused on the human experience, the user experience, that it helps a company who embraces this have more meaning in their work. It helps them hopefully deliver, I would guess, better products and services to their clients. Business owners or business managers, when they come to you, are they looking for really discrete, tangible benefits like, “We need to increase sales by X percent”? Or are they coming because they really want to feel that more meaning aspect?

**Whitney Hess:** Well, come on, who's like, “I want to feel more meaning in my work. Let me go onto Google and search for that.”

**Lea Alcantara:** [Laughs]

**Emily Lewis:** [Laughs] Some people can't appreciate that.

**Whitney Hess:** Yeah. They can appreciate it once they're presented with it, but no, people have their own problems that they're trying to solve and they too are one centimeter away from their work, so they're seeing the immediate pains. There are many different layers. So I'll give you an example of a client that I'm working with now.

They are a design and development shop. They get hired primarily to implement designs that have been done internally by brands or other agencies. They are offshore, so they're an inexpensive option, and they have user experience talent in-house and they have user experience backgrounds, the founders, However, the market they felt was dictating, “Let's do a lot of the post-launch support.



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That's what we're going to get that ongoing revenue from. Let's do SEO optimization. Let's do – I don't know – analytics. Let's do usability.” Not even use usability testing. “But let's do kind of some tweaks, some technical support post-launch” that they could charge on a monthly basis, because that's where they found their clients really didn't have anyone else to go to.

So they wanted to work with me because both the founders and the team doesn't really want to be doing that. They want more ownership over the end-to-end site experience. They have the chops to do it, but they've positioned themselves in such a way they're not really being asked or empowered to do that and they feel like they've become order takers. So they came to me saying, “How do we get more design projects? How do we present ourselves more as user experience-centric? How do we get more projects locally rather than just be seen a offshore?”

In my coaching with them, we are addressing that, but that is the symptom, not the cause. The cause of the problem, the reason why they're not making money in these areas, why they're being asked to do these other things, why they're not being the strategic partners to their clients that they want to be is because somewhere along the way they convinced themselves that what they do is make websites for a living, and that couldn't be farthest from the truth. How they do what they do is make websites for a living, but they don't do that because that's what they're passionate about.

**Emily Lewis:** [Agrees]

**Whitney Hess:** I quite honestly don't think they'd be able to be passionate about making websites.  
[Laughs]

**Lea Alcantara:** [Laughs]

**Emily Lewis:** [Laughs]

**Whitney Hess:** I think that...



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**Lea Alcantara:** Emily, I don't know. [Laughs]

**Emily Lewis:** I know...[Laughs]

**Whitney Hess:** People are passionate about what those websites facilitate.

**Lea Alcantara:** Sure.

**Whitney Hess:** It's how people use them, what they create in the world, what they remove from the world, the change that they enable. It's not the website itself. It's rare, but it happens that you go to a bookstore and you're just like, "Oh, sheets of paper and binding. Wow!"

**Emily Lewis:** [Laughs]

**Whitney Hess:** It's like, no, there are stories in there. There's emotion. There's power. There's connection. I'm going to see myself reflected, or it's going to take me away to a far away land that I could never go. That's what in the bookstore. Not just a bunch of pieces of paper bound together with glue. There are the few who are really enamored with the craftsmanship of the book, and I've actually taken bookbinding classes because I'm one of those people.

**Emily Lewis:** [Laughs]

**Whitney Hess:** Just there are some people who are enamored by the craftsmanship of the website, but I would say 99.9999% of people are doing it because of what it creates, because of what it enables. So this company, the one that I was just describing, along the way, forgot that the reason they exist is because they're trying to change the culture of their country. The country is not a place where the customer is always right. That's the way we see it in America, but that's not the way their country experiences it.

**Lea Alcantara:** Interesting.



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**Whitney Hess:** And they believe that there is a hunger for that to shift culturally. They believe that user experience can educate businesses, large telecoms, small startups, agencies and everything in between, that they really are in service of their customers, that if they design with the customer in mind, if they craft an experience that pleases their customers or that makes their pains go away, that it will differentiate them as a business and it will increase their profits. It will decrease their costs and it will make their brand sore. They believe that, but at some point along the way, they forgot and they convince themselves, “We just make websites,” and it’s a lot less motivating when you go to work every day thinking, “I’m going to make some websites today,” than it is to think, “I’m going to change the culture of this country because my people deserve better.”

**Lea Alcantara:** Actually, this reminds me, have you ever read a book called *What Should I Do With My Life?* by Po Bronson?

**Whitney Hess:** No.

**Lea Alcantara:** It’s an excellent book. It’s just full of stories. Po Bronson went and interviewed people who asked themselves that question. They had various careers that worked out and didn’t work out, and one of the lessons or stories was essentially who trapped you can be by being successful in something you don’t actually want to do.

**Whitney Hess:** Oh.

**Lea Alcantara:** Do you know what I mean?

**Whitney Hess:** I experienced that personally.

**Lea Alcantara:** Yeah, and I feel like that particular tenet sounds like there’s a lot of businesses out there where they might be struggling or they’re doing okay, but not great, and part of it is because, well, they’re not maybe dire, but they’re not where they want to be, and part of it is because it could



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be comfortable staying where things are, being successful again in something you don't even really want to do, but since it's paying the bills, I guess this is the way things should be, maybe, I don't know. This actually leads me to a question, how can more people like business owners, managers, leaders recognize they need more humanity? Like how do they know? And like it's obvious when things are struggling, that people ask for help, but how do we not get to that point? Like not get to the point where I really need help now or else everything is going to go to crap? How can people get more humanity and the organization recognize they need that?

**Whitney Hess:** Well, firstly, when you're moving a million miles a minute, it can be very challenging or near impossible to recognize that you're moving in the wrong direction.

**Lea Alcantara:** Right.

**Emily Lewis:** [Agrees]

**Whitney Hess:** So one of the most crucial things that any business can do is take a pause. It does not mean that you turn away dollars in revenue. It does not mean that you necessarily change everything you're doing as a business or that the whole business has to stop, but I really feel strongly that the key decision makers have to have periodic periods of rest and it's only in those periods of rest that you're able to truly reflect and quiet and still yourself and listen to yourself, otherwise, sometimes our hyperactivity represses a lot of our emotions and we're not able to listen to them as clearly.

So in those periods of rest, you can then start to ask yourself some important questions, "Am I doing work I don't want to be doing? Am I not getting the work I want to be getting? Am I happy? Are my people happy? Are we healthy? Are people sick all the time? Are people leaving all the time? Do we have a good balance? Do we feel rushed? Do we have room to do things outside of making



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money, or is there constantly a pressure to make money that we don't get to do projects just for fun? Is there fun? Have we lost the fun? Did we ever have fun in the first place?

**Lea Alcantara:** So regarding these breaks, is there a difference between a break and a vacation?

**Whitney Hess:** Well, I don't know about you, but these days when I take a vacation, I then need a vacation from my vacation afterwards.

**Lea Alcantara:** Yeah. [Laughs]

**Emily Lewis:** [Laughs]

**Whitney Hess:** I don't know that a vacation is what we're talking about here.

**Lea Alcantara:** Yeah.

*Timestamp: 00:29:49*

**Whitney Hess:** In fact, I'm going to rephrase that. I know that I'm not talking about a vacation here.

**Lea Alcantara:** Right.

**Whitney Hess:** A vacation is what you do to take care of yourself. Hopefully, you are not running around like a maniac on vacation so that you're actually resting and rejuvenating in that time period, but that should not be about work.

**Emily Lewis:** Right.

**Whitney Hess:** That should be about you. You should live outside of work. What I'm referring to with the break, and I don't really want to call it a break because it sounds like in you're going to stop doing something, but just a pause. A pause is a time to look back in time and reflect and a time to feel into the present and a time to plan for the future. This is a business activity. This should be done



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during business hours. I don't believe that it should be done on personal time because a business needs to be sustainable.

**Lea Alcantara:** Right.

**Whitney Hess:** And sustainability means that it has to be able to grow and exist and thrive with appropriate balance, that you can't be maxed out on energy, maxed out on spending, maxed out on resources, maxed out on everything all of the time. That's not sustainable because then there's no room to grow.

So what I'm referring to is about creating space. It's about creating space around the day to day so that you're able to plan for the future, so that you're able to reflect on the past, so that you're able to feel in to what is happening today, literally feel the energy of the business, feel the energy of the individuals who make up the business.

Because if we're not paying attention right now to what's going on around us, we're going to miss it, and it's only going to be 10,000 miles down the road that it finally catches up to us and then we are way farther off course than we would have been had we taken just a moment to recognize it was there and course correct.

**Lea Alcantara:** Let me see if this sounds like what you mean. I know, for example, that Emily and I don't have meetings on Mondays, like with other clients. We don't respond to emails necessarily. We don't do any HTML/CSS perhaps, unless I guess there's a deadline, but that's another story, but generally speaking, we try to focus on Bright Umbrella work on Mondays. So it's like taking a break from the actual nitty-gritty of like designing and developing and just like thinking about, "Well, what can we do to help our business," things like that or is it something different? Like I'm trying to figure out, like how do you consciously structure a break within...



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**Emily Lewis:** A pause.

**Lea Alcantara:** Yeah, a pause, a break, however you want to call it, without actually leaving the office?

**Whitney Hess:** So what you're describing of not doing client work on Mondays is an example of how this can work for a business, and there is no one size fits all solution.

**Lea Alcantara:** Sure.

**Whitney Hess:** So a big part of my work is getting to know the people in the business, getting to know the culture so that I can make recommendations or lead them to the discovery of what's best for them as individuals.

**Emily Lewis:** [Agrees]

**Lea Alcantara:** Right.

**Whitney Hess:** Not because there is this one thing that every business can do. For the two of you, it make sense for you to not do client work on Mondays. Now, there are two pieces of this. There is the policy definition, which was the two of you coming together and say, "We're going to make it a policy to not work on Mondays," and then there's the execution, which is not actually working on Mondays.

**Lea Alcantara:** [Laughs]

**Emily Lewis:** [Laughs]

**Whitney Hess:** You need both.

**Lea Alcantara:** Right.



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**Emily Lewis:** Right. [Laughs]

**Whitney Hess:** So I have similar things to what you're describing in my calendar, and it shifts based on what projects I've got going on because my calendar year is inconsistent from week to week because I have different clients, different engagements and different requirements for those engagements, but periodically, I'm in a space where I block Mondays and Wednesdays, no meetings and I produce because for me, days that are filled with meetings are not conducive to producing. I don't even feel that having three meetings in the morning is conducive to producing in the afternoon because my mode is already set by having those meetings.

There's a great essay by Paul Graham, *The Maker's Schedule Versus the Manager's Schedule*, and there are maker days where you are focused, not a single interruptions, which is maybe what you both are doing on your Mondays, but you may be each other's interruption, so you might be conscious of that, and then there are the manager days which is having meetings, client presentations, fielding emails, et cetera. So I try to carve out two days a week in which I'm not having any meetings so that I can focus on producing. When I'm in a specific kind of client engagement, that may not be realistic, so then I have to either shift those days to other days of the week or I tell myself weekends are off limits.

**Lea Alcantara:** [Agrees]

**Whitney Hess:** Yes, I'm independent.

**Emily Lewis:** [Agrees]

**Whitney Hess:** Yes, I am just me, and I have to be flexible and that means I live my business, but I would prefer to live my life, so I will be very stringent with at least one of the days on the weekend, if not, both are not for working. It's for physical activity, hanging out with my loved ones, running



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errands, cleaning, watching TV, just whatever, frolicking, all the things that have nothing to do with my business.

**Emily Lewis:** [Laughs]

**Whitney Hess:** But if I'm smart enough to realize, have everything to do with my business because they make me better.

**Emily Lewis:** [Agrees]

**Whitney Hess:** That's our examples. There are so many other examples. Let me tell you a few. Medium, the blogging platform or essay platform, whatever you want to call them.

**Emily Lewis:** [Agrees]

**Whitney Hess:** They have group meditations every morning.

**Lea Alcantara:** Interesting.

**Whitney Hess:** Where Ev (Williams), co-founder of Twitter and the founder of Medium is a regular participant. You can come in the morning. Everyone is seated at a large room without tables and you are having your morning meditation to get grounded, to listen to yourself, to clear your mind, to just watch your breath, to be in touch with yourself as a whole human being who is more than just a mind, but a heart and a body, and just those five or ten minutes in the morning can completely change the course of your day.

Medium also has a policy where every meeting starts with a two-minute pause, so if you have an hour-long meeting and you have ten people in the room, you begin the meeting with a two-minute essentially meditation, just not speaking for two minutes. The reason that exist is because they found that when you book meetings from 10 to 11 and 11 to 12 and 12 to 1 and 1 to 2, when you get to your



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2 o'clock, you're still thinking about your 1 o'clock that ended a minute ago, and vice versa. So they wanted to provide a buffer so that people could truly arrive at the meeting, not just physically, but mentally and emotionally.

**Emily Lewis:** [Agrees]

**Whitney Hess:** That's also a pause.

**Lea Alcantara:** Right.

**Whitney Hess:** That's not taking time off of work. That's not going on a retreat or an offsite. That's not shutting down for the month of July and not accepting client work. It's another way of taking stock of where you are, who you are, how you feel, what you are experiencing, and acknowledging it before you just pummel through the rest of your day as most of us do most of the time.

**Lea Alcantara:** So before we go on, we'd like to take a moment again to thank our sponsor, [searchengineneews.com](http://searchengineneews.com). Since 1997, SEN has been providing website owners with cutting edge SEO intelligence. For a \$1 trial and a 60% discount off the life of your membership, visit [searchengineneews.com/click](http://searchengineneews.com/click) to sign up today.

**Emily Lewis:** So Whitney, I've been thinking about the stuff you're describing, and it resonates with me. I mean, you and I have talked before, a lot of the stuff resonates because my work is more than just the practical execution of something. It's how I want it to make me feel and how I want my life to be, but I wonder if every person is going to be open to that concept of taking a pause or even taking the time to ask themselves questions about happiness.

So I'm guessing that when someone comes with work and hires you to help them, they're already embracing that, but do you ever encounter someone who's kind of resistant to these things that you're



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suggesting that are kind of – I don't know the word – they're more feeling and being as opposed to thinking and doing, and so how do you help them recognize the value of these things?

**Whitney Hess:** You start with people where they are, not where you want them to be.

**Lea Alcantara:** [Agrees]

**Whitney Hess:** So I've heard this described once like an avocado.

**Emily Lewis:** [Laughs]

**Whitney Hess:** One of my favorite things on Earth. It's a fruit.

**Lea Alcantara:** Yum.

**Whitney Hess:** It has a seed. The avocado fruit has a skin. It's a little rough, dark, but it's pretty thin, but when you first hold an avocado, you are holding basically its skin. For some companies, that's where we're working. We are focused on the skin. It's a skin problem, "Our websites, we're getting customer complaints. There must be a problem with the interface. We need to move the buttons around. We need to re-label the dev. We need to spruce up the copy, change our tone. We need to be responsive. We need to be mobile friendly." These are the things that people at the skin level are talking about. It's all that mechanics. Then when you pull back the skin, you have the pulp. Is that what it's called? The mushy..

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**Emily Lewis:** Meat.

**Lea Alcantara:** The flesh?

**Whitney Hess:** The flesh.



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**Emily Lewis:** The good part. [Laughs]

**Whitney Hess:** The flesh.

**Lea Alcantara:** The flesh.

**Whitney Hess:** The flesh. You've got the flesh just beneath the skin level. Maybe then you're talking about how the reason we need a responsive site is because we can't always predict how people will be accessing our system. They might need to do the same things, the same tasks on their phone as they would on their desktop computer. It's not necessarily up to us to define which features are more relevant on mobile or on desktop than they are on mobile. Maybe we can't make that claim because there's a lot more that we don't understand.

So what is the reasoning behind creating a responsive site? How can we put the highest priority elements first? How can we adapt some of the images so that they're more clearly seen in a mobile context without eliminating the possibilities on desktop. So we're starting to talk about the why, the principles a bit behind all of these things, and it isn't just we need a responsive site because everyone is supposed to have a responsive site.

Then there is there is the pit or the seed. That is the core of the avocado, and so at times, the company is at a stage where you can discuss the reason why we can't assume what people need when they need it, what platform they're using, blah, blah, blah is because we want to serve people regardless of how they access us. This is the nature of the relationship we want to have with our customers. This is our purpose. This is the problem that we see in the world. This is the shift we're trying to create. It's getting richer and richer, and then there's something that's even deeper than the seed, and it's something almost none of us can see because that damn avocado pit is impossible to cut, and it's the spark. It is that center of the seed under the flesh, under the skin of the avocado that



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causes the avocado to grow, and that is a very deep level and most companies never get there because most people never get there, but regardless of where the company is, there is something that I can work on with them to help them get one level deeper.

**Lea Alcantara:** When you were explaining all that, actually that reminded me of our episode with Aisha Satterwhite, Technology For Social Good, especially because when you're looking at the whys, I mean, we could talk about the donation implementation or surveys that they do or the email campaigns and all that stuff, but at the very end of it all, it's because they want to affect change in the particular society. And so having that type of idea and figuring out where people are actually wanting to speak to them, and that's part of the reason why they're even implementing these technologies in the first place and having these particular campaigns because that's where their people are, that's where the people are already talking and interacting.

So it's definitely interesting like when throughout this episode we've been kind of talking about it like a little, like hinting towards to e-commerce because we're using the buy now and all those kinds of things, but technology can be empowering and more than just commerce. It could have a variety of different ways we can impact people's like behavior and emotions in their lives.

**Whitney Hess:** Absolutely, and it can be done through e-commerce as well.

**Lea Alcantara:** Sure.

**Emily Lewis:** [Agrees]

**Whitney Hess:** I mean, look at the power of Etsy.

**Emily Lewis:** [Agrees]

**Whitney Hess:** People making things by hand that they love, preserving the handcraft tradition of the American history of preserving people's culture, preserving handwork in general. What about



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preserving individual-to-individual commerce? That's getting erased in our country. So even the buy now button has the power to create change in the world that is far, far more than just getting someone to buy something. I think what you're getting at is the purpose, the underlying meaning behind what we do, and I feel passionately that no one wants their obituary to read, "She made websites."

**Lea Alcantara:** [Laughs]

**Emily Lewis:** [Laughs]

**Whitney Hess:** They want it to say, "She helped cancer patients get funding from friends when the insurance companies would no longer pay." They want it to say, "She helped up and coming young designers be noticed in an industry that only recognizes name brands. She helped nonprofits connect with foundations that could fund their dream projects. She allowed people to order food online so that they could continue to do what they're most passionate about without wasting time going grocery shopping."

**Lea Alcantara:** [Agrees]

**Whitney Hess:** I mean, some of us change the world through kind of humanitarian efforts. Others of us do it through convenience.

**Emily Lewis:** Right.

**Whitney Hess:** There's nothing less meaningful in my mind about Seamless, which is a client that I work with in New York, that allows people to order food from restaurants online than there is about Kickstarter or Etsy or eBay.

**Lea Alcantara:** Sure.



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**Whitney Hess:** I mean, there's meaning in all of it. It's just about connecting with what that meaning is, so that you know why you're doing what you're doing and you can get excited about it, so that there's an underlying purpose and it isn't just because making websites is cool.

**Emily Lewis:** If someone is feeling that this is something they want to explore for their own business, but they're not really in a position where they can have someone come in and help them discover these meanings, or even discover what it is they're trying to change. Is there anything that you would suggest that business owner do on their own to sort of help them start discovering the meaning at their core that they maybe don't get a chance to look at or think about regularly? You mentioned a pause, but is there anything else that you could suggest maybe exercises or even resources that you could point people to?

**Whitney Hess:** I can name a bunch of exercises, and Emily, we're talked about some of these before, but there is the pause.

**Emily Lewis:** [Agrees]

**Whitney Hess:** There's writing every morning.

**Emily Lewis:** Oh right.

**Whitney Hess:** So having a journal and just writing everything.

**Emily Lewis:** That was one of those things in *The Artist's Way* (Julia Cameron).

**Whitney Hess:** Yes. So in *The Artist's Way*, there are two exercises that are essentially encouraged that you do throughout the 12-week period of reading this book. So it's twelve chapters, one chapter a week and one of those exercises is Morning Pages, and the idea is that you have a notepad and a pen next to your bed and the first thing you do when you wake up before you pee, before you make your coffee, before you do anything, before you check your email, you write down everything that's on



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your mind at least three pages, 8-1/2 x 11 back to back, and what that does is it allows you to empty out everything that's living in your mind that you may not even be conscious of. So it could be all of the things that you have to do today. It could be what you were dreaming about last night. It could be that fight that you had with your significant other the other day that's still nagging at you, or this thing that you have to plan that's really worrying you or whatever, but you're just getting it all down. You could even write "I have no idea. I have no idea. I have no idea. I have no idea" for three pages over.

**Emily Lewis:** [Laughs]

**Whitney Hess:** You'd be surprised what starts to come out after you've written it 30 times. So the point is that it is giving you an opportunity to be in touch with yourself, so for any company or any individual that is sensing something in the conversation that we're having that, "Hmm, maybe this somehow applies to me, but I have no idea how," the first step is to spend some time with yourself, to start listening to what you are trying to tell yourself, but you've busied yourself so much that you can't hear, so it could be a pause where all you're doing is not talking, not thinking, not listening to anyone else, not reading your phone, just stopping and breathing for two minutes. It could be doing this journaling exercise.

Another one of the exercises in *The Artist's Way* is having basically a Solo Date once a week. So by yourself you go see a show. You go to a gallery exhibit. You go to your favorite craft store. You take a walk through the park. You do a collage. You draw. You do anything. You garden. Anything that is for you, by you, and alone one hour a week.

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**Lea Alcantara:** I love that last one. [Laughs] I feel like it's interesting talking to some friends and stuff how difficult that last part is. It's like trying to do something they want for pleasure but just



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completely by themselves. Because I was discussing with a girlfriend about how she went to a movie by herself for the first time ever in her life, and I was surprised because she was so nervous about it, like she was so nervous that like, "I'm dating myself today. There is no friend, guy, nobody else here but me because I really want to watch this movie now." She said she had to talk herself into it, and it's interesting that just having that simple act, like it shows you that you can, that there's benefits to being by yourself and recognizing and like pausing to see what you actually can be without having to have justification of somebody else, I think, in some ways.

**Whitney Hess:** Why do you think she was so nervous about going to the movies alone?

**Lea Alcantara:** Oh, that's a difficult question. I would assume it's that she's just never had a chance to be alone in her life in her particular time, like she's just so used to being with somebody else.

**Emily Lewis:** Oh, and I wonder if there is some level of fear to be alone with yourself because when you are alone with yourself, that's when all of a sudden, you start asking yourself critical questions like, "Am I happy?" You know?

**Whitney Hess:** Exactly, exactly.

**Lea Alcantara:** Right.

**Emily Lewis:** Do I have a purpose?

**Lea Alcantara:** Yes, that's true.

**Whitney Hess:** Yes.

**Lea Alcantara:** That's true.

**Whitney Hess:** Because when you're alone, suddenly everything comes to the surface, all of the emotions.



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**Emily Lewis:** Right.

**Whitney Hess:** I have a client who when he goes to like a yoga class and it's the end of the yoga class, in Shavasana, where all you're doing is laying there. He is so overcome with emotion that he's like embarrassed because he's in public and it makes him not even want to go to yoga to stretch his body and to strengthen his body, strengthen his core and improve his balance because of those five to ten minutes at the end, he gets so emotional and he's not an emotional guy, and he's like, "What is it about that time?" Because he's not doing anything, we are constantly doing, doing, doing all the time and we've got our phones in our hands and if we have 30 seconds of waiting all on a line, we're pulling out our phone to read something or text something or log on Facebook.

**Lea Alcantara:** [Agrees]

**Emily Lewis:** Right.

**Whitney Hess:** We are constantly occupying ourselves, and something pretty major happens when you stop trying to occupy yourself. You start feeling. You start paying attention to your feelings. You start listening to what's going on, and that clues you in to where the work needs to be done. You're able then to recognize it, and you can confront it and do something about it. But most of us are so not used to, as you said, being with ourselves that we are so afraid of what we might find that we just power through and we just keep doing, doing, doing, doing.

**Emily Lewis:** [Agrees]

**Whitney Hess:** But one of my favorite sayings is human being, not human doing. We are not doings, we are beings.

**Lea Alcantara:** Right.



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**Whitney Hess:** And we do too much, and that buries a lot of our own personal truth, and so when you ask what can a business do or what can an individual do when they don't have the resources to hire someone like me to start to identify where they may need to grow, the first step is to just be. It could be done in silence with sitting. It could be done through writing. It could be done with a walk in nature. It could be done through writing music. It could be done in a million and one ways. Everyone is different, but you can tap into what is just being for you and start listening to yourself and the clues reside there.

**Lea Alcantara:** I have to say this reminded me of this brilliant Louis CK rant that he had while he was on Conan, and he was ranting about how he doesn't like smartphones, and he was trying to say that people these days, like he was listening to his song in his car and it was a sad Bruce Springsteen song, so he was getting said and his first inclination was to get onto his phone immediately and text 50 people and then he decided, "Wait, no, I'm not going to text those people. I'm just going to be sad." He's going to be sad for a bit and he let it come and then he actually pulled over and he cried, and then he was happy again. [Laughs]

**Emily Lewis:** [Laughs]

**Whitney Hess:** [Laughs]

**Lea Alcantara:** Of course, my delivery isn't Louis CK level. [Laughs]

**Emily Lewis:** [Laughs]

**Whitney Hess:** But that was pretty good.

**Lea Alcantara:** But his main point was that it's okay to let yourself pause and have these emotions, and you'll be fine.



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**Whitney Hess:** The irony is that you overcome the emotion. You go through it and you heal faster when you allow yourself to feel it.

**Lea Alcantara:** Right.

**Whitney Hess:** When you suppress it, you are only perpetuating your pain, and the same goes for a business, because all a business is, it's a collection of individual human beings showing up together to work towards a shared vision.

**Emily Lewis:** Right.

**Whitney Hess:** It's agreeing to work together every day and to call themselves a company. But a company or business does not exist without the human beings that make it, so if we can just deal with what we're feeling and use that to move us forward, we will be happier, more fulfilled and more excited by and passionate about our work than if we just plow through, continuing to suppress what we really feel because it will rear its ugly head one way or another, and then we're really going to have damage control to do that we could have avoided had we just taken the time to listen to ourselves all along.

**Lea Alcantara:** Well, I think that's the great note to end on.

**Emily Lewis:** Although I really want to get a personal development coach.

**Whitney Hess:** [Laughs]

**Lea Alcantara:** [Laughs]

**Emily Lewis:** [Laughs]

**Lea Alcantara:** Exactly, but before we finish up, we do have our rapid fire ten questions, so our listeners can get to know you a bit better. Are you ready, Whitney?



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**Whitney Hess:** I think I'm ready, let's try it.

**Lea Alcantara:** Okay, first question, Mac OS or Windows?

**Whitney Hess:** Mac.

**Emily Lewis:** What is your favorite mobile app?

**Whitney Hess:** Up (Mobile App).

**Lea Alcantara:** Up? What is Up?

**Whitney Hess:** It's an activity tracker, so I know what the steps that I've taken, how much sleep I got. I can put my eating into it.

**Lea Alcantara:** Oh.

**Whitney Hess:** It's not really my favorite, but it's the one I use the most.

**Lea Alcantara:** Okay. What's your least favorite thing about social media?

**Whitney Hess:** Mean people.

**Lea Alcantara:** [Laughs]

**Emily Lewis:** What profession other than yours would you like to attempt?

**Whitney Hess:** Interior designer.

**Lea Alcantara:** Very cool. Opposite question, what profession would you not like to do?

**Whitney Hess:** Tool booth operator.

**Emily Lewis:** [Laughs]

**Lea Alcantara:** Oh God, yeah.



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**Emily Lewis:** That's a first.

**Lea Alcantara:** Oh, that's...

**Emily Lewis:** Yeah, that job has got to suck. [Laughs]

**Whitney Hess:** People are so mean to toll booth operators.

**Emily Lewis:** Yeah, they don't even pay attention to them.

**Whitney Hess:** Exactly.

**Emily Lewis:** All right, who is the web professional you admire the most?

**Whitney Hess:** Well, I don't see people as web professionals.

**Emily Lewis:** Who is the human you admire the most?

**Whitney Hess:** [Laughs]

**Lea Alcantara:** [Laughs]

**Emily Lewis:** [Laughs]

**Whitney Hess:** I just don't think that way. I'm sorry. I can't think of anyone.

**Emily Lewis:** [Laughs]

**Whitney Hess:** I have been so blessed to work with the people that I admire the most and then when you start to get to know people, you see them as people and not people to admire. So I can't answer that.

**Lea Alcantara:** All right. What music do you like to work to?



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**Whitney Hess:** I don't. Most of my work is with other people and I'm not producing that much, so I can't really have music on while I'm working.

**Emily Lewis:** What's your secret talent?

**Whitney Hess:** I can rap.

**Lea Alcantara:** Oh my goodness.

**Emily Lewis:** Are you kidding? Really?

**Whitney Hess:** [Laughs]

**Lea Alcantara:** [Laughs]

**Emily Lewis:** [Laughs]

**Whitney Hess:** You're not going to make me do it now, but I can.

**Emily Lewis:** No, I won't make you do it, but that's really awesome. [Laughs]

**Lea Alcantara:** That's amazing.

**Whitney Hess:** If you ever karaoke with me, I can prove it.

**Lea Alcantara:** Okay. You and me, karaoke. All right, what's the most recent book you read?

**Whitney Hess:** Well, I'm re-reading *The Power of Now*, which is a book that I've read many times.

**Lea Alcantara:** [Agrees]

**Emily Lewis:** [Agrees]

**Whitney Hess:** So I guess that's the most recent, but I had already read it.

**Emily Lewis:** All right, last question, *Star Wars* or *Star Trek*?



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**Whitney Hess:** Neither.

**Lea Alcantara:** Oh.

**Emily Lewis:** [Laughs] You're a second guest this year who had neither.

**Whitney Hess:** I've only seen Episode 4 of *Star Wars*, which is the first one, right?

**Lea Alcantara:** Yes, yes.

**Whitney Hess:** Okay.

**Emily Lewis:** Wow!

**Whitney Hess:** I was conned by my high school boyfriend's 6-year-old sister into watching that, so I couldn't say no to her because she was super cute.

**Lea Alcantara:** [Laughs]

**Whitney Hess:** I haven't seen the others, and *Star Trek*, I never watched on TV, but I've seen a couple of the movies, but I couldn't tell you which one.

**Emily Lewis:** [Laughs]

**Whitney Hess:** I'm not really into fantasy.

**Lea Alcantara:** All right, well, that's all the time we have for today. Thanks for joining us, Whitney.

**Whitney Hess:** Thank you both so much for having me. I enjoyed your questions.

**Emily Lewis:** So in case our listeners want to follow up with you, where can they find you online?

**Whitney Hess:** I'm at [whitneyhess.com](http://whitneyhess.com) or [@whitneyhess](https://twitter.com/whitneyhess) on Twitter. I will probably respond within the day, so reach out to me if you want to talk more about any of this.



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**Emily Lewis:** Awesome, thanks again, Whitney. I'm so glad we finally got you on the show.

**Whitney Hess:** My pleasure. Thank you so much for having me.

[Music starts]

**Lea Alcantara:** We'd now like to thank our sponsors for this podcast, [searchengineneews.com](http://searchengineneews.com) and [Pixel & Tonic](http://Pixel&Tonic.com).

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**Lea Alcantara:** We also want to thank our listeners for tuning in! If you want to know more about CTRL+CLICK, make sure you follow us on Twitter [@ctrlclickcast](https://twitter.com/ctrlclickcast) or visit our website, [ctrlclickcast.com](http://ctrlclickcast.com). And if you like this episode, please give us a review on [Stitcher](http://Stitcher.com) or [iTunes](http://iTunes.com) or both.

**Emily Lewis:** Don't forget to tune in to our next episode which will be the last episode of 2014 when Lea and I will take a look back at the year, and we also have a special guest joining us, our intern for Bright Umbrella. Be sure to check out our schedule on our site, [ctrlclickcast.com/schedule](http://ctrlclickcast.com/schedule) for more upcoming topics.

**Lea Alcantara:** This is Lea Alcantara ...

**Emily Lewis:** And Emily Lewis ...

**Lea Alcantara:** Signing off for CTRL+CLICK CAST. See you next time!

**Emily Lewis:** Cheers!

[Music stops]

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