

Ep #228: Slow & Steady Wins the Race



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Stacey Brown Randall

Roadmap to Grow Your Business with Stacey Brown Randall

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Stacey Brown Randall: You are going to love this powerful conversation I had with my client, Denise Pough, about her intentionality of growing slow while also growing well.

Stacey Brown Randall: Hey there, and welcome to episode 228 of The Roadmap To Grow Your Business Podcast, a show about helping you build a referable business. I'm your host, Stacey Brown Randall.

If you're wondering, no, it's not too late for you to snag your seat at our Re:FOCUS Retreat coming up in December with me, live in person in Charlotte. All you have to do is go to staceybrownrandall.com/goals and complete the registration form. We are going to have an epic day and all details about that day are available on the website, staceybrownrandall.com/goals.

We're going to do some reverse goal-setting, which is going to allow you to set goals probably unlike you've ever done before. And I promise, I think you'll love it.

Okay, let's dive into today's episode. Denise is my guest today, and she has a powerful lesson in being intentional and how you decide to grow your business.

Oh my gosh, it's so good. And it's actually a lesson I didn't expect out of this interview. And when she served it up, I was like, "This is so good. Love it."

So, Denise is the founder of AJ Interiors by D located in New Jersey. So, if you're needing an interior designer, my friends, look her up. She does things with a gold sink that are absolutely amazing. And for everybody who's in Building a Referable

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Business, they totally just got that gold sink reference because, well, it's true.

Denise designed an entire kitchen around a gold sink that our client found and it was pretty amazing. See, there, now you're in on the inside joke that my BRB members have as well.

So, Denise specializes in combining lifestyle, personal needs, and the space you live in to create a home that's uniquely yours. Today, she joins me on the podcast to talk about her journey with referrals, growing her business. And of course, being a member of my group coaching experience, Building a Referral Business, or as we call it, BRB for short.

Alright, let's dive into the interview.

Denise, I am so glad to welcome you to the podcast. I know we've been talking about having you on and I'm so glad that you said yes and you were willing to be here. So, thank you so much for joining us today.

Denise Pough: Well, thank you for having me.

Stacey Brown Randall: Absolutely. I always love sitting down and talking with my clients because they had so much to share about reality.

Okay, so I want to start off with a question that I feel a lot of people like they hear this like this truth or what they think is a truth. It's not, it's actually a big myth; but I think it kind of lulls them into a place when they start a business, and you're a couple years into your business.

So, I think it lulls them into a place where they start a business that what it takes to get referrals. And this idea, and I think it's like a damaging mindset that if you give amazing service or provide the most fantastic design, since you're an interior

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designer, that you'll just receive referrals from all those super happy clients.

But what you and I know, and it's outside of the interior design space as well, that's just not true. And it isn't because your clients don't love you. They just don't always think to refer you. But I think there is this false truth that is out there that people teach: hey, if you do great work, you will get referrals.

And so, in your world as an interior designer, it's like, "Hey, if you just do the best interior design renovation ever, you are going to get so many referrals from that." But we know that that's actually not what happens. And not because you're not beloved and not because you don't do great work, it's because a lot of times, our clients don't always seek to refer us.

But I'm curious from your perspective, when you were starting your business back in 2019, had you been told that too? Like, "Hey, just do amazing work and you'll get referrals." Like what's been your experience with that falsity?

Denise Pough: Well, when I started my business, I just focused more on doing work to provide the best spaces possible for my clients. And when it came to the part of having referrals, I learned a lot through you as well as through my own innate abilities that referrals is relationships. And when it comes to my clients, I build relationships with them.

But in order to get a referral from them, they may think once the project is over, that's how they'll forget about you. Even though you've provided them with a great space and you've given them everything that they've asked for, they'll be excited for the moment.

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But as they live their life, as everyone does, you live your life. You can get the greatest Christmas present ever, but as you live your life, you'll forget.

So, in order to build referrals from that, you have to be, as you say, "top of mind." And the only way to do that is still be connected with them even after the project is done. So, that's where I feel that that is kind of the avenue that I've needed to take.

Stacey Brown Randall: Absolutely. And I'll be honest with you, I think because as you were starting your business, I kind of came into your peripheral vision.

I mean, I think around the time that you were getting started, and we know that you listened to LuAnn's podcast on A Well-Designed Business, which I've been on before. And so, you got exposed to me.

I think you learned that, hey, just because you do amazing work doesn't mean you'll get referrals. I think you learned that pretty early on. I think most people who start businesses don't learn that. They have to be like retaught that. They are literally told, "Hey, just do great work and you'll get referrals."

And I wish that were the case. I mean, to be honest, if we all did awesome work and that's all it took to get all of our clients to refer us, A, well, I wouldn't have a business and B which that would be bad for me, but not for anybody else, and that's okay. I would just be doing something else.

But it's just like I think it's so damaging and it's kind of refreshing to hear a business owner like yourself saying "Actually, like from the very beginning of starting my business, I kind of understood I was going to have to do something different if I wanted to get referrals."

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And that's really refreshing. I think there's a lot of business owners listening right now to this episode, and they're like, "I wish somebody had told me that in the beginning, and I wouldn't have just assumed all these referrals will just come rolling in."

Which I think it's, I would say, I don't like to use the word "lucky" easily, but I think that's a little that you got lucky that you actually were learning from people early on about what this looks like. So, you started building up your business for success in that way.

And I know the listeners are like, "Okay, we know Denise is a client of your Stacey, just tell us what her results are and we'll get there." But we're not answering that question yet.

I do want to know what's important about referrals for you? Like why are referrals so important for your business? What's your driver and the importance of referrals in your sales strategy?

Denise Pough: Well, I feel that when someone refers me, and even if they haven't been a client of mine, I've already built a certain relationship with them, that they know who I am to refer me because whoever they're referring me to, trust them.

So, it automatically brings that first step of trust of me into me, even before they get a chance to speak with me.

I just had a referral from a longtime friend and it just happened to be they referred me through Facebook, and the woman happened to ask in regards to, "Oh, I wish there was someone that I can have like HGTV or something like that." And she just mentioned, and she referred me.

This person didn't have me as working in their home. I gave them a couple of things of advice, but she was also a longtime

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relationship that I have already built and kept in contact with. So, having that, there's trust right there, and that person who reached out to me trusted who referred me.

So, that automatically gives me a little bit more of a step in, and in order to build those referrals, I have to build certain relationships. I can't just assume that someone is going to just refer me because I did a project with them, because sometimes, I get referrals that I haven't done any work for them yet either. So, it works both ways.

Stacey Brown Randall: So, if you could grow your business any way you wanted to, would you be like, I would be doing it all referral-based if I could like that's how powerful and meaningful, they are to you and your business?

Denise Pough: That is a 100% yes, because the other stuff is just way too hard. It's draining and it's hard, like to be real, it's a lot. Some things may seem easy, but it's never guaranteed. And I'm not saying that trying to build referrals is easy. It's not because it takes time to do that.

And in the interior design business, it's just like when someone is trying to make a decision on when they want to start a project, they could say, "Yeah, I want to start it" in their head. They'll say, "Yeah, January I want to start it." But they don't call you until June, or they don't call you until the next January.

That's how it is when you're building relationships with anyone. It's you're dating. Technically you're dating. Like you're not going to marry that person after the first date. I mean, not saying that people haven't done it, but that's very few and far between. But yes, I will prefer building my business strictly on referrals.

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Stacey Brown Randall: So, if I removed your option as referrals, like I removed the option to grow your business by referrals and I know you're probably just like dying a little bit inside because you've just admitted, as we all know all the other stuff's really hard.

Like okay, but I'm removing your option then as an interior designer to generate referrals. Well, I'm just curious, how else do you think you would grow your — what tactics do you think you would do? What have you been told that you need to do to grow your business?

Denise Pough: Well, going back a couple of years, when I first started my business and even before I actually launched my business and I was just trying to get my name out there, I was thinking, “Hey, put my business information in journal ads.”

So, I was attending certain events or organizations I was a part of and I was like let me just put that in there or be a sponsor at an event and then my name's called out.

But the real logistics of it is that yes, my name is called out or yes, they got the journal book that has my business information in there, but there's no connection. So, the hundreds of people who are in the room are technically, they don't know me.

So, yeah, so what, there's another ad in there or someone else did sponsor the event, but if they don't really know who I am or what I can provide and someone doesn't say, “Oh yeah, I know Denise, and she can do this, this, this and this.” They're not technically going to call me. But that's how I thought I needed to do it.

I had preferred to want to do say maybe be a vendor at an event. I was supposed to have been a vendor at an event in 2020, and the world shut down, and then my life had to turn in a

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different direction. So, that event was canceled. I was like, “Oh my gosh, what am I going to do now? There's not even an event to put an ad in for a journal. So, what's going to happen?”

And that's when I really was listening a lot more to LuAnn's podcast. I also had gotten your book initially, and I read through that and it resonated with me because I'm not the kind of person to even ask for referrals. And your way of doing this, it was a way that I felt that I could get referrals in a more holistic way versus trying to wait for someone to think of me to do it.

Because in asking for referrals, even if you did ask, not many people ask more than once. They just ask and they walk away. And at that point, it's like they'll still forget you that you even asked that question.

Even if they said, “Okay, I'm stressed” to say find someone for Denise to do an interior design project — design projects are not like a product. It's something that someone is ready to do in their home. And if they're not ready, it's not going to matter whether they say, “Oh, I'm thinking of someone who needs their home done.” Maybe that person doesn't want their home done yet.

Stacey Brown Randall: Can you imagine though, if it's like, what are you saying about me? I didn't say I wanted my home done. Are you saying my home looks crappy like? Why are you referring me to an interior designer? Like I didn't say I wanted to have this done. I think my 1980s wood paneling is beautiful. Thank you very much.

Denise Pough: Exactly. I love my new flooring.

Stacey Brown Randall: I mean, it's fabulous. I love my fluorescent line in my kitchen. I can see really well. What are you talking about?

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I think that's so true from that perspective of there's a lot of people just like you. I mean, obviously, this is why I have a business, this is why I do what I do because you're like, "Hey, yes, referrals sound amazing. Let's get some of those." Wait, now I've got to go ask for them.

A, that's a lot of work if the only way I'm going to get referrals is every time I ask for them. And then B, what relationships am I damaging in the process? Because all I do every time, I see those people is ask them to refer me. Like it's just not a sustainable or a feel-good strategy which is why I'm so against it.

Okay, so I love what you're sharing so far. Let's talk some numbers because I know there are people listening and they're like, "Okay, Denise has been talking about how like this is working for her. Like she loves referrals, this is how she wants to grow her business." Let's talk about the results that you've had so far.

So, I'm going to give everybody kind of like a historical perspective for your business and then being a client of mine. And then we'll kind of dive into like how you feel about all of this.

So, you started your business towards the end of 2019. Is that correct? Just want to make sure I have that right.

Denise Pough: Yes

Stacey Brown Randall: Okay so, towards the end of 2019, you started your business. You were like, what, like five months old when COVID hit in March of 2020?

Denise Pough: Yes.

Stacey Brown Randall: Okay, so you baby business.

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Denise Pough: Right after the winter.

Stacey Brown Randall: You were the baby business and then boom, here comes COVID. That had to be so not fun.

Okay, so in 2020, you generated one referral. Like your business has started, but then COVID has hit, you're having to pivot. Some of the ways that you would traditionally thought you were supposed to grow your business by placing ads or sponsoring an event or doing one of those like design home shows or whatever — like all the things you thought you were supposed to be doing like they also evaporated for you in 2020 as well.

You did get one referral in 2020, which is impressive because some people were like their whole world shut down in 2020 and that did not happen for them. So, you did get a referral in 2020, kind of like your first year in business. Then in 2021, you joined my world. You joined Growth by Referrals the middle of 2021. Is that correct?

Denise Pough: Yes.

Stacey Brown Randall: Okay. So, you joined Growth by Referrals in the middle of 2021. You kind of did like a third quarter kind of kickoff with it and you got three referrals in 2021, which is fabulous.

And then so, you're doing the Growth by Referrals strategy, and then also referring machines. So, you're deploying two main strategies as kind of like your baseline, which is getting new people to refer you, which is what we teach in referring machines.

And then the GBR, which is kind of where you started though, it's like, "Hey, I've got some referral sources, but I've got to get

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those people to give me more referrals, not just one every five years.” And so, you're deploying on kind of like both strategies.

So, we go from three referrals in 2021, you're getting your strategies in place, really in fourth quarter, I would say, you're really honing in on the two strategies.

And then so far in 2022, you've received six referrals and we still, at the time of this recording, have a whole quarter to go. So, your goal for this year was nine referrals. And so, the goal there would've been to triple your 2021 results. So, go from three to nine.

I would definitely say you're on pace to hit it. My plan is for you to hit it to get three more referrals before the end of the year. But we also recognize for you, it hasn't just been about getting new referrals, it's also about — I mean, yes, of course it's about getting new referrals, but it's also been about identifying the gap that you have with really being able to turbocharge your results.

And for you, what you've determined is, and this is perfect because I think a lot of people land here is like, okay, I've got a strategy in place to take care of the people who have referred me and should be able to continue to refer me.

So, I've got my strategy, my plan in place to take care of them. You have been learning the referring machine strategy, which is what we call “running five, keeping warm.”

And so, you're applying that, and then you've identified this additional gap. You're like, I need more COIs (centers of influence) referring to me and not being so reliant on clients. And so, that's going to take the focus for the rest of this year for you and be a big part of your strategy for next year.

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So, knowing that you are increasing your results every year, you're having success, you have so much more success ahead of you. Like I like to think of your results as like slow and steady wins the race.

Yes, we went for one to three. So, your first year with me, we got you three, and then three to six so far this year. But I believe you'll get to nine before the end of the year.

That's not going to make you a millionaire, let's be really honest. Only if you charge like half a million dollars. If you charge half a million dollars for every referral you received, that's what you got paid, you would be a millionaire. But that's not the goal here, ultimately.

That's why I say you have so much growth to come and I want to be really clear about this really is a slow and steady wins the race and it's like applying something, seeing results from it, then moving on and applying the next strategy, and then realizing, hey, I need to dig in more with this strategy.

For you, we've known this from day one when you upgraded from GBR into BRB (Building a Referable Business) — we've known this from day one, you've got to have more people referring you. Like we've got to get you a couple of dozen people referring you, not six or seven people referring you.

So, as you've kind of made that shift and you're kind of recognizing where you're going, the progress you've made, how are you feeling?

Denise Pough: I feel pretty good of what has transpired. One thing that I have to say is, and I think that especially if you have my industry, the interior design industry, a lot of people are solopreneurs. And when you're doing everything by yourself,

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you have to also incorporate everything else you have on your schedule.

So, you have to do your marketing, you have to do your bookkeeping, aside from, working with the clients that you do get. So, whether they will refer to you or not, you still have clients that you got to work on projects.

So, understanding that building this process also has to fall on that person. There are businesses that are going to have exponential numbers and they may also be solopreneurs, but their business may be transpired differently.

I know for myself as being the only one who is doing everything and making sure that I'm doing it right, I personally don't need an explosion of 20 referrals in three months because that would just ... it would be mind-blowing. It would be a blessing. I'm not saying it wouldn't be. But it would be a lot to handle.

So, in this process of me building my business, I like the slow and steady. So, I wouldn't want anyone to think that it should be more, but for me, I like where I'm at, and I am building it this way so that way I know I can incorporate this in my work schedule in a way where nothing falls short if that's clear.

Stacey Brown Randall: I think there is such power in recognizing and holding true to how you want to grow your business.

I think so many people get caught up into the comparison society of like, well, that designer has X number of clients every year. And that designer's making that much money. And that designer turns out 14 reels a day.

And that's just an interior design space — that's every space. I mean, that's like it doesn't matter if you're a coach or a consultant, it doesn't matter if you're a CPA, it doesn't matter if

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you're an attorney, like we all play the comparison game in terms of what everybody else is doing and what everybody else's front stage looks like.

Let alone we have no idea how crazy and chaotic it is on their backstage of actually making all that happen. And I think it shows like just such power that you are confident in how you want to grow your business and how you want your business to fit into your lifestyle, not your life to fit into your business.

And you're like, this steady growth is exactly what I want. It's how I can manage it, it's how I can handle it. I mean, yes, if you wanted it differently, you would make it different, but you know what you want and then you're doing the things to get you there and having success.

I think that's brilliant because I think a lot of people, like they maybe want to grow their business slower, but they feel bad. Like when they're like having conversations with other people who do what they do or they're seeing other people on social media, they're like, "Maybe I should want to be a big old business."

And I love the fact that you're like, "No, this is exactly what I want." A, it's working and B, it's exactly how I want to grow. Congrats to you for knowing that.

Denise Pough: Thank you.

Stacey Brown Randall: Yeah, absolutely. I mean, so many times my husband and I have had this conversation, I've even talked about it here on the podcast. Like there's this big like out there, I don't know what it is about the million-dollar mark for a business; "Oh, are you a million dollar business?"

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I actually ran the numbers and looked at like, okay, for me to be a million-dollar business, how hard would I have to work? You know me, Denise, there's a reason why I don't do a video podcast because I don't want to have to look video-ready every single day.

So, let's be honest, we all know here that I love what I do, but I am not interested in working 60 hours a week if I can do it in 20, like what is the point? And if I want something different. But the reality of it is, I ran the numbers, like, okay, so what would I have to sell?

Let's be honest, like that's how we look at it. Like, to hit a million dollars, what would I have to sell? And I looked at what I'd have to do. I'm like, "Oh no, I do not want to work that hard." Like that's not thrilling for me at all. And I know some people are like, "Well, your model's wrong or this is blah, blah, blah."

No, like I know Denise's business because she's a part of Building a Referral Business. Like she's a part of my BRB group coaching program, and if I had hundreds of people in BRB, I'd never know her business the way I know it. Because she's not one of hundreds, she's one of like 30.

And I think that is ultimately like being consistent with how you want to grow and how your business fits into your lifestyle, and what you want that to look like. That is so powerful.

And I don't think enough business owners talk about that. Like, hey, I know what enough is and I know how I want to grow and I want to be able to grow in a way I can handle it. So, I'm just impressed. I'm impressed with you.

Denise Pough: Thank you. I have to say, I need somebody to be accountable to, too.

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Stacey Brown Randall: Well, enter Stacey from stage right. Like not afraid, hold anybody's butt accountable. But I know accountability is like the dirty word. Like, oh, you're a grownup, you should be able to hold yourself accountable.

No, sometimes you just need somebody else saying, "How you doing? And are you doing it?"

Denise Pough: Yes, yes.

Stacey Brown Randall: You just do. Okay, so I just have two more questions I want to ask you and I just so appreciate you spending the time talking about your business, like getting started, what your results have looked like for you. The intentionality behind how you're trying to grow your business and the pace you're trying to grow it, I think that's all awesome.

What's been kind of like your biggest "aha" that you've had over the last year and a half working with me? Either one, just in the self-study course, Growth By Referrals before you upgraded to the group coaching to BRB.

Like whether it's from GBR or it's from being now in the BRB group; what's been one of the biggest like ah, like light bulb moments or "aha" moments that you've had? It can be small or little. Just from working with me in my different programs.

Denise Pough: My biggest "aha" is ... how do I say this? My biggest "aha" is that I have to get out of my own head. So, what I mean by that is every time when I'm at say, an event or social or with friends or just interacting with others, it's not always just talking about the kids or the husband or that kind of thing.

It's really me being a business owner sometimes too. And not asking for referrals, but planting seeds in just subtle ways when

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you're having a conversation with someone that can be enough to build them into being a referral source.

And that's something that I didn't realize was an easy way to do it because you don't have to sit there and say, "Hey, do you have a referral for me?" You can just talk about, you know what, I had a great client and she actually referred me to someone else.

That takes the pressure off of me asking for a referral as well as takes the pressure off of the person I'm talking to. So, I think that was the biggest "aha" for me is to understand just the communication behind it that makes it a little less stressful, I could say.

Stacey Brown Randall: I love that. I think people always say the language piece is kind of like ... I always call it my secret sauce. And I think some people would say that is where I'm probably in my zone of genius.

My zone of brilliance is like when I'm helping people understand how we communicate from that referral seed perspective to make it normal and comfortable, and then guess what else, it gets to work.

Like it's like all the things you want it to be. And I think that that being your biggest "aha," that's huge for me because it's always nice knowing ... I mean, people have all kinds of different "ahas."

We always do, no matter what trainings we go through. But knowing that that one's been the ... "Wait, this can be easier than I thought it would be. And then, because Stacey's told me in all the ways that it could work and then I'm just remembering them" and then deploying them in those moments — I love it

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that your “aha” moment was like the tools in your toolbox, and you pull them out when you need them. I think that's huge.

So, what would you say to someone who's thinking about joining Building a Referable Business, BRB, the group coaching program that you're in? There's an application now.

So, for some people, it's just deciding they want to apply to join BRB before they decide to join. But what would you say for someone who's thinking about joining you inside Building a Referable Business?

Denise Pough: First of all, I would say it is definitely a method that for people who are like me that are ... and I'm an introvert technically. I mean, some people would be like, “Really, are you?” I technically am. I'm the person that is behind the scenes, and even if I got recognized, I'm grateful for it.

But this helps, especially if you are an introvert. It shows you a way that you could still be yourself and not have to show anything different and still get results. I love the accountability piece. Especially when you work by yourself sometimes you need someone to be accountable to just to keep you on task and on schedule.

Because before you know it, I mean look at it, it's October already, we're already in the fourth quarter of 2022, and I was just thinking it was January. But someone to help keep you on task in regards to getting your progress through the process. That was a big thing for me.

And that's one of the reasons why I changed from GBR to BRB, is because I wanted to have that more interaction and being more accountable versus it just being online, submitting some stuff. It gave me a little bit more of a reality to what this could

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be. So, if you choose, I would say that this would be a great choice.

Stacey Brown Randall: Well, thank you so much for saying that. And if people join, then they can also join you in December. The Re:FOCUS Retreat because I'm so glad you're coming, and I actually get to meet you in person.

It's funny how many of my long-term clients that have been around for a while and then upgraded to BRB. And of course, we get some newbies, which is awesome as well — but we love our newbies that I've never met, and I get to meet you guys in person because we're doing the two-day Re:FOCUS Retreat just for the BRB members. So, that will be awesome.

Okay, thank you so much for coming on. You shared some great thoughts on like why referral's for you and then kind of talked about your results and kind of opened up about the results and what you're trying to build, which I really appreciate you sharing that.

And then of course, the encouragement for folks who are considering joining you inside BRB, that was awesome as well. So, thank you for taking time to be on the podcast today.

Denise Pough: No, this was fun. Thank you, Stacey.

Stacey Brown Randall: Denise, I cannot thank you enough for spending time with me doing this interview and then sharing it, of course, with all of my listeners. It is such a strong and important lesson that you remind us of.

There is such a hustle mentality in the world today. And there's always about the next level, the next milestone, the next big growth trajectory you're going to be on. And there's nothing

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wrong if that's the race you're running. There's absolutely nothing wrong with that race.

But I think it's also really important for those of us who are running a different race intentionally choosing to run a different race, reminding ourselves that there's so much goodness in the slow and steady.

And building a business on your own terms, one that works for you and your lifestyle, not necessarily one that is supposed to be impressive to a whole bunch of strangers. So, Denise, thank you my dear for your time.

I will definitely link to Denise's website on the show notes page for this episode. And of course, the show notes page for this episode is staceybrownrandall.com/228. That's for episode 228. And of course, you know, Stacey has an E.

Okay, one quick final reminder before I let you go; you can definitely come join me and Denise (yep, she'll be there in person too) at our Re:FOCUS Retreat coming up in December.

Denise is one of our attendees. As a BRB member, it was included and I'm so excited that she is going to join me live in person when we do our Re:FOCUS Retreat.

And you can join us, and it would be wonderful to have you. I would love to help you do some reverse goal-setting; setting goals in a way that you've probably never done before that'll flip on its head.

Because the truth is, if you set your 2023 goals in a vacuum by only thinking about what do I want to accomplish next year, you're doing it wrong. And I'll teach you how to do it better, and I'll do it with you in person live at our Re:FOCUS Retreat

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coming up in Charlotte in December. Just go to staceybrownrandall.com/goals and you can join us.

Okay, coming up next week is episode 229 and it's also crazy to think we're in the fourth quarter. We're wrapping up October and we have two months left in this year. It's a little crazy.

So, I have got some great things on tap for you guys as we move into our final couple of months of 2022.

Until then, my friends, you know what to do; take control and grow your business. Bye for now.

Thanks for listening to the Roadmap to Grow Your Business podcast. To access all resources and links mentioned in today's show, and to connect with Stacey, head over to www.staceybrownrandall.com.