

Transcripts from the Pre-election PSA episode:

It's incredible to me that there are still people out there, giving the business advice that you should never talk about politics or religion, if you are a business owner. I think that advice is bullshit. I've thought that advice was bullshit for basically about a decade, and, I once... and I once staked my entire business on it back in 2012. The same person who I used to think was really, really smart, is still giving that advice to thousands of business owners all over my area, every single week. That's why, today, I had to come and record this episode for you. If you're listening to this in real time, it is just days before the 2020 election and millions of Americans have already voted.

Now, you're going to hear my voice is a little crackly today. That's because unfortunately, I think I'm getting sick. Now, I am pretty sure that it's just a normal cold but, in a 2020 world, we also have to consider whether it is a deadly disease. Because that's just where we live right now. And it has made me as I approach the election, want to come and talk to all of you out there who are marketers and small business owners about this terrible piece of advice that I was given by one of my former mentors and have been trying to dismantle for 10 years.

I feel so strongly about this issue and I wish that I could talk to you about it with a more clear voice. So I'm hoping that y'all will give me a little bit of leeway to be less clear than I normally am because, with just a few days to go before this election, I didn't feel like this episode could wait until later. So, what was that stupid advice? Well, a former mentor of mine, the same one incidentally that told me being a mother, wasn't professional, also insisted to every single business owner that he worked with and still does to the thousands of them just in my area that follow him, that they should be neutral and quiet about their politics and their religion. I used to follow this advice, even though it didn't sit very well with me.

Now, me being the type of person that I am, that wasn't gonna work for me for very long. So, by 2012, I could no longer work with this mentor, no longer be a part of his organization, because of this type of advice. So I've spent the last eight years, almost nine years since I left there, proving this theory dead wrong. Not just with myself, not just as an antidote, but with business after business after business that I work with. Here's the thing. That advice to be neutral in your politics and your religion, it made sense in a pre-internet pre-social media world in lots of ways.

Now, I don't think it was ever morally right to be neutral about your values, to hide your values behind your business as if they were something that you could put on your nightstand and leave at home when you went to work each day, but I understand that that's what my friend Lori likes to call the IBM style of management, where you stop being a human while you're at work and that's what this mentor was raised in. But in an internet world, in a social media world, in a world frankly where Donald Trump is the president of our country, neutrality about your values is not an option. Neutrality about your values is bad for your business because your customers don't see it, as an option. Neutrality about your values is morally bankrupt.

In a moment like 2020, where people are dying in the middle of a pandemic, where people are dying from the constant racial pandemic that is social and racial injustice in this country. Where people are afraid for their marriages, they're afraid for their lives, they're afraid to be separated from their families. They're afraid in a level that they have never been afraid before in my lifetime, and maybe in many of your lifetimes. Neutrality about your values and what you stand for in your business, is really, really morally bankrupt and pretty dumb from a marketing perspective too.

I want to be able to say that this person who in so many ways is such a genius, understood that this year was different and went back on that advice that he had been giving for decades. But unfortunately, instead what he did, was just a few days ago, put that same stupid advice back out on the internet again, and leads thousands of small businesses down the wrong path. So I'm gonna give you this from a couple of angles. I don't think if you've listened to even one episode of the show, you will have any problem understanding where my value stand, y'all know that kindness, is pretty much my number one value.

Kindness, truth, these things are at the heart of everything that we do, and I feel like truth and kindness are pretty much like, on the chopping block in so many places in 2020. So, I'm not really here to talk to you about my own values. I'm not even here to have a discussion with you about your politics if you disagree with me, because frankly, I don't have any more patience for that shit this year. Come talk to me in December when I've cooled down a little bit, maybe. What I'm here to talk to you about is why neutrality is bad for your business.

Because I'm not going to spend any more time trying to convince you what the morally right thing to do is. We've got almost 50 episodes of this show that you can go back to and I think that we've done a fairly good job in those episodes of laying out our case for what we believe is morally right. Particularly in your business marketing and the way you lead your teams. What I wanna talk to you about today, just a few days before the 2020 election if you're hearing this in real time, is, why neutrality is a bad marketing idea. Because here's what's gonna happen to you if

you're trying to be neutral in this moment. There are very few, fewer and fewer and fewer people, left in America who are neutral or undecided about where they stand.

Now, I've actually had some conversations with some of those elusive neutral voters. They're still out there in politics, but where people stand around their values, where they stand about the way... around the way they think people should be treated, and the way that businesses should interact with their customers, those are really not up for debate anymore for a lot of people. They've come down pretty hard on their values and social media culture has taught us to be voyeuristic about where we stand. It's taught us to look up, what companies stand for, before we make a decision to do business with them, particularly if you are younger than 35. So if you are .

So if you are a millennial or doing business So if you are a millennial or doing business with millennials or younger, these generations of Americans at least, have really been raised to check their values and whether or not the business that they are going to do business with, agrees with those values, at least on its face. This is not perfect and there are lots of BS, value statements out there that companies don't really follow when you scratch below the surface. But the idea that you can not have a value statement, particularly in a moment like this one. So the idea that you could pretend to not care about whether Donald Trump or Joe Biden is elected president.

The idea that you could stay neutral in the middle of a pandemic, about what the right protocols are for your employees and your customers that come into contact with those employees, the idea that you could stay neutral in 2020 about the economic instability that is happening as a business owner, that is absurd. It's so absurd, that even to the least socially conscious consumer, it makes you look out of touch. It makes you look like a coward, and it makes people look for someone who they can trust, is at least trying to consider these things. You cannot pretend to be neutral in this moment.

For 10 years, as I have been working in SEO and digital marketing and social media, as my business has evolved, my opinion about a lot of things has changed. We've been really open in this show about where in the past we have possibly given bad advice, but this is something I have been fighting about with people particularly old school business leaders like my former mentor, for a decade. I continue to be more and more right. I see the evidence of it every day and therefore, I need you to hear me. That old school business idea that you can keep your politics, your values to yourself, is over. You must take a stand for what you believe in.

Now that does not mean that you have to come out on your business Instagram account or your business Facebook page or your website, and say, I support Donald

Trump, or I support Joe Biden, or I support whatever candidate, it does mean that you need to give clear indicators to your customers about your values. It means that if you are doing the work of being an ally and a co-conspirator for social justice, for black lives and people of color and LGBTQ+ people and other marginalized folks, that you must be clear in your statements about what work you're doing, where you are in the work, and what you can and cannot offer to these people.

To all of us as people, it means that you must be clear, about what you stand for and what your business will not back down from. So for example, my business is loud and proud, vote blue all the way down the ticket in 2020, because the Republican Party has become morally bankrupt. It is not just about, the candidate. It is about a systematic issue that is much deeper than Donald Trump. So my business is out and proud about its stance on this election, because it is too tied to my values, to our values as a company, kindness first, people above innovations, systems and careful sustainable leadership. These are core values that we run everything on.

So the idea that we could be neutral about a political system that breaks down all those values and destroys them, is ridiculous. The type of customers that we most want and the type of customers that we interact with on a daily basis and our raving fans, would not tolerate neutrality. And it's a good, it's a good chance that yours may not either. Lemme give you an example of this. I work with several trades companies that go into people's homes, and they being in a small town where they are, were very afraid to come out with their opinions or their procedures or what they were doing to keep their employees and people safe or to do what they believed was right, in this pandemic moment.

But the moment that they came out with explicit instructions about what they were doing, explicit statements about why they were doing it, their businesses began to expand again after contracting from the pandemic, because people don't wanna have to guess. People don't wanna have to guess about your values. I was just on a panel, a virtual panel a few weeks ago where we were talking about this. I was asking a question of someone sitting on the panel whose values are diametrically opposed to mine. He is a...in my opinion, very delusional, Qanon, so strong Trump supporter, but not big stint. Anything that I can figure out his reality around that.

That's fine, his customers love it. Well, I wanna back up and say, I don't think that's fine, but in the context of business marketing, that's fine. His customers love it. He's in an area where most of his customers share his same belief system, and he knows it. I have experienced this myself in moments where the rest of the world was less charged, over and over again as a person running a business in a rural area, where I've had people say, well, you're not a Christian, so I can't do business with you. Yes, it

frustrated me to no end, but at the same time, that is their choice, with their value system.

We don't question that. We don't question someone when they say, they run a Christian business, or they only do business with other people who are Christians. Most people let that one pass. Most people don't have any problem with that one. So if you're one of those people that are still thinking that, it's not okay to talk about politics and business, I might ask you if you think it's not okay, for someone to say they're a Christian business. Maybe you do or you don't. But in my experience, most people don't have a problem with that in America. Here's the thing. This was different 20 years ago. It was, you could keep your opinions about some of these things to yourself. I'm not saying that it was right then, it wasn't, but it was reality.

You could keep your Opinions], you could keep your values, you could keep your politics to yourself, and you could probably still be fine. But in a social media world, where there is so much noise and everybody is in their corners, if you aren't willing to take a stand for your values, note here, I'm not asking you to fight with people, I'm not asking you to new, to argue with people on Facebook, I'm not asking you to back a political candidate, all of those things can be terrible ideas. What I'm asking you to do, five days before the 2020 election, is to be clear about what your values are.

That's true five days before the election, it's true, the day of the election, and it's true, 150 days after the election. It's not really about the election, it's about taking a stand for what you believe in, in a clear enough way, so that the people that are for you can find you. By the way, you know what else it does? The people who are not for you, will stay away and stop wasting your time. In a 2020 world, neutrality is not an option. In a 2020 world as a small business, you must take a stand for what you believe in.

That does not mean you need to talk about everything, that does not mean you need to fight with anyone, that does not mean you need to share every thing you think on the internet. In fact, please don't. Please take the time to carefully consider what things you are willing to hang your business on. What are the things that are so deeply held core beliefs, that you would be willing to close your business, rather than break those values. By the way, if you don't have anything that you can think of, then I would highly suggest that you do some deep work, because there are always things that are more important than our business.

Like our families, like who we are, like strong community, like lifting up those who have less than we do, like insisting on justice for people who have less privilege than we do. These are all things that are worth our business, because they're what make us human. Before a business, there is always a human. I think sometimes we forget

that. So, all I wanna ask you this week of the 2020 election is to make sure that you are really clear, in the way that your business is messaging this week, about what your values are, what you stand for, and that you refuse to be neutral in this moment.

Neutrality is not an option. If you are preparing your business for what could be a difficult couple of days, for those of us here in the United States. Hopefully it's only a couple of days, it could be longer, but I'm thinking optimistically. I'd like for you to take the time to have a word with your staff this week, about how you will handle things. To have a plan in place, if things get difficult in your area. For example, because I live in a place that has, a 70%, ultra conservative Trump supporting area, we have made the decision and many of the people I work with in this area, to close our company for the day after the election. We've done that for two reasons.

The first is that, in the area where I am in, I am worried that if the current president loses, which is obviously what I hope for, but if he loses, that people in my area will be in the streets. You may live in an area that is different than that, where if he wins, people may be in the streets or some combination of the above. So consider how will handle that in your work. If you're a business where people... you go into other people's homes or your employees do, you might wanna consider that. I've never recommended that before, in any election cycle to the businesses I work with, but this time I think it's important to at least consider and have a contingency plan.

The other reason we decided to close is that, our team is very invested in the outcome of the selection for a variety of different reasons, as our clients. We may just need the day to rest and to process. So we decided that the best use of our privilege in this moment, is to keep that day free, for whatever we need from each other, what our families need from us, and yes, maybe even what our clients need from us. So that's what we're doing. I highly recommend that given the way this moment is, you think that through with your own business.

But whatever you decide to do in preparation, or, just in your day to day marketing efforts for your business, or just in your day-to-day being in your business for that matter, I want to ask you in this moment, to take a stand for what you believe in. To stop being quiet and neutral about what you believe is right, and using the excuse, that it's for the sake of your business. Because that was bad advice when it was given to me 10 years ago, and it's even worse advice today. I'll leave you with the words of Desmond Tutu.

If you are neutral in situations of injustice, you have chosen the side of the oppressor. If an elephant has its foot on the tail of a mouse, and you say that you are neutral, the mouse will not appreciate your neutrality. So where are you right now? Be clear, so your raving fans, know where you are. Be clear, and stand strong in your values in

who you are, just because it's the right thing to do. At the end of the day, at the end of our lives, at the end of our companies, all we have, is that we did what we believed was right. Neutrality is no longer an option.