



Expand Your Fempire Podcast #18

Leadership & Sisterhood with Shannon Crotty

Welcome to Expand your Fempire with Caterina Rando, the podcast for women in business on a mission. Sharing ideas to support you to grow and thrive. Now here's your host, Caterina Rando.

[00:00:27] **Caterina Rando:** When the pandemic hit, it was uncomfortable and bringing uncertainty for all of us. As a business owner, serving many other women in business, I looked for ideas, inspiration, role modeling from other women leaders. The one who stepped up, stepped out, and right away did not skip a beat, was Shannon Crotty, founder of Polka Dot. She is inspirational. She is positivo. She is a woman leader to watch. And I am so honored and so excited that she is with us today. **When you hear this interview, you will absolutely know why she is a woman leader to watch.**

[00:01:31] Welcome back to the Expand Your Fempire podcast with Caterina Rando. We are serving women on a mission today, and I am so excited. We have the most fabulous, amazing guest that you are going to want to get to know, Shannon Crotty. She is the founder of Polka Dot Powerhouse. Now, if you don't know what Polka Dot Powerhouse is, that's okay, because you will be well-versed by the end of our time together. Shannon, I am so happy to have you with us. Let's take a moment just to start to give context to our listeners. What is Polka Dot Powerhouse?

[00:02:12] **Shannon Crotty:** Well, first of all, thank you so much for having me on it's an honor and privilege to be talking with you today.

[00:02:16] Polka Dot Powerhouse is a connection company for women across the globe. We connect really positive, action-forward women who want to support, push and celebrate each other. And it started through my sister, Tina, this is my sister, Tina, and she is deceased, and I had a really close relationship with her. And she sent me the name from heaven and **the experience that I had with my sister of being so seen, accepted, appreciated is what I want to replicate for other women.**

[00:02:50] And **sometimes it's easier to do that in a relationship with people that are not emotionally attached to you.** You know, like your family, they're great and all that, but

sometimes it's great to have allies that just see your possibilities. You know? They just push you in that way. And so, this community has been really, really great for that. And they they've really taught me how to be a better person as well.

[00:03:12] **Caterina Rando:** Well, definitely when you have a community, as you have so beautifully cultivated, Shannon, it is an opportunity for us to grow, too, in lots of different ways. I have so many questions for you. I want to say one of the things that really touched my heart with you, was when the pandemic started, and everyone had their shelter in place orders that you immediately got into action and started your daily connects with the ladies. And I thought that that was such a **beautiful demonstration of leadership.**

[00:03:56] I want to ask you, what are some of the qualities that you feel you embody? Now, I know my friend, I know I'm having you talk about yourself and one of the things that you are is you are a humble, amazing leader. I'm still going to ask you to talk about yourself and **perhaps share three of the qualities that you feel have served you well, as the head of this amazing organization.**

[00:04:25] **Shannon Crotty:** Well, number one, **I'm a visionary.** And so, I sometimes see things further and farther than other people, you know, we're all geared in different ways. So, I'm a visionary. **I lack patience, which is sometimes the Achilles heel, but actually is my superpower.**

[00:04:40] **Caterina Rando:** I love that!

[00:04:42] **Shannon Crotty:** Yeah, I lack patience. And actually, I don't think Polka Dot would be here if I had any patience because I would've over-thought it. I would have talked myself out of it. But I tend to jump and then build the plane as I'm going down. I don't know if that's expert advice, but that's what I do.

[00:04:56] And then the other thing is I'm very focused on - and this has been a process - but at this point in my life, **I'm very focused on how my gut feels.** So, in my integrity, I'm very focused on my integrity and putting everything through the filter. And that was a practice. I mean, Polka Dot is eight years old this year, and I've gotten much better at it in the last year or two, you know, listening to all of the voices, putting them through the filter, thanking everybody for their knowledge, and then really applying what works for us.

[00:05:26] **Caterina Rando:** I love it. I love it, Shannon and I love that you say that you have no patience because I've been saying for years, **patience is not a virtue.** I often say it was created to keep uppity women in their place. And when you're an entrepreneur, it's definitely the antithesis of moving forward in your business.

[00:05:47] You mentioned integrity. Integrity is absolutely one of the values by which I run my community, Thriving Women in Business. **I want to ask you, what are some of the other values by which you run your organization?**

[00:06:04] **Shannon Crotty:** Again, very, kind of repeat here, but **very vision focused**. I think, as the person, as the leader of your company, the leader of your vision, you have a heavy responsibility to the people you're impacting to stay laser focused. So again, **it's my job as the founder, as a CEO, to stay laser focused, even while everything else is going on and to pull everybody back to mission.**

[00:06:26] But I also really rely on, you know, I'm Irish and so I can move very fast and I can make kind of decisions based on emotion. But over time, I've learned to sleep on things sometimes. And I still don't do it sometimes, sometimes I answer, right? But some things require a sleep. Some things require more thought and more process, but what this is all leading to, the long way, is **trusting myself... is confidence and trust in myself and my creator.**

[00:06:59] Because I don't know about you, but **everything has made sense looking back**. It doesn't make sense right now. It doesn't have to make sense right now. I just need to trust in myself, my gut, my creator, to know that wherever this is headed is where it's supposed to be headed.

[00:07:14] **Caterina Rando:** Trust. Integrity. What else? Listening to intuition...

[00:07:19] **Shannon Crotty:** Trust, integrity, and you know, listening to your gut. I think as women, sometimes we're taught that however you feel is the right decision and that is sometimes true. And it's sometimes not. I have in the past hired people or work with people that I just really liked them. And I ignored possibly the fact that were they the best person for this position?

[00:07:38] And so **you have to work those two together, like a perfect team**. How do I feel? And also, if I'm going to put this through mission and integrity, is it a good business decision? So, I think we can't act out of just emotion and gut, we can't just act out of just business mindset. **We have to partner those two together in a way that we can make better decisions** and I've had to learn that the hard way for sure.

[00:08:03] **Caterina Rando:** Well, perhaps Shannon you've had to learn it the hard way, it looks great from my view. You have done such an incredible job of cultivating an amazing network of really positive, uplifting women. I've been to many Polka Dot chapters as a speaker. I am a Polka Dot in my own area. The women are really phenomenal. **What do you think makes positive, loving, heart-centered women attracted to come to be in Polka Dot?**

[00:08:43] **Shannon Crotty:** I think that it's because it's from the top down. So one thing that we're told often that is very unusual and I find it so odd people say this, but they say it's unusual that we on the upper end, those of us who are on upper leadership, are not just a hierarchy kind of looking down and planning. **We're planning, but we all connect and are engaged in the membership as much as any member.** So, depending on my

travel schedule, which is zero right now, I will connect with between three and five members a week.

[00:09:14] And, we are on the ground level with our members, totally experiencing the sisterhood that we're preaching about. So, we're not just telling people, we're doing it. Our members get a new member email "here, connect with any of our head leaders." And I've always said to our staff and our upper leaders, "look, if there's any point that we can't be involved in the sisterhood, then we need to call it." **Because it can't just be called sisterhood. It needs to be that. And it needs to be a model from the top down.**

[00:09:41] **Caterina Rando:** Shannon, I'm curious. You do such an amazing job of cultivating community. And I'm wondering because you shared eight years now with Polka Dot, **was there any lessons you had in the early years that really shaped what Polka Dot is today and the amazing community it is today?**

[00:10:05] **Shannon Crotty:** Yeah, I think you've heard me talk about this before, but **I talk about the gift of 300 feet. You know, the distance of headlights.** I only need to see the next 300 feet, right? And that has served me cause you know what? If I had known in the beginning, what I know now - if I'd known that I'd have to know the laws of Canada, and have an events director and marketing director, hell no, I would have cut and run-a-way, way early. It would have been too much. I would have been too scared.

[00:10:30] **The gift of 300 feet of vision and trusting again in whatever your belief system is - God, the universe, whatever - that you'll be given more vision as you need.** It was really something I didn't understand at the beginning, but as I look back on our journey, I can see the whole way is that all you need to see is the next 300 feet. And you needed trust when you are able to handle more, you can see more.

[00:10:53] So that was one of the biggest lessons for me. I don't know about anybody else, but for me, my instinct is I want to know A to Z and I want to know all the parts of it and I want to be able to see it now. Well, you know how I said I wasn't good at patience? This maybe is my lesson in patience is - "yeah, you're not going to see that because you can't handle it. But if you've been given this dream, you are the person to take it where it's supposed to go. And so, you'll be given enough to take you each step of the journey." **So, for me as the founder, I think that was the biggest lesson that we learned.**

[00:11:23] **One of the lessons that we learned with our membership is women share many commonalities.** And those commonalities bring us together. **But women in different parts of the country, different parts of the world lead very different lives and have very different challenges.**

[00:11:36] And it was important to us...like we... all of our chapters run the same format. And then that way we provide that security and that stability that the members need. But **each chapter feels like a little bit different community within our big community.** And

I think that's so important that we don't make it so much like a cookie cutter. Because women in different parts of the world and country are dealing with different things.

[00:11:58] **Caterina Rando:** And so, then you have allowed them to put a little of their own flavor in it.

[00:12:03] **Shannon Crotty:** Yeah. And when I go to visit a chapter, I am just like absorbing it because they all feel a little different. They run it in our format, but maybe they have leadership team members running part of the chapter. Maybe they run their pre-meeting a little bit different. Maybe they send out birthday cards, maybe another chapter sends out anniversary cards. It all feels like a different community. But then we have our big community, which just feels like a nice big hug of sisterhood.

[00:12:27] **Caterina Rando:** That's beautiful. It definitely feels like a big hug of sisterhood. I want to ask you this Shannon. In eight years, your organization has significantly grown, expanded in the U.S. and Canada. I believe you're also in Australia. Is that right?

[00:12:44] **Shannon Crotty:** We have members there, but we don't have actual physical location.

[00:12:47] **Caterina Rando:** Not yet, but I'm sure you will very soon. **How has your business lifestyle changed?** Because many women in business want more than they have now. How has building your team changed? How has your lifestyle changed? How have you adapted to having this worldwide company so that it is not only profitable and sustainable, but so it will continue to grow?

[00:13:17] **Shannon Crotty:** Right? It's a great question. First of all, we're a no debt company. And so, **we only take on new leadership people as our, our membership supports it**, right? So, in the beginning, and even now a little bit, we're all doing, you know, a small team of us are doing 10 different things, right? As we've grown, I discovered that if I wanted to have a life and I wanted the company to be able to grow, I couldn't handle everything.

[00:13:44] And what I had to admit to myself, which I've always admitted, but I really had to admit it deeper level is, I stink at 97% of the things. I'm a genius at 3%. The rest is like, yeah, not so much.

[00:13:55] And so **the more that I can hand off, because for everything that we stink at, which is again for me for a lot of things, there's someone who loves it**. There's someone that it's easy for. And so, the more that I can hand off and again, so demonstrating community right from the top down, not just talking it, but doing it, the more things I can hand off, the more areas of genius that I can go into.

[00:14:18] This is where I shine. This is where I have fun. This is where the members most appreciate me. And then it **also gives the opportunity for other people to be involved**. So, I think, again, the biggest lesson for me there was handing things off, you know,

delegating and having no shame in saying, Yeah, I don't do well with that and I need someone else to help me." And **understanding that there's plenty of people who love what you don't love and can help you get there.**

[00:14:42] **Caterina Rando:** And that's an opportunity for them too. That's an opportunity to grow leaders. That's the opportunity to employ more women, to support them in their journey.

[00:14:51] **Shannon Crotty:** Right.

[00:14:52] **Caterina Rando:** Shannon you mentioned that you're a "no debt" company. **Has that been one of your guiding principles for your business?**

[00:15:01] **Shannon Crotty:** Well, yeah, my husband, Brian is our CFO and he's a money guy and he's a numbers guy. And if we had any capital funding or anything like that, he would just not be able to sleep at night. That's just how he's always run, be in the green at all times. And so, we've never done the business loans or anything like that. Not because they're not great. If you do that, there's no shame in that. Do what you gotta do. But for me to remain married to this man, I love and for him to sleep at night and for me to sleep at night, we needed that.

[00:15:25] And in a year, like we're having that, we're recording this right now in 2020, that was definitely a great decision. Because we haven't had to lay off anyone. We've certainly been like other companies have been impacted, but that decision to not have those extra loans or that funding or what have you has made it possible to get through a year, like 2020 intact. And so, I'm really happy that we made that decision for ourselves.

[00:15:49] **Caterina Rando:** And that's something for everyone to consider because Shannon, I'm recording this in California, where everyone's always talking about funding, right? And you don't necessarily need outside funding. We'll have to save that whole conversation for another day.

[00:16:06] **That is something for women to look at because I do see too many women struggling with their numbers and with debt.** And it's very important to look at that, to look at being a company with no debt. Cause I know in my business when there's no debt, oh my gosh. Life is so much better for sure. Yeah. And I'm sure that is for many women.

[00:16:27] **Shannon Crotty:** Yeah and I know there's a lot of women that need that, but they're at a different industry than we are, and they need that for production costs and things like that. So, there's absolutely no shame in that, but the more that you can get away from that, the more that you can go toward, it's just so much less stress. And none of us need that extra stress on us at any time, but especially right now.

[00:16:47] **Caterina Rando:** Exactly, exactly. Shannon, I cannot not ask you some very important questions about this because one of the things that Polka Dot is, is it's a networking organization. I know that's not how we necessarily describe it. Part of it

though is networking right? To meet some new people, make some new connections. And I consider you to be so masterful in networking. **What are maybe a mistake that you see women make and how we can correct that. And then I'm going to ask you to give a couple of your favorite networking super tips.**

[00:17:23] **Shannon Crotty:** Okay. Well, and it depends on the group you're in, right? Because some groups have different rules, the mistake I see women make when they come into Polka Dot is they went to the school of "always be closing." And they come in and you're like, "Hi." And they're like, "Here's my stuff." And you're like, "I was just trying to meet you. I was trying to get your name."

[00:17:41] You know, **in Polka Dot, we do relationship first and business naturally follows.** I want to do business and refer people to a business that I know, like, and trust. That doesn't happen by you just handing your card. That doesn't happen by you vomiting, all your information on me. That happens by you letting me meet you and know you, get to know you.

[00:18:00] And so there's a little patience that it's applied there. **You're going to see the results, but you're not going to see it at that meeting.** You're not going to see it in that second. You're going to have to develop relationship. And I love clients that are relationship clients, because that's a client you don't have to reinvent. You just have to be yourself and have relationship with them, right? Which is a bonus, right? I get a relationship. I get someone who absolutely is like a walking billboard for me.

[00:18:24] But I can see that sometimes women come in somewhere along the lines, someone has told them, "if you don't get all your information to someone in the first 10 seconds you meet them, you've lost them."

[00:18:33] Someone's taught someone that. I'm like, that may be true for some groups, but that's not this. And people will back away because **you don't join a relationship group to approach people that way.** And it actually makes them scared of you, or it makes them question your integrity. So, I guess at least for polka dot and other relationship- based networking groups... and you know networking is certainly a part of what we do.

[00:18:57] The reason that we don't choose to call ourselves a networking group it's because it's only a fraction of what we do. And there's so many people that have such a bad anger with the word networking. Like they'll just start to back up. That we really connect and build relationship, and then again, the business follows. So that's why we call it that.

[00:19:16] **As far as a few good tips is, number one, listen with the intent to listen, not with the intent to answer.** Right. Which is hard in networking. I'm not saying it's easy, but when you're talking to someone, when you're meeting with someone, listen with the intent to

listen, not what you're going to say next. Practice that, it's a habit that you can build just like everything else.

[00:19:38] Because people can tell, you know, look people in the eye. Don't be, "Oh, what's Sally doing over there and what's going on over there." **Look people in the eye, listen with the intent to listen, not answer, and then make a note about them.** I have a horrible time with names. I will eventually get a name, but I've got to hear it six, seven, eight times. So, I tend to associate someone. Like if I had never met you and I met you in the crowd, I'd be like, "Oh, pretty necklace." And then later I'd be like, "you know, the pretty necklace girl." It's not their name, but I have some reason to remember them, right?

[00:20:11] And also to get curious later and go look them up and see what they do. So if you're just blindly going around, introducing yourself, handing out your card, handing out your brochures and there's no mental anchor to anyone. You kind of wasted your time too, because you're not leaving with any benefit either. You're not leaving, having connected to anybody. And they certainly didn't connect with you because people can feel that energy off of you. And so, you certainly didn't leave with any clients either, did you?

[00:20:37] **Caterina Rando:** That's for sure. I love that. **And that's very prevalent in Polka Dot - build relationships first, build influence first, before you ask someone to buy.** Very, very important. One of the things that I love about Polka Dot, when you walk in the room, it simply feels good and you've done a great job. Shannon, you said at the top of our time together, making everyone feel welcome. Making everyone feel included. That really does come down from your top leadership throughout the chapters. **I've always felt wonderful walking into a Polka Dot chapter, even when I don't know anybody. And that's how every woman should feel when she walks in any room to be with other women in business.**

[00:21:26] **Shannon Crotty:** Yeah.

[00:21:26] **Caterina Rando:** Okay, Shannon, I wish we could talk all day. Here's, what I want to ask you. I know you got a lifetime supply, but **what's one piece of advice that you want to give to our listeners? Because these are all women, just like our polka dots, sisters, women on a mission, having a business. What is some of your best advice for them?**

[00:21:50] **Shannon Crotty:** I want to kind of go back to something we talked about, but it's the biggest thing I think for women is - well, first of all, **if you like to read, read business biographies. It will help you know that you are not broken, and this is not broken. This is just the life cycle of a business.**

[00:22:05] I think we get so mesmerized by social media and the "ahhhhhhh" like the company came out of the womb looking perfect. That may be how it looks on social

media, but once you start reading a few business biographies you know that, oh no, they went through the muck, they had their own struggles, all of those things. **So, business biographies are very, very helpful in helping remind you that, hey, it doesn't look perfect for almost anyone. It's just not being publicized that way.**

[00:22:33] The other thing is, remember that we're all given that vision and hopefully a lot of your viewers are utilizing that, right? We're given that vision that will not let us sleep at night. Like it won't leave us alone. You're like, "okay, enough." And it just still stays there.

[00:22:47] **It's my belief that if you are given that, you are the person to pursue that.** It might turn into something else. It might lead you down a different road. But just because, like I said, **just because you stink at 97% of the parts of making it go, does not mean that you're not the person to lead it.**

[00:23:05] I got really involved early on in asking experts. Because I'll tell you this. When we first started to launch and get big, I was Googling, "what's a founder supposed to say, and what are they supposed to eat? What are they supposed to wear?" Cause I was like, I'm just me. What are they expecting of me? And so I started to list to listen to experts who were telling me what founders are supposed to do, and it started to pull us off mission. Because I didn't want to mess it up. I want to be whatever they need me to be as the founder. What am I supposed to be? They started to pull us off mission, not intentionally, but they started to pull us off mission cause they had a different vision than I did, right?

[00:23:41] And I eventually had to learn that, look, if I was given this vision, then I'm the person that's supposed to lead it. **And yes, I will have to have help. I'll have to get other people on board because again, I stink at 97% of the things. But as the leader, I only need to be me. And that's all I ever need to be.**

[00:24:03] **Caterina Rando:** That is great advice for all of our women on a mission listening. Be yourself, ladies. Beautiful. Shannon, I know some of the ladies that are listening to this have maybe never heard of Polka Dot before. **How do we have them check it out and get involved?**

[00:24:22] **Shannon Crotty:** You can go to the website, which is **www.polkadotpowerhouse.com** or also on Facebook and Instagram and all the lovely places. You can learn more about our community. You can meet our leaders. You can sign up for a free meeting there to attend. And if there's no chapter near you, you can still be a member. We have many members without chapters near them. Or you can join Polka Dot and apply to start a chapter near you. So, lots of opportunities there, again, just polkadotpowerhouse.com.

[00:24:48] **Caterina Rando:** My friends, I want to encourage you to check out Polka Dot Powerhouse. I want to encourage you to become a member. It's a great organization.

You will make friends and have sisters all over the place and you know what? It's good for your business.

[00:25:02] I will tell you, Shannon. We just got into contract with a credit card processor to save us lots of money on our credit card processing from a lovely lady I met at a virtual Polka Dot meeting. I don't even know what state it was. And I'm so happy. **Whatever you need for your business, there are amazing women to support you.**

[00:25:25] Shannon, thank you so much for your time. Thank you so much for bringing your wisdom and your massive value to our listeners.

[00:25:35] Everyone, you have massive value to bring. Go bring it and build your Fempire. We will see you next time on the Expand Your Fempire podcast.

We hope you enjoyed this episode of Expand Your Fempire with Caterina Rando.

THRIVING *Women* IN BUSINESS

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