

Episode 5. How to Make Money Online - From VA to Course Creator with Abbey Ashley

JACLYN: Abbey! I'm so excited you're here today!

ABBEY: Hey! Oh, super pumped for this.

JACLYN: Yay! Okay, so before we get into all the good stuff that you are doing now, I'd love to go back in time when you were growing up or even early on in your career. What were you the Go-to-Gal for back then?

ABBEY: You know, I think I've always been known as kind of the idea person. My dad was a business owner too. Probably mid-life crisis, he quit his job in his forties and opened up a fast-food restaurant. And I even remember as a kid, we would just bounce ideas off of each other. I was his entrepreneur kid and we would just come up with these crazy business ideas. And I feel like my friend, anytime they had an idea, they would kinda run it by me, like is this a good idea? I'm like I don't know, it sounds fun. I don't know how I became that person but I've always been the idea person. That's just been with me always since I was a kid.

JACLYN: Oh and I feel like that's probably helped you into getting you to where you are now. So tell us a little bit about your business now?

ABBEY: Yeah. So I started out as a virtual assistant back in 2013. And that was phenomenal. **I still think the virtual assistance was just the quickest way to make money online. It is just the easiest entry point. It's just an awesome way to kinda get your feet wet in this whole online space.** And during that time I started to build an audience which we can talk the details (of that). But I actually worked for an online course creator who's selling a million dollars in courses and working behind the scenes in his business. I was like I could do this! I could totally do this. And so through some trial and error it wasn't a success on the first run by any means. But I finally did in 2015 and launched an online course to teach people to become virtual assistants. And it totally took off to the point where I kept working for clients for probably another six months after that and then decided to make the switch to you know what, I love this course-creation thing. I love mentoring people. So now that's what I do. I have an online course and I teach people how to become virtual assistants through my online course.

JACLYN: Oh, I love this so much. And I agree with you so much. Being able to just take and say I know how to do this thing and I can do that for other people and charge money for it. And I work from home in my yoga pants and work whenever I want. Being a VA is definitely the best entry point.

ABBEY: **I'm always amazed at how skilled people are without realizing it.** It's like you have things that you can do. You learned them from the job that you have or you learned them in some kind of internship. Or you learned them by just posting on your own social media. People know how to do things. And I'm always just amazed that people don't realize their own skill and that they can actually charge for those things. So it's pretty cool.

JACLYN: **Yes! And not everyone knows how to do what you know how to do. And also when people are growing a business, even if they know how to do it, they may not have time to do it. So it's so needed.** And I love how you have this amazing tribe of talented VAs that are growing businesses now. I know this is something. One, I love hearing your transition. But I know this is something, like someone's listening and they're thinking the same thing. So I wanna ask the question for them. You started as a VA, ran a very successful VA business. Then you made this transition to teaching other people how to do it. Obviously we have limited time here [laughter]. But how did that shift happen? **What were some of the key things that you had to do to make that shift from service provider to teaching other people how to do that service?**

ABBEY: The idea of switching from a service to an online course or even coaching or products or things like that – **service is very one-to-one.** This is why I think it's so awesome to start out with a service based business because to start making money you literally have to convince one person to agree with what you're doing. One person believes in you and then they start paying you money. That's it. But **obviously it takes a lot of time and devotion to that one person. Now with building an online course, let's take that because that's what I did. You really do have to have an audience. It's a mistake honestly that pains me sometimes to see – people will be in the service industry and they'll be like I'm gonna create a course; so they spend three months creating this phenomenal course with so much content and they just pour their entire heart to it. And they're like okay, now how do I sell this thing? Oh, you went about this all wrong because really it's all about building that audience first.** For me, I chose an email list. I feel like that converts really well for me. It's kind of what, from the beginning, people would say oh an email list, an email list. I know some people have done really well just building a really huge Instagram following or whatever. There are other methods for me. From day one, I just started an email list. It might be kind of scary to start an email list. But I wasn't afraid of starting small. I literally asked my mom to be on my email list. One subscriber – done [laughter]!

JACLYN: I'm like mom please don't because I'm gonna be embarrassed about everything that you're gonna read, which of course she still did.

ABBEY: She's my best editor and makes sure that people don't get in my Facebook groups. She's awesome. So I would ask my clients hey, do you wanna join my email list. At that time I was just sharing tips about marketing and business and was really generic, honestly, in how I started the list. I made an opt-in which was this eBook on how to get clients on LinkedIn. It was my first opt-in, so I just started telling people about my opt-in. So I just really started my business slowly in 2013. I didn't launch my course until the end of 2015. It was three whole years and I had just gotten to a thousand email subscribers. And that might seem a lot for somebody, but over three years that's really not that much. I just really slowly built it as I was doing my service business. So it wasn't all of my attention, it was just some of my attention. And then at that point I launched a course. I did what I don't recommend the very first time I launched a course. So I guess it was a few months earlier, it was mid-2015 is when I had all these ideas for a course and I thought this is what people wanna learn. **And so I built up this course and I thought this was going to be amazing. And then I tried to sell it and literally one person bought. I spent two months creating the course and -**

JACLYN: Oh, heartbreaking.

ABBEY: **and I just got \$97 for my two months of hard work. And I made the mistake where I didn't ask my audience what they want.** So I feel like I got the first part right. I had grown an audience but I really think that it comes down to growing an audience, even if it's slowly but surely. **Just grow an audience, ask your audience what they want, and then create that thing.** That's how easy it is to make money online. It really is. And so that is when I finally got the hint after my courses didn't sell. And I was just like okay fine, what do you guys wanna learn? And literally I just hit reply to this email to a thousand people, and I'm getting responses. How did you build the virtual assistance business? I didn't even know those were the people on my list. Honestly, I had no idea.

JACLYN: Right?

ABBEY: But somehow those were the people that ended up on my list. So it's funny because **The Virtual Savvy didn't even start out teaching people about virtual assistance; just hey, what do you guys wanna learn. We wanna learn how to become a virtual assistant. I'm like well, I know how to teach that! So I actually pre-launched the course. I launched the idea for creating it.** I think that's another big tip: **when you're ready and you've had that audience; you've asked them what they want, it's still not time to actually create the thing. In my opinion, come up with an outline of a course.** I did put together like a sales page and then I just

pitched the idea for the course. I had people pay 50% of what it would eventually be once it was finally created. So I pitched the idea for a course and a week later I had \$8,000 in the bank. And I thought okay, I guess this is what people want to learn. **So I validated before I created**, which I think is really important.

JACLYN: It's so important. And I'm so glad you shared this because preach it sister! People need to know this. Stop. It's so easy getting caught up in your own zone when you're in your house and your sitting there and your creating it. It's almost comfortable when you're doing that. It's the selling and the getting out there part that can get uncomfortable. Plus it's the ultimate accountability once you've sold something, you actually have to create it.

ABBEY: I'm the best starter and a terrible finisher. I've taken all of the personality tests, the Myers & Briggs, all of them and they're (saying) like basically you should start things and then hand them off to other people because you don't finish things. That's my personality.

JACLYN: That's my personality too. That's why I have a really awesome team. What is your Myers-Briggs? Do you know off-hand?

ABBEY: I'm an ESFP.

JACLYN: An ESFP.

ABBEY: Yep. Extroverted, sensing, feeling, perceiver. So basically I just wanna have fun all the time [laughter].

JACLYN: Yeah, I'm the same way. I'm the N. I'm the intuitive instead of the sensing. So that explains a lot why we're so similar then. Well, thank you so much for sharing that. I think those are some really tangible (things). Listen to this advice. It doesn't have to be all that more complicated. If you're at that point where you have this service-based business and you are looking to shift, that's the perfect way to get started. So thank you so much for sharing that.

Well I love to really look behind the scenes of businesses especially those that have personal brands like you do. How are you making money? How does this work? So tell us a little bit about what your business model looks like right now.

ABBEY: I have two products. I have two courses. One's an online course, I guess my signature program you would call it. And that's kind of my big ticket item, and I'll just tell you guys: it's \$1,000 course. And then I have a

membership community that is \$47 a month, cancel anytime. So those are my two separate products and honestly we've kind of narrowed that down. A year ago I had more products. And I started looking at these really successful businesses. One day I'm just searching all these amazing people online and I stumbled upon Marie Forleo's website. And I'm like, "This woman sells two things!" That's all she sells. We can really narrow down. If sometimes we just have so many offerings that we can't really concentrate on what our big ticket items are and what's really gonna help people and making sure they're the best programs ever. So I don't really do any one-on-one coaching. Coaching isn't really my thing, which is funny since I'm an extrovert. But I don't do coaching. I don't do live events. I don't do that. I just have my two courses and that's about all I do. And I love it because I can just throw my whole heart into those two things. So my signature course teaches how to become a virtual assistant, and we have a monthly tech membership. So every month we release a new course like ConvertKit, Canva, InfusionSoft, whatever.

JACLYN: Do you find that people join the course than the membership, or are they coming into the membership and then upselling into the course? Or is it both?

ABBEY: **It's a little bit of both. Honestly, my preference is for people to buy the course first and then go into the membership. The way I've laid them out, the course is really foundational. But some people don't. Some people don't need the course; they just need the membership. And so what's great, too, about only having two products is that I basically do only one sales push per quarter. So Q1, I only sell my signature course. Q2, I push my membership site. Then back to the signature course then back to the membership site. So I really only have to sell hard once a quarter, which the rest of the time I'm just giving away new content and just giving to my audience which feels really good for me. And I think that that's a big thing. In your business, there are so many gurus out there telling you that you have to do this and do that. You have to do what feels good for you and for me. I really don't love just selling all the time. And so for me, having just one big time that I sell my course per quarter feels really good. Now I do have an evergreen funnel running in the background as well so that's something else that's making me money in the background. But that's just for people to kind of stumble upon my stuff for the first time that they get introduced to that.**

JACLYN: Alright, good. Thank you for sharing all those moving pieces. You know, people can see from the outside looking in, but you can always jump to conclusions. I love that you shared both the "why" of these are my two main products. I also have this evergreen funnel, making sure people are joining them. I launch once a quarter and this is why. And I think that just

pulls it all together. **And there's no one way to do it.** Hearing how different people do it is why I find it so fascinating.

ABBEY: Yeah, and I'll note this, too: my launches are pretty much the same almost every single time. I literally send the same email.

JACLYN: What? I love it! [laughter]

ABBEY: I feel like oh, if I'm gonna launch twice a year then I'm gonna have to create all these new content. I'm not gonna lie – I literally send the exact same content

JACLYN: And they still eat that.

ABBEY: It's the exact same email! So my launch is done. **I'm launching again in a week, my course again, and I barely had to do anything. We just took all the emails from last time I keep converting.** Because you think oh my gosh people are going to remember... People don't remember what you said six months ago. They really don't.

JACLYN: **And if you know that it's converting, if it ain't broke, right? So you've taken the time to master what is the stuff that's gonna convert, let's not reinvent that wheel.** Well this is why you look so relaxed. You have it all, I love it!

Okay. So mindset is such a big piece of growing as an entrepreneur. And I'd love to know, as you've grown your business from VA to star course creator, now to big tribe of VAs that you're helping, **what are some of the mindset shifts that you've had to make to really step into that role?**

ABBEY: **That I'm a mom. And definitely one of the biggest mindset shift that I've had to overcome and I feel like I'm still working on is definitely mom guilt, which is so dumb.** And it's something that I talk about a lot now. **I started my VA business when I was pregnant with my first kid. I did it because I wanted to be a stay-at-home mom.** I've gotta figure out a way to be at home with my kid and not go back to the job that I hate. That was my driving force. And so over time it got more successful and I started finding fulfillment in something other than my kid. Of course I started to feel guilty about that. Like gosh, I love my kid so much but there's also this other part of me and this creative person – this idea person that I've always been that still has to be fostered. And so we've done the full transition from being a full-time stay-at-home mom; and then someone would come and help us one day a week; and then someone would help us three days a week. And then my kids went to an in-home day care five days. And I was like omigosh, what am I gonna

do? And over time it just, from 2013, we've been slowly making that transition. And now my kids do go to daycare full time and I love it, and they love it. And when I need a break, I go and pick them up. Like today my daughter has a cough, and I told the teacher if she keeps coughing and she just isn't happy, I'll just come get her. I can do that. And that's a really big deal to me. So again, **you have to find what's right for you. But mindset part of it has just always been this reassuring that I am a better mom when I'm happy. When I'm happy, my kids are happy. Our motherly instincts are going to take care of our kids. We're going to love them. But our motherly instincts don't always do that for ourselves.** We don't always take care of ourselves and make sure that we're happy too. So I feel like if I focus on me being happy then we both end up happy because I'm naturally gonna make my kids happy because I love them so freaking much.

JACLYN: Yes! Oh, so good. And I think this is something that a lot of working moms in general struggle with. Whether you have a business or not, there's mom guilt. I don't think there's dad guilt, right? What's up with this? We never hear about dad guilt. My husband has zero guilt about anything [laughter]. Why is it?

ABBEY: **[00:20:18 – Inaudible]** which was a big, big win this past year. So he actually just volunteers pretty much the whole time. But it's so funny because I don't like my kids to be the last kids at day care. Omigosh that's the worst, I can't do that! And so sometimes it'll be like you gotta go get them. And he's like they're still good for another two hours. I'm like no, you gotta go get them now! It's just so funny because he's just like okay.

JACLYN: They're having fun with their friends. What's the big deal here? Oh, totally. No, I could see that, though. Just letting go of that guilt and totally be able to say that what's best for them is that I'm able to focus on this thing that lights me up and makes a big impact and it really provides for our family in such a big way. And I could see that they'll be happy and learn and play with their friends. It is such a positive thing all around. But sometimes we have those stories in our heads of how it's supposed to be and that can hold us back. If you didn't have child care, you wouldn't have not been able to figure out all of this. You're husband wouldn't be able to volunteer full time and all of these things.

ABBEY: Yeah. I will say the business really took off when I started getting more childcare. We can say that the two are correlated, but they probably are.

JACLYN: I can see that. So here at Go-to-Gal we are all about relationships and relationship-building. I'd love if you could share any of these stuff that's

invisible from the outside world. People don't necessarily see the things that go on behind the scenes. Had there been any key relationships, whether it was a formal mentorship or even just like a friend that introduced you to someone who gave you a good opportunity. Anything behind the scenes like that with relationships that made a big impact in you and your business to help get to where you are right now?

ABBEY:

Yes, totally. **I feel like it's always important to be influenced and mentored by someone. And you'll go through different seasons; that person is not gonna be the same person all the time as you develop and as your business grows. And so the three tiers of relationships. You should have somebody pouring into you; you should have kind of friendships with people at the same level as you; and you should be pouring into other people. And so that's what I've tried to model** So as far as finding those mentors, sometimes it's like oh, that's kinda tough. What's that gonna look like? Because it's not always easy to be like hey, your business is ten times bigger me; do you wanna be my friend and pour into me for free? That just doesn't always happen. And so for me, it started out, my first mentor was really the person that I was working for – it was Bryan Harris and I worked for him and I got to see so much behind the scenes of this business, and it was amazing. So that was not a formal coaching relationship. He was just a person that was there and I could ask business questions to. So that one happened really naturally. The next one was somebody that I hired. I hired Dana Malstaff, Boss Mom, to be my coach. She was a huge help in getting my business to continue growing after I launched the course. Bryan mentored me as a grew my email list and kinda got the idea for the first course and then I went through a phase where Dana really got me focused. Narrowing in and really making sure that my launches were good and that I had one awesome course. Now I'm in a group coaching program with Mariah [00:24:27]. And so again that was another paid relationship, which now even the people that I paid to work with – now they're friends. **So now I can still go back and ask Dana or Bryan and say oh this exciting thing happened, or hey what do you think about this? Because those did turn into actual friendships which is awesome. But for me I invested in paid coaching. And for some people maybe you can't make that huge investment in paid coaching. But a lot of these people do have courses. So maybe you can't get that one-on-one mentorship through their high-tier coaching program; but if there's somebody that you really respect and they have an online course you can take, then I recommend at least starting there. So having some kind of strategy downloaded into. Because I promise you, reading all the free stuff on the internet is not gonna get you where you need to go.**

JACLYN:

That's the nugget right there.

ABBEY: There's just so much. You just run around in circles. I know it because I've done it. And I think having somebody pour strategy into, whether it's through coaching or through a course. And then there are those intermediate relationships. Those are my friends like Jaclyn where we can just hang out and chat and we can share about life and business and frustrations. And then obviously I love to spend time with people that I'm mentoring to which for me those are the people in my course. I just went to Boston this past weekend, and rather than doing paid events, I love that anytime I go to a new city I just do a meet up. So I say hey, if there's anyone who's in my community, paid or free, and you wanna meet up; let's all have dinner, appetizers, or whatever together. And so we just sit around for just two hours and we just chat and we talk. So I think that having those three different tiers of relationships is really important

JACLYN: So powerful. And I love how you shared the ins and outs there. I think there's something, especially the service providers, I want to pay special attention to is **how you were mentored by the person you were working for**. And a lot of times people don't see that it's right around them. And maybe you're working on someone's team who could really be an incredible mentor for you. And not that you're gonna expect free coaching from that person, but it's okay to build that relationship and get some guidance there, that those opportunities do exist when you have a close relationship like that.

ABBEY: Yeah. And unless you are a full time employee for somebody like that, that's a little bit different. But most of the people that I ever worked with – they knew that I was trying to grow my own thing. I've been growing an email list since day one. So it wasn't like a secret. And I think that that's important. I'm still gonna serve you 100%. I'm still here. But hey, can I ask you a quick question about... this opt in, or this little challenge that I'm gonna be doing – what are your thoughts behind this. You'll be surprised. People will give you, even if it's just five minutes of their day. People will do that if you just ask.

JACLYN: Totally. Alright, so if anyone is listening who is thinking about becoming a VA and getting into that space, what are a couple quick tips that they can take action on now?

ABBEY: In the virtual assistance space? The biggest things are really this: **you probably have services that you already know how to offer. And so the big thing is define what you can do. It can be as simple as I can do data entry and answer customer servicing calls. If that's it, that's okay.** That can be your thing and that can be what you market. And maybe you have a bigger list of what you can do, that's awesome. You have web

design skills or graphic design skills, even better. So make a list of all the things that you can do. **Then you need to decide on an hourly rate, which I recommend starting out on an hourly rate.** You can move in on maybe big packages later, but it's nice just to start with an hourly rate as you're learning how fast you do things. You don't know what you don't know, right? So if you have an hourly rate, just keep tracking your time. That really helps you to really know what to charge people. And in the US, people usually start between \$20 to \$30 an hour, which I think is great. Obviously it goes up if you have some higher level web design skills or Facebook ads or something. So start with just an hourly rate. **And then beyond that, it's getting clients.** It sounds so simple but the rest of it... **I recommend to people: don't spend time building a website; don't spend all this time doing all the back end stuff. Because even your contracts and your processes and all of that – if you just go out and start marketing, you start telling people about your business and then someone wants to hire you, that's gonna light a fire under your butt.** And you're like oh crap, now I gotta put all this stuff together. So I recommend **decide on your services, decide on your hourly rate, and then just start telling people.** Tell your friends and family. You probably know one business owner and since you know one small business owner, everyone you know knows one small business owner. So even if people – your aunts, your cousins, your neighbors – they're not small business owners; still tell them what you're doing because when they encounter people that need your services, you're gonna be the person that comes to mind. So just start telling people.

JACLYN: So good. So actionable. **So many parallels, notice, between that and launching a course.** This doesn't have to be a whole thing. People are worried about their process or onboarding before they even have clients. But no, no, no, that's not how this works. Go out there and get the clients. Then you're gonna figure out how to do all that stuff. So good.

ABBEY: **It's gonna be uncomfortable. But go get ready.** That's kind of my motto.

JACLYN: Yes! Love it, love it. Alright. Where can we keep in touch with you? Where can we follow you? And where can we get your checklist?

ABBEY: Definitely you can hang out with me on Facebook, on The Virtual Savvy. We also have our VA Savvies Community. We're about to hit 30,000 members in that group, so you can come hang out with us. A bunch of virtual assistants all doing this alongside you. Peer relationships we were talking about. And also on Instagram, @thevirtualsavvy. You can also go to thevirtualsavvy.com/checklist to download my free checklist and starter kit for virtual assistants.

JACLYN: And that's like what they really need to get started.

ABBEY: It's the step-by-step. If you are the process or checklist person, it's legit everything. It's awesome.

JACLYN: And it's free. Omigosh. So good. Alright. Thank you so much. So much gold here today. I appreciate you joining us

ABBEY: Yeah, thank you so much, ma'am!