

**Ep. 103: This 8-Figure Agency Does Zero Promotion and Ads?!
With Shannon Simpson Jones and Yadira Harrison of Verb**



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Rachel Rodgers

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Rachel: Especially for us who have been sidelined or marginalized in different, first of all, in all aspects of our life in a variety of ways. We just somehow internalize that we don't deserve more, right? And so we accept less. And like less is acceptable all the time and we lower our standards. So I think it's very important for people like us to have those experiences to be like, oh, okay, I can live like this. I deserve this.

Shannon: Yes.

Yadira: Yes, we appreciate that.

Rachel: Yes.

You want to make more money? You are in the right place. Welcome to the *Hello Seven Podcast*, that's seven as in seven figures. I'm your host, Rachel Rodgers. On this show, it's all about you and your money. We talk about how to maximize your earning potential, how to make better financial decisions, and how to find your million-dollar idea, that genius business idea that's going to make you a whole lot more money. I'm here to show you how to expand your income and expand your confidence, power, and joy.

If you are a woman, a person of color, a queer person, if you're a person living with a disability, or you don't fit the stereotypical image of what a millionaire is "supposed" to look like, this show is for you. No matter who you are or what you do for a living, you could be earning a lot more than you currently do. Your journey to wealth starts right here.

Rachel: Welcome back to the Hello Seven podcast. I am so delighted to be here with my friends and clients, and I'm clients of theirs. So y'all are in for

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a treat, because you're getting introduced to this very exclusive duo, okay? They run an amazing experience marketing agency called Verb. And we'll talk a little bit more about that. So I'm sitting here with Shannon Simpson Jones and Yadira Harrison. Welcome!

Yadira: Yay!

Shannon: Thank you.

Rachel: I'm so glad you're here.

Shannon: Yes, thanks for having us.

Rachel: Okay, so tell us why did you decide to name your company Verb?

Shannon: Oh, that's a fun one. I actually started an Evernote with a bunch of names for Yadira to review. We make shit happen, and so that felt like it captured the ethos of what we do. And we didn't want to use an expletive in our name.

Rachel: Yes.

Shannon: So we called it Verb.

Rachel: Yes, it's smart for ad platforms, not that y'all use that.

Shannon: We don't.

Rachel: Which we'll talk about. But I love the name, Verb. I like action words. That's why our challenge is called Make Money Moves because it was going to be something around making money. I'm like, no, no, no, no, before you make the money, you got to make the money moves, okay? So

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let's be very clear that the action is required. That's what comes first, then you get the result.

So tell us like what caused you to start Verb? Where were you at? And why did you say, "You know what? We're going to go out on our own and start our own thing."

Yadira: We worked at a previous agency together. We started off, Shannon one day just popped up at the end of two desks down and I was like, "Well, who is that?" And we just over time built a really great foundation and worked together all the time. And around 2017 we both were going through at the same agency, now at this point we were on two different accounts. We were both going through like, crazy back and forth with our bosses at the time.

Rachel: Yes.

Yadira: Some stuff was about salary. Some stuff was about positioning. They had brought somebody in, a white man over me when I had just led this like massive business and proprietary thing for Airbnb. And it was just like, wait, what is going on here?

And so people had asked us over time like when y'all going to start your own thing? When you going to start your own thing? We were like, we're riding this. Like we're doing really well, we're winning awards, everything's going well. And then when stuff like that starts to happen and you start to get pushback on your value and who you are, it makes you rethink things.

Rachel: Yes.

Yadira: So it made us think, what can we do? And what can we go out there and do for ourselves? And we were like, let's go out there and do it

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for ourselves. Because we're doing it for somebody else, they're winning, we're helping them win, we can go win for ourselves. And that's exactly what we went to do.

Rachel: Yes. And how long was it from the moment that you had the idea or had the initial discussion where y'all were like, we could do our own thing? How long was it from that thought or that initial seed of an idea to actually Verb taking action?

Shannon: Officially, or unofficially?

Rachel: Let's hear officially and unofficially.

Shannon: Officially, we didn't know what we wanted to do after we left the agency and were going to take time to figure it out.

Rachel: That's what the exit conversation was.

Shannon: Yeah. Unofficially I think that we said 100 days.

Yadira: 100 days.

Rachel: Wow. So y'all thought about it and were like, "Okay, let's do this." And you said 100 days to go make it happen.

Yadira: On our 100th day, which was a week into Verb existing, we had our third client.

Rachel: Wow, I'm obsessed.

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Shannon: Yeah, and so we didn't know exactly what it was going to look like. And when we started Verb, we gave ourselves three months to figure it out. And that's what our bank accounts could afford, three months runway.

And within the first few days just from sending those goodbye notes, when you say, "Oh, I'm leaving, keep in touch." That's when we had clients say, "Wait, where are you going? What are you doing?" And got referrals, and so that's how things took off right away. But 100 days, you know, when people talk about take the leap, make the jump, it's like stack your coins.

Rachel: Yes.

Shannon: Give yourself some runway so that you have options. So I think that that was part of it, of being really intentional about saving and just some soul searching a little bit too. Because I had been a freelancer, I had been a consultant. Yadira had never done that before. So I had to sit down with her one day and say there's not a check coming on the first and the 15th.

Rachel: We got to go get that check.

Shannon: Yes, and especially when it's a nice check. When you're making multi six-figures, that's a big leap to take to know that you do not have that guaranteed income coming on the first and 15th. And so we had that heart to heart.

Rachel: Yes.

Yadira: It took a lot. It took a lot of soul searching. Finally I got there, I was with watching Oprah's masterclass.

Rachel: Oprah will do it to you.

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Yadira: Every time.

Rachel: She'll get you.

Yadira: And it was like one o'clock in the morning and I'm sitting there and I was already like, "I don't know." And she talked about betting on herself and she had had so much success and made so much money for everybody else, why wouldn't I do this for myself? Why don't I think I could win for myself? And I texted her that night at like one, two in the morning and was just like, "Let's go. I'm ready to go."

Y'all, Black Friday is coming and I know you want to make some extra money before the year ends. I'm going to tell you exactly how to do it inside The Club I am teaching my Black Friday course, a special training just for you including a group coaching call. So you need to get in The Club. Do it right now so that you are ready to get this money on Black Friday. Go to helloseven.co/club to get all the details and join us.

Rachel: Awesome. And I think 100 days is fast.

Shannon: Yeah.

Rachel: Like I think most people have an idea, have a million dollar idea. But then they think about it literally for years, sometimes decades and sometimes they never ever take action on it. So I love that you were action oriented and said like, hey, we're talking about if this is what we're thinking, we're not satisfied where we're at anymore, let's just go. Let's just set a timeline and do it. I love that.

Shannon: Yeah. And just also being mindful too. Like you're on somebody else's time, you're somebody else's clock. So we tried to be really mindful of that as well, of like not doing anything during the workday, use a

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separate computer. Just like really being respectful of where we were, but also having our sights set of like 100 days, we know this is what needs to happen.

Especially because, like she said, she had been really sidelined at one point. And then also I was going through contract negotiations and I just knew I was getting a big raise. And my whole goal was I wanted to be an accredited investor. You had to be making at least 250. And so that was my goal. Like okay, I have to make 250. And you had to make it for at least two years.

And so we went through my contract negotiations. And then after we had signed this seven figure retainer, I had done the renewals, then they said no, we didn't say we would, we say we would try to get you there. Try? So I just filed it away. I mean, it was still months and months before I left, but you just file that away.

Rachel: But those are the dings that put a dent in the relationship. And if there was not a super strong foundation, and if you didn't feel respected in every other way, like if you did, then you could probably get through that. But if there were other dings, it starts to be like, okay, you know what? I'm not valued here.

Shannon Yeah, for sure.

Rachel: And then it's like, okay, well—

Yadira: And it's like I got to go. I got to go do what's best for me, because you're doing what's best for you, so that works both ways.

Rachel: Exactly. Exactly. And I think too, sometimes companies are so short-sighted, and I think about this as a business owner as well. Like,

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when you've got A players on your team, you've got to really think that through, right? It can be a mistake sometimes. And sometimes it's like literally you're like, I know – We're talking about 100 million dollar, billion dollar companies sometimes. This is not that. We're doing well but we ain't there yet, right? Stick with me and let us get there.

But also making sure that your people feel respected and taken care of. And I think when we come from places where we were not respected, it's such a blessing to be able to be like, oh, I get to create a workplace that has the things that I wish that I had when I was working or when I was interviewing for different roles.

Shannon: Absolutely. That's how we are now. And there's so many things that we implement. We talk all the time about how culture is so important to us and our community.

Rachel: Yes, y'all truly live like it's all about culture. Like I feel like every conversation I have with y'all the word culture comes up.

Yadira: Yes.

Shannon: Yeah, it's so important. We say all the time like, we want to do dope shit with our friends.

Rachel: Yes.

Shannon: We wanted to create the company that we always wanted to work for. And honestly, sometimes we almost feel like we're overcompensating for the bullshit that we went through sometimes of like trying to make is so great, and so PC, and so woo woo for our team because we went through BS in the past. And now I think we're finding that balance between the two.

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Rachel: Yes, finding that balance is important. I agree, because you can also get taken advantage of as an employer.

Shannon: Yeah.

Rachel: And you don't realize it, right? Because if you're an employer, people see you as a person in, you're in the position of power. Therefore you have all the power and you're wielding all of the power.

Shannon: Yeah.

Yadira: Yes.

Rachel: And that's not always the case, right? Obviously, you depend on people. And sometimes our past experiences, like you said, we're overcompensating for what we've experienced. And then we're like, "Oh, I've created a monster. I've spoiled everybody and now the expectations are beyond what I can meet." So yeah, there's definitely a fine line to walk there.

Yadira: There is, and you definitely have to find the balance. And I think, for us, we are always challenging ourselves of like, hey, how much of this can – Now we don't have to be as transparent or as radical, because now we're starting to understand why our past bosses made some of the decisions that they made, why agencies are modeled the way that they're model.

So even though we're testing and learning along the way and trying things out based on like how we set up our project teams, what's the culture? How much collaboration and consensus? And it's just like at some point you start to understand why certain things happen the way that they do.

Rachel: Yes.

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Yadira: But it's like, okay, what's toxic about how they happened? And how do we take some of that toxicity out of it and do this in a much better way and give that freedom to like all of our folks while also building really great culture? So I think that's the, right now, over this last year we've been really going back and forth with that and trying to find that balance.

Rachel: It's so true because there are certain things about the corporate structure of building a business that are tried and true for a reason. Because in some ways they really work, like in terms of making sure —

I remember when my business started getting bigger and I had a bigger team. I'd like make a decision on something and then I'd realize, somebody would be like, "Oh, what are we doing?" And I'm like, "Oh, I didn't tell you? I told like six different people but I forgot you somehow, because our communication system is not operating the way it needs to."

So there's certain things that you need. And then there's other things that you're like, "Hmm, do we want that? Is that helping us?"

Yadira: Every week.

Rachel: Exactly. All right, let's evaluate this policy.

Yadira: Yes, every Monday and Friday.

Rachel: Exactly. So y'all had a six figure week your first week, is that right?

Shannon: Yes.

Yadira: Yes.

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Rachel: And that was just based on – Why do you think that that happened? Because I think that everybody starting a business would love to have it be a six figure business within a week. So what do you think was the prelude to that?

Yadira: That was really between relationships and reputation.

Rachel: Yes.

Yadira: So sending out those goodbye notes you have folks who worked with you, that you came up with that are now in positions of decision making, power, budgets, things of that sort.

Rachel: Yes.

Yadira: So even before we started in those 100 days we were like, “Let's make a list of everybody that we know that controls a budget and that can say yes to us.”

Rachel: Yes.

Yadira: And that's really like on the first day how we had Amazon and Nielsen off the bat.

Rachel: Yes.

Yadira: That was just based off of relationship. And then the reputation was –

Shannon: Referral.

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Yadira: Yeah, referral. We had built out this proprietary platform from Airbnb. The person who was leading the charge over there told one CMO someplace else like, “Oh, you want to build something? You want to do something? You need to talk to them.”

Rachel: Yes.

Yadira: And so that's literally how that happened. And it just like, overnight. And it was really all about those relationships and the reputation that we had built of saying, hey, we want to work with people, we want to collaborate, we want to do this in a manner that makes sense for you and for us, and this is what we're building, our agency. And so folks just went with it. And that's why we've been by referral ever since, because that has just worked the best for us.

Rachel: Yes. And it's funny because that's exactly the advice that I give new entrepreneurs. I'm like, announce your business, right? Let people know. And I tell them, make a list of like everybody that you know, right? So the people that you know, know somebody, right? And so even your neighbor might have, maybe their cousin or their son works at this company and can bring you in, right?

And so you make that announcement to those people who already know, like, and trust you, that you already have a relationship and a reputation with, and you just announce it and say, “Hey, do you want to work with me? Here's what I can do. Or can you refer me?” And that's how you get, that's how I got my first three clients, right?

Like my first clients I had on the day, I started my business September 1, 2010 and on that date I had three clients. And my last day at work was August 31st because I had been lining it up, same as you, right? And then I

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just had that list and I had already reached out to my network. And so I started with those clients.

So you can do it in a really strategic way and it doesn't need to take forever. But I think sometimes people are just so shy about saying, "Hey, I'm going out on my own, I'm doing my thing."

Shannon: Yes.

Yadira: Yeah.

Rachel: Like they have impostor syndrome or think like, "Oh, who am I to do my own thing?" What would you say to that?

Shannon: Based on what? Honestly, I think that sometimes when people have impostor syndrome, it's like to each his own. Like everyone's feeling are valid, but it's just like is that true? Is that factual?

Rachel: Yes.

Shannon: You know, and just really questioning that, because what is that based on? Everyone is doing things for the first time the first time they do it, you know? Even that CEO had to start somewhere, they didn't walk in as CEO. They had to figure it out.

Rachel: Exactly.

Shannon: So I don't think that we've really carried that with us in any spaces because we're confident about what we do. But if we don't know, we'll go look it up.

Rachel: Right.

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Shannon: We'll go read about it. We'll go learn about it. We'll go ask someone, ask the questions and get smart on it. So sometimes when you have impostor syndrome, maybe you're thinking that the people in the room like have this special thing or they have this information or access. And it's like everybody's figuring it out. And once you get in those rooms you realize, "Oh, y'all really don't know what you're doing."

Rachel: Exactly.

Yadira: Either you don't know what you're doing or there is a secret sauce and you're at the table for a reason.

Rachel: Yes.

Shannon: That too.

Yadira: So it works both ways. And coming into this, like I had to rebuild some of my secret sauce. And I came into this with impostor syndrome.

Rachel: Yes.

Yadira: When you are sidelined and some of those things happen, it took a lot. It took a year for me to get back. I went from like top of the world in 2016 to like 2017 was like my worst professional year yet, and just feeling very much undervalued and stepped over.

Rachel: Yes.

Yadira: And it was just like I had to rebuild that little by little. And with each yes, with each check, with each press, like it just comes back. And then you start to realize that not only do I belong here, but we all belong here.

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Rachel: Yes.

Yadira: We all have something to give and so you have to figure out what your secret sauce is and why you're sitting at the table with everybody else.

Rachel: Yeah, and then own that sauce.

Yadira: And own it.

Rachel: Don't be shy about that sauce.

Yadira: Yeah, that's right. That's right, and tell everybody, tell the world.

Rachel: Yes, y'all need to know about this sauce up in here.

Shannon: We don't really say much, but yes.

Yadira: I mean, you know.

Rachel: So tell us what does an experience agency do? Like what is that? Explain that to us layman.

Shannon: Sure.

Rachel: And women and non-binary folks.

Yadira: Yes.

Shannon: So I think the biggest misconception about brand experiences is that it's just limited to events.

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Rachel: Yes.

Shannon: I think that's where it starts and I think that, you know, even the experiential space, people sometimes think that it's just about events. Events are one big part of it, for sure. Whether it's festivals, or a summit, a conference, all those types of things. Some of it may be a brand experience within a larger context.

So if we have a brand and we're creating an event for them within Sundance, or within Coachella, or within South By, so those are all brand experiences where it might be like a pop up space, like the space you spoke at South By. Or dinner parties and, you know, those cultural tent pole moments.

But for us, it doesn't have to be limited to an event. I think one really great example of a brand experience that we work on with Airbnb is they're only on Airbnb platform. And so if you've seen the Fresh Prince house, Sex in the City, or the Home Alone house where we take these really iconic homes and turn them into Airbnb listings for a night.

Rachel: Yes.

Shannon: That's a way to experience a brand unlike anything people have done before, and it's not an event.

Rachel: That's so dope.

Shannon: But they're getting thousands of press hits globally based on this experience that we've built.

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Rachel: I love that. Listen, we need to create a Hello Seven house, let's work on that. Because I'm like, yes, come live like a millionaire for a night, right?

Shannon: Yes.

Yadira: Yeah.

Shannon: Yes, I love it.

Rachel: Experience it for yourself. Like feel it tangibly. Because that's why I do retreats, is to put people in different environments so that they can experience something different and be like you deserve this level of experience.

Shannon: Yes.

Rachel: Especially for us who have been sidelined or marginalized in different, first of all, in all aspects of our life in a variety of ways, we just somehow internalize that we don't deserve more, right? And so we accept less and less is acceptable all the time and we lower our standards. So I just think it's very important for people like us to have those experiences, to be like, "Oh, okay, I can live like this. I deserve this."

Shannon: Yes.

Yadira: Yes, we appreciate that.

Rachel: Yes. I love it, I love it. Okay, so one of the projects that we're working on together is our event, ROI. So I'm super excited because this is our first time doing a really big conference at Hello Seven. And my biggest event that I've ever held, I think, was 150 people. And this event, we

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opened the tickets and sold almost 300 tickets like in a week. It's just bananas. I'm like, "Okay, y'all want this. That's good to know."

But I find it very intimidating. Like if you want to do a big event like that, I just wanted to partner with somebody because I just didn't know what I didn't know, right? So tell us a little bit about just your process for how you work with people and what that looks like.

Shannon: I think one thing that's so exciting for us is building proprietary platforms with brands and CEOs that have this vision. And they say, "Oh, I've always wanted to do X." Or "Wouldn't it be great for my community if we did this thing?" And then we can just kind of take that and run with it.

And so we have a whole lengthy process that we go through about really getting specific about who it's for and having that archetype in mind. We work with brands sometimes, and she knows this, when we're in a meeting and they say, "Our target demo is 18 to 49, men and women." It's like, oh my gosh.

Yadira: Stop, tap out.

Shannon: That's not a target.

Yadira: That's not a thing.

Rachel: Yes. That's not a target, that's just everybody.

Shannon: That's just everybody.

Rachel: That's everybody that age, stop it.

Yadira: Right, which means this is for nobody.

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Rachel: Exactly, exactly.

Shannon: But when we build an experience, it's about that intentionality and that through line and every single touch point. And so when we go through, there's this process we used to do back in the day with Airbnb, and one of their core values was every frame matters. And it was inspired by animators, how every single frame of the animation had to be drawn out. And so we've adopted that for experience designs.

Rachel: I love that.

Shannon: So from the first email they get, from the minute they walk through the door, what do they see, hear, smell? And then over the last, I don't know, two years I would say, we've really refined our creative lens in talking about seen, valued, and connected.

Yadira: Yeah, and for us that was such a big thing because we were trying to figure out like, yes, you can go big, you can do this. And bigger doesn't always mean better.

Rachel: Yes.

Yadira: But it's like, what does that mean for us? When we want to experience an experience or when we are putting one on, what is it that we want people to feel? And it's like, we want them to feel seen, we want them to feel like they are valued, and we want them to connect with each other, with their community, with the brand.

Rachel: Yes.

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Yadira: And all of that has to go into every single piece, every frame, as we talked about. Like that's really where we really hone in and everything that we do has to ladder back up to that.

Rachel: Yes, I love that. And those core values, obviously, so align with Hello Seven's values as well. And I think that's important when you're working with partners, to make sure that you're partnering with people who get you, where you have the same goals, right, and you have the same values.

Because I've definitely worked with event planners, so not experience designers, they call themselves event planners, that I'm almost always dissatisfied. It's almost always, like as a general rule it's a disaster. And so I tend to go back to planning my own events because I'm just like, forget it, right? Because it's like they're not thinking about all of those details. And so everything, it's just always janky. And I'm like, no, we're growing up, no more jankiness.

Yadira: Yes.

Shannon: Right, you want someone that's going to be a steward of the brand.

Rachel: Yes.

Shannon: It's not one size fits all. When you look at the experiences that we've done for different brands, some are more corporate, some are a little more laid back, some want to be a little more edgy. And so really finding what aligns best with their values, and their brand, and their audience. And I think that's what's most important.

Rachel: Yes.

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Shannon: And that intentionality is there, no matter who the experience is for. And I think that that was one thing that served us well in the pandemic, was because we weren't limited to events, we were able to do a lot more during that time. And Yadira and I, when we started Verb we talked about this notion of using all the tools in our toolbox.

Rachel: Yes.

Shannon: And we felt almost pigeonholed by our success at our last agency when we had built this beautiful, amazing, proprietary event and they were like, "Okay, do it more." I mean, there's still winning business to this day off of that event. So that's great, but we want to do something else.

And so that's what I was really excited about for Verb, that we were able to build more and have an integrated relationship where we could understand our client's brand, we could understand their mission, understand their community. And sometimes with agencies now, especially when it's more project based, you can be very siloed and it can be a very short-term project. Even if we have repeat business, sometimes it's in these stents.

But it's great when you can have more of a long-term relationship and really understand the brand, what makes them tick. You know, even what the stakeholders love. Like if they just want to meet Drake, okay, then we'll do it so they can meet Drake.

Yadira: We need to know that so we can ensure that you meet Drake with us. But those are the things that people don't want to tell you.

Rachel: Yes, what actually matters to you.

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Yadira: And it's like we have to read between the lines. What actually matters to you and all the various stakeholders, you know, because it's all different.

Rachel: Yes. And I think that intention with your end user is so important in every aspect of business. Like making the client the star, right? And making the ideal client that filter for every decision that you make so that you're like, well, does – Our ideal client, we call her New To Business Nicole, right? And so we're like helping her go from zero all the way to eight figures, right?

And so is this valuable to New To Businesses Nicole? Does New To Business Nicole want to come to this? We have to ask that question so that we can think about like, are we just creating things for the sake of it? Or are we doing things that actually New To Business Nicole will be hype about?

Shannon: Every business owner can apply that same methodology.

Rachel: Yes, exactly, exactly. So y'all have a very exclusive brand. So tell us a little bit about that because I think most people, this is hilarious, y'all. I can't wait. Most people want to promote their thing, right? So they're like, how can I get – And so like certain businesses at certain stages, they can't help but just be like, “Hey, so do you want to buy my stuff?” Right? Like they're almost in that promotional phase.

I feel like it's like when they're in that low six figures trying to get to their first seven. Maybe they're not even at half a million yet and they're in that just everything is a promo. You can't talk to them without them promoting their business. It's like, “Listen, I just want to be your friend, stop trying to sell me your stuff, okay? I'm not going to buy it, but I do like you. I'll tell a friend about you though, give me your card.”

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But y'all are the opposite. Y'all don't promote. And in fact, y'all don't allow people to become clients, which is so funny to me. So you know how some businesses, they'll have a barrier up. Like for us, if you want to join our mastermind you have to fill out an application, then you have to get on the phone with a salesperson, right? There's some filters.

And there are people who want to give us money and we were like, "No, no, no, you keep your money. We don't want your money. It's not a good fit and you're not going to drive me nuts." Right? We have some hoops that we require people to jump through. I think it's good for us to have standards in our business, boundaries in our business.

Y'all take it to a whole nother, y'all are like Beyonce level standards and boundaries. So tell us about that choice to be like referral only. If you go to their website right now, I mean, it will change and who knows to when you're listening to this. It may change, I don't know if it will. I was trying to convince them. But their website will literally, what is it?

Shannon: By referral only.

Yadira: By referral only.

Rachel: Yeah, it says what you do, by referral only. I don't even think, is there even an email or contact info?

Shannon: No.

Yadira: No.

Rachel: No, right. It's just like verb.com, that's it.

Shannon: Yeah.

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Yadira: Yeah, it's like all the various verbs and at the end it just says by referral only.

Shannon: But she did add a LinkedIn button.

Yadira: I did. I did.

Rachel: She added a LinkedIn button, so now y'all could check her out on LinkedIn and that's about it.

Shannon: If someone, okay, I will say this, one of our core values is resourcefulness.

Rachel: Yes.

Shannon: If someone is resourceful, they just click the LinkedIn button, you can find us.

Rachel: Yes. So just to be clear, when I wanted to hire them the LinkedIn button wasn't there.

Shannon: No.

Rachel: So I was like, listen, I went to this event, I spoke at the event. So I loved the way I was handled as a speaker, I sat next to y'all. Or I sat next to you definitely, I don't know if I sat next to both of you at the speaker's dinner. I loved the speaker's dinner. I was like chatting with all these people, it was so fun, I loved everybody that I was meeting, I just had a great experience at that event and I thought it was managed very well.

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And so I was like, when I was thinking about doing this big event, I was like, where are they? And so I didn't, y'all were Club members at the time and I did not know that, which is wild.

Shannon: We had just signed up.

Yadira: Yeah, we had just signed up.

Rachel: Yes, you had just signed up for the Club. So you were literally in my customer list but I didn't know, right? And so I'm like, "How can I find them?" So I went to the website, nothing, by referral only. I'm like, well, you know I don't take no for an answer. So I was like, let me go find that email from literally three or four years ago where I got emails from y'all because I was a speaker telling me where to be and what time to be there and blah, blah, blah.

I was like, let me go find it. I found somebody on your team's email and I was like, "I don't even know if this email works, but let me just try it." And I emailed her, got a response, and I was like, "Yay!" And then I found out from another team member that y'all were in the Club, and I was like, "What?"

Yadira: Yes. Yes, that all happened over like a 48 hour period.

Rachel: Oh my God, y'all were thinking of me at the same time I was thinking of y'all. Oh my God, it's magic. I love it.

Shannon: I think one really practical thing about being by referral, we're Black women, that's obvious. I think that it's very easy to get put in a box as a Black woman. Like, oh, is this a multi-cultural agency? Oh, are you this? Oh, are you that? And you get sidelined. Or the rates people want to pay you might be different.

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Rachel: Oh, they always think the rate is lower. No, you're going to add tax because I'm Black. It's a Black tax, add it. That's for you to pay, not me.

Shannon: Right. And this is the thing, if this CMO is referring us to that CMO, there is an inherent level of trust, there's not a prove it.

Rachel: Yes.

Shannon: And I think that what we were so put off by is the prove it of us going out on our own. How are we managing a multi-seven figure retainer for other people and then we got to go out on our own and have to justify it?

Rachel: Yes.

Shannon: So at first, we kind of felt like the only thing that's changed is the letterhead. We've been doing this for 15, 20 years, it's still us. You still have all of our accolades, all of our experience, why do we have to justify that? So in the beginning it was almost defiant of like we know what we do, we know we're the shit, we don't have to prove it. And we have receipts, so if you know, you know.

Rachel: Yes.

Shannon: And so we are getting these very high level referrals, that worked for us and it kept us busy. And so now I think that there is a little bit of intrigue, and I think it is aligned with our brand. Like we are still very if you know, you know. And we deliver.

And that's why we get the referrals, because people are happy with our team, they're happy with the work that we produce, and it's a great working

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relationship. And so they want to refer us to other people and say, “Oh, I know exactly who you should work with.”

So that's really the balance. I think we always find that when we ever actually talk about our work, I mean, I never post on social, but when I do people are like, “Oh my gosh, I didn't know you did that.” And then they send folks our way. So it's a little bit of that balance. We always say we're going to.

Rachel: And then you don't.

Yadira: Then we don't.

Rachel: Well they say like the best marketing is good work, right?

Shannon: Yes.

Yadira: Yes.

Rachel: When you do good work, that's what caused Hello Seven to grow, is people loved the book so they refer the book. People love the Club so they refer the Club, right? So that's always been, I can market all day, I can run all the ads or whatever, but nothing brings more people in than organic word of mouth.

Shannon: Yes.

Yadira: Right.

Rachel: So that's just to get the engine going and get those early adopters, the ads and the marketing and stuff like that. And then after that, it's really just about, it's about doing good work and letting that be your marketing,

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right? And y'all take it to a whole nother level, which I love. Like y'all don't even have, I'm like, "Where can I find a bio for y'all?" Can't find one. You better like piece it together from a Forbes article.

Yadira: But that's how we know who's really interested.

Rachel: Yes.

Yadira: We've been places where, literally this one woman jumped over, like jumped over the couch and crawled to us and said, "I know you, your Verb." And I was like, "Do you know her?" And she's like, "No, do you know her?" And she's like, "I read all about you. I looked you up." She's like, "You guys are by referral, that's amazing." And when people want to find you, they will find you.

Rachel: Yes.

Yadira: And there is a certain cachet that comes with that.

Rachel: Yes.

Yadira: And that's what we are, we are premium. We are a premium service. We work with premium clients, like you will get to know that about us. But that's not for us to just give you that, you need to go and find that.

Rachel: So I love it. I love it. And I'm like working on convincing them to have a website. So we'll see what comes of that.

Shannon: No.

Rachel: No, the answer is no. But I do, I like the exclusivity of it. I like the having standards, right? And not saying I'm just going to work with

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anybody. It's the opposite of desperate, right? Which is what sells. When you have a desperate vibe, when you're selling your stuff and it's like, "Please buy my stuff," right? Your whole energy from your marketing is like begging somebody to work with you.

First of all, they're going to undervalue you because you're coming up that way. And then second of all, they're not going to buy your stuff because what do we do when people chase us? We run, right? We're like, "Oh, everybody running? I'm running too." So I think that's so interesting and it's such a different way for people to think about it because we always think like, how can I be the loudest and promote the most? And maybe you don't need to do that.

And y'all, are y'all hurting for business? Have y'all had a hard time getting clients?

Shannon: No.

Yadira: We're saying no, we're in the no business. No, no, sorry, can't do that.

Rachel: Yes.

Yadira: Or we don't want to do that.

Rachel: Yes.

Yadira: We're now in the know of like we don't want to do that. That doesn't align with us, that doesn't feel like something that aligns with where we're going creatively.

Rachel: Yes.

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Yadira: We are in the no business. Don't get me wrong, there was a time like we were hot. And then we didn't do any.

Shannon: We didn't do any business development one year.

Yadira: And it was just like, "Oh, okay." And you wanted to get that desperation and do that. But it's like time and patience.

Rachel: Yes.

Yadira: And so we just kind of held off and seen like who was around and start to foster some of that energy again.

Rachel: Book some calls.

Yadira: Book some calls.

Rachel: Have some lunches.

Yadira: And it just like automatically turned over. I was like, "Okay, now we know that by referral only doesn't also mean we can't cultivate relationships."

Rachel: Yes, exactly.

Shannon: For sure.

Rachel: Right. So if referral is your marketing strategy, then that's the strategy, right? So then you foster those relationships, you maintain those relationships, and that's the marketing strategy, right? Instead of social media or whatever it is.

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Shannon: For sure.

Rachel: So tell me about like, so this time – Not this time last year, at the beginning of this year you joined the Hello Seven mastermind.

Shannon: Yes.

Rachel: Tell me why you decided to do that. And like what were some of the pain points you were trying to overcome?

Shannon: We've had a business coach for the last several years and it fundamentally changed our business. We would do a founder's off site with her once a year, every year. And after our first year, it was like part therapy part business coaching. It was like, "Oh, okay, let's unpack." And she had us read Profit First. Game changer.

Rachel: Yes.

Yadira: Yeah.

Shannon: It was like, oh, we're not doing this right. And that completely changed our business. And she said, "If you do not take this approach, you will tap out within two years." And so we saw the value right away of the power of having a business coach from a mindset standpoint, but also on a very tactical level of building a business.

It's one thing to, oh, you're a VP, you're a VP at this agency. And even if we were managing P&L, that's very different than running a company, being responsible for cash flow, HR, operations, insurance.

Rachel: Payroll.

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Yadira: Taxes.

Shannon: Girl, let's not go there.

Rachel: Taxes is Shannon's trigger word.

Shannon: It is. It is. I wasn't ready. It's levels, it levels, now I wasn't ready. And so I think that that was something that we were looking for. And what appealed to us was the consistency, that instead of us doing one founder's retreat a year, there were multiple retreats a year, there was monthly coaching. And we wanted to figure out how to scale our business.

And so I think that that was what really appealed to us. And having community. It's one thing to have a community of entrepreneurs and friends in industry and that sort of thing. But having a community of women that are all seven-figure business owners, that's a very different dynamic. There are very different conversations that we could have in that room.

And when we're talking about our taxes, no one's blinking an eye when we're talking about the numbers. Or give us solutions, you referred us to someone that we can talk about tax strategy.

Rachel: Yep.

Shannon: We can't get that in other places necessarily. So I think that was a tremendous value to us.

Rachel: I agree. And that's why I always, I offer coaching but I also receive coaching, always, because it helps you grow, it shows you where your blind spots are.

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Were there any particular pain points that you were trying to resolve? Was there any one thing that you were like, I feel like if we solve this, this will be great?

Yadira: I don't think when we got here, our very first retreat, I don't think we knew how fundamentally behind we were because we grew so fast, in a week.

Rachel: Yes.

Yadira: Whatever we thought those three months were going to be, maybe that would have been some of this. But it's like I think we were the only ones who didn't VAs, we didn't have an ops manager. And some of that stuff we came into the year thinking we wanted, but we were going to get one ops manager, one executive assistant.

Shannon: She wanted us to share an executive assistant.

Yadira: Yeah, I was like, "You need more than I do." It's just like, no, we have individual ones. Like there was just, there was so much that we fundamentally did not realize that we were behind on that either were on our roadmap, but it was just like you're already at five mil, how do you not have these things?

Rachel: Let's do it now.

Yadira: Let's do it now.

Rachel: What are we waiting for?

Yadira: And so until we got here, literally in this room, I don't think we knew that.

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Shannon: No.

Yadira: So I can tell you like, oh, we came for X. I think we really came from mindset. Just like, oh yeah, we really want to open up our eyes to making more money. But it was really like we can't make more money without understanding the structure and operations that go with it and we're stunting our own growth. And I think we didn't realize how much we were stunting our own growth by also being a little scared.

Rachel: Yes. There's always fear, right? And that fear will be the reason why you don't push forward and you don't make the decisions. And that's why we say in five years we're going to do this. And in three years we're going to do this. And then like 10 years from now, I could see us blah, blah, blah. No, or we can have that in 12 months. Let's get it poppin.

Shannon: Yeah, you're always like, next month. We're like, "Next month?" Yeah, I think that some of it is just you don't know what you don't know.

Rachel: Yes.

Shannon: We had never run an eight-figure business, so we don't know what we don't know. And even when we started talking about staff plans and you're like, "Let me see your org chart, where's that org chart?" Because what it takes to be able to scale a business and do it well and be able to still continue to deliver for our clients, that's a fundamentally different structure than we had. We had 20 something people reporting to just us.

Rachel: Yeah, that sounds like a nightmare.

Shannon: It was crazy. And they're not getting the support they necessarily need.

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Rachel: Yes, it's not serving anybody. It sounds very, very painful.

Shannon: Yeah, and we've almost doubled this year. And even, you know, there was one session we had in the mastermind –

Rachel: Doubled what? What did you double?

Shannon: Employees and revenue.

Rachel: Well, there you go.

Shannon: Yes.

Rachel: Doubled employees and revenue. Let's just make sure we put a pin in that so everybody hears. Make sure you catch that.

Shannon: Yes.

Rachel: So you were at 5 million and now you've doubled, so now you are an eight-figure business?

Shannon: Yes.

Yadira: Yes.

Rachel: Okay. Put some respect on it.

Shannon: Yes, definitely. Even just this notion of hiring before you need the people.

Rachel: Yes.

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Shannon: We were in the sessions talking about onboard the people now so that they're ready. You know, we always say stay ready so you don't got to get ready. But what does that actually look like when you have payroll to pay? That's like cute to say.

Rachel: That's cute to say.

Shannon: It's cute to say until you have to pay the people.

Rachel: Yes, it's always cute to say until, you know, there's a Jay-Z line from one of their songs from the joint album that he did with Beyonce. And it's something about like everybody's a boss until it's time to pay the invoices.

Shannon: That's my favorite.

Rachel: I quote that all the time.

Shannon: All the time.

Rachel: Everybody's a boss until it's time to pay the bills. Being the boss means you pay the bills.

Shannon: That's right.

Yadira: Yes.

Rachel: Being the boss doesn't mean that you look cute and you put on your shades and you get in your cute car. Yeah, you could do that. But guess what? Then you going to go pay everybody else before you get paid. People miss that part about being a boss.

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Yadira: Yes.

Shannon: Seven-figure payroll, you know, multi-seven figure overhead. And so, you know, in the pandemic we were fortunate to not have to make tons of cuts to our team, but we were making less than everybody.

Rachel: Yep.

Shannon: Nobody else knows that. We took the cuts, we took the hits.

Rachel: Yes.

Shannon: We still have lives, and families, and people to take care of, but that was important for us to maintain our team through that piece. And then as we continue to grow, we're really mindful of that.

And I think that that session where we talked about what you need to do to prepare for growth and to be ready for that, that was really important for us. We have debates all the time, but I think it helped reinforce some of her points to hear you say it.

Yadira: Yeah.

Rachel: It's always funny coaching partners because like I say something and whoever, they look at the other one like, "What did I tell you? See, she agrees with me. Thank you."

Yadira: Yes. I mean that was the whole first retreat, was just us looking and I'm like, "Mm-hmm, you hear that? You hear that?"

Rachel: You heard that part? It's so true because it's a different way of thinking than let me operate like on a razor line and just get by, right? It's

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almost like that's what a lot of our parents experienced, right? And so we're accustomed to do what you got to do make a dollar out of 15 cents, get by.

Shannon: Yeah.

Rachel: And then when you're building a business, particularly when you're scaling it at the level that you are, you have to get ahead. So you're like, "Who do you need in three months? We need to start hiring them today."

Shannon: Yes.

Yadira: Yes.

Rachel: And even if they're sitting at their desk for a quarter of the time twiddling their thumbs, that's exactly what I need them doing because I need them learning so that they're ready in three months when things blow up, right? And so you have to start hiring before. And people wait and wait and wait. And I'm like, "You're going to cause so much pain for yourself and the other team members."

Yadira: And burnout.

Shannon: And burnout.

Rachel: Exactly, and burnout. And I did the same thing. I burned myself out, I burned different team members out, because we had the same thing happened where we doubled and then we doubled again. And the team size, when you're not getting ahead of it, it's not fast. Finding the right people that fit your culture when you have standards about who you will let on your team, it is not fast.

Shannon: Right.

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Yadira: Right.

Shannon: Yeah, for sure.

Rachel: So waiting and waiting and waiting, trust me, is going to be so painful. Because then when you finally decide to hire them you're going to wait some more until you find the right person.

Yadira: Yes.

Shannon: For sure.

Rachel: What were some of the other things that, like so you built your team, that was definitely a big move. What were some of the other things that you had to do this year to go from seven to eight figures?

Yadira:: Raised our rates.

Rachel: Raised your rates, yes. This is my favorite conversation.

Yadira: That's your favorite thing.

Rachel: Raise the price.

Shannon: We did.

Yadira: Yeah, because we had to go back and look and say, what are we charging? And what we do know is it does not matter to us, like sometimes people are coming to us and it's just like, "This is all I can do."

Rachel: Yes.

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Yadira: And it's usually like smaller organizations, like this is all I can do. And we're like, "Okay, let's, let's work with you. But you're going to get the same service that any billionaire, any billion dollar company is going to get."

Rachel: Yes.

Yadira: We realized we can't do that to people. You might get different resources. But like the time level, attention, our commitment, the team's commitment that doesn't go away. So there's a value to that.

Rachel: Yes.

Yadira: And we have to actually give that value.

Rachel: Yes.

Yadira: And so we had to start to say, this is actually the rate because this is actually the time, attention, this is the challenge. And for a lot of people they love a, "Can't you just?"

Rachel: They love a, "Can't you just?"

Yadira: And it's just like it's not a "can't you just." The "can't you just" to you is really 18 steps in the background and 18 people all moving this thing forward for you. So for us it was like we have to get back to the root of that and be very clear of like, my favorite is the fee is the fee, fam. That will be on my tombstone.

Rachel: The fee is the fee, fam. You've heard it here first, Yadira Harrison. The fee is the fee, fam.

Yadira: That's it.

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Rachel: Don't forget the fam part though.

Yadira: Because that is really what it is. And it's just like we know our worth and our value. And in the beginning we didn't necessarily know that.

Rachel: Yes.

Yadira: And then to hear, you're like, "Raise your rates."

Rachel: Yes.

Yadira: Raise your prices. And it's just like, yeah, and it doesn't feel outlandish because, again, we know what other agencies are charging and making.

Shannon: More.

Yadira: More. We know that even right now. And we also know, given some of what we do know, you're not also going to get the service that you get with us. People feel like they're really in good hands. We're not going to let balls drop. It doesn't matter, we're going to come in and quarterback a team and make sure that everybody's doing what they have to do or bring things to light.

That's just how we roll and that's just who we are. And that's what trickles down to our team. So there's a price to pay for that. And we feel like it's a fair price. But the rates will continue to go up as more and more we're growing and understanding our value, that is what we're going to continue to be out there saying.

Shannon: And our contribution to their business also.

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Rachel: Yes.

Shannon: That's the key thing, we know we can deliver on that.

Rachel: Right. And understanding the result that you're providing, right? I'm not just providing a completed event, I'm providing this brand experience that's going to be talked about for the next 10 years, right? Like that one that you did at your former agency.

That is going to make people loyal to you for years to come, right? And that is going to turn into X many millions or billions, right, depending on who we're talking about. And so when you understand that, then charging 500,000 more is not that, it doesn't sound outlandish, right? The math will math if you let it, okay?

Shannon: Yes.

Yadira: Yes, yes, for sure.

Rachel: Let the math math. Is there anything, any parting words or any advice that you would give to entrepreneurs who are at seven figures who want to get to eight and are very afraid of like – Because sometimes you're like, “Well, I worked so hard to get to seven figures. It was all about getting to seven, we're here. Now you're asking me to like make scary moves and sacrifice what I already – Shouldn't I be content with what I already got, right? Now I got to make moves and sacrifice what I have, to get to that next level.” What would you say to them?

Shannon: I would say don't limit yourself. Don't be afraid to think bigger. There was one point when we thought we wouldn't be more than 25 people.

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Rachel: Yes.

Shannon: And that seemed huge that we would have a team that big.

Rachel: Yes.

Shannon: So I think my biggest advice to entrepreneurs and founders is don't put any limits on yourself. And I think that's what's been great about the mastermind, is someone in your ear just pushing the limits a little bit like, "Oh, you going to make 100 mil." She came home and told me that.

Rachel: Oh yes, 100 mil, I see it. It's happening, let's go.

Shannon: But someone that can push you. So I think even for yourself it's taking those limits off.

Rachel: Yes, taking the limits off. I agree. Anything that you would add to that?

Yadira: I would say really getting organized. I don't think that without understanding the organization and the operations, even if we would have got to 10 mil, it would have fallen apart.

Rachel: Yeah.

Yadira: It would fall apart. And fundamentally, it's not falling apart because we know we're putting structure in place, we're putting operations in place. And we had to do that to get to 10. You have to be able to support the infrastructure.

Rachel: Right.

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Yadira: And that's what the number kind of tells us, is like you want to do 10? You want to do 20? This is what it looks like, double it.

Rachel: Yes, exactly. The operations make it possible to maintain.

Shannon: Yes.

Yadira: Absolutely.

Rachel: You can always muscle your way there. But in order to stay there. and then grow from there, you have to have an infrastructure that allows you to have an eight-figure business, right? It's not just money in the bank. Although we wish it was. Thank you both so much for being here.

Shannon: Thank you.

Yadira: Thank you for having us.

Rachel: I think you've inspired a lot of people and I think there's going to be more exclusive brands out there. You've inspired some folks.

Yadira: Join us.

Shannon: I love it, thank you.

Rachel: Awesome.

How come you're not a millionaire yet? What is standing in between you and having seven figures in the bank? Well, a lot of things might be getting in the way. Maybe you need to work on your mindset. Maybe you're trying to build a business but you honestly have no clue what you're doing.

Ep. 103: This 8-Figure Agency Does Zero Promotion and Ads?! With Shannon Simpson Jones and Yadira Harrison of Verb

Maybe you don't have the right support network or you never got a basic financial education.

You're leaving easy money on the table and you don't even realize you're doing it. Whatever is standing in between you and having more money, I want to help you clear those blocks out of the way. So here's what you need to do, go to helloseven.co/club and join The Club.

Once you join The Club, you get education, you get coaching, you get a community. You get everything you need to remove those roadblocks and start making more money today. If you feel like you're not earning as much money as you could, then you need to join The Club. Go to helloseven.co/club and join us. That is helloseven.co/club.