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What To Do When You Feel Trapped By Your Business From An Entrepreneur Who Escaped: Barnaby Andersun

YARO: Hello, this is Yaro Starak and welcome to the Entrepreneurs-Journey podcast. Online with me right now is Barnaby AndersUn, who is a long-time friend of mine, a fellow entrepreneur who I've connected with here and there for many years for all kinds of different reasons not just business. Barnaby is an avid meditation expert. I don't know if you can be an expert on meditation, I guess you can. but Barnaby does a lot of it and we can perhaps touch on that at some point.

As well as having had his own business and selling it and starting up a couple of interesting start-ups at the moment too. We are going to talk about this entire story behind Barnaby and hopefully we can learn a lot. So Barnaby, thank you for joining me.

BARNABY: Wow. It's great to be here and the entire story, that sounds quite formidable. I'm sure we'll have some fun.

YARO: Dauting, yes. Barnaby, you are an Aussie, I believe, from...

BARNABY: Yes.

YARO: Born and raised.



BARNABY: Yes I was born, brought up in Sydney in the Blue Mountains, that's where I spent my childhood. And then my adolescence was down in Geelong, near Melbourne, moved up to Brisbane in '95. Basically, I moved here the month that the World Wide Web pretty much started. That's when things started to really take off for me on the business front.

YARO: How old were you then?

BARNABY: In '95, I was 24. I just started my family. My daughter was on her way so it was a massive time of change. I've already been working in the tech industry for about two years in Sydney for a very small software company doing design and technical writing.

There was no Internet, although there was nothing that anybody... Compuserv was the thing that we were into back then, so it was a very different time.

YARO: Your background then. Did you study design and these technical subjects in a university degree or technical qualification after high school? How did you get into it?

BARNABY: I had no technical qualifications whatsoever. I always came from an artistic background. While I was young, like in 1979, I represented Australia in the Year of the Child as a young artist. You can say that art and design were sort of part of my skills, as was actually acting and writing. Those were all things that I was very passionate about as a teenager.

I guess computers always interested me. While I was at uni, I did an Arts degree like Philosophy and Comparative Religion and that stuff, but I soon realized that was not really going to go anywhere. I dropped out of uni after being there a couple of years. I must have been quite ambitious because I thought I was just hanging out with people who were just drifting by.

I quickly got a job at a software company.

YARO: Why did they hire you if you didn't have any qualifications?

BARNABY: I was just quite persistent. I must have impressed them somehow. I was 21 and I just showed up. Yes, it was bizarre because he'd been used to hiring people with full-on programming experience. I think he was just looking for somebody who could do technical writing, and I had no experience with that either. I just told them I could do it.

He gave me that opportunity. I wrote, and he kept me on for a couple of years so I must have done a reasonable job.



YARO: You learned on the job basically.

BARNABY: What was that, Yaro?

YARO: You learned on the job say, technical writing and design, which possibly would be Photoshop back then as well or something like that, Adobe InDesign, I don't know?

BARNABY: He was actually a Mac programmer. Seriously, we were working on those classic SEs, I think they were called? Like the small all-in-one piece ones. This was the early 90s. It was a very strange time.

YARO: Okay, so that was your doorway into the world of technology anyway, in terms of actually getting money from it.

BARNABY: Yes. Eventually, things really changed for me when I moved to Brisbane. I've never been to Brisbane in my life. It was quite a strange thing to move here, which is where I've been living for the last 17 odd years. I quickly found a job in a, basically like a hardware shop selling computers.

I've never done sales before. I really liked it though. People I was working with, they were professional. Basically, I was quite terrified, but there was this magical day where I went downstairs to the [0:04:34.2].

There were all these magazines. I take one of the magazines and one of them had on the front cover, "The World Wide Web is Coming," or something like that. I just had no idea what that meant. This was February of '95 and I was like "What is this?" And it said "Internet."

This is a strange thing for you and I to even try to think of. I didn't understand what those words meant. I've been working in the tech industry for two or three years and I was reading this word, "Internet." It was appearing all over the place, and I was like, "What does this even mean?"

I bought the magazine and took it upstairs where I was working. I was flipping through it, trying to understand what it was talking about. At the back was an ad that said, "Website design by" this company called "Firehorse." I thought, "Wow, what are they talking about?"

I gave these guys a call and they said they were giving a business presentation that night [0:05:26.3]. I just went along. I just thought, "Well, this sounds really interesting." I went along that evening and true enough they gave a presentation. They actually were



a bunch of hippies. They were very strange guys. They were forming probably pretty much maybe even the first web design company in Australia.

I was so entranced in what they were doing that they took me back to their place that evening. No joke, they were a bunch of dope-smoking hippies who spent most of their time living in their teepees. Yes, no kidding.

They were living in this strange house in Brisbane. I was peering through all the smoke and coughing and stuttering as they were showing me Netscape 0.93b. I was just so blown away. I was like, "Far out! This is amazing." You can actually put up a page online and you can show the world.

They gave me the very rudimentaries of HTML that night and started teaching myself. That's what I did. I quit my job the next week.

YARO: Wow. Barnaby, I don't know if you have any downloads going. The Skype connection's a little bit lagging. If you could have a quick look if you've got anything that might be slowing you down while we continue.

BARNABY: Okay.

YARO: It's pretty good though. I'm just getting a little bit of skipping in your voice. It could just be me.

To continue the story... Okay, you've discovered the Internet thanks to a bunch of hippies, which is a very lovely dichotomy there. People not typically known for technology introduced you to the Internet.

Now how does that lead into you I guess becoming an entrepreneur and actually starting your own business?

BARNABY: I worked with them for about six months, but they were not really business guys. They were all over the place. I was a bit like a contractor as I found my feat with building websites.

Basically, I formed a partnership with another guy who set up a small, head of design studio and I basically was like a partner in that, so it wasn't quite still my own business.

I was basically running that new department. I had a share in it. But that was the way it worked.



In '95, it was too early. People weren't really interested in websites, businesses weren't. That basically fell apart because there just wasn't enough there.

I went out the next year on my own. I started Alive Online, which was the company I ran for the next decade or more. That was a web design firm. It was based around finding clients and signing them websites and doing online marketing and all that.

I built that up from just myself. Eventually, I sold that about a dozen years later. There were probably ten staff and we had hundreds of clients around the world.

YARO: All right, you're skipping a bunch of stuff I have to ask you about this business.

BARNABY: Yes.

YARO: Alive Online, it's starting as an I'm assuming as sort of a website design maybe hosting kind of company. I'm assuming you've also just had your first child around this time as well because you are leaving the consistent income of a reliable job to do your own thing. I guess you were already contracting so you had a feel for what that's like.

Is there concerns that this business is not going to work? Do you have savings built up? Do you have a deadline for how quickly you need to start making money from it? How did that play out?

BARNABY: In 1995, I was working at the hardware sales computer place. That was obviously, I had a consistent income there, but I left that for no income to go and do this contracting work for this web design firm because it was too exciting. But that became more and more... it was basically falling part.

When I formed that partnership with that guy, yes, that was a consistent income. He basically was bankrolling it. He paid me a weekly wage. My job was to build up the department and get clients. When that ran of steam, I left that. I had no other income. I just chose to step out there. I thought, "Well, I could win clients."

He basically lost confidence with it, and I felt I could make this thing work. Yes, we had a baby. Mia's her name. That was in April of '96. She would have been six months old.

Yes, I just stepped out there. I had no savings, nothing. When you're young and foolish, but I've pretty much always thought like that since then. "I can make this work. I don't care what the obstacles are." I guess I just had some confidence.

YARO: Tell us about these first few years then. The confidence, was it warranted? Did you have clients? Did you make enough money to feed your baby, pay your rent?



BARNABY: I wasn't completely stupid. There was some strategy there. While I was working with building up that design firm, I've made an alliance with Brisbane's largest ISP at the time, PowerUp Head. PowerUp Head, they were an amazing company. They were just growing in huge leaps and bounds.

While I was doing that website design stuff, I was hosting all the clients with them.

This is, in the day basically, web hosting is so small at this point. It isn't even really what we would think about today in a completely separate industry. Back then, it was like this small add-on feature that ISPs were running. That whole deal was about connecting people up. I would go out there and I would visit them. When I left the partnership, I went out there and saw them and said, "Look, I'm going to be doing this full-on." They said, "We will just send you leads." I said, "Great!"

That's basically how things kicked off because I was like, I'm pretty sure these guys are going to have leads. It was through my relationship with them. It built up another company. There were leads coming through, and I'd go out to networking events like go to business breakfasts.

Eventually, I actually moved myself, actually into their organization. I said to them, "Give me a little desk and I'll run everything from in here." But that was a couple of years later.

That relationship with those guys ran like '96, '97, '98, sort of '99, where it stopped working was basically when they actually really vamped up the web hosting. They went from being purely an ISP with a bit of web hosting into becoming WebCentral, Australia's largest web hosting company.

There were just so many opportunities there. When I think about things, it was like I was constantly at the birth of a massive industry and I didn't take the opportunity.

YARO: You must be frustrated.

BARNABY: Yes, there were so many opportun-- the number of times where I could have literally made many, many millions were just extraordinary. Those guys who ran PowerUp and turned it into WebCentral, when they sold it for \$40 million, I was there with them in those early meetings when we were just talking about what this thing could be and do, and I couldn't actually see it. I don't think that they could even quite see it. But they could see something.



Let's put it this way, if I've really seen where things were going to go, I could've moved those meetings in different ways. It was just very interesting that I was still, not just naive but I was really, I guess my thinking was still way limited.

YARO: I mean the power of hindsight, it's like that. You'd want to tell a story about, "Oh I wish I did that idea, like I had the idea for eBay before eBay did, but I just didn't do it," that sort of thing.

But, you obviously had a business that did give you a living and it continued to grow. It sounds like it was just you sitting in an office for quite a number of years though as the only employee, or the only worker for your company. Is that right?

BARNABY: Yes, it was. That was the tough part. I was really focused on getting clients and doing the work. As I said I was coming from an artistic background. How things looked were really important to me. I was really focused on doing a good job for clients making them a website that looked great and just getting the next client.

It wasn't until I probably started going to more seminars like in '99, 2000, I started getting exposed to a lot of other business concepts, like about leverage and scalability. I started to look at things from quite a different angle. That's what opened up my eyes to, "Wow, do I really want to keep on doing this just me?" I hadn't figured out how I could make changes in the area.

YARO: Which is a very common question. This is something that would be great for you to answer now, Barnaby. A lot of people are good consultants, or people who are making money doing some sort of creative job, whether it is building a website, doing desktop publishing, writing e-mail marketing campaigns or people acting as contractors, freelance writing even. Those are all good paying contract jobs, but they're not really businesses.

It's a common desire, especially after two or three years of doing this, when you realize your income potential is capped because you get paid by the job or paid by the hour. You don't have the leverage or the scalability there as a solo entrepreneur in this case. You have to transition from that to hiring a first person, hiring more people, getting more clients and juggling all of that while maintaining the cash flow of what you're currently doing. It sounds like you've managed to do that, so could you explain how?

BARNABY: Okay. Well, it was quite a process. This whole thing went on for many years. To really go into this, there are some tricky parts. Sort of around that turn of the millennium, I had one very large client, a one really big job, but things didn't go well with it. They had a change of management, and there were just all these problems, basically.



I got really burnt, so I basically decided to step away. I took a step back, probably for a couple of years. There I was, building up this web design business, and I've been around WebCentral getting built. And then I was like, "This is actually pretty painful. Some of these web clients can go south, not even for any fault of my own."

I stepped back and just did some pure consulting for a couple of years. As in I took a contract. Do you really want to hear some of these really crazy stories, Yaro?

YARO: You can't say that without giving us at least one, Barnaby.

BARNABY: Things got pretty low because I've used up my capital. I took a job amongst all that. I took a job at a multimedia training firm. They're one of the e-commerce strategists. I went in there and just told them what I could do and they hired me.

The salary wasn't great. It was probably 50K, 60K, something like that. I just had so many commitments. Basically, what I'm saying is that I stayed there probably for maybe two months. I walked in one day to the manager and said, "I just can't do this anymore. I have to leave because you're not paying me enough."

They couldn't afford to pay me anymore, they said, so I just walked out not to anything else. It was just, I just chose to leave there with the presumption that I would be able to go and get more money. The opportunity cost was too high by staying there and spending my eight hours everyday in that office. I left there even though I had my family. My daughter was five, or so.

I started looking for another contract, and I found some [0:17:28.5]. They had this e-mail marketing system where they wanted to send out e-mails that would be [0:17:37.9]. They told me that they want to have this full-on Java script programmer, two of them actually. And they said to me, "Can you do this?" I said to them, "No." And they said, "Well we think you can. Can you start on Monday?"

YARO: Barnaby, you need to do a product on how to get jobs you shouldn't get because that sounds like the consistent thing here in your story so far.

BARNABY: It was just amazing to be in an interview and to tell them I couldn't do it, and they said they thought I could. Anyway, so I start on Monday and I was terrified. Full-on Java script programmer, to make these e-mails that people would get and have all these dots and images flying across the screen. I started pumping them out, and they were so impressed.



I was blown away that I could do it. Then I needed more people. Then, I hit upon this idea while I was in there. I thought, "Hang on. They're having trouble finding people. Why don't I see if I can find people?"

I started putting ads in the paper. On my lunch breaks, I'd go out there and interview somebody and ask them, "Do you want this job?" And they'd say yes, and I'd say, "How much money do you want per hour?" And they'd say, "Thirty dollars." I'd say, "You know, give me your phone number and I'll get back to you." I'd walk back into my office, I'd go to my manager and say, "Hey, you wanted a programmer?"

"Yes."

"How much do you want to pay them?"

"Fifty bucks an hour."

I just became the middleman. I probably brought in about six to eight programmers while I was there for that next year. That just made me awesome cash. It was a great job.

YARO: It's bizarre, you became a recruiter within a company you were working for where they decided you were good enough when you said you weren't.

BARNABY: Exactly, yes.

YARO: Okay.

BARNABY: What was amazing was that day when I got the job. It was a Friday. You could tell that I've sort of gained by the scrape of my teeth. That afternoon, the rent was overdue by a month, and the car payments, well they were going to come and repossess the car. It was a Friday. I went for the job interview, and they said to me, "We want you." And I said, "I can't do this," fully knowing that everything was going so badly if I didn't take this particular opportunity.

What was amazing was it was like everything [0:19:49.0]. It went from being really dark to just going really well, and actually by saying the truth as well. I didn't have to lie, and it just brought all these amazing opportunities where I hired all these people. Some of them are still my friends today. I've made some great connections there. Some of the people I hired, they were fabulous, they were amazing.

It was just amazing to see the power... I guess that was my first true experience of leverage, where I went, "Hang on. I can be sitting here, and show that paying me 50



bucks, I've got six people here and every hour that they worked, I'm getting 20 bucks. I just managed all the invoices and everything. Then the dot com bust happened big time, and the company just exploded, or imploded rather.

I remember that day, we were there when everybody was just running around and I was one of them. We were saying, "Come on, what coat could we grab? What could we take from this thing, this carcass that is falling apart."

YARO: Wow.

BARNABY: We were sort of looking at the service and the guys were coming in to try to pull it apart. I mean, seriously, it was the end of 2000 and things were just falling apart. That was an interesting experience.

YARO: Okay. You still haven't answered the question though. How did you transition, because you went down before you went back up, judging by the story.

BARNABY: I've gone down and up quite a few times, Yaro.

YARO: And yes, we'd love to cover every single one, Barnaby, but let's try and answer that question because I know a lot of people are in that situation there. A publicity expert now, or a writer now or even a blogger now and they get okay money but they just want to turn this into something bigger and get some employees and that transition is so hard. Tell us when that worked for you.

BARNABY: I guess, getting that extra bit of cash behind me from from that, and then experiencing that power, "I've got leverage of hiring people," it really shifted my focus. I basically then decided that web design was something I could do and I could do it well again, but now I want to fold into web hosting.

I realized I had to have a component that was going to be residual. The residual income component became really important to me. Just as I'd had with the recruitment system, I thought, well, I need to basically have a foundation where each client that comes in are paying a certain monthly fee.

That was the new system I then implemented. That gave me basically the basis for them to start hiring staff. I went from it being just me to hiring other people and having a web hosting system that I was getting the residual income from.

YARO: That's a pretty important point, come up with a cash flow system that is sustainable rather than just doing one-off contract jobs where you don't know if the money will continue to come. That sounds like it worked for you.



BARNABY: Yes, it did. It worked for a few years. That was the basis of the whole program. It went from it being purely me doing the website design to having the hosting, employing support staff and getting 50 clients, a hundred clients paying that monthly fee and building it up. Then having one staff, two staff, three staff, learning all about managing them.

After doing that for a couple of years, then getting some investment in there to then start expanding that further and having a new office premises. That's how I... I just kept on ramping things up, basically.

YARO: Maybe you can tell us about investment, Barnaby. Why did you decide to get investment?

BARNABY: It was more like I had a friend and he was watching was I doing and he felt that he wanted to get into that space. He said, "Let's expand this." At that time, I must admit I was like, "I think we could probably do things even more interesting than just website design," but we decided to focus on that.

He wanted to get in there and start having a new opportunity in that particular area of technology. He'd run other businesses that were quite different. I moved my office over to where he was. He was somebody who was very experienced in business. That's how it certainly worked for me. He had a few decades of it. I guess I was looking for him for guidance really.

I was like, "Well okay, I don't just want an investment here. I'm wanting someone to help me, lead me the way through this tricky part of employing people. So, we hired all these people. I started speaking, actually. At that point, all these [0:24:35.4] open where I started speaking around Australia and internationally.

I think, at some point around here, I met you.

YARO: Yes.

BARNABY: Before then or sometime around this area. I think we probably met up in 2005, 2006, something like that. You see me actually from this point on where I'm speaking and ramping things up with Alive Online.

YARO: Yes. And as I talk to you, Barnaby, as you went through this process, it did seem like there was two forces at play. Your need to keep a business running on a model that has been proven, which is the hosting and the design, and that's a cash cow sort of thing. It keeps the bills paid. It keeps the staff paid.



Your own personal motivation to do something much different. And you're kind of over the industry. You've been in it for ten years already almost there. You were trying to reconcile that. I noticed I think obviously you have sold that business so you've now moved on to projects, and it sounds like you're much more passionate about.

Can you explain how, and this is as equally an interesting question, when a person realizes that he no longer want to be in the business they're in and they want to try other things, how can you go about that? Now that you've had the experience, would you recommend trying a clean break and selling the business or setting up some sort of unit within the existing business like, for example, you started doing selling from a stage, which wasn't exactly what you were doing prior to that. It gave you, I guess, another creative outlet, which was different. Can you talk about which is the best way to explore when you are kind of over your existing business and want to change.

BARNABY: To be honest, I really struggled with that. One of the mentors I had in business, he said this line to me. I've never forgotten, and I've found it really helpful in helping guide the things I do today. And that was, "Make sure you put your letter up against the right wall so when you get to the top, you realize that you are actually in the right place you want to be."

I've never really understood that before. I've never really thought through what my life would be like if I actually had a successful web hosting web design business. Because the more clients I got, for me personally, undoubtedly, there's a lot of people in the world who can run those businesses really well. I wasn't one of them, in terms of having a whole team of support staff answering technical questions. It just wasn't me.

It took me a few years to realize that. By the time I realized it, I had so many clients I didn't know how to get out of it. It was really tricky. The more clients I got, the bigger it became, the more difficult it was, and I just got really stressed. I won't say really stressed. If there's anybody out there listening to this who is in the business that they don't like and they don't know how to get out of, I've been there.

It's really painful. That wasn't the only thing. I had a bunch of things that weren't working at that point. It's these waves of building something up and then finding that, "Hang on. This isn't really me," and "How do we get out of here?" It's not like a job you can quit. You've got all these clients you're responsible to and all these staff that you have all these obligations to and this rent to pay and insurances. The list just goes on and on and on.

I truly probably spent a couple of years I didn't know what to do. I didn't know how to get out of it. Thankfully, I had somebody else come in, and they were helping me manage



things in that business from a friend point of view. They helped me get some new staff on board, one person in particular, who became an expert at managing all the clients.

He became my manager, my CEO, so I realized that I needed to have someone like that step in and look after everything, which helped me step back and eased up a lot of my stress. I just had no opportunity really to think creatively in that space. You could probably tell that the things that really drive me are creative thinking, design, new ideas. And here I was just managing all these people's technical issues. Everything from a service that goes down, e-mail that goes down, websites, all these things. They were creative elements too, but it was very stressful.

It was only when it dawned on me... Actually, I met up with one of the guys that I used to know. I did a bit of consulting for him once, in his web design firm. I caught with him at a party. This is really when I was at my wits' end. I was like, "What am I going to do?" I haven't seen him for probably four or five years. The last time I saw him he was this weedy, thin, pale, geeky guy and I saw him at this party and he was all buffed up and smiling.

He looked totally different. And I said, "What have you done?" and he said, "I got out of the tech industry." He was doing a completely different business. And I said to him, "How did you do that? I'm in the same space as you. How can I get out of this?" And he said, "Well, I sold it to my manager!" And I was like, "Wow," so I just went back and did the same thing.

YARO: That easy, huh?

BARNABY: Obviously that stuff isn't really that easy, but I was able to pull it off. I was able to go through with the deal, I was able to show... Yes, he was an amazing guy. He was running things really well. He turned things around in a lot of departments. He started to put up his own team. He raised the investment capital himself.

By no means, I had a lot of advice I had to put out at this point because I wasn't really enjoying that particular business. Some areas weren't working, some were. I didn't come out of it like a millionaire or anything even close to that. I was able to just get out of that business.

YARO: Yes, and its nice to point that out. I've interviewed people who've sold a website for \$300 thousand, or people who've sold their businesses for multimillions, and some people are still in the same businesses. I think this is a great example where just getting yourself out of something almost because it's an emotional release than anything else, not about the money, just so you can create the space to do something when you well and truly are over of what you're currently doing.



Can we just touch a little bit on how that deal went down? Whatever you're comfortable sharing with, Barnaby, because I'm sure there are some of you right now who are going, "Wait a second, I've got a manager," or "I've got someone who's heavily involved in my company but they're an employee. Maybe they could buy it." How is the best way of going about beginning that discussion and closing the deal?

BARNABY: I just brought it up. He was doing such a good job. He was really being responsible for the business. He really cared about it. He was a really great guy. He had great ethics. I knew that he cared about the clients and he was young. He had a lot of energy. He was very driven. He was very ambitious. I thought, "Wow, he's probably got what it would take."

But, at the same time he was afraid. Well, maybe not afraid, it's not right. But, he haven't ever done his own business before. He had a degree. He'd been brought up in a very... He's done everything very properly. I could see that there was an entrepreneur in him but it needed to be unleashed, if you know what I mean.

I don't think he was going to go out there necessarily and just start something himself. I felt like, "Well, here's the opportunity." I presented it to him like that, and he basically said to me he waiting for me to say something. He must have had some sense of how things were going to go. I just presented the deal, we negotiated terms about the money. We got legal contracts together. We just did everything right. I signed everything over to him.

YARO: That was what year?

BARNABY: That was in the beginning of 2010. The deal was done and finalized in April.

YARO: Okay, so you're a free man in terms of not having any responsibilities in the business. I'm assuming that you've at least covered your debts. Like you said you didn't become a millionaire but you've broken away financially from it, so you're stable.

BARNABY: Yes.

YARO: How did that feel?

BARNABY: It was amazing. We're not going to go too much into this but I'd also been through, at that same time, a number of those sort of endings on a very personal front as well. My marriage had ended and I've had quite a lot of things happening in that previous 18 months or so. It wasn't just the end of my running that company which I've



been running. It was April 2010, and I began in April 1996. I ran that for about 15 years. My marriage had gone for about that long as well.

There was this complete change in my life. I was like, "Okay, all these things that I felt weren't working." It was just me there, and I was able to look at things with a fresh eye. I guess I was quite stunned. I realized I just needed some time out where I'd just been going at things so hard for so many years. I wanted to have the space to think up new ideas, but I also recognized that I probably just didn't have the fuel inside me to do that. It was probably important that I just take some time out. That's what I did for the rest of the year.

YARO: What did you do? This is when the meditation comes into it?

BARNABY: Yes, I probably did more of that. Actually, all through all those years I'd always probably gone to India for about at least one or two months every year. Because of my drive to take time out to go meditate, that was also one of the elements for running these businesses because the kind of lifestyle I wanted to lead wasn't one that I could fit into somebody else's nine-to-five job.

I had to be somebody who was doing things my way. When I took that year off, I spent more time with my daughter. She was now a teenager and I was raising her. I took up hip-hop dancing. I joined the theater company and did some improv theater. Just sat around reading. A few times I did a little bit of consulting. Little things here and there. You could probably say I've been burnt out. I just thought I need to recuperate before I take on anything else.

YARO: Okay, bring us up to date then. That's only two years ago as we record this. What have you been doing since then?

BARNABY: I became very fascinated, after all of that, with crowdsourcing. I guess I was always interested in the power of the crowd; not just social networks but what people could do collectively together. I came up with an idea, which I worked on all through 2011, of a crowd-funding website, but in the green space.

In that time off I came up with a list of criteria of what would be my rules for doing business from this point on. There had to be things like it had to be fun. It had to be something that would make a difference to society. It had to be something that would have leverage. Had to be something that would be endlessly scalable. I had 17 rules that I was going to follow from this point on whenever I would assess a business, and if it didn't fit these, I wasn't going to do it.



Yes, and so I wanted to set up a website that was going to help people in the green and ecological space, to raising funds for their projects. I had a few friends who helped me with setting it up. I spent a year working on the code and the project. I hired people for that. That's a website that is still being... It's working now but it needs more projects in there, so that's something we've been working on. At the same time, while I committed myself to that project, another project was born out of it.

I invented the brand for that project, which is called The Green Crowd. The Green Crowd is the world's only crowd-funding eco-green website. How I invented to brand for it was again, I wanted to go to the crowd. I thought, "Well, I want to actually get the community involved in actually naming this and branding it." I was looking on the Net. Nobody else was doing that style of branding. People would go and see a branding consultant and they would pay them \$30,000 and they pull a name out of the air and say that's what you should call it.

That depends on all the internal focus groups. I've got a lot of creativity there. I basically invented this system of going to specific target markets and running in-depth surveys across hundreds of people or more, and creating a name. I did that with The Green Crowd.

I was working with other consultants in the trademark space and they were saying what I was doing was really interesting and I had other clients who wanted to do that. And I was like, "Wow, maybe I could actually get some clients through this method and help fund the other projects I'm doing."

That became what basically is called Brand Aloud. Brand Aloud is my new branding venture. It uses branding through a crowdsourcing method. I'd have clients through that. That's what I've been doing for this last 18 months.

YARO: Just to clarify, that's not just simply, "Here's the logo and having the crowd choose which one they think is best." How exactly does it work?

BARNABY: Through my background of keyword research, SEO, I'm very much into looking at where are the numbers, where are people looking. What are they typing in, where is the trends? Working with the client or whatever the project is, it's coming up with all the words that they think people are using, coming up with whatever names they've got. We can brainstorm those, and there's usually quite a list. Then I go away and further brainstorm that and go through all these other bases I've got access to.

This is a typical model where, that's what I did with The Green Crowd, I'll come up with about five thousand names for it. And then I'll whittle it down to about 500 and have people voting on that. From that I take down it to a hundred, the top hundred names that



people are voting on. And from there we just keep whittling it down to about seven different levels. You get like a top 50 or top 20 or top ten, down to a top two, and then top winning name. At the same time, we're making sure that the trademarks are available, or there's at least a good chance that they could get registered, if the dot com is available. We do all these checks, and then there's this winning name.

We do the same process with logos. The actual people that we are willing to target are the ones who actually come up with a name and the whole design, which means that it's got a much better chance of actually connecting with the audience when it's launched.

For a number of projects that have been running, including Brand Aloud and The Green Crowd, and one of the smaller one I'm about to launch, I've used that process. Some of the clients I've been working with, they've just been thrilled because we've come up with names that they would just never have thought of. They had their own ideas, it was funny but very often the ideas that they have the target market doesn't actually like. It's quite something for the owner to grapple with that because here I am, saying to them, well, they're actually paying for me to tell them off that their name is no good and that this name over here is the one that the people they want to sell to actually like more than that one.

YARO: To clarify this, it's like you do a massive keyword generation as you would always do for search engine optimization to generate just hundreds and thousands of possible names and start whittling them down and then once you get to a small-enough selection, you get actual human beings to say which one they like the best.

Now you said it's the target market that you can go to. Does that limit what sort of industries you can service? How do you find enough people to survey regarding whatever industry a person might be coming to you asking for research data?

BARNABY: I can research almost anything now. We've got a list of over two million people across nearly every demographic. We usually pay them, so we pay people to do the surveys and do the interviews, which means I can turn things out very quickly.

Let's say you had a brand, and you felt intuitively that it was going to be aimed at women in their 30s and 40s, then, basically, I can go off with that demographic. One of the clients we've had recently, they were willing to go after the Tradies. It was a construction industry. We have been after just people working in the construction industry. It was a specific building product. Your opinion and my opinion meant nothing for that product, it was these guys who work in that field everyday. We worked with them, and they picked the name.



YARO: Okay, that sounds very appealing. I know when I hear that story, it sounds like a great way to choose a brand. More than just a logo and everything, what your company's going to be called and what's it going to look like, plus the fact that you can trademark it and get the dot com. So it's like a nice, I guess start in your business, something you should do, just part of the process and takes away a lot of the guesswork because you're letting your target market decide what works. Great idea, Barnaby.

How can we find out more about that?

BARNABY: That one, if you go to BrandAloud.com.

YARO: Spell that?

BARNABY: That's A-L-O-U-D, BrandAloud.com. Yes, that's been running for probably almost a year now. It's really exciting because I love the creativity in there. I also like the validity of it. I like to do things where there's actually some basis, because you know anybody can call something whatever they like. But what's the chance of that really working?

I'm really interested in looking at things from a scientific point of view. For many, many years, in the whole time I've been running all these businesses, I've been coming across the top branding experts in the city, and the tens, the thousands that they charge, and I know how they do it. They sit around and they think up names, and they pick one that they like. And they say to the client, "Here's the name." But really, what evidence would they have to back it up? That always bothered me a little bit. I've put together a system which can actually put some scientific data.

YARO: Even if these large branding companies that, say, they are doing a lot of focus groups and a lot of market research, 30 thousand dollars is out of reach for most small businesses. You can get a similar kind of research done by using the wonderful scale of the Internet to send out surveys and collect that data for much less money.

It is a nice option for those who don't have the... It's in between the, "You're not going to spend 30 grand like Coke or whatever." Well, they probably spend more than that. Whatever it is. You're not guessing by, for example, going to 99 designs and just putting up a brief and just choosing the one you like best.

BARNABY: Yes.



YARO: It's in between that. You're spending a little bit more than 99 designs but you're getting some research behind the decision to what logo you use. Anyway, Barnaby, great idea, BrandAloud.com. TheGreenCrowd.com, was that the other?

BARNABY: Yes, that's the other one.

YARO: It's "The" in that?

BARNABY: Yes.

YARO: The Green Crowd.

BARNABY: I'm negotiating with somebody to get the other one at the moment.

YARO: Those are great two URLs they can check out your work.

Now, it's a good time I think to wrap up the interview. First of all, thank you for sharing some of the personal stuff with the story of selling your business and starting it, and the roller coaster ride you've certainly had going up and down with the different projects and seeing people around you in different businesses as the Internet grew up too. It must have been terribly difficult as an entrepreneur willing to not jump ship every two seconds with all the stuff going around you.

Can we end the interview, Barnaby, perhaps just thinking about a person who was in your situation, maybe has had a successful company but really they want to jump on something different right now. I know you've given some advice in that regard, sell to your manager, for example. But I think people really are afraid of doing this, and they are also extremely stressed. It's hard to make decisions when you are stressed. You're walking into your coffee shop everyday and making sure your staff are getting paid and your customers are getting their coffees and all these things when really what you want to do is come up with some design or fashion and sell it online and you just don't have time to do it. You have to run your coffee shop or something that like.

Or, even you're in some kind of online business and you want to move to a different online business. Whatever the case may be, you sound like a person who is really good at transitions and dealing with the ambiguity behind leaving something and starting something else. Even now with your current projects, they're just in start-up mode as I understand it. You're facing a lot of ambiguity there. You're good at this. You're good at facing that fear and doing it anyway. Can you give people... How do you do that, how do you become like Barnaby and become that fearless?



BARNABY: I don't know if this is really going to help anybody because, as you said I've been there, and I know how hard and terrifying it can be. People are stuck in so many different areas of their lives. People could be stuck in a relationship, or they can be stuck in a job or they can be stuck in a business. They can be stuck in any number of things and usually it's about the fear.

They want something new. They want to go and do something new but they're afraid of failing. They're afraid that if they give up what they've got, that they'll fail. That keeps them where they are. But every day that they stay where they are, they're sort of dying inside. They keep looking at other people, and they keep fantasizing about, "Well, what that person's got over there. I don't have that. Why can't I have the life that I would love." They fall on these ideas, and that could consume them for years. We've only got so many years to live.

When I really realized all this, in a way all I can say is that you kind of just have to let things fall if they have to. Sometimes there's no other option than to let it all collapse to get out.

One of my friends, he said to me, "Barnaby, there's no neat way for you to do this." I guess that really started to affect me. I keep looking for the easy solution, I keep looking for the neat solution here and there isn't one.

The more I've realized that, the more I've been less afraid to step up and take action in these areas where often, very often or all the time, there is no smooth easy way to do something. But if I don't take some action, I'm going to be stuck in staying where I have been for years. That's just become more and more untenable to me. It's like, "Wow. I'm alive, I've got this life." It's precious, and it's too short for me to be spending it worrying and just having an awful time.

Sure, if you've got lots of responsibilities, I'm not telling you to just throw caution to the wind. I understand. I'm also somebody who-- I've had a family. I've raised a child. She's a teenager now. She's doing year 12. I've had staff, I've had businesses. I've all these things. I also know that sometimes you just can't be careful. Sometimes, if you stay too careful, you stay stuck. Sometimes there is nothing else to do other than to take what appears to be the most terrifying and crazy risk. For me, I'm really glad that I've taken those every step of the way.

YARO: Fantastic, Barnaby. That's a lovely way to end this interview. Thank you for sharing your story. Again, if you want to find out more about Barnaby, you've got BrandAloud.com and TheGreenCrowd.com. You can check out his current projects there. Barnaby, thank you.



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BARNABY: Thanks, Yaro. It's been really great talking to you.

YARO: And if you're interested in getting more interviews like this with Barnaby, there's plenty more in the Entrepreneurs-Journey podcast archives. Lots of entrepreneurs there sharing their stories of how they've left their jobs, made an online income, started companies, sold them for millions. Great stories, very inspiring, just like Barnaby.

Head to my blog, Entrepreneurs-Journey.com, or you can Google my name, which is Yaro, Y-A-R-O. I look forward to talking to you again on a future podcast. Thanks for listening. Bye-bye.

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