

Business For Superheroes Podcast Transcription: Episode Thirty Six: Business Banter with Dom Hodgson



In an industry stuffed with marketing bullshit, empty promises and shiny-suited liars, one woman's had enough. She knows what it's like to have the wrong clients, no money and no time for fun, but she also knows how to fix it, and, on the Business For Superheroes Show, she promises to tell the down and dirty truth about business, sales and running away with the circus! Here's your host: Vicky Fraser...

Vicky: Hello and welcome to the Business For Superheroes Show I'm Vicky Fraser and today there is no Joe, because he's at work and it's 10am on a Wednesday morning. I am joined by Dom Hodgson who is a member of my Inner Circle and a dog trainer extraordinaire, and a superhero business owner. Hi, Dom!

Dom: Hello Vicky! Thanks for having me on.

Vicky: You're welcome, thanks for coming. Today we're powered by tea because as I said it's way before midday. Probably the sun is over the yardarm somewhere in world but I try not to drink gin before midday. What are you drinking, Dom?

Dom: I have Yorkshire tea as well.

Vicky: Ah, good man. Okay, so that's good. Let's get down to business. I'm going to try and ramble a bit less than I normally do on this one. It's really great to have you on the show, thank you very much for being here. Tell us who you are and what you do.

Dom: Right, well my name is Dom Hodgson, as you've already said, I'll just confirm that! I'm a dog trainer from Sunderland, in the north east of England and a little bit about my story then. I was a sales rep for about 10 years with a tobacco company. Basically I just didn't want to do it for another 30, so I quit. And people always say if you're going to do a business, do something that you

love, and at the time I knew that I wanted to work outdoors and I knew that I wanted to work with dogs, so I set up a dog adventure business - taking out people's dogs when they go to work and stuff, as the dogs still need exercise. It just went on from there really. I quickly realised that as much as I wanted to start a business, I didn't really know that much about dogs. So I embarked on a bit of a dog education and went on some courses, and learned - there's nothing better than learning from people who are experts, in whatever it is that you want to get better at. It just went on from there and now I consider myself a trainer and I still do my dog adventures as well. We have some online dog training courses and we help people out. It's been merging, trying to make a business out of it over the last couple of years. That's been my journey. I got good at the dog training and now it's been about getting good at marketing myself, I suppose, and getting more clients.

Vicky: Absolutely. So what makes you different from other dog walkers and trainers. You've already mentioned something - you do dog adventures and not just walks. That's really cool, that's the power of a USP. Is that what you would say would make you different from other dog walkers?

Dom: Yeah, I've always tried to be different. Sometimes not in a good way! But I've always tried to be different and I can remember when I had my proper job, I can remember talking to a good friend of mine, Ginny, we always used to have chats. We were talking about if we ever did start a business, we would want to be a Harrods and not an Aldi, that kind of thing. And so when I eventually came out I suppose I did a lot of things right without realising. I positioned myself as a premium dog walker and set my fees accordingly. Everything that happened, without knowing that this was what you teach within your Inner Circle and stuff like that. I attracted better clients, they paid on time - that kind of thing. So it was logical for me to start doing some online training etc. with the dog training as well that I continued to position myself and make myself stand out really, with some USP.

Vicky: So is your dog adventures the sum of your USP or - I know you positioned yourself as being the Harrods of dog walkers and that's brilliant. If people want to be seen as the top of their game then that's absolutely what

they should do. But there's always that danger that you have to give that value, so what is it about you that you do differently?

Dom: Well, as regards the actual dog adventure part, I always wanted to do something different. I didn't just want it to be a service where you just take the dogs for a walk around the block just to stretch their legs. I thought it would be better to pick the dogs up and take them out - and we go somewhere different everyday. One day we'll go to the beach, the next day we'll go to the woods. We'll play with the dogs as well - that's another part of the USP, I don't just take them to a field and let them arse around for an hour together because then you end up with out of control dogs. We play with them, we interact, we train them as well. It's interactive so that I am the thing that they look at, the thing that they want to play with. That has benefits for the owner as well because then when the owner takes them out, all the owner needs to do is take a toy with them, or some treats and the dog will look to them as well, rather than another dog.

Vicky: That's really cool because you quite often see - and it always makes me laugh - what I presume are dog walkers (although maybe they're crazy dog people, I don't know) with like 35 dogs on a lead in a fan. It always makes me think of those helium balloons. You know when you see people with a massive bunch of helium balloons and think, "How are they not floating off?" They're getting pulled along by these dogs and often they're on the phone, or talking to somebody and you think, "Are they fully engaged with those dogs?" It's really nice to hear of somebody putting their all into giving the dogs their attention.

Dom: Yeah and that's the basis of good dog training really, it's taking an interest in your dog and your dog will be interested in you. Some business lessons there too, I guess.

Vicky: Yes, there probably are. I shall move onto that. So, what plans have you got to grow your business because you've got your dog adventures and you've got your dog training, but for me there's obviously a certain element of swapping your time for money there. Do you want to grow? Are you planning to be scalable? What are you going to do? What's your plans?

Dom: The plans, I'm quite happy with the day to day dog adventure side of it. We're full really, we've been full for a number of years now. My son works full time with me in the business as well - Alex. That's been interesting as well, the father/son thing. We get on fantastically, we have a good laugh everyday but still it must be challenging for him having to work for me - I'll be honest about that. So that side of it's really good but I wanted to do something where I was getting out of this time for money thing, because there are only so many hours you can walk a dog and do it well, and enjoy it still - obviously I still want to enjoy it. So that's where I started doing some online training because I thought I could reach more people with the power of the internet - there's never been a better time has there to find your crowd and connect with them wherever you are. All over the world. That's where I'm moving onto now.

Vicky: Okay, so tell me about online dog training. How does that work? In my head I've got this idea that you go to see a dog trainer and they look at you and your dog, and how you interact. So how does that work online? That's a really cool idea if you can make it work.

Dom: It has been challenging. I have to say, a big part of it is - as with anything I suppose - you can teach someone a lot easier-- Well, no, that's not true actually. If people want to learn, you can teach them much quicker face to face and get them to do exactly what you want them to do, spot all the mistakes etc. But if people really want to learn, then they'll learn other ways as well. We have a private Facebook group where we can interact in there. I have lots of demonstration videos. And they just follow what I teach, I try and teach through a variety of - sending PDFs and Facebook live posts, I put videos up within the membership, and they just ask questions. Gradually - I think if you want to learn, that's the key. Once I've found the people who are suffering from the problems that I know I can help them with, they're a success.

Vicky: I'm glad to hear that because, as you said, it is a great thing to be able to teach people remotely because you can only help so many people one to one, and like you said there's only so many hours in the day, you're going to get overstretched. It's really cool that you've found a way to do stuff online as well. By the way - I don't have a dog, I love Dom's live Facebook posts they're often really funny. So if you have a dog for sure you should look. What's your Facebook page, Dom?

Dom: The Facebook page is Pack Leader Dog Adventures, so they can check that out.

Vicky: Pack Leader Dog Adventures. Dom is the pack leader, which is really cool. I think your business is great actually because you're quite different from a lot of the other dog training and walking businesses. One of the reasons for that, I think, is that a lot of them come across - they're probably very good at what they do but they come across as quite amateurish because their websites are cheap. I talked to a few people and they were like, "Branding doesn't matter. It's all about doing direct response marketing". That's true to a point but actually I think the whole branding thing does matter. It matters what impression you make on people and you make a really good first impression because you come across as really very put together and professional but without being corporate and faceless. I think you've got the balance really well there. Especially with your book because you've just written a book, haven't you?

Dom: I have indeed, yes.

Vicky: Tell us about your book.

Dom: The book is called, [Pack Leader Dog Adventures](#) and it's how to transform your dastardly dog using the power of play. It's basically my whole philosophy and everything I've learned about dogs, spoken the way that I speak - whether you like it, or whether you don't. It's all real life actionable, practical stuff that you can read and put into practice with your dog straight away.

Vicky: Cool. So, why did you decide to write a book?

Dom: Well you played a part in this obviously as well. I think I thought a book would be a good idea. I realised sometime last year that a book would be a powerful thing to have as a marketing tool. And so I started last year and I messed around a bit with it - as with anything that you're not really committed to. I wrote a couple of chapters and then left it for a month. Then wrote a little bit more. Then your course cropped up because I was already on your email

list at the time, and I was enjoying your emails – obviously I still do. And the I think that’s the name isn’t it, Vicky?

Vicky: It is indeed.

Dom: The course, you brought that out and I’d even already paid for the books – I’d already paid for the first print run as well. I just needed something to get me over the line. I knew I was going to do it, I just needed a bit more help. Your course came in and just did exactly what it said on the tin, really. It got me the book finished in pretty good time. It took me a little bit longer but that’s because I’ve been working on a membership site and stuff like that at the same time. So that was how the book came together.

Vicky: I think you’ve done a brilliant job actually because you say it took you a little bit longer. Yeah, it did take you a little bit longer than 90 days but like you said you had all this other stuff going on as well. You’ve got your membership site that you’ve been putting together and all that. So, how is that going? It looks to me – because I’ve been following you on Facebook and stuff – like your book is insanely popular and is doing really well. I should point out, here, that I never advise anyone to write a book because it’s going to make them rich. It’s not. It might do, you might get lucky but that’s not the point of doing it. You write your book as a kind of marketing and positioning tool. I say that but that’s not all it is. It’s – like you say, you wanted to write it to help people get on better with their dogs, which is the good reason why. My rambling, circular point is that you don’t write it to become a best-selling author necessarily. That’s just a bonus if it happens. So, how is your book going?

Dom: Yeah, it’s going really well. You’re right, it does so many things doesn’t it? From a business point of view it’s a positioning thing, it’s an inexpensive thing for people to buy if they’re interested in me and want to learn more about me. It gives me something to focus on with the marketing because I just have to concentrate on the book. But at the same time it’s a very powerful thing for people to buy to help them with their dogs. I’m similar to you, Vicky, I get feedback all the time from my emails and people say, “I’ve never tried that before and now my dog’s looking at me and he’s following me around, and he never did this before so thanks very much”. And now I’m getting even more of those responses because of the book. People are reading it and taking action

on it and they're seeing results. It's been brilliant, we're getting really good feedback all the time. Obviously I'm marketing it now, I'm trying to get it into more people's hands, so I'm trying to figure out that side of it as well. Which your course was very helpful with as well.

Vicky: Thank you.

Dom: Yeah, it's going good.

Vicky: Cool, I'm really glad to hear that because one of the things that I've found with my book is that people who read it are much more likely to buy other stuff from me as well, and to ask me for help in other ways, and to join my Inner Circle and that kind of thing. I've found it to be incredibly useful for that because it just lightens the load of having to sell all the time because I don't like that hard sell and I suspect you're probably similar. I don't think -- it's just icky.

Dom: When I first did my online course, the first one I did last year, it was brilliant and just going back to what we were talking about before, it really opened my eyes to how much I could help people online and how much I was surprised myself. Some people come along and say, "I've got this dog and he's doing this" and I was thinking, "Crikey I've got my work cut out for me here". But I was still able to help them over time. What I was going to say about that was, the whole launching of the program, going through the launch, I found it quite stressful and I didn't want to keep doing that. So having the book and the membership fit in better for me, where I can continually market them and push them, and help people that way rather than going through stressful launches.

Vicky: Yeah, and these launches are quite stressful I find because you look at these big internet marketing people who've got massive lists and do these really huge launches all the time - and they make a lot of money out of them - but I do wonder how stressful it is. And you've always got to look at the number of people who don't buy as well. If you get a 10% conversion, even from a warm list, that's still very good. But that still means that 90% of people are ignoring you! Always a little bit sobering to realise that. It leaves a bad taste in my mouth as well because like you say it's stressful and pushing sales onto

people is not very nice. When you've got something like a book to hang everything off, it allows people to come to you and say, "I really loved your book, what else have you got?" You have your little stable of products and services etc. things that people will ask you for, questions that people ask. I get that all the time. I had a few questions from people on certain topics and because of that I've thought, "I'm going to put this product together and that training together etc." A lot of them are half-finished in the nature of things. But it allows people to come to you, rather than you having to go to them all the time, and I think that's a very valuable thing.

Dom: Yeah, definitely. I totally agree.

Vicky: So, what else are you going to do with your book, Dom?

Dom: Well I did my first course, like I said, a seminar thing last week. The week before last. That went really well. That was just off the back of the book, before the book was even out I had that booked. I'll be doing more of those, I'm trying to get a bit of a tour going so i can go around some dog training clubs and show people in person what I actually teach in the book. It went down really well so I'm definitely going to do more of that. I've got the membership - my own sort of membership site starting, within the next month. I'm just putting together a few things. A podcast as well - Vicky I've got my own podcast starting in a couple of weeks!

Vicky: Hurrah!

Dom: I'm really looking forward to that. I'm going to try a video podcast, again because of the nature of dogs and working with dogs. It's nice to see the dogs and see what I'm doing, even if they have to look at me at the same time - they'll have to put up with that!

Vicky: I'm sure they'll cope, it's fine. They can focus on the dog, it'll be fine.

[Laughter]

Dom: Yeah, that's the plan.

Vicky: I think that's a really good idea actually. I love the idea of video podcasts because, like you say, what you do lends itself very well to the visual thing. Also the live events thing is a great idea because the absolute best members of my Inner Circle are people that I've met in real life. If you can get yourself out there, in real life, actually meeting people - this goes for you, this goes for anybody who is listening - it's worth doing free seminars for people. For example, I did a bunch at the chamber of commerce on email marketing and various other bits and bobs, and the longest-standing members that I have are people that met me in person, that have met me from these free events. The ROI on that is awesome, it's massive, so that's a really good idea. The other thing that's just popped into my head - and this is the kind of thing that you'll get from me if you have a lot of listeners. Take piles of your books to dog kennels and cattery type places - not catteries but they'll often do dogs and cats. Take them there and say to them, "Guys, you can sell this if you want and keep all the profits".

Dom: Yeah, brilliant. I just did that yesterday actually. There were a couple of people who we interviewed as part of the podcast prep for my podcast. They run rescues - one was in France and another was in Ireland, and I sent them off a little pile of books yesterday to do just that. I said, "Sell it for what you want, and just keep it and stick it in the jar for other little animals".

Vicky: Yeah, and that's a great idea. If you can, if you can get them to capture people's email addresses or agree to opt in to your email list at the same time, that might be a little more tricky.

Dom: I'm sure they'd be happy to do that for me, yeah.

Vicky: Yeah, I know that you'll have a call to action in your book anyway that will drive people to a resources page, or whatever. But if you can get people to actually agree to opt in at the point that they buy the book, that would be quite a cool thing to do.

Dom: Definitely. Yeah. I shall do that.

Vicky: Do. Okay, so what would you say to other business owners - or other people - who are either thinking of starting a business, or who have just started a business. What's your top piece of advice for them? Just to put you on the spot there.

Dom: [Laughs] I would definitely say do something that you love. Do something that you're going to enjoy doing because to me that's really important. If none of the online stuff worked out for me, if all of this disappeared tomorrow, I would still be quite happy walking the dogs every day. So you definitely should do something that you're going to enjoy doing.

Vicky: I totally agree.

Dom: But the other thing that I would say is to find people that are smarter than you and to pay them money to tell you stuff. It's not always easy and you do have to go through some shit people first but like anything, if you work hard enough. Buy some books, like your book. People should buy these things and read it, just see if they like what you've got to say. You can waste an awful lot of money trying to advertise a business with SEO and that kind of thing, as I have done in the past before I started to build a tribe, and build my own list of people, doing things the way that you do it and the way that I know a lot of other people do as well. That's definitely what I'd say you need because you can waste thousands and thousands on absolute crap, can't you?

Vicky: You can and I think it can be quite difficult to ask for help as well, to admit that you don't know something. And that's okay because what I've found is that a lot of business owners are so good at the thing that they do but they just don't know anything about running and marketing a business, and that's perfectly reasonable because they've never done it before, so there's no reason why they should know. It's not something that automatically you know, it's something that you learn from a lot of trial and error - because there is a lot of trial and error - and also from finding people who are just a little further down the road than you are. Taking advice from them and being really wary of people who claim to have all the answers as well, and who say, "This is the only way to do it" because there are a million and one different ways to do it.

What you have to do is to find the person that - like you say - you like the look and sound of them and you get on with. Just see what they're doing and take their advice. And question them as well, question their advice because not everything that anybody says is gospel just because they're successful. Successful people also tend to forget how they got there I think.

Dom: For sure, yeah. You don't need - I've just discovered this with the dog training - that many clients really, I don't think you need that many clients. It depends on what you're selling of course. If you're selling toilet brushes then you probably need quite a few but certainly if you're in the service industry - any kind of service - then you don't actually need that many clients, online or offline, to have a really comfortable living and be happy.

Vicky: Absolutely, I try not to have more than three clients at once because otherwise you can't give them your full attention. When you start charging more as well, you don't need that many and it just leads to stress. I think you're right, it's better - not putting all your eggs in one basket and just having those few clients. What I like to do is have a waiting lists of sorts, people who I know are waiting for me. It's probably the same with you. You're always going to have people - like you said, you're full to capacity - you're always going to have people who are like, "Dom, when can I come and work with you?", which is a really nice situation to be in.

Dom: Yeah it is, yeah. It's lovely.

Vicky: Well that's been really cool. I've really enjoyed chatting with you, thank you very much. Well, yes thank you really, that's basically it.

Dom: You're very welcome.

Vicky: Coming up, we're going to do some more about USPs because we kind of mentioned Dom's dog USP earlier - he's dog adventures and not just walks. That's really important so in the future, over the next few weeks, we're going to talk more about USPs - what they are, what they definitely aren't and what

most people get wrong. You can buy Dom's book, where can you buy Dom's book?

Dom: You can go to: www.mydogsuperhero.com, you can get the book there. It's also available on Kindle: If people want to just download a chapter for free and get on my email list you can go to www.mydogsuperhero.com/dogdays

Vicky: Podfly guys, that's Dog Days for the URL. Cool, that's brilliant and your Facebook page is Pack Leader Dog Adventures. Birllaitn and if anyone would like to for half an hour then that's www.businessforsuperheroes.com/borrow-my-brain That's all for this week. Thank you so much, Dom I really enjoyed that and I will see you - I will be in your ears next week, talking about possibly USPs, possibly something else, depending on how distracted I get. Be good, if you can't be good, don't get caught and we will see you. Joe will be back next time. Ta taa!

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