

## From Bankrupt to Six-Figures: How Amy Osaba Turned Her Business Around!

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Shanna Skidmore:

Hey, guys. We're so excited to jump in and talk all about the business side of doing flowers. We're here at Amy's house, and we're just so excited to dive in with you. And we thought it would be really fun to start just hearing more about Amy's background and how she got started in the floral business. And hopefully, you can kind of relate a little bit to her story in some ways or find inspiration in the fact that you can do this too. So, hey, Amy.

Amy Osaba:

Hey, Shanna.

Shanna Skidmore:

So I would love if you just take us back before you ever even started flowers, what were you doing, what was your story, and just kind of introduce us.

Amy Osaba:

I think, I was blissfully unaware of a lot of things. Let's see. Before I started doing flowers, I guess I was always the artistic, creative person. School is not my thing. I did not like school, but I really pursued ballet dancing. And I knew that I wanted to be a professional ballet dancer one day. So, that was where my focus was a lot in school. And after high school, I did move to New York City and pursued a ballet career, which was an awesome, incredible opportunity in my life to say that I got to fulfill a dream. But like many things after you do it for a while and you get in the drudgery of it all, it quickly, well, not quickly, I did it for about 10 years, but I kind of hit the wall. I felt like I did everything creatively that I could do and I just didn't see how it was going to get any better than it had already been. And I just got really burnt out and usually I'll do things hard for a long period of time and burn myself out. And then I'm like, "I never want to do that again." So, I don't have any regrets. So it was great, but I decided I didn't want to do that anymore. I didn't really know what I was going to do. So I did the natural progression to go back to school, even though I was not ever a good student, but I figured I'll go to that and figure out what I want to do next.

Shanna Skidmore:

Yeah.

Amy Osaba:

But after I was back home in Georgia for about a year, I met my husband then and got married and had children, three kids, three boys, and I was just kind of doing the mom thing. And I was very happy doing that. I love being a mom. But after maybe being married, gosh, it must've

been like four years or so. And he lost his job and I was like, well, I'm doing this sort of for friends and flower arrangements, and you're the creative person you end up doing all of the parties and all of the friend's weddings and my mom's friend's weddings, but-

Shanna Skidmore:

Do you mean just kind of doing it because they were asking you?

Amy Osaba:

Yeah, I was just doing it for fun.

Shanna Skidmore:

Yeah.

Amy Osaba:

But then after he lost his job, I'm like, "I think I could probably make some money doing this."

Shanna Skidmore:

Yeah.

Amy Osaba:

Just some residual income until he got a job, but that didn't ever happen. And so I was really forced into trying to start a business and you just make some money for our family.

Shanna Skidmore:

Right.

Amy Osaba:

And while it was still something that I loved doing, I didn't know what I was doing. And I was making it up as I went along, but I decided I'm going to do one bridal show and let's see what happens. I have like three gigs from that and then it just-

Shanna Skidmore:

Which is awesome because bridal shows now are-

Amy Osaba:

I would never do another one again, that was the only one. I don't really recommend doing that. Don't go that route, but it was the only thing that I knew to do and I did, but it was good, and then it was all like word of mouth after that. And here we are 13, 12 years later, I can't remember. But I always say, I think God knew I was going to need this. And so he just like thrust it forward into the universe. And I just had to kind of figure it out as I went along. But,

thankfully, awesome people were brought into my life like you and helped me pave the way to understand how to be a better business person which I'm still learning.

Shanna Skidmore:

Well, I really do feel like your story. I feel like so many listening can relate to because a lot of people I meet with are doing it just for fun or a passion or they did it for their own wedding, and then that's how they got started. Business is a secondary thing to the actual work.

Amy Osaba:

Yeah.

Shanna Skidmore:

Will you share, just in the beginning, how did you even order flowers and figure out how to price what you were doing?

Amy Osaba:

I didn't know what I was doing. I was really making it up as I went along and I had never really had any business background. I mean, I knew what I had going for me. I knew that I was creative and I have good people skills, so I just sort of made it up. If somebody gave me \$100 to spend on flowers, I spent 100 and sometimes \$150 on flowers because I wanted them to be overwhelmed not underwhelmed.

Shanna Skidmore:

Right.

Amy Osaba:

I always wanted to go above their expectations, but I didn't know anything about pricing. I thought, "Oh, I had \$100 check deposited in my account." I didn't even have a business account.

Shanna Skidmore:

In your personal account?

Amy Osaba:

Yeah, just a personal account. Yeah. Lots of people do that. And then that check would have been in there and then there's all this other money, not all this other, but some money. And when I went to go and do the flowers, I was like, "Oh, I'll just spend \$150. I got it in there. Let's just do that."

Shanna Skidmore:

Yeah.

Amy Osaba:

But not really realizing on the product or the service that I was giving, I wasn't making any money. So that quickly became exhausting, but I didn't know any other way and I just kept going through the treasury of it all. A lot of people already know this part of my story. After about two or three years of doing flowers as sort of a way to make some money for my family for a little while, I ended up getting divorced and at this point I had three little boys. The youngest was four whenever I got divorced. And I had a lot of pressure to make this work. I mean, I didn't have a college degree. Remember? Because I don't like school, and that's okay because there are some people who are like that in the world and we can make money doing other things.

Shanna Skidmore:

Right.

Amy Osaba:

So I was pursuing something creative and that I loved, but I was really just struggling. I was burning the candle at both ends, trying to be a great mom, trying to just have income for my family. Attorney's fees aren't cheap either. So I was really kind of forced to go down this path, which I think it's funny how life does that sometimes. I love what I do. And I love the people that have come into my life and my team and the experiences that I get to have. But it really wasn't a choice, like a cognitive choice where I said, "I'm going to be a floral designer."

Shanna Skidmore:

Yeah.

Amy Osaba:

But that was what I was doing well in that creative arena and it just happened, and I'm so thankful it did. But a lot of times, if you're younger, you have time on your side. If you have a partner, if you have a spouse, sometimes starting your own business is a little less pressure, not to say that it's not hard.

Shanna Skidmore:

Right.

Amy Osaba:

Because it's hard no matter what.

Shanna Skidmore:

Yeah.

Amy Osaba:

But I feel like I made all of the mistakes and then have the scramble on the backend of my business after I was already established-

Shanna Skidmore:

Brand-wise.

Amy Osaba:

... brand-wise. But learning about business stuff, I was not established that way. So I had to go back and undo a lot of things.

Shanna Skidmore:

I love so much hearing your story because I think a lot of people can relate to that. We're just figuring it out. And for you, you had a moment in your life where you had to figure out the business side. And I think like as hard as that was, maybe that was something that's, as you said, you are really thankful for that in ways because you were forced to figure it out.

Amy Osaba:

Yeah, it was pretty bad. I mean, I think I finally realized, "Oh, I need some business knowledge or something." And I went to some guy that was like a CPA or a mutual fund person, and he came in and asked to see my books and my business plan. I was like, "Huh, what?" And then, he asked me what my income was or something, and I don't even know. I didn't even know what to show him.

Shanna Skidmore:

Yeah.

Amy Osaba:

I mean, that's so up here for me. And, of course, he was using all these big words and trying to... I mean, I feel like he was intentionally trying to make me feel stupid. I don't know if he was doing it intentionally, but he did. And I was mad about it because I'm like, I don't like to look like an idiot, but I'm also okay with the fact that that is not my brain. But you do have to acknowledge what your strengths and what your weaknesses are. And what your weaknesses are especially in business, it's either ask for help, learn it yourself, figure out a way to have a long, sustainable business because I knew in my position and where I was with my life that I was getting older. I had children. It's not like I could go and do some other career or I wasn't going to start something else at this point. And so I was like, "Okay, these are the cards I've been dealt. I'm going to make it happen."

Shanna Skidmore:

Yeah.

Amy Osaba:

And that was that guy. And then Shanna Skidmore came into my life, and explained all those big words in ways that I could understand. But it just made sense to me. And then I really started to connect the dots and realize, "Wow. I really do have an awesome opportunity here with the business and what I was doing." And you were just so motivating and encouraging at one of the lowest points in my life because that CPA guy told me that I was bankrupt and I should just walk away. And I was like, "Well, that's not an option. So I'm just going to keep trudging forward. Thanks, bye-bye."

Shanna Skidmore:

Yeah, absolutely. I feel like so many people feel that way because you just don't know what you don't know.

Amy Osaba:

Yeah. I don't even know the questions to ask.

Shanna Skidmore:

I think the biggest thing, you built a brand that was very recognizable, but I want to go back to and talk about in those early stages. You said, "I was just figuring out the pricing, I just would basically use their budget." Tell us some other kind of first things that you did. Did you have a website? Did you go to networking events? Was there anything that you strategically kind of did or the steps that you were taking way back then that you felt like helped you?

Amy Osaba:

I really don't think I did anything strategic back then. But I do think there's sort of an instinct inside of me that I did know, "Okay, this is something that I need to pursue." And I had an instinct of the people that I wanted to work with or the kind of business that I wanted, which was creative, outside the box, not your normal, whatever, but I didn't have a website for almost the first two years. And the first website I ever had, I mean, I wish I could find it. It would probably be laughable now, but-

Shanna Skidmore:

Your friend did it.

Amy Osaba:

My friend did it, yeah. And I mean, it was one of my really good friend's husbands, and we stayed up until like four o'clock in the morning at his kitchen table. And I mean, what a labor of love. I have a good friend.

Shanna Skidmore:

Right. Yeah.

Amy Osaba:

But it just had pictures on it. I think that was it. Nothing else. But I had a website. I did go to a lot of handshake networking things. I mean, we have social media networking, which is basically the same thing, but any kind of event I would go to. And I hated it every night before I was going to go. I'm like, "Why am I doing this?" But every single time I went, I was so glad I did. I made a new connection or gain some business or I don't know, a lead in some way. I mean, it was always... And I still feel like that to this day. It's never a bad idea to get in front of someone's face.

Shanna Skidmore:

Right.

Amy Osaba:

But there was a really cool opportunity that came along early in my career. But when I first started having kids, I used to teach ballet whenever I came back to Georgia and there's this one student that she and I just became friends. I sort of mentored her and we were still friends now, but she was really good friends and went to school with Emily Newman of Once Wed and If I Made. And they had just gotten out of college, I think, and I needed someone to babysit my kids. And she was like, "Oh, my really good friend, Emily, she's awesome. She's like the best nanny. She reads books on all of this business stuff and nannying." Anyway, she, I think was just starting Once Wed, with the dresses. Anyway, she babysat my kids. And after about a year or so, she was really doing awesome with Once Wed and they did, it was called The Not Wedding back then the N-O-T wedding. And that experience really introduced me to this new wave of weddings that we see now, which are, I guess it started out as being more crafty, more DIY, a little more artistically-driven instead of just your traditional weddings. But the other vendors are people that we all were starting at the same time. And we all were kind of just figuring it out, but we all wanted to have events. I mean, it was photographers caterers, that was the beginning of Smilebooth and few others that we were just starting, but we all kind of were doing this new look, especially if we're here on the East Coast. No one was really doing those like wildflower flowers, but I was like a big fan of Flower Wild and Saipua way before and Ariella Chezar before I ever even started doing flowers.

Shanna Skidmore:

Yeah.

Amy Osaba:

So down here, I think that's where my niche kind of started and how the brand became recognizable so quickly because no one else was really doing that here. But those network of people I still do events with, and we all have general same point of view and perspective on aesthetics of weddings and then serve anything.

Shanna Skidmore:

Will you share some of the names of those people? So you said Emily with Once Wed, and who were some of the other people? Because I think the audience would really...

Amy Osaba:

Yeah. It's a neat part of the story because we were all just starting out. It was Jesse Chamberlin of Our Labor of Love. They used to live in Atlanta a long time ago. And Heidi Geldhauser, they were all in Our Labor of Love together. And Our Labor of Love is now Smilebooth and Sharkpig, and I don't know what else, but they are all doing awesome. And those relationships that I built back then are still thriving now and incredible relationships. I mean, I got to go out to California and do the flowers for Jesse's and Jimmy Marble's wedding, which was so random and cool. It's just neat to find your people that you can rely on and bounce business ideas back and forth with and be like, "Hey, I struggled with this." And it's also comforting when they're like, "I struggle with that too." Or, yeah, "I'm not getting any leads in January and February. Are we going to make it next year?" It's good.

Shanna Skidmore:

And I think that's really important for everyone to hear that because I think those names now are people that are... Amy Osaba was like way up here, but you guys started together. You were all at the same level and kind of just an encouragement to find that group of people that are where you are because those are the vendors that are going to grow with you. They're all going to grow together.

Amy Osaba:

Yeah. And you can have your own people that instead of getting into the whole comparison thing, instead of looking at other people that you might be online with and wondering and wishing, "Oh, I wish I could have that opportunity." You can create those opportunities yourself.

Shanna Skidmore:

And knowing that you all grow. I mean, I think you would say looking back at your first pictures, you would not really love those flowers now, but it takes time to get there.

Amy Osaba:

Yeah. It does. It takes time.

Shanna Skidmore:

For sure. So I loved hearing like the beginning of your story and some first steps that you took, but now 12 years later, what would you look back and say, "If I had done these three things or one or two things like these are the things I wish I had known at the beginning because, wow, it would have really helped."



Amy Osaba:

Well, number one, pricing. Number one, pricing. I wish that I would have priced right and just known that you have to have top costs like you can't just spend your whole budget on just the flowers and not think about the chicken wire or the oasis or the vessel or the container or the gas to go and pick them up and bring it back. I mean, I didn't understand any of that. So pricing right, and the price point. And this is one thing that I always say to people that want my advice, which is still weird by the way. But I feel like I've gained enough knowledge in these 12 years to hopefully prevent people from making mistakes like I did. But I feel like if everyone would price correctly, then it doesn't dumb down the industry, whether that's weddings or flowers or whatever, but especially in flowers, because it is hard to price flowers out sometimes. And you don't know really how because they fluctuate so much. But if people can just get that right, rather than worrying or thinking, "Well, I can do it better than her. And I would do it cheaper." That's not successful for you or it's not going to set you up to be successful in the long run. You can charge less than the beginning, I think. But as you grow and develop your own style and sense of, okay, I know that this is what I'm worth. And then it's just better in the long run for yourself, then you can charge more later on. But pricing's a big, big thing. You have to price right. Another thing that I wish, I wish I would have just probably been a little more selective of great opportunities, I call them, which they are great opportunities, but generally you spend your own money and it's out of pocket, which those things are good to do sometimes, but I think I wish I would have been more selective and really vetted out certain opportunities instead of wasting my time and effort and money on running around.

Shanna Skidmore:

Yeah. And I think that's such a great point because a lot of people, especially starting out, you want to build a portfolio and you want to get these images and you have all this, and that's why I always talk about doing a brand shoot. These are really great pointers. Thanks for sharing your story-