

S04 E03

BEHIND THE MEMBERSHIP

CARYN LILES
CENTRE FOR CANINE EDUCATION



Callie: My guest today is Caryn Liles from the Centre of Canine Education. And while her membership is only a few months old, I really wanted to share her experience with listeners to show what's possible with memberships even when you have to launch quickly and in a market that you may not think is a fit for online training. Because when COVID-19 first hit earlier this year, Caryn could have easily thought the worst when she had to close her brick-and-mortar dog training business down overnight.

Instead, she chose to pivot quickly to an online membership model for both her existing clients and a wider audience as well. And it's been such a success that she isn't even sure if she'll open up her physical business again. I loved talking with Caryn about her journey and how the membership has quite literally been life-changing for her, giving her more time, less stress and a better work-life balance than she thought possible. So without further ado, here's Behind The Membership season 4, episode 3.

Speaker 2: Welcome to Behind The Membership with Callie Willows. Real people, real stories, real memberships.

Callie: Today, I'm joined on the show by Caryn Liles from the Centre of Canine Education. Thank you so much for joining me on the show today, Caryn I'm really looking forward to chatting with you about all things membership.

Caryn: Thanks for having me.

Callie: To get us started, I like to get my guests to tell us a little bit about your membership first. So who's it for, what kind of thing does it offer.

Caryn: Sure. So our membership is a dog training and behaviour modification membership and it's geared towards just average pet dog guardians and we cover everything from pre-adoption planning through puppyhood and adolescents all the way up through really complex behaviour challenges into senior and geriatric.

Callie: How awesome. So a whole spectrum then. And that's for end customers. It's not for kind of other dog trainers and things like that, it's for people adopting dogs themselves.

Caryn: Exactly.

Callie: Awesome. And so when did you actually launch the membership?

Caryn: So I started building the membership early on this year, so January or so and I wasn't sure why I was building it, I just sort of felt some kind of a need. And by March I realised what that need was, and it was good old COVID, and I was really lucky and that I could really pivot quickly and move my brick-and-mortar students into the membership quickly and also launched to a greater population.

Callie: Awesome. So you'd already started building the membership, but then you know what hit the fan and you kind of were already in that good position to be able to launch this quite quickly.

Caryn: Exactly. And I've been doing online courses for two years already. So it wasn't super, super new to me but the membership side of things definitely was.

Callie: So I'd love to know then making that shift from the more brick-and-mortar based to the membership. Now, obviously a lot of that was kind of instigated by events and things closing down or in person work closing down. But did you find that you had any pushback from your audience on doing that or were they actually quite appreciative of the fact that they could now do this online experience instead?

Caryn: I was honestly blown away at how much support I was getting from my students. I mean, I do have the best students and I've known that for more than 10 years, but this was really overwhelming and the support that I received was incredible. I think I only had about five requests for refunds and they were for the most part very understanding in the sense that they were willing to wait until later in the summer, until we figured out what was really happening.

Callie: So that was refunds for your in-person services?

Caryn: Exactly.

Callie: Okay. With your in-person clients, did you grandfather them into the membership or was that a separate offer to them?

Caryn: So I grandfathered them in. I calculated what they had remaining as a credit and then I put that towards this membership so they would get three months free or a month free or six or 12 months free depending on how much they had and there, or I would just make the adjustments based on what their needs were if they needed more private training then I would just adjust that to say, "Okay, you've got three months in the membership and you've got two live calls with me that we can work through your specific challenges."

Callie: Awesome. So it sounds like there's a fair amount of kind of customization for each member in the start there for you.

Caryn: Absolutely. It was a lot of spreadsheets.

Callie: Yeah. I don't envy that. Not at all. But you mentioned that you did also launch the membership to kind of your wider audience as well as a result. So did you find that you had a good uptake from that as well?

Caryn: Yeah, I was again surprised that people were so willing to jump in, but I think we were all expecting more of an online life for a little while. So it wasn't terribly surprising, but it was nice welcome for sure.

Callie: And so I think in Canada kind of the situation is changing a bit and things are starting to open back up now. So are you now running the membership alongside the in-person classes or is it still mainly the membership?

Caryn: So right now it's only the membership. I'm not totally comfortable reopening. I actually closed my brick-and-mortar completely because we didn't have the most understanding landlord situation and I wasn't willing to carry the overhead indefinitely. So I put everything in storage and kind of moved everything online. And I think all of our students are kind of expecting that we'll reopen because we are one of the busiest schools in the city and the surrounding area and we have been for 10 years.

So it's been a little bit of a challenge to kind of get back to people and say, you know what, even though we're in phase two of reopening and we can go and sit on a patio with a select number of people, it doesn't mean that I'm comfortable putting senior citizens and children and families into a small space.

Callie: Yeah, and I think that makes perfect sense. Definitely a tough situation for you, but I am really happy that you've actually been able to get that membership up and running so quickly so that you've kind of got that a little bit of a safety net there to allow you to do that from the sounds of it.

Caryn: Exactly.

Callie: And so you mentioned before that you had offered other online products and courses before the membership. Are you still offering them? If they've been put into the membership, how are you dealing with those?

Caryn: Yeah. So those ones actually slid perfectly into more of a premium level of the membership. We started with three levels of the membership and then I quickly learned my lesson that it was just too complex and it was way too much work and way too confusing for people. So I pared it down to two levels basic and premium and the premium level is the grandfathering of the old courses that are for more complex behaviour challenges like reactivity and aggression or severe separation anxiety. And people who just need a little bit more daily support as opposed to just sort of the basics or planning for a puppy.

Callie: Awesome. And so do you find that with this particular topic are people in it for the long haul kind of thing? Do they recognise that kind of having the dog and training the dog is kind of a long-term commitment or are people wanting more of that quick fix? They've got one particular issue and they want to get that fixed and you've then got to educate them on, "Well, you

might have fixed that but now here's these other things that you might need to do."

Caryn: Exactly. I love that you asked that question. I think a lot of people... I shouldn't say a lot, but maybe 30 to 40% of people don't recognise that this is a journey and they think that they need to just join for that first month get what they need and get the heck out of Dodge. But you're right. It is a journey, it's a process and it doesn't just end with fixing that one problem, it can really go on for quite some time, the life of the dog.

So it's really fascinating to see the people who join up and they get through the first month or two or three and then they go, "Oh, wow. There's a lot more to this." There are other things that I'm dealing with. It's kind of a game of whack-a-mole because I fix one problem and two other things pop up because now my dog is an adolescent. Or we had this bad experience in the dog park and there's some residual trauma and now we have to work through that. So it's been really interesting to see that 30 to 40% of people come in expecting a quick fix, but then end up staying longer because they can.

Callie: Yeah, and I guess the membership is a perfect way to present that to them as well because they can see everything else that's there and that they might need.

Caryn: Exactly that.

Callie: So the membership is still quite new for you, but what would you say has been your biggest challenge so far?

Caryn: I think my biggest challenges, it feels more like juggling, not really knowing what my day looks like and feeling that pressure, that pressure not just for perfectionism. It's got to be perfect before I put it out there, but also the pressure to be constantly creating content when I have so much content. There is so much in there, these people could be busy for the next six to eight months easily and I'm still putting that pressure on myself to create new and innovative courses and things like that. So those are my biggest challenges.

Callie: So with that question of content then, is that pressure coming from your members or is that just something you're feeling that you need to do?

Caryn: Oh, it's 100% pressure from me. My members are actually really happy and they feel like, "Wow, there's a lot of content. There's so much to go through." They're always asking, "Okay, I finished this one course. Where do I go next? What would you suggest if this is what I'm dealing with?" And then I've always got something to point them to. And I think only twice in the last few months have I ever said to anyone, "I don't have a course for that specifically so we would need to book a call on one-on-one."

Callie: Awesome. And so with the one-on-one calls, is that an additional fee or is that something you include in the membership?

Caryn: So it is an additional fee. What I do is I block certain parts of my day so that I'm available for a limited number of one-on-one calls every week otherwise I'm going to burn out. And also I give them a members-only discount. So my regular hourly fee right now is of course discounted because of COVID and that'll be coming up as soon as we hit phase three, uncomfortable sort of re-upping that to my regular rate. But as of right now my members get a really, really sweet discount on one-on-one lessons.

Callie: Awesome. And so if those are things you found challenging, what's been your favourite thing so far?

Caryn: Absolutely my favourite thing has to be the communication every day with my students and getting to know them. I went into dog training because I love people and I feel like I'm more of a people trainer than I am a dog trainer. And I think a lot of people in my position, a lot of dog trainers feel that way that they go into it because they love animals, they love dogs and then they're sort of surprised how much human contact there is. Whereas when I went into this, I knew that going in and I was really excited about it.

So being able to communicate with my students every day, Monday to Friday, whether it's on the forum or on a live Q&A or in a group class on Zoom, it's really great to put faces to names, to see the dogs, even though I can't snuggle them and smell their sweet paws, it's really nice to be able to have that contact and be able to support them in a way that I wasn't able to do with a brick and mortar.

Callie: Yeah, and something I noticed from the academy is that you're providing quite a lot of live content in the membership as well.

Caryn: Yes. And I think that that was a little bit of a stressor for me in the beginning because I wasn't sure how much is too much and I was really worried because I know that sometimes less is more and I don't want to overwhelm my students. But I do find that I've hit that sweet spot where I've got my live Q&A on Tuesdays where they can just bombard me with questions and I answer them, we recorded it, repost the replay and we're good to go.

Every Wednesday we do a live class and as many people can join as they want and they can show me what they're doing with their dog. We work on three specific behaviours and that's it. So I demonstrate with my dog. I've got a bit of a studio set up, which is really nice and easy and then I come back to the video and they practise and I give them feedback. It's a nice balance because I'm in and out of the forum Monday to Friday and then I'm live twice a week with them to really give them that live feedback that they need. And I don't find it terribly overwhelming. There's not planning that I need to do because I've been doing it for 10 years.

Callie: And so you finding that your members are actually really liking that option for the live feedback, is that a case of using Zoom and they can kind of show you how they're working with the dog and you can give feedback that way?

Caryn: Absolutely. It's really nice because I can help them with their timing or their mechanics. I can give them a heads up like, "Oh your dog your dog is showing some stress signals right now so we need to back off a little bit, give them a little bit of space and time and let's come back and try it again. Or what the angle that you're working at is causing you to lean over your dog, whatever it is that I can actually see them over Zoom as opposed to coaching them over the phone for example or trying to give feedback blindly.

Callie: I love that. It's something that I would never think of necessarily being. I can't think of the right way to put it, but that kind of really recreating more of an in-person experience as much as possible, and in fact probably better because people are in their own home and more relaxed I would imagine as well.

Caryn: Yeah. And it's amazing what happens with the dogs as well because in a brick-and-mortar, in a group dog training class, the dogs are excited, right? Their buddies are everywhere. Everyone's got meatballs and cheese in their treat pouches and there's noise and there's excitement, and then of course the instructors are the most amazing Pez dispensing machines on the planet.

So the dogs get really overstimulated and really excited. And in their home environment, they're super relaxed.

So it's a nice starting point because when we're working with any kind of behaviour change, we have to make it easy to start and then gradually increase the difficulty. And that's with all species. And so I think I'm finding that the people are also less stressed because there's less social pressure. They can turn their camera off and then if they need a hand they can either ask a question or they could turn their camera on. I can zoom in on them, give them some live feedback and off we go.

Callie: That sounds awesome. As an introvert that sounds like my idea of heaven over going to a group class to be honest.

Caryn: We cater to both introverts and extroverts.

Callie: Yeah, perfect. So let's talk tactics now then. What are you finding has been working well for you when it comes to actually attracting new members?

Caryn: So I'm really lucky in the sense that I still have a really, really wild presence in the City of Toronto. People still know our name and there's that ghost of our brick and mortar that's still there. People talk about us in the dog parks and in their play groups and that daycare and things like that. So I think that's a really big part of the word of mouth is huge. So I've tried to take that, turn it into an affiliate programme. I haven't put enough energy into it to be completely fair and honest. It's not really super taking off. It's sort of trickling which is fine. I'm happy with that and I can put more time in that one. I've got the energy.

The other tactic that's working for me is just my relationship with veterinarians. Before COVID hit, I would travel to that clinics within the GTA or the Greater Toronto Area and I would train the veterinarians and the text and the staff in body language and behaviour in dogs. And I would give them a box of personalised cards with a coupon code for their patients or their clients and that would link directly to our booking system, so I could really track that ROI. I had some of these things in place for many years before this. So all of those things are still paying off which is nice, but I am getting worried that as time goes on and I don't have a brick-and-mortar, how active is that tactic going to be you know in another three or six months.

Callie: Yeah. So it sounds like most of your members are still local to you then.

Caryn: Yeah. I would say that most of them are maybe 80 to 85% of them are local and then about maybe 15% are sort of scattered around Canada. I've got some in the states as well and I've got a couple in the UK.

Callie: Awesome. And so would you be looking to kind of turn it more international as it grows or are you quite happy keeping that more local feel as well?

Caryn: I don't know. I mean, I think the dream is always to go international, right? I think the dream is always to be as big as you can be and to make this as great as it could possibly be. So of course, I would be so happy to have anyone from Canada, the States, the UK and beyond, right?

Callie: So one thing I noticed on your sales page and again, you've mentioned this in the academy as well is that you're offering free discovery calls for people as well before they join the membership.

Caryn: Yes.

Callie: How is that working for you and what made you decide to try that?

Caryn: It was about two years ago when I first launched an online course and it was a pretty robust course for dogs who are experiencing leash reactivity or aggression. And when I launched this course I knew that people would have a tonne of questions, but at the time, it was really challenging to be able to answer the phone all day while I'm trying to teach and do marketing and advertising and all of the other good stuff. So I started booking 15-minute discovery calls with people. And it was amazing how even within the first five minutes, I could make the sale.

I knew the questions they would ask because I've been teaching this course for a decade and so it was easy for me to sort of hone in on what it was they're looking for based on the questions that they ask, and I could kind of put them in a specific bucket and go, "Okay, this is the challenge they're dealing with. I've seen this a thousand times. These are the concerns that they have and here's how I can address those obstacles."

So I just started doing it again recently. I don't know why I took it off my roster for a while. Probably overwhelmed, pre-COVID overwhelmed, but

now that I've got a little bit of time, I put them back on the calendar and it's incredible how quickly that books up in my calendar and the signup rate is a hundred percent.

Callie: That's awesome.

Caryn: So far.

Callie: I was going to say that's incredible. It's an incredible conversion rate, but it's also not something most people would consider doing for a membership that kind of discovery call. So I love that you obviously had the experience of doing it previously, but I love that you've been testing that for this as well. And I would imagine given that your topic that perhaps one of the biggest issues to people joining the membership is that concern about the fact that, "Well, how are you going to see if what I'm doing is actually working? How does it work online?" So I'd imagine that discovery call is perfect for you actually being able to explain, "Well, this is how it works. You can still get the personal feedback," and that kind of thing.

Caryn: Exactly. And to really dispel the myth that I need to be there physically in person, in order for them to change their dog's behaviour, 99.9% of dog training can be done from absolutely anywhere with just a little bit of coaching. And if you've got good visuals and if you can describe things really, really clearly and easily and simplify them. It doesn't have to be really complex. It doesn't have to be brain surgery, and to be able to follow up with good resources to support them as they work through that behaviour change. Now, yes, there are some situations where I would much rather be there in person and when that happens I can either set a time to go into a social distancing session in the backyard if need be or I can refer to a colleague that I know and trust who is working in their area.

Callie: Awesome. And so the other thing I wanted to talk about with getting the members side of things was your pricing structure. So I know you used a little bit of a different pricing structure to the majority of memberships out there where you kind of have a higher fee for the first three months, and then you drop down to that much, much lower monthly fee. So what was the basis for that pricing structure?

Caryn: So pricing, I think was the biggest hurdle that I had when I started this process. And I struggled with it for quite some time and even now, I still

question it. It is something that I'm still sort of throwing around and playing with and thinking should I just up it to a flat fee of \$40 or \$50 a month. And then move on from there. But I do feel like because they get so much of me live every week, it would be really easy for them to take the first month and then go, "Okay. Got what I need. Thanks. I don't need any more."

I know that's always a concern that people have and it's not always realistic. I think in a lot of memberships because a lot of memberships don't have a tonne of live stuff happening every week, it's easy for them to say you know it's fine. If you do take the first month and you take off, that's okay. But I really need these people to commit to a time frame. And so that's why I stuck with three months in advance just to get that upfront commitment. It's very reasonable in comparison to a lot of dog training class formats that are out there.

So most of the time, you'll find you know six classes are anywhere from \$150 to 297 for those six classes. And so I think people see that that's right in the middle and maybe on the low end and they're comfortable committing to that for a good three months with what they get.

Callie: And then presumably as well because if I remember off the top of my head, I had the monthly pricing after that is 19 or 29 depending on the membership level. So that presumably then seems kind of like a no-brainer price to carry on in order to get that support ongoing.

Caryn: Exactly that. And that's what I tell people in our discovery calls. I'm like you know what, you can leave after the first three months if that's what you want. There's no pressure. You can cancel anytime. But for \$19 a month, it is a no-brainer. Where else are you going to find a dog trainer, a certified qualified dog trainer who is totally science-based and doesn't support silly gimmicks out there. Someone who has studied psychology and animal behaviour for \$19 a month. You've got a trainer on call. It would be crazy not to take advantage of it.

Callie: So this might not be something that you've come across yet, given how young the membership is. But what's your plan with if somebody does cancel and then come back. Would they still pay the three months up front again or would they go straight to monthly payments in that case?

Caryn: So I love that question because it's been on my board this entire week. I've been sort of looking at that question and going I really need to plan for this. Because so far no one has asked that question. I'm really, really lucky because I don't have the answer. But I think based on the fact that when they come in there is so much content and if they were to come back, I don't think it would make sense to charge another registration fee. But I do have to recognise that it's really easy for people to sort of come and go and come and go.

And I don't want to make it super, super easy for that to happen in this case where there's so much live support. I do have to find a good balance there where maybe there's just like a re-up registration fee as opposed to the full registration fee.

Callie: Yeah. And so if those are the kind of things you're doing to market site, get new members, what are you focusing on when it comes to retention and keeping your members happy and sticking around?

Caryn: So that's the part that I actually don't feel any stress about to be completely honest. I do send out a fairly regular email to everyone to say, "Here's what's been happening. Here the new things that have been added." I've spruced up this course. There's more video content and there are some downloadables and things like that. And I think just keeping them in the loop as far as what I'm doing to help support them through this journey.

The other thing that I do is I do one live webinar every month and it's open to the public. I charge \$25 for it which is pretty great for an hour-and-a-half webinar I would say, and again COVID pricing. My members don't pay for it. It's part of their membership fee. So that's another big selling point and it's another big retention point because they're going to want to come to that webinar, but they could pay \$25 for it as a non-member or they could pay 19 and get an entire month of support as well. So I've kind of adjusted things in that way to make like you said, a no-brainer to just stick around.

Callie: Yeah. So moving forward when you either reopen things or you're expanding what you're doing, is your goal that the membership is essentially going to become the focus of the business. So things like the extra workshops and webinars you're doing, there'll always be an added benefit for members or would you be separating things out a bit further as things grow do you think?

Caryn: Yeah. It's so tough to know what the future holds. I mean, do I want to reopen a brick-and-mortar? I ask myself that question every day because the overhead is it's obscene in Toronto. It's so expensive. And having instructors and staff and cleaning, and all of that stuff it's a big responsibility. And if we can keep going with a membership, why would we need to do that when there are other people out there who are doing great jobs with their brick and mortars and I could just send them there if they need in-person training.

But I feel like this is kind of the way of the future in a lot of ways. There's always going to be a need for puppy socialisation classes. There's always going to be a need for hands-on dog training, but I think at this exact moment on this day, I'm kind of feeling like there's really no need for me to go backwards and to reopen and get that overhead, but more so just focus on the membership and keep growing it.

Callie: Wow, awesome. Yeah, definitely, you can't really compare the overheads of a membership to a brick-and-mortar business really.

Caryn: Exactly.

Callie: So shifting gears a little bit then. Let's actually talk about life as a membership site owner. How are you finding things so far?

Caryn: I love it. I'm not going to lie. I feel like I am so much less stressed than I was with a brick-and-mortar which is really exciting, that's amazing. I have totally figured out work-life balance. I understand why people take weekends off, which is something I've never done in my entire career as a dog trainer. I have worked seven days a week, 18 hours a day. I just go, go, go, go, go until I crash. And this has provided me with a work-life balance where I can go and spend time with my dog, we can take longer walks, we can go on hikes we can you know do all of these things I can visit family and friends outside of COVID.

There's so much that I can do that I couldn't do before. And so that freedom has been incredible because I can check in from my phone. I can be sitting in a parking lot and checking in on the forum and answering questions. And then head out to do my grocery shopping or whatever it is. So I think that part of it is really amazing, but the other side of it is a creative outlet. I'm such a nerd. I used to code websites from the ground up and so this has been

sort of scratching that itch for me where I can kind of nerd out on the software and get back into it. I'm a little rusty but I'm really enjoying it.

Callie: Awesome. And so has anything actually surprised you about being a membership site owner or running the membership site?

Caryn: Oh, good question. I feel like it's all been surprising. In the beginning I think I doubted that this would fit my industry. You know what I mean? I kept thinking I need to be a life coach or I need to be some sort of a business-related business, if that makes any sense. And I need to be providing a service or a product that helps people make money. And that's the way I had perceived memberships up until this point. And when I started doing this and I realised, you know what, I can have a service-based membership. People are going to pay to solve a problem and not just pay to make more money. That changed everything for me and so I think it's just a matter of changing everyone else's mind as well and that dog training doesn't have to be live, in person with me holding your hands.

Callie: And was there anything in particular that kind of highlighted that for you? So when you realise that actually this could really work as a membership site.

Caryn: I don't think I believed it until I started getting feedback. I think I needed that external feedback because I mean we can get stuck in our own heads really, really, easily and we can have perceptions that are completely inaccurate. And we can look at the data and go, "Things are going well. I was able to give myself a paycheck this month or whatever it was." But I think when I started getting feedback from my members where they would send a video and say, "This was my morning walk with my dog. He's not pulling on leash. He's not lunging at children on scooters. He's not barking at dogs. He's looking at me with joy in his eyes and we're super connected and things are going really well." That's when I started to realise, "Oh my gosh. I'm actually making a difference. This is working. It can work and it's going to work."

Callie: I love that and just going back to something you mentioned a few minutes ago, you mentioned about the fact that you've got a forum as part of the membership. So are you finding that your members are actually happy asking questions in there and engaging with both you and each other?

Caryn: I am. I'm finding that it's a very active forum which is really nice. I may have to bring another trainer on board just to sort of help me work through the questions because there are going to be tonnes of questions every day and there are going to be a lot of repeats for sure. When is it normal for my dog to be potty trained? At what age should I expect this that or the other thing? And those types of questions while they are covered in the courses, some people don't get to them first. They go to the forum for that immediate support.

And when I get my feedback, I send out a sequence through ConvertKit to my members and I've got as one of them, maybe the fourth or fifth message is, "Hey, how are things going? What's working for you? What isn't? Do you mind just taking this really really quick little survey. It's like five questions long. You just click a button, that's it." And when I get that survey back, a lot of the people who are filling out the survey are saying that the community is not a big part of why they're sticking around. They're not using it at all and I'm thinking, "That's so weird because it is so active. It's unbelievable." So it's like, "Okay. Why are the people who are not using the community submitting feedback and the ones who are using the community aren't?" I guess they know that I know they're happy perhaps.

Callie: I think that's actually quite common. We have a very similar thing where a lot of the people that are very vocal in the community, if we send out surveys and things like that, they're not the ones that complete them, it's the ones that we never normally hear from, but they give you really good feedback and they're like, "We love all the things." And you're like, "But you never speak to us."

Caryn: Exactly. It really blows my mind because I'm like I have to go in and look them up, and "Who are you? I've never seen you on camera. I don't know what your dog looks like. You've never introduced yourself. What's happening? But I'm glad you're having a great time."

Callie: I think things like that always remind me of the fact that there's so many people that you are affecting and helping that you don't even realise. So that's great. And so you mentioned about you might bring on another trainer in the future. At the moment is everything with the membership just you or do you have anybody helping you now?

Caryn: So it's myself and my Veronica. And Veronica is a fabulous human that I actually hired January 2nd of this year. She was there to run the whole brick-and-mortar. So she was in charge of the operations, the administrative side and supporting the instructors in class. As I got to know her and I started to realise that she's got these amazing gifts, she's an incredible artist, she's brilliant when it comes to marketing, social media and she's an excellent communicator. She's just an all-around incredible human.

So when COVID hit, I was like, "I cannot lose this girl. She is gold. So the two of us, she increased her hours almost up to full-time hours once COVID hit, which is the opposite of what most people were doing." And the two of us really dug deep into this membership. And so it's two of us right now. I do have another trainer who was at my brick-and-mortar with me for many years who is helping out on the sidelines with certain handouts and training plans and things like that. And then I've got two other trainers I'm hoping to sort of bring back as things get busier to do either video calls or live training or workshops or interviews, or even just helping out in the forum.

Callie: Awesome. So already kind of have a game plan for how you're going to expand things as you continue to grow?

Caryn: Yeah. It's all about getting my team back. I miss them like crazy.

Callie: And so you've already touched on this, but what impact would you say having the membership has had for you so far?

Caryn: It's really decreased my stress, which is fascinating. I didn't realise how stressed I was running a brick-and-mortar until I started running a membership. And I think it's a matter of finding what makes you happy as opposed to finding what the public thinks they need right or your members or your people think they need. And I can serve people so much better this way than I've ever been able to. I don't regret the brick and mortar. I don't regret the 10 plus years that I spent in the industry doing what I was doing. I think it was incredible and I loved it. But this way, I can give people five days of support every week whereas beforehand it was you show up for an hour-long class, you've got your handouts and I'll see you next week. If you have questions, I'll answer them next week.

So it was a lot of burnout whereas with this, its bite-size and it's at my pace. I can sit down for two blocks in one day to say, "Okay, I'm going to tackle

email and forum and then I'll do that at the end of the day as well, and I don't feel overwhelmed." So that's life changing.

Callie: Wow. I love that. I love that the membership has been a life change for you already. That's awesome. So something you've mentioned a couple of times is about the fact that with the membership you're providing support five days a week. So are you actually quite firm in setting those boundaries of this is a Monday to Friday, you can access me and Saturday and Sunday is my time kind of thing?

Caryn: It is. This conversation with you, Callie is so well timed because as of right now, the weekend that just passed was the first weekend that I have honestly taken off in, I don't know how long. It might be years, right? So my last vacation was 2014 and that's probably the last time that I unplugged, and this past weekend I unplugged. I didn't look at the membership, I didn't look at my emails. I didn't check my phone. I didn't do anything relating to technology. I did everything outdoorsy. I did everything crafty. I spent time with family. It was completely wild. And I thought, "Oh my gosh, I totally get this whole weekend thing, why people do this."

From day one, I actually have been very vigilant with those boundaries because I knew it had to happen at some point. But I was only outwardly vigilant with those boundaries. My clients knew, my students knew that I wouldn't be checking and answering on a Saturday, Sunday even if they had some sort of a training emergency. It would be dealt with on Monday at noon when we opened back up, but I was still working. I was still creating content and I was still reading the messages.

Callie: So you've kind of gone from setting that initial boundary, giving that a little time to kick in and now fully embracing it and actually taking that time off?

Caryn: Exactly.

Callie: That sounds good to me.

Caryn: Me too.

Callie: So as we start to wrap up then, I would love to know what your goals for the membership are. Where would you like to be in 12 months time?

Caryn: So in 12 months time, I want to be at the same level of income for the business as I was with a brick-and-mortar and... Well, not the same. I want to be beyond that. That would be of course my goal. But I also would love to have another person on staff and I would love to be able to look at my calendar and see that every three months, I have booked a week off. And that is completely disconnected. That's a road trip somewhere. That's a camping trip, whatever it is. It's a staycation. I don't care. I don't think we'll be flying anywhere anytime soon. But that would be my goal is to really have sort of the ultimate work-life balance in place and the support that I need to keep doing what I'm doing. I think those are my biggest, biggest goals.

Callie: Awesome. And so if someone is listening and they're thinking about starting a membership, what is the one tip that you would give them to help them get started?

Caryn: Oh, let me tell you, the one tip and it should be in bright neon, flashing colours with a siren behind it is do not complicate it. I think that was my biggest challenge. We've got a free membership, which has a couple of like short mini-courses that are really helpful for people and I really encourage them to jump into that if they want to test us out. We started with basic, premium, and premium plus and it was three different levels. But in total it was really four different levels. I'm still managing those free members. I'm still communicating with them and answering their questions and trying to sell them on the paid memberships.

So I really in essence had four levels of membership and it was so overwhelming that within the first month, I thought I'm done, I'm out, I can't do it. I'm crashing and burning. So I left the free membership as is and I pared it down to basic and the premium level. So I think the message that I want to send out there is if you're looking at building a membership, listen to Callie and Mike. Do not complicate things. Trust me on this. You can grow. It's really hard to shrink.

Callie: Yeah. Definitely, definitely. As you said, you can grow, you can't shrink and also, you can always make things more complex. You can add more bells and whistles. You can add stuff in, but taking stuff away, that's a whole other ballgame.

Caryn: It really, really is. And it doesn't look good either when you have to get back to your members and say, "You know what, we're taking away this level or

we're taking away this, anything." People feel like they're being robbed. And so it's so important to always be giving as opposed to taking away because that perception is so incredibly important.

Callie: Definitely. I know I said that was the last question, but I just want to touch on something you said there about having the free membership level as well. So is that something that you are finding is working well for translating to paid members or is it still a little bit too early to say for that?

Caryn: I think it's actually translating really, really well. There's always some improvements that can be made for sure. But I think it's nice because it's giving people almost like a free trial without all the really good juicy stuff. They're not getting the live trainings, they're not getting the replays, they're not getting the forum, but they've got these three courses that are really, they're quite robust, but they're quick wins. And so when people go in and then get those quick wins and they go, "Oh my gosh, I could be making progress with my dog this fast. This is amazing. I've got to jump into that basic membership and see what else I can do."

Callie: I love that. And so if somebody wants to actually check out the site, where's the best place for them to do that?

Caryn: Sure. So if you go to canineeducationacademy.com, that is the short version of our really long name, and that's where you can find all of our membership information, information about our team as well.

Callie: Perfect. So thank you so much for joining me today, Caryn. It's been a real pleasure talking with you. I've absolutely loved seeing your progress over the last few months in the academy and how well the launch went and how quickly you were able to get things up and running. So I was really keen to speak to you for this season. So thank you so much for your time and sharing your experience.

Caryn: Thank you so much for having me just such a huge shout-out to you and Mike and the team for what you guys give in the academy. I don't think I've ever felt so supported through an experience. And the value is absolutely outstanding. So if I can do your sales pitch for one quick second, if anyone is listening to this and you're not a member of the Membership Academy, you are nuts. You've got to get in there. It's mind blowing and it's life changing.

Callie: Oh, thank you. It's been a pleasure helping you and having you as a member.

Caryn: Thank you, thank you, thank you.

Callie: That's it for another week, folks. Thank you for listening. I hope you enjoyed today's episode. I love what Caryn has created and how she has really embraced the membership model while still putting her own spin on things like offering free discovery calls to attract new members. With an impressive 100% conversion rate, it's safe to say those calls are definitely worth the time for her.

You'll find the links to connect with Caryn, the transcript of this episode and all the show notes over at themembershipguys.com/btm35. And I'd love to hear your favourite takeaways for the episode over at talkmemberships.com too.

A big thank you once again to Caryn for taking us behind her membership journey. I'm really looking forward to at what the next few months and years have in store for her. Join me same time, same bat-channel next week for another episode of Behind The Membership.