



Callie: And I'm back. That's right, folks. It is time for another season of Behind The Membership and I have 10 awesome guests lined up for you over the next few weeks in all kinds of markets and with all kinds of stories to tell. And we're starting things off with Jenny Finnell who runs CRNA School Prep Academy, a highly niche membership site for nurses in America. Jenny started her membership just over a year ago now and it's fair to say it has taken off. In fact, within eight months of launching she was able to replace both hers and her husband's salaries, allowing her husband to leave his job to join the business and Jenny to reduce her nursing hours from full-time to just a couple of days a week.

I love what Jenny has been able to achieve in such a short time and how she was able to launch the membership site despite working full-time hours in a hospital and having two small children at home. It's fair to say she's been working some long, long hours to get everything done so it's great to see her being able to reap the rewards of that now, especially as she just had baby number three a few weeks ago. Jenny is a real powerhouse and I'm really excited to share her story with you, so let's dive in.

Announcer: Welcome to Behind The Membership with Callie Willows, real people, real stories, real memberships.

Callie: My guest today is Jenny Finnell from CRNA School Prep Academy. Welcome to the show, Jenny. I am really looking forward to talking with you.

Jenny: Me too, thank you for having me.

Callie: And so you've got a great story, the little that I know about it, so I'd like to really just dive straight in by talking about your membership itself, what do you offer, who's it for, that kind of thing?

Jenny: Yeah, sure. I would love to share that. Again, I am a CRNA, which for those of you guys who do not know what that stands for, it stands for Certified Registered Nurse Anesthetists. We are a unique breed to the United States. Essentially my membership helps nurses, registered nurses, gain acceptance in the CRNA school. CRNA school is very competitive, it has about a 10% national average acceptance rate, so it's again, a very competitive thing, a lot of people want to do it.

We have a very high job satisfaction, we make good money, we have a lot of autonomy, we get to do fun things like push drugs all day. So it's a very sought-after career and unfortunately people face a lot of rejection or get discouraged because there's a lot of unknowns about it. I essentially started mentoring people through a Facebook site and quickly realized there was not enough out there to help these students. So my membership site was formed again to help nurses who want to pursue the career of anesthesia as a nurse.

Callie: That's such a specific market. I love it. Again, I don't think until you joined the Academy it was anything I was even aware of. But yeah, I love that you've got that membership to help those people, and are people coming into that then, it sounds like they're coming in before they apply to become an anesthetist?

Jenny: Correct. Well, I should take that back. Yes and no. 98% I would say come to us when they're starting their journey or whenever they find us, honestly. And that's part of the problem is if you find us early that's great, if you find us right before you're interviewing, it's still going to be beneficial but at the same time the earlier you can start preparing with us the better you're going to be.

I will say we've had a few people who gain acceptance who are new. And typically once you gain acceptance in the school you have six to nine months before you actually start your program. And so we do have some students who join us then for the education because we do monthly education, we do pharmacology, pathophysiology, all different types of workshops. Some students join us for the education piece prior to school so they kind of get a headstart.

Callie: Awesome. And so it sounds like it's very much focused on career progression essentially. Is it something that the nurses are joining and paying for themselves or is it something the hospitals will pay for? I know here in the UK at least nurses are massively underpaid so the idea of them paying out of pocket for any additional training and stuff might be a bit more tricky.

Jenny: Yes, yes. Nurses in the United States are probably paid better. However, especially with the recent pandemic there's been a lot of opportunities for travel nursing, and hazard pay essentially where they're making a lot of money doing these assignments. So it probably depends on where you are at as far as what you're getting offered, but yes, there is opportunities for employer reimbursement.

We actually... I'm probably jumping ahead of myself, but we just started offering continuing education credits for our workshops. I'm in the process of doing that and trying to keep doing that so there are opportunities for reimbursement.

But up until now it's been out of pocket, essentially. It's been something that they invest in themselves but I have had that on my radar and I want my nurses to have all the access to mentoring they can get and if it could be free that would be amazing. So I have thought about that but, yeah, historically nurses have paid for continuing education essentially out of pocket.

Callie: And I guess if it's something that is going to progress their career or as you said, lead them to a better...

Jenny: Yes.

Callie: ... Job essentially then it's worth it.

Jenny: Mm-hmm (affirmative). Oh yeah.

Callie: I'd love to know then what actually inspired you to create a membership in the first place.

Jenny: Yeah. So this is... I didn't intend to, to be quite honest with you, I really never had intentions of doing any of this. I was working full-time, I had two little kids. I took students as a CRNA. We have students in clinical essentially where they're learning. I always enjoyed that part of my job and I did a lot of open heart surgery so I had a lot of students that were relatively experienced students, their senior year getting ready to graduate. I just I always liked it.

And so I actually started having nurses reach out to me on social media, Instagram being the main one, seeing that I had a title of a CRNA saying, "Hey, how did you become a CRNA? I'm really interested in that but I don't know how to get started." And then I had a few coworkers who were operating room nurses who wanted to go back for CRNA that I was helping.

I had 10 people essentially that I was helping in the beginning. And because I was a broken record and I would make phone calls to these people, check up on them, have conversations, emails, I'm like, oh, it'd save me some time if I just had a Facebook community and that way I can make these live teachings and they could all watch it. I did that and then it was awesome, they loved it. And so I was like, "Well, gosh, there's probably more people out there who need this advice." So I actually started trying to do what I... That's where I listened to the podcast about how to find my ideal audience, where

are they're at. And so that's what I did is I sought out where they were hiding on social media and I brought them to my group.

And people just started spreading the word and before you know it, within four or five months my group was up to three or 4,000 people. And I quickly realized that, gosh, this is very needed and it's becoming very time-consuming for me. I was spending about 20 hours a week teaching in Facebook and working full-time and had little kids. And so I started looking into doing a course, actually, not a membership. I didn't even know that normal people did memberships, I thought memberships were like Netflix. I didn't think that business people did memberships. I mean, I guess I did but just wasn't on my radar.

So I looked into a course and that's actually what I was going to do. I had Kajabi I was literally ready to do it, started mapping it out and I realized, holy moly, this is so overwhelming and just so much content, how in the world is anyone going to get through it all? They're going to get discouraged before they finish and I mean, not to mention they would take me up to probably a year to even make this course because there's so much information. I'm like, there has to be a better way, this is just way too much. I mean, because essentially people take years to prepare for school, years. So years and years worth of content and the course is just crazy.

I was like, there has to be a better way. That's when I started, I think I came and stumbled upon you guys. I don't honestly even remember how but I started listening to literally every single podcast episode of Mike and all the way back from the beginning, every single one, everyday going to work I listened to it. And I was like, "Wow, I can really do this. This would be awesome, this would be the solution." That way I could get started sooner than later, I could drip content as I go and keep building on it.

And I liked the fact that a membership was ongoing, meaning things are always changing the medical field, education is always changing and I liked how that was... It was I had that flexibility with a membership where a course is set in stone. Now you can update it but I mean, I like the fluid nature of a membership. So yeah, I went all in at that point. I sought out, I got help early on with web development because I knew I was not techie enough to do that and just jumped all in.

Callie: Awesome. And so how long ago did you actually launch the membership now?

Jenny: I launched February 26 of 2020, a week before COVID, essentially. So it's only been a little over a year.

Callie: Awesome. But yeah, great to hear you've made that 12-month mark already at that first member-versary. You mentioned COVID there actually so actually would you say that that was for want of a better word, beneficial for the membership or not in terms of the number of people looking for this kind of training?

Jenny: Yeah. I didn't know how that was going to shake out initially. I actually thought it would slow things down, I thought people would be not wanting to spend money on a membership. I thought people are probably going to be so busy with everything going on they're not going to pursue CRNA school. It actually had the opposite effect. These schools saw record numbers of applicants. I think for a couple of reasons, one, the burnout in the ICU. Now they were seeing... I mean the ICUs were just swamped. Being an ICU nurse is extremely hard work. It's depressing, frankly. And then we had these recuse which is respiratory ICU.

And so I think nurses were getting extremely burnt out and looking for... If they had already been thinking CRNA they're like, "Well, now I definitely want CRNA because this is just not what I like in ICU." So it pushed them to just start doing work on their application. People had more time because they weren't going out and doing things so I had time to work on their application.

And I also think that people actually had more money because like I said, these nurses were taking 100,000 plus travel assignments. They're making \$10,000 in a month as a ICU nurse so, yes, they had a lot of money when they were doing these assignments. All those factors combined the membership completely took off. Now, granted prior to COVID I already had 300 on the waitlist so it was already looking like it was going to shake out to be good before COVID happened but it definitely picked up.

Callie: And so you mentioned before that when you started the membership you were actually doing it alongside working full-time and your family and things like that. Is that still the case? Are you still working full-time as well or have you been able to scale back those hours as the membership's grown?

Jenny: I have been able to scale back and I want to just thank you right now because that has always been a dream of mine and I really think without doing this that never would've happened. I was definitely in the whole work full-time, work more and more and more, the only way to make more money is to work more. Not that I don't work more because this membership is definitely a lot of work, but I got to do it from home. And so, yes, I started in February, as of October I started a PRN position.

I actually essentially retired my husband to help me full-time with the business. And as of December of 2020, I only work two days a week and when I go back from having our third child, we just had our third child, I plan on only hopefully working one day a week. So it has dramatically decreased my... And I'm thankful because again between running the membership and working full-time I was plugging in 70, 80 hours a week-

Callie: Oh, wow.

Jenny: It was insane, to say the least.

Callie: Yeah. And especially with the new baby as well then, yeah, that extra time is going to come in really handy. And with retiring your husband then, well, bringing him on board to work with you instead, what's his role in the company now?

Jenny: Yeah. His role is business because like I said I'm a nurse by trade, I'm not tech-savvy, I'm not business-savvy. He luckily is business-minded. He has a business degree but he was actually doing automation sales, is what he was doing prior to helping me. But he's always had a knack for that. He picks things up, he understands it way better than I do. So essentially he's managing our finances, thank heavens. And then the business side in the marketing, he's helping me with my emails. And really just anything I need him for which is nice because he's home so I can easily communicate with him about what I'm struggling with and he can help me. He does all kinds of stuff, really. But it's been excellent and fun, honestly, to do it together.

Callie: Yeah, I love that. And yeah, the fact that you've been able to do that in what? Eight months?

Jenny: Yes.

Callie: Was that the timescale there?

Jenny: Yes.

Callie: That's awesome. Yeah, that's incredible.

Jenny: Thank you. That's been crazy.

Callie: And so I would imagine that the membership itself is probably quite a technical topic or there's technical topics involved. Are you delivering all of those trainings yourself? Are you creating everything for the membership yourself?

Jenny: Yes. Well, yes and no. I was in the beginning. I actually recorded some of my very first courses in our car because I didn't have a quiet place to do that and our kids were home. I mean, I worked Monday through Friday and all I had was my weekends and the kids were home on the weekends so I recorded in our car. So yeah, I made all the initial courses myself. In October I actually brought on a faculty member who is an Assistant Director and he found out about me through one of his students who came to an open house and he was like, "Who is this? What's this I.C.U. Dreaming About Anesthesia Facebook group? What is the CRNA School Prep Academy?" So out of curiosity he looked me up and contacted me and said, "Hey, I really love what you're doing. I would love to help out if you're interested."

And so after a little bit of back and forth I'm like, "Well, why not?" It wouldn't hurt to have someone, especially because he teaches anesthesia. He teaches what I'm trying to teach my students and he's a program director who has 10 years of experience who knows what he's looking for. So he's essentially an expert contributor. And so, yeah, I brought him on as of October. Like I said now we're doing monthly educational workshops, we're doing monthly Q&A calls and we rotate. He'll do one, I'll do one, same with the workshop. Like this next month he's doing a second pharmacology course and then June I'm doing a cardio vascular course. We're taking turns with the content. He's been excellent, he's just awesome. So essentially I have a helper now making content.

Callie: That's awesome, and what a credit to what you've created as well. Somebody with that experience and things would want to be involved in that as well and approach you about that. That's a huge credit to what you've created.

Jenny: Thank you. Yeah, I agree. Like I said we're trying to get the community involved. The anesthesia community is really small and lately or not lately... I'm kind of, overall I was really impressed with how supportive it's been. And I think in the last few months it's really stepped up a notch because people are now finding out about us. In the beginning I think people were like, "Well, what is the CRNA School Prep Academy?" But now that I think more students have found success and they're spreading the word not only to other students but to faculty members, I think we're getting a lot more credit. And so again recently we've had a surge of faculty members taking notice and wanting to support us.

Callie: Oh, that's lovely. And so speaking about that then, how are people finding you? How are you getting new members?

Jenny: That's a great question. We have not done any marketing, I know. It's all been word of mouth. And my whole model from the very beginning was to just show up and serve my students. I love my students, I really do. I have a big heart for them. I want them to be successful and when they have success it makes my day. And so from the very beginning I've poured my heart and soul into this and done whatever I can to really just mentor and foster growth both personally and professionally for my students.

And so I really think just showing up and serving has been what has made this business so successful so quickly and, yeah, just word of mouth, social media. And, now, if you count boosting a post, I have tried boosting posts which I don't even know what I'm doing when I do that, but I do try. That's really the only... Excuse me... the only marketing we've done up until this point. I'm excited for when we actually do get a marketing campaign going, what it's going to do.

Callie: But that's incredible that you've been able to work just through word of mouth though from that as well. And again, it, it sounds like it's quite a tight niche community as you mentioned before, So, yeah, it's the kind of thing where people will talk, where people will recommend people and things like that. So the focus on the cold marketing, essentially, maybe isn't so essential as it might be with other businesses.

Jenny: True.

Callie: When you mentioned that with social media, I think you mentioned Instagram and Facebook there, what kind of things are you sharing that? Is it just a little bit about what you're working on and things like that? How are you drawing in your audience there?

Jenny: Yeah. I listen to a lot of podcasts as one of your guys' podcasts. One thing that I love to do is share success stories. I really think sharing success stories from my students, I screenshot every acceptance. The students who tell me they get gain acceptance I screenshot every single one of them. Not only because I love them and I hold onto them, they're precious to me but then I share them on social media. And I really think that that gives us credibility to what we can do for students.

I also share behind-the-scenes when I'm doing one, I'm working on what courses are coming up, the podcast, or if I go live. I just share whatever I'm doing, essentially, that can be beneficial for others. I just did a SRNA Q&A panel where I gathered eight SRNAs from various schools across the country to just do a Q&A session for whoever wanted to come, so sharing things like that, just things that I know my students will find helpful and always asking questions. What do they need? What do they need help with? Where are they stuck? And then gathering that information. Essentially I think by listening to what my students need I'm able to deliver what they need and then they spread the word to their coworker who's also pursuing CRNA.

Callie: And so, do you still have the... I think you mentioned at the start that you had a free Facebook group initially, do you still have that as well?

Jenny: I do. It's hopping. We have, well, 12,500 members right now. It's growing by about 200 a week, essentially 200 people a week. And so that group has taken on a life of its own. It's awesome. I have high school students in there, we have current anesthesia students, we even have some CRNAs who also love to mentor in that group. And some community leaders, some CRNAs that are involved and the national associations are in that group. It's really taken on a life of its own, it's very successful.

Callie: And are you finding that easy to balance with the membership itself and the membership community and everything the membership involves?

Jenny: Yeah. The Facebook group got to be very overwhelming, very, very quickly for me. That's why I knew if I was going to continue to do what I was doing, which was mentoring, I had to figure out how to monetize my time because again I was doing it for free 20 hours a week. I'm like, "I love you guys, but I also love my family." And I can't spend 40 hours in the OR and 20 hours on Facebook and no time with my family. I knew I had to drop my hours at work and I had to monetize with a membership to keep teaching.

And so, yeah, to be honest with you, I was answering every single question on Facebook, I was on there constantly. But probably back in October, back when I started making the workshops I took a huge step back because I also started realizing, well, if I'm there answering questions all the time why would they want to join the membership? They're getting me inside the Facebook community where now I really make it a priority to be there for my current students with my Q&A calls, answering their emails.

They reach out to me, DMs all the time so I answer those. I make my students the priority, the Facebook comes last. But I have enough CRNAs now that contribute, students that contribute. The Facebook group is fine, it's totally fine without me. I do interact occasionally but I'm just not nearly as present because I can't be, I just don't have enough time and my time now is for my paying students.

Callie: Yeah. It's that shift in priorities, essentially. So what's actually been your biggest challenge with the membership since you launched, would you say?

Jenny: Time, time management. Prioritizing and time management. There's just always so much I want to do and so little time. Everything that I think, "Oh, I want to get this done, I want to do this. I want to make a quiz or I want to get AACN approval for CE credits for my courses. I've been working on that since August and it just happened. So everything that I want to do it just takes so much time so I have to really be careful because I have to say, "Okay, what do I need to do right now and what can wait?"

And then a lot of that comes from my students, listening to them, making sure I'm not dropping the ball on their end to fill my own needs. And so it's been challenging too to also boundaries with my time. And when a student reaches out on a Sunday evening, based on what they're needing I have to say, "Okay, well they can wait or. Are they a paying student, are they not a paying student? So it's been hard setting boundaries with my time.

Callie: Yeah, definitely. And is that something you think has improved as time's gone on as you've got used to the membership?

Jenny: It has definitely. I mean, I'm not going to lie, there's been times back in the beginning that I was very frustrated with it and I was upset that I was... Felt like I was always on, I never had an off time. And that was an adjustment working a 9:00 to 5:00 and having my work be done when I got home to always being hounded, always getting emails, always getting DMs. I'm like, "Aah, I can never get a break." I just felt like I was being eaten alive by my community. And so that was really hard and I had to really take a step back and say, "Before I get bitter about it I really need to realize that I need to set boundaries so I can do this not only so it's beneficial for them but healthy for me."

It has gotten easier but I will tell you it's still a struggle because I think just as a nurse I don't want to say no, I want to be there, I want to help. I'm naturally like, "Yes, I will help you. I will do whatever I can to help you." That's always my nature. It's been hard to ever say no but at the expense of myself. It's a work in progress, let's just say that, but it has gotten better a little bit.

Callie: And so if that's been the challenge then what's been the highlight or what's your favorite thing about having the membership?

Jenny: That's really easy for me to say and that's the relationship with my students, always, always been. I love the relationship, I love being able to watch them grow into an SRNA and then a CRNA. I just, I love the journey. Because a lot of these students now I consider them friends and they just check up every now and then not because they need something or want something, they just want to say hi and, "I just want to say hi and see how you're doing." And I love that, I love that part of it.

Callie: I love that. And you're making such a difference not just to their lives but obviously to the people that they're then impacting with the new job and what they're doing as well, so it really is that ripple effect in action there, really.

Jenny: Yeah. I agree.

Callie: Trying to think of the best way to put this, but, if the membership helps people to essentially achieve this new job position, does that mean there's a natural end point to it? Do people then time out of the membership essentially once they've got that role or is it something where they do stay on board and there's always something new for them to learn?

Jenny: That's a great question. And the answer is unfortunately, yes. There is a natural end to needing what we do. And so that has been a challenge as far as I feel like I always have to continuously bring in new people. But that being said, the vast majority of our resources are for our aspiring students. I do have hopes to help current SRNAs but we have that six to nine-month window, like I said, before they start school. Once they start school, not that we can't help them but they're so overwhelmed and bombarded with so much information and then they have the NC, which is our national certification exam prep, which is like apex prodigy. They are just slammed. And I mean, you get slammed with, do this, do that, do this. They don't have any extra room for anything else, essentially.

But that being said, a lot of our SRNAs what they need the most is support mentally with stress because school is crazy stressful and so when students have problems it's because of that. So what I'm working on next is developing some kind of stress management where we can do some kind of, or even on one-on-one mentoring where I could pair them up with a mentor. I want to find some way to help them. The other caveat is when they start school they can't work so they are broke. Living on loans, broke, broke, broke, come out with \$200,000 of debt broke. That's the other part of it too, is I don't expect them to pay me when they're already spending hundreds of thousands of dollars on their education and taking out loans so they can actually afford to pay their mortgage. So it does have a natural end.

Callie: But it sounds like you do have a good at least a few months before you get to that point in terms of helping them to achieve that.

Jenny: Yeah.

Callie: And I think, yeah, if you wanted to there is those things that you could bring in to help people pass that but at the same time it sounds like what you're already doing is working really well.

Jenny: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Callie: And so we've mentioned about time and time management and you have reduced your hours at work now so you can focus on the membership and family. Is the membership still something you're working on every day?

Jenny: Yes. I work on it every single day. Now some days it might be an hour or two, other days are 12, 13 hours. So yeah, even though I'm only working one day or two days a week I pretty much work every other day of the week on the membership. But part of that is my type A personality and my go, go, go personality because like I said there's always something that is on my to do list. So part of that is me. I think if I could be a little more laid back I could probably take some more time away. But I don't know if I even want to because like I said, I want to show up and I want to serve and I enjoy it.

So even if it's just a few hours a day I think I owe that to my communities to be there and to make sure I'm at least answering emails or updating something that's broken in the membership, or reaching out to someone else to help someone else out as far as finding them a mentor, I'm always doing something for my students. And so, yeah, but I mean, it's flexible now. If I need to go see a doctor on a Tuesday at noon I can so it's flexible.

Callie: And apart from you, your husband, and the person you've got helping on the faculty now is that it as far as the team goes or do you have other support as well?

Jenny: Oh, I have a lot of support. Like I said from the very beginning I knew I couldn't do it by myself, especially because I started my waitlist back in November for the launch and I didn't want to lose steam. And look, I'm very time-limited, meaning based on where they are in the application process if I wait too long I'm going to miss that window, that golden window if they're going to want to jump in and join me. So I got a web developer involved, Jessica. I mean, everyone who's gotten involved in my membership have become friends.

Jessica is my web developer. I have Jesse who is my copywriter. Those two were with me from the very beginning and they played a really key component in my success early on because they allowed me to essentially go quicker which I think was key to getting up off the ground as well as it did. And then now I have a graphic designer, a social media manager, I have a podcast manager, and now my husband. So essentially it's a team of six people helping me and it's been awesome. It essentially allows me to do more for my students and less time doing busy Canva design for my social media posts.

I love having a team. It's definitely challenging and it's scary because you're like, "Do I have the money to pay other people to do work for me?" The ROI, you hear a lot about our ROI, return on investment, and I always try to think of what is my time worth based on what I'm paying them per hour. Can I make more per hour so the return on investment is worth it?

Callie: Yeah. I think that's a great way of looking at when it comes to a team, especially when you are first starting out. But I love that you did actually recognize that you did have that limitation in terms of time and things like that initially so you did make that leap and get some people on early as well so that you could get started essentially. And yeah, I think that kind of set as you say it gave you that leg up and that boost and that initial momentum. Would you say that actually where you are now is where you expected to be at this point having started the membership?

Jenny: Oh, that's a good question. To be honest with you I don't know if I had... Early on I don't know if I had any expectations. I just hope to make the money back that I had invested which was a lot. I luckily had a good career to where I felt like I could make that investment upfront and I just hoped that... Within like a few months we made that investment back and I guess I didn't really know or have any expectations on where it would be a year, I guess I just hoped it would continue. I hoped to learn from my students so that way I can continue to provide it for them and it has panned out.

And so as far as my vision I just want to keep growing it as far as the resources for my students and getting the community involved. I think that the more community I get involved the better, the more resources for my students. As far as expectations, as far as what that looks like on my end, I'm kind of, go with the flow. I just go with it and try to make adjustments as I go. But I think the big part of it is trying to grow a team, so that way I can scale it successfully.

Callie: And so you mentioned there about getting your community involved. Is that in the sense of actually getting them to start creating content for the membership or how are you seeing that?

Jenny: Not necessarily content, more mentoring. I want them to realize how important mentoring is within this community and I am actually going to be speaking at a... It's just an Ohio conference about mentoring.

But I'm speaking to all these different CRNs from Ohio about mentoring, how important and how vital it is for the success of our students. And these programs want successful students, these programs want high board passing rates and low attrition rates, so I can help them do that. And if more people realize the importance of it, I just simply want this current working CRNAs that are out there to realize that mentoring is a big pivotal part in helping future generations of CRNAs be successful.

And I want program directors to recognize that as well and take necessary steps to allow that for their students. Not even necessarily for CRNA School Prep Academy, I'm just looking to make a big change overall to the community, to the atmosphere, to the way of thinking. And so I guess my plan, obviously the gross goes to the CRNA School Prep Academy but it's more of a bigger picture for the whole community to recognize the importance of what we're doing so they can all play a part whether that's big or small. And so that's what I guess I mean by getting the community involved. Not necessarily with CRNA School Prep Academy but inevitably it will because they're going to recognize what we're doing, we're serving this purpose.

Callie: And so actually I'd love to know a little of our members who have membership sites where they're maybe teaching somebody a particular career or something like that, they're worried about the community because people are essentially in competition with each other. And I know you mentioned this a kind of field where there is a lot of competition for these places at school and things. Have you found that is something that has impacted on your community in terms of people being willing to share and help each other?

Jenny: Yeah. There's a couple of different directions I could take this question. One, schools themselves as far as nurses getting into school they're directly in competition with one another. But schools themselves, sure they're in competition, they want the best students. But you can't get a good student if you're not willing to help everyone, you have to just provide information and the students ultimately have the choice of where they're going to go to school. And so the schools really can't control that, they can just try to help as much as they can so they hopefully will attract the right students. Now, as far as competition goes on what I'm doing, there is always going to be competition. You mean as far as mentoring aspiring students?

Callie: Yeah, right. And the students themselves. So in things like your membership community, are people willing to share and help each other there or do they feel like they're competing with each other for these places, essentially?

Jenny: Okay, now I understand. Thank you. That's a good point. And actually I would say that yes, they do feel that way. But one of the things that I try to remind them that I did early on in my journey was I had three... There was four of us. So three other ICU nurses, one of my friends worked in the surgical ICU, I worked in the NICU with my two other friends. So there's four of us all together. We're all applying to the same school, same time, and I didn't hold anything back. I shared and they did the same thing. We all worked together, we actually studied with each other. We quizzed each other because the interview can be very grueling. It's usually rapid fire, either personality or clinical-style questions.

We would just study together. And all four of us got into the same program, same year. Now it might not have worked out that way, but then I'm for sure the fact that we would have helped each other they would have my back, meaning they maybe would have put in a good word to the program directors say, "Hey, my friend Jenny is applying to step next round, she'd be a great candidate." They would remember the fact that we all worked together and even though we didn't all didn't make it is a team effort and it will pay off.

And so I try to remind my students that even if you have a coworker who's, yes, your direct competition it's still worthwhile to share what you know. Help each other out because whether you get in or they get in they could then help you in return the next year. And so to be honest with you, no, students share, students are usually willing to share information and whether it's directly or indirectly I always tell them you can tell me and if you make it anonymous no one's going to know who's sharing this information.

I do try to respect the school's wishes. Some of the schools they don't allow the students to release the interview questions, they actually sign a document. And so if that's the case, and I always make a big bold, if you sign any kind of documentation please do not share this information. But the ones who don't, yeah, share with me. I can post anonymously inside a private community. Because people do it on the forums, public forums all the time, but then you have people who I call them trawls. People trawl those sites, where my site I control it so there's no trawls, essentially.

Callie: Yeah. And so talking about the private community there, is that community also on Facebook or is that a community that's on your website where you do have that full control?

Jenny: No, I follow you guys and I did the IP board. So it's going great. I will say I haven't had as much time as I want to get in there. I mean, I've been there a ton, don't get me wrong, but it's been a much harder for me to take that community off the way the Facebook has taken off because the Facebook is still overshadowing that group because there's 12,000 people. So it's easy to have it to be active and lively while my forum has 800 people. It's just you can't sometimes compare the activity level. So people still sometimes even though they're members they'll go to the Facebook community to ask questions, which is a little frustrating. But again, partially I need to make the forum more present by reminding them and things like that.

Callie: And so is there anything you'd do differently if you were starting again?

Jenny: I actually thought about this question prior. And there is one thing, a couple of things actually. One of the things may not seem like a big deal but ended up being a big deal when we were first doing our taxes, is when I first got started it was so crazy. I was working full-time and just between paying a web developer or copywriter, all these different technical platforms and oh, I need this, I need that. I even did WebinarJam for a little bit which I regretted afterwards. I just was buying all this stuff that I thought I needed but I was charging various credit cards. So trying to track all that down, holy moly, it was insane. It was hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of charges. I was like, "Oh gosh, this business charge, what credit card is it on?"

And so, yeah, from the very beginning I would have had one credit card for all business expenses and kept it that way. Would've made my life a heck of a lot easier when we were doing our taxes our first year. And then the only other thing that I would have done differently, not that we did everything perfectly, I actually I'm a big proponent of just getting your feet dirty and learning from your mistakes because if you're waiting for perfection that's just never going to happen. So nothing was perfect about what we did but I actually prefer to not be perfect and that way I learn from imperfection.

But it's the courses. I made these giant course that were two hours long. And so I wish I would have divvied them up into maybe 15, 20 minute sections. I put jump links in there and based on the jump links you can go to different sections within the course. But I wish I would've had it designed more like your guys' courses where they're more broken up and you can go to the next lesson, that takes you into the next step. It's more easily digestible and not so overwhelming to sit down with a two-hour course.

Callie: And so overall then, what impact would you say having the membership has had on your life and your business so far?

Jenny: Well, in our life, I mean, it's really changed our life for the better. There's always a give and take, there's always positives and negatives to everything, but overall this has just been the most amazing experience. I mean, the flexibility we have now, the growth potential now, I mean, you can't get this kind of growth potential in a 9:00 to 5:00 job, you just can't, it doesn't exist. They're not going to give me that those kind of raises but if I work harder at this membership site and grow it I create my own raise essentially by working harder. You don't have that in a 9:00 to 5:00 job. You can work really hard and you might not get a raise for years.

I love the fact that I'm in control of essentially my own success. And as far as what it's done for our family and the business, I mean, the business is just booming. The business is clearly needed, people need this in their lives, people need this help. So I'm helping a lot of people and I feel really good about that. And yeah, the fact that my husband's now involved it's a fun team effort now. Hopefully our kids will be CRNAs.

I've had a lot of fun with it but it's a challenge, but I like challenge. And it's a learning process, you make a lot of mistakes but you have to be willing to make those mistakes. Like I said, sometimes these mistakes hurt but I think that's part of the... If you don't take a chance you're never going to know what you're capable of.

Callie: Yeah, yeah. I love that. And so for somebody listening who might be thinking about starting a membership site what's one tip that you would give them to get started?

Jenny: Well, just that actually, to get started. That's the best advice you can give anyone is to just get started. I see so many people who maybe want to do something who out of fear stop themselves. And maybe they think, "Oh, well, gosh, I'm not ready yet. I don't have it all figured out." Well, guess what? I didn't have it all figured out, all I knew is I needed a waitlist and a community.

The community and the waitlist were the two essential pieces of me getting started and doing it well, was nurturing my community because you can't get someone to buy from you unless they trust you. That's a huge component so if you're not building that trust from the very beginning before you launch your membership you're going to get crickets. They're like, "Who's this guy? What are they trying to sell me? I don't even know them from Joe Schmo."

But if they know you and you talk to them on Facebook lives, you DM them, you show them that you're just a person, that you're honest and you genuinely want to help, you're not just here to make a buck, they will trust you and they will buy from you. But it's about building that trust first and then get the excitement going with the waitlist and then just launching the membership and how messy it is, no matter how little it is, just get started.

Even if all you do initially is do live Q&As, you don't have any courses, just give yourself to them on live courses initially while you build your actual courses for them to use later on. That's essentially I had some signature courses but for the most part I used my live Q&As as continuous drip content and just stopped doing them on my Facebook group because that was essentially, I was replacing that time in my membership.

Callie: Yeah. I think that's a great tip in terms of just getting started, starting where you are at as well and not worrying too much about, as you say, having everything perfect or having tons of content or anything like that. And so last question then, what are your goals? Where would you like the Prep Academy to be in 12 months time, say?

Jenny: My goal with that is to... Gosh, I have so many things. I have so many things. Like I said, I'm always working on, oh, what's next? It gets me excited to think, "What else can I do?" But some of the things I've been working on, obviously I launched my podcast but I'm working on an SRNA scholarship fund which is starting to take off. I'm having companies fund that...

Callie: Oh, awesome.

Jenny: ... Now. Yeah. I'm going to be launching our first SRNA scholarship. My long-term goal is to get it to be CRNA School Prep Academy scholarship, but I have to have a significant amount of money to do that. That again, we're doing a conference this fall, we're hopefully going to do a spring conference. I guess. I just I'm getting the community involved in a way that I even hope to expand it to where I can work with recruiters, hospital recruiters, and provide them because CRNAs are in high demand and they can't ever seem to find enough CRNAs. So I could have a recruiter essentially sponsor one of my students and pay for their school or even just help them find good candidates could be a way to fund the scholarship fund.

Again, I'm always thinking of ways to, how can I give back more to my students? How can I make this better for them? And I just got CE approval from the AACN which there's a lot of letters, but essentially it's continuing education for my nurses. I'm trying to find them ways to provide more value. A year from now I want to see how much more value I can provide my students to make the Academy even more of a no-brainer. You should join this from the day you decide you want to do CRNA from the time you step foot in the ICU. Come to CRNA School Prep Academy, get the mentoring you need, get the continuing education you need. Have access to all these great resources, opportunities, networking.

Yeah, a year from now I don't really look at it as a numbers game. I mean, I guess if I had to put numbers on it I hope we double in size. But I don't let the numbers get too much in my head, I just focus on serving and I know it will grow and it has. That's where I mentally put myself. I don't ever want to be disappointed if I don't hit a goal so I don't put numbers on things. I just say, "I want to keep growing and whether that's 50, 100, 200, because every month it changes so I think if you focus on a number you can either be disappointed if it doesn't hit that number, so I just try to say growth in general.

Callie: Awesome. And yeah, I know I said that was the last question but I just wanted to... See, you mentioned there about scholarships. Is that scholarships to the membership or is that helping people get scholarships for the tuition payments and things once they get applied?

Jenny: Yes, tuition. Tuition. I mean, the membership is not... We charge for a year, it's 325 a month.

Callie: That's sweet, isn't it?

Jenny: Yeah. It's not like we're charging anything crazy and they get a ton of value for that. It breaks down to \$27 a month. I mean, I can spend that on Starbucks or DoorDash. We try to make the membership affordable, but yeah, it's scholarships for tuition.

Callie: Awesome. Yeah, just a few plans you've got there for the future but...

Jenny: Yeah, quite a bit.

Callie: It sounds like you're going to be offering... I mean, you're already offering awesome value but even more opportunities for your students. So yeah, that's amazing.

Jenny: Thanks. I'm very excited about it all.

Callie: And so if somebody wants to connect with you or check out what you're working on, where's the best place for them to do that?

Jenny: There's a couple different ways. You can either follow me on Instagram, which is CNRA School Prep Academy. Or I think you can just reach out to me via email which would be Jenny Finnell, which is J-E-N-N-Y-F-I-N-N-E-L-L@crnaschoolprep.academy. You can always send me an email if you have questions, but yeah, probably connect me on social media would probably be the best way. The Facebook community is private for aspiring students. But if you are an aspiring student and you happen to be listening to this you're welcome to join. It's called the I.C.U. Dreaming About Anesthesia by CRNA School Prep Academy. But again, I screen everyone who I let in to make sure they're actually nurses.

Callie: Yeah, such a specific community. You really need to protect that.

Jenny: Yes.

Callie: Well, awesome. Thank you so much for talking with me today, Jenny. I've loved hearing more about your journey. Obviously I knew bits of what's been happening through the Academy and it's been awesome to see that progress over the first year that you've had, and I'm really looking forward to seeing what year two has in store for you as well.

Jenny: Thank you so much, Callie. And, oh my gosh, you and Mike have been such a blessing and your academy is awesome, I never could have done this without The Membership Guys for sure. And you guys provide just... Again, I've been doing my model based on yours and all the value you guys provide in there, I'm always striving to get to that level. I'm like, "I want to be like Callie and Mike, have my membership be like theirs." I'm sure everyone feels that way when they get in there, like, "Wow, this is awesome." But I couldn't have done it because I just didn't know what I was doing. I think like I've said before, early on, seek out help, get guidance and The Membership Guys is definitely the way to go.

Callie: Oh, well, thank you. It's been a pleasure being part of your journey. Yeah, it's been awesome to watch your progress. So yeah-

Jenny: Thank you.

Callie: We really appreciate being our member.

Jenny: Yeah, of course. I'll be here for a long time, hopefully forever.

Callie: That's all for this episode, folks. Thank you for listening and a big thank you to Jenny for joining me for this episode and sharing her membership journey so far. I'm looking forward to continuing to watch Jenny's membership growth this year and I love that she's still looking for ways to bring even more value to her members. To find all Jenny's links and to pick up the transcript and show notes for this episode, then head to the membershipguys.com/btm45, and remember to hit subscribe and tune in for another episode of Behind The Membership next week.

Announcer: If you enjoyed this week's episode we invite you to check out membershipacademy.com. The Membership Academy is the essential resource for anyone at any stage of starting, growing, and running a membership website. Whether you're still trying to figure out what your idea is going to be or whether your website is already up and running and you're just looking for ways to grow it and attract new members, then the Membership Academy can help you to get to the next level.

With our extensive course library, monthly training, exclusive member-only discounts, perks, and tools, and a supportive, active community to help you along the way with feedback, encouragement, and advice, the Membership Academy is the perfect place to be for anyone looking to start, manage, and grow a successful membership website. Check it out at membershipacademy.com.