

SEASON THREE - EPISODE THREE

BEHIND *the* MEMBERSHIP

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Callie: Welcome to Behind the Membership Season Three, Episode Three. Today, I'm talking with Dr. Melissa West all about her longstanding yoga membership. Melissa has actually had her membership for nearly eight years now, which is an impressive feat in the online world. In this episode, we're talking all about how she went from burnout to setting up her membership with her husband Tim, how the membership has evolved over the years, and the importance of community and relationships in her long term success.

We also talked about how Melissa uses YouTube to attract new members, and some of the things Melissa does to ensure her membership community continues to thrive, including how she's built a team of committed volunteers that help her with her membership on a day-to-day basis, and a counterintuitive content strategy that she has introduced that is working really well for increasing engagement and retention. So, let's dive in.

Mike: Welcome to Behind the Membership with Callie Willows, real people, real stories, real memberships.

Callie: On today's show, I'm joined by Melissa West, yoga aficionado and the talent behind Yoga with Melissa. Thank you for joining me, Melissa.

Melissa: Thanks for having me, Callie. It's my pleasure to be here today.

Callie: Yeah. It's great to get a chance to speak to you about your membership. I know it's been quite a journey for you. I think it's seven, eight years the membership has been going for now, is it?

Melissa: Yeah. We first opened our doors in November of 2011. We recorded a retreat that I had done in person, and that's how we started.

Callie: Awesome. That's a great innings for the membership. To get us started then properly, could you tell us a little bit more about what the membership actually is, who it's for, what it offers, that kind of thing?

Melissa: Sure. So, our membership community is a yoga membership community. It's different from a lot of what you see yoga in media and advertising and on YouTube because a lot of times that's yoga for exercise and contortionist yoga and acrobatic yoga, Instagrammy yoga where you're getting really great, awesome pictures of yourself. We're definitely not doing that. We're looking after the whole person. We're looking after our mental health, our energy, our emotions.

We're doing other styles of yoga. So, we're doing yin yoga, which is long holds, which focuses on the energy body and the deeper connective tissue in the body. So, as you age, it's great for the joints. We're doing restorative yoga, which is great because a lot of people are really exhausted from the lives they're leaving, leading, not leaving, hopefully, not yet.

Callie: Hopefully not yet.

Melissa: We're doing yoga nidra, which is sleep yoga, which is great, again, because a lot of people suffer from insomnia, so either to help them fall asleep or to recover from sleepless nights. We do a style of yoga called yin yang yoga, which combines yin and hatha yoga. So, all that to say that we look after the whole person.

One of my members the other day just described it as yoga, a convalescence, which I never thought of it before, but it's true. We just celebrated 20,000 on our secondary channel on YouTube. I have a testimonial here that somebody left. Do you mind if I read that?

Callie: No. Go ahead.

Melissa: Okay. Yeah, because I think this really speaks to a typical member for us and a typical person who watches us on YouTube, too. She said she found us when she was looking for inner peace and suffering from anxiety and panic attacks, and other health issues such as sciatica. "Your calm approach was a breath of fresh air. I'm in my 60s now. I'm recovering from an extremely bad case of shingles, but I was able to find some peace with yoga through it all. I especially enjoy your outdoor yoga with Tim," that's my husband's videos with beautiful scenery, " and also your plant-filled room"

I used to film in one of my students' room. She's a teacher, and she gave me the keys to her house. We used to go in and film there while she was teaching. Yeah. She says, "I want to thank you for your style of real yoga for real people." She says she's been watching us for years. "You're the only teacher that made me feel like it wasn't too fast for me, and with poses that I'd be able to do, but not feel intimidated by. I shy away from group classes, but I felt a connection to you. You're so calm and reassuring." So, this is something that we hear again and again from our students. So, that pretty much sums it up.

Callie: Yeah. I mean, that's amazing feedback for you to be getting as well. So, how did you actually decide to start a membership site? What inspired you to do that?

Melissa: Well, I have been teaching for a number of years. I started teaching yoga in 2003. To make money as a yoga teacher, you have to teach a lot of classes. You have to have a side gig as well. Well, at least that's how it was working for me. So, I was teaching 10 classes a week, and that's pretty low as a yoga teacher. Then

also, my side gig was I was doing Thai massage, and yoga therapy during the day. So, I would get up at 6:00 in the morning, practise my yoga. I would teach a morning class or two, then I would come home and I would see Thai massage clients, and yoga therapy clients, and then I would go out again at night and teach more yoga, and I'd get home at 10:00 at night, and do the whole thing again.

So, it doesn't take long for that to become a recipe for burnout, which happened to me. I got a migraine. It didn't go away. So, I had to give the whole thing up and come up with another idea. Just prior to that, we had started filming my classes for YouTube. In 2009, we had started filming my classes for YouTube because people loved my classes. They were themed. So, if they missed them, they felt like they really missed out, but I'm pretty creative, so I was always coming up with new ideas for my classes.

So, we started filming them, putting them on YouTube. We realised that we needed a business model behind it because we weren't making any money on YouTube. In 2009, nobody was a YouTuber. I don't even know there was AdSense back then. I mean, there were three-minute videos back then. We basically direct-

Callie: They were really short. Yeah.

Melissa: Yeah. We were directing them to something else back then. We were filming on tape back then. I mean, it was crazy. It would take us all night to upload. Our videos were released on Friday then because it took us all week to produce a video. It was crazy. Anyway, back then, there was a podcast, this is really old school, by Tim Reid and James Schramko called Freedom Ocean in 2011. They laid out all these different business models. One of the business models was a membership community, business models of how you can make money online because I was online.

I was like, "Okay. I need to figure out how to make some money doing this."

The membership community made the most sense to me. It was something that I felt like I wanted to continually contribute, and build and connect with a community of people that were connecting with me on YouTube. So, I felt like that was something that I could do. So, in November of 2011, we opened our community.

Callie: Awesome. You work alongside your husband Tim as well, don't you? Was that always the plan or did that come along later?

Melissa: That grew organically. So, Tim worked his own gig in Toronto. We used to live in Toronto. He did business services and printing, and he sold used cars. Basically, we were doing whatever it took to make money and to get by. A couple of years into the membership community, so 2011, three years in, 2014, a couple of years in, we realised, "You know what? Everything we're doing isn't location-specific. We could be doing this anywhere."

So, we wanted to stay in Canada, and we looked on a map. I knew I wanted to move out west. Again, I lived here as a child. "Tim," I said, "anywhere in BC." Tim looked on the map and said he wanted to be on Vancouver Island. So, we moved out west, and by 2014, he came in to the membership community business, and helped me with YouTube and everything full-time. He has some side gigs now because he does a lot of photography and stuff like that, but now, it's passion work. Before, it was groundwork.

Callie: Real work.

Melissa: Real work, yeah. Now, it is passion work that he really loves. Yeah. So, three years in, he came on full-time because, yeah, I really needed him. I really needed the help. He does all our customer service, and he does all the tech stuff. Everybody loves him. I think that everybody needs a Tim in their business because for me, I do all the connection with the community, and I do all the content creation. I think having somebody like that look after all the money side of things, and all the customer complaints and stuff allows me to have that real connection with my members, too. So, I'm not ever-knowing about all that stuff going on.

It's like, "Any questions about that, just talk to Tim," and then Tim deals with all of it.

Callie: That's also neat being able to work together like that, though, and have that partnership in the business. Obviously, Mike and I do that. So, I'm having fun whenever I see anybody else doing that as well because I think it can work really well.

Melissa: Yeah. You guys never fight, right?

Callie: Almost never. Never anything to do with the business, so yeah, but no. I love working with Mike and, yeah, as I said, it's always nice to see other partners are doing it as well.

Melissa: I think what works about it is that we each have our own roles in the business. That makes a big difference, yeah, really appreciating each other, too.

Callie: Yeah. It allows you to focus on what you're good at. As you said, if you can focus on the content and the community, and Tim deals with the more behind the scenes things, then it frees you up to do what you do best, essentially.

Melissa: Yeah. If you can both really support each other in what you do, then it makes a big difference. Yeah.

Callie: Yeah, it really does. So, obviously, before you started the membership, you were doing classes and things like that. Do you still offer other services and products or is it just the membership now?

Melissa: Yeah. We have one product. It's our membership community. That's it. Yeah. It keeps us so busy. We don't have time. I don't know how other people have other products.

Callie: I think it's definitely a slightly different model when you're all in on the membership and it's full-time versus when the membership is just one of the things you offer. I definitely see the way people manage those differently, but yeah. So, a tough one now then, what would you say has actually been your biggest

challenge that you've had with the membership over the last seven years?

Melissa: Okay. So, I would like to answer this question by talking about something that I feel like has been a hurdle that I've overcome, and it's something that I really learned from connecting with people in the membership academy. This is working with people. So, one of the things that I found would be a big challenge for me for a long time in the community was that the people that weren't contributing to my community in a positive way were taking up a lot of my time.

So, people that were complaining, are having problems, they were just a big time suck. I wanted to be spending my time with our A-team members, the ones that were contributing and giving a lot to our community. I raised this point in your community. Somebody asked in the community, they're going to be speaking at your conference...

Callie: Oh, Diana, Diana Tower.

Melissa: That's it.

She said, "What's the biggest challenge in your community?"

I mentioned that to her, and she just said, "There's a way to ..." Just the way she framed it, she said, "There's a way to put your time with the people that are giving the most to your community and not spend all your time on the people that aren't." Just the fact that she said it and just a little bit of discussion around it, it was like a light bulb moment for me.

So, now, I recognise when those things come up in our community, it's like, "Okay. Hold on a second. Is this a person that's contributing in a really positive way in my community? Are they one of my A-team? Are they making a big difference in our community or is this just somebody that's draining my time?" I can usually very quickly see if I need to put a lot of time into the situation. That's been a huge learning curve for me.

It might sound super obvious, but it used to be I would spend a lot of time with the whiners and complainers, even on YouTube with negative comments and stuff. Now, it's just like, "Hmm. Would I take advice from this person? Do I really care about their opinion?" It's like, "No." So, then I just move on quickly from that, and I go back to the people who are positively contributing to our community. So, that's been something that has made a huge difference.

As soon as I did that, our community, it flourished because you can spend a lot of time with people that are really making a difference in your community, trying to make them happy, implicate them.

Callie: Yeah, definitely, especially if you're a people pleaser. I think there are some times where as much as you want to keep everybody happy and all of your members have the best experience, there's some people where it's just not a good fit, and being able to let them go or not buy into, as you say, if they're complaining and things like that, being able to be at peace with the fact you can't please everybody, I think that's actually a really important lesson for every membership site owner, I think.

Melissa: Yeah. One of the things that really stood out to me is looking at my capacity, too, of what I can offer. So, a lot of times, I'll beat myself up and think, "I want to be able to help this person, and this such and such organisation. I know they would be able to do it," but then I look at what my capacity is in our membership community and I think, "Okay. My team is mostly Tim and I, and we just do not have the capacity to hold space for this person of what they need right now. So, we need to move on from this and let them know that we don't have that capacity right now. Maybe someday I will have a team where I can hold space for people that need more attention, but right now, just given the resources and what I have, I can't do it."

So, just recognising the capacity for what I'm able to do right now has been really, really huge, and not beating myself up for that, right?

Callie: Yeah, definitely. I think especially with the membership model, when it's that lower cost model as well, it's realising as well there is that limit on what you can give to people within that kind of membership as well. So, yeah, I think again it's, as you say, important to make that realisation because it makes your life so much easier.

Melissa: Yeah. I think maybe if I give an example, I mean, I think I hit rock bottom when I was in a Skype call with a member, with her therapist and I was like, "You know what? Yeah. This is way beyond above the call of duty." So, that was a big learning curve.

Now, I would say the biggest challenge and this is just something that I've heard on almost every single podcast that you do. You probably already know what I'm going to say. Do you want to answer it for me?

Callie: You say it. You say it.

Melissa: Okay. Juggling all the balls. Yeah. There's so much to look after when you run a membership site. You're creating content, you're looking after members, and then you have to promote it all. It feels like just keeping all of those in the air. Even if I have somebody looking after customer service and all the technical side, and even though, just that whole big picture thing, it's a lot to hold on to even just in your head, and to keep it all going is a lot.

Callie: It's definitely not passive income.

Melissa: It's not passive income. It gets presented as that, and it's not. It's not at all.

Callie: No, it's not. I think it's important what you said, first of all, about the learning to let go essentially of the wrong members because it's something I think especially when you first start your membership, you want to keep all of your members happy. It's admirable, but it's a fool's game, essentially, because there's always going to be people that need a little bit more than you can

give in the membership or who aren't the right fit, and things like that.

I think getting to that point where you realise that, "Actually, this isn't where I should be spending my energy, and it's okay for some people to need more than I can give or to not be the right fit for the membership, and to let them go," I think that can be a really important turning point. Again, when you tie that with what you're saying now about having so many things to do, it can take a little bit of pressure off I think when you realise that there are going to be certain members, certain things that you can't really win with, and if you're putting all your energy into that, it takes away from other things that you could be doing that would help more people.

Melissa: Yeah. I like to say just a little bit more about that that's allowed me to have little more clarity around that, too, recently is that I also look at my team and what we're capable of now. So, I'll say, "Okay. It's just Tim and I." So, oftentimes, it's a question of exactly what you're saying is that this person needs more than what I'm able to give them at this time.

I think I want to be able to give them more, but my team right now is Tim and I, and the two of us right now, with what we have and the time we have, aren't capable of giving them more right now. Sometimes I find myself comparing myself to another organisation, and I think, "Well, that organisation can do it," and I think, "but I'm not that organisation. That organisation has this huge team and, of course, they could do that, but we are Tim and I, and we can't give them that."

So, I have to be really clear on what the scope of what we have and what we can offer. That makes it really clear to say, "Hey, you know what? We're just not able to give you what you offer. It's not a good fit." That was one thing that when Tim and I went over the questions that you asked yesterday, too, he said his big thing was that he would let people go more easily now, too.

Callie: Yeah. I think that that's really interesting. As I said, I think it's something most membership site owners will realise at some time point, but it can take quite a long time to get there, and I think-

Melissa: Yeah, eight years.

Callie: Yeah.

Melissa: I'll be the first person to tell you that the most important thing to me in our membership community is community. It's the people. Also, the most important thing that I learned is to let go of people.

Callie: Yeah. It's definitely hard, but-

Melissa: It's the same thing, right? It's like the two sides of the same coin, I think, right? Because in order to value the most important people, you also have to be able to realise who you need to let go of, too, I think.

Callie: Yeah, definitely. So, you mentioned about the community side of things. So, actually, I know you've just undergone a big site revamp, but for a large part of the time you have the membership if I remember correctly, it was all run through a forum, essentially, wasn't it? So, it was all community-based.

Melissa: Yeah. Yeah. So, when we started our community in 2011, you guys weren't around. So, it was really hard. We didn't know about you until when we found you last summer. Thank God we found you. So, as far as we knew, the best option to run our community on was via bulletin. I mean, I don't think there was a lot out there back then when we started. That was the best option, and it was the one we are using.

We're a yoga community, but that site, that option was put together by techy nerds. Our people hated it. They hated it with passion for all the years we used it. So, it was desperately in need of revamping. So, when we found you, when we saw what you guys were running, we're like, "Okay. We want that." We just

completely copied what you were using because it looked good and it ran like social media sites.

People just kept saying, "We want your site to look and run more like a website." We knew that if it could run like other social media platforms that they would be a lot happier. So, yeah. You're going to ask me what we're using now, but-

Callie: No. That's fine. What I want to highlight there is, essentially, you said that the members hated it, and you found it difficult to use and things, the previous software, but at the same time, you still succeeded for six, seven years with that tech even though it wasn't necessarily the ideal option or what your members like. So, I think that's a testament to the community that you've built and what you were offering that despite the tech maybe being less than optimal and not what your members wanted, you still built a successful membership that lasted the test of time anyway.

Melissa: Yeah. I think that speaks to the philosophy behind our whole membership, which is that we're about community. I'm always asking myself, "What can we do together?" So, even though we had this total garbage platform that everybody hated, we are always doing things together. So, in our community, we have something called the Daily Yoga Connection. We have monthly themes.

So, every week, and we have teams of volunteers in our ... It's hard to talk through the whole thing, so I'll try to do the best. We have teams of volunteers. So, every week, one of our carriers of the teachings brings one of the themes forward into the Daily Yoga Connection, and one of the guardians of the community supports everybody in that in the Daily Yoga Connection. What they do is they curate content around the theme.

So, let's say we have a theme like right now, our theme this month is Myofascial May. So, we're doing myofascial release this May. So, they'll go in to our video library, and they'll pull out a class for everyday short videos during the week, and longer

videos during the weekends when people have more time, short videos when they have to get to work. Then everybody goes in all week, and they all practise together. They talk about their practises during the week. So, everybody is practising the same class everyday. They're talking about how it for them. Our guardian of the community makes sure that everybody gets a response and acknowledgement, "Woohoo! You practised today. That's awesome." That's one of the ways that we're doing things together everyday. That's a very community-oriented thing.

Callie: Yeah. I love that. I can imagine that that's really great for not just engagement and retention, but also bringing those members together and helping members connect with each other as well.

Melissa: Right. It takes away from, also, the overwhelm of, "You go to the video library," and it's like, "Oh, my God! There's 500 here. I'm so overwhelmed. I'm going to spend my whole yoga practise time choosing a video."

"No. We've just taken all that choice overwhelm away for you and today, you're going to practise this. If you don't like that practise, then Tuesday's practise. We don't care. Just take one for the week, whichever is good for you," right?

Callie: Then presumably, you still have that video library there. So, for those people who do just want to come in and pick and choose, they can still do that as well. So, you've got the best of both there.

Melissa: Exactly.

Callie: The other thing I found interesting, though, is you've mentioned that it's just you and Tim, but it sounds like you actually have a lot of your community on your team as well. So, you mentioned that you have your guardians of the community and things like that. So, they're maybe not official team members, but essentially are helping with that kind of day-to-day community element of the site.

Melissa: Yeah. So, we do have actually quite a big team. It's a volunteer team, and all come from the community. Right now, there's around 11 people on the team because that team grows, and growing and shrinking all the time, too, because it's volunteer. I don't know. I think probably even if you pay them, it would grow and shrink, too. These things come and go.

That team is integral to the community because ... That took a long time to grow as well, and it's something that I'm super proud of. I mean, every part of running a community is a learning curve. That was something that I had to really learn and grow into was creating a team of leaders as well. So, there's the carriers of the teachings. So, a big part of that team runs the DYC, the Daily Yoga Connection, where they rotate through who presents.

We also have somebody who runs a moon pieces section. She goes the waxing and the waning of the moon, which is really cool. I have somebody who runs a book club, some recipes, somebody who does more spiritually focused section. So, every month we meet, and I meet with them and they get a more close mentorship with me. Also, I just present the teachings that we're going to have. We just met yesterday, but they also help me.

So, after we presented the teachings that we're going to be carrying into the community for June, we sat down. We just talked for half an hour about, "Okay. So, where are we going for July and August? What do you think about this? What do you think about that?" We just brainstorm together. So, they help me a lot, too, because part of that holding all the balls in the air and being the only one making the decisions, it's hard. So, yeah, they really help me see clearly around some things.

We're just saying, "Well, really, July and August, people aren't around as much. They're on holiday more. So, there's no need to bring in a bunch of new content. Let's go back and mind the resources that are there, and bring those forward instead, and let's give you some time off more in July and August, so you can focus on researching content and really bring some great new

content forward in September and October. Why don't you do this content in September and October?"

It's just really great to have that team around you to support you with that. So, yeah, the volunteer teams have been amazing, and they have special names, and they're recognised in the community. That's part of the culture of community, too, right?

Callie: Yeah, and I love that. Presumably, you mentioned they're volunteers. So, did they start off as members and you then elevated them up from the membership into that role?

Melissa: Yeah. They started off as members. I have some guidelines for myself around that now. I like them to be members for a year at least now, so that they know the culture of the community, so that I can get to know them well, and see how they're settling in, and see how they behave in the community. You can tell who's going to really be active and who's a good fit, but you just like to see how they're settling in, and if they're going to stick, too, because some people can come in super gung-ho, but yeah. That's how I do it, but I like to wait a year and let them have a good year before I even approach them.

Callie: Cool. So, while we're on the topic of community then and engagement then, I can imagine that that community element actually means that your retention is quite good. Do you do anything aside from that community to encourage retention or do you think that's just inherent in the kind of membership and community you're running?

Melissa: Yeah. We do. So, there are quite a few things that we do for retention. I think, like I said, the 30-day challenges, the DYC, but another thing that I'm doing that I'm quite proud of, and I think it's quite different, and even when I mentioned it to you, you were like, "Oh, I don't know, but you know your community best," and I'm so glad I did it.

So, for the last three years, I have been doing live, we call them dharma talks and meditations on Mondays, so basically, teaching

talks. They have been going really well at the beginning, and then attendance had been dwindling, and I've been putting a lot of work into the talks, researching the talks and preparing. It was just feeling like, "Okay." The effort was coming from my side and not as much from their side. I was getting frustrated with that, and also feeling like I needed a break.

It was every Monday, and I would have two times to hit both time zones because you want to get Australia, and you need to get Europe and North America. So, it was just a lot. So, I came up with the idea of courses instead. I was asking ... I put some prerequisites on them. I was asking people to apply. I was turning people away. So, I called them advanced courses, too. So, I wasn't taking brand new people to the community. I was saying certain people had to ... If I felt there was too much going on in their lives, then it was not going to be a good time for them maybe. Maybe now would be ... A lot of emotional stuff can come up when you go into this deep spiritual work.

So, it was just like, "Now is maybe not a good time for this. Maybe another time would be good," or it was like, "Really, you need to go back and do these classes before you jump into this work." It was things like that more than, "No, you're not qualified for this course." That was more the turning away.

It was also with applications. Also, me going into the community saying, "Why haven't you applied for this course yet because, really, you should have applied for this course." So, it wasn't just me saying that to certain people. It's me saying, too, tapping some people in the shoulder and saying, "Really, you should be applying for this course because you are more than qualified."

So, that took my engagement in those classes. To me, they were always full. I like my class sizes to be around 12. So, they always had 12 in them. Also, it meant that they were engaged. So, I always give them homework now, too. So, it meant they were doing things between classes, they were more engaged, and they were more committed. So, to me, that made retention really good. It also brought in new members, too.

Callie: Awesome. So, to clarify, those courses are included in the membership, but only available to 12 members each time.

Melissa: Yeah.

Callie: I think that was the thing I remember discussing that with you and saying that, "Would that put off all the other people that don't get to do that course and things like that?" So, it's great that that's worked really well for you.

Melissa: Yeah. It's interesting because you would think ... I get your point about that, but they self-select. They think, "Oh, well, I don't really have time for this time around, but I'm going to do it next time." It makes them more attractive, too, like, "Oh, I missed it last time, so I have to make sure I get it next time around." I make them close, too. So, if you're not in the course, you don't have access to them.

Callie: Awesome.

Melissa: So, it makes them really more special

Callie: Yeah. I think that goes to show as well how knowing your audience the way that you do, knowing your members and what works for them and how they'll react to certain things really makes a difference because as I said, I know some memberships where if they did that and they had something that was just available to a few members or something, it would be a terrible idea. As you said, for you, it's worked really well both for engagement, retention, making those members feel special, and also making other members aspire to want to be in the next round. So, that's a complete win for you.

Melissa: Even to get new members to sign up.

Callie: Yeah.

Melissa: Yeah. So, that's been really cool.

Callie: Yeah. So, I really like that that's worked really well for you. So, actually, you mentioned there about new members signing up. So, how are you actually getting new members to the membership? What are you finding is working for you for getting members in the door?

Melissa: So, I think our tried and true is the freemium model with the YouTube funnel. So, we have a YouTube channel. We put out yoga class every week. We funnel that into our membership. The best way we find is to get people on our mailing list. So, we have different opt-ins. We have a whole bunch of different opt-ins. Tim keeps track of all of this, but he usually finds that people that have become members are in one of those opt-ins, email opt-ins. So, that's the usual way, but I do have to say that every time we change something, you got to keep it fresh. Every time I change something, that's when members come in.

Callie: Yeah. That's really interesting because I think, yeah, you can get something that's working really well for you, but after a while, if you're just doing it to the same audience then it can get stale. It can stop being as effective. So, as you say, changing things up even if it's just ... I know sites where, again, YouTube, you just slightly change the style of the video that you're putting out, and even that can just make huge difference because it's just that extra bowl of freshness, as you say.

Melissa: Yup. I really think just the constant change, which it drives me crazy because I like things to be steady and calm, but honestly, it's the change that makes people, the constant newness that ... It just must pull different people in, right? You speak to different people in different ways.

Callie: Yeah, definitely. So, with the YouTube content then, you've been doing that for, I think, 10 years, you said. Do you actually batch create that in advance or do you work on a more ad hoc basis with the content you're putting out there?

Melissa: Yeah. We don't batch create. We have two channels, actually. So, on one channel, we batch create because we do long form

content on our main channel. I don't know how anybody batch creates a long form. You're doing it today. I don't know how you do it. It's just not in it. I mean, I guess maybe it depends on what you're doing, but for me, it's just not possible. So, I have to do what works for me.

So, on our main channel with the long form content, there's something about doing it in realtime that's always worked for us, and as much as we try, it just works for us to do it week-by-week. On our secondary channel, we do batch film because they're five-minute videos, usually, five to 10-minute videos. Last night, we were out and we batch filmed four of those. So, it depends on which channel, I guess.

Callie: Cool. So, I think, again, you mentioned that that's what works for you, and I think that's an important part of getting to grips with running your membership site is actually finding what works for you when it comes to content creation and things like that because, yeah, all the people in the world can say, "You should batch everything," but if that doesn't work for you, it's not going to lower your stress levels, it's not going to lower the time that it's taking and things like that.

Melissa: Yeah. You definitely have to find what works for you, and not do what other people are doing. That takes, I think, a lot of courage, and it takes putting on the blinders, and staying in your own lane or if you're into yoga, just keeping your eyes on your own yoga mat and figuring out what works for you for everything because honestly, that's what's going to resonate with your own audience the most, too.

I think about some of the things that we've done that's most popular. It does well, but anytime I come up with something that I think that I'm excited about, but I think, "I don't think this is going to fly because it just seems too out there," our audience always goes nuts for it. I think you have to go for it. The more I do that, the better it goes.

Callie: Awesome. So, what is life as a membership site owner, like for you now? Do you have a particular routine at all? How does the membership fit into your day-to-day life?

Melissa: Yeah. I think I was thinking about this, and I think although most days are different, they're the same, too. That's what I love about being a membership site owner is that there's a lot of variety, and there's a routine, too. So, I love living here. We just live in the most gorgeous place in my opinion. We get up early. I like getting up early. I usually practise some yoga or meditation. Then mornings, I like dedicating to creative high thinking things, so usually, content creation of some kind.

Lately, we've been filming either early or late, so we get the really nice light outside because we're in the nice time of year right now. So, we're filming outside right now. So, we either film at 7:00 in the morning or 6:00 at night, so we get golden hour on either side. Also, then we avoid the leaf blowers, and the power tools. They generally haven't started up yet. So, that helps us a lot with that.

Also, this is something, speaking of the things that really work for me, I tend to tire quickly, so this is something that I've learned, it's taking me a long time to learn, is that I need a lot of breaks. So, I take a lot of breaks. I use an adapted Pomodoro. Is that how you pronounce it?

Callie: I think so, Pomodoro, yeah, something like that.

Melissa: Yeah. So, I set a timer for 25 minutes when I'm working especially on screens. I stick to that. I work for 25 minutes, and then I break, but I break away for more than five minutes. I need it, and I take that. So, I'll go and I'll do a yoga pose or legs up the wall or go and do some dishes or go for a walk, and then I come back. That's really helped me, and it makes the workflow much more easy.

When I'm in a good flow, I try to keep my email and responding to members and things like that to later in the day because it just takes this brain space. I try to keep the really high level thinking

first thing in the day. Then I also really try to turn off the computer and things by 4:00. If I don't, it really goes into my sleep time if I'm still thinking about work and stuff later in the day. So, I really do try to shut it off by 4:00. Then it's dinner, and relaxing in the evening.

I do have to say, Callie, you and Mike, you model this so well in the membership community. You guys have fun in your lives. You have fun with what's fun for you guys. You guys play video games. You watch certain TV programmes. I really appreciate that because I think that each one of us has to figure out what is fun for us, and just really go for it and don't worry about what everybody else thinks, and play to your strengths and look after your weaknesses.

Then I think don't worry about what everybody else is doing. I can't believe what some other people can do, but it doesn't matter what everybody else can do. I just have to look after me, and have fun the way that I can have fun, and then everybody else, my members are going to be better for that.

Callie: Yeah. I love that. I couldn't agree more. I love the way you put it there as well. Play to your strengths and look after your weaknesses. I think that's a really nice way of putting that as well.

Melissa: Yeah.

Callie: So, I asked before about your challenges, but I didn't actually ask what's been your favourite thing about having a membership. What's the highlight or the impact that it's had for you?

Melissa: My most favourite thing is helping people. This has been an incredible year for that, and even just over the last little while. Just this week, there was a woman, a longtime member in our community, who was diagnosed with Parkinson's. So, over the last few days, I spent a lot of time with her, and talking to her about what her doctors have been telling her she can and can't do, and then we've been talking about how to make lifestyle changes, and what yoga is going to be appropriate, and just

recommending certain books, and yeah, all of that, and just being able to be there for her, and letting her know that I've got her back.

I really love being able to know that I can put in that time with individual people. I've had two women in my membership community over the last year who have lost children to suicide. One of them, in particular, I have spent a lot of time with over the last few months. That has just been a blessing to be able to know that because I'm in control of my time, and I'm the boss of me, I can drop everything when I want to and I need to, and just spend time with her.

There are a couple of women right now in our community that are recovering from two different kinds of cancer. One of them is just so thrilled because of doing the styles of yoga that I'm teaching, she's really getting her energy back. Chemo just zaps your energy. So, she just can't believe that she wakes up in the morning with energy now, and she's not so drained anymore. That's just trusting the process and doing the styles of yoga that I teach.

Another one had a form of breast cancer that went right into her limbs, and there's a lot of swelling. She's just thrilled that her swelling has really gone down because of some of the styles of yoga that she's been doing with me. So, just knowing when you get those ... These are the direct messages. They're not the ones that are necessarily getting shared. This is the more of the one-on-one stuff. I love that.

Knowing that what I'm doing and having this platform is able to have that massive difference on people's lives and to be able to have that personal impact, I'd do that all day long. That's amazing.

Callie: Yeah. I mean, it's amazing, as you say, the impact that you can have on people and that you've got that freedom that you spend that bit more time with members that need that help and things like that and to be able to really make a difference to their lives and have that knock on effect there as well. That's a huge thing.

Melissa: Mm-hmm (affirmative). The freedom to be able to spend your time the way you want to spend your time, I think that's an amazing part of being self-employed and to take it and to be able to do what you want. Yeah. That's the best part about having a membership, and being self-employed. Just saying that I get to choose what makes me happy about this, and my version of success is going to be unique to anybody else's. For me, that one-on-one and small groups and spending a lot of time with people, that really lights me up. So, I love doing that. So, I'm going to do more of them. When the need arises, I'm going to be right there for the people that need me.

Callie: Awesome. So, is there anything you'd actually wish you had known earlier or would do differently if you were starting again?

Melissa: Definitely, I wish I had known about Membership Site Academy earlier. I don't know what took me so long to find you guys. I mean, all those times, I felt so alone because, especially as a yoga membership community, I think a lot of times we're supposed to ... The branding around it isn't to be very business-oriented, right? So, we don't talk about that publicly, but we have to be smart that way or else we're not going to get paid. We're not going to be able to continue to do what we're doing, right?

So, yeah, I wish I had found you guys earlier. Other than that, I think I've learned as I've gone, and that learning curve is so valuable. I know that Tim tried to hammered in to me earlier how important community was, and I wish that I had learned that earlier, but I learned it as I learned it, and I get it now, but it took me a while to learn it. It's a hard one to learn. I thought content was most important, but it's not.

Callie: Yeah. It definitely sounds like the membership now as you've been talking about it is very much more focused on that community element.

Melissa: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Callie: So, finally then, I would love to know what's next for you. What are the goals for the membership? Where would you like it to be in the next year?

Melissa: My biggest goal is to run in-person retreats. In the next year, we have a couple of things left to do with the membership redesign on our main site and stuff. Once that is done, then our next goal is to run in-person retreats. First, here on the island, and then we have some key locations that we're looking at in Australia and Europe.

Callie: Awesome. So, would they be for members or would they be open for everybody?

Melissa: They're going to be open for everybody, but basically, members are going to get a discount. That means that their membership is free. You know what I'm saying? The member price is going to essentially be discounted, so that the cost of their membership is going to be ... You know what I'm saying?

Callie: Yeah. Yeah. I love that idea. I definitely like to see how you do those retreats. I always love that kind of thing and bringing in that in-person element as well. So, if someone wants to check out a site, where's the best place for them to find you online?

Melissa: Yeah, just our website, which is my name, MelissaWest.com. That's one L, two S's.

Callie: Awesome. I'll be sure to put that in the show notes as well. So, final thing before we wrap up then is, what one piece of advice would you give to somebody who's starting a membership today or thinking about starting a membership?

Melissa: I would say to focus on people and building community that I think relationships are the most important thing, and to just really focus in on connecting with people and building ... I think community is a word that's almost become cliché in anywhere it gets used. So, build relationships, connect with people, and really do that. Don't just throw around the word community, but

actually build relationships and connect with people, and then you will actually be able to, when you open the doors to membership, you'll actually have people come in.

Callie: Awesome. I love that. Thank you so much for joining me today, Melissa. It's been a pleasure talking with you, and hearing a bit more about your membership journey. I'm looking forward to seeing where the next eight years take you.

Melissa: I can't imagine. I can't imagine when we're celebrating 20 years with the membership, really. Gosh! That's going to be crazy.

Callie: Yeah. You definitely got to do a good celebration for that one.

Melissa: Yeah. My gosh! Thank you, Callie.

Callie: Thank you for joining me.

That's it for this week, folks. Thank you once again to Melissa for joining me on this episode, and sharing her membership journey with us. I particularly love how Melissa talked about learning how to let go of the wrong members, so that they weren't detrimental to her time, mindset or the larger community. I love the little things Melissa was doing with her community such as her daily sessions and the way volunteers help her to keep things running nicely.

It's great to see how she's actually evolved in her role as a membership site owner over the years, and gone from thinking that content was most important to really embracing her role as a community leader.

If you want to check out more of what Melissa was doing, then be sure to head over to MelissaWest.com or head over to TheMembershipGuys.com/btm25 to find all Melissa's details, and links, as well as this episode's show notes and, of course, the transcript.

Thank you again to Melissa, and thank you to you for listening as well. Join me same time, same bat channel next week for another episode of Behind the Membership.

Male: If you've enjoyed today's episode of Behind the Membership, we invite you to check out the [MemberSiteAcademy.com](https://www.membersiteacademy.com). The Member Site Academy is the essential resource for anyone at any stage of starting, growing and running a membership website. So, whether you're still figuring 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 Member Site 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 Member Site Academy is the perfect place to be for anyone looking to start, manage and grow a successful membership website. So, check it out at [MemberSiteAcademy.com](https://www.membersiteacademy.com).