

Negative Income to Thriving Business

With Megan Galane featuring Trivinia Barber

Megan: Hello, everyone! Thank you for tuning in to Refuse Defeat. Today, I have Trivinia in here and we are talking about how she started Priority VA and her failure.

Trivinia: Which one, right? Thank you for having me.

Megan: Can you tell us about yourself?

Trivinia: Yah! So, like Megan said I'm Trivinia Barber and I founded Priority VA about five and a half years ago. After working as a virtual assistant myself for over 12 years and I started my company because I adopted a child and that girl needed way more therapy than every little person she'd ever meet and I couldn't continue to straddle the funds between working in corporate job but I was actually working remotely but I was going into the office and coming home and I just had to make that decision of like — I needed to be at home — and so Priority VA was born as a result of that and it's been crazy five and a half years.

Megan: What was your biggest failure in starting this business? So, we're talking to entrepreneur either going through a failure and trying to get out or we're trying to brace them so they don't have a failure. What can you give that was your biggest failure?

Trivinia: Yah, well first let me say, you will continue to have failures and I think that was something that I didn't realize when I started a business. I remember being on another podcast in someone asked me, "What do you wish someone would have told you before you started your business?" and I said that it was gonna be so hard. Like I literally didn't think it was gonna be so hard as it is and so, for those entrepreneurs that are listening like just know that. You know, I don't want to just wave you because the world needs us but if you go into it with your eyes wide open knowing this is going to be — sometimes very very high mountains and super low valley — just know it and surround yourself with people like Megan that can help you through those valleys and you'll totally do way better. But my biggest failure, I would say especially when I was starting out was my husband and I co-founded our business together and we really built our business on the promise that we're gonna take care of our people. Me having worked as a virtual assistant, I have been paid really crappily, right? From other people that I worked for. I have been a part of organizations that maybe didn't like honor their team members as much as I would have wanted to and so, I was really really dead set on paying my team well, paying them on time and like just not jacking with people's money. It's one of the thing I always tell my team like we just don't mess with people's money, 'kay? 'Cause I know that what we do puts diapers on baby's butts, right? In some cases, it puts gas on people's car and we had set up our business really wrong. Honestly, the lesson here is like talk to people that you're setting up your business, make sure the model is some — because what we did, we would sign contract with clients, perform the services, and then bill. So, we were billing in arrears and the

first year in our business, we...it was about first year and a half, we paid \$43,000 out of our own money, savings accounts — things like that in order to pay contractors because clients weren't paying. On a whole variety of clients Megan. I can't say that it was one big client. I mean it was like I remember, the hardest one was a pastor. It was like \$8000 or something and he was like, "It's not that much money" and I was like, "Aaahh, yes it is!" and it was terrible. And so doing collections and trying to chase money down — oh, it was so terrible! But I see that was the biggest failure that we had. Just realizing, we had really set ourselves for failure in the way we had set up our business.

Megan: And it's just straining how you chase these people for money. Like you would expect people to want pay you did the service. You did a great service and you just build them in the end and you think it would be so easy to just come up with the money that you did the service for.

Trivinia: Yah, you know, the biggest challenge for me was that we often think like we're people of integrity and we assumed, honestly, that people conduct themselves in the same way like we do, right? Like I'm never gonna do something and not pay for it or even at starbucks, if you don't like your drink well we make it for you and I'm like, "Naaaah, that's alright, we were tired on that." And so I anticipated (**Megan:** Like a whole bar bridge.) Right? I mean I feel like I want — I really pay for people for what they did and I — It's a wrong assumption. People, there are some people in this world that will just take and take and take and they will see that they're working on someone whose sort of has maybe this bleeding heart for people and they will milk it as much as they can and so I was really really blessed though to get a call from someone we actually know, a gentleman Todd Herman wanted some virtual assistant services. And so I'm on my call with him and I'm giving him my spiel and you know our sales pitch and he said, "Yah, no!" and I was like, "Okay?" And he said, "Here's the deal. I'm not" He said, "I really wanna work with you but I'm not going to sign with you until you redo your contract." I was like, "Why?" and he was like, "Until you ask me for money first. I'm not signing." and I was like, "Ahh, okay?" He said, "You've got a great business here but you're setting yourself up for failure" and he didn't even know. Like totally screwed ourselves. And so I hired an attorney and like 2 or 3 days, we redid our contracts and I sent it to Todd and he signed it and he said, "Good girl!" [*Laughter*] and I was like, "I ain't kitten."

Megan: But it changed your business completely (**Trivinia:** Absolutely!) and you've grown, tremendously.

Trivinia: At that point, I remember that at first year, I mean, we're in such a deficit. You know, of needing to pay out of our own money and stuff and just in my time after that contract got talked about — we talked about our contract and we went on that year, I had started 90 Day Year which is a program you and I both love. And my business grew 220% (**Megan:** Wow!) and I do contribute so much of that into that changing of my thinking of like — you're worth it! Like you don't have to beg for money after you proved yourself. Like this is what your services are, this is

how much they cost and so much for this, for me has been just growing a backbone, honestly, and not being afraid to ask ask for what we're worth and interesting.

Megan: Knowing your worth and knowing your company, you're a woman of integrity and you know you're going to bring your purpose and serve whoever you're working with. So that's such a great lesson to learn (**Trivinia:** Exactly!) really early, hopefully before \$43,000. [laughs]

Trivinia: Before you do anything make sure you run your business plan by someone smarter than you guys. [laughter]

Megan: Is there any detail you'd like to add in? To talk about what you had take away from this lesson?

Trivinia: Yah, I think that, you know, so much of what worked for us and getting out of that mess was getting people in front of us that really honestly are smarter than us and so one the other things that we did as a result to that is that — my husband whose my co-founder and I, we were trying to do everything like be a Quickbooks ourselves and I am not an accountant and he's certainly not an accountant and so we had to hire a team of people. We used a company called "The Bottom Line" and they're amazing and they had helped us in the numbers part, right? So, we never would have got to \$43,000. How we had someone looking at the numbers and stuff and saying like, "Client B is not paying and why are you continuing to provide services for him month after month while he's not paying." Because I would give people the benefit of the doubt, you know, and so again another lesson I think for folks here is that I think it's human nature to be kind and want to think the best in people. But you have to set guidelines and boundaries for yourself and make sure that your clients know them at the very beginning. And so now, our clients know, we bill every month on the first of the month in advance and if that credit card declines, we give you 3 days to figure it out. And after 3 days, we're done. And you know, we will send the collections for out term 'cause we have, you know, things on out contract that help us terminate an agreement and so we will send the collections for the final billing amount and everything. Like we have ourselves all set up but none of that would have happened if I would have still continue to like, "I wanna be nice and he's a pastor." Oh my gosh, like you know, you have to own yourself, you know, your own part on this and it was hard for me to realize that the failure wasn't anybody else's. It wasn't that pastor client, it wasn't anyone — It was mine because I truly did not look at the whole landscape of my business. And I was just trying to be the "nice girl".

Megan: That doesn't get you paid. Doesn't put diapers on your baby (**Trivinia:** EXACTLY!) and on other people. So, it so important to make sure you put yourself first to an extent and make sure you are getting paid for the services you provide. Thank you so much for your time!

Trivinia: Absolutely!

Megan: You wanna talk about the freebie part?

Trivinia: Yaaah! I totally forgot what we have. Hang on one second because my team put up something for me. You guys, I'm so sorry I feel like I'm uh! Alright so priorityva.com/megan and I put together this really cool thing a couple months ago because I think most entrepreneurs, whether you're just starting out or you have a 7 or 8-figure business, we are in-dated with email all the time and I feel so strongly that if you need to get rid of one thing of your business that is sucking the life out of you, it's your inbox. And so if you go to priorityva.com/megan, I put together a whole guide on how to go from inbox zero to zero inbox which works way better for entrepreneurs like us that's to get stuff done.

Megan: Perfect and that will also be in the link in the description if you're interested in getting that freebie. It is there and all Priority VA contact information as well. So, thank you so much for joining me today on Refuse Defeat.

Trivinia: Thanks Megan.