

The Burnt Out Baker with Jenni Reher

David Crabill: Welcome to the Forrager podcast, where I talk with cottage food entrepreneurs, about their strategies for running a food business from home. I'm David Crabill. And today I'm talking with Jenni Reher. Jenni lives in Mead, Colorado inserted a vegan donut business named rustic donut back in 2015. She started from home under Colorado's cottage food law but eventually moved to a shared commercial kitchen in Loveland, Colorado. So she could wholesale her donuts to coffee shops over the course of four years. Jenni grew her bakery into a substantial business with about 20 wholesale accounts that reordered every single week.

And in 2019, she sold her business to a vegan restaurant. It's quite the interesting startup story. And there is a lot to learn here, not just in how she grew the business, but also what led her to let it go. And with that, let's jump right into this episode.

Welcome to the show, Jenni. Nice to have you here.

[00:00:57] **Jenni Reher:** Thank you so much for having me. This is such an honor.

[00:01:01] **David Crabill:** So Jenni, can you take us back to the beginning of this journey? How did you get started with your donut business?

[00:01:07] **Jenni Reher:** Oh, my gosh. It's a crazy story, but basically, I was newly vegan at the time and it was 2015 and I was watching the Food Network. And one of the famous chefs was making donuts. First of all, I didn't even know you could bake donuts. But she was using things, you know, just like a ton of butter and a ton of milk and a ton of dairy and a ton of sugar.

And I just thought, oh my gosh, I could totally do this. I can do this. I'm gonna veganize this, and this is gonna be my thing. And of course, that was just so crazy. Because I don't have a culinary background. Like the most, I've ever baked at that time was just cookies for my husband. And they were awful.

They were always burned. I didn't know what I was doing. Like I had no clue, but I had this passion and I wanted to do this. I knew that it was gonna be a thing.

[00:02:00] **David Crabill:** So, what were you doing up to this point? What was your background before this business got started?

[00:02:07] **Jenni Reher:** My background was in marketing. So I was doing like all different kinds of jobs in marketing, like a marketing assistant, marketing manager, and project manager. So I've always been in marketing. I've always understood how to market other people's products. But not necessarily my own.

[00:02:26] **David Crabill:** So, it is interesting that you were working at marketing jobs, like why'd you feel compelled to jump ship and start a business?

[00:02:35] **Jenni Reher:** Well, I've been in the advertising world forever, and I was working for advertising agencies as well as smaller companies. And I just felt this pull to just kind of do my own thing. My husband and I lived in a different town at the time and he was getting transferred. And so it was like the perfect time to start something new because I was obviously gonna have to quit my job.

So yeah, it was just like the perfect time to start something and all the stars aligned and, and yeah, that's why I basically just wanted to start my own thing.

[00:03:08] **David Crabill:** Did you have business experience before this?

[00:03:11] **Jenni Reher:** No, zero none. Like I said, I always sold other people's products, but I never sold my own. So yeah, no, I had, I had none.

[00:03:23] **David Crabill:** Well, one thing I've learned is that marketing is a pretty big part of any business. And so you probably did have more business experience than you realized. Yeah. So it is really interesting.

[00:03:32] **Jenni Reher:** Well, yeah. I think it was super helpful for me to have the marketing experience that I did because I was able to market my story and market my business. So yeah, I definitely had an advantage in that sense, but you know, not ever having baked anything more than cookies was a struggle.

[00:03:53] **David Crabill:** And you said that you were watching the Food Network and I thought you were gonna say, this chef on the Food Network, she was making vegan donuts as she was like making the polar opposite of vegan donuts. So what was the process like for developing these vegan donuts?

[00:04:10] **Jenni Reher:** Oh, my gosh, it was impossible. It was so hard. I had no idea what I was doing, but I winged it. I just figured it out. I watched what

she was doing and then I just figured it out. I just went through a ton of awful batter.

but I figured out a blend of ingredients that would work for the rise of the donut. And my poor husband had to try so much bad batter before I finally figured it out. But once I did, I was like, this is it. This is perfect. It's so good.

And then I started um, sharing it with some friends and everyone said, I can't tell this is vegan. Are you sure it's vegan? And I was like, this is it. I'm done. I have my recipe, but I really didn't but I thought it did, but I didn't.

[00:04:59] **David Crabill:** I mean your business and products always evolve as you build a business. But were you developing this recipe? Well, before you started the business?

[00:05:09] **Jenni Reher:** I was, I wanted the recipe to be done before I started really trying to figure out how to market it and what I was gonna do to get the word out. And so I had the recipe. My husband and I moved. I had to start from scratch, because I knew no one in our new town. And because of my marketing background, I did a lot of Google keyword research.

And I found out that vegan donuts were really hot. it was a term that a lot of people were searching for. And especially in places like New York and LA and San Francisco and Chicago. And I thought if vegan donuts are taking off there, then it's just a matter of time before they start taking off in Colorado.

And I just knew that it was a trend that I had to jump on.

[00:06:00] **David Crabill:** Was there any delay in the ramp-up of your business because you had to get people familiar with a brand new type of product?

[00:06:10] **Jenni Reher:** You know, it was. Because Google was my best friend. So I spent a ton of time just doing research, trying to figure things out, and everything just kind of fell into place. Like, I didn't even know I needed a cottage food license. Right. And I, you know, finally figured that out. I was able to join a class in Fort Collins and it was pre-pandemic.

So it was in person. I got my cottage food license. And then I was like, okay, how am I gonna sell this? And they kind of recommended some farmer's markets. and of all things there were, I mean, there were tons of farmer's markets, in Boulder and other towns.

But they were really, really, really expensive. I was like, there is no way I'm gonna spend thousands of dollars just to try to market this product and then, believe it or not, the very first year in the town that I had just moved in, they decided to have a farmer's market. And I was like, oh no, I missed the deadline.

I missed it. But I was determined and I wrote a letter to the mayor. so embarrassing, but I like begged them to let me in this farmer's market. And it was like \$50, I think. And I got in and that's how I started selling at the very beginning.

[00:07:24] **David Crabill:** Your first farmer's market day, how did that go?

[00:07:28] **Jenni Reher:** Oh, my gosh, it was awful. I had been to some farmer's markets, but it wasn't really a thing where I was living before. And so I didn't even know you were supposed to give out samples, so I didn't have samples for anyone. It was 95 degrees plus and I used coconut oil in my donut frosting, so my donuts were completely melty and gloppy.

I lived in a farming town. So, you know, like veganism was not a thing so I had a woman yell at me. She said, if it doesn't have better milk or eggs or dairy then what the heck is in it? And I almost cried. And then I had another woman who told me that I used too much baking soda and my donuts were really bitter.

And instead of being like, okay, I'm done. This is it. I am finished before I even start. I really took that woman's uh, advice to heart because she was vegan. And she said, you know, if you use too much baking soda, then they're just not gonna taste. Right. And I was like, what do I do?

She's like, just use less baking soda and you know, I'll come back next week. If you bring your donuts and you make them the right way, then you know, I'll let you know if they're good and I'm like done. So I went home. And I revised my recipe and I understood what she was saying because they were kind of bitter.

And then she came back to the farmer's market and she tried it and she was like, this is it. This is an amazing donut you're gonna do really well. I don't know, that just gave me so much confidence that I started selling it. I started selling out at my farmer's markets and granted it was a teeny tiny farmer's market, but I was so excited.

It was like the beginning of something that I knew that was gonna be successful. And I knew that nothing was gonna stop me at that point. And I started getting regular people coming up to my table. I still didn't have samples because I was

cheap and they would just buy my donuts and then they'd recommend them to their friends.

And I was at that farmer's market for like three or four more times cause it was just so hot and my donuts were such a mess. I knew that farmer's markets were not my thing. I needed to find a different way to market my donuts.

[00:09:33] **David Crabill:** So what other ways did you get your name out there? Get your donuts into people's hands.

[00:09:38] **Jenni Reher:** Well, the hard thing was that I'm an introvert. So first of all, I'd moved to this new town. I knew no one. I thought that if I just built my website, you know, people would just come and that didn't obviously happen. So I started, you know, going to like networking events and those weren't my thing, because they were huge.

And I was just super intimidated by all the people. And then I don't know how long the meetup was around, but I decided to join a meetup group, which was really small in Longmont, a town close to me. It was for entrepreneurs and I'm like done, I'm an entrepreneur. I can go to this meetup group, but it turned out it was a meetup group full of men that were tech startups.

Like totally not. something that you would think a baker would go to. But I brought my donuts. And I got swarmed by men and they started eating my donuts and they're like, oh my God, these are amazing. Did you make these? And yeah, it was, again, just more of a positive thing that I was on the right track.

I knew that I was on the right track if I had people that I've never met before try them and, and tell me that I like them. And I think that's what a lot of people do is they just only test out their products with their friends and family. And I think that's gonna set you back a lot just because You're not giving opinions of people who are gonna be really, really critical.

And really honest with you, you know, like I had, I only tested it with, you know, friends and family, nobody would've ever told me that I used too much baking soda. So that's one thing I really recommend is just, you know, getting out there and having tons of people try your product before you even try to sell. Or just to reaffirm the fact that you were on the right track.

[00:11:23] **David Crabill:** It's interesting that you said that the big networking events weren't helpful for you. Why do you think

[00:11:30] **Jenni Reher:** It's my introversion for sure. And just the bigger the events were, the more intimidated I got and I just kind of found myself shrinking in the back and not meeting people and just really wasting my time. I'm better in smaller groups. um, I went to an event and, you know, it was full of business people, right? Everybody had business suits on and stuff like that. And it was mostly men once again. And one guy, you know, I showed him my branding or whatever, cause he wanted to see it.

I don't know. Maybe I had a card with me or something I don't remember. And he basically said that my branding was awful and that he would never buy my product from me ever based on that. And I was like, okay, first of all, I'm in marketing second of all, that was like, so mean. Right. And I had so many people, mostly men once again, just look at me like, oh, isn't that cute?

You have a little donut business, how's your little donut business going? it really took a toll on me and I just didn't enjoy those kinds of events. And I thought, okay, well, if I just do a smaller event, maybe that would be better. And if I could bring my donuts, maybe they could take me a little bit more seriously.

[00:12:44] **David Crabill:** So it seems like you faced quite a bit of resistance and, you know, obviously you're trying to bring something new to a new market. Was there a point at which you doubted yourself and you thought, you know, maybe I should just add regular donuts to my lineup as well?

[00:13:00] **Jenni Reher:** No. I never thought that. I definitely thought of quitting a million times, but I really, really felt like I have done my research. I know people like what I have to offer. I'm not gonna be for everyone. And I need to figure out my messaging so that it resonates with my audience.

You know, obviously, I was super niche down. I think that was part of the reason that I did well. But I also knew my audience. I knew them very well, and I knew that not saying that they were necessarily vegan, but that they didn't have any artificial ingredients or flavors or colors or preservatives, unlike a regular donut was basically the message that I landed on.

[00:13:43] **David Crabill:** Did you ever consider adding other vegan items, other than donuts to your menu?

[00:13:49] **Jenni Reher:** No. Pretty much, right after I started posting on Facebook, it took me a while to start posting on Instagram. People started asking for gluten free donuts and I was like, are you kidding me? It's hard

enough to do a vegan donut. Let alone, gluten free. I am not gluten free. And I had no idea how to do that.

And it was, So hard for me to figure out. And at first I was like, I'm not gonna do that. I'm sorry. You don't have to listen to your customer every single time. Right. But I really felt like if I could figure it out, it would be massive. And so I worked on that recipe for quite a while and then I started kind of teasing that it was coming. Yeah, it became my best seller.

It was a vegan and gluten-free vegan chocolate donut with chocolate icing and vegan chocolate chips on top.

But other than that, I didn't want to introduce anything else. Just because I wanted to be known for just one thing, that's it. I didn't want people to think that I could do all these other things. I wanted to be the person that people would go to for only vegan donuts at the time.

And then when I expanded to gluten free vegan donuts, I wanted to be that person. I mean, my, the name of my business was rustic donuts. So I wasn't gonna start adding cakes and cupcakes and whatever else it was donuts. And I was not gonna change.

[00:15:14] **David Crabill:** I did see that in the early days somebody asked you to make a smash cake.

[00:15:18] **Jenni Reher:** First of all, I had no idea what that was. I had to Google it. And then second of all, she was a really great customer. I was already doing wholesale at the time and she was awesome about supporting me and posting my donuts on her feed so I could repost them on mine. And she wanted me to make a smash cake for her baby.

And I. Was really hesitant because first of all, I am not a decorator. I didn't know how to use a piping bag.

I didn't know any of the techniques at all. And I finally just told her no, because I didn't want to be that baker that people post on their feed and they're like, I asked for this, but this is what I got I didn't want that to be my legacy. So I was like, I'm so sorry. I can't do it.

And I think a lot of new bakers are afraid to niche down because they think it will put them in a box and they don't wanna be known as the donut lady or the cake lady or whatever. But I think when you're starting out, it's incredibly

overwhelming and expensive. If you have so many various products, and nobody really knows what you specialize in. And so you're not known for that one thing. And I think that really sets people apart.

[00:16:35] **David Crabill:** So I know you went into wholesale eventually and you had to get a commercial kitchen to do so. So how long were you using the cottage food law?

[00:16:45] **Jenni Reher:** I don't really remember. I wanna say like six months. And then I met a woman at that tech meetup and she was like, you know what, coffee and donuts would be great. Have you ever thought about being in a coffee shop? And I'm like, no, I never even considered it. But more and more people started to say that And so I was making enough that I was just like, okay, I'll find the cheapest commercial kitchen that I can, which was really difficult because it's so competitive here in Colorado. But I found a tiny one and I went out and I started to get wholesale accounts after that.

And then I had to move to another commercial kitchen in Loveland, which ended up being my final one because it was huge. And it was able to hold all the volume that I had.

[00:17:29] **David Crabill:** So the first commercial kitchen, that was your own commercial kitchen. And

[00:17:33] **Jenni Reher:** No, it was always a shared commercial kitchen. I never took a loan. I never, you know, got funding or anything like that. I started with \$500 and I'm like, if I can't make it on \$500, I'm not continuing this business, but I, I was able to do that. And when I first started out, I was like, yep, I'm gonna have a brick and mortar. My business is gonna be adorable. It's gonna be pink and I'm gonna have flowers and it's gonna have polka dots. And I had all these like crazy dreams of, you know, having this adorable donut shop on the corner.

But then I started figuring out like, oh my gosh, the overhead that's involved with that. And the nightmare of like, having to hire a ton of employees to run it for you and, dealing with, you have any broken equipment, first of all, buying the equipment is so expensive. And then having to pay release on top of that, it's, it's not something that I thought of at the very beginning, but then I was just like, yeah, a shared commercial kitchen is the way to do it because the only thing you pay for is monthly rent and that's it.

And then it's everybody else's responsibility, right. That owns the kitchen to fix all the problems.

[00:18:39] **David Crabill:** And can you take me? First six months running under the cottage food law, I mean, was this mostly farmers markets and how did your business grow during that time?

[00:18:50] **Jenni Reher:** It was actually online orders. My very first order when it came in, it was from somebody named moon snake. And I was like, is this a joke? But it turned out. It was a real person when I met him and he turned out to be one of my best customers. I met a lot of people in the vegan community who loved my donuts and they bought from me online and I would deliver to them and meet them in like random parking lots during the middle of the day.

And then I had a church that I was supplying donuts too on Sundays. So I was pretty busy. But I knew that the next step would probably to be in coffee shops after.

[00:19:34] **David Crabill:** What was your first step in trying to get a wholesale account?

[00:19:38] **Jenni Reher:** I totally winged it. And I was told that if I get into so and so coffee shop, it's gonna be massive. It was called Ziggi's. They're now national, but at the time they had like two coffee shops, one huge one in Longmont, and I was so intimidated, but finally I was like, I'm just gonna do this. I'm just gonna do this.

And so I had a good hair day. I went in, I didn't bring my donuts because I, I just know like managers are busy. They're not gonna take the time to like, sit down with you and have some donut you know, I just didn't feel right about that. So I basically just asked them if they had donuts and they said, Yeah, we do actually.

And then I said, well, do you have vegan donuts? And they said, no, no, we don't. Do you make them? And I was like, yeah, actually I do. And they said, great, our manager's really busy obviously. but you can email her and see if she'd be interested in meeting with you and whatever. And I was like, okay, sure.

So they said it would take her a couple of days to get back to me. She's super busy. Don't take offense to it, but if you email her, I'm sure she's gonna be really interested in what you have to offer. So I ran home, I fired off an email, and so

then I was like, okay, yeah, hit send, you know, I was so nervous. And then 30 minutes later, she got back to me and she was like, we would love to try your donuts.

Can you come by for a meeting? And I was just so excited. Oh my gosh, I was so excited. So yeah, that worked and I would say 99% of the time, that's how I got new business, but I would always scope it out. I would always go to the coffee shop and just make sure it was a good fit for my donuts, because I wanted to make sure that the customers understood what vegan was.

And so I looked for craft coffee shops that had a real, you know, cool vibe, kind of a Starbucks vibe. I was just looking for a very, very particular type of customer. So I scoped out, you know, my coffee shops first and then I would contact them.

[00:21:48] **David Crabill:** they took you on as a wholesale customer. I guess you got your commercial kitchen, you got that all sorted out. What was it like the first day that you sold the donuts in the coffee shop?

[00:22:00] **Jenni Reher:** Oh, my gosh, it was nuts. First of all, they wanted me to do a demo. And I didn't even know what that was. I had to Google it. No kidding. And when I found out it was, you know, to demonstrate or demo my donuts in front of their customers to see how they would like them.

Yeah, I was freaked out, but it went really, really, really well. There was a line out the door and, you know, obviously they were a hit, so I got my order from them. I think they only took two dozen and I delivered them on Friday and they were like, yeah, these will get us by, you know, till next week we'll order from you again.

And then I was coming home after I had delivered them, then I was baking at the kitchen and then I was coming home and I got a call from them on Friday, the day that I delivered and they had already sold out. So they were like, This has never happened to us before with any products that we've ever had. Is there any way that you can make more for us that we'll have enough to get through the weekend?

And I was like, of course I ran back to the kitchen and I made more. I

[00:23:05] **David Crabill:** Wow. That's crazy. Can you remember when you started selling at Ziggi's that first day, do you remember what they were selling for price wise?

[00:23:17] **Jenni Reher:** I don't, I know that they were high to them, they were concerned about the price. They didn't think they were gonna sell it that, and then of course they have to make their mark up on top of that. And they were high. They weren't like cupcakes. They weren't, they were a specialty item and they were, they were really concerned that they weren't gonna sell at all. But they did

[00:23:39] **David Crabill:** Do you remember what your pricing was like when you started the business?

[00:23:42] **Jenni Reher:** I do. When I started, I didn't know what I was doing as far as pricing. But I was like, they're not a cupcake, but they're a little bit better than a cupcake. I don't know. And so I started really low. I remember I started \$18 a dozen and I wasn't making a dime, especially with delivery included in that. And obviously they were selling a lot just because that was such a good deal for the people that got in on that.

But during the time in my business, I had to raise my prices like three or four times, and I was terrified. I was absolutely terrified that I was gonna lose all my tests. customers, but I did it incrementally. I learned from somebody in the kitchen, that's a benefit of working in a commercial kitchen.

That's shared as you get all different kinds of opinions on what you're selling and you can ask anyone. I mean, everybody's kind of all over the board. And somebody, I think it was a, a caterer said that, you should raise your prices incrementally by cents instead of like dollars, because it makes more sense for a business to do business transactions.

So like, if they're 3 25, then you raise them by 30 cents, even though it turns out to be a different amount. It just doesn't seem like it's a huge jump to do that to them

[00:24:58] **David Crabill:** So what did your prices eventually become towards the end of when you were running the business? So

[00:25:05] **Jenni Reher:** They were pretty high. I think especially when the vegan gluten free donut came out, I know that coffee shops were selling them for like 4 25, a piece for 50 a piece. So yeah, they were, they were a specialty item for sure. But people were still buying them.

[00:25:28] **David Crabill:** That's like \$50 a dozen.

[00:25:32] **Jenni Reher:** Yeah. So I stopped selling to the end consumer you know, pretty much like the second year in my business, just because I couldn't handle consumer business plus business, you know, from the coffee shops, I couldn't do it all. And plus it was really expensive to buy my donuts at that point.

[00:25:50] **David Crabill:** So how many wholesale accounts did you eventually take on?

[00:25:54] **Jenni Reher:** In the end, I had close to 20. Which doesn't sound like a lot, but it was really fortunate to be with Ziggi's because they ended up expanding a ton. They decided to go to a franchise model and they started having kiosks, like drive through coffee shops and they just started popping up all over Colorado.

And I had an amazing relationship with them and they wanted me in all of their coffee shops, all of them. And I was constantly adding new accounts. And. I would say like 10 of my accounts were probably Ziggi's at the time. And then I was in another coffee shop that had another franchise. They had two, no, they had three locations.

I was in those. And then I was in some smaller coffee shops, but really craft coffee, really amazing coffee shops that were just single coffee shops. Those made up the rest of my, my customers

[00:26:52] **David Crabill:** So the donuts themselves. We haven't really talked about like what flavors you had and like what, what flavors did you start out with when you got the business started?

[00:27:02] **Jenni Reher:** didn't want to have a lot of flavors and I didn't wanna have a ton of variety. Just because I had a lot of toppings that went on the donuts that made them a variety in a way. And so I had a base of a vanilla donut and then a base of a chocolate donut, but then I had a chocolate frosting and a vanilla frosting.

And as my signature flavors and then seasonal one of my best sellers was lemonade stand and it was a vegan vanilla donut with lemon frosting, but all of my frostings were based on those basic flavors. So I would just add, you know, spices or whatever to make them different. For my seasonal flavors.

Like I had a pumpkin spice and I had the lemonade stand. I think I had a cranberry one once and yeah, I just, I mixed it up in those frostings.

[00:27:58] **David Crabill:** what was your best selling flavor? So,

[00:28:00] **Jenni Reher:** At the beginning, it was a lemonade stand. That was the biggest one. And then when I went gluten-free vegan, it was the chocoholic donut, which was a completely chocolate donut with um, chocolate chips on. So, yeah, the gluten-free, which was like a test, ended up being my best seller hands down.

That's what most of the coffee shops bought. That's what the restaurant bought. That's what pretty much everybody did. Um, Which is just crazy because just, wouldn't not have ever expected that, but gluten free was a thing at the time. It still is, but just to have something vegan, gluten free, that didn't taste like either one of those was a big deal.

[00:28:43] **David Crabill:** What was the process of making your donuts? I know you said you baked them, you didn't fry them. Can you describe a little bit about how you actually made these?

[00:28:52] **Jenni Reher:** Oh, man, it wasn't easy at all. It was a really involved process, but basically I just made the batter. And then I would use a piping bag and pipe the dough by hand, every single time into the donut pan. I finally figured out that you can buy really big donut pans on Amazon. But for a really long time, I was just using, you know, half dozen donut pans.

I had a bazillion of them, and then yeah, then I baked them and then I would freeze them. because it was easier to put the frosting on. Then I made the frosting. So everything took like a couple of days. I wanna say three days, probably total to make them I

[00:29:36] **David Crabill:** And did you ever consider getting like a donut machine or something specifically tailored to making donuts to make the process faster?

[00:29:44] **Jenni Reher:** did, but I didn't know how to do it. I honestly was so busy. I didn't have time to think about things like that. I was just trying to get through all of the orders that I had that's the unfortunate thing is that I didn't have time to think about what the next step was and how to expand even further, even though my business was blowing up, you know, I thought about using a co-packer and I actually contacted them and they, basically said I didn't have enough volume, which I was like, are you crazy?

I mean, I'm so busy and that there's just no way, but they, they just basically laughed at me and said, we're not even gonna touch you. And so after that, I was just kinda like, I'll just, I'll just figure it out. I'll just keep doing what I'm doing.

[00:30:30] **David Crabill:** I did see on social media, you said the baking life is not always as glamorous as it seems.

[00:30:39] **Jenni Reher:** think when I started out, like I said, I, I wanted this cute little pink store and everybody was gonna come and I was gonna have my little apron and I had all these dreams that it was gonna be this fantasy, like bakery life. I'll be the first to tell you, it is really hard work you're on your feet constantly.

you're your own. Boss. And so you do everything right? You do the sales, you do the marketing, you make the donuts, you bake the donuts, you decorate the donuts, you get new customers, you deal with things that go wrong. You have to deal with comments or you have to, you know, learn how to have thick skin.

And It's really hard. I think it's a lot unglamorous as any job could be, because you're constantly covered in flour and frosting and sugar and it's work. It's definitely work.

[00:31:35] **David Crabill:** What kept you going or what were some of the reasons why you loved running the business?

[00:31:42] **Jenni Reher:** I loved being my own boss. I loved the social media aspect of it. I loved creating community on social media. I loved knowing that people were eating my donuts out there and that people were talking about it and that people were sharing them and that people were excited. One guy came all the way up from Colorado Springs just to get one of my donuts.

And just that feeling alone, like somebody is eating something that I made with my own bare hands. It's an incredible feeling and it's humbling. And, we would drive around, you know, like I'd be on the highway. And I'm like, I wonder if they had one of my donuts today and just to like, see people, like sometimes I would sneak into coffee shops and I would see people eating my donuts.

And I can't explain it. it's this feeling of like, oh my gosh, people are eating something that I made. And you know, I didn't have contracts. And my customers ordered for me every single week, every single week, I never asked them to, I never held them to anything. And they always ordered, and it was just such an emotional thing for me.

And that's what kept me going. And also to know, like, you know, that people were just as passionate about it as I was, you know, and sharing it with their friends and telling their friends about it or their family and seeing pictures of little kids eating them and having people eat gluten free, that hadn't been able to eat gluten free in so long. It was just, yeah, it was such a cool feeling.

[00:33:18] **David Crabill:** So considering that this is such an emotional thing for you and you got so much value from running your business. I know you, decided to sell your business in 2019, which is four years after you started it. Why did you decide to sell, what was that process like?

[00:33:34] **Jenni Reher:** it was not something that I had ever thought of. It was not something that ever crossed my radar, but at the end of four years I was burned out. I was seeing a coach um, my business was booming, but I was basically dying. I wasn't taking care of myself. I was just constantly working.

Um, If I wasn't at the kitchen, I was always working on trying to get new business or, you know, social media posts or working on events or whatever. And I just came to a point in my business of just utter burnout. And through talking to my coach, she basically, I was like crying in her office and my marriage wasn't great.

like I said, I wasn't taking care of myself. I wasn't sleeping at all. And um, I had decided to close my business. She's like, something's gotta give what's it gonna be? And I'm like, I don't know. And then I had a dream that I died and I was hooked up to tubes and all my friends and family were standing around and I woke up and I was like, she's right.

Something has to change. I can't do this anymore. I just can't. I had so many decisions that I needed to make and I had no time to make them. At the time Ziggi's wanted me in, you know, seven to eight more of their stores within, you know, two to three months. And I didn't know how I was gonna make it happen.

I was looking at distribution and I didn't know how that was gonna work. I had no one to turn to really to make those decisions or to help me make those decisions. And so I. Just decided I talked to my husband and I'm like, I just can't do this anymore. I think I just need to quit. And he's like, you know what?

I think it's time. But are you sure you just don't wanna try it one more time? And I'm like, I can't, I mean, all I wanted to do was take a nap. I was so tired. I can't even explain what burnout feels like if you haven't had it before, but it's crippling really. And it's.

Just exhausting. And you can't think about anything other than just being so, so tired. And so I told one of my customers that I was quitting and she was so sad, but really supportive. And she was like, it's hard. I get it. The food industry is difficult. And then I told Ziggi's that I was quitting.

And that was really difficult because obviously I had an amazing relationship with them as I did with all my customers. But that was awful. And then I told a restaurant that I was working with that I was quitting and he and I were friends and he was mad and he was like, No, you are not quitting.

You built this, you can't quit when you're on top. You just can't do that. And I'm like, I have to, I have no other choice. I'm so burned out. I'm so tired. I just wanna take a nap. I just wanna take a break. I hadn't been on vacation. I hadn't taken a break. And he was like, you know, through a series of conversations, he was just like, I can't let you do this.

Do you wanna partner? Do you wanna do this? And I'm like, no, I don't. I, I don't. And then like I said, there were a series of conversations. He ended up offering to buy the business from me and it was a really good fit. Because he had a vegan restaurant, his customers loved my donuts. He loved my donuts.

So it wasn't like starting from scratch. And I had a couple of people through the years who wanted to buy my business and they wanted to change everything. They wanted to fry them. They wanted to not make them vegan and I think. Maybe they just wanted my name. But I don't, I don't know why you would buy somebody's business and just wanna change everything. But I guess that can happen.

[00:37:07] **David Crabill:** so, I mean, in hindsight now that you have more of a clear mind about it, what do you think you could have done better? did you just need to be hiring employees more to offload more work in order to grow?

[00:37:21] **Jenni Reher:** Yeah, for sure. There were so many things that I would change. I think I was so proud of doing everything by myself. Like I saw it as a badge of honor and are, I, you know, I can handle all this volume and I can handle all these customers and I can do all by myself. I was so proud. Have that all on my own.

I finally hired a part-time employee at the end and I was terrified, but I realized, oh my gosh, I'm so much more productive. I'm making so much more money when she helps me at events or when she's just in the kitchen with me. But I was

just really afraid of getting a loan. I don't know why. I think that would've been a lot easier.

I think having more employees would've been easier. I was at the point though in my business, like the kitchen I was in was massive, but I still didn't have enough room. So I was looking at getting a huge loan for hundreds of thousands of dollars probably to create my own kitchen.

Right. And that's an extremely expensive venture because you have to buy all the equipment and all of that. Like we talked about. And it just wasn't that wasn't an option, but yeah, I definitely would've done things differently there as far as being able to expand in a way that made sense, hiring people, getting a loan, all of that.

But I just, I'm not sure. I think I just wanted to do it all myself. I didn't want anybody else to like own me. I didn't wanna have to have a loan on top of, the rent that I was paying and the overhead that I had with all my ingredients and it was just something that just seemed so massive to me at the time.

I wasn't able to break it down into something that made sense.

[00:39:04] **David Crabill:** So this restaurant decided to buy the business and it sounds like that was a pretty good fit. Like, did you have to really learn much about selling in a business or how did that transaction go? Like, did you need a lawyer? So

[00:39:18] **Jenni Reher:** It was an interesting arrangement and yeah, we did everything, but you know, it was, it was pretty seamless at the end. Like I taught him how to make them. He knew how to make them. And I introduced him to all of my customers, my clients, whatever.

Because I wanted the transaction to be really seamless. I wanted all of my coffee shop owners to feel really comfortable with him. And, the fact that I was moving on, but don't worry, he's gonna be there for you and rustic donut isn't changing and all that kind of stuff. And yeah, it was a lot smoother than I thought it would be for sure.

[00:39:56] **David Crabill:** I take it after, sometimes passed obviously, and you have no regrets. For selling it.

[00:40:04] **Jenni Reher:** You know, I do because the business doesn't exist anymore and it breaks my heart. You know, I miss it a lot. I miss my customers

a lot and I miss that exhilaration of getting up every day and making something so amazing and important. But I know that I had to do what I did.

I had no choice. I either had to quit or I sold and selling is not a bad option. But yeah, I did have regrets for a while and I didn't know what my next step was gonna be. I felt really, really lost because that was unfortunately kind of part of my identity. But, it was time to move on I guess, and I'm definitely healthier for it.

And I don't regret that aspect at all. I don't regret that I'm taking care of myself and it's not a part of my life in that way, but yeah, I do. I still kind of have twinges of like, Ugh, darn it.

[00:41:06] **David Crabill:** So the business doesn't exist anymore. Do you feel like that's because it was so tied to you?

[00:41:12] **Jenni Reher:** Honestly, I don't know the pandemic hit. And that changed a lot. I think I know that Ziggi's was exploding still because they had drive-through locations. And so a lot of the coffee shops, I think suffered because of the pandemic they had to shut or they had to figure out, delivery or whatever.

He made a couple of changes that I don't really know. I don't know exactly what happened and I don't know what caused that, but I do think that some of the reason was because of the pandemic and it just made it difficult. Like, I know he had employees and I know that, COVID was running rampant. And just to have that extra stress on top of running a business, a food business, no less just, I don't even know how I would've handled it.

[00:42:04] **David Crabill:** And the pandemic was particularly hard on restaurants. So I might have done okay. With a wholesale only business, but um, you probably had other priorities during the pandemic than trying to sustain the donut business. So you finally let go of the business. You sold it. What was the feeling like once it was out of your hands?

[00:42:26] **Jenni Reher:** It was terrifying. I felt really lost. I felt like part of my identity was gone. I didn't know what I was gonna do. And I was so used to running. Around like crazy every day, all day. I mean, I would start working at 11 o'clock at night and then I would come home around 10:00 AM.

you know, and then I'd sleep on the couch for a couple of hours. And then I would, I mean, it was an insane schedule, so it took me a long time to like a

calm down from that and actually realize like, I don't have to live like that anymore. And B I, like I said, I was so tired. I slept a lot. And I thought it would take me six months to get over my burnout, but it actually took a year and I dabbled in like, okay, what am I gonna do?

How am I gonna start my next thing? What's gonna be my legacy? But I think it was good to just kind of like, let those things go and just, be, just get back to me and get my health back.

[00:43:27] **David Crabill:** So, you know, I think it was early 2019 that you sold the business. When did you start taking your next step?

[00:43:36] **Jenni Reher:** started right away. I was like, I'm gonna teach people to do what I did. But I didn't know how to do it. Like I said, I was still tired and it just didn't pan out at that point. So I took a year off and slept and took care of myself. And then I basically started to think about what was important to me and, Like I said, what my next step was. And so I tried a bunch of different things. I was really into coaching at that time. I would listen to podcasts constantly while I was baking about entrepreneurship and being a coach and all that kind of stuff. I was really into personal development. I read tons of personal development books and it was something that was pretty much an obvious next step for me.

And so I kind of went the coaching route for a while and then I kind of went back to, okay, maybe I'm gonna teach people how to do what I did. And then, yeah, I've just kind of gone in a bunch of different directions. Since then,

[00:44:34] **David Crabill:** And where are you right now?

[00:44:37] **Jenni Reher:** Right now it's ironic. I'm just back kind of to my marketing roots. And I am a content creator for coaches, which is interesting, and I am helping coaches with their social media. And it's great because I understand the coaching world and I've been a coach. And I enjoy it so much. It's not half as stressful as rustic donut was.

And also the really cool thing that I love so much is that I'm a score mentor. Being able to give back like that and, you know, using my experience and helping multiple businesses startups with their entrepreneurial dreams is so, so gratifying. I just love it. I've worked with some baking businesses and I've also worked with businesses all over the board and it's so rewarding.

And it's also interesting because I can see what's working in their business and what's not working and I can see it from a bird's eye view. I've been helping some clients with burnout because it's just so obvious when I talk to them that they're burned out and I don't want anyone to ever get in the position that I was.

And I think it's something that a lot of people don't talk about is burnout. Especially in the baking world. Like I was afraid to admit it. I was afraid to say, that's why I sold my business because of burnout. But yeah, I get to help people with that as a score mentor. And it's, it's really awesome.

[00:46:06] **David Crabill:** Can you explain what score is and when and how a cottage food business might want to use it?

[00:46:15] **Jenni Reher:** Oh yeah. I didn't know about score when I was in my donut business. I had only heard of the Small Business Development Corporation (SBDC) and I worked with them a little bit, but at the time I didn't get a lot of support from them. So I basically had to figure out everything on my own, but score is a nonprofit And it is full of volunteers who have been entrepreneurs, who either are continuing in their businesses or they've sold their businesses, but they basically started a business from scratch and it has been successful and they share their experience with whoever wants help. And there are all kinds of resources on the score website.

It's um, I think it's dot org there are, you know, webinars that you can go to and there are, a bunch of classes that you can take online, or maybe now in person, you can have a mentoring conversation over zoom or. With someone like me and yeah, it's a really great resource. Ironically, I never heard about score before and I heard about it in a baking Facebook group and I was like, oh, what's that? And then I applied to be a score mentor and I got it. And I was so excited and it's, you know, it's free advice from somebody who's been there. So really having support while you're building a business, especially a baking business, I think is key.

I think you can use as much support as you can get, especially from someone who's done it before and who's made a bazillion mistakes and can help you avoid all of those is extremely valuable. I

[00:47:57] **David Crabill:** So someone can go to your score page and basically sign up for a coaching call with you for free?

[00:48:04] **Jenni Reher:** I think so. Yeah, I think you can or you can just request help and then once you request help through score you will be assigned

a score mentor who specializes in your area of your entrepreneurial journey. So I specialized in baking businesses and marketing and social media.

So I tend to get those kinds of clients, but I've all, like I said, I've had clients all over the board. I had a photographer, a wallpaper installer. I had a farmer. So I think it is just, dependent on your experience probably.

[00:48:39] **David Crabill:** Let's talk about social media a bit. I know that you're a social media expert, particularly with Instagram, correct?

[00:48:46] **Jenni Reher:** I don't know about expert, but I've been doing it since 2015. So I would say that I'm very comfortable in that realm.

[00:48:55] **David Crabill:** I feel like, for a lot of people, Instagram is just so confusing. Cause the algorithm keeps changing and it's like, how do you keep up with, you know, what works? So what do you typically guide people on when they're trying to build their social media accounts?

[00:49:11] **Jenni Reher:** I do it differently than most people. I don't believe in the hard sell. I don't believe in it, just constantly selling all the time. When I had my donut business, which I rarely sold, I shared my excitement. I shared how I started. I shared my story. I shared why I talked about what this business meant to me.

I talked about why my ingredients were different than anybody else's. I shared a lot of photos of my customers and re-shared, you know, their posts and I. That is the thing that endorses people to a brand or a person when they're selling something because they feel like they know them and they feel like they're a part of that story.

It's more than sell sell sell all the time. It's more like building that community and telling people, you know, just like a rags, not a rags to riches story, but it's like, they watch your progression from like day one, and then they follow you through that. And just so, so much more meaningful and you end up getting more customers that way you may not have like a bazillion followers.

I think in the four years that I was in business, I had 800 followers, but. The posts were liked by, like over a hundred people. And I got messages, I got DMS, it was just this community that I had created. And I highly recommend that. I think so many people are just focused on, you know, just selling their product or having value posts, which is really popular right now.

Reels are really popular right now, but you could still tell your story through those things. And I think having that kind of relationship with your customers is so much more important than just trying to sell to them all the time.

[00:51:07] **David Crabill:** as an introvert, was it difficult for you to share your story on social media?

[00:51:14] **Jenni Reher:** Yeah, it was, but it was also really gratifying because I felt like I needed to share it. I needed people to know why I started. And it was just like a poll that I felt that I needed to share. And I shared a post about like, How I went on vacation and I would dream about, you know, selling bananas on the beach, right?

Like quit my job and sell bananas on the beach, but now I'm selling donuts. And that was one of my most popular posts because people can relate to that. And the more that I started sharing, the more I saw that people were like, oh my gosh, me too. Oh my gosh. That is so cool that you did that no way. Right.

And you kinda have to get over that. When you have your own business, I think, but you don't have to dance and point and do things that aren't part of your personality when you're on social media. I think it's so important to stay true to who you are. Being authentic because people can see right through that.

they know that you're not comfortable dancing and pointing, and they know that that's not who you are as a person. It's amazing how they can figure stuff out like that, but they can. And I think it's so important to just be you, if you're an introvert, be an introvert, but do it in a way that makes sense to you, tell your story share your product, talk about, you know, the customers that you have, talk about why you started to show yourself at the market with customers.

You know, there's so many stories that you can tell that don't put you in the spotlight of somebody that you're not.

[00:52:46] **David Crabill:** You're also a very effective writer, marketing-wise. What are some of the tips that you would share with someone who wants to improve their writing for marketing?

[00:52:58] **Jenni Reher:** First of all, talk like you speak, that's really good. I say totally and like a lot and I use that in my writing. I don't shy away from who I am as a person. In my writing either. And then, so when people meet me, it's not a surprise. They're not like, oh my gosh, you're not the person that I thought you were.

Right. So you wanna be who you are on paper as well as in person. Not using big words, not expecting that you have to be someone else to be on social media. What cracks me up is that when I started, I said we and I made my company like this thing, like, oh, it's not just me.

Oh, no, it's we, our stuff, me, I was not a part of that. It was always we, and our, and I noticed that in a lot of startups and a lot of bakers too, they pretend that they're bigger than they really are. And you don't have to do that. People don't need a huge donut company or a huge cupcake company to buy from in a way it's better to just buy from you.

You're the one who's making it. And so you might as well, just be honest and come out and just be like, it's just me. I do it all. And I found out when I started to do that and I started to share like, you know, the post where I'm like, you know, this is not glamorous by the way, you know, people relate to that and they understand that it's just you and they want to support that.

[00:54:28] **David Crabill:** So are there any other mistakes that you see entrepreneurs making?

[00:54:33] **Jenni Reher:** one thing that really kind of just makes me sad and kind of bothers me at the same time. In some circles, some bakers feel like everybody's out to get them. And so somebody will make a post that, you know, customers only want free products. And they're saying that it doesn't taste good because they want it for free.

And if you have that kind of mindset about your customer, first of all, that's a horrible mindset to have because you're thinking that everybody's out to get you. And second of all it just shows a lot of mistrust that you have for your customers. And yes, you know, not everyone in the world is good, but I think you have to take them at their word.

Because I think they're trying to give you feedback and if you're not open to that feedback, you're not hearing that feedback then not only is it gonna affect your relationship with that customer, it's also going to affect. Your business and your reputation. So when the woman said that I used too much baking soda in my donuts, I could have been like, oh, whatever, you don't know, you have no idea, but instead, I took it as feedback and I took it as, you know what, maybe she's right.

I don't know what I'm doing. I'm not a vegan expert. Right. And I changed my recipe for that. Now I'm not saying you have to change everything for your

customers, but you know, having these contracts and having all of this, you know, these hard rules, it won't set you apart is being easy to work with. Let's just put it that way.

[00:56:09] **David Crabill:** Are there any books or resources that you'd recommend to someone who's starting out?

[00:56:16] **Jenni Reher:** oh, for sure. I did not pay myself forever in my business and I find through talking to a lot of entrepreneurs that they don't pay themselves either. profit first really changed my life. As far as being able to pay myself. It was a lot of mathy concepts and I am not a really good math person. So it was a little over my head, but the basic concept is amazing. And it's that you have to pay yourself otherwise you're working for free. And I tell that to the clients that I have through score is would you ever work for anyone for free, unless it was like an internship in your twenties?

No. So if you're not paying yourself, you're working for free and eventually, you're going to resent that you're gonna be so mad that you're paying everyone else except for yourself. So. it's not rocket science, but I think a lot of people and myself included you just think about like, oh, I'm not gonna pay myself.

That's for everyone else. And eventually when I make it, I'm gonna pay myself. And I think that's a major mistake. Another one that I read recently is "Pivot to Purpose" by Kristen Boss, she's a coach. But it is such a good book. It's full of information about burnout and how to avoid burnout, especially being online and being, you know, "in the public eye", right? And just having a purpose behind what you do instead of just trying to get likes and trying to be popular. It's more you have a purpose behind what you're selling and a reason and a why, and that why is so strong that you can't help but share your message. And I have never read a book all the way through ever. And this is the only book that I've ever read. And I mean, I read a ton, but I just, I get bored really easily. But I read this one, like three or four times and it's really, really good book. I highly recommend it, especially on the online space and I know as a new baker, you're probably like, yeah, whatever, I'm lucky if I get one customer, but I promise you once you start getting those orders and you treat your customers with so much respect it will happen and you obviously have to have a really good product.

And it also comes with having a process and paying yourself and charging enough and all of that. But you can avoid burnout, if you have those things in place, but if you don't, then it's eventually gonna creep up on you, especially at the very beginning.

If you don't have those things, if you don't keep them in mind,

[00:58:48] **David Crabill:** Jenni, thanks for coming on the show. Now, if people would like to learn more about you, how can they find you or where can they reach out?

[00:58:57] **Jenni Reher:** Yeah, I am on Instagram. It's Jenni Reher, J-E-N-N-I R-E-H-E-R. And @jennireher at Instagram.

[00:59:07] **David Crabill:** Perfect. Well, thank you so much for coming on the show and sharing with us today.

[00:59:12] **Jenni Reher:** yeah. Thank you so much for having me. It's been such an honor. Yeah,

[00:59:17] **David Crabill:** That wraps up another episode of the Forrager podcast. For more information about this episode, go to forrager.com/podcast/66.

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