

Stop Letting Fear Run Your Business with Brette Hawks

David Crabill: Welcome to the Forrager Podcast where I talk with cottage food entrepreneurs about their strategies for running a food business from. I'm David Crabill, and today I'm talking with Brette Hawks. But a real quick reminder, we are just a month and a half away from the Home-Based Food Entrepreneur Conference. This is the only national conference for our industry, so you're not gonna want to miss it. It's a virtual four day conference that goes from April 10th through April 13th, so four full days of keynotes.

Breakout sessions and perhaps most importantly, the community that you'll get to interact with along the. Now most multi-day virtual conferences like this cost well over a hundred dollars, but this conference will only cost you \$35. And yes, that price includes everything. And even if you can't attend during the day, you'll still get access to all the recordings you can watch on your own time.

So if you haven't registered yet, you can sign up right now by going to [cottage food conference.com](http://cottagefoodconference.com).

Alright, so I have Brette Hawks on the show today. She lives near Provo, Utah and sells custom wedding cakes with her cottage food bakery, Hobble Creek Cake Company. But that is just the beginning. She started her business only three years ago and she has done a lot since then.

Brette is now one of Utah's top cake artists. She has over 13,000 followers on her Instagram page, and she has been featured by Wilton, Martha Stewart, And the popular American Cake Decorating Magazine and Cake Masters Magazine, but you don't have to be a cake artist. To learn from Brette for the past two years, she's also run a coaching business for cottage food entrepreneurs called the Out of Home Baker, and it's pretty popular. She's got over 55,000 Instagram followers for that business.

She also runs her own podcast called Business Is Sweet. recently hosted the Bake It Happen Summit, And she has been a speaker at the Bake Fest. Now, that three year journey is pretty incredible, but on top of all of that, Brette is a stay-at-home mom of two very young kids, and by very young, I mean she had her second baby while building these businesses.

In this episode, Brette shares how she's grown, not one but two businesses, by niching down pricing correctly and working smarter, not harder. And with that, let's jump right into this episode. Welcome to the show, Brette. Nice to have you here.

[00:02:30] **Brette Hawks:** It's so good to be here. Thank you, David.

[00:02:33] **David Crabill:** So Brette, can you walk me back to when, I guess what, you were 16 years old, when did this all get started?

[00:02:40] **Brette Hawks:** Yeah, I mean, I've loved baking as long as I can remember. As I trace back my story, I realize it's always been a part of me. I used to rope off the kitchen and set up little bakeries, and back then it was just the simplest form of chocolate chip cookies.

I was known in high school as the friend who would make you cupcakes when you had a birthday. And I would help my neighbor who was a wedding cake caterer, and so when I was in college, I was attending university and I was trying to figure out what I wanted to do and I was a studio art major and I started taking an intro to food science class and I learned so much about.

Food chemistry, food microbiology, food safety. I got to visit a lot of different food plants. I internship in California where they have the strawberry fields. I got to do quality assurance and quality control of the strawberries out there. And it was amazing. And I really fell in love with the food world.

And in the food science degree, they had two tracks. You could either do the technical track and do more of that chemistry, microbiology, and hard science, or you could take the business track, which was finance, entrepreneurship, marketing and strategy accounting. And I was like, that sounds a lot better than the chemistry.

So I ended up on this business track and that was kind of like my emphasis. And then I fell in. With business. So I had this passion for food and I was starting to find out that I really enjoyed learning how to market, learning how to be an entrepreneur. There was this spark and this excitement, and it's like the world kind of opened up these possibilities.

And I'm in school. I'm my senior year finishing my program. I'm pregnant and I remember I'm sitting in this food analysis class and everyone's taking notes and paying attention.

And I'm in the back of the class building my very first website for my cake business because finally I, the dots had connected and I realized I love business. I love making cakes for people. I love baking. This is what I wanna do. So I built that first website and started taking on some of my first orders.

And at that point it was like really just kind of this passion project. And I really had no vision. At all for where I wanted it to go. The only thing I could think was like, wouldn't it be cool if I could do one wedding cake?

If I could have just one wedding client? And then maybe another like that was as far down the road as I was possibly thinking. And I also kind of had this roadblock coming up this due date with my baby who was gonna be born. And at the time, I felt like as a mom, if I didn't have to work to keep us afloat financially, then.

Shouldn't then I should kind of just fold up my dreams, stick them on a shelf And so I took on order as I taught some classes and then I had my baby and everything kind of just came to a halt. And especially with your first baby, it's like I had no idea what to expect.

I'm like, I don't know how fast I'm gonna bounce back from this. So I took a lot of time off to kind of navigate that, and pretty soon I realized like, wait a sec. No, I don't think this is it. I don't think I have to stop doing everything.

We're actually doing really good and I'm ready to step back into this world I started to kind of rewire my brain and to think differently about motherhood and realize I don't think my full potential outside the home was realized at age 22, 23 when I had my first baby. I think there was more for me to do.

By chasing my dreams and by, providing for our family and using my creativity to build something. I think it was important for me as a mom, it gave me an outlet, and it also teaches this lesson my kiddos, that, you know, what you want is possible and you can take control of it, and you can manage it

and so I would kind of start up again, and then I would pull back because it got to be too much.

And then I'd start again. And then I'd quit because I just was like ebbing and flowing with our life seasons and trying to navigate the mom guilt. And finally, finally, I came to a point where we moved to a new place. I was able to get a second fridge. My husband's schedule was a little bit easier to work with.

and also our finances were starting to squeeze a little bit because he moved from being an exhibit designer to being a teacher.

And even though there was like this very set path now where he knew his income was gonna grow, I'm the one who does all our books and all our finances. And I was looking at it knowing like, okay, someday we're gonna have more kids and we wanna buy a house and it's not gonna happen just on his salary.

One day talking to my mother-in-law about this, I was like, I think I need to go get a job in the mornings.

Like, do you think you could watch the kids if I did that? And she kind of stopped me in my tracks and thank goodness she did. And just kind of said like, you are supposed to be home with your kids and you've been given this gift and these talents, and I really believe you're supposed to use those. And I don't think the place for you is at a job like you are talented.

You should use this in a creative way to be home with your kids and also provide for your family in the way that you need to. And after that, it's like, that was the mental, I guess, validation that I needed for this path that I was, about to start. And so from then on, it was like I was all in. I actually officially registered my home-based baking business I got it registered with the state. I got my cottage food license, got inspected, passed all of that, bought a website and from then on. It was just up and up and up from there. And even, this was 2019, I started in 2019, so obviously five or six months away was the Covid pandemic.

And even with that business never slowed down. It was crazy. Like it just kept on growing and growing and I got better and I got smarter until there was months where I would match my husband's paycheck. And

it actually got to a point where, I enjoyed it so much, that I, I literally couldn't help but teach it to other people.

So I started a second business called the out-of-home baker, where I coach other home bakers, especially stay-at-home moms.

And my mission is to help show the real potential and possibility that there is for home-based bakers to make money, to have freedom of your schedule, of your creativity, and to create this life that you want. And I've been doing that coaching now for two years, and that has just been incredible

So I still do the baking here and there. In fact, I just moved this summer. We bought our first house thanks to my baking business we were able to prove like that we can afford, and we were able to qualify for more.

All thanks to my baking business. We bought our first house, and so now I'm starting from scratch and I'm starting my cake business over and it's gonna be this fun kind of experiment to put, to test everything I've been teaching for the past two years. And prove that it's, not luck that I can do it again, because there's, there's a recipe, there's strategy, and there's things you can do to actually make it happen.

[00:09:52] **David Crabill:** Yeah. So you haven't been doing this that long. I think you said you started in 2019 when you really started the business and um, many kids do you have and how old were they at that time?

[00:10:03] **Brette Hawks:** So I have two kids now. At the time in 2019 when I started it was just my one little boy and he was one and a half at that point. And then I had my second one year ago, so he just turned one. it's been really cool to. Have those experiences of motherhood. Like I said, we've gone through different seasons where I was pregnant for nine months trying to run this business, and I was able to have total control of my schedule.

Instead of like needing someone to give me maternity leave, I was able to take that for myself and I was able to plan my business in such a way that I still made, I had some of my most successful months of income and revenue when I was working the least, because I got smarter instead of just working harder, harder, harder all the time, I was able to work smarter.

[00:10:54] **David Crabill:** how did you make that work, like time-wise? Did you have parent help or I mean, you're a stay-at-home mom. I know, but was there like daycare or something to help you run this business?

[00:11:05] **Brette Hawks:** Yeah, I did, I had help. My mother-in-law watches them from time to time when I have my big projects. And a lot of it is really just planning ahead and, I, I work in the nighttime and I work during nap time and I'll get up in the morning and I kind of just work around our schedule because my ultimate goal, my ultimate personal mission is to be with my kids.

And the baking business is like the means to that end. And so I try really hard. And I've learned not to let that means take over the end, not to let my business become like everything and take over our family. And again, that comes from

trial and error that comes from late nights where I am so tired and then I can't parent the way I want to the next day.

And it just kind of puts our family in a down spiral. And those moments for me used to be quitting moments. I used to tell my husband, I am done. This was awful. Don't let me take on any more orders. And now I've switched my mindset when we have a time like that. Where, things get too busy, I take on too much or life, it just gets a little imbalanced.

We take that as a moment, as like a sign to step back and analyze, okay, what's not working and how can we change it? How can we plan better next time? So this doesn't happen. Oh, well you took on four cakes and we also had a family reunion, so next time. Don't take on so much and like put family first, and if you need that income, then try and mark it so you can fill those slots on a different week

Basically learning to not run my business out of fear, because I think we say yes to everything and we put our families in tight spots when we make fear-based decisions. Like, oh, if I say no to this person, what if they're the last order I get? Or what if I don't get another one? Or I, I have bills to pay and I need this money.

And so I'm gonna say yes and I know it's gonna kill us. I know it's gonna mean putting my kids in front of the TV for hours and hours and hours while I try and finish this because we need the money, because I'm making these decisions out of fear. And so really shifting this mindset into, okay, I, I can say no and there's still gonna be customers and Again, be smart and I can plan and prep and find solutions so that it can run smoothly.

[00:13:23] **David Crabill:** So if I'm hearing it correctly, I mean there's been Of upsides to starting your business. You know, you've gotten this income sometimes matching your husband's, you've been able to get your first house and qualify for it with the income that you're getting from the baking business.

But it also kind of sounds like it's been messy, so like, where are you like right now in your business? Like, does it feel like you've attained the balance that you were, have been trying to get to?

[00:13:53] **Brette Hawks:** Yeah, so I'm in a strange spot right now because like I said, we moved and so I haven't started taking new orders again quite yet. I've just been finishing up what was in our books. I just did this summer, I did my,

most expensive cake order, yet it was a four tier cake that I delivered a few hours away and it was \$1,600.

so it was fun. I've really kind of broken into this higher end market and that was the path that I chose to go down because I believe you can decide, whatever you like to do. It doesn't have to be the high end stuff, but you.

Can be creative to make the money you want, selling whatever it is you sell as a food entrepreneur. And for me, that has been the high end wedding market. That's the cakes that I just love to do. so this past year, I focused a lot on booking, like one to two, maybe three weddings a month, and they were very like intricate.

I had this kind of painted buttercream style where I do colorful floral designs and they're really fun, kind of whimsical and kind of unique, and so I would take fewer of those at a higher price and I would spend more time and more energy on each of those orders, and that's how I've been able to hit my income goals.

Um, As far as being messy,, it does get messy. And honestly, that's what makes it fun and that's what lets you learn is by treating this whole business thing like a science experiment. And too often I think we approach it like, it's an audition and if, we don't get the part on the first try, then heck, we are done. I don't wanna put myself out there again and instead thinking about it like a science experiment.

Like you're gonna come with this hypothesis. Like, I think I'm gonna sell cakes and I think people will buy them, and this is what I'm gonna do and I'm gonna go out and test it and see what works and see what doesn't. And I'm learning and it's messy and I'm making mistakes. But that's what really refines you as a business owner and as a creative.

And that's what really gets you in the right direction. You're never gonna learn the things that you need to know. To get where you wanna be unless you take those messy steps forward.

like, looking back at my first cakes and some of those crazy weeks, it's like in those moments I like probably felt disappointed or I probably felt like, oh, this wasn't as good as I wanted it to be.

Or this week was just so crazy. Like I'm not doing as good as I want to. But looking at it now, I see such value in those experiences. And the fact that I took

time to pause. I can't emphasize the importance of that enough that instead of hustle, hustle, hustle, hustle and running too fast to take time and figure out what you're doing, take time to pause, like schedule business meetings with yourself to like really analyze what you're doing and, and figure out what you can change.

And that, made all the difference in my business is taking time off to actually figure out what's working, what's not working, and what direction do I wanna go in. And my first year in business, I went back and looked at my books, that 2019 kind of into 2020. I averaged paying myself about 300 to \$400 a month, and by the end of the year I was like, well, that doesn't cut it for me.

Because that was a lot of work to only make that little bit. Sure. It was cool. I was at home and I made a little bit of money, but the energy trade off was not right because I put so much energy into it and the money coming in didn't match that value. So I took a month off and said no to orders so I could actually look at my books and make a business plan and figure out, okay, how do I wanna make this work?

Also, we're gonna have a baby in a year, so how do I factor that in? And that next year I did like half the work that I'd done my first year. And part of that is because I just got better at what I was doing. And part of that is because I got smarter about what I was doing that second year in business. I averaged paying myself between \$1,500 to \$2,000.

And that's net that's like my paycheck. It stayed in my pocket. So \$1,500 to \$1,500 to \$2,000 a month a month that second year in business. And now, now with coaching and with, the cakes that I've been doing, it's like, I make more than my husband at this point. And it's fun because it's just gonna go up, up from there. It's like the sky's the limit.

[00:18:17] **David Crabill:** So you say that you worked less and you worked smarter. Can you give some examples of what you mean by working smarter?

[00:18:26] **Brette Hawks:** Yeah, absolutely. So part of that was just being efficient in my production and being smart about my production. Because it's really easy when you work for yourself to put things off. And if you have an order coming up, like let's say people have ordered cakes and cupcakes, or you're doing some kind of like treat box on the weekend and you've got so many to make and it's so easy on Monday to be like, oh, I can just do it tomorrow.

Like I'll just start my baking tomorrow. But if you get behind a day, then you get behind the next day and then you end up like really kicking yourself on the weekend that you left all this work for the end.. And so I've learned to do my future self a favor and get the baking done ahead of time and get the dishes done so all of my dishes are clean to work.

like on Monday I'm baking my cake layers and I put them in the freezer On Tuesday, I make my buttercream ahead of time.

On Wednesday, I'm like assembling any like decorations or putting boxes together or prepping some my cake boards and I break up the process so that it doesn't take such a toll on our family, time, and on our family life. And so

You have to wear a lot of hats as a business owner, and it just, it takes a little bit of dedication and motivation. You have to be a self-starter. You have to really just discipline yourself. yourself to keep yourself on task and to get those things done ahead of time.

So setting a production schedule was important. And also communicating it to my husband and our family so that they knew this is mom's work time. And we were all on the same page about that.

The other thing that allowed me to work smarter was really analyzing what I was selling. I see this with a lot of bakers and I saw it with myself trying to be a jack of all trades, a jack of all treats, I guess we'll call it I was trying to offer this really full menu. I did cupcakes. I did single layer cakes, kitchen cakes. I did big cakes. I would do cookies. Sometimes I would throw in all these different random things because A, like we have this creative need. We wanna play around with those things. And I think it also comes from this place of not always understanding the value we provide as bakers, as food entrepreneurs.

And we think, okay, if I'm gonna get more customers, I have to make a bigger menu like that way more people will come in the door. And what I see happen is it spreads you really thin and not all your products are equally profitable.

There's some that take a lot more time, but They don't pay off in the same way as the other ones you make. And just learning that I really wanted to nail down my efficiency, my brand, and my quality around a very niche set of products, which for me was just wedding cakes and realizing that I actually hated doing cupcakes and they took me a lot longer.

I didn't enjoy the process and the payoff wasn't, quite what I wanted it to be, and that was for me. For someone else, they might love cupcakes and they might find a way to make that work, but I took a good look at everything I was doing and I cut out everything that didn't meet the standard that I actually had set for.

And I ended up cutting out a lot of things. I don't do holiday sales anymore. I don't sell cookie kits. I don't do cupcakes. If you want kitchen cakes, it's a round, single layer naked cake, and I just streamlined everything and that was a smart thing to do because instead of just adding a bunch of stuff and trying to be everything to everyone, because that fear, that fear that if I'm not everything to everyone, then customers will stop coming instead.

Just really honing in and fine tuning the one thing that I really loved to make and that I was actually known. And by putting my focus on that, it really allowed my business to flourish even more. So that's kind of what I mean between like working smarter, working harder. You gotta do both.

Like you can't cut out hard work, but when you work smart, the hard work gets funner and it doesn't feel quite as draining and quite as heavy.

[00:22:37] **David Crabill:** Yeah, I mean, I definitely have noticed that you've niched way, way down in your business, and that's huge regarding the production schedule. I mean, it sounds like a really good idea, right? Like, oh, you know, just don't procrastinate and just get on top of your work, just do the dishes ahead of time.

Like, that's, that's a nice idea. But like when you're a stay-at-home parent of young kids, right? Like life gets in the way, right all the time and. Be moms out there, they're going, I don't have any time for myself. Like how did you find the time to work smarter and prioritize the business?

[00:23:15] **Brette Hawks:** Well to anyone thinking that out there, how much time did you spend on Instagram today would be my response because I bet you, you spent enough time that you could have done what you needed to do. And it's like some tough love, but you have to be a good boss to yourself and you have to like analyze your day.

Like there's time, you're spending time in different places and a lot of it sometimes is wasted. And I totally get that as a mom, that sometimes you need a breather. I mean, one thing that helped me enjoy some of those processes was finding podcasts that I loved and then I looked forward to doing those nitty gritty work things because I had my podcast in one ear.

I've got my baby on my leg. I guess I'm doing these dishes, but I'm like, I'm gonna get these done because I have already learned I'm gonna suffer for it later. And I'm doing my future self a favor. I'm like loving myself enough and taking care of myself enough that I will take those 10 minutes, I would've scrolled Instagram and I put them into working on my business the way that I need to.

And.. There's times where, you know, you take a break and that's totally fine. When I had my baby, so I worked, I was pregnant and I worked up until about my third trimester and then I took everything off and I didn't take any orders for like nine months after that,

and that break was awesome and it was the time I needed to, gosh, really work on my own mental, physical health to be there for my kids to get into this new groove. And so lock out some time each month, like, book yourself for yourself. You know, give yourself a weekend where you don't take anything so that you can have a breather.

a lot of the reason our businesses. Seem to like fail or not do as well as we want them to is because we get in our own way and we don't take care of ourselves. We run ourselves into the ground.

I think you have to set boundaries. I know you have to set boundaries. You have to write them down. Like what are your operating rules of business? what are your, policies for yourself? Set yourself some breaks and be a good boss to yourself. And you can find the time. There is this infinite amount of time during your day in reality, and you get to choose how to spend it.

And I feel like when we act like, oh, but I don't, and I can't, and it's like, we play the victim. We play this victim who's just drug around by the day, and you have to dig deep and find it a way in yourself to just, prioritize and be kind to yourself buckle down and do the work when you have to do it.

[00:25:54] **David Crabill:** I think part of the prioritization comes from like understanding where your priorities actually are, right? Like with a, you know, what, two year old and a newborn, like, it'd be very easy to say, you know what, this is not the right season of my life to be focusing on a business, but you've got the baby on your hip and you're doing.

Like what is it that drives you in this business? Like why do you need to do it now and like why is it so important for you? Is it just the income or is it something more?

[00:26:21] **Brette Hawks:** Well, and like I said, I, I do take breaks and, when I had my baby, we weren't doing all the business stuff. And I don't think it's about doing everything right now because it's not this sprint, the finish. It's not like if you don't get it done today, it won't be there tomorrow. You have a whole life ahead of you and all these beautiful seasons of life, and so don't miss what's going on right now because you're so worried about a future date.

I'm learning that every single day that, right now is what it's all about. Like the reason we go into business It is to enjoy this creativity at the heart of it. You know, the reason why we sell what we sell and why we make what we make is because we are looking for this feeling in our lives of validation, of connection, of like, love, and just these awesome experiences.

And then we run and run and run and run in our businesses thinking like, okay, we're gonna get that, we're gonna get those good feelings, those good experiences we want, and we almost lose them. It's like they're accessible to us right now in just the everyday moments. And sometimes we lose actually what we're looking for in running our businesses so hard, so fast.

So it's not about doing everything right now, but for me, with my business, I have just come to terms that this is part of who I am. I love working on projects. I love getting to bake. I love getting to teach other people it lights me up and it actually makes me a better mom when I get a little bit of time to work on my stuff and to serve and to do what I do.

In this way, I'm able to show up more as myself. It puts energy into me, like it energizes me and I come away and I'm like so excited to go out and play with my kids now because I got to do, you know, a little bit of, of my thing and I just, I don't believe That as stay-at-home moms. And I know not everyone listening is a stay-at-home mom, but you are in some capacity, like family or friend to somebody.

Like, those relationships are so key. And, I believe that by filling your own cup, you're able to then fill everybody else's even better. And just for too long, I struggled with the battle of, if I'm working, then I'm a bad mom. And if I am like, have something I wanna do that's not like, be with my kids right now, then how that's terrible.

Like, how could I have a thought like that? But honestly, like I am still a human person with talents and gifts that I'm meant to use. And when I use them, it makes me happy and I'm able to then be a happier person at home. And this

beautiful, intricate, awesome thing that happens of learning to balance all these different parts of myself

And then yeah, I do, I get to make an income and that is important. Because what's so cool is when you make money, it's this transaction of energy that when, when I am paid well for what I do, then again, I don't have to leave the home. I get to be with my kids and I get to drive them to preschool.

I get to go on the play dates, and I don't have to be tied to a job because I'm so worried about meeting our needs. it's so beautiful. It's so amazing and I, I just see it as the biggest blessing that I get to do all of this.

[00:29:36] **David Crabill:** So let's talk a little bit about the trajectory of your business. I mean, I, I saw, I think it was just a few orders in that you did your first wedding cake and I wouldn't say typical for a baker to be taking on a wedding cake with just a few orders under their belt. Like, did you just like naturally have a skill for this or something like

[00:29:56] **Brette Hawks:** Oh heck no. Absolutely not., of course not. And I, it's like everyone has their own story of how they get started. And my first wedding cake was for my cousin. Uh, it's usually for a family member when you do your first wedding cake because it's like someone has to trust you with that opportunity.

So my first wedding cake was for her, and she was like, I'd really like to make my own wedding cake, but I don't know how. And I know you like to bake. Do you think we could work together on it? And so we spent, you know, a couple weeks designing what she wanted and trying to figure out flavors. We practiced a whole bunch of stuff. I watched so many YouTube tutorials I was stressing over it. I was quite anxious because I didn't know, I didn't know how I was gonna pull it off.

And that's part of that messiness, like just, throwing yourself in so you can learn what you need to learn. And her being the bride, my cousin, obviously the few days before the wedding she was pretty busy. And so really pulling off this cake came down to me and I remember it was this two-tier cake.

It was very small. It wasn't a tall two-tier cake. and I remember driving that first wedding cake was like the ultimate scary moment in my life, even though it was perfectly fine looking back on it, that tiny little cake was not going anywhere,, and it was so, it was so sturdy and there was no reason to sweat.

But that drive was like the longest drive of my life trying to deliver that wedding cake. And I, I remember I was like so proud of it. I couldn't believe I pulled it off. It was my first wedding cake. I thought it was the most beautiful thing in the world. And. You know, within a few months I took a step back and realized like, oh, I have a lot to improve on.

It's like now the rose colored glasses of this creation I had made had kind of doled and I was able to see it a little bit more for what it was and be like okay. No, that was a good first try. But I've definitely got a long ways to go as a decorator,, so that was my first wedding cake.

And my second one was for a one of my best friends, and I got to do her wedding cake and then for another friend, and then my best friend's cousin, like it just kind of. Snowballed from there. And I slowly accumulated those experiences and that knowledge that I needed, like little by little by little this was all before I ever officially launched my business in 2019. This was like the two years leading up to that. which helped me realize I even wanted to start a business around, it was just kind of like dipping my toes in here and there taking on like one little order when someone asked me.

I wasn't actively pursuing getting orders. It just kind of like was happening. But yeah, that's kind of how, how my wedding experience got started.

[00:32:41] **David Crabill:** So you were like developing these skills, you're focusing in on wedding cakes and you're like, this is the medium I wanna choose. And then you started your business and then the pandemic hit and people stopped having weddings. And so like, did you do different things during that period of time or did your like wedding cake business actually grow throughout the pandemic?

[00:33:02] **Brette Hawks:** well, it was funny because I hadn't quite specialized just into wedding cakes yet. I still did a lot of birthday cakes and baby smash cakes, and those were still happening. People were still actually wanting to celebrate more, like, please give me a reason. To feel good today or to have a fun time with just my family at home.

And so I still did birthday cakes and smash cakes, and I still had some weddings. There was some smaller weddings that happened. There was people in masks having weddings, and a lot of those cakes still happened. And I just, I reached out to my brides and just let them know, like, I am a hundred percent willing to work with you.

This is crazy times. Like, if you come back to me in a year and you're ready to have your wedding, like I'll just hold onto your deposit until then. And you know, we really just kind of like felt through it by ear what we were doing. And I, I did, I still did a lot of cakes and a lot of my friends started their cake businesses during the pandemic and have just grown since then, it's like crazy because for some reason in the baking industry, I feel like a lot of us flourished.

A lot of us still had business and somehow it was just, yeah, this kind of unique. Opportunity where people were able to start a business and grow it. And I, I saw that too. I saw my own growth even during the pandemic.

Um, That was when I started kind of teaching and coaching for the first time. I had my first Zoom class.

The month or two after the pandemic shut everything down. I was like, okay. A couple of my orders have been canceled, like I still have stuff going on, but how can I do something that kind of fits into this new covid world that we're living in? And so I set up this Zoom class where I taught people about cottage food law in Utah

and that kind of became a springboard for my coaching business during the pandemic.

[00:34:52] **David Crabill:** If I heard that right, you started your cake business like officially started your cake business in the latter part of 2019, and then you said it was just a couple months after the pandemic hit that you started teaching. I mean, it's pretty crazy, right? For you to be like teaching. Like with, well, less than a year of experience, like business experience under your belt like that, isn't that pretty atypical?

And did you feel like, who am I to teach this? Like, I haven't had been in business that long.

[00:35:24] **Brette Hawks:** I totally understand the room for that imposter syndrome, and I don't know if it's just like my unique personality, but I didn't feel that. Because I buy into this idea that if I'm one step ahead of anyone, like if I'm just one step ahead, I can turn around and help you get to the next step. I don't have to be 10 steps ahead.

And that's kind of the attitude I approached it with. I knew that cottage food law was this complex subject that a lot of people struggled and feared. It was this scary thing, like the legals of business. And I had just gone through it.

And on the other side of it I was like, oh, that wasn't as bad as I had thought it was gonna be. And so I really kind of just felt this personal mission. Like, I wanna show people, I wanna show them that it's not so bad and I just went through it. So who better to teach them than somebody who just like figured out this step in their business?

That's really what fueled me. And being able to turn around and teach it. And I taught cake decorating classes before then, but like years before, this is even crazier where I hadn't started my business officially yet. I was still in those like two years where I'm in college and getting ready to have a baby and haven't totally put together everything I wanna do yet, haven't officially started.

But I was looking for a cake decorating class. And this is like 2018. And I couldn't find one. And so I went to like Joann's fabric store and they had little classes and I was like, cool, I'll take this one.

And I went, I was the only student in this class and the lady teaching it did not know anything more than I already did. in fact, I felt like I knew a little bit more than she did. I'd done a little bit more, and that's when it dawned on me. I was like, if somebody who knows maybe less than me has less experience is teaching this class. maybe I should teach.

And so in 2018, I taught my first cake decorating class I mean, probably most people would've looked at me and said, you have no business teaching a cake class because you don't even have a business like you're barely starting.

But I knew more than the beginners. I knew more than they did. And so I was able to turn around and teach them the basic skills that I had accumulated. I had 10 people in that first class, and it was amazing. And some of them I knew, some were people that were my friends and some were people I did not know.

They just found my class and they came and it was awesome. so that's just kind of the attitude I have is that if you are even just one step ahead, you can turn around and teach that to somebody.

[00:37:57] **David Crabill:** So you started your business and didn't have tons of skills at the time, but it grew and grew and grew and sounds like you started teaching way early and that just kind of grew and you had a knack for teaching and you've taught enough people now to know that like a lot of people don't have that experience, right?

They struggle and their business doesn't grow organically or automatically. Like what do you think it is about you or your business that caused it to grow and what do you advise to people who are struggling to get their business off the ground?

[00:38:32] **Brette Hawks:** I don't think it's me. I don't think I'm just like the anomaly in this equation, I think I have two things. That really fueled my growth. And the first one is mindset. That is so critical. I always believed that I was gonna like find a way that even on those sucky days when I quit for a sec, I was like, no, I'm coming back to this and I'm gonna figure out what went wrong.

I'm gonna change it. I'm gonna take control of it. I'm gonna, you know, learn how to do it a different way. And I've always had this mindset that I can win the day. That if I work hard at it, and if I am smart and if I test things and research and learn and apply and actually like put in that energy, I believe it's gonna pay off.

And I think too many times we buy into this story of like, as home bakers, it's gonna be hard and you're not gonna make money and people don't wanna pay. And we kind of have that. Audio running in our heads all the time, telling us like, it's not gonna work, it's gonna be hard, da da da da da. And we have to learn to put in a new cd, put it on a new track, like change the channel.

And start to actually believe in it. Because if you don't even believe that it's possible, then that's as far as you're ever gonna get. And if you aren't getting where you wanna be, you have to learn how to be your best cheerleader. You have to learn how to give yourself that energy.

What actually helps us achieve our dreams is the right energy and motivation for what we're doing. That purpose, that passion, that like I'm awake at three in the morning writing down ideas because I can't sleep cause I'm so excited about this.

That kind of energy. That's what people need to actually accomplish their dreams and their goals. And so all of the food entrepreneurs out there and the home bakers, if you can capture that, the world is your oyster, there is so much you can accomplish. And, you'll put in the work and, you'll put in the creativity and you'll be inventive to figure it out because you have that, energy and that purpose and that passion driving you.

I really believe that that's like step number one. And second thing I think you really wanna do is sit down and make a plan.

Don't just fly by the seat of your pants. I always tell people, don't throw buttercream at the wall and hope it sticks.. that's part of it, but like, Don't just say yes to everything and make decisions out of fear and just run and run and run. Take that time to just make a plan. Define what your goals are.

If you don't know where you're trying to go, then you're gonna end up anywhere. And I think if you can define just a little bit, you don't have to know the whole path and you don't have to know all the how of how you're gonna get there, but just like, okay, this is what I'd like to achieve.

This is what I sell, this is what my rules are, this is who my target customer is. And just kind of create that simple business plan to help give you a guide of where you wanna go. And I think those two things are incredibly powerful

[00:41:35] **David Crabill:** so did you create a business plan before you started officially started your business in 2019?

[00:41:41] **Brette Hawks:** When I officially started in 2019 is when I made my first business plan, and it was really simple. It wasn't anything complex I had this simple plan of like, okay, here's my mission statement.

Like, here's what I'm actually trying to achieve. Here's my goals, here's some rules for myself, here's some boundaries. Here's like my product, my customer. And I just, you know, laid it out. Really. It was a Word document. It wasn't formatted pretty, it was just on paper. But that changed everything and that helped me get a sense of what I was trying to do and I updated it and it changed and I pivoted and in my original business plan I had put on my like, Unique value line. Like what, what's the unique thing that I'm gonna offer that's gonna make me different and gonna set me apart from my competitors?

And I had written, I'm gonna be the most affordable wedding cake person. And I just laugh at that because it's not even possible. in a space where you're creating custom made to order products, you cannot be a cost leader. It will, if you try to, it puts yourself at war with your business and it'll tank you real fast.

And I had to learn that the hard way. So it was just, it was funny to go back and see like that's, that's as far as I could see down the road at that time. Like I didn't understand that there was more value in what I was doing than just being a low

price. That actually being a low price was detrimental to me and to my customers that they didn't perceive the value when it was priced low.

And so my business plan changed. Um, I made one in 2019 and I have come back to it and revised it and made a new one and added to it. I always have a working plan that's running in the background.

[00:43:24] **David Crabill:** So let's talk about prices a little bit. You mentioned that you just did your most expensive \$1,600 cake. Where'd you start and how has your perspective on pricing changed? Like how did you price initially and how do you price now?

[00:43:42] **Brette Hawks:** I love to talk about pricing. It's my favorite subject,, because it is so key to success, and it's key to allowing yourself to have fun and to grow your business. When you can understand your pricing, and like I said, when I started, I was trying to be the most affordable because that's all I could see as that was the only value that I could perceive putting out into the world.

My first two-tier cake was like \$80, which everybody's in a different market. Everybody has different costs of living. And so \$80 might sound high or low depending on who you are and at what point you are in your business. But I will tell you that is incredibly low. I didn't make any money off that cake.

After the supplies, after the time I put in an ingredient costs and the energy there, it's like it wasn't an equal trade. But when I was starting out, There's this level of comfortability where to charge anymore when I'm starting would scare me out of my pants, and it would be too much stress to hold at that point because I don't even know if I can pull it off, you know, when I'm starting and doing that first two-tier wedding cake.

And so when you're beginning, it's okay to kind of test the waters and ease yourself into it. And that's what I did. I just raised things incrementally as I went along. you don't have to jump too high, too fast. You can kind of like ease yourself, but also you wanna push yourself because you will never, see the value of your product the way a customer does because you can make it, and it's so commonplace to you in a way, and you know, the back end of it.

And so it feels like it's less valuable because you can do it to someone else who can't make that wedding cake or that birthday cake, or who maybe doesn't have the time. To do it. It is of huge value to them that you are showing up in the world and putting that out there so that they can buy it from you.

It's incredibly valuable because when they buy it, it's actually about them. It's not about you begging for money. It's not about you saying like, please like support my business and feeling salesy and sleazy. When people buy from you, it's actually them filling a need that they have in their lives. When people have a party or a wedding.

Or some kind of event and they want baked goods to celebrate. For most people, it's not just this utilitarian, like we need something to eat. Like we need that caloric value to fuel our bodies. It's not that base physical need of consumption. Buying those baked goods is actually about a moment that they're trying to create and a memory and an experience.

And the right people understand that that comes at a cost, and the right people buy that so that they can have that experience. And when you raise your hand and say, I'm selling this cake for \$300, the right people are gonna say, done. Here's my credit card. I can't wait because this is gonna be so beautiful and so important to me.

So pricing is a matter of understanding who your customer is because there's customers at every single price point. There's customers down on the low end who maybe do lean more toward that utilitarian, like the cake or the cookies or the brownies is not the most important thing at the event, and it's not where they wanna spend their money.

It's not where they see the value. And so thank goodness that grocery stores exist for those people where they can go and buy. That's awesome. And for you, you know that they're not your people. And you turn and you shift, and you face a different market who values what you do at a different price point.

Pricing comes down to three objectives. When you're looking to price your products, there are three things it needs to achieve. Number one, you have to cover all your costs. All of the costs of creating that product need to be covered in your price. If you don't do that, then you don't even break even, and you might even be paying to make the thing which is no good.

So you have to cover all your costs, number one. The second thing is you have to compensate the labor involved at a fair, good price. And I like to think of it as if you're your own employee. When it's just you and you're like charging for your worth. I don't like the term charge your worth, because then it makes it so personal and emotional and tied to you, and you're gonna undercut yourself every time.

And so I like to think of it as if you were paying somebody to create this, like what would you have to pay them hourly and how much time are they actually spending to make sure you compensate the time, the energy, the stress that goes into that? And that becomes your paycheck when you do this, order.

So number one, cover your costs. Number two, compensate the labor fairly for what's involved. And then the third objective of your price is to leave money in your business to make a profit that stays inside your business so that you can grow your business that way. When it's time to buy a new mixer or you wanna take a

or you need to invest in your business, there's money in there to do that because your pricing has been fueling that all along. Those are the three objectives of price, and

These are all topics that I cover in my pricing Mastermind course. It's a course that I created specifically for Cake Makers because it's one of the trickiest things because we place so much morality around the idea of money and pricing and we, we let it get all hooked onto these nuances that don't actually exist with money.

Money is this neutral tool. It's not good. It's not bad. People who are bad can use money. People who are good can use money. And we observe those people with money. And so we kind of assume, oh, well this person did something bad and they have money, so the money actually is what did that, the money made them bad. And it's just not, it's not true.

And so in my course, we tackle that. We talk about money, mindset, and, we learn as I talk to my cakemakers about how to change the story around money and pricing in your head, and then how to step confidently into this new price point.

And it's fun. It's so much fun because once you understand your numbers,, you can tell your business where to go.

[00:50:04] **David Crabill:** So you have niched down into this like very specific style, right? Wedding cakes. They're very elegant very high end. They're also pretty simple, I would say. Just like really high skilled and they're really high price. So I was wondering like, did you find this style or like, were you more motivated to like niche down to this style because the money that came from this style gave you the excitement and energy to do it, or do you think you just like randomly landed on this style and like some other person could randomly

land on doing kids' cakes and, you know, maybe, they wouldn't have the same leverage pricing wise?

[00:50:45] **Brette Hawks:** Yeah, no, I believe that any style, anything you're selling, you can create a brand and a perceived value around it, and you can market it in such a way that you can charge those higher prices and you can, refine your skills and your quality so that your product matches that value. And I, I think for me, it was those high end wedding cakes, but I believe

you can work within, whatever your style is.

To actually make money as a baker. As for me, definitely like the money wasn't involved in finding my style because that the creative process.

Is what has guided me this whole time. finding my style in painted cakes just kind of came from practicing. I really enjoyed practicing my craft and I bought dummy cakes, which were just like foam styrofoam cakes, and I would practice on them. I'd practice smoothing my buttercream, and then these kind of palette knife painted cake style, it kind of came on the scene and I loved it.

I loved the aesthetic. And so I started to try and my first, my first attempts at it were pretty miserable, and there wasn't much to show for it. But I, I just still loved it. And so I kept practicing and learning. I learned so much about color theory, and so I'm able to like master these beautiful color palettes with cake.

I really grew to love the actual process of palette knife painting. It is so satisfying, it's so smooth. It just fulfills me creatively. And so that's what put me down this pathway of creating those types of cakes and really niching down into those things because it's what really fueled me. I believe that because I fell in love with it so much because that's where my passion was.

That's why I got so good at it. And that's why people started to recognize it. And that's how I built this brand around it because it was really what I loved doing. And if I was trying to pour all my time into something I didn't love, I think the disconnect would show. And it wouldn't, wouldn't have become what it was.

I would've pivoted. I would've changed. And so, yeah, breaking into the high end wedding market, it like I never set out to be like, I wanna charge \$1,600 for a cake. I just kind of like, Let that style take me where it wanted to go,. and so yeah. Now here I am where it's like average, I charge about \$700 to \$800 for my cakes.

And I had that one that was \$1,600. my first year in business, I never could have charged that because my confidence wasn't there. My skills weren't quite there yet, my brand wasn't there. And, and people weren't gonna trust me with that kind of money yet because I hadn't built up that prior experience.

And I, didn't have my business quite refined yet enough. And so I eased into that. And when, when I met with that couple. The bride and groom who they wanted this cake. It was four tiers. It was a couple different flavors, and it was like this beautiful palette knife, mountain painting with flowers added on later.

I actually transported it up, a ski gondola. And so I got in this little contraption with that cake and took a 10 minute ride up a mountain up, a ski lift with this cake to deliver it. And so when I told them, when we went over all these details, I'm sitting face to face with them And when I said, okay, it will be \$1,600, they said, great. Can we pay half today? Here's our credit card. And so they paid my deposit, which is half, And the fact that they paid that much meant I could put a hundred percent of my effort into that cake and that I wasn't gonna let one little detail slip past me.

I needed to buy a wagon to transport it done. I could buy the wagon because they had paid me to make this happen And if I had been paid any less, it would not have been as smooth because I wouldn't have, been able to show up a hundred percent like I was able to. And I got a text from the bride that night, her wedding night, like she's going on her honeymoon and she's texting me to tell me that that cake was the most gorgeous thing in the world, that they ate every single slice of that four-tier cake.

and it was just so beautiful and thank you so much for being a part of our day. That is the level of. Experience that you're able to give to somebody when you're paid well for it. it's like sometimes people act like when you get paid for making these cakes, it's like you're putting a gun to their head, like saying, you will pay me for this.

And they're like, how dare you, how dare you charged that much for just food? But it really, it's more than food. It becomes an experience and the people want it. when you can create this business and brand and product that they're able to trust and they like know that you're gonna follow through, they're willing to pay for that.

And so that was like just a really awesome experience to be able to make that cake. And we all came out on top

[00:55:52] **David Crabill:** So, I know you've done a lot of teaching at this point. can you just share a little bit about, what you currently do, like, you know, you have the out-of-home baker and like, what is that all about?

[00:56:02] **Brette Hawks:** Yeah, so currently that's where most my focus is with the out of home baker, and that's my coaching page that I started two years ago. And it's, grown incredibly and it's been just so fun to help other people on their baking journeys to actually get started. So I have several resources there. You can follow me on Instagram at the Out of Home Baker and I share tips, tutorials, videos some really good juicy stuff.

If you go back on my feed, you'll find some really good posts that walk you through like a little bit about pricing and marketing and Instagram, and you can find lots of, free, just good solid information there. And then if you find my link in my bio, you can find my library of resources where I've got my pricing mastermind course.

And then I have eBooks about, you know, how to talk to customers.

It comes with all these different templates that way. You don't have to like write your own messages from scratch and it helps you to streamline your order process. I have a whole book on Instagram and so my job right now as a coach, what I'm trying to do is I want people to a, see the possibility of success as a home baker because I believe everyone can achieve it and everyone deserves it and.

I'm here to provide the resources for you to be able to do that. So through my courses, my lives, my Instagram my eBooks that I write, I plan to just give you this step-by-step roadmap of how to take these principles and apply it to your business. Because I don't teach people to do what I do. I teach them the business principles and the strategy and the things that worked so that they can then take them and apply them and tweak them and adjust them and put them into work and action for their own business.

It's not about like charging exactly what I charge or doing the same kind of cakes that I do, but about learning the recipe to success. And then applying all of it to their own businesses. So that's what I'm working on right now. I'll be coming out with a whole course on how to break into the wedding cake market specifically.

And it'll be fun because they'll be like, lessons on how to hold a tasting consultation, how to deliver, and just videos that go along with it. And I that'll

just be a real fun one to launch. So anyone who's interested in wedding cakes, make sure you jump on over and follow along so you can see when that launches.

But I love to connect with people and if anyone has questions and if anyone needs advice or encouragement, you can DM me on Instagram and I will answer. I will be there on the other side, being your biggest cheerleader and helping you find the way forward, that's just kind of really what the out of home baker is about.

So you can find me on the Out of Home Baker on Instagram.

My website is outofhomebaker.com. And then I also have a podcast called Business is Sweet. And so you can find me there and listen to some more episodes about, running your baking business.

[00:58:56] **David Crabill:** Awesome. Well, it's cool to see where your businesses have come in just a few short years. I appreciate all the advice that you shared, and yeah, thank you so much for coming on the show and sharing with us today.

[00:59:08] **Brette Hawks:** Absolutely. It was a blast. Thank you so much for having me.

[00:59:12] **David Crabill:** That wraps up another episode of the Forrager Podcast. For more information about this episode, go to forrager.com/podcast/83.

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Thanks for listening, and I'll see you in the next episode.