

Think Like A CEO with Jen Morris

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 Jen Morris.

[00:00:11] But a quick reminder, we are just a couple weeks away from the Home-based Food Entrepreneur conference. This is the only national conference for our industry, so you're not going to 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, workshops, breakout sessions, and perhaps most importantly, the community that you'll get to interact with along the way.

[00:00:37] Now, most multi-day virtual conferences like this cost well over \$100, 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 that you can watch on your own time. So if you haven't registered yet, you can sign up right now by going to cottagefoodconference.com

[00:01:05] all right, so I have Jen Morris on the show today. Jen and her husband Rob, spent over a decade building up a very successful cupcake bakery in Collingdale, Pennsylvania called Cupcakeology, and wow, their journey involves so many twists and turns. At first, they sold from home under the table for a little while.

[00:01:27] Then they converted an office lunchroom into their new kitchen. Then they got a food truck they got on the Steve Harvey show. They started selling at the Philadelphia International Airport. They went bankrupt, and then they moved into their dream brick and mortar storefront where things really took off.

[00:01:49] So a wild ride. Indeed, they now have experience in so many facets of building a food business, which they've leveraged by starting to coach other food entrepreneurs. In fact, in 2021, they shut down their bakery to focus their efforts on coaching, and they now run the Start Small Win Big Academy.

[00:02:10] As you might expect, Jen shares tons of advice in this episode. So with that, let's jump right in. Welcome to the show, Jen. Nice to have you here.

[00:02:21] **Jen Morris:** Thank you, David. It's so good to be here.

[00:02:24] **David Crabill:** So Jen, can you take me back to the beginning of your journey? How did it all get started?

[00:02:29] **Jen Morris:** Ooh, yes. I'm going to take you way back. really this Cupcakeology started with us. It started with just our love for food. We're complete foodies, complete desserties. So when I was, my kids were young, we were still working two jobs a piece, me and Rob and I would bring home the dessert from Center City, Philadelphia, because we had more of an option from where we were living at that time.

[00:02:54] So, Saturday and Sunday came and we're like, okay, we wish there were, good bakeries around here. We wish that there was something different that we could eat around here. this was around the time where Food Truck wars was on, you know, when cupcake Wars first started out and I wanted to eat desserts like I saw on tv.

[00:03:13] couple also with just us wanting to kind of change up our lifestyle, you know, like I said, we worked two jobs, a piece. Our kids were young, they were in daycare 24/7.

[00:03:22] So we were also thinking about something different to do. What can we do? What can we start? What type of business can we start with the family? And then it just all made sense. Why not cupcakes?

[00:03:34] **David Crabill:** So what were you working on before you started this business

[00:03:38] **Jen Morris:** I was a mortgage broker and real estate agent, and I was doing very well. But you know, as being a real estate agent, people wanted to go out on nights and weekends. So that was taking up my extra time. although I loved what I was doing. I loved selling all things sales, you know, I love selling, but it just took up too much of my family time and for me, becoming a mother was just my priority.

[00:04:03] **David Crabill:** And uh, what year was this about that you, you made the transition into the cupcake business?

[00:04:09] **Jen Morris:** I would say definitely beginning of 2010, that is when we were thinking about it. And it, it is funny because my husband and I actually met years before we actually became official and got married back at Old

Country Buffet. we met back then as teenagers, so we always had, the food business aspect in us some way somehow. And so it only makes sense to just start a food establishment, a baking establishment.

[00:04:35] **David Crabill:** And so can you just walk me through what, what were your first steps, like how did you go from this real estate world to starting this food business?

[00:04:45] **Jen Morris:** Yeah, so I would sit at work, and I would make up flyers, right. I would sit at work and I would think about recipes to create. I would sit at work and I would just think about the business idea and what we can do with this thing so that when I got home, I knew I had the young kids, you know, we would eat with them, bathe them, read to them, and they would go to sleep.

[00:05:08] And then me and my husband was in the test kitchen and our very first recipe was red velvet because I am a stickler for red velvet cake So I remember this particular time, and I, I, it brought me to tears because thought that the recipe was okay, and then he didn't, and then he thought the recipe was okay when we switched it up. And then I didn't. And this was just the ongoing thing. I promise you, we were so close to not even having red velvet on our menu, but for us, if we could get red velvet right, everything else was going to be okay.

[00:05:40] So we finally got that one red velvet recipe together, and we started, you know, giving it out to family, friends, the coworkers, you know, and just getting their opinions and, and it was just all about the validity of our products, because what you think may be good, somebody else might not think is good, right?

[00:05:57] And we really wanted to put out something different. We really wanted to put out something unique. So once we got past that red velvet, then we started testing with a medley of flavors like piña coladas and Maple and Bacons and French toast. And really then we started thinking of the concept, okay, we're going to start a business, a bakery, in an area that has other bakeries, but they've been around since, you know, before we were born, right?

[00:06:21] We had to come with something different. We had to do something spectacular. We had to knock this thing out the box. So then we created uh, what was called our bar line. So everybody loved the piña coladas. But then we started creating other different flavors from, our favorite alcohol beverages, right?

[00:06:42] And then we started creating our food line of cupcakes based off of the things that we love to eat. So, That's kind of how Cupcakeology the name was born, because we've found ourselves to be like chemists in the kitchen with cupcakes.

[00:06:57] **David Crabill:** Now cupcakes. I'm just thinking, I can't remember when it started, but I'm thinking what, you know, 15 years ago, 10 years ago, some point there was this massive cupcake trend, right? , like, it just seemed like cupcakeries were everywhere. Were you guys jumping on that trend or were you before it like, I can't even remember when it, it started exactly.

[00:07:20] **Jen Morris:** Oh my goodness. 1000%. I really feel like we were introduced to it, like I said, with Cupcake Wars and I just fell in love and that kind of gave me the permission to go all out and really.

[00:07:34] Be the person that I wanted to be as far as, you know using all of my creativity in the kitchen.

[00:07:40] **David Crabill:** Well, you definitely jumped on a pretty big trend that lasted for a number of years, and I know you coach a. Entrepreneurs now, is that something that you recommend to them? Like look for the trends, follow the trends, and like do you think that that was a big part of the reason why you succeeded?

[00:07:58] **Jen Morris:** Well, no, that was the reason why in the very beginning, how it accelerated so quickly., right? But no, to the answer of your question, I do not recommend following the trends, because especially these days, trends come and they go, So if you want to follow the trend, then that's the type of business model you're going to have, and you're going to be a trendy business, but you're going to be all over the place.

[00:08:23] So you're just a business person. But for a lot of home bakers and cottage bakers, their business comes from passion. Their business comes from, you know, a particular skill and talent that they have, that they've learned from growing up in grandma's kitchen and mom's kitchen, and that's personal to them.

[00:08:39] So I absolutely don't recommend going on trends. However, you still have to know what's going on so that you can incorporate some of that trend in your business model and just be fluid with it.

[00:08:50] **David Crabill:** So you did a lot of experimentation in the kitchen. It sounds like you saw Cupcake Wars, you got this inspiration to start this type of business, and, you know, what were the next steps to actually get it out there? What, like how did you start taking sales at first?

[00:09:07] **Jen Morris:** Right. So once we were validating the deliciousness of our cupcakes my husband said, okay, well that means nothing if nobody's paying for it, because everybody loves something free, So he said, okay, we gotta put a price tag on it. And that's what we did. We put a price tag on it. And people were actually buying, right?

[00:09:26] So that was like the next step for us. And then he said, okay, well these are people that are kind of warm to us that kind of know us, so let's try to get out there even more to try to prove this business concept and see if it's going to work. And we were baking from our home. We didn't know the next steps to take as far as licensing and things like that.

[00:09:47] So we just got on the Google, started Googling, you know, how to start a baking business, how to start a baking business from home, all the things. So we got our L L C, because that's what Google said everywhere. Get your L I C, get your e i n number. So we had those things, the basics, but how do we actually. Get to the point where we can sell on farmer's markets and get to the point where we can like really put the name Cupcakeology out.

[00:10:09] So we couldn't really figure that out. We called the local health department. Unfortunately, they said that we could not legally bake out of our home kitchen because we were two houses away from a commercial street. Therefore we were still in a residential block and couldn't get licensing. So that knocked us out of a lot of the farmer's market buckets in our surrounding area.

[00:10:34] However, there was a window of opportunity that allowed us to vend at a very big spring market. And I remember, like it was yesterday, I called them, I asked them what they required and they just said a check in an application.

[00:10:50] Boom, we secured our spot. We decided to bake 350 cupcakes. Now, it may not sound like a lot now, or maybe it does, I don't know. But then with one mixer,, two cupcake pans and a conventional oven. That took us 24 hours to

prep, to bake, to decorate, to package up and get ready to do this spring fair. And then when we got there, David, we set up right.

[00:11:19] this was even in a, a township that we weren't familiar with, so they had no idea who we were. We set up, by the time it opened, it took us 24 hours to bake, but 24 minutes to sell out of those cupcakes. And this was money that people paid us for a creation that we made. And we looked at each other and said, oh my goodness, this is it. It's time to move forward. We can really do this.

[00:11:43] **David Crabill:** Wow, that's, that's crazy. So within a half an hour, you sold out of 350 cupcakes and how'd you come with that number? Like, we're going to make 350. That actually sounds a little bit risky to me.

[00:11:56] **Jen Morris:** It sounds very risky. I think I just did a re I knew that that was a very large market. I mean, they only did it one time a year and if we were going to do this, if this was going to be something a, a way for us to get our brand out there, to get our product out there, to test it out, we really had to make sure we were.

[00:12:13] offer enough product for that amount of people. I mean, you're talking thousands of people. So for us to sell out, I mean, we were really thinking small in comparison to, right. Like, it sounds like a lot, but you know, with the ratio of people that were there. Yeah. We, we, we were thinking very small, but that's the best that we can do because we were in our home kitchen.

[00:12:32] **David Crabill:** Well, that's still extremely successful for a first market by anyone's standard. So that's, that's pretty crazy. Um, didn't I see that Rob had quite a bit of food service experience at this point?

[00:12:46] **Jen Morris:** Yeah, he. So he, when I left Old Country Buffet when we were working together he stayed he ended up moving up the ranks um, from dishwasher to kitchen manager and he was kitchen manager starting off just in the, the food part.

[00:13:03] And then they made him kitchen manager of the bakery department and then of the whole store. So Our commercial kitchen knowledge and experience came from his experience working managing old country Buffet. And then

[00:13:14] he went over to Perkins for a few years and ended up managing the bakery department at Perkins, which was huge because that's where we got all of our, you know, how to store our baked goods, how to store our batters, you

know, how to create, you know, SOPs to be able to scale our baking and decorating and things like that.

[00:13:33] So that is something that I bring to the table to my students because a lot of, you know, as a home baker, you're a solopreneur, right? But even if you're a solopreneur, there are things that you can do right there in your home baking operation that you can still scale some of your processes to be able to, give yourself some more time to do other things in your business.

[00:13:54] **David Crabill:** So what are some of those things that you recommend that people do in their home bakery to, you know, make things easier?

[00:14:02] **Jen Morris:** Yeah, absolutely. So when we're speaking to our students and they're making that transition from, you know, home baker to commercial kitchen, and I tell them things like, well, you know, you want to use liquid eggs versus shelled eggs?

[00:14:17] And they're like, what? What do you mean use liquid eggs? You know, isn't that going to mess up the, integrity of the recipe? No, because it's just already shelled eggs just already cracked. But the secret to. is that, there's a difference between liquid eggs coming from, you know, a retail store versus coming from a, like a restaurant depot

[00:14:39] Definitely go to a restaurant supply store to get restaurant quality liquid eggs. But the purpose of that is, you know, it's saving you time because you're not cracking a bunch of eggs.

[00:14:48] Right. It's easy, especially if you've already, convert your recipes from volume to weight. That's another system., So a lot of people ask me, well, how do I keep, you know, consistent as I grow, I'm afraid to grow.

[00:15:01] Well, the answer to that is you have to make sure you convert your recipes now before that happens from volume to weight, because again, it's just easier to do. It's faster, it's easier to do, and it's more accurate, right? So those are the first two things that I have my students start to convert in their prepping.

[00:15:19] **David Crabill:** So I know that Rob had a lot of experience and that eases the transition into moving into commercial bakery, but it's never easy no matter what, right. And it's also not cheap to do that. Can you talk about what that process was like in terms of finding the space, deciding on it, and actually

like, I don't know if you had to get funding or something to actually get in there?

[00:15:43] **Jen Morris:** Oh man. So funding that F word. Yeah, so we had these big ideas and we had even smaller pockets. So at that point, we were looking for any type of space. And we came across an office building and it said, offices for rent, \$300 to \$350. Now remember, we're talking about 20 10, 20 11 here now at this point, right? \$300, \$350. Well, that sounds like something that is, that's doable.

[00:16:16] Something that I could do, right? And my husband was pretty handy. So, I called the landlord and I made an appointment with him and I went to see the space and he asked me what type of business I was doing. Was I an accountant? Was I, you know, whatever. I said, no, I'm a baker and I want to open up a bakery.

[00:16:32] And he started laughing. He thought that that was the funniest thing in the world, that I'm coming to him in an office building, asking to lease a space, and I'm want to open up a bakery. I'm going to make food. Right? And it does sound silly when you think about it, but not in my head. And I said, yeah, I want to make food.

[00:16:48] But is there a way that I can get somewhere near the bathroom? Because I know if I'm near the bathroom, then it has a drain and it has the water hookups. And he started thinking, and he said, well, I do have a kitchen. You know how so when you walk into an office building like your dentist or your doctor or you know, just a, business suite.

[00:17:07] And then they have like a communal kitchen where, you know, all the offices come in and they have the coffee and things like that. Right. That's what he offered us. And I said, perfect, we'll take it. And that was the, next step of Cupcakeology. That was, the beginning of Cupcakeology, our little office space bakery.

[00:17:25] **David Crabill:** Wow. So, even though you didn't start out of your home, it still sounds like you were in a, like, kind of a hidden spot, right? Like, how did you get people to notice you?

[00:17:39] **Jen Morris:** Hmm. because we couldn't make that transition into our dream storefront at that time. We ended up purchasing a truck, an old used, I mean old and used uh, utility truck. And we gutted it we, you know, we asked the health department again, because they were so strict, right?

[00:17:58] And we asked the health department, listen, is this even possible? Can we do this? Is this a thing? And, you know, they said yes. And what do we need to put in this, to properly get licensed? And they just said, make sure it's clean,, make sure we have, you know, NSF certified equipment in there, like a table, whatever.

[00:18:17] And that's exactly what we did. We stripped this truck down to the bare bones. We put in, you know, some type of like a rubber mat flooring, right? So things won't slip or we won't slip. We put in an NSF certified table you know, a receptacle, all the minimal things we needed to get that truck operating.

[00:18:34] We painted the outside of the truck, we could not afford to get it wrapped. My husband cut a window in the truck right, for us to be able to sell. We got some decals from Vistaprint and we slapped those decals on that truck.

[00:18:49] And then we went out with all the best food trucks in Philadelphia. Okay. And we were not the fanciest. We were not the prettiest truck, but we made some noise and we made some noise because we had to be creative and we knew we had to be creative because we didn't have all the fancy bells and whistles like everybody else had.

[00:19:08] So we, we tapped into, you know, who we were as a fun couple, a fun family. My husband loves, he's so animated. He, he loves to do things different and outside of the box. So we went and purchased like a Muppet and I think the Muppet's name was little JJ. and he would literally put this Muppet on his hand, like Sesame Street and he would have the Muppet hanging out the window.

[00:19:30] He's like stooping down under the window and he's taking, the Muppet is taking orders. So what did that do that attracted people? because they're like, wait a minute, what is this furry, purple, furry animal hanging out of this truck over here? What are they selling? So, you know, people started coming over and then they found out we were selling cupcakes.

[00:19:48] And then of course we had to make sure that the cupcakes were the best that they were ever going to taste again, to make up for the bells and whistles that we couldn't have that everybody else had. And then, you know, our customer service was top notch because again, that's just, those are the things that we could control at the time.

[00:20:06] So I tell people, when you're making this transition, or even when you're going to the next phase in your business, whatever that may look like, you want to think of the next step. people always try to think of level Z, how do I get to level Z when I'm on level A or level B? And they get so overwhelmed and they get.

[00:20:26] and they don't move. Right? But if you think about, okay, what is my next logical step? How do I want to grow? What is my goal? And our goal was to spread the name of Cupcakeology, Knowing that we didn't have the capital, we didn't have the money for the marketing, so we had to do it ourselves. And then the township actually came in to say, well, you are allowed to sell from here technically.

[00:20:51] I mean, I don't know who's going to find you in this, office building, but you're allowed to sell from here. So my husband put in a half door, like a whole Mr. Ed situation, half door, and he put in a half door. He said, well, if they said we can sell, then we're going to have people come in here and buy these cupcakes out of here and the truck.

[00:21:07] And that's what we did. We put the half door in there. We signed up for all the different farmer's markets now that we were legally able to bake and sell our products. We hired people, you know Like college kids and high school kids to do our farmer's markets for us because we couldn't be everywhere at the same time and we paid them on commission and you know, because you're not about to sit up there for three hours and not care if you sell cupcakes and think you're going to get paid.

[00:21:31] So for us it's like, okay, well let's pay them commission so they can work hard to sell these cupcakes and we can all get paid. Right. And I'm a big proponent of the art of storytelling and I got that from working in real estate, right? because it was all about selling. It is selling it's advertising.

[00:21:48] So your story is powerful and your story is your brand. And for us, again, we didn't have a marketing budget, so we had to go. And my logic was, if I can get these cupcakes in as many mouths as possible, then the word was spread faster. So I went up to the local news stations and gave samples. I went up to the local uh, morning radio stations and gave samples with the hopes of them sharing my story, telling everybody how good the cupcakes are, and then that's many ears at one time, hearing about our story and hearing about cupcakeology.

[00:22:27] And then, they'll just have to find their way down to us, even though people were right in front of us, they were calling and saying, Hey, I can't find you. So at that point, we'll just direct them.

[00:22:35] **David Crabill:** So, I mean, it all sounds great. Like you, you've got all these different layers, right? You've got the kitchen slash. Kind of storefront ish thing. You got the food truck, you know, you're, you're reaching out to people, you've got employees. It also sounds like a lot. And then you have two young kids at the same time. Right? Like, it just sounds really, really hectic to me.

[00:22:58] **Jen Morris:** Yeah, it was very hectic. As a matter of fact, the grand opening to the office building bakery my mom had to take my daughter to the hospital, rush her to the hospital. She was 18 months at the time because she had a double ear infection and pneumonia of one lung. And I knew that, but he, I couldn't leave.

[00:23:18] I had to stay, you know, I made sure I got bloggers to come down to report on the grand opening, and I was doing interviews. And in between interviews I'm running in the back and I'm bawling my eyes out because I want to shut this whole thing down, and go to the hospital with my baby, knowing that, okay, at this point I'm going to have to rely on family.

[00:23:39] I'm going to have to rely on the fact that, we did this to be able to have more time with our kids, So at that point it was, okay, let's take them out of daycare, number one, because we couldn't afford daycare any longer having a new business, right? And number two, let's just truly make this a family run business.

[00:24:02] And that's what we did. We had them in there every single day. I had pictures out on my Instagram and Facebook where my daughter was, you know, standing up on a chair drying off sheet pans, and my, my son, you know, helping me with cakes and. My aunt was in there, you know, here and there. I had my sisters in there, here and there.

[00:24:23] You know, it wasn't for a long time where we could really truly hire employees. So it was just family coming in and out. And the biggest thing again was just our story and just being very transparent and letting everybody know, Hey, this is our journey. As messy as it is, I have my kids here. I have my mom guilt moments.

[00:24:43] You know, guilty because my four year old is up at 3:00 AM in the morning, probably playing and eating up loads of fondant,, right? When he should be asleep. But at the end of the day, this is our story and this is how we're getting it done. and I know that it's going to work out if we just continue to do it together.

[00:25:03] **David Crabill:** So speaking of sharing your story, Could you just expand a little bit on some of the techniques that you used? because I know that, you know, you didn't just get in in blogs and local journals, but you also eventually got on the Steve Harvey show. So like, you clearly have some, tricks up your sleeve.

[00:25:21] **Jen Morris:** People have to realize that producers and journalists and editors of newspapers or magazines, they're looking for stories, So you just have to be in the position to give them one, and everybody with a business has a story. So you have to really become intentional with learning how to articulate the right story to fit the right news outlet.

[00:25:44] So, you know, if you are trying to get on tv, everything on TV is visual. our first time on Fox News, local Fox News our news anchor at that time was pregnant with twins. So I said, okay, well I am going to make her some cupcakes and put two peas in a pod on them cupcakes and take them down. So what I did was Twitter.

[00:26:06] Twitter will be your best friend. Okay. I tweeted the morning show anchors while they were on, TV at that time, because everybody who's on TV. I think it's now they have to, I think they have to tweet at the same time they're on TV to keep in contact with their um, listeners and their audience. So I made sure they were on tv. I tweeted her co-anchor and said, Hey, I have two peas in the pod, cupcakes that I would like to bring up to her, you know, how do I do this? And he said, bring them on up. I'll let them know you're coming. So we, put our uniform more, we got the cupcakes, we went up there and they were already expecting us.

[00:26:40] So I didn't expect to be on tv. Right. I just wanted my cupcakes to be on tv and just for them to say our name, that was fine enough for me. But they didn't just invite the cupcakes on. They invited us on TV too. So that was our first break in news. And once I knew it was that easy, I said, okay, I'm going to call everybody else

[00:26:59] Right. So it's kind of like about, it's about stalking. So if you're on Twitter and that particular news anchor or radio, you know, show host is on air

or on TV at that time, just figure out what's going on in the news, how you can make yourself relevant and going up there and give them your products.

[00:27:19] Everybody loves food. If you have baked goods, cookies, donuts, cupcakes, cakes in your hand, that is your ticket into anywhere.

[00:27:28] **David Crabill:** So it sounds great, but at the same time, you know, you are trying to run a business, right? Like you're trying to do all the things because Rob had a full-time job and you've obviously got kids and you are starting this commercial kitchen and you've got the truck and you're making cupcakes. When you're doing the events, like where do you find the time?

[00:27:51] How do you balance that of like actually finding time to promote yourself and put your, all these feelers out there.

[00:27:59] **Jen Morris:** I do it every day. Everywhere I go. Promoting my business is a part of daily life. It's like air that I breathe,, right? Because if you don't promote your business, then you're not going to have a business eventually. So for me that was my chosen marketing strategy. So today a lot of people say they're on social media a lot.

[00:28:22] You know, social media wasn't as prevalent back then. Like I think Instagram started in what, 2009 or 2010 or something like that. That's when, you know, we were right before we started, so I didn't know what about an Instagram back then, and it was just Facebook. So for me, I didn't have the mindset of I had to be on somewhere or some particular platform 24 7.

[00:28:43] But for me, if I'm at the grocery store getting groceries for, the house, I'm listening. I have my ear to people's conversations. You know, one time I got a, a big birthday order because the deli lady was talking about her son having a baby. So if her son's having a baby, then someone's going to be throwing a baby shower for that mama.

[00:29:02] and they're going to need some cupcakes and cake and it might as well come from me, right? So promoting is everywhere. You can be in a line somewhere. You could be at a party, I sent the email to Steve Harvey while I was eating dinner, again, because I didn't have that marketing budget, I was always turned on when it came to promoting my business.

[00:29:22] If I heard something on tv, if I heard somebody say an event was coming up, then I am googling that event and Googling to see who's in charge. And I'm Googling to see, Hey, do you guys have desserts for this event? So a lot

of times we don't get the opportunity because you don't ask, So all you have to do is ask, and sometimes you can be the person that they've been looking for.

[00:29:47] **David Crabill:** Well, we have talked about the Steve Harvey show. Like how did that all go down?

[00:29:53] **Jen Morris:** Right. That was a funny situation because like I said, I was eating dinner and I listened to Steve Harvey every single morning at that time. Every single morning I am tuned in I don't know, something just said, send him an email. And I pushed my plate aside.

[00:30:09] I got to my laptop and I went on his website and I just went to the contact form and I wrote an email and like I said, we had the bar line, the infused cupcake line. So he's a comedian, right? So I knew to make the email kind of funny, so I can't remember exactly what I said and I wish I was able to say the email, but you know, it disappears on one of those forms.

[00:30:31] And I said something to the fact of, we have the, most amazing cupcakes, whatever. And I know for a fact once your lips hit these cupcakes or something, right? It was comical. Something that I said, but I know I said something about his lips. Okay. And the very next day they read that email on air, but they read it too early.

[00:30:52] I didn't, I didn't get a chance to listen to the very beginning of the show. So I got a phone call while baking and it was the producer of Steve Harvey show. And she said, did you hear your letter read on air? I said, no,. That was fast. I didn't expect anything that fast. I didn't really expect anything, anything at all.

[00:31:12] But like I said, I'm not going to tell myself no. So she said, yeah uh, we read the letter and we thought it was amazing. Steve thought it was hilarious, and we want to know if you can come out to be on his show. Oh my goodness.. So I'm screaming, you know, I don't know who was in there with me at that time. I'm air screaming, by the way.

[00:31:34] I'm not really screaming in her ear, but I'm air screaming. And so I got on with the segment producer of the actual TV show. So she did all the preparation. Now here's the funny part though, when you're on certain TV shows, people think they're reality. People think that, you know, it's just like how me and you are talking, right, David, on your podcast, right?

[00:31:57] And you're just asking a question and I'm just free to answer how I want to answer. Well, that's not always the case when you're watching syndicated tv. So she emailed me questions. With answers to the questions. So it's not like she emailed me questions and I had to answer. She emailed, emailed me questions along with answers that I should say, and that's when that particular interview It started to feel like a job. And I remember saying to my husband, I can't remember this, like, I'm not an actress. You know, I can only get on here and tell my story, but remember how I said they have to fit a story in, so I'm not able to go on here and just talk freely. I have to fit my story into what they want me to say, into how they want the audience to react.

[00:32:46] And so for me, that kind of took the fun out of it. Now I can say we were also on there to be on his morning show. So he has a morning radio show and that was fun. That was not scripted. That was fun. Free. I can say anything I wanted to say That was funny. You know, Steve was a lot more laid back with that, but we encountered a whole different Steve when it came to that tv interview.

[00:33:11] But nonetheless, it was an opportunity to share my story and to put my brand out in front of millions of people, which opened up a lot more doors of opportunity all throughout our business journey, even till today, people still remember us till today. And now that they know that we're on the educational side now that just opened up a whole other door of opportunities.

[00:33:34] **David Crabill:** a lot of baker's dream of having that kind of publicity and think that, you know, wow, I could really make it big if I had something like peering on the Steve Harvey show. How did it really affect your business? I'm sure it, brought you more opportunity, but was it, what you expected?

[00:33:52] Was it more, was it less?

[00:33:53] **Jen Morris:** Yeah, it, taught us to be prepared next time. You know, so when I share that story, I say, anticipate, your website shutting down number one, and that's the initial impact. And then if you're a local baker, right, you're just serving your community and you don't have any shipping capabilities, think about that ahead of time when you're going to be on a nationally syndicated show.

[00:34:20] Because if you're going to in front of a national audience, then they're going to expect for you to be able to ship your products. And again, the lack of mentorship, guidance or you know, just any type of ex business type

experience. We didn't think like that. So here we are flaunting our cupcakes, sharing our story on national TV and national radio.

[00:34:41] The radio uh, show was the biggest impact. It was the, the, quickest impact. And we got phone calls. I remember when we were still in Chicago our staff was calling and said, they're asking if we can, shit. We don't shit, do we? and nor did we think about that. So my advice is, if you're looking to get on a nationally syndicated show, you want to make sure you have shipping capabilities because you're going to miss out on thousands and thousands of dollars worth of orders.

[00:35:10] And that's what happens. So within 30 days, we promise these people, we gathered their information, put them in a database and we promised these people that we will be able to ship our cupcakes to them within a month. And that left us scrambling. how the heck to ship cupcakes fresh, to customers in other states.

[00:35:28] **David Crabill:** Well, how? How did you do it? Were you successful? You get that out in 30 days? Like how did that all happen?

[00:35:36] **Jen Morris:** It was a learning curve, and it was a little more than 30 days. But We found out who was the best in the game at shipping, which at that time was Georgetown Cupcakes. We quickly ordered cupcakes from them and we kind of reverse engineered it. We, looked around for their exact packaging that they used.

[00:35:55] We dissected everything. We saw that they used dry ice, popsicle sticks, all the things. So we quickly tested. We have family out of state, so we tested with family out of state. You know, it didn't work out too well the first couple times, uh, we spent a lot of money doing this. But I knew that we were going to get the money back with all of the, the new interests we had in our business. But we finally figured out, and it was probably more on the lines of two months, that we were able to start shipping. So that really opened up another can of worms. And all of this is still in the office building bakery, by the way.

[00:36:25] Okay.. So now we're shipping in a little, eight by eight square of a space. Plus we're taking orders. And then now at this point we have migrated into being a full service bakery because back to your question about the trends, no, you don't want to be a trend, because when cupcakes started falling off and cake balls started showing people all these things that they can do with cake, then that's what people started to want.

[00:36:52] So we're shipping out of this little office building bakery. We're running our food truck out of this little office building bakery. We're doing cupcakes out of this little office building bakery, and we're doing tiered cakes out of this office building bakery. And that was a challenge because it was small.

[00:37:07] So we didn't have much space for those big old cakes, but we made it happen because we didn't have no choice.

[00:37:14] **David Crabill:** So when you took these shipping orders like. You know, obviously you had a business model that was working for you at the time, locally, and I imagine it involved a lot of repeat customers. But when you took these shipping orders, were you thinking like, okay, these are going to be repeat customers, like this is our new business model, like we're, we're adding a whole element to our business.

[00:37:36] **Jen Morris:** Absolutely. And they were, I mean, once they tasted those cupcakes one time, they ended up becoming repeat customers. And that was a whole different um, system really, that we had to put in place. We had to, and then so after that airing on the Steve Harvey show, I mean, it just, oh my goodness. It just opened up so many doors for us. But yet, and still. We still weren't thinking along the lines of, well, maybe we're able to relocate into a bigger spot. Instead, we just leased another office space, that was across from across the hallway from the office the commercial kitchen. So we had to add more freezer space because we froze the cupcakes overnight before we shipped them out the next day.

[00:38:22] So we had to have a space for all of those cupcakes that we were going to freeze. So we, we rented that other space and we had to create a whole different database for the out-of-towners. It was a lot. And now that I'm speaking of it and you're saying, how are you doing all this? You know how, you know, yeah, Rob was working, but he was in it almost just as full-time as I was, I don't even know how he did it, but he did it. And we did it. And we did it together. Looking back on it, it was crazy. Crazy. But the only way it worked, you said, how are you able to do all this marketing? Like how are you able to do all this promoting? It worked because we systematized everything.

[00:39:02] And that's why I try to tell people, you have to create systems. Like you can't just be out there all willy-nilly. I'm going to bake, I'm going to sell, oh, I want to do this wholesale. Oh, but I want to do retail. Oh, but I want to do this. And oh, but I want to do farmer's markets. Like if you are saying that this is what I want to do, then you better be creating a how you're going to do it.

[00:39:20] that was honestly our biggest downfall. The fact that even though we were creating a system for everything, but we needed more than just a system in order to really foresee how our business was going to grow and sustain. And the one thing that we were lacking was a business plan. And the fact that we had no business plan.

[00:39:37] A lot of these things we were offered, like, because now we were well known in the community, well known, you know, just all over the United States. We got phone calls in and emails all the time from people wanted to collaborate with us. People wanted to partner up with us and do things. And a lot of the times we say yes, even though we couldn't figure out how we were going to do it, where we were going to fit it in, how much it was going to cost us, right?

[00:40:01] But we just said yes and that I can say was probably our biggest downfall in the beginning of the cupcake ology journey.

[00:40:09] **David Crabill:** Yeah. I know that you teach a lot about business plans in your course and in your coaching, but I'm just like thinking about your journey here and there's just no way you could have planned for this, right? I mean, it took so many different curves and directions. Like what? What do you think is the value in a business plan? And do your business plans now actually pan.

[00:40:34] **Jen Morris:** They do. And the value is one of the particular collaborations that if we had a business plan, we would not have said yes. And one of them was to be able to sell, have a kiosk at the Philadelphia International Airport, which when they approached us, it sounded amazing, right? I mean, who wouldn't want to sell their big goods at an airport?

[00:40:57] you know, you got millions of, customers coming through, walking through and everything, and it just sounds amazing. But when you look at the logistics of it, it's an expensive venture it is a separate business really. So business plans will prepare you to make decisions like that.

[00:41:15] Even as a home baker. Like people kind of have the concept of, well I'm a home baker, I don't really need a business plan. But that is not true. It may not have to be a full business plan, like we're getting funding or anything like that, but it should at the very least be a lean business plan to where, when you're.

[00:41:31] Making collaborations and you're, you're setting the stage to grow to that next level in your business. How are you going to do it? What are going to be your systems? How much is it going to cost you?

[00:41:41] So for us, if we had a business plan, if we knew how to write a business plan, if we knew the importance of a business plan then we definitely would not have made a decision to go and open up that kiosk in the, in the airport, because that was a, a total separate business, which meant more upfront costs, more equipment, more staff, not only to man the cart, the kiosk, but more staff in that little office building bakery

[00:42:07] And if the revenue was going to be able to exceed that cost, and obviously it would've been a good business deal. Right? But it costs so much. To be in the airport.

[00:42:17] They took so much from us that we could never lift our heads above water. And it came to the point where we were about to drown 100%. Everything was about to go down, our food truck was about to go down. Our original bakery, the office building bakery was about to go down and we were about to lose everything from this one blind business decision.

[00:42:39] So we ended up filing for Chapter seven bankruptcy to get ourselves out of it. And that was the only way that we could see that was our only Hail Mary that we could see that would not have us lose everything. So having a business plan,, is it important 1000% having a business plan? Does it work 1000%?

[00:43:00] Does it work, flawlessly? No, because like you said, things happen. Things change. Life happens. You know, things that you can't foresee and can't control happen. But if you think about those things ahead of time, and that's the purpose of a business plan, you're thinking about all the different obstacles that could potentially come up to the best of your knowledge, versus if you're just going into it with your heart and excite with excitement, you know, you can definitely mitigate some potential losses.

[00:43:26] **David Crabill:** Wow. That's, that's a pretty crazy um, story. So it sounds like just took on too many things and got in an overhead to some degree. But it also raises a good point, right? Because, you know, you can have a lot of revenue coming in, but that is a very separate from actually making a profit, right?

[00:43:46] So what do you coach people in terms of what they need to do to make a profit in their business?

[00:43:51] **Jen Morris:** Right. So think of as many revenue streams as possible, and everybody has something in them that somebody else wants, right? So I always say, think of things that you can teach. Think of digital items. Something that you can make one time, And put it on your website and people just purchase, think outside of the box.

[00:44:13] Um, They want many desserts these days, you know? So if you have a, a branded product that everyone loves, think about making it in many form, and, gift packaging. People pay for pretty things.

[00:44:27] People pay for experiences, We brought in extra revenue by, especially when covid hit, but we were doing this before covid on demand., So you know, if you can go and order cupcakes or cookies or cannolis or croissants and get them to your door within an hour fresh, I mean, that's golden.

[00:44:47] I'll pay you whatever for that, right? So it's just thinking of other things like e-gift cards and loyalty programs, you just always have to think ahead, think about what's going on, the need in the market, and just be that person, that business to fulfill it.

[00:45:03] **David Crabill:** The flip side of this is, there are so many different paths that you could go down. How do you know what's the next best path to go down?

[00:45:13] **Jen Morris:** You're just testing, you just got to test and see what. and don't be married to one particular thing, especially if that one particular thing is not working any longer. I always tell my students, it's not about you,, right? It's about what people need and what and what they're going to pay for.

[00:45:32] So you kind of have to be fluid as a business owner. You have to be fluid, you have to be resilient, and you can't let your heart lead you everywhere.

[00:45:41] **David Crabill:** Well, it sounds like you definitely hustled. You put a lot of things in place over the first few years, and I know you eventually got to a point where your business was so successful, you're ready to move out of the office space. Can you share a little bit about that?

[00:45:58] **Jen Morris:** Yes. So ironically we made that big move the same year we filed for Chapter seven bankruptcy. And how that happened was, at that

point, it was already about four years in the office building bakery and running the food truck. And after being on the Steve Harvey show, you know, we were just getting so much business.

[00:46:20] Locally, things started to slow down and we feel like it started to slow down because, people just wanted that experience. They wanted to be able to walk into the store, they wanted to be able to look around and, freely, you know, look at the things that they wanted to purchase before they bought it, where they couldn't really do that, where we were,

[00:46:37] so I think the novelty were off. So again, it was like Sink or swim type thing. we kind of saved the business by filing for bankruptcy and we got rid of all of our debt and we literally were starting from scratch. But at this point I knew that it wouldn't move any further if we didn't get into that traditional, at least in that area, brick and mortar.

[00:46:57] So we made the decision not to get comfortable because it was so easy for us to just go back to doing what we were doing. I mean, I was terrified at making another move. Trust me. You know, filing for bankruptcy is not an easy thing to do. It's not an easy decision, but it was a decision that we made to be able to, at least start off above water again and to see where we were going to go.

[00:47:17] So a building came up that presented itself to us twice before we didn't feel like we were ready to make the move. We didn't feel like we could afford the larger overhead. This building was the dream. It was a corner property. windows, floor to ceiling, quadruple the size of where we were. It was just so beautiful and so sexy,, and so ideal.

[00:47:41] But we turned it down the first few times, two times. So when it presented itself again, they actually changed ownership. And then the owners knew about us and the owner said, listen, this could be yours. I would love to see your business here. And I know before the lease, you know, was a problem. And he went down significantly on the lease and he gave us two months uh, without having to pay the rent for us to get it together, you know, and start making a profit.

[00:48:13] It was like all the terms, David was perfect for us. So we were at the point where either we were going to say yes and trust and have faith and know that this business idea was meant for us and meant for us to grow and meant for us to serve the community in a bigger way, or we were just going to let fear stop

us and just stay where we were most comfortable, even though we were super uncomfortable.

[00:48:38] So we've decided to take the risk again. We signed that lease. The kids were a little older so they could help us paint at this time, they could help us decorate and do all the things. And within a month we opened up, we had our second grand opening, and this was the biggest grand opening ever. It was amazing.

[00:48:55] Everybody turned out, I mean lines. Oh my gosh. You couldn't even see the ending of the line. It was just an amazing day. And from then on I said if this was going to be something that we were going to sustain to grow, to make, to turn into an actual brand and just see how far we can take this thing, I'm going to have to learn how to write a business plan.

[00:49:18] And that's what I did. I taught myself how to write a business plan. I wrote a business plan. We ended up using capital loans. Now at this point, we have more access to capital than we did when we first moved into the office building. And we used Square Capital loans and we used business credit cards.

[00:49:34] And I really taught myself how to be a C E O because I knew that I had to do something different the second go around to get a different result. And we did and it was amazing. The floodgates opened for us. We started manufacturing our cake batter and that again, started from stem from being on a Steve Harvey show and having that national presence because now people were like, okay, I want to get cupcakes and I love your cupcakes, but you know, I may want different flavors or, you know, and they couldn't really order all of our flavors.

[00:50:04] So they said, can you just sell us your batter? Can you just, ship your batter? So we started shipping our cake batter and then other businesses in the area started, you know, getting a wind of that. And they said, well, hey, can we get buckets of your batter, right? So we started selling buckets of our batter, 10 pound buckets of our batter, and just doors started opening.

[00:50:24] And, you know, we made a plan. And if the plan said yes, then we walked through them. And if the numbers didn't look right, then we kindly declined.

[00:50:32] **David Crabill:** I know that your business is named Cupcakeology still even today, but of course the cupcake trend kind of died. So like, do you wish you had named your business something more generic?

[00:50:46] **Jen Morris:** I do not. Because at the end of the day, it says cupcake, but the allergy part is us. And so wherever we take our brand, we are the alchemists, we are the chemists, we are the people putting the right potions, to turn out the right, product or service now, right? So, you know, and, and Cupcake is how it started.

[00:51:08] That's how it started. Everything that we've gone through, you know, we wouldn't be where we are today if it weren't for. If it wasn't for that red velvet cupcake. So no, I don't, I don't want to change it. I don't regret it. And that name will be around forever, longer than us.

[00:51:26] **David Crabill:** So we're skipping ahead a little bit, but I know that eventually, I mean, you obviously reopened. Storefront and that you ran that business for many years successfully. But then at some point, I think what, a couple years ago you decide to shut it down. Like can you just share sort of that journey of like starting an opening, have this huge grand opening, and then like where did that lead you to the point where you actually were ready to let go of the business?

[00:51:55] **Jen Morris:** Yeah. So we ran it for about six and a half years after the second grand opening, six, seven years. And then when Covid hit, everything came crashing down on us in a good way.

[00:52:06] So all the businesses around were closing, like shutting the doors and shutting operation. And I didn't understand it. I said, why are they closing and shutting operation? the government said we can't let anybody in any longer. They didn't say that we couldn't sell any longer. I continued to sell and

[00:52:23] our revenue went up like 300% in a year because people who didn't even know we existed, Found out about our on demand delivery service.

[00:52:33] So business was creeping up. We were hiring when everybody was firing. You know, it was just a weird time. But with that being said, I was ready for something different. I was ready for a 100% total change.

[00:52:47] I was tired. So, a little bit before we closed the store, I ended up starting a food blog called Loving From the Oven Blog, and that was my way of being able to share more of my personal recipes that, weren't in on our menu. And then that's why I started to become introduced to the online industry, the digital, product industry and all those things. So that was, for me, a whole different world. And then at that point,

[00:53:15] We ended up moving from our house that we had for 16 years, which was literally two minutes away from the bakery.

[00:53:21] We ended up moving over to New Jersey, and I would say a few months after that I said, you know what? I don't think I want to come over the bridge anymore. I think I want to continue. Because at that point we were already coaches. We already had to Start Small Win Big Academy out.

[00:53:36] We were already selling our e-books. I said, I want to do this coaching program 100%. And I want to make a bigger impact and I want to help other people realize their dream and make that total transition from, you know, home baking business to storefront or to food truck. I want to be that person, that mentor that I wish we had when we started Cupcakeology. And then we were toying back and forth with, are we going to sell the business? Are we going to just dissolve the assets? we've talked to a couple business brokers that gave us uh, you know, evaluation on our business, but that meant that we had to give up all the branding, obviously, All the social media accounts, all the things. And Cupcakeology was embedded in us. It was us and there's a lot more to Cupcakeology's story and I couldn't give that up.

[00:54:26] So we decided to just close and not sell. We dissolved all the assets and we cashed out and then we went, full-time as coaches and speakers and mentors, and this is where we are today.

[00:54:39] **David Crabill:** Wow. I mean, I, I can see how like you came to that decision, but still, I mean, you're leaving something that you've built up over a long time, right?

[00:54:51] And you're essentially starting over with you know, almost new clientele, right? So what did it feel like to like let that go and to start. Completely over again.

[00:55:04] **Jen Morris:** Well, I was ready to let it go. I mean, I didn't want the back and forth of, if somebody were to call out, you know, I had to go and figure that out. I just, I didn't want that anymore. I needed, I needed kind of to like reset.

[00:55:17] But what I wasn't ready for is that I had to start over. And that's what I didn't anticipate,, the fact that I had to start over, because that is a completely total different demographic, completely different products, completely different, audience and everything.

[00:55:37] So, yeah, I mean, come on now we're robbing Jen from cupcakeology. You mean to tell me you know, you don't know us? No, never heard of you. Wait, well, where you been under a rock? You know, so my bubble definitely popped with that. honestly, I went through something, I went through imposter syndrome.

[00:55:54] And this is me being super transparent because I want to let people know that, fear and imposter syndrome and like, you know, self-sabotage, all of those things are very real. However, you can't let it stop you., you can't let it freeze you and paralyze you, right? You have to work through it. And so I hired a coach

[00:56:15] I hired a business coach and a life coach. Spent thousands of dollars on that. That was a huge investment. But the ROI was life changing because I had to go through a period of being well known everywhere I went, and everybody knows my name, everybody knows my story. Everybody knows what we do to a person that, you know, I can go outside and no one knows who I am, or I can go online or do a class.

[00:56:42] And people are looking at me like, yeah, you have to prove to me that I can trust you. So I had to work through that and I'm glad that I did because working through that imposter syndrome gave me the ability to say, okay. You are starting fresh, so therefore act accordingly. And then when I started acting accordingly, then things definitely got better because now I understood that I am building a new business from the ground up.

[00:57:08] And I've already done that before, Jen, like, you, you're not new to this, you're true to this. So, I just started doing what I do.

[00:57:15] **David Crabill:** Well, can you share a little bit about you know, what you've built so far?

[00:57:19] **Jen Morris:** Yeah. So it started off with an ebook called Think Like a C E O, and then that was for, just retail in general. And then we made an actual Baker's edition, And that. Ebook was so popular that that's when we decided to, okay, people need more than advice, right?

[00:57:36] I mean, it's a great book. They learn a lot, but if people have imposter syndrome, if people have that fear, so much fear that is stopping them from taking these steps that they're, we're instructing them to do, then it doesn't mean anything.

[00:57:51] So when we, you know, make that that transition to full-time coaches, we added an element of like life coaching we kind of revamped everything. And that really started to accelerate our student.

[00:58:02] So that's what I would say that's the biggest part of the success of our students in the Start Small Win Big Academy is the 100% support The life coaching element, and then the extra accountability

[00:58:13] like, okay, you say this is what you want to do. You say this is your goal, then I'm going to be here. Making sure you continue to do the right steps in order to reach, entertain your goal. So, we're actually making an even bigger impact, by helping someone change pretty much the whole trajectory of their life, and that is the best part of my day.

[00:58:36] **David Crabill:** Well, Jen, thank you so much for coming on the show Can you just share a little bit about, where people can find you and how can people reach out?

[00:58:45] **Jen Morris:** Sure. Um, They can reach me on my website, www.cupcakeologypa.com, and I'm always hanging out on Instagram at Rob underscore Jen Morris. It's r o b _ j e n m o r r i s, and I'm also on Facebook. Rob Jenn with two Ns Morris.

[00:59:08] **David Crabill:** Well, Jen, thank you so much for coming on the show and sharing with us today.

[00:59:12] **Jen Morris:** Thank you for having me. I appreciate it.

[00:59:16] **David Crabill:** That wraps up another episode of the Forrager Podcast.

[00:59:19] For more information about this episode, go to forrager.com/podcast/85.

[00:59:26] And if you're enjoying this podcast, please take a quick moment right now to leave me a review on Apple Podcasts. It doesn't have to be a long review, but it's truly the best way to support the show and it'll help others like you find this podcast.

[00:59:38] And finally, if you're thinking about selling your home homemade food, check out my free mini course where I walk you through the steps you

need to take to get a cottage food business off the ground. To get the course, go to cottagefoodcourse.com.

[00:59:50] Thanks for listening, and I'll see you in the next episode.