

Allyson Grant with The Better Baker Club

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 Allyson Grant.

[00:00:11] But first, we need to talk about email, and especially email marketing. If you're not sending emails to your customers on a consistent basis, then I think you're missing a big opportunity for sales.

[00:00:23] I really love using Kit to manage email for my fudge business. And they recently introduced the best free tier that I have ever seen in an email marketing platform, which allows you to send emails to up to 10,000 subscribers for free. So if you still haven't hopped on the email marketing bandwagon, now is a great time to do so.

[00:00:42] To get started and learn more, you can watch my free email marketing tutorial at forrager.com/email.

[00:00:46] All right, so I have Allyson Grant on the show today. She lives in Baldwin City, Kansas, and runs an online academy for food entrepreneurs called The Better Baker Club. Allyson started her home bakery 25 years ago, well before the term cottage food was even a thing. Her home business expanded so quickly that within just a couple of years, she fulfilled her lifelong dream of opening her own brick and mortar bakery.

[00:01:18] Unforeseen circumstances caused her to sell that bakery, but a year later she started a cupcake shop that was wildly successful. It was featured in Rachel Ray magazine, and led Allyson to appear on the very first episode of Cupcake Wars on the Food Network. After a leg injury that left her unable to run a baking business, Allyson shifted to coaching and now helps other entrepreneurs fulfill their bakery dreams.

[00:01:42] As you might expect, she shared tons of helpful advice and key takeaways in this episode. So let's get right to it.

[00:01:50] Welcome to the show, Allyson Nice to have you here.

[00:01:54] **Allyson Grant:** Hi, David. Thanks for having me.

[00:01:57] **David Crabill:** Well, Allyson, I know you've been doing this for a long time. Uh, How did it all get started?

[00:02:03] **Allyson Grant:** Oh, my goodness. Um, Way, way back in my early days, I went to uh, culinary school to become an artisan baker. And, you know, I worked for other people for the first 15 years of my career. And then something happened where, I finally had the opportunity to open my own home based bakery that had been a dream of mine forever, but I just really didn't know when and where, and how that was going to happen.

[00:02:36] But the company that I was working for. decided to terminate their baking and pastry program. And that felt like the time and the place to finally kind of venture out. and do something on my own. So I started a home based baking business in my home kitchen and I think it was the year 2000.

[00:02:58] So it was a while ago. So that was kind of how it all began. I was really nervous and excited and I felt like I had thought about it and dreamed about it for so long, but when it all came down to actually happening launching my business, I. was kind of surprised at how little information was out there and how lost I kind of felt in the process.

[00:03:22] And so that has kind of stuck with me the whole time. Because if you fast forward to today, that's sort of the direction that my baking career went. It was teaching other people how to do what I did.

[00:03:33] **David Crabill:** So you started 25 years ago with your home baking business. And that's obvious. Well predates any kind of cottage food law in Kansas, I would imagine.

[00:03:45] **Allyson Grant:** yeah, absolutely. That's one of the things that was so difficult about it was that I really didn't know what I was doing in terms of the legality. And, you know, I went down to our chamber of commerce and just started asking questions and they were sort of confused too. So, you know, in my situation, I mentioned that the business that I was working for, the hotel and restaurant group we were doing a wholesale accounts for that company and when they terminated their Baking and pastry program that left all of the clients that we were serving with no supplier So when I decided, you know, like next day basically to open my home baking business I had a list of people that were ready for products and in today's climate, you know, you'd have to go through a lot of application processes and inspections and various different, bells and whistles to get fully licensed and take your first order.

[00:04:49] But back in, at the time when I was doing it,

[00:04:51] it was sort of like, well, go ahead. You know, I guess go ahead and try it and see how it goes. And that's sort of my approach to it. But I really wanted information. You know, I wanted to do it right. I wanted to follow the rules. There just weren't any rules. And now there's more limitations but there's also so much possibility.

[00:05:13] **David Crabill:** So it sounds like, you know, you had a customer base right off the bat and you're doing wholesale right off the bat.

[00:05:20] **Allyson Grant:** That's how we started. So we approached each of the businesses that we're getting wholesale, and said, Hey, you know, I know that the company contacted you yesterday and said they were discontinuing.

[00:05:31] But we'd like your business. And if we start our own baking business, would you order from us? And they said, absolutely. We just want the same stuff we've been getting. So overnight we had 10 clients and these were cafes that were ordering on a daily basis. So. One of the big challenges for bakers now is how do I find my customers?

[00:05:52] You know, how do I get those orders? And for me, that wasn't the challenge immediately. It was more of those resources. And you know, just how do I do this the legal way? So, yeah, we started out with a full calendar of orders.

[00:06:09] **David Crabill:** So that obviously served as a proof of concept for the business. Do you think you would have started the business if you didn't have that customer base?

[00:06:17] **Allyson Grant:** Well, that certainly made it safer. I had always dreamed of starting a business. That was probably not going to go away. I just knew that I wanted to bake for myself after having worked for so many people and kind of learned as much as I could and then had my own ideas about the way I wanted to do things.

[00:06:38] I think I would have gotten there eventually, but that was one of those perfect moments where. Everything just sort of came together. My desire was there. The opportunity was there.

[00:06:48] The ability was there. And it just sort of happened organically like that. But it was scary, even though it felt safe.

[00:06:57] **David Crabill:** You mentioned that you worked professionally for 15 years working for others. What if you had just started selling from home after culinary school? Where do you think you would have Ended up?

[00:07:10] **Allyson Grant:** Well, I know that having worked for others, Was really part of my personal strategy. There was so much that I wanted to learn that I curated my resume with, you know, this is the type of chef I want to work for. This is the type of bakery that I want to work for.

[00:07:29] But if I had just gone straight to a home baking business, In hindsight, I know that I would have needed to be much more aware of marketing and sales.

[00:07:41] That's just the one element that you don't really learn that much working for other people. When you do it for yourself, you all of a sudden become so aware of how am I going to find my customers?

[00:07:52] And you know, how am I going to stand out from the other bakers? And what is different about me? And what is special about me? So as long as you're aware of that in the early stages, and you really continue to hone your niche, then I think you can get there without working for other people. Baking is not finite, you know, everybody has their own take on it and there's a space for all bakers out there.

[00:08:16] I really think the most important thing is that people go and take that chance because if you've got the passion for it, then there is a space for you

[00:08:26] **David Crabill:** Well, it sounds like you had quite the jumpstart with having these customers. Sounds like you were super busy from the beginning. So did your business go from there?

[00:08:36] **Allyson Grant:** Well, so we started doing these wholesale orders, like I mentioned, straight from the restaurant. And then it sort of picked up from there, back before Starbucks did their own, Production starbucks approached us and said, could you do 20 stores? And this was just based on a referral from the other clients that we were serving.

[00:08:58] So our name was getting out there and we were getting a good reputation for quality and consistency. When we took on the starbucks accounts, we knew we needed a bigger facility so we moved into a commercial location. And then from that commercial location, we weren't even there for a full year

because the cafes and restaurants that we provided uh, the baked goods to, they had customers asking, where are you getting these?

[00:09:23] Baked goods from and they would say, you know, it's boulangerie philippe that was the name of our business So from the commercial location, we opened our bakery and continued that wholesale business. So it was about 75 percent wholesale and maybe 25 percent retail with a little you know, walk in bakery and then lunch specials and, at the same time, continuing to do our wholesale.

[00:09:52] **David Crabill:** So you said that you started the home bakery around like 2000. How long was it before you actually opened up this retail location?

[00:10:02] **Allyson Grant:** Yeah. So to be more specific, I started baking out of my kitchen. I believe that was 2002. And by maybe mid 2003, we were opening. Our brick and mortar so pretty quickly under two years to go from our home to the retail location and you know, that's not typical. I would say that's not typical for any Baker to go quite that quickly. It was just my experience.

[00:10:34] **David Crabill:** Well, and as you said, you already had this entire customer base that needed pastries and you obviously already had all the skills to make them. So, Yeah, I mean, it was probably just jump started by that in some ways, you know, you're like, Oh, you know, I went from home bakery to brick and mortar in two years, but in many ways you'd been starting many years before that,

[00:10:55] **Allyson Grant:** Yeah, that's true. I mean, if you think about this niche that we had, which was French breakfast pastries, specifically that was something that I went to school for. I apprenticed in France. When we moved to Kansas from France, I knew that we would open a French pastry shop specifically for that niche. So, you know, that was years in the making to focus on the niche that we did and that's something in the early stages of Starting your home based micro bakery, cottage bakery, that's one of the, the big, you know, hurdles new bakers is finding their niche.

[00:11:37] I think that's one of the things that's so important about not comparing yourself to other bakers is that everybody's story is so different. And it's easy to look at a baker that is having success. And then compare yourself and think, I'm not doing it. It's not working for me. But really, you don't really know their whole story and what they've done leading up to that that has really prepared them for the success or, or the, lack of success that they're having.

[00:12:04] So, for that reason, you know, I like to tell my story, but I also like to tell my story with some explanation.

[00:12:13] **David Crabill:** So you opened up this retail location. It was like a dream come true. Take me forward. Where did it go from there?

[00:12:22] **Allyson Grant:** Oh, it was a dream come true. It was everything that I imagined it would be, and the community really embraced it. I just wanted to pinch myself every day. It was, it was just amazing. And then, you know, life happened, and all of this good fortune that I was having kind of came to a screeching halt because my husband at the time he did something that was very destructive to the business.

[00:12:49] So, maybe without getting into too many details, I would just say that he made some really bad choices that had legal consequences to them. And because of that, it really started to impact the bakery. The things that he did made it in the news. And then people were coming into the store to ask questions about who he was.

[00:13:12] And it started to impact the business and my own mental health really and so that was just a really hard time in my life because I felt like I was living my Best dream and my worst nightmare at the same time.

[00:13:28] **David Crabill:** So could you just expand on that a little bit more with, What that led to.

[00:13:35] **Allyson Grant:** Yeah, so, when we opened the store, I had one young daughter who was six. And then by the time this happened, I had had another baby. So I had a six year old and a newborn. And We were doing a really good job of sort of making it all work and fitting together, parenting and baking. And when this happened, he was just no longer a part of the business.

[00:14:02] And I was bringing my baby in, in the car seat and putting a little sleeping bag down on the floor of the kitchen.

[00:14:09] So my kids could sleep while I baked through the night and you know, did whatever it took to keep the business going. And I did, you know, I was able to continue to meet all of our wholesale accounts, and keep our store open, but it was more like the judgment from other people about the charges that my ex husband was facing.

[00:14:31] And that was a really, really hard time for me to continue to be proud of the work that I was doing and who I was and being a mom and running a business. so that kind of became too much for me. And I decided that it would be better for me. To sell the business than to continue to feel so, you know, rung out every day.

[00:14:57] And it was actually part of a really positive new step for me, which was really learning how to open and close businesses.

[00:15:07] And so. You know, one thing that most people don't ever want to think about is what's your exit strategy In your business and I have so much compassion for bakers who? Decide that they have to close their business that they're done For whatever your personal reason is, everything has a beginning and an end.

[00:15:26] And for me, that dream had an end. But I was really fortunate in that I found a buyer that really wanted a turnkey operation. They wanted to invest a certain amount of money and they wanted all the recipes they wanted, the training, they really just wanted their own little business. That I had done to create this business was really valuable to them because they didn't know how to do that.

[00:15:51] So I was able to walk away from that experience with my head held high and, and it felt like I had really learned from it. And it's still open to this day.

[00:16:03] **David Crabill:** Wow. That is really crazy. I can definitely understand why you had to move on. So, what was the next step in your journey?

[00:16:13] **Allyson Grant:** So I took a break from baking, and after I sold that, I felt like, what's next for me? You know, maybe I'm done baking, maybe I don't wanna bake anymore. And I kind of let that sit for a little while. I moved to a different city. I got a fresh start for myself and just really needed that break. And then.

[00:16:36] That sort of voice in my head was like, you're not done yet. So I remember driving by a vacant building and I thought, Oh my gosh, that's the cutest building I've ever seen. It is in the middle of a shopping mall. Center And It was about 600 square feet. There's benches all the way around it and had a little clock tower over the top of it and it had a little walk up window and I thought, Oh, that's just Destined to be a bakery. So I made a call to a landlord

and and that started the process of maybe I'll do one more store and I was sort of thinking about what I wanted to do this time because my background had been in artisan bread baking and and French pastries and I knew I needed to do something completely different to kind of distance myself from the experience that I had

[00:17:29] And do something more fun, more trendy,

[00:17:33] **Allyson Grant:** and at the same time, I Had been visiting family in California, which is where I was born and raised. And I noticed that the trends in California and New York kind of make their way to the Midwest eventually. And for this trip my family member was telling me about everybody waiting in line at this cupcake store and I thought, wow, people are standing in line to buy cupcakes.

[00:18:01] That's so interesting. And so the more I thought about it, the more I felt like, I think I'd like to try that because it's exactly what I was looking for.

[00:18:11] This little shop was perfect for a cupcake store. And I remember. Telling people what I was going to do. And they were saying like, what else are you going to put on the menu? Cause you can't have a whole store of just cupcakes. And I was like, yeah, I'm good. That's exactly what I'm going to do. I'm going to have a whole store of just cupcakes.

[00:18:28] and so that was early in the cupcake trend. It was 2006. Maybe even 2005 when I was thinking about that idea. And that's what I did. So, that bakery was called Daddy Cakes

[00:18:42] Because at this time, I had been in business for myself for a while and I had a little bit of an understanding about marketing, who my customers were, and really how to stand out. So I really. Designed this business as something that was different and it was just very fun, funky, lighthearted, flavor based, delicious cupcakes.

[00:19:13] **David Crabill:** So this was obviously not a very big trend when you started so it's kind of a risk and you said you're in a new city? So I assume you didn't like carrying over customers. What was it like when you opened up your store?

[00:19:27] **Allyson Grant:** So when I opened our store, I opened on November 1st, which was the day after Halloween. That was not a good strategy for an opening day because obviously nobody wants to buy a cupcake the day after

Halloween. But it took about a month or two for the word to get out then we started getting a lot of interest right away.

[00:19:50] I set the hours for that business based on my own schedule. I still had young kids. I needed to drive them to school. Then I could get into the bakery shop, do my baking. So I didn't have cupcakes until 11 a. m. And there was a line outside the building. I was starting with about 1030 people lined up, so it really took off.

[00:20:10] It just took about two or three months for the people in the city that I lived in to find it. And one of the things that I wanted to do early on for that business was to have a website. You know, now that's a given. Everybody has a website and you can build them yourself. you could do it on a weekend if you wanted to, but in 2006, it was a newer concept for small businesses to have websites.

[00:20:34] So that was one of my priorities was to have a website. And that really helped me with my exposure because everyday Rachel Ray magazine found us and asked if they could do an article on us. They did a story which was basically if you're going to travel from one end of the United States to another, which five cupcake stores would you stop at?

[00:20:58] And so they put my business, which was called Daddy Cakes. When I first opened, they put us on the map for Kansas. As this is where you need to stop. And so that really got us national exposure. And I thought we were busy before that happened, and then it really got crazy. And then the Food Network called and said, we're filming a brand new show.

[00:21:20] It's called Cupcake Wars, and we want you to be on the first season, first episode. So that experience really put my business on the map.

[00:21:33] **David Crabill:** Wow, that is crazy I mean, I think most listeners probably are familiar with Cupcake Wars and that you were on the very first episode of the first season is really crazy. Well, so what was it like being in the Cupcake Wars?

[00:21:49] **Allyson Grant:** It was a really, really interesting experience, you know, the hard thing about reality TV, number one, is it is reality and it's not reality, so it's like, you really are in a competition. That's the first part. And then it's not what you see as a viewer. So to me, that was really challenging because I take a lot of pride in my baking.

[00:22:14] I feel like my quality is really high and you know, I just wouldn't go and compete on something if I didn't really have a very polished professional product, but then there's the, it's produced for TV. And, you know, for example, each team has a producer on set. So there's four teams competing.

[00:22:32] And then you, your team, have a whole production crew that works with you. And so they would say, we want you to get in an argument. It was my brother who was my baking partner. We want you to get in an argument about the lemon curd isn't tart enough. And that really bothered me because everything is a recipe.

[00:22:52] It's a formulated recipe where I've already worked that out. I wouldn't not know how tart a lemon curd was. So. You know, you have to do that. It's acting. It's produced for TV. And when you do watch shows like that and there's always some tension, that's produced. And so for me, that element, I felt it wasn't the professional standard that I hold myself to.

[00:23:18] But I also understood this is entertainment, this is for TV. But then the judges really do judge you. You really are getting judged. So they make you, let's have this mistake happen. You're going to spill something, you know, whatever, but then you're going to put that cupcake out there and they really are going to judge you for it.

[00:23:35] And so I felt like that was a little bit challenging because it's not the environment that we're used to baking in. It's not your kitchen. It's not your oven. You know, it's under a time crunch. And so it was really challenging.

[00:23:49] **David Crabill:** So would you say it's an experience you would do again?

[00:23:55] **Allyson Grant:** Yeah. You know, as hard as it was for me, because it was really brokenhearted when I didn't win. And I really felt like I disappointed my customers. they knew I was filming a show. I really couldn't disclose the details, but at the end of the day, I had to come back home to my shop and I couldn't talk about the results until the show aired.

[00:24:15] And I really felt like I disappointed people and it was the exact opposite. People were so supportive. They were proud of the town, you know, they were proud of being put on the map for something that they thought was, you know, fun. And so it was just, it was a great experience and I would do it again.

[00:24:36] I've been asked to do several more but For right now, I'm focusing on something a little bit different.

[00:24:43] **David Crabill:** Yeah, I mean, I think just even being good enough to appear on the show is a win in and of itself. Now, you had said that you initially were called Daddy Cakes. So, what changed with the business name?

[00:24:58] **Allyson Grant:** Yeah, that's a great question. I'm glad you asked that because when we went on the Food Network, we were called Daddy Cakes. With that national exposure, it also called attention to our name. And although I registered with my secretary of state, when I opened the business, I didn't trademark the name because I never really thought I was going to get that big. And so. After that national exposure, a company called Daddy Cakes that makes a pancake mix in California asked me to basically cease and desist, and You know, I was actually legally using my name.

[00:25:37] He was legally using his name, but it was trademarked, which meant that basically in a nutshell, I could only use my name in Kansas. And anytime I wanted to go larger than that, I would be infringing on his copyright. So I decided to rename my business so that I could grow it. And then I had to look for a name that I could copyright or trademark rather.

[00:26:03] And it actually was hard to find a name to trademark because at this time there were more cupcake stores than when I started. So I ended up choosing the name of my vanilla cupcake. Billy Vanilly. And if you remember the Music group from the 90s called Milli Vanilli. It was sort of a pun on that group.

[00:26:27] And so when I rebranded the business, I was able to trademark the name. Billy Vanilly, I actually had to contact the band members, the one remaining band member to get permission for any trademark infringement or confusion.

[00:26:43] And then we became Billy Vanilly.

[00:26:47] **David Crabill:** Well, so you had this whole rebrand process and you know, you're trying to grow where did things go from there?

[00:26:56] **Allyson Grant:** So when I was on Cupcake Wars, I had one store and it was already doing really well. Cupcake Wars only made things more successful and the trend was still growing. So I opened my second store. in Kansas after a year of having two stores, I then opened my third store.

[00:27:18] So I had a chain of three cupcake stores and my goal for the business was to franchise it and then to, you know, allow people to open a Billy Vanilly franchise in any city that they wanted. That's really the driving force behind having a name that was. You know, free and clear

[00:27:38] **David Crabill:** I feel like a lot of food entrepreneurs really like to control their business and the idea of like Franchising or letting other people start businesses is a little bit intimidating. Why do you feel like you were compelled to go super big with this idea?

[00:27:59] **Allyson Grant:** I really felt like this was a business model that was profitable. you can't go from one store to two stores to three stores without knowing your numbers inside and out. You know, even for one store to be successful, you really do have to understand how much does it cost you to make your products?

[00:28:20] You know, how much profit do you make after all of your bills are paid? You know, what is left? You just have to be really clear on your numbers. And, this model of making cupcakes from scratch that tasted amazing that anybody could do. Because when I had three stores, I couldn't physically be in all of those stores at the same time, but we have the exact same menu.

[00:28:44] If you bought, you know, a Billy Vanilly, vanilla cupcake in one store and you bought it in the other store, they would taste the same. That was really our goal. I could remove myself from the process because you know, that was what I was looking for was that level of consistency to me it felt like the natural next step, like if I don't have to be involved in operations and I can just be involved in the growth of the business, then why not let somebody step in.

[00:29:11] So in, in my other two stores, I did have people stepping in and doing basically what I would do. So that for me was sort of the logical next step and it was a really valuable experience for me to learn and I think it'd be good. Take away for somebody who has a home based bakery as well. And that is that, you know, you have to be able to step out of your business sometimes.

[00:29:34] And so, we tend to want to give as much as we can with this unlimited resource of time, but time is your biggest asset in a business. And if you are going all in and you're burning the candle at both ends, just to get your sales up and to make money that's not sustainable. So to create something where.

[00:29:57] Okay, this can run. This is doable. Um, And I have systems in place that make things easier for me. They're more efficient, you know, that type of thing. For me, that was a good takeaway from what I was doing, which was to really learn how to. grow a business in that aspect.

[00:30:16] So, you know, why did I end up wanting to franchise? Because I felt like it was a really solid business model.

[00:30:24] **David Crabill:** And I'd imagine that at this stage you're dealing with investors.

[00:30:29] **Allyson Grant:** Yeah, that was really the next step. I had a business partner who. was going to come on at the franchise level. So we were working together while I was the sole owner of the business, but it was like, when we go to franchise, then we would be partners. And then he was a lawyer. So he really handled all of the legal side of things.

[00:30:52] So that was really the stage that we were at when the cupcake trend started to die down.

[00:30:59] **David Crabill:** Okay, so it sounds like the trend was waning about the same time that you were really thinking of going big.

[00:31:07] **Allyson Grant:** Yeah. The trend was waning and for me to open three stores and build each store You know I had had enough experience at this point that I knew how much it cost me to open a new store And I financed all of it on my own and one of the ways you do that is you offer the bank Collateral for the loan that you're asking for And so each store was collateralized against One prior store.

[00:31:32] So my third store just never performed. We did so much research and marketing and looked at who our customers might be. It was a small college town and everything looked right. Everything looked like exactly what we knew we wanted. And, you know, for the ideal climate for a cupcake store, and it just didn't perform that way.

[00:31:55] So the sales in that store were always low, and it was really pulling from the other stores. The two other stores were actually doing really well. But there was really no exit strategy there. You would think I would have learned my lesson with the French bakery and having an exit strategy. And, in the cupcake stores, that was really what ended up happening. My third store had collateralized assets from another store and then that store had collateralized

assets from the other store. So, on paper, two stores looked like they were doing really well. But in order to, you know, think about closing one store, it had so many financial repercussions to another store that it just really didn't seem viable.

[00:32:41] So at that point I decided that I was going to just close all three. And that was a tough decision. That was a really tough decision, but I didn't have any optimistic models of what was happening in the cupcake industry, I guess you could say, at the time to really give me the confidence that that was going to continue.

[00:33:05] So, uh, you know, I closed the stores and again, I had this little pause in what I was doing and thinking about where's my baking journey taking me now. And right at that time, I, suffered a really, really bad uh, leg break One that took me more than a year to recover from and so I couldn't bake I couldn't go into the kitchen I was in a wheelchair and You know most of my time was spent in a recliner with my leg up so I felt so disconnected from the baking world that I Got a laptop and I you know watch some YouTube videos on how to start a website And I just started blogging about recipes and I think one of the first blog posts that I wrote was how to price your baked goods.

[00:33:54] And readers were just asking me questions about pricing and selling and marketing and how did you find your customers and teaching was just so natural. extension of what I was doing on the blog. So I started vlogging in 2019. And as I sat there recovering from multiple surgeries, I finally got to the point where I could get back in the kitchen again.

[00:34:20] And, and I still felt like, you know what, I've connected with a group of bakers that I, I was, so happy to meet and um, it just sort of naturally grew from there. So now on the blog, I share the recipes from my pastry shop, from my cupcake shop and how my customers loved the recipes that they asked for over and over again.

[00:34:41] And I really talk a lot about marketing. and selling because that is the area where people ask the most questions and they want the most help.

[00:34:53] **David Crabill:** Yeah, I feel like a lot of entrepreneurs are very protective of their recipes. How did you get to the point where you decided I'm just going to give them all away?

[00:35:04] **Allyson Grant:** I have always believed that it's the baker who makes the recipe unique and it's not so much the recipe itself. Because I've seen so

many times where people will make my recipe and it's so different from the way I make it that I don't feel like a recipe is really proprietary.

[00:35:24] I think what people love is you and your version of the recipe and everything that you do to bring that to life. So I have the spirit of helping other bakers, to me that's more important than the buttercream recipe that made me famous on Cupcake Wars. So I would much rather see somebody else succeed.

[00:35:47] I've had the. So many of the successes that I only dreamed about, you know, opening my own bakery and being on the Food Network were two things that I thought I would never achieve. And I did that. So I feel like why not pay it forward?

[00:36:02] Once I opened my business, I thought it was all about the recipe, but what I learned was, you know, I really had to have this learning mindset for the things I didn't know. I didn't know very much about pricing.

[00:36:14] **Allyson Grant:** I didn't know very much about marketing in the early days, but I just created this sort of thing. Rinse and repeat like recipes basically for running a business. And so that's really what I focus on teaching now. So aside from the recipes, which, you know, you can get on my blog or on any of my social media channels for bakers who want to really learn how to do the business of running a bakery.

[00:36:39] That's what I teach inside my program.

[00:36:42] **David Crabill:** Yeah. So, I mean, you have this, program now called The Better Baker Club. and

[00:36:47] It's so interesting and fascinating to think about your story. I mean, you've had so many crushing blows, you know, that for many people, would just be the end of their journey or story. I mean, you were laid off from a long baking career. You know, you had that initial bakery and then the mishap with your husband and then that closed.

[00:37:07] And then of course the closing, all three cupcake shops, and then. This leg injury, which, you know, doesn't even enable you to bake as you used to. What do you think has kept you going through the years and kept you coming back to baking?

[00:37:25] **Allyson Grant:** I really feel like I was born a baker. It's like I never really had a choice whether I wanted to bake or not. It's a blessing or a curse.

I'm not sure. I just. in my blood, you know, so I guess I always felt like I just had unfinished business that I hadn't really done and seen everything that I needed to do in this space.

[00:37:46] And I guess we'll know it when I get there, but I'm not there yet. I just really, love seeing other bakers. Have these wins, they'll come into my programs or they'll start, you know In one of my Facebook communities and say like, I'm 50 years old. I've had my career. I just love to bake and I would love to start my own business. Is there anything you can do to help me and then fast forward a year and a half and they're like, oh my gosh Allyson I am living my dream.

[00:38:16] I'm so happy. I'm doing the thing that I never Thought I could. And to me that is such an amazing feeling that I just wanna help more people to do that because I know, like for me, you know, when you said, how did you do that? How did you bounce back from all those crushing blows? You know, a lot of those.

[00:38:36] Moments where I needed an income, I never had an opportunity to say, Oh, well, it was a low sales month, you know, I had a hustle in me because I was a single mom to two young kids, and I needed a paycheck every month. And so I had that drive from day one. That it was not an option to not be a success.

[00:39:00] **David Crabill:** You said that you were born a baker and I have to ask this. When I was researching you and your business it came across a page that says that you have worked for Baker University. Is that true?

[00:39:15] **Allyson Grant:** Yeah. I currently do work there part time. Baker University asked me if I would manage their social media, I said, Yeah, absolutely. I'd love to. And it's just a coincidence that it's called Baker University.

[00:39:28] **David Crabill:** It's so funny because when I came across that, I was like, Oh, Baker University, like, haven't heard of that. That must be some kind of e learning website or something for bakers. And then I was like, wait, no, this is an actual legit university that it is just too. So I really do feel like baking must be in your blood because it just seems to find you a step on the way. It's pretty funny. So, social media, I definitely wanted to talk to you about social media. I know you're a social media strategist. I see you've gone viral on TikTok many times.

[00:39:58] Can you share some social media strategies for the new or existing Baker.

[00:40:06] **Allyson Grant:** Okay. Yes. I love social media. I think the first tip for new bakers is to pick a platform that you love. So find a platform that you like. You like the way the algorithm works. You like the type of content that people create there someplace that you feel comfortable and start there.

[00:40:29] some social media platforms lend themselves better to the type of business that you want to run. And if you're trying to attract local people in your community, then, you know, TikTok might not be for you. So really think about like, where are my people hanging out? The other thing is that it is so important to be yourself. And just like I said, you know, comparing yourself to other bakers, it's not really helpful because you don't know their whole journey. The thing about social media. Nowadays people really respond to things like real unfiltered, unedited, honesty, you know, so you don't have to wait until you've made it to start sharing on social media.

[00:41:12] You don't have to do your hair and makeup and set your kitchen a certain way before you hit a record on your phone. Just flip your camera forward facing and hit record and do what you normally do and talk to the camera or, you know, buy yourself a simple little tripod and just start because your journey is what people like.

[00:41:36] So when they see the progress that you've made and the change over time in your business, they feel so invested in you that that journey is what did it for them, not just showing up perfect.

[00:41:49] **David Crabill:** So I know you've chosen TikTok as your platform. and what have you found has worked well on TikTok?

[00:41:56] **Allyson Grant:** For me, for the type of content that I make, which is a little bit different than a cottage baker. Uh, But for me, what works on Tik Tok is. It has to have a good visual hook. The first like three seconds of your video has to be something that changes. Like it's got to be like, here's a gorgeous loaf of bread.

[00:42:17] And then it's going to cut to me talking about it. So it's kind of in the editing. You want to put like the money shot right at the front. If you are making a video of something, or you want to show your setup at the farmer's market, you have to look at that video and find, like, what is the most eye-catching, like three seconds of it.

[00:42:40] And then edit that part out. Of where it naturally occurs in the video and put it right at the front. So you kind of stop the scroll and get people to watch for a minute. So I like to have a visual hook. And then audio hook. So sometimes what I'm saying Doesn't necessarily match what you're seeing, because I want what I'm saying to be some words that the algorithm might pick up.

[00:43:07] Like, I do a lot of sourdough bread on TikTok right now. So, I just did one this morning. I think I just published it today for a shelf stable sourdough pancake mix, so the first clip is just a stack of buttery drippy pancakes and my forks going through it.

[00:43:26] so that's my visual hook. And then my audio hook, what you're hearing me say is Are you looking for things to do with your sourdough discard? So sourdough discard is what I want to kind of get people to get the algorithm to spread the word on. But then what you see is a stack of pancakes.

[00:43:44] So that's how I use tick tock to sort of get more views if I give it lots of keywords to lock in on. So for a home based baker, it might be the word micro bakery or cottage bakery or farmer's market. You know, you have to think about the way you talk about your business as what would somebody search in that search bar?

[00:44:09] What, what would they be looking for? They might be looking for how to sell at the farmer's market, or they might be looking for what other cottage bakeries are doing, but they might call it a micro bakery. So that's a little tip about how TikTok works for me. But really the thing is to just kind of show up as who you are.

[00:44:30] **David Crabill:** I know you. know a lot more about social media. We just don't have the time to get to it, but I know you have a guide. Can you share a little bit about that and how people can get it?

[00:44:40] **Allyson Grant:** Yeah. So I put together this guide, which is sort of a blueprint for what you should say about your business on social media. I put together a template. I put pictures of a real Baker's posts. So it's visual. You know, if you're somebody who learns by, by seeing. That's really helpful. It's step by step what to put on social media to start letting people know That you are taking orders for your business and you can find it on my website. It's a better baker club.

[00:45:11] com forward slash social, and then you can download a copy of that. And you'll get to walk through the steps of how to get started on social media.

[00:45:23] **David Crabill:** Awesome. And I also know that for someone who maybe isn't ready to invest in your program, you also have a Facebook group. Can you share a little bit about that?

[00:45:33] **Allyson Grant:** Yeah, my Facebook group is called Home Bakery Business Tips. And in that group, we really focus on the business side of getting your Cottage bakery up and running. So I have resources to get started with your pricing to get started with marketing. But honestly most people join and they say like I just don't know where to start. So we're gonna walk you through the steps if you need to do this and this and these orders Just to kind of get you going from there.

[00:46:06] You know, there's All kinds of different options for you. If you want more information or if you want to really take part in the chat in the community, there's so many bakers in there who have experiences to share, pictures to share and just inspiration and a sense of community. So it's specifically for bakers who are thinking about or are already selling their baked goods.

[00:46:35] **David Crabill:** Yeah, I know that group has 13, 000 members and is a great place to find more information, but for that person who. Comes in and says I am starting. I don't know where to start. What should I do? What are some of your top tips for them?

[00:46:52] **Allyson Grant:** So my top tips for them, if you're just starting out, your very first step, obviously, is to learn your state requirements for what you can sell, where you can sell, and what licenses, permits, and, you know, any type of regulation that your state has. So that's going to help you to really understand what type of business you could have.

[00:47:15] I think it's really important to keep an open mind. So if you have always made these gourmet cakes, And you say, I want to get started in, you know, selling these and then you go to read your cottage food laws and you realize I live in a state where I can't use any butter or cream in my frosting. I guess it's out for me.

[00:47:37] Just stay open minded and do your research first and find out what your state allows you to sell. And then. Take it from there.

[00:47:46] Then the next step is to start looking at your menu and your pricing. Pricing is something that I could talk about all day long. I love, love, love talking about pricing. So the biggest mistake that I see bakers making is they're not taking into account how their expenses affect their pricing. So if you're selling by porch pickup, then you might not have the overhead of somebody who's selling at a farmer's market. You have to pay fees to be in the farmer's market.

[00:48:20] You have to have insurance in most cases. And those are costs that they should be recuperating in their pricing.

[00:48:28] So you definitely want to make a list of all the recurring expenses that your business has each month, any apps that you pay for, any fees for your vendor events, anything like that, and then factor that into your pricing. The other thing you want to think about is obviously you have to cover your ingredient costs, your packaging costs.

[00:48:49] And the labor that it takes you to make the recipe, but I kind of look at it as like a gas gauge for your profit on the low end. Like your tank is empty. That is where you're covering your expenses and you're making a little profit. That would be like where wholesale falls in.

[00:49:08] When you decide to sell wholesale, you're not going to make as much profit because the person who's buying it from you has to mark it up a little bit. And so they need some of your profit and then your tank is full where you are an expert in your field. You have a really good reputation. Your skill level is really high and you know that you're going to sell out.

[00:49:31] That's like the tank is full. That's like the higher markup range. Generally say like 30 percent for the wholesale up to 50 percent profit for like the highly skilled in high demand bakers. And you can choose which margin works for you based on where you're at in your journey. And I always tell bakers in my program, your menu is not your resume. It is not everything that you know how to make under the sun.

[00:49:57] You want to just pick a small curated list of what you're doing right now. And it can always change later on. And in today's climate with the, you know, home baking businesses taking off the way they have, it's super important to think about who your customer is and what they want. And as soon as you know that there's this need that's not really being filled, maybe it's organic bread. Then when you start to talk on social media you know who you're talking to. You're talking to the people who want organic sourdough bread and that

makes your voice stand out louder than if you're trying to talk to everybody on the internet. So that's kind of my tips for just getting started.

[00:50:46] **David Crabill:** knowing who your customer is and knowing what they want is obviously something that you have to do but when you're starting out how do you actually do that? It sounds like good advice, but like how do you actually implement that?

[00:51:00] **Allyson Grant:** I think the best way to implement it is to kind of think about the one thing that's doing really well and then take a look at who's buying it from you. Is there anything that you can glean from the type of customer that you're getting? So maybe, you know, it's the cake pops and you're customizing them for parties or something like that. If those are the ones that you're getting the most orders for, then maybe you want to go in the direction of offering custom treats for special events, that kind of thing.

[00:51:32] The other thing that's really important is to test your niche. So you might think I want to be a freshly milled grain. Cause that's what I love and I don't see anybody else doing it. So that's what I'm going to go for. You want to test the niche and start to look around and see, is there anybody else doing it?

[00:51:54] Are there customers asking for it? Is anybody buying it? Because you can have an original idea that you think is You know, this isn't being done. So therefore I'm going to do it and I'll get all of the traffic and the business for this. But it might just be that that's not a strong enough niche. There's just not enough people out there looking for that.

[00:52:15] So you want to find that sweet spot between it's not a saturated niche and it's not a non-existent niche.

[00:52:23] One thing that's important to remember is it takes a baker's A while to find their niche. It doesn't come right away. And in the beginning, it's okay to try a lot of stuff and to see what works, that's okay. That's how you find where your niche is.

[00:52:38] And even though you might not know your niche, it's okay to start selling and just get out there and do it. And then remember to just Look at the facts, what sold, what didn't, what are people asking for? And once you're out there and actually selling, you might start to see what your local community Needs and what, what the customers want.

[00:53:02] **David Crabill:** I also know you teach a lot about pop ups markets and setting up. What are some of your top tips there?

[00:53:10] **Allyson Grant:** for pop ups and markets, I think that one of the biggest question marks that bakers have is how much should I prepare for this event? And you know, if you over bake and it doesn't sell, then you've really eaten into all your profits, right? Cause you made some money on what you sell, but then you have all this stuff that didn't sell.

[00:53:28] that you're losing money on. So my first tip for that is to have some way of gauging how much foot traffic you're going to get and how much you might potentially sell and have a realistic amount. for what you think you're going to sell there. Base it on some things like measurables, the past year's performance, or, you know, how many people come to this event.

[00:53:54] So that you don't over bake and you don't under bake. That's the goal. The second tip is to have a plan for what you're going to do with any product that you have left over. I like to do a flash sale the next day and, you know, really like, Continue to sell that product. Most people have baked goods that have more than a one day shelf life. So if that is you and your products are still good for multiple days, don't discount it. Just keep selling it.

[00:54:23] So even though it didn't sell at the pop up, they continued to sell it the next day. One of the bakers in my community does this mystery bag the next day, which is so fun. She numbers the bags and you know, everybody calls out which bag they want on her platform. It's really fun. It's a great way to sell her leftovers.

[00:54:45] But in terms of your actual event, I would say that repetition builds confidence. If you're feeling like, you know, my booth isn't quite right. And I don't feel like I'm a hundred percent there in terms of knowing what all to pack and to bring and how to prepare. Just know that the more often that you do these things, the more confident that you're going to get at it.

[00:55:08] **David Crabill:** You obviously have taught a lot of new entrepreneurs? Are there certain qualities that you see in entrepreneurs where you feel like, wow, this person's really going to be successful?

[00:55:21] **Allyson Grant:** Yeah, I do. I can usually tell when somebody is going to do well. Usually the members who join bakers, who joined my program, who I could tell are going to do really well, set aside time each week to learn.

[00:55:35] It's okay to try something new that you don't know about. It's okay to step outside your comfort zone. But if you have this learning attitude, like I am going to set aside one hour a week for myself and I'm going to learn how to price my baked goods.

[00:55:50] That type of attitude really gets you the results that you're seeking the fastest. Also think a little bit of grit. Like you just really know that you want this and you're going to do whatever it takes to get it.

[00:56:05] And it's okay that people are not all like that. Some people just want to, you know, break even on their hobby. And that's okay too, of bakers of all different types in the program, but the ones who really find amazing success are the ones that, number one, need it, and number two, want it badly.

[00:56:27] **David Crabill:** Well, I know. You have so much more to share that we don't have time for and obviously people can either join your Facebook group or join your membership or you have a lot of information just available on your resources. What are your future plans?

[00:56:42] Like What do you see your next few years looking like?

[00:56:46] **Allyson Grant:** Well I've really, I'm kind of torn in two directions right now, I love coaching bakers and I love blogging about recipes. I plan to do both those things for the foreseeable future. I plan to slow down a little bit. Um, I'm not quite at retirement age yet, but it's on the horizon and I'll probably, you know, continue my coaching and my blogging until I feel that it's time to really kind of slow down and move on to the next stage of my life.

[00:57:25] My husband is retiring in a couple of years and I know that we're going to be doing some traveling. One of the things that I love to do when traveling is go and review bakeries around the world. So like I said, I was born a baker. I never stopped thinking about baking and I've accepted that.

[00:57:43] I'm okay with that.

[00:57:44] And I know that my story is different from a lot of the bakers that I help. You know, I was really lucky to have a fast trajectory to success. And not everybody looks like that.

[00:57:58] And that is okay. it's all about doing what you love and finding a way to kind of monetize it and make it work for you. So, you know, just because my

story looked like I went from cottage bakery to commercial kitchen to retail bakery, I don't think that that is the path for everybody.

[00:58:19] **David Crabill:** Well thank you so much for coming on and sharing all of that advice with us. I know that listeners are going to get a ton of value out of this episode. Now if people would like to learn more about you, where can they find you or how can they reach out?

[00:58:34] **Allyson Grant:** People can go to betterbakerclub.com for, you know, the social media download. I'm on the Better Baker Club for all platforms. You know, if anybody wants to connect, I would love for them to just pop in my comments and say, "Hey, I heard you on the Forrager Podcast."

[00:58:53] I will give you a special hello. I just really love meeting new bakers and love learning about how you found me and what your goals are. So, just, pop in, drop into my comments and say hi.

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

[00:59:13] **Allyson Grant:** You're welcome. It's great to be here. I really enjoyed chatting with you.

[00:59:19] **David Crabill:** That wraps up another episode of the Forrager podcast.

[00:59:23] For more information about this episode, go to forrager.com/podcast/136.

[00:59:30] And if you are enjoying this podcast, please take a quick moment right now and 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 help others like you find this podcast.

[00:59:41] And finally, if you're thinking about selling your own 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.

[00:59:53] Thanks for listening, and I'll see you in the next episode.