Introduction and guest background

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I was like, You have a gift and you are going to be able to go out there and help people. More patients, more authority, and more freedom. Welcome to another episode of Doctor Talks.

I'm your host, Brett Gregory, the founder where we are democratizing the creator economy for doctors and we've got a great show for you today. And with Dr.

Jo Watkins, she's the Founder of the Startup Support Surgery, which is both a podcast and an online program. We're going to hear from her about how she went from a family physician general practitioner to her own entrepreneur and is now helping health professionals go from being a health professional to an entrepreneur.

we're gonna go through the three critical shifts for building a successful personal brand and business. Dr. Joe Watkins, welcome to the program Oh, thank you, Brett.

Thank you so much for having me. It's a pleasure to be here. Thanks for being here, so tell us a little bit about your background and your journey. How did you go from being a physician, general practitioner, to your own entrepreneur?

Well, it is a long story, as these stories often are, but I'm based over in the UK. I am based in Wales. trained as a GP and qualified as GP, and became a partner in a practice, as was expected of me.

probably 18, 19 years ago. It was very much I'd been on a treadmill, I was from a medical family. I had always wondered whether I have something else in me, and I always wonder whether there was other stuff that I might do, but I very focused on jumping through the hoops as we often are in the world of training as a doctor.

I became a GP partner and as soon as I become a partner, I found myself looking for those other things that I could do alongside my clinical work. So I was really interested in other potential ways that could expand my training, my learning and reach and help other people in a different way.

I started off with things like acupuncture. Acupunctur I trained to do some Botox because that seemed to be what lots of medics were doing outside of…

Absolutely. And I just tried my hand at lots of things. I also did a lot of intrapreneurial activities within the practice. So I took the Practice website and revamped that.

Tried to change the way we did training. You know, I trained as a GP trainer, helping younger doctors coming through. so I tried to do as much as possible.

From GP to entrepreneur

But I think it was when I was doing all of these things and kind of looking around me at all these opportunities, one of my partners, GP partners at the time, said to me, you know, You're quite entrepreneurial.

And I'd never really heard that term. Certainly I've never been described as that before. And it was around that time that I had two children, went back after maternity leave, and I started thinking, I know there's something else.

And actually, retrospectively, I wish I'd had somebody like me around to talk to at that point, because I think what I

needed to do was was sound all these ideas off with somebody else that kind of understood what business was going to look like.

Because the first business I really invested my time in was actually a breakfast cereal. So I started making a granola in the kitchen. It was called Baby Legs Granola and it became a huge thing over the following three years.

That was my first ever proper business. And what was it called? What Leg's Granol? Bendy Legs granola. And it was just the most magical, intense marketing, branding, business lesson you could possibly have.

It was really fast forwarded my learning because at the beginning I just had a product which was my cousin in Canada makes this beautiful gridola. I bought it home, couldn't find anything in the shops here, started making it.

And then I started thinking, well, I could try the market. I started very small. I learned everything I could possibly learn, wore all the hats, did all of the things and grew what was really quite a substantial cottage industry from my first proper business that I did.

And what happened with that business? Well, that business basically took over our lives because what I didn't realize when I was entering into business is I did understand concepts like outsourcing, like, you know, how to get somebody else to make your product.

Somebody told me right early on at the beginning, no food business has ever been successfully grown by making the product yourself. And advice like this was dropping into my world, but I wasn't taking it.

I just going hell for leather, making it out of the kitchen. Eventually, I was pregnant with number three, surrounded by oats and seeds, baking till midnight, supplying all over the country, online shop, farm shops, winning awards everywhere.

I got 38 weeks pregnant and got a call from Amazon, and they wanted to stock as much of it as I could possibly provide. Wow. Very popular. Yeah, I realized I just wasn't set up for it.

And I kind of froze, actually, retrospectively. I did not know what to do. It would be very different now because of my lived experience. But at that point, so I mothballed, kept hold of the brand.

I still haven't given the recipe to anyone, it's still there. It's a closely guarded secret. But you know what, I realized that it wasn't giving me what I really, really was wanting and striving for.

I was not aligned with my values. What were you really wanting in striving? Well, I think what I really wanted was the ability to be around for my children, the availability to have some flexibility.

The time freedom. Yeah. To be geographically independent, to able to off on the holidays with them, To able be present while working from wherever I could be.

I've subsequently realized that I want to work from my computer wherever in the world. You want the freedom to live and work from anywhere. And is that common for your doctors who are your health coaching clients?

Building the first business and learning the hard way

Do they also want that kind of freedom? Yes. I think a lot of people aspire to that sort of freedom, but don't really even know where to start. But it's much more talked about now.

Back then, it wasn't something that anyone ever really described. It was something I only got into about eight, nine years ago. And I it is glamorized.

it made to seem much easier than it actually is. Oh, yeah. But ultimately I can plan my days around school runs, around holidays, and around assemblies that I want to go to.

I organize my time and that's the biggest success for me is being able to manage a business and young kids at the moment for this season of my life until the next season when they're off doing their own thing and who knows then.

Yeah. So, okay. Let's talk about from health professional to entrepreneur. You mentioned there are three critical mindset shifts for building that successful personal brand and business.

A lot of the health professionals who are listening dream about building not personal brands, but most of them never make the leap. What is the biggest mindset difference between being a health profession and an entrepreneur?

I think the biggest thing is the need for an experimental approach to what you do. I thing for very good reasons within our work as healthcare professionals, we follow guidelines, there are strict rules as to we do or don't do and there is a right way and a wrong way of doing things and we have to be guided by that when we go out there and offer treatments to people and help people.

Within business, there is no one right way of doing things, particularly in the online space. It's not a membership, a core. Should it be a cohort, should it a low ticket, high ticket?

All of this language that gets banded about. There's no right one way to do it. And I think you have to be experimental and start before you're ready.

And what I see repeatedly in healthcare professionals that I work with is this reluctance in case it's not going to work out and in the case that it is not the right thing to do.

So, I think being able to take that step into this whole, like, I don't know how this is going to work out. I dont know if this even going be something that I'm going enjoy doing. I didn't what the end point necessarily is, but Im prepared to go all in and give this a go with the right support around me.

And I am going try it and test it, and see. That applies to products, but it also applies on posting on social media or posting in LinkedIn or gathering your audience or doing a talk or an event.

You've just got to give it a go. And so many people need that hand holding to do that. So I think that's a really big important thing. So that's the big first mindset shift is that having that experimental mindsets, like going from the health professional to the entrepreneur, having an experimental mindset, being okay.

What I really loved that you said is being OK with starting before you're ready. That is one of the biggest things that I think hold doctors and health professionals back from starting on their entrepreneurial journey is I have to be ready before I start.

No, actually, you have start before you feel ready. And that is really true. That is something that, I sometimes hardwired into themselves, but that doesn't mean you can't learn that mindset shift.

Why freedom and flexibility mattered

And do you have any customer stories of any of your customers who are able to make that leap, that mind set shift that you would be able share? Yeah, absolutely.

I've got a few really. The best example for this is a wonderful doctor called Dr. Ruth Machin. She was a radiologist. Somebody who specifically looked at people's hearts when they died.

So she was cardiac radiologists. And she had to retire early through ill health because she has problems with dry eyes and corneal issues as a result of spending so much time looking at x-rays.

So when I first met her, she was very low in confidence. She was not sure how she going to be able to to actually bring something like her health coaching that she was doing, her Health Coaching training.

And she's like, how am I actually going to bring this into the real world? How am i going make this a thing? And we had a first conversation, I remember exactly where I was when we spoke about it.

She was a bit like I get it, but You know, it doesn't, you know we talked about the fact that she could offer help in lots of different ways. She could run one, do one-to-one, she can do courses.

she was very, very much wanted to do group programs because she couldn't spend that much time on Zoom. And she also didn't have a huge network. support network around her, she hasn't had her own children, and she doesn't have huge numbers of entrepreneurial friends.

So there was initially a lot of encouragement required for her to say to her look, you have this amazing gift. She's a very vibrant, very cheeky, sarcastic, wonderful lady.

I was like, You have a gift and you are going to be able to go out there and help people. And she just It was almost like she didn't quite believe what I was saying, but she was prepared a few years ago.

And she came on board the program, she did the modules, She attended all of the live trainings. She connected with other people in the group. she supported other.

People she she. Was not afraid to put herself forward for things like I do hot seat coaching and people can submit their questions. He wasn't afraid. To do any of that.

It really showed because of her progress. And then we did a, after she'd been in the program for about nine months, she decided to pivot completely into a different niche.

She took a bit of a break because I think it was a lot, everything was, was feeling like a law for her. And, then I did her masterclass where I had somebody who was YouTube.

you know, a YouTube expert came on and did a masterclass. And she put in the comments as we were talking, she said, oh, I've always wondered whether I should start a Youtube channel.

The guy that was doing the talk kind of got in touch with her afterwards and sent her a little message. He said go on, and he just gave her little nudge again.

That's all she needed. She just thought, do you what, that's what I'm going to do.

Mindset shift: start before you're ready

So she puts some red lipstick on. got her script out, and she started recording YouTube videos. It wasn't perfect, but she just did it. She got into a cadence of doing it regularly.

After about three months, she had a viral… I might get the figures wrong, I think she has something like 10,000 views in 24 hours or something. Fabulous.

Yeah, yeah. And she has had such huge results. She's just messaged today to say that, you know, we're talking like a year later, she's Just opened a founding members program.

she just sold all her slots in like off one webinar and she is flying and She is fantastic and now helps post menopausal women with nutrition. Specifically, she does amazing videos.

You'll find her on YouTube. She's fabulous. But she didn't feel ready. she recognized it and she did it anyway. I love that. That's a great story. Great success story of a doctor clinician, practitioner, radiologist, going to an entrepreneur and truly starting before she was ready.

I imagine she didn't begin thinking, oh, I'm going help post-menopausal women with these particular issues. That

came out through the process. So you don't have to know what your niche is.

A lot of people will imagine themselves saying, hey, I only want to do these great group programs. But maybe that's not where you start out. Maybe you started out with one-to-one coaching because that is a much easier path of least resistance to get started.

Great story. It was about men's health to start with as well. Oh, yeah. And I think you're right, that whole, I everybody sees again, it's that everything you see on Instagram tells you what you need as a group program.

When people haven't done, It's almost like missing the one-to-one work is actually missing that gold that comes out in those conversations. That's kind of the fundamental of if you want to grow to do group programs, if want do do groups sales, you need to get good at one-on-one sales first.

If you wanted to group coaching, and you needed to good one on one coaching first, that's the foundation that you're going to need be really good delivering those.

So what are some of signs that someone is truly entrepreneurial or ready to be an entrepreneur versus simply being frustrated or burned out in their current practice?

Yeah, this is something I'm really mindful of, and I am very careful when I initially speak to people that they're not jumping. I describe it as literally jumping from the frying pan into the fire.

Particularly in the UK, there's a lot of frustration around the system here, the fact that we don't have any time with our patients, When I do my clinics, I was in clinic yesterday, and I'll be in the clinic tomorrow, so I have 10 minutes.

I am literally plastering over problems. And I'm not getting into the root cause of anything. People get very frustrated with that. They sometimes have felt frustrated for a long time, then they start feeling those symptoms of burnout and irritation with the system.

Then they think, God, tell you what, i'm going to start my own business and i'll train to be a coach, which gives them this perspective that they haven't had.

I see people who have had incredible shifts for themselves through their coaching training, but they very quickly then decide actually now is the time for me to go out there and help other people when maybe there's a lot of kind of healing and reflection that may need to do themselves first before they start going out and helping others.

Because I think what we have to recognize is that the actual coaching skills or the clinical skills are only a small part of running your own business or being your founder or running a personal brand.

Customer success stories and finding confidence

The other stuff, and everyone always goes, oh, social media. I don't want to go on social, but social is a fraction of it as well. But the other things that go for you to be able to actually get in front, if somebody brought you a patient every hour for eight hours a day, you'd be amazing at doing your job.

Like there's no doubt about it, but actually there is a lot of work to get that one client in front of you. There's a little marketing, there are a lots of conversations, that is lot objection, and there a's lot uncertainty.

And I think going into having to do that when you are feeling not well yourself from a burnout perspective can be very, very demoralizing. And then your confidence drops, and then you think, oh, I'm rubbish at this.

Nobody's signing up. My sales calls aren't going well. I am rubbish, therefore I'll get back in my box. Actually, that does nothing for your confident.

So you've got to be looking after yourself before you go and help others. You were mentioning that you had another

customer success story. Can you share another story that maybe talked about the difference between somebody who is feeling truly entrepreneurial versus just being frustrated in their career?

Yeah. I mean, I've worked with so many wonderful medics who have been through their own really difficult struggles. The one that comes to mind is a lovely doctor called Dr.

Emma Presson, who is wonderful human ex-family physician. She's still doing GP shifts, but Her focus has completely changed, but she had a really difficult period of burnout during COVID, working as a junior doctor in London in the busy teaching hospitals.

When she first contacted me, she'd actually made the decision to leave London. They bought a little place up in North Wales. She'd never really had any huge connection to that place, they just found this beautiful house in The Hills and they'd moved from London, I remember that first conversation.

She had so much lived experience that was very raw for her, and she was wanting to go out and help other people that are in a similar scenario. But she also had this huge passion to change the system, which she still does.

Change the systems, change how we're looking after our healthcare professionals, but change, how are we teaching our doctors as well. And she has these huge ideas.

And I remember that first conversation, I was like, right, okay, you can do all of this, but not all it straight away. Let's just start with some of the basics.

Start with getting you out there and start talking about your own lived experience because she took a sabbatical, which was the key for her own healing journey.

She took six or eight weeks and she walked across Corsica on her. Wow. I said, you know, like, what about telling people the importance, talking to people about the important of taking time out?

Sometimes that can be completely refreshing for people when they come back into the workplace, rather than trying to solve all of the problems in the NHS first.

Let's start with something small. And she, over the last few years, has built this fantastic project called the RE Project, where she helps burnt-out healthcare professionals reestablish good routines and, you know, their own health first to be able to then go and help others in their day job.

And she's doing some incredible work. Amazing. So, another great customer success story of another Dr. Emma Presson, who was able make that journey from health professional to entrepreneur.

In our last few minutes, one of the biggest challenges for health professionals is choosing a niche. So why is specialization so important in today's market?

I think we're living in a world where specialization and individualization, and people are more important than anything else. At the end of the day, you can have help from a top expert in the world, wherever they are in the specifics about your illness or your situation or has that lived experience because, especially with AI now, like we have answers at the end of our fingertips, right?

But what we really want is that interpersonal skills, that relationship. And this is why healthcare professionals are so good at this. If they can get through these initial barriers, they are fantastic entrepreneurs because they so good at the clinical skills and so they have the authority, they the experience, but then they go out there and they try and be kind of beige and like bland and sort of fit in everywhere and help everyone with everything.

And it's just a bit of a disaster because nobody wants that. Like if I've got rheumatoid arthritis and I want to find out which supplements I need to take, what diet I to be on to reduce my inflammation, I wanna speak to somebody that knows about that and knows a specialist.

Yes, that's really important. And so just think about as a specialists, you're a doctor specialist, your practitioner specialist people want to see you as the specialist it's the same thing in business.

they want to see the specialist. So who do you specialize in? Because the perception is you will have special knowledge, which you probably do, you'll have a special a knowledge about that individual.

You will be more likely to be successful helping them achieve their wants, dreams, desires, outcomes than if you are just general. I hear a lot of doctors when we have this conversation, who's your patient client or customer and they will say, well, I want to work with women.

Why niching matters for health professionals

Well, that's way too broad. That's 50% of the world. Yeah. We're down to 4 billion people, so let's go a little further. Yes, That is fabulous. You mentioned one other customer success story and maybe, can you talk about that person and how did they choose the niche?

Yeah, I think a really good example here is a company called Lamala Health. They're run by two doctors, Dr. Mary Walling and Dr Emma Jins. And I guess what this is is It's the relationship between the two of them is what makes their business special.

So they run a menopause clinic, an online menopus clinic. They were actually made redundant from another organization. And they were left in a position where they will like, okay, we either work for some other organization or we set something up together.

and they have, you know, really, embrace this connection of the, two have lived experience. know, teenagers that are growing up, they both have this relationship with each other, which means that they have something really special to offer and something much more approachable in a busy, busy sort of menopause space that can be quite clinical sometimes.

They have this holistic approach, they've both done lifestyle medicine diplomas, both have coaching qualifications. So they have created a holistic menoppause clinic, which is attracting women because of the way that they develop their friendship and the they showed up online.

You know, so they are forcing men and women, a big niche. But I've talked to them about the importance of that connection that they have with each other and about that, the fact that are much more approachable and that don't just focus on HRT.

They actually talk about a whole person, about exercise, nutrition, and the important connection and community and all the other things that we need as menopausal women going through this stage because they had that lived experience.

Yeah, so it's not just, I wanna work with women. It's just women in menopause. it is probably women with men opause in their local area who are interested in the whole functional medicine picture.

That's a great niche because then women who actively looking with that and there's there is a lot but it still a small enough niche that They will not be, they'll be easily distinguished from a traditional practice that focus on traditional medicine for menopausal women.

And that means they will be able to attract their customers, but not just their costumers. They'll likely attract higher paying, cash paying clients. What do all of those solo practitioners want?

It's those high paying cash-paying clients, so that's great, I love that. Let's go back, just as a reminder, so the three critical shifts is one, having that entrepreneurial mindset.

So the mindset, that experimental mindset going from the practitioner mindset to an entrepreneurial mind set. What

was number two again? The first one I tend to say, knowing your why.

Knowing why you're doing this and making sure you are not doing it because you come from a place of burnout, of frustration. You're flexibility around your working life.

For some people, there's been a burning desire to do something more creative.

Final advice and where to find Dr. Watkins

I don't just help people in the healthcare. So I help medics. One of my clients is a travel coach. and she's doing a travel podcast. She's passionate about adventurous travel with children.

And this is something she has always been passionate and I've helped to kind of bring that to life as a program and as podcast and now she is out there doing her own thing.

So why do you want to do this to start with? That's what I wish I'd sat down and really thought about all those years ago. I never have regrets and don't want change anything and it's all experience, but knowing your why, Having that entrepreneurial, having that experimental mindset, being brave, getting scrappy, not waiting for things to be perfect.

Getting out there and having a go. Because I think business is about relationship building. First and foremost, it's about having those conversations, Getting in front of people, putting yourself out.

And then knowing your niche, but understanding the concept of the importance of a niche would be the third. Love it. So how can people get ahold of you if they want to get hold of?

The easiest way is my website is joewatkins.com and LinkedIn is where I kind of hang out. I am on Instagram, but I'm linkedin.joe Watkins and I always answer any messages that come through to me.

And I was happy to do podcasts, happy chat. Please just get in touch. You have your own podcast. I do. Yes, I have a podcast called Startup Support Surgery Podcast, which I love.

Fantastic. We're going to put all those links in the description. Dr. Jo Watkins, thank you so much for being on our program today. Thank you, so, much, Brett.

It's been a huge pleasure. That's another edition of Dr. Talks. Thanks for tuning in. We'll see you next time. If you found this episode valuable, please consider hitting the like, subscribe and leave a review.

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