

Matt Bowles: Hey everybody, it's Matt Bowles! Welcome to *The Maverick Show*. My guest today is Danielle Thompson. She is a 25-year-old serial entrepreneur and full-time digital nomad. She is the founder of Moku, an agency focused on web and app design for tech startups. Her design work has serviced over 100 million users, and has helped founders raise over \$19 million in seed and VC funding. She is also the founder of the Freelance Travel Network, an online school that helps nomadic freelancers promote, grow, and profit from their online service business while traveling the world.

Danielle has helped individual freelancers 10x their income and land some of the world's top brands as clients. Her mission is to empower 1 million freelancers by teaching creatives the business skills they need to get work that inspires them. She runs all of her businesses remotely and has been traveling the world full-time since 2015. Since then, she has lived in over 20 countries and has amassed 50,000 Instagram followers. Danielle, welcome to the show!

Danielle Thompson: Oh, I'm so happy to be here. I'm so excited to talk to you today.

Matt: Well, I am so excited to have you here. Just for context of how we met, you and I got connected through our mutual friend Sean Tierney, whom *Maverick Show* listeners know well. He's been on the show twice. And, I heard your interview on Sean's *Nomad Podcast*, and I don't even know if the interview was over – it was probably somewhere in the middle of my listening to that interview when I had already started texting Sean, saying, “Sean, you've got to introduce me to Danielle. I simply need to know this person.” So, he did, and you and I have been connected now for a few months, and I'm so glad we were able to put this interview together.

Danielle: Yeah, I'm so happy to be here.

Matt: Awesome. Well, let's kick this off by talking about your journey to entrepreneurship. Could you talk a little bit about where you grew up and what your path was like finding your way to entrepreneurship?

Danielle: Yeah, that's a great question. I was so lucky to have a dad who was an entrepreneur. My dad was always working and hustling. I didn't

know it as a kid, but he was really hustling out there, trying to make money for the family, trying to make sure that we have an abundant, amazing life, but he was so amazing because even when we didn't have a lot of money, he always made me feel abundant. We'd be in the car, and he'd be telling me affirmations, and I would have to repeat them like, "I feel good, I feel fine," and other positive things, and I got it into my head that my time is worth a lot and I can do creative and fun things with my time.

My earliest memories of entrepreneurship are of taking everything that my parents owned in the house and selling it back to them with my little cash register and classic lemonade stands, until I was actually able to make money through one of my arts, which was photography. That was the first entrepreneurial business that I started. I was a photographer. I'd take pictures of my friends' families and make \$100.00, and it was super exciting.

But, it evolved pretty quickly from photography into design, as I went to design school and then started to work as an entrepreneur online a little bit through this guy I was dating. One day, I remember he was in his room, and I was doing my homework, and he turned around and said, "Hey, I made \$100.00 today" or something like that. I said, "But, you were here the whole time. I don't understand how you could have made this money." He was like, "Oh, I work online."

He explained to me and showed me everything online, and the first thing I did wasn't actually to get a job online, but it was to outsource my homework. I said, "This is great. I don't have to do work anymore." I outsourced my homework to the other side of the world, and then I saw these freelancers on the other side of the globe making money, and I was like, "You know what? Maybe I could try and do this."

So, I went on a site that was called Elance at the time, before it was Upwork, and I logged on, and I had no portfolio or experience, and I found this young man who had these photos for his online dating website, and he wanted to look tanner, his teeth to be whiter, and his eyes to be bluer. I was like, "I can do that with my Photoshop skills." To this day, I hope he's found love. So, that was kind of the start of my entrepreneurial journey.

Matt: That's amazing. How old were you when you first started getting

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on Elance, putting your services out there, and getting paid for things?

Danielle: I guess I would have been around 18-19.

Matt: From there, what was your entrepreneurial trajectory moving forward?

Danielle: It was interesting. When I discovered Elance and these sites, I took it twofold. One side was to find clients, and the other side was to outsource the work. I started building a business right off the bat, and I didn't know it. I was in school full-time, so there'd be months where I was working a lot and there'd be months I would have exams, so I didn't have a consistent business or anything like that. I might have been making \$2,000.00 a month on average.

I enjoyed my university time, but it was crazy because I remember the months I really pushed it and would make what I considered a big income at the time, a lot of my friends who were better at design and the creativity stuff than me would be making a lot less money than me because they were working in jobs that were not aligned with their discipline – maybe in a pet store or something like that – and it frustrated me because I was like, “You guys are so much better than me. You're so much more talented. The way you think is amazing, yet you don't see that value.”

At the time, I was annoyed with school because I felt like school made people wait for some kind of validation – when you graduate, or after this internship, you'll be good enough. That really frustrated me, so much so that I built my first actual company, and that company was called Intern. Intern was connecting students with work online. It was exactly what I was doing, or like Upwork today, but just for students.

I went and raised some money, I got funding for that, and then realized it was a lot harder to build a company than I thought. “All you have to do is find an investor, you have an idea, and you're good to go.” My naïve second-year self was very excited and thrilled. It was a great foundation and I learned a lot, but I also realized that was not the business I wanted to build.

I actually think that was such a pinnacle of my entrepreneurial journey because I had an investor, and that investor was an

amazing human – a beautiful person, but so sad and stressed. He had all the money. He was living the American Dream – or, Canadian Dream, whatever you want to call it – and he had all the money. He had his family, he had the houses, the cars, and all that stuff.

I remember being this young person looking at him like, “Wow, he’s still not happy. This is what everyone strives for, and this guy’s still not happy. What am I doing?” I was sitting in my room, doing homework during the day and working on the company at night, and I was miserable and sad, and I was like, “Why am I doing any of this? What’s the purpose?” That was when my business started to transform into more of a lifestyle business, and my happiness became the priority of any work that I did.

**Matt:** So, what were the lessons you learned from what you initially thought building a business was and what you found out that it actually was, and how did those lessons morph into your next venture?

**Danielle:** I thought you had an idea, I thought you needed money behind that idea, and the money would fuel the business. I think this still happens to a lot of entrepreneurs. You believe that if you can just get the money, then the business will come to life. But, I didn’t realize that businesses are so connected to business owners, so connected to your mission, to your passion, to the energy that you can put forth, and I figured, “Okay, I can shortcut that if I just put more money behind it.”

That doesn’t really work. I wanted to skip a lot of the things that made me feel vulnerable, so validating my business was definitely something I didn’t love doing, and I would skip over things. I didn’t want to talk to my target market directly and go ask them questions and interview them. I was so scared to put myself out there, but I realized that as a business owner, the only way to see your business thrive is to thrive yourself and to be out there in public with your target market. That was a huge lesson.

The second lesson was that it’s great to be building something, it’s amazing, but you should make sure that that doesn’t overshadow your happiness today. I feel like sometimes entrepreneurs are betting on a future that’s better than now, and that is a recipe for disaster. I learned to bet on today, to bet on now, and to bet on my

present and work toward something amazing, but not hope that the future is going to be better than the present because the present is actually pretty awesome.

Matt: Awesome. So then, from there, once you learned those lessons, what was your next move and your next venture?

Danielle: It was interesting because I decided to slow down completely. I come from a place of privilege – my parents were able to support me, pay my rent, and do things like that, so I didn't have to worry about that, I just needed money for groceries, pocket money, and going out. I decided to slow down and actually be a student. If any students are listening to this, I feel like there's this pressure, especially now that so many things are being documented – there's YouTube, everyone's building out in public – there's this pressure on you to be doing something huge and big right away.

But, it was so great when I stopped, and I started enjoying being a kid and hanging out with my friends. That actually led me into a really organic path of teaching. Because I didn't want to actually dive into freelancing full-time, I posted on this random site called University Tutors, and I said I could tutor in all these subjects, which I actually wasn't all that great in, but I also randomly wrote that I could tutor people with ADHD because I have ADHD, and I did really well with that. I always made sure my homework was done, everything was pretty smooth, and I understood what my mind was doing.

So, I put that I could teach people with ADHD, and all of a sudden, I got all these inquiries from people a bit older than me – startup founders who needed help actually organizing their lives, dealing with their thoughts, and gaining motivation and consistency, and that just opened up a whole new set of doors and a whole new set of learning.

Matt: Wow. So, from there, what was your trajectory in terms of how that business went and how you eventually ended up founding Moku?

Danielle: Yeah, wow. So, the teaching and the ADHD part comes in later, when the Freelance Travel Network comes about, but following that trajectory of design and freelancing – I actually got back into freelancing, and I remember that my business was picking up as I

was nearing graduation, and I remember I was so nervous to graduate because your whole world is about to explode. Everything that you knew to be true is now gone because you have no structure anymore, and that's a scary thing. Even though I was an entrepreneur and it seemed like I would thrive in that, I was still a bit nervous about having no structure.

Unfortunately, around the time I was graduating, I actually got a concussion, and it was the weirdest blessing because at the time, I was going forward, and I was pushing forward to make sure I got as many clients as I could and do as much as I could, but I was really running on a hamster wheel, and I know a lot of entrepreneurs might feel like that – the busy wheel. You're sending emails, but there's no consistent strategy. I had no real grounding. And so, when I was bedridden at home, I got to think about what kind of life I wanted to build. Winter was coming, and I was like, "I don't think I want to be here for the winter."

I swear the universe was listening to me because as soon as I got better – literally, that same day – I got a text from my friend Eric that said, "Danielle, I have this big project with this nonprofit, and I would love for you to work on it." We sat down the next day, wrote up a proposal, and we put three different tiers of pricing, and the top pricing was \$15,000.00. I had never charged \$15,000.00 for anything in my life.

Two days later, we got a call that they accepted the proposal at \$15,000.00, and right away, my friend booked a ticket to Bali, and my friend booked a ticket to Costa Rica, and that's when Moku really started to take off. I was like, "All right, I can do this. I'm going to build something beyond myself."

Matt: Awesome. So, how much traveling had you done prior to that, and what was your thought process in terms of getting that flight to Costa Rica?

Danielle: I had done very little, only going trips with my family, camping, or to summer camp, but I hadn't actually gone international by myself, and I was so scared that I booked a hostel for 30 days – one hostel room for 30 days – because I was like, "I don't know how to get from point A to point B, so I'm just going to stay here in this one place." Thankfully, when I got there, they were able to change the reservation, but at the time, I was so nervous about

going international that I was going to stay in this one place.

But, Costa Rica came up because it was the cheapest ticket available. It was \$300.00 return, and I was like, “Okay, great, I’ll go for a couple weeks, and then I’ll see how I like traveling by myself.” So, that was where I was taking off from – not very much experience at all.

Matt: Amazing. And then, business-wise, you had just validated your ability to charge \$15,000.00 and have people pay it. So, can you talk about what that moment meant for you as an entrepreneur, and from there, how did you proceed to build out Moku?

Danielle: I’d have to say everything in my life has been quite organic, and that moment was so validating because I didn’t really – I think a lot of entrepreneurs feel like an imposter. “Someone’s going to find out that this wasn’t worth it, so let me take the money and run.” There’s this anxiety, especially if you feel it when you’re sending a bill or an invoice. It really shows that imposter syndrome is present, and I really had that.

At the same time as I got that big contract, I actually got into Toptal. Toptal is a network of the top three percent of online freelancers – or, that’s how they position themselves – and I was one of the youngest people in their network. I was looking at the other designers and developers who were there, and they were world-class. They were working with these crazy big companies, and I was like, “How did I get into this network?”

So, the combination of charging those higher rates and getting into this amazing, elite network started giving me a foundation and made me feel like, “Okay, maybe I can do this.” For a while, Moku was just me until maybe about a year later, when I went to Argentina, and that is a whole other story.

Matt: I definitely want to talk about the travel experiences and the growth through travel. So, you had not done very much independent international travel, there was a lot of trepidation about taking that leap, and then, once you got to Costa Rica, how did that initial experience go for you?

Danielle: Yeah, it was amazing. It was amazing! So, first, I remember I met this lovely guy named Steve, and he was the first person I’d ever



met who worked online. A lot of digital nomads feel this. If you're working from home and working remotely, and none of your friends are doing the same thing, it's hard to relate on certain things. So, when I went and met Steve, he was working online as a project manager or something like that, and it was so incredible. I was like, "Wow, there are other people who are excited about my success and excited when I get a new client."

In Montreal, where I was living before, I would tell my friends, "I got a new client," and they'd be like, "Cool. Another one, Danielle? Don't you have one?" That's not how it works, guys! It was such a struggle to try and explain it to people back home. So, I went to Costa Rica, I met Steve, and he gave me the idea that a community of these people would be amazing. He was awesome, but I was like, "Whoa, I think there are more of us out here. Imagine if I could find more of these people."

Again, it was like the universe was listening. I saw a Facebook ad for WiFi Tribe that moment. It said, "Work and travel in Nicaragua, only four hours away from where you are right now" – I was in northern Costa Rica, which was only four hours away by land – and it was like, "Come live with this group of entrepreneurs who travel the world." I was like, "Oh my goodness, was my computer listening to me?" The synchronicity was too real.

So, I told Steve, "We're going to do this!" So, we did an interview with the founder of WiFi Tribe, Diego, we both got in, and then Steve told me he had to go home to Canada for some personal reason. I was heartbroken because I was so scared to travel to Nicaragua by myself. So, I booked the most expensive bus I could find – I thought the more expensive it was, the safer it was, so I booked this \$100.00 bus to Nicaragua.

It turned out to be a seniors' tour bus. It was so funny. I was there with all these people saying, "Where are you going?" I said, "I saw an ad online for this group of people." "So, you've never met them?" "Yeah, it's fine. Don't worry about it. It's an ad. They're safe now." It was amazing. I just remember going into the village where the house was, and I was trying to communicate to the driver in my broken Spanish. "I think we passed it. *Aquí, aquí!*" I was trying to point over like, "I think we passed the house."

I walked up to the house. It had an infinity pool at the back, just

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looking onto the ocean, and I was like, “Oh my goodness.” I remember the feeling like, “I made this happen. This is my life. This is real.” I had to pinch myself because it’s one of those moments you only dream of. Traveling felt so inaccessible when I was in Canada, and having this group of nomads and entrepreneurs who were excited about my success, who were excited about business, who were excited about building the lifestyle, the dream – I was like, “Who, I must be the luckiest girl in the world here.”

Matt: That’s amazing. I know a bunch of WiFi Tribe people. I’ve never actually met Diego, but I know Julia Kallweit, the other founder of WiFi Tribe. As of the recording of this interview, I have not done an official paid chapter of WiFi Tribe, but I have dropped in on them, visited them, I’ve been on the Nomad Cruise with a bunch of them, and I’ve done a number of the other work travel programs.

I did Remote Year for 12 months, I did Hacker Paradise for a number of months, and will probably officially do WiFi Tribe this coming year. But, I know a bunch of them, and I’ve had WiFi Tribe participants on this podcast, and everything else, but I would love to hear from you how your experience with WiFi Tribe was.

Danielle: It was incredible. Especially if you’re starting off on your journey, finding one of these work and travel groups is the biggest blessing because you learn that you’re not alone. So, when I was there, I met someone who had a startup, and they sold it, and they said, “I sold it because I just bought myself a job when I had my startup.” I remember that stuck with me because for the longest time – and, previously in my story, I was saying how my dream was to build this company, Intern, raise the money, and do this whole thing, and in the back of my mind, I was like, “Maybe I’ll still go down that path. Maybe I’ll still found a big company.”

But, there was this resistance in me about that, and when he said that he’d bought himself a job, that he didn’t actually buy himself any freedom by building this big company, that gave me more confident about the path I was on, and then, I started meeting people who had residual income. That just changed everything. I was like, “What? You don’t have to work all the time, and you still make money?”

Of course, it took them time to build what they have now, but that opened my mind and, I think, started laying the foundation for

what is the Freelance Travel Network today. But, it was so amazing. Our place was in a private area, but we went over to the city for a few days to party and hang out, and I remember being like, “I didn’t know I could be this happy. I didn’t know this was possible.”

Matt: That’s amazing. That’s so awesome. I’ve had similar experiences when I’ve joined these work travel programs, and you just meet such an extraordinary group of people who are choosing to create this lifestyle for themselves and pursue it. With most people in the world, you tell them what you do, and they think you’re crazy, and here you are, surrounding yourself with an entire group of people who are all doing the same thing, and it’s been truly spectacular for me to find all these different communities.

I’ve been nomading full-time now with no permanent base for over six years, so now, as a result of participating in all these groups, plugging into these communities, and being part of the alumni networks in particular, my whole social network in the larger digital nomad ecosystem has created a situation where no matter what city in the world I go to, I can always find really cool, interesting people to hang out with.

Danielle: That’s awesome. I totally agree. Sometimes, I feel like I’m so blessed, I have so many friends around the world, and I think a lot of people think that being a digital nomad is lonely, but I think it’s quite the opposite. Sometimes, there are too many people around.

Matt: Right. That’s a really important observation, though, which is that long-term world travel can be very lonely if you don’t take the initiative to create that social sustainability pillar. So, it can be lonely, but there is now such a significant infrastructure being built by so many different companies that if you are proactive about it, you can absolutely be consistently immersing yourself in these work travel communities and surrounding yourself with a really, really supportive, caring environment of people.

Danielle: Totally. And, to your point, it does take effort, and I think that’s something important to acknowledge. So, whether it’s signing up for the program when you don’t know who’s going to be there, which is kind of scary, or joining a coworking space, it takes some kind of effort, but the more you put out and the more you give, the more you receive, especially when it comes to social currency and connection.

Matt: I agree 100%. So, you did Nicaragua, and then, after you had that experience, what was your next move? What was your takeaway?

Danielle: Then, I was like, “This is going to be my life now.” So, I went back to Canada because I actually had to graduate. I still hadn’t formally graduated, so I had to go do my convocation. So, I went and actually graduated. My parents saw me on stage. It was hilarious because the girl who was before me – I can’t remember her name, but let’s say it was Melanie – “Melanie, high 90s, this award, that award, blah blah blah,” and then, “Danielle.”

So, I graduated and sold everything in my house, and I was like, “I need to leave Montreal.” I loved that place, but I felt like if I stayed there, the next five years of my life would have looked like the last five years. Even though I had so much fun and had a great community, I didn’t feel like that was where I could thrive and live my purpose. That was a big deal for me because I feel like when I talk to a lot of people about their nomad journey, it started out with them trying to move away from something whether they were in a job they didn’t like or in a community that wasn’t really supporting them.

I felt like I had an amazing life, and honestly, if I still lived it to this day, I probably would be quite content, but I knew I could do more and contribute more to the world, and to do that, I needed to get really uncomfortable.

Matt: Wow. Can you talk a little bit more about what you mean by that, and then, what you did to pursue and implement that?

Danielle: Of course. The cost of living in Montreal is quite low. The economy is not the strongest, but when you work online, you don’t have to worry about it in that specific area, so I was able to afford the lifestyle I wanted and I had a great community of friends. I had a lot of abundance in my life in every way – socially, financially, my community was great – and so, I was very happy, and I could see myself staying there. It didn’t sound painful to be there for five years or to buy a house. I remember looking at houses, possibly thinking about buying them, getting a mortgage, and all that stuff. And then, one day, it hit me because I got this text message. Everyone was like, “Hey, are you going out?”

It was a Friday night, and I had gotten that text message every single Friday night for the last few years, and I had this realization or moment where I felt like I was on *The Truman Show*, or it was Groundhog Day, or it was something like that where I was like, “Okay, I’ve gotten this message before, and the next week is going to be the same, and the next week is going to be the same. Maybe I’ll get slightly bigger clients and my income will go up a little bit, but if I want to do something great – I don’t know what it’s going to be – I need to get really uncomfortable, which means I need to leave this place I actually love.”

Matt: Wow. So, where did you decide to go next?

Danielle: I didn’t really know what was going to happen. I booked a ticket to Portugal, but I didn’t know how it would turn out, whether I would like it, or anything. I had never been to Europe, so I was just like, “Let’s try and go to Europe.” I landed there, and I remember it came out – I was still living in hostels around this time, and I came out, and they were like, “There’s a McDonald’s there, and then you walk up this hill.” I got to the McDonald’s and looked around, and I was like, “I’ve never seen a place so beautiful in my entire life.”

I remember just standing in awe. People probably thought I was on something because I was just standing there, looking around wide-eyed, being like, “So, this is Europe. I could get used to this.” I think that really speaks to the theme that sometimes, even when we’re in very amazing situations and amazing environments, pushing yourself and seeing what else is out there is always a very enriching experience. I never thought anywhere could be better than Montreal, and who knows if it is, but there are places that fulfill me just as much, and Portugal was definitely one of them.

Matt: Awesome. Yeah, I have been back to Portugal now at least three times myself, and I agree, Lisbon is an extraordinary city. And then, as you start traveling around Portugal, you go up to Porto, and you go to the wine country – it is really one of the most beautiful countries I have been to as well. I agree 100% with that.

Danielle: Definitely.

Matt: So, you went to Portugal. What was going on with your business journey at that point?

Danielle: I took a break from Moku and the Freelance Travel Network, and I randomly became a design recruiter. So, I was working with Toptal, and I was interviewing designers who wanted to be in the network. This was an amazing experience because I was able to start to talk to some of the best designers in the world, people who I would definitely not have access to. I was on the phone with them as they were interviewing with the company where I was working. Even though it was a freelance job, I was still part of the core team.

So, I was doing that, interviewing people from my hostel room in Portugal – it’s so funny – talking to designers who had built products that most of us have used, and being in the hostel room kitchen, muting myself while they talked so they couldn’t hear the chatter going around, and then speaking really quickly when I unmuted so they didn’t realize that I was in a hostel. It was such a funny dynamic.

But, yes, I was a recruiter for a little bit. I spent some time in Portugal and Europe, and then, I booked a ticket to Thailand. At that moment, I got a message from Diego from WiFi Tribe saying, “Hey Danielle, if you’re going to be in Thailand, we have a house down in Bali if you want to come.” I was like, “Ah, that sounds like a great idea.”

So, finishing up my European trip, I went to Spain, I went to Tenerife, which had really cool hiking and was just so beautiful. I had time to focus. I started to pick up a few freelance clients and headed over to Asia for the first time.

Matt: I understand that Bali ended up having a pretty big impact on you. Can you talk about what your experience was like in Bali initially, and then, what the residual impact of it was today?

Danielle: Of course. Bali is a really magical place. I think Bali is a place that is so beautiful, but it’s also a bit tumultuous in the fact that I feel like – it depends on your belief, but spiritually, it’s a place that shakes you to see what’s stable inside, and I was definitely shaken. When I got here, I felt nervous and overwhelmed because I’d had to drive a scooter, I lived really far out – actually, it wasn’t far in terms of today, but when you’re new to somewhere, everything seems so far away.

But, Bali actually showed me what it’s like to build a business

around the lifestyle you want because here in Bali, which is where I'm calling in from today, you have people who are not settling and not building their business just to make an income. There are definitely income-driven people here, but more often, you find people who are trying to align with their purpose, whatever that is.

So, coming to Bali, I was freelancing, doing this freelance work, and I was like, "Wait, what am I doing? Why am I doing this?" It really got me to stop and think, and because I didn't have to worry about money too much here in Bali – I was making enough income, and the cost of living is quite low – it gave me space.

That's also one tip I want to put out there. If anyone is thinking about going remote, traveling the world, and they're unsure of what skill they want to monetize, unsure of what their purpose is, and unsure of where they would want to go, I would definitely start somewhere with a lower cost of living because it gives you a bigger runway to figure that out without stressing about money. That's one big tip I tell everyone in my school. Go to Tokyo next year. For now, go somewhere where you can get that space and feel abundant financially, even if you're not working.

Matt: I think that's an awesome tip, and yeah, we did not announce where we are actually doing this interview from. So, you are currently in Bali, and I am actually in Bangkok, Thailand. I just got in yesterday.

I spent the last month in Russia. I was in St. Petersburg, and then I was in Moscow, and then I did the Nomad Train, which is taking the Trans-Siberian Railway from Moscow all the way across Siberia to Ulan Bator, Mongolia, at which point we went through the Gobi Desert, riding camels, staying in yurts, and all of that, which was completely epic, but by the time it was over, I was like, "I need urban, I need gritty, I need spicy food," so I was like, "Bangkok," and I booked a flight, and I got in yesterday.

Danielle: That's amazing. Bangkok is such a special place. That was the first place I touched down in Asia. Just a funny story – I was trying to avoid the jet lag, so I was trying to stay up, but I fell asleep face first on my bed, woke up at 2:00 a.m., and I was looking for some food. And so, I asked the guy who was running the homestay where I was staying, "Is there any food around here?" I think he figured I wouldn't eat street food, so he pointed to the 7-Eleven.

But, right beside the 7-Eleven was this alleyway, and in the alleyway, they had really great-smelling food, so I was like, “I’m going to go over there.”

But, it was a super local area where I was staying. It was maybe 20 minutes outside the city, so none of the menus had any English or anything like that. They didn’t even have the picture menus, so I just pointed to something and sat down. “Give me this.” So, they cooked up something, and I was eating it, and it was really yummy, but it was so spicy. I was trying to act like it wasn’t because I didn’t want to show – I don’t know if it’s disrespectful or not.

I tried to brush off my nose in quiet, and I was sniffing, but I was trying to play it cool. The guy just handed me a cupful of ice, just shaking his head, and then I looked across the table. A local guy was there, taking the chilies out. I think you weren’t supposed to eat all of them. I was like, “Oh man, I didn’t have to eat all these chilies.” That was my welcome to Bangkok.

Matt: That’s amazing. I just had a street food dinner last night, and by “street food” – I feel like people who have never been to Thailand – in terms of the pricing and the quality, it is just outrageous. Everything is extremely fresh, so there’s nothing sanitarilly compromised. Basically, they have these outdoor makeshift kitchens where they’re cooking everything in front of you, and then, outdoor tables and seating.

I had two dinner entrees because they were so good. The first one was a seafood stir fry. It was shrimp, squid, and rice. And then, I ordered another one because it was so good, and the next one I ordered was a chicken stir fry with rice. Both of these plates combined cost me \$3.00 USD, which was just unbelievable, and the food was so good.

As I was eating the food, I was like, “I can’t believe how good this is. I can’t believe how happy it makes me to eat this food because I have not had good Thai food in so long.” I asked for the check, and it came to \$3.00 USD. The ratio of the quality of food and the quality of life in a place like Thailand compared to the cost of living is unparalleled anywhere else in the world.

Danielle: It’s crazy, definitely. And then, the massages – everything is great!

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Thai massages for life. I'm sure we could talk about Bangkok and Thailand forever.

Matt: For sure. So, you were in Bali, and from there, what was your next move, both in terms of travel and how these businesses evolved?

Danielle: There are so many different stops to the story. In Bali, I realized I wanted to actually teach and help people work online, and I think that happens quite often here in Bali because you feel so grateful to be living this life, and then, you know people back home who are just as talented as you – maybe even more talented – and they can make it happen, but they just don't have the tools.

So, I decided I would build the Freelance Travel Network, and as the designer, I built the site first. Before the content or anything else, I built the site. It was like an Amazon approach – “Build the press release first” – and then it sat there for months until I left Bali and actually went to Argentina. That was the start of it where the seed was planted.

In terms of Moku, I was trying to hire people, so I was trying to start an actual business and start having people on board, but it was really hard because I wasn't a very good client, and I think sometimes, we blame talent – “Oh, it's so hard to find good talent” – but I just wasn't actually a great client. I didn't know how to brief someone, I didn't know how to set good expectations, and I was not great at communication, so I wasn't a good client, so I wasn't able to actually keep any amazing talent at the time. That was kind of a struggle.

Matt: So, what did you learn from that, and how did you end up correcting for that?

Danielle: So, the correction happened in Argentina. Argentina is one of the most amazing places on this earth. Buenos Aires is my second home, and I love it so much. I didn't love it when I went there the first time, but I love it now.

Matt: Let's talk about B.A. before we talk about the business stuff because I have actually lived in Buenos Aires for about four months. I also lived in Córdoba for a month, so I lived for five months total in Argentina. Buenos Aires was actually the first destination I ever went to when I started nomading – so, back in

the summer of 2013, when I got rid of all my stuff, sold my car, all of that, and left L.A. on what has now turned into a six-year-plus nomad journey, Buenos Aires was my first destination, so it's a super significant place in my journey as well, and I would love to hear your impressions about it and how they evolved.

Danielle:

Totally. So, when I got there, I was like, "I don't like this place." I got there, I got to my apartment, I met my roommate, we went the park, it was supposed to be beautiful, but I was like, "I don't like it." It was too busy, there were too many people, it was a city, it was huge, there was traffic, there were cars, and I was like, "This is not Bali. Oh no! I've made a horrible mistake. I've booked this place for three months, and this is definitely not Bali. What am I going to do about it?"

I was talking to someone about this recently, and I think it's a big thing that happens with nomads. All your external validators of who you are suddenly disappear, and I think I started to find an identity in Bali. I was like, "Who is Danielle? What does she love? What is she interested in?" For the longest time, I was defined by my work and my school, and so, Bali was the first time I sat down and figured out what mattered to me. It was health, wellness, and giving back.

Then, I went to B.A., and it was all about wine, partying, and going out, and I was like, "What did I do? I want to go to CrossFit, I still want to do this," but I was trying to have a social life, so I was going out until – in Buenos Aires, everyone goes out at 3:00 in the morning.

Matt:

That's so significant, too, and it's really interesting because a lot of people who haven't experienced that culture haven't even been to Spain or Italy, which is where a lot of the immigrants in Buenos Aires originally came from. They brought a lot of those cultural traditions, one of which was a very late-night culture. And so, in B.A., if you go out to a restaurant for dinner at 8:00 p.m., all of the doors will be locked. They do not unlock the doors to the restaurant until 9:00 p.m.

Now, at 9:00 p.m., the restaurant is going to be completely empty all the way until about 10:30. The prime dinner hour in B.A. is 11:00 p.m., and dinner in B.A. is a social event. Dinner takes two hours and has multiple bottles of wine. Prime dinner hours in B.A.

are from 11:00 p.m. until 1:00 a.m., then you go to the bars from 1:00 a.m. to 3:00 a.m., and then you go to the clubs from 3:00 a.m. until 7:00 a.m.

Now, I was looking at the guidebook when I was there in B.A. about the cultural dos and don'ts, and on the cultural "don't" list, it says, "Whatever you do, don't be that guy who shows up in the club before 3:00 a.m." So then, I would start telling people about this late-night culture in Buenos Aires, and the one question I would get would be, "When do people work?" I'd be like, "You know, I could never really figure that out."

The last time I went back to B.A., I was out at a bar at 5:00 in the morning on a Tuesday. We had just ordered another round of drinks. People were still coming into the bar at 5:00 a.m. on a Tuesday, and I was there with a bunch of locals, so I thought I would pose the question to them. I said, "I tell people about this culture you guys have here, and I get this question, and they want to know when people work. So, how do you respond to that?" My friend said, "Yeah, that's not necessarily our strong suit here, which is kind of why our economy is where it is, but you know what? We have an amazing social life."

Danielle: Honestly, it's so hard to explain to anyone who's never been to B.A. or exposed to those cultures. I was always wondering – and, I was in a coworking space there, and I would get there early because I wanted to work early, around 9:00 or even earlier, and no one was there until lunch, and then everyone had lunch for two hours, and then they'd leave an hour or two later.

Matt: Yeah, and they're drinking red wine at lunch, by the way. Two glasses of wine at lunch is pretty standard.

Danielle: It was so funny – and, a full steak at lunch. You can imagine my culture shock. I was coming from Bali, where I went to CrossFit at 4:00 a.m., meditated for 12 hours, and did my yoga. And then, to top it off, I started dating a DJ, so I was definitely going out and having a great time, and it was amazing, but I was honestly having an identity crisis. There was one part of me that loved it, but another part of me that just didn't want to accept it.

If I was like, "If I start falling into this, if I start enjoying myself fully, who will I be?" My identity was the girl who goes to

CrossFit, who eats a paleo diet, and all these things. All of a sudden, that was all gone, and now, I was the girl dating a DJ, going out every night, drinking and partying, and I was having this crisis, and I didn't want to fully accept myself.

It might sound silly, it might sound like, "Well, Danielle, those are both great people to be," but it was hard for me because all my habits, all my routines – everything was just gone. It was by choice, but I was struggling to really deal with that. But, that actually ended up being very helpful for my business because I was trying to do so much – going to CrossFit in the morning, then taking a nap, then going out and working, all this stuff – I didn't have time for work, but I needed some money.

So, what I did was hire my first person for real. Before, I was always scared to pay people the rates that they deserved because I didn't trust myself to earn enough to be able to pay them, so I found this lovely man from Vietnam, and I think he was charging \$25.00 an hour, which was crazy for me to be paying that much because I wasn't making that much money, but I had to invest in Aingh and in my business. If I wanted to actually stop working all the time, I needed someone to help me.

So, I hired him, and I still work with him to this day. I went to visit him in Vietnam. He had a baby and bought a condo. He is my first employee and one of my greatest friends. Because of Argentina, the crazy schedule, and the crazy lifestyle, I modified my whole business.

Matt: How did you end up reconciling those two different lifestyles and your appreciation and enjoyment of them from the point where you initially perceived it to be an identify conflict? How did you work through that and eventually reconcile that?

Danielle: So, since I was in South America, it was a great time to do some ayahuasca. This was awesome. I flew up to Peru, and I was feeling that conflict, so when I got to Argentina, I booked an ayahuasca ceremony in Peru for three months later.

That was really transformative because I thought the issue was Argentina, Buenos Aires, and the people. Obviously, it was the people and the culture, not me. How could it be my fault? How could I be responsible for my feelings? But, when I sat with ayahuasca, I definitely had a very

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rude awakening to the reality that I was creating my own reality, and I was definitely creating my own misery.

Matt: So, for people who have literally never even heard the term “ayahuasca,” can you basically explain what it is and how you came to learn about it and decided to try it? And then, I would love to hear about what your experience was like.

Danielle: Of course. Ayahuasca is a plant, and it contains DMT. DMT is naturally found in our body, but it basically can make you hallucinate and see a lot of different, interesting things. From a spiritual perspective – actually, from a scientific perspective, it’s really interesting. Basically, what they say is it breaks down neuro shortcuts. If you were bit by a dog when you were a kid and you saw a dog again, you might be scared, even though that dog is not the dog that bit you. That dog could be this cute little puppy, but your brain fires, and it’s like, “Fear, fear, fear,” and you’re like, “Oh my goodness, why? I know this dog is not going to bite me.”

What happens in our brain is there’s a shortcut that gets built. We see a dog, and we react to fear. This happens with us all the time. Anytime you’ve been embarrassed, maybe while speaking in public, you get a pattern in your brain that shortcuts to the fear or the feeling that you felt when you were embarrassed. Over the years, those shortcuts actually build. We have these pathways building in our brains where these shortcuts are almost instant, and it’s very hard to stop and reflect on them unless you do a ton of meditation.

So, ayahuasca gives you this rare opportunity to break that shortcut and actually evaluate the initial situation that caused the trauma – that dog bite or public speaking – with the insight you have now as an adult. It’s really powerful, and from a spiritual perspective, they say it connects you to Mother Earth, Ayahuasca Pachamama. She’s the ruler of the natural world, and they say that she’s really invested on us and our journey on Earth, and to make sure that we’re the best humans that we can be.

And so, the way I found out about it was from a friend in Montreal. He told me, “I did ayahuasca,” and I remember when I met up with this friend, he just seemed different. I don’t know what it was about him, but he just had this lightness about him, and he told me about it, and I looked into it, and nothing ever aligned. There was a

shaman who would come to Montreal, and I always missed him by a few days. Nothing ever aligned, so I put it on the back burner. When I went to Argentina, I felt a strong calling to go to the Amazon and do some ayahuasca, so I booked the ticket, and that was the start of a spiritual journey – a train going full speed – that I couldn't stop.

Matt: Wow. Well, I know that you have done it more than one time, so I would love to hear a little bit about those experiences and learn a little bit about that journey.

Danielle: Totally. So, I've sat with ayahuasca seven or eight times. It's not pleasant. It's not recreational. It's a very unpleasant experience, especially physically, in terms of how you might purge, so things might actually come up, and that's not necessarily comfortable, but I would definitely say if you feel a call to it, you should explore it and do the research yourself to see if it's for you.

When I sat with ayahuasca, I didn't know what to expect, and the first journey just felt like I was on every drug at the same time. I saw flashing images, and colors, and my parents, and I was scared, I was in their bed – all this stuff was happening so quickly. It was only on the second and third journeys where I started to get some clarity and clear messages.

In those first three ceremonies I did, which were all within a week, I actually went back into my past, and I relived every trauma that I've ever had – issues with my family, issues with my self-appearance, my body, all these things – I could see them so vividly, and I was able to reevaluate them with a bit of the insight I have today to be like, "That person didn't mean to hurt you. You're holding onto that situation because you saw it through a child's eyes, but look at it through an adult's eyes. What you think is there is not actually there."

It was very powerful in that way, and it opened up these spaces that I didn't realize were there. There were things about abandonment and deep fears that I had no idea existed, and it was crazy because I realized that I had almost been sleepwalking for many years.

The craziest thing was after that first journey, I went home for Christmas – because I did it in December – and I went to talk to my mom about things, and

she usually asks me where I'm going next, and for some reason, I would always get frustrated when she would ask me if it was safe. I don't know why this question would frustrate me, but I would be like, "Mom, of course. I'm going to the Sinai Peninsula. It's fine." She'd ask, "Is this place safe? Is this place safe?"

It used to frustrate me, and I used to get very aggressive about that. She asked me the same question – I can't remember where I said I was going. I think it was in Egypt, actually. She was like, "Is it safe?" I could feel the pathway in my brain that I used to take where I used to react aggressively, and I chose not to go there. It was the most empowering feeling I had ever felt. I was like, "Wow, I don't have to be a victim of my reactions anymore."

Matt: Wow. So, as you continued to do it, how did your journey evolve?

Danielle: I did it the next year, and this year, I did iboga, which is another plant medicine. The next year, I basically thought – after ayahuasca, I had this pain in my heart, and I thought I was really intuitive, so I thought I could feel people's feelings, like if you were sad, I would feel the pain in my heart. I was like, "Oh my gosh, I'm so intuitive."

But, years later, I found out that that was a mirror, and I was actually in pain for a couple of years and didn't know it. Being in pain doesn't mean I was sad every day. I was quite happy most of the time, but there were these wounds that were healing inside of me from my childhood, from my upbringing, from all these things, and generally speaking, I had quite a happy childhood, but we have all these imprints on us that we might not know are even there because we saw things through a child's eyes rather than the insight we have today.

So, the second set of ayahuasca journeys was really powerful. That was actually in the Amazon. I did the first set in the mountains because I was kind of scared. I was like, "The last thing I need when I'm on ayahuasca is a tarantula crawling up my leg." That was my only image. I was like, "I'm not ready for the Amazon yet." The next year, I felt ready for the Amazon, so I went up to the Amazon, and it was the most incredible journey.

Ayahuasca started training me. She started showing me the Freelance Travel Network, and she said, "This is your purpose. This school is not a school for freelancers, it's a school for human



betterment.” She told me that I was a healer and that I’m sent to save the world from pain, and she showed me that the first step to helping anyone is loving myself. That journey was so transformative because it was the first time I really explored self-love, and the first time I realized that I was lacking it.

Especially as an entrepreneur, there’s this persona of confidence that I think a lot of us have, and sometimes, it’s not deeply rooted in much, and I didn’t even realize it was true for me until these ayahuasca journeys, where I realized, “Wow, Danielle, there’s a lot of love that you’re missing here. There’s a lot that doesn’t exist.” After that set of ayahuasca journeys, I went back to Argentina – this was my second time back in Argentina – and that’s when I started to fall in love with the place because I started to fall in love with myself.

Matt: Wow. Can you talk a little bit more about self-love and what your realization was, how you began implementing that, and any tips you may have for other people to implement more self-love in their own life?

Danielle: Of course. Basically, I went back to Argentina, and one thing I love about Argentina is the dynamic between men and women. For better or worse, I think it’s a very interesting dynamic. I had realized that because I was building this business, I was in this very aggressive, masculine energy, and I was always pushing for it, so I never got time to slow down and appreciate the feminine side of myself. Other female entrepreneurs might resonate with this.

I think Argentina is a great place for women to explore their feminine side and men to explore their masculine side. When I was in Argentina, I started listening to more female musicians. It seems so simple – listening to female musicians, looking in the mirror, dressing a bit differently than I normally dress, and finding other sides of myself.

But, the biggest thing that helped with self-love is that I made a commitment to it. After that set of ayahuasca journeys, I said, “I’m committing to working on self-love. This is going to be my main focus going forward.” The biggest thing that stops you from self-love is judgment. One thing I had to become very aware of was my thoughts and when I was judging other people. I realized

that every judgment I had was kind of a mirror. It's great to use your judgment to actually observe what you're thinking about yourself.

What I would do is any time I heard a judgmental thought, I would just say, "Danielle, relax. Just relax. Who are you to judge that person on their appearance, their job, their demeanor, or on what they said?" That was the start of this huge transformation that continued into Bali, which was this round of being in Bali now.

Matt: And so, what was the rest of that transformation? How did the personal development journey evolve from there?

Danielle: I'm almost at a loss for words when I think of it because I'm so grateful to go through it, and if anyone is feeling a lack of self-love, if anyone is feeling like they're judging a lot and they're in that space, they should just take a second and step back, and that's what I did when I came back to Bali. I was like, "What's lacking? What are these thoughts that I have about myself that are limiting me?"

By this time, I had started the Freelance Travel Network. I had a few students in the course, but I felt like something was holding me back, and it was the same with my studio. Something was holding me back from fully giving myself to either of my companies. It felt like I knew exactly what I needed to do, but I just couldn't move forward. It was like I was running, but something was pulling me back at the same time. I realized that the person who was pulling me back was myself.

Sometimes, just showing up to the practice and showing up to the space where you're trying to improve is half the work. So, when I made a commitment to self-love, that was half the work, when I came to Bali to explore self-love, that was half the work, and everything else started evolving.

So, one was the big thing on life – no judgment, embrace people with love – and after that, I did some workshops, I got to explore my body through yoga, meditation, and fitness, and I started to fall in love with myself by finding things that bring me joy, that make me happy outside of my work, outside of those things, and then I started to actively look for the beauty in other people.

When you look at someone, whether you're in a café or you're driving and that person cuts you off, try and say something positive about them. It might feel fake at first, but eventually, it starts becoming real, and eventually, your eyes start to adjust, and you start to see people as the beautiful, divine creatures that they are. It's been amazing because lately, what's been happening is I know where I used to have judgment, whether it be on body image, status, or personality, and I can see spaces where I used to judge people.

So, when someone is walking up to me, I can feel this judging thought almost boiling up, and then it just gets replaced by something beautiful, genuine, and loving. It's been the most incredible journey, but again, for anyone who's in that space, the first thing is making the commitment to show up and actually look into those dark places to see why there's these limiting thoughts and to see what you're not loving about yourself because if you don't know what's in the darkness, you can't really bring it into the light.

**Matt:** Awesome. Let's talk a little bit more about the Freelance Travel Network. Coming out of that ayahuasca experience in particular, when you had a dramatically expanded vision of what it could be, or was meant to be, or what you could do with it, can you talk a little bit about how you then went about building the Freelance Travel Network from there? Maybe you should start by saying exactly what the Freelance Travel Network is today, what it offers, who it's for, and the journey of getting there.

**Danielle:** Of course, yes. The Freelance Travel Network is an online school that helps creative freelancers communicate their value and find better clients. Often, as I've talked to creatives – and, the biggest thing is, “What should I charge? How do I find clients?” I had this realization that it was about seeing your value first as a person, as a human, as an individual. It's falling in love with yourself and seeing that reflected in the marketplace.

It seemed farfetched when I came up with this idea because I was like, “Danielle, no one is going to care about that. It's all about the practical tips and tricks.” There is so much practical – how to generate leads, how to cold email, all these things – but it doesn't matter how many of those tools they give you. If you don't believe you're worthy of success, you can't get there.

It's that bridge between the practical business side of things and mindfulness, spirituality,

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and self-love. It's that side of things, and it's that merging right in the middle that allows you to realize what limiting beliefs you have that are holding you back, and once you get through those limiting beliefs, here are the exact tools to get you to where you want to be.

Matt: Awesome. Can you talk a little bit more about who exactly the Freelance Travel Network is for?

Danielle: Yeah, of course. The Freelance Travel Network is for any creative freelancer. So, whether you're a writer, a marketer, a developer, or a designer, the Freelance Travel Network is for you. It's the skill behind the skill. So, you already have your skill that you go out and monetize, but the skill behind the skill is the business – how to actually run it as a business. So, the course is for solopreneurs who are struggling, whether you're at a lower income level and you're struggling to get those first few clients or you're at a higher income level where you're struggling to systematize it and feel confident in building a system to actually get clients on demand.

So, if in you're in either of those two spaces, the Freelance Travel Network is an amazing resource for you. You can check out [www.freelancetravelnetwork.com](http://www.freelancetravelnetwork.com). You can even just read the blog posts. There's so much good content on there, and I'm very excited about it.

It came out of a desire that I had when I was in school. I told you earlier that I would see my friends who were way better than me who were earning so much less. Earning money isn't even the main thing about it. The money comes after you realize your value. I had these students I was in school with who didn't see their value, and so, they settled for something so much less. The Freelance Travel Network tries to rewrite those stories and lets you see your value so you can actually earn the rate you deserve; you can get clients who respect you, and work that really fires you up.

Matt: Awesome. Can you talk a little bit more behind the scenes about how you built and scaled both of your businesses – Moku and the Freelance Travel Network – and any tips that you may have for people in terms of building and scaling businesses remotely?

Danielle: Of course. So, this actually came after my last plant medicine ceremony, which was iboga. Iboga is this African plant, and it's – if you imagine ayahuasca, she's this warm, beautiful goddess

who's like, "Hey, everything's going to be okay," and iboga is the stern father. He comes to you and he's like, "What are you doing with your life? You need to show up more." It was a very interesting experience that really shaped where my businesses are today.

This was fairly recent. I sat with iboga, and I saw this spirit, this African man, come to me, and he was like, "Danielle, you're not showing up for your life. It's great that you're in flow, it's beautiful that these things have happened," and you'll hear that in my story – one thing happens after another and it's pretty flowing. I put in the work, I put in effort, but there wasn't really that much intention or goal when I was moving forward.

He was like, "Every time you don't show up, Danielle, someone else gets hurt." I was like, "What does that mean?" He's like, "When you don't show up fully to the Freelance Travel Network, when you're not working on that, when you're not trying to reach people, someone out there is not getting the insight that you have, and you're not sharing your gift. When you're not showing up for Moku, your employees suffer. You're not helping them build their future. So, you need to show up to your life. You need to show up to your business."

I was like, "Oh man, you're scared to hire the people you know you need to hire because you're scared that you can't make enough money, you're scared that you won't be abundant enough, and you need to do that. You need to show up." I was like, "Okay, all right, good morning."

This plant also shows you that – well, one of the takeaways I got from it is in life, we're often waiting for this boom. Maybe you want to meet the girl or the guy that's going to be this boom, this firework. Maybe when you get that job, there's going to be a boom. Maybe when you hit that income level, it's going to be a boom. You get there, and there's no boom. I told myself, "When I make \$10,000.00, \$20,000.00, \$30,000.00, \$40,000.00 a month, boom, it's going to feel different. It's going to boom. My life is going to change." But, there is no boom. There's no boom.

But, what you realize – it's not a sad realization because it's actually so beautiful – when you realize there's no big boom, you realize that everything around you is booming all the time. Everything in your life is vibrating and has an energy. You just

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weren't present for it because you were betting on a future. I realized that I was living the dream right now – this is the miracle; this is what's beautiful about life.

And so, when I came home from that ceremony, everything kind of changed, and so, I looked at Moku, and I knew who I needed to hire. I was way too active in my business, doing sales, doing client management – I was doing all the stuff. I have ADHD. I am not the most organized person in the whole world. I'm fairly organized, but that's not my strength. There's someone who can do it better. And so, I hired Kerry, who is our business manager today, who has been incredible building systems and processes so I can start leaving that first company.

And then, with the Freelance Travel Network, running ads is not my specialty, and I hired people to do that. I hired people to take over the SEO, to run ads, to do all of those things, and all I need to focus on today is content and creating things of value for you guys, for the listeners, for people who are watching my YouTube channel and looking at my Instagram, creating content and value, sharing my message, and sharing my gifts.

**Matt:** Awesome. Let's talk a little bit about your social media presence. You have somewhere around 50,000 followers on Instagram. You're now active on YouTube as well. Can you talk a little bit about any tips that you have for building a social media audience and presence?

**Danielle:** For sure. There are two tips. The first one goes with the last story. When I hired all these people – and, if you're looking to scale your business, you need to find the right talent. You can't do it all. I think some of us have issues with letting go, and I think that also applies to social media. I have someone to help me with YouTube SEO because that's not my specialty, and I have people to help me – not so much with Instagram these days, but with LinkedIn and my other social media, which are all doing really well.

If you're looking to build a following specifically on Instagram and YouTube, I think the greatest currency is authenticity. People are looking to connect. We did an experiment with some of my friends where they took a photo and tried two different captions. They tried one that was cool, trendy, and very minimal. And then, they would try a heartfelt caption that talked about what they're

doing now, how they feel, and their thoughts around that. Some of us don't feel that our thoughts are super value or worth listening to, but honestly, I can see the difference.

When I put a caption that talks about what's going on with my life, I get so many more likes and replies, and it's much better for building. Now, my following is big, but for a long time, it was under 10,000, and I had a really tight-knit group of people who really liked hearing what I had to say, and I think it's better to build that as a foundation than to just go after likes, use a billion hashtags, and things like that – to try and build real fans.

**Matt:** Awesome. And, what kind of content are you putting out on YouTube? If people were to subscribe to your YouTube channel, what kind of content could they expect there?

**Danielle:** My channel is called HeyDanielle, all one word, and it is about freelancing and that intersection between freelancing and mindfulness, and there are a lot of practical tips and reframing – from scarcity to abundance, your own value, and things like that.

**Matt:** Awesome. I want to ask you a little bit about your personal productivity habits, day structure, and routines. I know you've talked a lot about your personal development journey, and so, today, how do you structure your day? Do you have morning routines? Do you have evening routines? How do you structure your day to be mindful and productive?

**Danielle:** Totally. First off, gamify everything. I gamify everything. I have this app called Habitica. Habitica turns your life into an RPG. You can set points for doing your habits. You have dailies, you have to-dos, so that's one of the ways I keep on track with everything, because I want to get points. You set your own reward. If I get 200 points, I can shop on Amazon and get someone to bring it for me, or something like that. So, I assign rewards for actual actions I do in my everyday life, so this is a fun way to stay on track.

But, in terms of my day structure, in the morning, I like to do some kind of fitness, either going to gymnastics or doing some yoga for 30 minutes to an hour, depending on whether I go to a class or do it at home. I usually start the workday around 9:00, and I have two blocks of flow time every day. Primarily, on Monday and Tuesday, I work on the studio, and on Wednesday and Thursday, I work on



the Freelance Travel Network during those times. Monday and Tuesday are mainly for the studio, and then I have one hour for the Freelance Travel Network, and on Wednesday and Thursday, it's inverted, so I spend most of my time on the Freelance Travel Network and one hour on the studio.

It's really great to have dedicated flow times because I don't book any meetings or anything during those times. They are just for me to focus. I track my productivity using an app called RescueTime. It's actually free if you want, or you can pay for it, but I can see my productivity over the years, I can see my productivity at every location, and I get about four hours and 30 minutes' productive time per day on average, so I don't schedule more than five hours of work on any given day because after that, I find I'm not very productive.

Fridays are flow days. If I feel like working, I'll work on Friday, and if I don't feel like working, I won't work, but I let Fridays come organically because I find that a lot of serendipity happens on Fridays, so I leave that open. The last thing is batching calls. I only do calls on Mondays or Tuesdays, and that keeps my brain free to do other things. I go to the gym in the evening as well, around 4:30 or 5:30, do a sauna, have dinner, and try to get to bed by 11:00.

**Matt:** Awesome. Specifically, do you have any other mindfulness practices that you regularly use in your life?

**Danielle:** Definitely. I journal every day, so that's one of the things that gives me point in my app. I have a five-minute journal as well as journaling on my iPad and writing a bit about that day, and at the end of the week, I try to do a weekly review. With meditation, I would say my practice is a little weak, but I have the Muse headband, which tracks your brain waves, so I'm able to see how my brain's actually doing while I'm meditating, and if I'm feeling kind of lazy, I'll do a head space.

**Matt:** All right. So, I want to shift gears one more time and talk to you about your current travel structure and how you're currently designing your lifestyle.

**Danielle:** I'm almost an ex-nomad in the way that I have a year lease here in Bali until next April, and that's six months away. I'm kind of

based here, and I do some visa runs, go to visit my parents, and all that stuff, but I'm more based in one place, and I realize Bali just lights me up and it's a really great place to be in. I think I'm actually going to sign another lease next year as well and have Bali be my home base. I have a bank account here, I have a business visa now, but I plan to do a few more trips in between.

I still want to go back to Buenos Aires for maybe two months of the year, and I'm thinking of spending eight months here and the rest of the year traveling. That's how I'm structuring it for now.

Matt: Cool. Let me just ask you this as a macro-level question: Looking back on all the travel that you've done over the past four years and looking forward as you plan your upcoming trips, at this point in your life, what does travel mean to you? What do you get out of it? Why do you travel? What does travel mean to you?

Danielle: Travel is the reset I never knew I needed. No matter where I go, whether it's just Singapore, which is next door from here, or it's back home to my parents, every time I leave where I am, everything around me changes. Whether it's the gym I go to, the kind of food I eat, the people, the language – everything suddenly changes, and I feel like finding myself anew in each place helps me understand what my essence is and helps me relate to other people better. For me, travel is like a big reset button. If you can imagine, it's just a giant red button that says "Reset." Every time I get on a plane, I kind of press it, and I get to find myself as this new person wherever I decide to go.

Matt: So awesome. All right, Danielle, at this point, are you ready for the Lightning Round!

Danielle: Ahhh! Okay, okay, okay. Yes!

Matt: Let's do it.

Announcer: The Lightning Round!

Matt: What is one book that has most influenced you over the years that you would recommend people to check out?

Danielle: I think it's *The Four Agreements* by Don Miguel Ruiz. It's about the four agreements that you can make to live a really great,

peaceful, and happy life. It's so short, so if you're not into reading long books, it's the perfect book for you, but it absolutely impacted my life so significantly.

Matt: Awesome. We're going to link that up in the show notes, along with everything else that we have talked about in this episode, so folks can just go to one place at [www.themaverickshow.com](http://www.themaverickshow.com) and go to the show notes for this episode, and everything that Danielle recommends will be right there in one place. Next question: What is one app or productivity tool that you would recommend?

Danielle: Sunsama. It is an incredible tool. It's like Trello and Google Calendar had a baby. You can actually take your tasks for the day and block off time in your calendar with that task. So, instead of just having a long to-do list, you know when you're going to do that task, you can assign time for it, and stuff like that. It's amazing.

Matt: Cool. What is one travel hack that you use that you could share with people?

Danielle: I love sitting in the back of the plane because a lot of times, they don't fill it all the way up, so there's a higher chance of me getting at least two seats to myself, and I order a gluten-free meal because it always comes first.

Matt: Amazing. That's a good one. Who is one person, currently alive today, that you've never met who you would most like to have dinner with?

Danielle: Richard Branson, definitely. He's definitely not of this world. He's able to completely bend reality. To get a second to understand how he thinks would be such a privilege.

Matt: Awesome. Danielle, what are the top three travel destinations that you've ever been to – your three favorites that you'd most recommend people check out?

Danielle: Lisbon, definitely. We both talked about our love for Lisbon. The city has such an incredible vibe, and the food is great. And then, I'd say Bali or Buenos Aires. Bali is for if you're looking for something a bit more relaxed and spiritual with entrepreneur vibes. Buenos Aires is for if you want to have a great time.

Matt: Last question: What are your top three bucket-list destinations – places that you've never been that are at the top of your list of where you want to go right now?

Danielle: I really want to go to Zanzibar. The beaches look incredible, as does the culture. I want to go to Africa in general, so Zanzibar is up there, and Cape Town is also up there – all on the same continent. And then, Tahiti is a place I would like to visit. It just looks absolutely beautiful.

Matt: Great picks. I was in Cape Town for a couple months earlier this year. That was my second time there. It's a super amazing city. And then, I was in Zanzibar last year. I did East Africa – I went to Kenya, Uganda, and Tanzania, which included a trip out to Zanzibar. Awesome picks. Feel free to hit me up if you want any tips on those.

Danielle: I definitely will take you up on that.

Matt: Amazing. Danielle, it was so awesome to have you on the show. I want you to let people know how they can find you, follow you, get ahold of you, learn more about the Freelance Travel Network, check out your YouTube channel, follow you on Instagram – all that kind of stuff.

Danielle: Yeah, definitely. If you want to keep up with me, I post a lot of stories on Instagram, and my Instagram is DanielleTom. Also, just check out [www.freelancetravelnetwork.com](http://www.freelancetravelnetwork.com). There are so many blog posts and really good information about freelancing, working for yourself, and working online, so those are the ways I would recommend getting in touch with me.

Matt: Awesome. It was so great to have you here. I am most likely going to be swinging through Bali next month, so hopefully, we can grab a drink in person and continue the conversation.

Danielle: I might be in Bangkok, actually.

Matt: What? Well, we have to coordinate schedules, share dates, and hang out either in Bangkok or Bali, but either way, I look forward to it, and thank you again so much for being here. This was really a blast.

Danielle: Amazing. Thank you so much.

Matt: All right. Good night, everybody!

Announcer: Be sure to visit the show notes page at [www.themaverickshow.com](http://www.themaverickshow.com) for direct links to all the books, people, and resources mentioned in this episode. You'll find all that and much more at [www.themaverickshow.com](http://www.themaverickshow.com).

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