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BOOK MARKETING: How to Use Willpower to Do More of What You Want Interview with Lizzie Merritt

- Susan Friedmann: Welcome to Book Marketing Mentors, the weekly podcast where you learn proven strategies, tools, ideas, and tips from the masters. Every week I introduce you to a marketing master, who will share their expertise to help you market and sell more books.
- Today my special guest is an education delivery expert. Lizzie Merritt is the Director of Education at Mirasee, a special organization serving visionary businesses and entrepreneurs focused on delivering value, and making a difference in their world. Prior to that she taught fitness to moms of small children, and for five years she taught science to middle schoolers. No easy task. Lizzie loves learning about a whole range of things, but especially the Hegel Psychology and weight loss. When she's not interacting with the Mirasee community, you might find her exercising or writing about peace with the imperfect body. Her book, "Seven Ways to Willpower," teaches you how to train your brain to get better results. She's someone I've learned to love, even though we've only recently found each other. Lizzie, what a pleasure it is to welcome you to the show and thank you for being this week's guest expert and mentor.
- Lizzie Merritt: Great, thank you Susan. It is a pleasure to be here. I really appreciate you having me on.
- Susan Friedmann: So Lizzie, willpower - that's something that truly affects all of us in every area of our lives. So firstly, let's start by understanding why willpower is such a big deal, especially when we tell ourselves we don't have any.
- Lizzie Merritt: Oh, yeah, absolutely. Willpower really affects all areas of our lives. It's related to grit and resilience and number one, it's not a fixed trait. It is something that you can strengthen or improve, and the way you think about it and feel like the words you tell yourself in terms of, "oh I don't have any willpower" or "I can get better at it", those become self-fulfilling prophecies.

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Studies have shown that individuals with greater willpower or more grit or resilience are happier in their marriages, they make more money, they live longer, there's actually, I imagine your audience is probably familiar with the famous marshmallow study. I don't know exactly the dates and details, but the gist of it is that researchers had children in the lab and they gave them a marshmallow. They said, "We're going to walk out of the room and you can have the marshmallow now, but if you wait 15 minutes and don't eat the marshmallow, then when we come back you can have two." The researchers left the room and some children went ahead and ate the single marshmallow, some children found ways to have willpower and to busy themselves with other things and waited for the two marshmallows. So fast forward several years, and their correlation is that those children who were able to demonstrate willpower and delayed gratification were those who were dramatically more successful in life; in all different categories whether it was health, finance, marriage, so forth. So there you have it.

Susan Friedmann: It's a really big deal. I love that marshmallow example. I know that study and I would have loved to have been a fly on the wall in that room just watching those kids, resisting eating that marshmallow. That's really tough for those four-year-olds to do that.

You call willpower body building for the brain. What can we do to strengthen that willpower, so that we can have it do a better job for us?

Lizzie Merritt: Sure, well I think that the first part is recognizing that, like I said before that willpower is not a fixed trait. It is something that you can work on and strengthen. Number one; environment is a huge factor. You are more likely to be able to exercise your willpower if you change your environment. So other studies have shown that, let's say there's a jar of candy on the table. If you simply put the lid on the jar, it is much, much easier to resist dipping your hand into the candy jar. Simply because there's a small barrier there. There's a higher activation energy and so that's a higher activation energy is great when you're trying to avoid something. A lower activation energy is more important when you're trying to do something healthy.

Another example is the Shawn Achor, who wrote "The Happiness Advantage," he talks about lowering his activation energy, in other words improving his willpower to go exercise by sleeping in his exercise clothes and putting his shoes right by his bed. So that even though it's a small thing, he didn't have to go to his drawer and figure out okay, first of all what am I gonna wear? And secondly, where is it? And third, I've

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got to actually put it on. Even those are small, little bursts of energy, they're enough sometimes to thwart us from the things we want to do. So if you can lower your activation energy with the things you want to do, it improves your willpower.

Now I imagine, Susan maybe you and I can brainstorm with your audience since they're writers, I bet you there's ways they could lower their activation energy to help them write consistently or do the marketing that they need to do. Perhaps, if necessary, increase the activation energy for those distractions like Facebook and so forth.

Susan Friedmann: Yeah, and what comes to mind as you say that Lizzie, are tiny habits. And as you said with the example that you gave, is that you're taking something and you're breaking it up into very small pieces to make it easier for yourself to actually get to do it. Because sometimes I think we look at tasks and we think, oh, my goodness it's so big, I just don't know where to start with it. What are your thoughts on that?

Lizzie Merritt: Oh, absolutely. What comes to mind when you say that is, I can't remember which author I heard this about, it might be Stephen King, but there's a sort of lore that when they were finished writing each night they would leave an incomplete sentence. So that the next morning the trigger to get started was, all I have to do is finish this sentence. So it's going back to your idea of breaking things down into small pieces. If your job to get started is, "all I have to do to be successful is finish writing this sentence," you're like, "oh, that's not that hard." If I have to write seven pages, like, oof, maybe that's oh, "I gotta prepare for that."

That might be an example of breaking down a task into what is something really small that in your mind is like, "oh, that's easy. I can do that." Then it kind of builds.

Susan Friedmann: I think you're absolutely right. I think it was Stephen King in his book about writing. That's such a great little trick, or hack for people to do is just to break off and leave something incomplete because I believe the brain needs to have closure on things. So that incompleteness, you automatically want to complete it.

Let's talk about feelings and I know you have written about this; how feelings affect our thoughts and then how thoughts affect our feelings. Because, I believe that all has to do with willpower.

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Lizzie Merritt:

Absolutely. It's interesting to imagine that the way I feel about a task, or about something could actually impact its outcome. Or perhaps even the way that I think about something could help me be successful, or not. So for example, Kelly McGonigal is the author of two excellent books; "The Willpower Instinct," which much of my book is based on, but also a new book called, "The Upside of Stress." And in her new book "The Upside of Stress," she talks about how of course most of the information and news that we hear about stress is that stress is very harmful, it hurts your heart. You know people who are excessively stressed are more likely to die at a younger age, and so forth. There is science to back that up, but amazingly the way you view stress, the way you think about it, how you feel about it, actually impacts how stress impacts your body. For those people who look at stress as a challenge, or this is helping me grow, or I'm getting stronger as I work through this difficult thing, actually stress really does make them stronger.

It's, again, take a look at her book "The Upside of Stress," to look at the science behind it. But it's really amazing that just the way you view or think about stress literally impacts how it affects your body. I know there are many analogs to all kinds of things within life, for example if you're looking at a chore - we discussed a minute ago, Susan - let's say you told yourself that you've got a goal, you want to write 500 words every day and you get up in the morning and you have your coffee, and you sit down and say, "Okay now I have to write my 500 words." You've just told yourself, "I have to." We all have our inner child that nobody likes to be told what to do, and so whenever you tell yourself, "I have to write 500 words," "I have to eat my vegetables," there is already a subconscious inner-resistance to that. So if you can simply switch your words, going back to your question, change the way you think about it to, "Okay, now I get to write my 500 words. I've had my coffee, now I get to write my 500 words." That shifts the mindset to, "this is an opportunity. This is something I get to do." It really impacts the result that comes out the other side.

Susan Friedmann:

And that goes to, I believe people talk about making something that you don't necessarily like to do, but you try and make it a game. Or you make it fun so you actually look forward to it. For example, cleaning my office is not my favorite task. But, if I make it into a game and make it easy for myself, then it isn't such a chore, and I don't look at it as something heavy. I look at it as something light and more joyful to do.

Lizzie Merritt:

Exactly.

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Susan Friedmann: I know that you've done a lot of work with regards to dieting and weight loss. Talk to us about the willpower of food, for instance. I think that's a big one for everybody; is the willpower of not eating what you think you want, or you think you want to have. Talk to us about that.

Lizzie Merritt: Sure. Wow. Yeah. Well, that very much goes back to what I was just talking about, "I have to," versus, "I get to." So, the concept of the diet in general is pretty flawed because we're telling ourselves, "I can't have what I want." And ultimately, whether it takes a day or a month, the more you tell yourself, "I can't do this thing," the more you want it. So the way you think about your food, or your exercise, or your body really, really makes a difference. There is not perfect formula. It's all a process. As you mentioned, in the beginning that I sometimes write about being at peace with the imperfect body, and also being at peace with the imperfect nutrition regiment. The way that I think about it is, I try to think about, "I get to take care of myself. I get to eat wonderful food that makes me feel great." And if I'm having a stressful day, or I'm craving something sugar related, I will use my willpower to say, "I get to have something healthy and if I'm still hungry 10 minutes later for that sugary thing, then I get to have that to."

I also would say, related to willpower, that it is an exhaustible resource so when you're tired and you haven't slept well, or there's a lot going on in life think of it like a gas tank. So, you're already at a half a tank or less, so usually you're at a full tank for willpower first thing in the morning. And, as you or your audience might agree with, by the end of the day your willpower is depleted because you've gone through a number of things that can use up that willpower tank. And lots of things can affect your willpower. It's not just necessarily resisting a sugary food, or forcing yourself to go work out. It can be having a difficult conversation, or those kinds of things.

So, the way you think about, "I get to do this," versus, "I have to do this," can really impact your success in the long run.

Susan Friedmann: You talk about the word, "why," and that it's such a power word. Can you tell us why it is?

Lizzie Merritt: Sure. That can apply to a lot of different contexts. So, first of all if you're talking about your why, your reason why - obviously there are many books about this as well, Simon Sinek's "Start With Why." But the why that you are motivated to do anything really matters. And if it's an intrinsic goal, something inner, it's going to fuel that fire and fuel your

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motivation and your willpower more successfully over the long run versus if it's an extrinsic goal. "I simply want the New York Times best seller because I want to be able to put that on my resume," is not going to motivate you as much as "I really want to get my message out into the world."

Susan Friedmann: Yah. I love Simon Sinek's book. That's an excellent book, and I highly recommend it to everyone, "I'll Start With Why." That's brilliant. I never thought about that before I read that book. I've listened to his Ted Talks and he just makes so much sense.

Lizzie Merritt: Yah.

Susan Friedmann: Yah, it's like "Why do I want to do that?"

Lizzie Merritt: If you don't mind, I'd like to take that same question and answer it in a really different way.

Susan Friedmann: Please, do.

Lizzie Merritt: Sure. So I know that your audience is authors and not only is writing a book important, but also once you've written it then you have to market it so it can actually get into the hands of your readers so they'll hear about it. The way that why comes into marketing is really, really important. And, it's very different from the first answer.

The why you want to be considering when you're thinking about your marketing, "how do I explain my book to my audience so that they'll know they want it." You always want to put yourself in their shoes. So if you are Sally Audience Member, why does she want to read your book? How does it affect her life? What will be impacted in her life by reading your book? So whenever you're thinking about your marketing wording language, your message always start with your audience's why. Why should they read your book? How will it impact them?

Susan Friedmann: I think that's such an important message because we tend to get very involved with ourselves and forget our audience member and really if we focus on them, and as you rightly say, what's their why for wanting to read your book? Why should they have your message? What's it going to do for them? How's it going to help them? That's such a critical piece of that puzzle.

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- Lizzie Merritt: Absolutely. And, as an author it's difficult sometimes to see the forest through the trees and a little hack, or a trick to help you get out of your own mind and into the mind of your audience, is to enlist the help of a friend who could be a likely fit for your ideal audience member and say, "Hey, can you help me think about this from your point of view? Here's my book. Here's what I think it could do for you. Could you tell me, why would you want to read it?" That can help you with your marketing message.
- Susan Friedmann: That's really important. I hope our listeners heard you on that one. Replay that part, people.
- I know that our listeners love learning about mistakes. I know we've mentioned a few, especially when it comes to the wordsmithing. What are some other mistakes that you can think of that you could share with us?
- Lizzie Merritt: Sure. So if we're going to stick with the idea of a theme rather of marketing, one mistake is to begin any message with "Dear friend, I'm writing a book about 'such and such' and this is what I've been doing lately." Really, anything about you. It's okay to get into what your project is, and what you've been working on in the message, but that first sentence needs to be why is this interesting to the reader? So, let's say for example you wrote a book about willpower and you're writing out an email list of people who might be good candidates to buy your book, so I could say, "Dear Susan, do you ever struggle with willpower? Do you ever feel like it's difficult to avoid chocolate at 5 o'clock in the afternoon? Well, let me tell you about this book I've been writing." And so forth.
- Susan Friedmann: That's a wonderful approach, because you're right it's always looking at taking the I's out of everything that you say in your marketing message because we tend to be very, "I did this" and "I did that" and "This is what I have to offer you," rather than as you say, coming from what the issues are; the challenges and that you have the solution for their challenges.
- Lizzie Merritt: Yes. This might be a little off topic, but something that I learned as the Director of Education at Mirasee is that if you ever got any collateral assets that are related to your book - so you've got your book, but perhaps you have an online course as well, or perhaps you have an online newsletter that you would love for somebody to give you their email list [inaudible 00:17:42], as you know on Amazon Kindle, many

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Kindle books have a take a peek inside, and so somebody who was browsing through Amazon who is not on your email list, perhaps has not even heard of you but they're interested and "Oh, that looks interesting, I'll take a peek inside." You see the cover page, and perhaps the first chapter or something like that. A trick is between the cover page and the beginning of the content, is a short marketing message. You say, "You want to learn more? Here is a little bit more about," whatever the piece is whether it's the online course or your online newsletter to get them to sign up for your email list and include a URL link to a landing page where they can sign up for more information about your course, sign up for your online newsletter and that link, by the way, should not go to your homepage. It should only go to your landing page, where the only thing they can do from that page is enter their email address and say, "Yes, sign me up." But, that way someone who is just browsing through Amazon can learn more about you and get your email list without ever having bought your book. And, that way now you've got additional asset with your email list and you can continue to email them and market to them in the future.

Susan Friedmann: Yes, because I think one of the toughest things is and normally you don't know who buys your book from Amazon. So using that hack and getting them to at least sign up for something that they may want, maybe a checklist or tips, hacks or anything like that, then absolutely, that's a great way to do it.

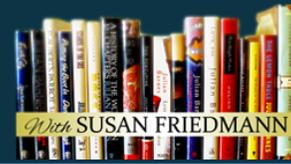
So Lizzie, you talked about Mirasee. Give our listeners a little bit more information about what they do and how they can get hold of you. Take it away.

Lizzie Merritt: Sure. So Mirasee we are online educators. We help entrepreneurs get their businesses up and running in many different ways. As I mentioned, I'm the Director of Education so I primarily help our students who are in the course loaders laboratory, so that helps people build an online course. We also do a lot of other things. We have the Business Ignition Boot Camp, which is completely free, and teaches entrepreneurs about the fundamentals of business. Basically we're trying to reimagine business and business education so that everything you wish you learned in business school but never were taught. So we're trying to revolutionize the business education world. If folks want to get in touch with me, my email address is Lizzie@mirasee.com.

Susan Friedmann: Fabulous. Folks, really check out the programs. I've done several of them. I love their programs. They're very different to anything else out

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there. The people at Mirasee are just really interested in helping you succeed. I think that's at the core of so much of what they do.

Lizzie, if you were to leave our listeners with a golden nugget, what would that be?

Lizzie Merritt:

I would go back to the marketing message of always put yourself in the point of view of your reader. It's so natural, especially if we're not trained marketers, that we just begin a conversation talking about our projects from our point of view because that's how we see the world. But, so does everyone else and so when someone else is reading your message, they're reading it from their point of view. So you want to shift the focus of your message from yourself to your reader. Help them understand why they need to read your book, why it will help them, and how it could change or help their lives.

Susan Friedmann:

Wonderful. You've condensed, I think, all the main messages that you delivered here, so thank you so much for sharing your wisdom.

Thank you all for taking time out of your precious day to listen to this interview. I sincerely hope that it sparks some ideas you can use to sell more books. Here's wishing you much book marketing success.