

Podcast Episode #026

A Real-Life Reinvention Story with special guest Dina D'Alessandro - Part 2

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Announcer: Welcome to the LiftOff Project with Coach Pamela.

Pamela: Welcome to the LiftOff Project. I'm Pamela Mitchell, your host and your coach, and this is the podcast devoted to helping you meld your professional self and your personal self into an enhanced version of your best self. My goal is to help you take control of your work and your life, feel more relaxed and confident, and experience the satisfaction and fulfillment of a sustainable, successful life.

Today's topic is a real life reinvention story part two. Last week we spoke with Dina D'Alessandro, and we have her back again this week! This episode is our behind the scenes conversation. Last week we did the typical interview. But after we were done with that interview, we turned off the microphone and just started talking and it got so good that I asked Dina if we could just turn it back on. This is what you're going to hear today. You're going to hear her raw and unfiltered reinvention story and all of the tough times that go on behind the scenes as we make progress towards our goals. I hope you enjoy it. Let's dive in!

All right, so we are back because after the last interview, Dina and I started chitchatting on our own, doing the behind the scenes thing, and it got so good and so real that I just felt like we needed to do this again. Sometimes when people are looking at the outside of it, your story, Dina, my story here, it just looks great and fabulous. As if we're saying, "Oh yeah, I made this decision, and then I put all these things in place, and now here I am magically." People are going to look at that and say, "Okay, that's great, but they don't have to deal with anything." When we turned off the recording before, Dina and I were both said, "Okay, let's just talk about the stuff that sucks."

Dina: Yeah, right. It's not all doves and butterflies and puppies and rainbows!

Pamela: That is so right. I was just saying that I've been going through some tough times. If any of my listeners have seen the email that I just sent out a couple of weeks ago about being silent for the past two years, they'll understand. I had to deal with my



mother-in-law's illness and stopping work for two months to go to the hospital every single day to show up for her and help her with her rehab. And then of course continuing all that through her final year and her passing. Then my husband went through pneumonia and another health challenge where they thought he might have lung cancer. That took another six months of doctors and being in hospitals every single week until that got resolved. Thankfully, he didn't have cancer in the end.

Then, very shortly after that, maybe six weeks after, my mom calls and she had been diagnosed with breast cancer. I finished that whole year out with going back into the hospitals and doctor visits with surgery and chemotherapy, all of that stuff. Somehow, even though I had all these intentions, basically I was dealing with all of this stuff and life was really hard. As I was sitting here thinking about restarting and coming back out, sending out this email, I thought, "Does this even really make a difference?" I don't know. We hit those moments in what we're doing. I knew I was committed and I knew that this is what I was supposed to do, but I still hit that moment where I was like, "Life is really hard and it kind of sucks and I don't know. I want to whine." You hit that moment too, Dina, right?

Dina: I hit that moment once a week, I think. Again, like you said, people think it's all fairies and doves flying around and so on. But there isn't a pile of cash that I can just magically pull out from under me and pay for things. No, I had to pull back a lot of spending, I had to take out some loans, I had to borrow some money from people to make certain things happen. As I was telling you before, Pamela, when we went off the air for a bit, every day I'm exhausted because I'm pursuing my goal, and that is a great thing, but with it comes a lot of responsibility and energy and time and so on.

Pamela: And sacrifice.

Dina: There are people in my life who don't get it, who say things like, "I can't believe you don't have two minutes to call or check in. I can't believe how long it's been since we've seen you." That really hurts because I am such a sociable person and I'm the first one to send out well wishes to people and remember people's birthdays and anniversaries. So it hurts my heart a little bit to have to re-prioritize things. It doesn't mean that anyone is less important than they've been, it's just that there are now time deadlines and grade point averages that I have to worry about. Unfortunately, that goes to the front of a list, but it's temporary. This will be done soon and then I can get back to my normal state of mind. For me, too, having been so socially involved with everybody, and then I had to pull the plug on all that definitely in the last five months. Actually, it's probably been the last three years on and off. I've been pursuing what is pretty much like three full-time jobs, being in the internship, the school, running the business behind the scenes when I can, and right now putting that on the back burner so that I can focus more on school and the internship because it's important to me to get that done.

Pamela: Right. That's right. Well, I think this is a really important piece of this because when you make a decision, when we make a decision that we're going to pursue a goal,



this idea that everything can be a priority is a myth. Something has to give, right? We can have everything, but we can't have it all at the same time.

Dina: Exactly.

Pamela: You say, "Yeah, I'm a social person and I love staying connected to people, and yet right now I've got a grade point average and I'm a human being. I need sleep, I need rest, there's only so much I can do." That makes it really real, and in those moments, like when you said it hurts your heart, I understand that. It hurts my heart because there are people that I want to get back to. I'm very much of a relationship-driven person. Every time I get an email from somebody and they're like, "Oh, talk to me about what's going on with you." Literally every day it hurts that I don't respond to them, but I also know that I've got all this with the business, I've got my clients that I'm talking to, I've got to launch, I've got a team that is coming to me for different things. I have my husband and I have my mom. I've got all this stuff going on and I've also got to keep myself anchored in all of that. Sometimes it's like I go to the gym and then I come home and I have dinner and then I'm like, "I need to read. I can't sit and do however many more emails or have a conversation or whatever it is."

Yeah, so these downside moments I think are really important to share with people. You talked about the word hustle, hustling for the goal.

Dina: Always hustling, always hustling.

Pamela: Yeah. Talk a little bit more about that, Dina, because there is that element, too, to making our goal happen, right?

Dina: Absolutely. Like I said, you have to put actions into place and into play in order to make things happen. I joke about being very busy and important, but I do it on purpose. I'm making myself busy because I want to achieve my goals. As I was saying to you before, I do get down every now and then because I'm so busy and I always feel like everything is a priority and I can't fit in things like doing my laundry or going for a walk. I can go for a walk but it can only be 20 minutes and then I have to stop because there are certain things that are the overwhelming deadlines. So the hustling part, it's a part of everyday life. I'm always trying to post to social media, so that happens in ten seconds, you're gone, you're at the bottom of the list.

I try to keep myself out there and engaged so that people don't forget I exist, and that's one thing that I would guess would be like a hustling thing. Then conferences, things like that. I know I do not have time, but if there's a four-hour conference on the weekend that seems like it would be a good thing not only for me to learn about but engage and maybe make some more connections and get some things lined up for my future endeavors, then I'm going to have to do that. I won't go to someone's wedding because I'm doing that. Again, it's not going to happen all the time. There'll be a time in a few years where things will be a little bit slower and I can maybe make some of those adjustments, but right now I have to set myself up to succeed because I wanted it to



happen and now it's happening. I can't poo-poo it. I can't say, "This sucks," because it's what I wanted.

Pamela: Right. That's right.

Dina: It's my dream.

Pamela: That's right. That's the thing, and I think that's an important piece because when our dream starts to happen and there's a momentum that begins to happen, when things start to move for our dreams, it takes on its own life, it becomes like its own child. It has its own needs. Sometimes you have to put aside what you might be thinking or normally doing and serve it, like you said. Like going to that conference instead of a wedding, which is one of those things that makes you say, "Oh God, this hurts," but sometimes it just is.

Dina: Yeah. I mean, I always say to myself, what's that quote? Are you more afraid of failure or success? To be successful, this is something that you have to continually do. I try to justify some of my choices because I think, okay, "I'm at a wedding. I meet 160 to 200 people but I'm not really spending quality time with anyone, with the exception of maybe who's to my left and to my right at my table." What I'll tend to do is say, "Can't make that, but come into the city one day, let me take you out to dinner and let's chat about how you've been and what's going on." This way it fits a little bit more into my schedule, but then I also feel like I'm having one-on-one time with somebody who means a lot to me. I'm not just thrown into a giant group of people obligated to go to an event. I try and do that. I can't come to this giant birthday party for your kid, but can I come over one night and I'll bring pizza, we chat, and we just have the four of us hang out.

People are amenable to that, at least if you're not completely forgetting about them. I think that's something too, Pamela. We know as business overachievers that we're going to be sacrificing some things, but you can't just cut your ties with everybody because these are the people who are supporting you and thinking about you, happy for you, and you have to definitely validate that relationship in some way.

Pamela: That's right! That's absolutely right! Last night when I got back from the gym, cooked dinner, and fed everybody, I said, "I'm tired. I just want to take a bath and I want to read." But I did send three emails to people who had written me. It's not everybody I need to respond to, but at least some, because to your point, we do what we can. It's important to stay connected and to stay nurtured, and that is because we have to remember back, as you said, as business overachievers, that it's important to nurture our soul while we're going through this because sometimes the goal can kind of take over. If we don't stay connected to those parts of us that feed our soul, then we become depleted as we are trying to accomplish this, and then there's less of us to actually move forward.

Dina: Right.



Pamela: It sounds like that's what you're doing, too. You're saying, "All right, I need to stay connected. That's important. It's important for so many reasons, but I need to find a more creative way of doing it."

Dina: Right, and I mean there are times where it just feels like every minute of every day, for many weeks on end, there's something. I walk to my internship location now. I have the luxury of not having to be crammed into a subway car underground, so I'm able to make some phone calls while I'm outside. I catch up with that. I'm like, "I don't want to. I want to focus on what's around me and enjoy the city and enjoy the walk and people watch and things like that." Sometimes it's okay to be "selfish" and take a day for yourself just to sit and stare into the atmosphere, the TV screen, anything. You have to be okay with that, because especially for people who are always so on, you definitely have to check in and say, "Am I okay? Am I going to be able to make it through the next day or have I worn myself so thin that I'm not good to anybody right now?"

Pamela: Right, right. That's actually another important point, which is checking in on what's going on inside, because when we're pursuing this reinvention or when we're pursuing a goal, it can be very, very consuming and our attention is outside of us, right?

Dina: Right.

Pamela: Our attention is on this next thing to do and, "I've got this and I've got this," and our attention is not necessarily inside. Before we know it, we're sitting there, staring at whatever the next thing is we're supposed to be doing thinking, "I can't do this."

Dina: "I can't go anymore. I can't do it. Make it stop!" It's funny, because you're the one in control. Nobody's making us do these things. I'm the one in control of my own schedule, for the most part. I mean, yes, I have my grad classes and my homework assignments, but I'm the one that schedules things out in my day.

Pamela: Right. That's right.

Dina: I was just going to say, though, that there are non-negotiables. As corny and old-lady as this sounds, I am in bed by 9:30. I don't care. I get up at 5:30. There's a give and take, and I like having that time to myself in the morning before I have to walk out the door. People will say to me, "What do you need so much time in the morning to do?" "Well, do you want the list? Feed the cats, feed myself, wash up. These things take time." I hate rushing out the door thinking I forgot something or not feeling put together. I like to journal. I like to have a quiet moment to myself. I purposely get up in the morning to do that. Then, once a week on Sundays, my entire day is shot because I meal prep for the entire week so that I do not have to come home and go, "Oh my gosh, I can't believe I have to cook something for myself," or I have to order something that I don't want. I don't want to spend money on outside food when I have a fridge full of food here that I can make myself. I sacrifice an entire day on Sunday to do my grocery shopping and cook so that I can have things when I walk in, I just grab and go, I'm done.



Pamela: Again with teh tradeoffs, right? You said you give an entire day because you know the rest of the week you don't want to have to think about it.

Dina: Yes. It's rare that I'll allow somebody to take a Sunday from me because if I don't have my Sunday, the whole week is thrown off.

Pamela: Yeah. That's another critical piece. We've got to have core time, and that's always a push/pull, right? When we're looking at our schedule and there's something that people want from us? For me, from a work perspective, that's Monday mornings. Every so often I'll have a client say, "Oh, you know, why don't we have a call on Monday morning?" A contact saying, "Well, let's have a call on Monday morning." I'm like, you know what? No. I need that morning just to begin thinking about what am I going to do this week. "What do I need to get done?"

I have my first call on Mondays at 1:00. That's good because I don't want to get up and begin my week rushing into something. I just need time. I might just do my numbers or look at my to-do list. I read a lot of productivity articles. I'm always reading articles, you know, we all do that, right?

Dina: Yeah.

Pamela: I'll say, "Well, the most productive people do all of this on Sunday, so that when they get in on Monday morning, they hit the ground running. I thought about that, I really did. I thought, "Okay, Sunday."

Dina: You take out a day from your weekend to do a business related thing?

Pamela: Yeah, to go through everything. Yeah, yeah. Exactly.

Dina: No. Where does it end, if that's the case? Where does it end?

Pamela: Exactly. Well, I forget who it was, it was some high powered woman on Wall Street who's not longer in that role and has this easy new life now, not easy, but at least not living full on like she was, and she said, " On Sunday, I would take an hour just to get myself together so that it wouldn't be so bad on Monday morning." Then she said, "That hour turned into an afternoon. Then, that afternoon turned into all of Sunday."

Dina: The whole day?

Pamela: The whole day. Where does it stop? Yeah, you can be more productive Monday morning if you're working Sunday, but then if you start working Sunday, then you're working Sunday.

Dina: Right. There's Parkinson's Law, which is, "Work expands to fill the time allotted to it." One of the big rules I had at my last job, working at the health department, is I refused to schedule things, meetings or anything, on Mondays and Fridays. I would



confine everything we needed to do to Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday and force people to do things in three days. If you can't get things done in three days, then there's got to be a problem. You're not managing your time or your tasks properly. Mondays and Fridays should be the lift off and then the cool down time as you're preparing for the next week on Fridays and you're getting all your files back in order that came from your meetings, the things you just threw on your desk because you didn't have time to do it. I refused to have anybody talk to me on Mondays and Fridays. I didn't care. I didn't care. I can't be productive if I'm always checking email, if I'm always responding, if I'm always running to a meeting.

I would make people tell me why. "Why do you need me to do this now? Why can't it wait until tomorrow?" There was never a good reason. Just because, because that's what they think. If you really make people look at it, you probably could maneuver things in a way that fit a little bit more of a closer time, a finite time so that you're not constantly spreading things out all over the place and having all this work creep out into other parts of your life where you should be planning, right?

Pamela: Right.

Dina: The quote I have in my email is from John Wood about if you don't have time to do it right, when are you going to have time to do it over? Make sure you have time to plan, right?

Pamela: Right.

Dina: People think that all the time. "We'll just fix it in post-production." But why? Why do you want to spend that time at the end when you could plan ahead and say, "This is how it should be." I get it, not everything's perfect. You have to be flexible with things. Things pop up, and I get it, but when the exception becomes the rule all of a sudden, then that's not fair to anybody and you're never efficient when you're always putting out fires. It's just not appropriate.

Pamela: Right. That's right. I love this because that is the conundrum about pursuing a reinvention or pursuing any goal: you're doing it on top of life, right?

Dina: Right.

Pamela: People think, "I'm going to stop, I'm going to do my reinvention, I'm going to work towards my goal when I have more time." Well, that's a myth. Because things will always come in, so you have to figure out a way to have that and have these other things going on, and that requires, to your point, boundaries around all of this.

Dina: Absolutely, boundaries, some sort of structure. Again, not to sound like such a drill sergeant with things, but just like you said, you have to have a start and an end time, otherwise things just start seeping out and then you lose sleep or, in my case, you gain loads of laundry that you still haven't done but will be done at some point. There has to



be a time where you just say, "Enough." I think what happens for me, I don't ever like looking at clocks. I hate watching the time, so I set 63 alarms in a day if I have to. My alarms say things like, "You have 10 minutes to start winding down." On Fridays, at about 20 minutes or 30 minutes before the end of the day, that's it. If any email comes through, a phone call comes in, I ignore it. That's no longer anyone else's time but my own. There are certain caps I put on things, otherwise I'll just be there forever. If you allow yourself to answer that phone call at 4:45 PM on a Friday, when you know you want to leave at 5:00, what if that's a half hour phone call?

Pamela: Right.

Dina: Now that's your time, and now you're leaving later, and now you're stuck in traffic, and now you're not getting home to your kids in time, and now everything's thrown off because of one person who does not run your life. You run your life.

Pamela: That's right. That's absolutely right. There's a new gym that just opened up literally on the corner of my block and they have classes that are at 5:30 and 6:30. Depending on the day, like on Fridays, I'll sign up for a 5:30 class. Why? Because I want to make sure I am done working by 5:30.

Dina: Right. Right. "I got to be somewhere."

Pamela: Right, I got to be somewhere. At 5:30, I'm in that class and that is my signal to my head that says, "Guess what? You're done! You're done with your week of work!" When I see that on my calendar, even though Fridays are technically my easier days, I do things like this, fun stuff. I'm working on a project now, so I've got a 4:00 pm call with my graphic designer. She's in New Zealand so it's not easy to find a time that works for both of us, but I said to her, "Look, I want to take this 5:30 class. And she says, "Well, if we need to do something, we can reconvene after." And I was like, "You know what? That would be okay because as long as in my head I stopped and I did that 5:30 class..."

Dina: For you.

Pamela: For me, that's right. Normally we schedule at 6:00, but I was like, "You know what? Not Friday." Fine. She's going to get up early. It'll be 4:00 pm my time. We're going to do it, we're going to finish, and if we're not exactly finished, then I can come back after. I do my 5:30 no matter what. That is for me. I don't sacrifice it because it doesn't work if we sacrifice ourselves for the very goal we're looking to achieve.

Dina: Exactly.

Pamela: The goal is important, but it can't come at the expense of ourselves.

Dina: Right, right. You want to practice what you preach. I mean, I'm going into the health and wellness field. Do I really want to sit there and look like I haven't slept in six months and I don't take care of myself and I'm snacking on junk food all the time? No. I



want to make sure I'm practicing what I preach for myself and for my clients because I want them to feel confident that I know what I'm talking about and that they want to come to me because I'm an expert in what I do. Why wouldn't you? You should lead by example.

Pamela: That's right.

Dina: I think it's important. I also think it's up to you, us, people who want to pursue their goals, to decide when and how we say yes and no to things. In other words, I don't always feel compelled to tell people what it is on my plate. I'll just say, "I have a conflict at that time," or, "I'm scheduled for another appointment," or whatever. I don't need to tell people anything. Even if it's just my time, I'm sitting here and I'm reading and I'm staring into space or I'm flipping through my magazines or I'm checking my mail, nobody needs to know anything.

Pamela: Right.

Dina: There are some people I can share that with, but it's not everyone.

Pamela: That's an important point because sometimes we feel like we need to justify.

Dina: Yeah, exactly. Right. I've got a kid thing. Nobody cares. Everybody's got something and it's nobody's business.

Pamela: That's right. And if you just say, "No, no, I have a prior commitment," or, "That time isn't free," nobody needs to know why that time isn't free.

Dina: Exactly. Right. Like I said before, with coming up with an alternative, if you feel like you need to do so, then you can say, "How about this time instead? Would this be okay with you?" Then at least you're offering somebody the option of understanding that it's not going to work but they're still important enough that I want to make sure they're involved in my schedule somehow, so can we make it work in a way that works for both of us?

Pamela: Right. That's right. Oh my God. Well, we had a whole second episode here, right?

Dina: I know. I'm so excited. I could talk to you forever, Pamela!

Pamela: I know. Right back at you. We touched on a lot of really good insights for people.

Dina: Good. Well, I hope people come away feeling more motivated and encouraged to take that first step of whatever it is that they want to do.



Pamela: Well, now you got to hear the behind the scenes scoop of my conversation with Dina. Like she said, I hope you are feeling motivated and encouraged to know that we all have tough times on the road to our goals. If you want to learn more about Dina's work, you can visit her at DishWithDina.com.

That's it for this segment of the LiftOff Project. Be sure to visit our website, TheLiftOffProject.com/podcast where you can download a transcript of today's episode. If you have a question for an upcoming segment of Ask Coach Pamela, go to TheLiftOffProject.com/Question and leave me a voice mail. If I answer your question in a future episode, I'll send you a free deck of reinvention cards as a gift, so go on over there and leave me a voice mail. You can also connect with me on Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram @thecoachpamela. If you enjoyed this episode, please leave a review for us on iTunes. Your feedback truly does make a difference.

Today's LiftOff inspiration comes from Thomas Woodlock, who says, "Times of stress and difficulty are seasons of opportunity when the seeds of progress are sown." Just remember that the next time you're going through a tough time on the road to your goals. Those seeds are going to flower into a beautiful and bountiful harvest.

Thank you for listening today, and remember, why settle for good when great is waiting? Take one small step this week to lift your life. Bye for now.

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