

Welcome to the Hair of the Dog podcast. I'm your host, Heather Lahtinen. Over the past six months, I've had the pleasure of hosting calls within our Elevate program, featuring two remarkable photographers who took part in what we affectionately call the coaching journals. You can catch those insightful conversations with Kristi Baker and Monica Addalsteinson in our previous podcast episodes. But that's not all because in a brilliant spinoff of that original concept,

and by the way, I can say it's brilliant because I have people that help me come up with these concepts like it was not for me. We've recently introduced a series of challenges in Elevate, specifically tailored for what we are calling the offline photographer. These challenges are not your run of the mill tasks. They are carefully crafted to supercharge your in-person marketing strategies because we know just how crucial meeting people and developing relationships and nurturing those relationships can be for the growth of your business.

Our goal is to help photographers like you connect, engage and thrive within your local community. As part of this exciting feature, we've handpicked a photographer to share their journey through these challenges, and our first guest in this series is the Fantastic Laura Wam. Well, over the next five months, you'll get an exclusive peak into her thoughts and approach as she tackles these offline photographer challenges.

And make sure you check out her work@laurawamwell.com. I'll have that link in the show notes. In today's conversation, Laura opens up about an event she hosts to raise funds for a local rescue organization. But you might wanna buckle up because things take a fascinating turn when we delve into why she's not promoting her business as vigorously as she could during these events. I hope you enjoy our conversation.

Welcome to the Hair of the Dog podcast. If you are a pet photographer ready to make more money and start living a life by your design, you've come to the right place. And now your host pet photographer, travel addict, chocolate martini connoisseur, Nicole Begley. Laura, welcome to the Offline Photographer. Are you excited for these next several months? I am so excited.

Okay, so we have, we're like in the middle. We just finished our challenge for last month. We're starting our next month. But let's talk about the first month's challenge for the offline photographer, which is all about meeting people. And it was around creating a holiday guide with maybe some business partners and you put your own unique spin on this. So tell me about it.

Sure thing. So, so for the second year in a row, I hosted a big fundraising event. Instead of doing a holiday guide, I thought I could try both, but no, there was just not enough time in the world for that to happen. So what I do is over the course of the months leading up, so I usually start in like April or May I meet with pet owners.

We do video and photo content about their rescue dog story. And then I knit all of the stories together. I reach out to a whole bunch of local businesses to get silent auction prizes, door prizes, all kinds of good stuff. And then in November I have a big event where I bring together members of the community, those businesses, all of the pet owners,

and we raise money for the rescues that rehomed the animals in the project. Okay. How did you come up with this and when? Like what that this, this sounds like a lot, you just made it sound really simple, but I think there's more to it. It was actually a hair of the dog summit that sort of planted the seed in my brain.

I, I'd have to look up exactly which year it was, but there was a photographer who had had a project, a video project where she would photograph women over 50 and then interview them about what, you know, what they were hoping forward to, you know, what they were looking forward to in their fifties and what they wish they'd done differently and all of that.

And I was like, we could do this with dogs. Of course we can. Of course you can. So that was kind of where it started and then I just took action on it right away that first year. And former puppy mill dogs are close to my heart. My soul dog was a puppy mill dog. So the first year was really focused just on mill dogs and their stories this year was a little tougher to find all mill dogs.

So I broadened it a little bit to be like any rescue dog with a, a more complicated history. So like we had a dog with a bite history and a dog with medical issues and a special needs dog. And I've been doing charitable marketing forever. And so have lots of connections with various businesses in the community and they were all so, so generous and happy to help out.

So that was really great. And we ended up raising \$2,800. Amazing. Congratulations. And this just happened, right? I mean this is very recent. Yeah, this was on November 10th, so it's, it's a big, big job, which is something that I'm thinking maybe to change moving forward, but, but definitely worthwhile and just allowed me to reconnect with a lot of the businesses that I have relationships with and you know,

get my name out in the media a little bit. And then as well, connecting with local people who love dogs. Yeah, just people in general. Okay. So this is the second year that you've done it, Correct? Yes. Yeah. So what do you think you'll do differently moving Forward? So there are a lot of ideas I'm toying with.

I kind of try to take stock after the event. 'cause leading up to it, it's just Crazy. Yeah, Right. But afterwards, I like to set a goal for fundraising for the next year. So last year, 2200. This year we raised 2,800. I'm hoping for like 35 next year. The first year we had maybe 50 people through this year we had more than a hundred.

Next year I'm thinking we might need a bigger venue, but what I'm thinking as far as my contribution goes is I need to figure out a way to really make it either make it really clear that it is my event, yes. That I'm hosting and sponsoring and who I am, so that it's not just a lot of money and work going into something that is great and raises,

you know, lots of goodwill but doesn't really have an equal payoff. Like so. So tell me about that, like the impact on your business from last year to year. Did this get you clients? No. Okay. Well then there's definitely something that needs to be looked at. Yeah. I think last year I booked one session and it was a friend because they got a discounted session card at the event and they were like,

oh, I should do this this year. And again, it's early days, so who knows people. Yeah. You don't know yet, right? Yes. But so far no inquiries from the offer that I made in person and sent out. That was my question. Did you make an offer? Yeah, so I had basically like get a free five by seven with any artwork purchase when you book a session before the end of the year,

hoping to like fill out my books a little bit for 2024. No bites on that. But like I was standing at the door saying hello and goodbye to everyone being like, hi, I am Laura, the photographer. And that sort of thing is like tough for me making those in-person offers, but within the confines of the event, it's a little bit easier,

I would say. 'cause you put all of that together so you have obviously earned the right to speak. One would help, Yes. But I haven't found, like even with the press coverage and with like both offering people something in person while they're there and following up with an email, adding them to my list, just not a lot of traction. So I either need to figure out a way to make it something that will be more profitable.

Like if I look at it as marketing dollars, it's not so, so bad. Right. You know? But If it gets you clients, If it gets me clients that that would be great. But historically it has not done that. Okay. Why not? Do you think? Like what's your theory? I, that's a tough one because I feel like I'm doing,

I, I hope I'm doing a lot of the right things. You know, like I think it, what it might come down to is at the end of the day when I'm at the event and I'm making those offers, I'm not really focused on what it's doing for me. I'm focused on like getting them to the silent auction items or getting them to yes.

Donating in the day. It's not about booking a session. Yes. With me it's about raising money for the rescues. And even with the follow up, it's like more of a thank you for supporting rescues than you know, hey, look at me. And I think that balance between trying to do something good for the community versus promoting myself is a,

is a struggle, is a Struggle for me. You know? Do you know why? Because you're making it either or? Yeah. You're making it, I wrote this down as you were saying that, that when you're at the event and even leading up to and after, it's really about raising money for the rescue versus promoting my own business. So you just created an adversarial relationship between,

between the event and your business? It's either or when really it's both and it could be both. I wanna raise money for the rescue, and I know I lost you for a second. Did you, did you catch that? We just had like a zoom glitch. No, if you could, you said, I created an adversarial relationship. Yes.

Yeah. So it was like, either or. It's like either I'm raising money for the rescue and promoting my business is not appropriate here. Like as you were explaining that I felt this value conflict that was like, you know, it's either them or it's me. It can't be both. And there's this, you know, not just adversarial, but there's like this tension,

there's a, there's a tension between the event and your business. So, but what

if it could be both? And I think that's something that I am trying to navigate with a lot of what I do with rescue. Like now that we're leading into the holidays, I do a ton of holiday fundraisers, which again are like low cost lots of work for me,

lots of great happy people and happy rescues. And I do a not very good job of converting those people to anything for me. Yeah. Why? I think this is something that I've been kind of delving into over the past months. It's like, why? When I believe that my work is good, I believe that I'm doing good things. I am,

I'm confident in the work that I create. But I don't think that I am super confident in, I don't even know if it's like super confident in my business, but historically I was like, when I was a kid, I was always doing things and I was very like, woo razzle dazzle look at me. And was very often told like, don't brag.

No one wants to hear about that. Oh, Okay. There it is. Yes. And I think somewhere in my lizard brain, I really, really held onto that and been like, nobody wants to hear what you have to do. Oh, just do the thing. And like eventually the universe will sort it out and people will be like, oh,

that Laura, she's great. But to not tell them because that's braggy and no one wants to hear about And that's dangerous and bad. And then everybody will hate you. So you better just play small and hide. Yes. Yeah. Okay. Listen, this is great because now that you've uncovered it, you can decide to drop it. Like, we just don't do that anymore.

Like, I, like it makes perfect sense why it happened because of that from my childhood. And now that I recognize it, I can, I can tell myself, well actually I'm safe. I'm okay. And there's not a problem with talking about my business because I'm excited about it. You know how I feel about the word bragging. Like it just has this negative connotation when the truth is you're just sharing your passion for what you love.

And one way you can look at this, Laura, is like, what's the difference? You are so on fire for these rescues and these events, and you make so many things happen. You make things happen and you're okay talking about that, shouting it from the rooftops. What's the difference between that and your business? Well, my business is about me.

Oh, is it? Or is it, is it also about the dogs and your clients? Yes, that is true. That is true. If we think, if you are thinking the business is all about you because I wanna make more money and get more clients, it is no wonder you are holding yourself back. But with the rescues, you make it about the dogs and the rescues and raising money.

So what would you need to think or believe about you and your own business that could give you that same energy? Well, I'd have to, I'd have to believe that it was, I guess more about the client experience, which I think that I do. But there's this, like, there's this hang up there that if it is about the client and their experience,

then I should be like bending over backwards for the clients and just doing it all for, you know, like there's, there's something there where the idea of

serving the clients well and being paid fairly for it and like not working myself to the bone. I don't know. I don't know. Yeah. Because you know what you're doing in that instance and that this is another like micro example of a theme that I've picked up on with you about this black and white thinking.

If I make it about me, it's bragging and bad and selfish and money and all of those things. If I make it about them, then I have to sacrifice myself and I have to bend over backwards and then experience burnout. And so you, you made that an either or as well. It's like, it's either me and I'm making money and that's bad or I like kill myself to do it for,

okay, we need to work on some middle ground here. Where, where is the both? And could you be in full service to clients with your own boundaries making money and everybody wins. I'm sure that that is a thing that is possible That is happening that is real because people are doing it. Yeah. Yeah. But it's just like, I actually did this series recently on the podcast about cognitive distortions where we see reality a certain way and we tend to,

all of us see things as like either or, you know, just like either I'm like virtuous and I'm doing this for the rescues and raising money for them and you know, and look at me. I'm so giving, or I have this business where I'm making a ton of money. Oh my gosh, don't look at me, I'm selfish. Hmm.

When it's, it's, it's like somewhere in the middle, you know, it's like you can do this for the rescues, raise money and get the benefit out of it, and also grow your business and be in service to people and make it about your client and about them and still honor your own values, needs, boundaries, terms and conditions, contracts,

et cetera. You know, like in a, it could be good. Like you can, you can make this a win across the board for everyone, including this is gonna be a shocker to you, including yourself. What comes up for you? When I say that, I, I definitely believe that it is something that I have to do if I want to keep doing this because what's,

what's happening right now is Not working. Not working. Yeah. And that I, I have to wrap my mind around a way for it to be both, you know, there needs to be more balance there. You're right. Right. Like, there needs to be more middle ground. And I think for me, like I need actionable steps Mm.

As to how to make that happen. Not just with like next year's event, but even with like the holiday fundraisers that I'm doing. Just ways to make it a little bit about me while it's mostly for the charity. Yeah. Well, or what if it was just equal Or equal? Yes. Yeah. Like what if it's about the charity and about you?

I mean, don't you, don't you think you deserve that? Like after the effort you put into create this event? Yeah. Yeah. And the last thing I want is to start resenting the event. Right? Right. And if you're not, if you're getting zero clients, how long is that gonna last before you're like, I'm out. So it's funny,

you know, we all want like the actionable steps. You said like, I just need the steps. Like this is what I'm going to do next year in order to either make more offers or convert. So I think it, it's a conversion issue. Like there's some

disconnect between you and these events and these rescues and then getting you clients. There's like something broken there that we just need to reconnect,

you know? Yeah. So when you said like the action steps in strategy, here's the thing about that I could tell you. Okay. And I have ideas, actually, I could tell you Laura, do these three things. Like for instance, one example would be when you're greeting people, you said they come in, they leave and you're talking to them and you're saying hello and you're meeting them and you say,

oh, and don't forget to call me to book your session because I'm, I'm a pet photographer. Like, don't forget to reach out to me. Like when we schedule in our session, you know, you like, there's like sideways wink, like you're just having fun. Like, it's just fun. Like, yeah, don't forget, you know,

let's be in touch or let, like, 'cause presumably you are like connecting on some level with like hundreds of people, right? Oh yeah. Like I spend most of the event, you know, if someone comes in and is like, oh, you know, I wanna volunteer for a rescue, or I'm looking for my next dog, I'll direct them to the people from the rescues or,

you know, if, if folks are there from different businesses who could benefit from each other, I'm like, Hey, you should meet so and so. But I don't so much do that with myself and the people Because you are thinking, Well, it could be a lot of stuff. It could be because the, I don't think the event should be about me.

It could be like a self-worth self-confidence, self valuing thing, which it probably is both and Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. And at, at my core, like I am shy, I'm outgoing. Right. And, and I'm good at like, connecting people. Yeah. You're easy to be around, you're easy to talk to. But at the end of the day,

like it self, self-promotion and doesn't come easily to me yet. Yeah. So you're protecting yourself from something. What is it, what is the fear? Probably rejection and embarrassment. Mm. Like if I, if I did self-promote, then somebody might What? You don't think it's even that someone would say no, because I'm okay with people saying no,

I, you know, like I send my pricing out to people all the time who say, no, I'm fine with that. I think, and I know it's a thought because I can't control how other people conceptualize what's going on, but especially at the charitable marketing events, I think inserting myself and my business makes it seem like a bait and switch.

Oh. Where it's like, yeah, this is for charity, but also you should buy this thing. Oh, interesting. So you're a swindler. Yes. Yeah. You're stealing money from people if you, it's Tricking them into liking your business. You're tricking them into you telling them about your business. Because keep in mind, they don't hire you unless they want to.

Yeah. So how are, it's not like they've hired you and you've done a bait, you know, bait and switch is like when you hire someone and you pay for something and they give you something else. Yeah. That's not, that's not even what's happening. 'cause they're not even paying you yet. So you feel like you're tricking that if you promote your business,

you are tricking them into coming to the event just to promote your business. Yeah. Yeah. What do you think about these stadiums or concert venues where giant corporations put their name all over? Like, are they like tricking you to go to a football game and then putting No, that's fine. Like I, and it's so funny that came to my mind because as you were explaining this to me,

I was thinking I could literally see myself at an event like that getting the biggest, most giant lights ever. And just putting Heather up on like, Heather did this, Heather created this look like Laura, you know, like your name. So in Pittsburgh it recently changed, but Heinz catch up. Heinz, the corporation sponsored the stadium where the Steelers play.

So like Heinz was everywhere on everything because they, they paid for that. So people go to see a football game and they're getting inundated with Heinz ads. Now it was purchased by another company that nobody can pronounce, called Acrisure. And I think their investments, but whatever, it was a big controversy about it. But the point is, do you feel like Hines did a bait and switch on Steelers fans by like,

come to the football game and learn about our ketchup? What? No. And of course not. And like, it Doesn't make sense And, and logically Yes. Correct. And I know if it's just because all of it is so close to me that I've just conflated all this stuff and I'm Probably, yeah, that's actually one of my favorite words recently because I think that's what exactly what photographers do is they confuse all of the issues and they lump it into one.

And that's why it's so important to get really clear on like, okay, what's happening, number one, which is I'm not, I'm not stepping outta my comfort zone to promote myself more. And why and why? The question why is like, what's the fear? You know, the fear maybe is not rejection because you can handle that. Maybe the fears just being seen like,

then they'll see me and that makes me vulnerable. Yeah. Maybe. Or like up for judgment or criticism or what if they think something, or what if I'm embarrassed? And like all of these questions swirl around in your brain about the possibilities of some fear you're trying to avoid. It's actually worth exploring. Like, okay, so what if you put your name up in lights and like you,

it said, Laura did, Laura created this event, you should hire her. That's like, that's what it said really big. Like billboard says, Yeah, What if somebody saw that and they thought, oh my gosh, she's so forward and braggy and like, ew, I hate that. Okay, so what, what if somebody thinks that? Yeah.

I mean at the end of the day, I can't control what people think And how would you know they're even thinking it True. But I am thinking it. I think that's the problem. Which is why you're projecting it onto them. So when we think that, that this is how, this is like what I would think in this situation, we magically assume that everyone else thinks it as well.

But what if somebody saw that sign and was like, oh my gosh, I love this Laura, look what she does. I want to support her. I want to hire her. How do I find out more? You could just as easily think that thought, but you choose to think and project the thought that your brain presented you with. And I just wanna

challenge it.

Like, why couldn't we just think the exact opposite? Because in my mind I would put Heather my name up in really big lights because in my mind I'm thinking people wanna know more about me because I created this awesome event. They want to know, they're excited, they're curious. Who is this Laura? Who is this person that goes to all this trouble to do this?

She must be pretty awesome. Like, that's my, that's my driving thought. And because that's my thought. All of these action steps and the strategies that we're looking for just fall into place. But if I told you to do that, but your thought is no, nobody wants to hear from me. You're never gonna execute. Yeah. It's not the strategy,

you know this. It's the thought behind it. It's the thought that's driving the feeling that's driving the action. So what is something that you would like to think or believe that would lead you feeling excited to share more about you? So I actually have it written on my whiteboard beside me. And I think this was shared in one of the Elevate groups.

But the idea that this is my thing and I wanna share it with you. And I look at it every day because it's, it's an ongoing process for me to like retrain my brain to not think that nobody wants to hear about it. And just to make it about sharing passion. Yes. Yes. As opposed to like, Look at me, Look at me.

Right. And what if, I mean, I'm just gonna throw a crazy thought out there. What if the thought was like, people want to hear from me. People are really curious. People want to hear from me. 'cause you know, a lot of people don't understand or know what, what pet photography is or like that it's a thing. True.

You know? And I know that whenever I tell someone about my pet photographer friends, I'm always so excited to tell them because people are like, what? That's a thing. And I'm like, I know. It's so crazy. They make money photographing puppies and it's so fun. You know, like, like it's just fun and exciting. I'm not making it about me.

I'm making it about like, Hey, you person on the street need to know my pet photographer friends. I literally went up to a woman in a local department store recently and she had her dog with her and told her to contact Jess to hire her for a, a photography session. That's how much I believe in it. Like what if you did that for yourself?

What if you saw someone with a dog in a department store and you were like, clearly you and your dog are very close and bonded. 'cause she was shopping for mittens for her dog. And, and you said like, I love pets. I photographed pets. Like, you should call me. It would be so fun to do a session, but it's not about you and money.

It's about like, no, you love your dog. I love your dog. I take photos like, this is fun. What if this were just light and fun and you let go of the stories that were driving you from childhood? What if this is just about the dog? And guess what, they're happy either way. They don't even, they don't care if you're bragging or what you're saying.

Like they're just happy for the attention. 'cause they get a lot of treats on those photo sessions. True. I mean, right. And then the owner is happy. Is it possible that you're just protecting your ego? Listen, I'm gonna be straight with you. You are protecting your ego and you're depriving people of a lot of joy. I think that's probably true.

Ouch. Like, I need to get over myself in order to serve my community. Because the, the more, I always like to say the world languishes suffers to the degree that you hold yourself back. Your community doesn't have this beautiful artwork that you create or your composites or my mom does. 'cause you, you created a composite of her dog that passed and she loves that photo.

She loves that. Like you, that brought so much joy to her in the middle of that heartache. Like that's just, that's what you do. You, you offer that service to people because you have the skills and you're passionate about it. So what if you just really focused on your client and the pet and stopped thinking about your own darn self?

Oh, my language today, huh? Like, no, you're, you're right. You just playing small to protect yourself. And I'm not saying that's a, that's not a, a little thing that mean it's very important. Let's look at the fear and examine the thoughts. And also, so I'm not making this either or, and how can I just shift things to focus on others?

So I make it less about me and more about them. And that involves putting my name in lights up on a billboard. Then I'm willing to do that. I'm willing to put myself in that slightly uncomfortable situation knowing that it's for the greater good of these pets. You see how I'm just like shifting the thoughts? What do you think? I agree that that is what I need to do.

I am trying it with this month's challenge. Oh yes. That's perfect segue. Thank you. Leading into this month. Yeah. Tell us just briefly what that looks like for you. So this month, not doing anything nearly as flashy, but I took Jess's idea. She had talked about doing magnets for her clients. So I went ahead and made up magnets and some really cute cards.

And I've never sent anything to my clients before. Hmm. I think I, I don't even know if I sent e-cards in the past. Like basically we have a session and then we're done. And I have a referral program, but I don't like follow up a lot. So this will be the first sort of big effort in following up with people.

So I made a list of like my biggest spenders and so they're all gonna get like little magnet present. And I don't think it's even gonna be so much an offer, but just like, Hey, I'm thinking about you and your dog. Yeah. Reconnecting. Yeah. Like, hey, you, you popped in my mind. And so this month's challenge is to reconnect with past clients in some way.

Either to reach out, maybe send them a gift. I love this idea. And then when we check back in, in a month, we can see how that goes for you. But that, that feels a little, a little easier. You think More straightforward than Way easier because Yeah, Because I like these people. I, if I were,

You know them, I sender, I, I would send them cards. Like I know them, I like them. I would like to reconnect with them and their pets. So that feels a lot

easier to me than being like, Hey stranger in a department store, here's what I do. Let's make it happen. 'cause that to me feels, I don't know.

Do you think I'm sleazy? No, not at all. I did that. What you just described. I did that. I know. And it was genuine. Like it was just very natural and genuine. She had her dog in the department store. I was curious, like, it's not often that in our mall, which is dying like everyone else's,

but it's not often that you would see somebody just like with their dog in the department store. So that was unusual. So I was curious. So I talked to her And I, my my partner is always on me about this. 'cause we see people when we're walking our dogs and you know, I, I don't ever have cards. I don't ever talk to them other than like,

oh, your dog's so cute. That's where the conversation ends. Okay. I have a challenge for you. This is, this is your special in because November's too easy for you. This challenge coming up too easy. Okay. The next time you're in a walk with the dogs and you say that, say what you normally say and then say, yeah,

this is the craziest thing. So I'm actually a pet photographer. I photograph dogs and I your dog's eyes or like ears or something. I don't know. Like you just point out a feature that like, oh that would be so cute, you should like check out my stuff. Or like, it's like super fun because you're excited about it. It's not about you.

You're just excited to share. So I just wanna challenge you to take that conversation just one tiny layer deeper. Not, you don't have to like say hire me today for 1599. You know, you don't have to say that. Just like, could you just tell them that you're a pet photographer and it's the coolest job ever. Yeah. It would be scary.

But yes, I could do it. Okay. And then I will check back with you and we will, we'll see how that goes. Thank you so much. Thank you. Thanks for listening to the Hair of the Dog podcast. This was episode number 219. If you wanna check out the show notes for access to any of the resources that we mentioned,

simply go to www.hairofthedogacademy.com/ 2 1 9. Thanks for listening to this episode of Hair of the Dog Podcast. If you enjoyed this show, please take a minute to leave a review. And while you're there, don't forget to subscribe so you don't miss our upcoming episodes. One last thing. If you are ready to dive into more resources, head over to our website@[www.hair of the Dog Academy](http://www.hairofthedogacademy.com/).

Thanks for being a part of this pet community.