

Angela Kelly Smith

Denise VanNooten: Gut-Health Expert

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Podcast Transcript

[Angela Kelly Smith]: Welcome to Brand + Design Scoop, where I share practical, relatable tips on branding, design, and building a business. I'm Kelly, a marketing strategist and Squarespace website designer.

Today I'm interviewing Denise VanNooten. Denise is a nutrition and gut health expert, teaching women how to become their healthiest by making lifestyle shifts to improve their gut disturbances. Best known for her accessible and fun approach to food and healthy living, she's creating an online wellness business starting with the Clean up Your Gut Academy. As a certified holistic health coach (Integrative Nutrition) and personal trainer, Denise is cultivating a lifestyle of freedom and gut health. She has been featured on Lynette Turner's "This is 50: Freedom Through Passions" and has worked with non profit organizations such as Happy Mamma, happy mini inc, and Choice4Kids.

Welcome, Denise! I am so happy you're here today!

[Denise VanNooten]: I'm super excited and honored to be here! Thank you so much for inviting me. Appreciate it.

[Kelly]: Absolutely! So, can you tell me a little bit about your background and how you came to healthy living?

[Denise]: Oh, my background is weird. My background, I say it's weird how I got to this place, in regards to this journey that I'm on right now really because I'm still on that journey. But my background is retail. I worked in retail for over 20-some years. My background is investigations. So, I was a regional investigator. I was also a district manager, and so I worked for various companies, and I relocated numerous times throughout that.

And how I got to where I am right now, it was actually during the pandemic. I had colon surgery. And literally, I was one of those individuals that had my surgery before they shut everything down. I want to say, 24hours before they shut everything down I had my surgery. And basically I did a routine colonoscopy, which I recommend for everybody. Don't skip it.

But I did a routine, colonoscopy, and they found a polyp. And it wasn't something that they wouldn't be able to remove during the outpatient procedure. So, I actually had to have surgery. Well, long story short, of course, the polyp was benign, which was fantastic. But I also ended up finding out that I had endometriosis. So, a whole host of things came from that particular situation and just maybe do self reflection.

And I really kind of thought about where I was at. Like, what was my purpose? And I'm quite sure a lot of other people felt that way, were that same position. But I really focused on what was my purpose and what was I doing. And I was making lots of money—a six-figure job. But I was not happy at all. I had a lot of perks, company car, lots of gift bags, and items the company would always give us.

But I was on a leave of absence, and I dreaded going back. I did not want to go back and, literally, when I was supposed to return from leave of absence of, everything shut down as well with the company. And they closed all the stores. And of course they still paid me while I was on a leave of absence, and also while the stores were closed.

And then during that time I just started doing a lot of research on health. Now, prior to that, I've been a personal trainer, and I'm also a professional bodybuilder. So, I've been on-stage many of times and competed in various shows in different states, and, again, I personal trained clients. But I wanted to go into a different arena in light of what I experienced myself. And I knew what others were experiencing as a professional bodybuilder.

You have a tendency, well, you have to eat a lot of protein to build muscle. And by eating a lot of that protein, there's a lot of blockage. There's a lot of bulk. There's a lot of constipation, and there's always shortcut to get out of those particular situations that they're really not healthy.

So, I was a natural professional bodybuilder, which means that I didn't take any supplements or steroids or what have you. And typically when I did a show, you have to take a drug test to show that you are not on any kind of steroids or inhibitors or growth agents before you perform on the show. And so I realized, just personal situation, and also seeing the people that I worked with, that it really is not a hundred-percent healthy the way that you go about building these muscles because you may look good on the outside, but, on the inside, again, all that protein, all that carb, it does something to your intestinal walls.

And so I really wanted to focus on what can I do to alleviate this and what can I do to help others. And through my journey of personal training and body building, I also changed from eating... you have to eat a lot of meat. I ate a lot of meat and beef. And that was not what I really, you know, liked. I did love chicken, and so I said, "Well, you know, I can still get the same body if I changed." So I changed to just doing fish, and I saw that I was still able to get the muscles and the definition that I wanted too. And then one day I just woke up and said, "You know, I think I'm going to be a vegetarian. I don't think I want fish anymore. I don't want meat. I don't want chicken. And I'm just going to be a vegetarian."

Can I still get the the healthy lifestyle? And I still have tasty food? And can I still look, you know, aesthetically pleasing to myself, as well as to my husband, and get the muscles that I want while still being a vegetarian?

And it was on that journey of becoming a vegetarian and also still trying to find my purpose and what is it that I wanted to do with my life that I started researching a lot about plant-based food. And I started doing a lot of research of reading books and just getting a lot of information. And what I found out, there's a lot of information, and there's a lot of recipes, but they were so boring and so flavorless. And I just said to myself, I can only imagine what it feels like for somebody saying that they want to transition from being a meat-eater or a chicken-eater to being a vegetarian. There's not a lot of options, or the options that are out there are just flavorless or boring.

And so that's when I embarked on just doing my own recipes and making things that I know that could be flavorful, could be tasty. And at the same time I just started branching out and saying, "You know what, I'm at home. And instead of just, you know, watching TV and just doing whatever, I'm go to start educating myself."

So I started educating myself on plant-based meals. I took courses on business and I, at that point in time, I said to myself, "You know what, I think that I could potentially start a company. Not sure what it is I want to do and how I want to do it. But I'm gonna use this time. I'm going to use it wisely, and I'm just going to do more research."

I'm one of those individuals, I like to do many things at one time. So, I was taking a business course, and then I was also taking an exercise nutrition course. And then when I finished that, I just said, "Okay, I'm going to take another course to be officially a certified health coach." And after I finished taking that, I was just so amazed and really interested in the gut specifically. So, again, I have a, I'm a professional bodybuilder; I'm a personal trainer; I'm also a certified exercise nutritionist and a health coach.

But I wanted to find out more about the gut and that was what I was passionate about, and I wanted to have a specific niche, which I learned that you can't just be so broad and be so general. You have to have a niche, and I struggled to find that niche. I was like, "Oh, I'm gonna do plant-based. I'm gonna teach people recipes. And then I found, you know what, that's kind of limited. It's kind of boring. But I'm really passionate about this gut. I'm interested in this gut, and I'm experiencing some of the things that I know that others are experiencing: Constipation, bloating, inflammation, and what are the right foods, and what are the the right things that you need to do to overcome some of those things, and what are some of the things that are really ailing your body.

And just based on my own experience, and just being around other professional bodybuilders and personal trainers, and also clients coming to me and asking me questions about meal plans

and just asking me about how could they be more healthy, and then also me, just seeing some of the symptoms that they suffered through, that's what led me to be a certified gut-health coach and really focus on gut health.

[Kelly]: Wow, I didn't even know that there was such a certification in gut health.

[Denise]: Yeah, there is, there is. Yeah, and in order for you to get that particular certification, you've got to be at least half certification of a health coach because it's just an extension of that because it gives you more specific information on the digestion and all the different things that impact our gut, such a stress, such as your job, such as a lot of the external factors that people really don't think about or don't consider.

But it, there's a lot that goes into gut health. And I found myself just really drawn to it and just really passionate about it and then just looking at myself outwardly and thinking about what are some of the things that I can personally change for myself that will impact others and just telling my story. And I think a lot of people are fearful of sometimes sharing some of the stories. Because I share that I had fibroids, and after having those fibroids, it left me with scars. And so that's how, long story short, I never wanted, I always wanted to be a bodybuilder when I was a little kid. I know that's kind of weird, but I just didn't think that I would really get into it. And then once I got back into training someone said, "Oh, Denise wanted to be a bodybuilder," but I was like, "No," because I was very conscious of scars from my surgery. And they were like, "No, you can still be a bodybuilder, and we can spray tan, and we can do what have you."

And so I took the leap of faith, and I did it with the scars. So, I had it on my old website. I think I'm going to show it a little bit later on, on a post or something of that nature. But I think people seeing me, somebody that was in her 40s, somebody that had five boys, and somebody that has scars, to come out on stage and have that confidence. It helped to build confidence in others, and it helped them to say, "Well, you know, if she can do it, then I can do it."

I felt like I was that motivating factor for women of my age, and also that motivating factor for individuals that have surgeries that let them with outward scars. I'm always talking about the scars on the outside. But what can you do to heal the scars on the inside, which is basically the lining of your gut, your digestive, system, etc. So, I'm a big proponent of sharing life experience and sharing the things that I've gone through so that people can either learn from it or ask more questions about it. I believe in being transparent because I think sometimes in the world of social media and in the world of filters, and in the world of airbrushing, that sometimes people live through the lens of a fantasy. And they don't realize that what they're looking at on social media is not real. And the results that you see on social media are not guaranteed, because in some way they've been warped in order to get more likes or more hits or more ticks or more tocks, or what have you?

And so I pride myself on really showing the natural Denise, the Denise that is relatable to others such as myself. And I think people are drawn to me just being honest and being transparent in the sharing some of that information.

[Kelly]: Absolutely, you are so right. And your having gone through these things, such as the polyp and the fibroids, really does make you more relatable, because you, otherwise, people, knowing that you always wanted to be a bodybuilder and you are now, it would be easy for people to look at that and say, “Well, all of this was easy for you. So, you know, what do you have to teach me?”

But for you to share all of this and say no, “This is not easy. This took work. This a health crisis.” This took a lot of studying and trial and error and to go from eating meat then to just chicken and just fish, and now plant-based diet. That is really some work. And now you have a lot of studying but also personal experience to share with clients.

[Denise]: Yeah, yeah, and I think the personal experience is what really, because you can study. I mean, I've taken certifications, and it's like, oh, you take the test just to pass the test or just to get the the the certificate. But then, if you're not walking away with valuable information, if you're not walking away knowing how to apply that information and coupling it with your life experience, then you really didn't do anything other than get a certification.

And so, for me, I think again, my life experience and the things that I had gone through helped me to merge the two together: The institutional knowledge, I would say, with the real life experience, because you know I, I was so anemic that I had to have a blood transfusion during the surgery. That's how bad it was. And then to think about somebody who's trying to be a bodybuilder or somebody who's into physical fitness. I could barely lift because I didn't realize that I was anemic. I didn't realize that I had fibroids until I went to the doctor and then the doctor was like, “Oh, you have fibroids, and oh, you're anemic, and by the way, you need to have a blood transfusion. So, I had to have a blood transfusion during my surgery, and after the surgery, the doctor wanted me to have another blood transfusion because my iron was so low.

[Kelly]: And that's back when you were eating meat.

[Denise]: Yes, that's when I was eating meat. And so my husband said, “Well, no, we're not going to have a second blood transfusion. We're just going to load on these green vegetables, or we're going to do what we need to do. But we're not having another blood transfusion, and we'll find another solution for her to get healthy, other than having another blood transfusion.”

So, I didn't have a second one. I just had the one. And, again, just all of those things that I experienced, that's what led me to changing the way I eat and not that it wasn't healthy. But, again, being a bodybuilder, you just eat all of that meat, all of that protein. It does something to you on the inside, and people don't realize that. Yeah, you're wreaking havoc on your gut. You're really putting your intestinal lining through a lot of stress and damage because you're stuffing

your body with all of that meat and all that protein. But it has to leave and then guess what. It's not leaving fast enough. It's not transitioning in your colon fast enough because you're constipated. So, the walls of your intestine, there's not a lot of water to help the transition process, and so as a result of that, you get backed up, you're backed up, and you are creating a lot of toxins in your body, which then leads to inflammation and a whole host of other issues that transpire in that lifestyle. I say bodybuilding is a bad thing, but there's a way to go about doing it, and there's also a way to make sure that you're doing it healthy, or healthily, I should say, to ensure that you know you're aesthetically pleasing on the outside, but you're not damaging your insides as well.

[Kelly]: So, with the gut health, do your clients come to you knowing that they need help with gut health, or are they coming to you saying, "Hey, I have a problem with this," and then you know that they need gut-health solutions?

[Denise]: It's the latter because often it is the constipation, often it is the bloating, often it is the inflammation, often it is, "I'm not getting sleep often." It is skin issues. And, so, it's through conversation, because I'm always a big proponent of let's just talk. Let's just have a regular conversation. Let's build a relationship, and then let's find out how I can support you, how I can help you.

And so I'll give you an example. I just had a friend of mine yesterday, and we were talking and just through conversation she said, "Oh, Denise. I'm so constipated, this, that, and the other." And I just went through a whole host of like, "Okay, are you on antibiotics? Are you taking a lot of prescriptions? Are you doing so-and-so?" And she says, "Yes, I am." And I said, "Yes. That's why you're constipated." I said, "When you take those prescription, and when you take those antibiotics, they really wreck havoc on your digestive system. And that's why you are constipated." And so we talked about what are some of the solutions that you can do. And people have a tendency to say, "Well, if I'm constipated, I'll go ahead and take a diuretic." That's not a solution. That's just a band-aid that you're putting on the issue. It's not a solution to what's ailing you and your gut.

And, again, sometimes what's ailing you in your gut may not be related directly to nutrition. It may be directly or indirectly related to the fact that you're not getting enough sleep. It may be that you are so stressed out at work and you're not happy. So again, that wrecks havoc on your gut. So, it's a whole host of symptoms, but it's about getting to the root cause of your specific issue and then talking about what of the steps that you're going to take to help minimize some of those symptoms and really have a lifestyle shift so that you can get the results that you're looking for.

[Kelly]: Yeah, I love that holistic approach. I'm sure your clients appreciate that too, even though it's a lot of change when so many people want, like you know, a magic bullet or something. And yet like jumping straight to a laxative, "Oh, that's easy. Now I'm not constipated anymore." But that's a quick fix. So they're not constipated for this week, but it's going to come

back, and if they keep taking the laxative, then they' going to rely on it, and it does nothing but damage their digestive, system, doesn't it?

[Denise]: And then it doesn't work well for a while. It doesn't work as well. And you mention something that is so true. Everybody wants a quick fix. So, I have somebody that wanted a consultation with me. It's a former NFL player, and he's in another state. And he said, "Well, you know what, I thought about you, and I thought about your background. And, instead of going to somebody else, I wanted to come to you. And here's what I need. I just need you to tell you what I need to eat. I need you to tell me what kind of probiotics to take. And I need you to give me some recipes.

"Well, it sounds like you want a quick fix. And so that's not how I work."

We had a conversation on the phone. I said. "Well, we actually have to have a consultation. So, I'm glad that you chose to talk to me." And he spent about 45minutes just running down everything that was going on with him. He has to have hip surgery, but he's overweight. He has to have, he's taking testosterone supplements, etc.

"Okay, so you give me all the information. That's fantastic, but I still need to sit down with you and do a proper consultation because I need to find out your history. I need to find out a lot of the things that are going on with you."

And as a gut-health specialist, it's really like a life coach because I'm not just going to give you a diet. I'm not just going to give you a meal plan. I'm having conversations with you. We're just talking about your day-to-day life you're talking about—you know, the things that you like to eat, the things that you don't like to eat. We're talking about some of those external factors, such as what's going on with work. We're talking about what makes you happy, what stresses you out, what makes you feel good, what's getting in the way of you being consistent, what routines that you have.

So, really, it's a life coach, but I'm really focused on healing your gut. In order for me to heal your gut, I have to establish a relationship with you. You have to sit down and really get to the root cause of what's going on so that you and I collectively can talk about what the solution is, because the work has to come from you. I can help you, but you've got to do the work.

And so I don't think that's what he was ready to hear. I think he was ready for me to just give him, "Hey, do this. Do this." And then it's going to happen. Doesn't work like that, you know. And when I read his intake—I have everybody to do an intake form, which is basically a health history form—when I read his information, and it's about five pages long, I was like, "Wow, Okay." And then one of the things that he struggled with was consistency, and you're going to continue to struggle with consistency if you have the approach of, like, I just need a magic pill. I just think, "Oh, it's not going to work. It's not going to work."

[Kelly]: Yeah, it sounds like he wanted you essentially to give him a prescription—not in the form of a bottle of pills, but here are the recipes, here are the supplements, and he'd just go off and follow them. But no one is going to follow that kind of prescription unless they have the follow-up with you, with a really experienced, qualified health coach.

[Denise]: Exactly. So, that's the part that I love about the gut health people because I use my health coach experience, which is basically like a life coach. But it's more, again, with the gut health, I'm really just holding on and talking about your gut health and and healing your gut. But, again, there's other external facts that impact. So, a lot of people they need, I found, even as a personal trainer, “Just give me a meal plan to follow.”

I can give you a meal plan, but if you don't understand what that meal plan is all about, and if you have issues with being consistent, if you have issues with being disciplined, if you have issues with making and preparing meals, and all other issues, me giving you a meal plan is not going to fix it. It's not going to be the solution. And then I find that they do the meal plan for three days or four days, and then they get tired of it. I've seen it. It's like it's related to their why. Why are they doing this? And they need to know that for them themselves.

[Kelly]: I mean, tell me if I'm wrong, but it seems like they need to know why they're doing this, and then they need that reminder from you, a constant reminder, especially if they start to fall off what they're supposed to do.

I remember, when taking supplements, I would forget what they were for. Like, okay, I just know at one point I decided to take these, and I knew why I was taking them then, and then I, you know, would forget. And they'd run out. It's like, “Well, I don't know what they're for anyway, so I'm just not going to take them anymore.”

And it's not that they necessarily have to remember, “Okay, this one is for this, this that. But their overall why. Why do they want to get healthier? Why did they start doing this, these routines? Why did they come to you? And what is their vision for their health in the future? And when you know all of that, and when you can keep looking toward it, then you stay motivated to keep these changes in place. At least that's true for me.

[Denise]: And you're right because one of the questions that I ask on the on the health history-slash-intake form is “what are you willing to do to improve your health?” Not “what can I do for you?”, but “what are *you* willing to do?”

And that's a key question. And you're so right because you have to invest in you. You can come to me all that you want, but if you're not doing the work, it's sort of like, I had to have toe surgery last year. And after having toe surgery, I had to go to physical therapy. At the end of the day, if I didn't do the work that they gave me at home, me coming to them is not going to be beneficial. I'm not going to make progress. I still have to do the homework, and I have to know exactly why. My why is I want my toe to be restored. I want to be able to wear shoes, the right

shoes, and I want to be able to work out. And if I don't do the things that I need to do in order to obtain those results, then, yes, it's not going to happen.

And so that's one of the things that they said to me said. "Well, you're fantastic because you're actually doing the work. We have so many clients or so many patients that they come in and they only do the work right there and then. When they leave, they don't do the work at home." I'm like, no, I'm going to do the work because I want to get the results, and I'm going to get the benefits, and I want to make the change.

And so you have to invest in yourself. What does that investment look like? You have to ask yourself, "What goal do I want to achieve, and based on this goal, how much time, how much energy am I willing to invest so that I can achieve this goal?"

So, we're on the same page. You have to be willing to invest in yourself, but you also have to ask yourself why because if the why is more so about shallowness and not necessarily about your health, then it may be short-term lived, and it may not be long-term that you're going to be able to sustain this particular goal.

[Kelly]: That's a great point, and I love that you ask essentially how committed are you to making these changes. That's really awesome.

What made you decide then to turn all of this into a business? I mean, you've already said a little bit about that, but you know that was a big leap.

[Denise]: It was a hard leap, too. But what made me decide to just take that leap was I really decided to invest in myself. I have such a varied background with doing investigations and driving sales, and training and developing people. So, I've got so many of the foundations already instilled in me, as well as through my experience. But like I said, I sat down and I said to myself, like, I'm just really not happy going back into that corporate arena. And what is my purpose?

I want to one day or don't want to one day close my eyes and say that I didn't fulfill my dreams, I didn't try, I didn't pursue my passions. And I said to myself, "You know, you only got one life. And guess what, if it doesn't work out, corporate is still there. You can always go back. But guess what. You're going to make it work out."

And I just said, "I just don't want to live this one life and not invest in me. I'm working hard making money for a corporation that's making billions. And, at the end of the day, what do I have to show for it, other than you know bonuses and you know fantastic pay? But I want something that's mine. I want something that I could put my stamp on. I want something where I'm able to service others and I can see the results and the fruits of my labor. And it's mine versus it's the fruits of the labor that is then turned over to a corporation.

This is all me. This is coming from me, and somebody is benefiting better from me working with them. And I want to be able to have those lasting relationships with those individuals.

And so it was with trepidation that I decided to pursue this. But I'm on that journey where I feel like, you know what, there's no turning back. There's no turning back, and I'm just going to keep on focusing and and forging ahead.

[Kelly]: You seem like a very brave and committed person so

[Denise]: Thank you!

[Kelly]: I'm not surprised that you took this path, and I expect nothing but success from you based on everything that I've heard in our chats.

Were you scared at all, though taking this path, and if you were, what did you do to move through that fear?

[Denise]: I got a secret for you. I'm still scared.

[Kelly]: I hear you!

[Denise]: I'll be honest with you, I suffered from impostor syndrome for a year and some change, meaning that I would not move forward, or, if I did move forward, I moved forward at a slow pace. And I just kept questioning myself again, questioning myself because I kept saying that I'm not good enough. I'm not experienced enough. I'm not qualified enough. And that's because I kept comparing my journey to others'. I kept seeing people moving faster than me, getting further ahead than me, getting better results than me. I just can't say sure it's because I'm not good enough, I'm not experienced enough, and this is not my space.

And I kept questioning myself every time. It was just that self-doubt. No matter what I would do, self doubt would always just be right there on my shoulder saying, "You can't do it, Denise. You can't do this. You can't do it, Denise."

And then I had that other side that says, "You got this. You got all the certifications. You've got the qualifications. You know what to do. You have to keep on moving. You just have to keep on moving."

And I don't know if it was one day that I just woke up, and I felt more confidence, and I felt more reassured, and I felt more braver, and just I wanted to strut myself like a peacock, And I just woke up one day, and I just felt like was in a better place.

But for a long period of time, I got to say, well over a year, I struggled with imposter syndrome. And I think a lot of people or a lot of women starting businesses, we suffer from that because we

either are told that we're not good enough, or either we're comparing ourselves to others, and that's what really impacts and impedes us for moving forward because we are not on our journey. We're following somebody else's journey instead of our path. And so that's what I learned. "Okay, Denise, stay in your lane, stay on your path."

You're going to make mistakes. You're gonna lose money.

[Kelly]: Oh, yeah, at the in the beginning, certainly!

[Denise]: Oh, my goodness, you know, and you're gonna get frustrated. But you know what? Keep pushing. Just keep pushing.

[Kelly]: Yes, and that whole thing about not enough experience, we have to just do it to build the experience. And sometimes it means giving some of it away at first. But what are we supposed to just do that forever? We're supposed to work for like ten years to do it with friends and family until we're like that expert? What do they say? What is it? Ten-thousand hours makes you an expert? We can't just keep giving it away for 10,000 hours, you know.

[Denise]: Not at all. You know what my husband said to me, and it rings true. And so, in addition to me waking up one day and having more confidence in myself, but my husband said something, he said, "Denise, everybody out there is just faking it."

And I was like, "What?" He said, "Everybody out there is just faking it. You don't know their capabilities, their experience. You don't know their journey." What that means is, of course, he's saying, "They're exploring, and they're navigating the process just the same way that you're doing it. But when you see them, you assume that they are better than you, or that they've got more success than you, But guess what. When you really get to the heart of it, everybody is faking it," he said, "even the major corporations. They're faking it, as well. They're navigating through these new times."

And it really rings true to what we are, what they're experiencing right now, which is better. But when the pandemic came through, lots of corporations didn't know what to do, as far as like having employees work from the home. Lots of companies didn't know anything about creating a playbook as it relates to how can we keep stores safe. How can we keep customers safe? How we keep our employees safe. How can we ensure that they can shop and stay six feet away while we're still making a profit? How can we balance safety with ensuring that we are being empathetic? How can we display agility? How can we display empathy?

So, they're faking it because they had never had to be in this position before. So, now guess what you're creating. A playbook. And some of the things that they're doing, it's not going to work. So, then they're going to have to go back to the drawing board and re-tweak it.

And I was just like, “Yeah, you’re right. they're faking it.” So, that's what helps me, to say, “Well, okay, guess what. They're faking. So, continue to fake it yourself.” And what that means is just move forward and that you learn and, as you grow, and as you experience, you're going to get better.

[Kelly]: That's a great point. We making it up as we go. There are some things that we can learn that are tried-and-true, but applying it to ourselves, it’s trial and error.

[Denise]: It sure is.

[Kelly]: Lots of error. And we learn from it move on.

[Denise]: I've lost money and I've lost money taking a chance on a person to do some work for me, and then realizing that this person did not know what they were doing at all. And I said, “Do you know what?” After being mad for a couple of days I said, “You know, I'm going to get it back. God's going to get it back to me, and it’s going to work itself out.” And also, it's an experience that I could share with others to possibly avoid. And it's an experience that I can say, “You know what, okay, we won't do that again.”

[Kelly]: It’s also like, when I've had that experience, it motivates me to make sure that I deliver above and beyond for my clients, that I'm not going to leave them regretting hiring me.

[Denise]: It's about taking pride, and it's all about having integrity, right, because even though I say everybody is faking it, that doesn't mean that your approach is without integrity. That doesn't mean that you give 50 percent or you are not a credible person as it relates to your brand and to your business. It just means that you are navigating through a space that you may never have gone through before. So, therefore, you’re thinking it, so to speak. But at the end of the day, your word is everything.

I always like to be transparent, and I always like to make sure that I share stories because I'm always talking about what I experienced so that hopefully somebody could relate to it and learn from it. So, I think sharing stories is very valuable, and being transparent is very important because it lends to your integrity. And when somebody knows what you stand for and knows what your values are, whether it's your first client or you're fresh out of being certified, they will work with you because of that. And they will honor that versus somebody that’s more expensive or somebody that's more experienced. So, I value that in myself.

[Kelly]: Very true. There are plenty of people with more experience who don't have that integrity. That's a great point.

Do you have tips for then that you'd be willing to share for people about gut health?

[Denise]: You know what I, I'll give you....

[Kelly]: And actually, I hate to interrupt, but I understand this is probably not a fair question because we just talked about how it's not a quick fix. Maybe I should retract the question!

[Denise]: No, you know, and no. It's still a good question because what I will share with you is, and it's relevant and it kind of goes back to what we're talking about a little bit, but it digs a little bit deeper. My suggestion for everyone, if you're struggling with gut health, is to move slow in order to go fast.

And what I mean by that is sometimes, just like when you think about a New Year's resolution, think about a new diet. We want to do everything all at once in hopes of getting results right away, and so what I mean is, instead of trying to eliminate all these foods and say, "I'm going to drink all this water, and I'm going to work out every single day, and I'm going to change my diet, and I'm going to go to bed at 9 pm, and I'm going to have all these routines," go slow in order to go fast. Know what I mean? That is, invest in one thing,

So, you find that, okay, sleep deprivation is your opportunity. Okay, the one thing is, let me adapt the philosophy of having a sleep routine, and it could be the one thing. I'm not going to have electronic devices in the bedroom for a week. Okay, that worked for a week. How did you feel after not having electronic devices in the bedroom for a week?

Oh, I felt so good and I got better sleep. I was more focused. I'm going to try for two weeks. We try for three weeks. So, now that we feel better with not having electronic devices in the room, I think you know what I'm going to do now. I'm going to make sure that I take a soothing shower with essential oils every night to accommodate not having the electric devices in the room. So, you just build on that one thing.

So, if it's sleep deprivation or it's stress, you build on that one thing versus trying to attack everything at once. Don't try to attack changing your meal plan, drinking a lot of water, doing all these things at one time. Do one thing, and build on it. And then move on to the next.

So, move slow in order to move fast. And so that's my recommendation, without necessarily saying, "These are the things that you need to do to help relieve your gut, etc." I think that's to me more wise and sage advice than telling someone they'll take this probiotic or take this prebiotic. One thing and build on that one thing, and that's also go to bring consistency.

[Kelly]: That's perfect!

[Denise]: Yeah, this's going to bring consistency, and then you're going to feel so much better knowing that you accomplished that one thing and that you're ready and you're capable to move one on to bigger things and other things.

[Kelly]: That makes sense. I love that so much. Thank you!

[Denise]: You're welcome!

[Kelly]: And, as an entrepreneur, do you have anything you want to share? Maybe one thing for anyone considering starting their own business?

[Denise]: I would say, make sure that you have support. Make sure that you surround yourself with people that support you because you can't do it all by yourself. And know that you're not in it by yourself. And, if you are right now by yourself, get the right support. And support means different individuals, because the way that my husband supports me is different than the way that I have an accountability group that I meet with every Tuesday 8 am, and have been meeting every Tuesday 8 am for the last year and maybe two months without fail. And they support me differently than how my husband supports me. So, my husband encourages me. He gives me feedback. And he motivates me. But he also gives me resources.

But these ladies, they are in the trenches with me, and so their support is different because they're also going to give me resources that they've used that they were successful in. They're going to give me information on how I get a VA. They're going to give me information on how you're building your course, use this particular platform. We're going to talk to each other and express our stories or our frustrations, etc.

So, having that support, having that accountability team every single week that I can talk to and that I can lean on, and get to reach out. And, on top of that, we communicate on Telegram. And so we're not meeting every single week. If we want to ask each other a question or or give some feedback or give somebody a shout out, we do it via Trello because we're all over the place. We have somebody in Poland, somebody in Australia, Denver, Wisconsin, Florida, Minnesota. It's about eight to 10 of us, and we're in different states, and we all are in different niches. We have several individuals that are doing podcasts. One teaches somebody how to cook Greek food and how to learn the Greek alphabet. Another person's a golf instructor. Another individual is a sake maker and a yoga based instructor.

[Kelly]: That's awesome!

[Denise]: So, we're all in different niches, but we are still able to support each other collectively and just, it's a great network. When I get up in the morning, I get up at 6 am. I do a quick workout. I come back, and I walk the dogs, and faithfully at 8 o'clock, I'm on the phone, and I'm in front of my computer. And and we're just having conversations and we're just talking about stuff, and we're just motivating each other. So, having a support system is key to your success.

[Kelly]: That's excellent! Thank you for that!

[Denise]: You're welcome!

[Kelly]: So, is there anything you want to share that I haven't asked you about?

[Denise]: You know what, I think I've shared a lot. What I would say is for those listening, and it sounds cliché, but I'm going to say, trust your gut. Trust your gut. If you want to start your own business, trust your gut. If it's telling you that something's ailing you, trust your gut. If you feel like you're making the wrong decisions and you know that you need to make a different path or use a different path or do something different, trust your gut. I know it's a cliché, but really trust your intuition and let your intuition lead you down your path, and let your intuition help you to find and identify what your purpose is. So, trust your gut.

That's my cliché feedback. But it really is true, and especially for women. We are so powerful and in tune with our intuition when, how we fail ourselves by not following it. Some trust your gut. Trust your intuition, even if it's scary, even if it's daunting, even if you don't have a clear path or a clear view. It took me that year of trepidation, that year of having that impostor syndrome feeling to navigate to good health because I was really trying to figure out which way do I go? Do I do plant-based? How do I do this health coaching thing, etc.?

So, you're going to find that your paths are going to change. Your focus is going to change. You are trying to get clarity of what your niche is and what your purpose is. It's going to evolve. So, trust the path that you're on let it evolve, and let things uncover and just roll with the punches, and enjoy the process because, now that I'm here and loving gut health and really passionate about it, I'm like, "Okay, I took those paths, and I took those ones to the room to get where I am right now."

[Kelly]: That's beautiful! I love it! Thank you so much.

[Denise]: You're very welcome!

[Kelly]: I am so glad you were here today. This was awesome!

[Denise]: I am super-honored!

[Kelly]: Excellent!

So, y'all can find Denise online at Denise VanNooten Healthy Living dot com, and I will put that link in the show notes. I'll be back next week with more branding, design, and business tips. You can leave comments on the web page for this episode. Link in the show notes, of course.

Thank you so much for being here! See you next week on Brand + Design Scoop!

Links mentioned in the episode:

[Denise VanNooten website](#)

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