1: DON’T SHARE QUESTIONS IN ADVANCE

When I started my podcast I didn’t script anything. I had an outline that I thought would make me sound more natural. What I found is that it actually led to lots of rambling and long tangents. As a result, my solo episodes now are well planned out, researched, and scripted.

That’s not the same with my interviews.

For every interview I have a theme in mind. After getting a “yes” from my guest, I then create a series of questions I can draw from. These help me get the conversation started and something to go back to if there’s a lull.

Sometimes I’ve had guests ask if I can send them questions in advance and the answer is always NO.

Here’s why: people who ask for this are generally nervous. They want something to help them prepare. But when you send questions in advance, they’re likely to try to take notes or memorize their answers. This does not create good conversation. It’s not natural or engaging.

Instead, I tell my guests that we’ll be focusing on one main theme and how I see that as valuable to my listeners. I send them a guest prep sheet with answers to FAQs and everything they need to know about the mechanics of recording.

I also let them know that I’ll guide them through the conversation. There won’t be any trick questions or things they need to prepare in advance.

I can do this because my podcast isn’t focused on guests sharing their top 5 tips. I carry the responsibility for the conversation moving forward, not the guest. That always puts them at ease.

Comfort is key to good interviews. When someone is nervous, they’re not present. When they’re uncomfortable, they ramble.

Think of how you would host a dinner party. How would you help someone know how to prepare? How would you welcome them into your space? How would you make them feel at ease?

Then do this for your podcast guests.
When you’re hosting guests on your podcast, you’re playing the role of journalist. Being a good journalist requires curiosity.

Sure, you may have a little bit of information about your guest and what they do. Maybe you’ve even been over to their website or social media. But that’s just the beginning.

When I have a guest on my show I always dig. I want to learn as much as I can about their story, I want to find out what they typically talk about. And I want to uncover what would be interesting to MY audience.

Most of the time that’s different from what has been done before.

Look for the patterns in their work that are relevant to your angle. Let me give you an example.

I’m in the planning stages for an episode with a former client who is a therapist. Obviously she could talk about the need for therapy and how she approaches her practice. But my clients are busy business owners. They have a ton of ideas, and just due to that fact alone experience anxiety frequently.

I’m planning to ask her why she thinks creatives experience anxiety and how she’s seen her clients get through it. I’m going to dig into her perspective on the difference between a therapist and a coach. And I want to know if she experiences the same things her clients do.

Now, she’s not a therapist just for business owners. But my people are business owners and I want to lead the conversation to what’s relevant for them.

Speaking of conversation...
When I think of the podcasts I’ve been on that felt off, it was always for one reason: it felt like I was being interviewed for a job.

Questions flew at me to which I responded and then we moved on. Nothing expanded on by the host. No inflection in their voice. Just impersonal.

I believe if your guest is good enough to be on your show they’re good enough to get to know. Even though your listeners are only hearing you through their ears, you’d be amazed at how much we can sense a connection or lack thereof.

Think about when you’re having a conversation with someone. When someone comes in with a list of questions for you to answer, how does that feel?

This is the difference between talking AT each other and talking WITH each other.

It’s the same for your guest. If they come prepared with “talking points” they’re much less likely to be able to talk with you.

A book I just finished and highly recommend is “We Need to Talk” by Celeste Headlee. She says, “meaningful conversations require an investment of time.” She also points out that “most of the time it’s the tangents and offhand remarks that reveal so much about someone.”

This leads to my fourth tip...
This is a hard one for most of us. We show up with our list of questions and are already thinking about where we’ll guide the conversation when our guest is still talking.

I still catch myself doing this.

But when you find yourself focused on the questions you need to get through, you aren’t listening for the golden nuggets coming up in the present.

Regardless of how well we want to believe we can multitask, we just can’t. When you’re scrolling on Instagram and watching Netflix, you’re not really taking in either. The same goes for thinking ahead.

This one takes practice—because at the end of the day you don’t want to end up with 60+ minutes of disconnected talking. That’s hard for a listener to follow and gain value from.

How do you encourage flow? Avoid interrupting and give an extra pause after your guest is done talking. That will give them an opportunity to continue their thought rather than edit themselves down for fear they’re talking too much.

You can’t plan for everything because you don’t know everything about this person. Release a bit of control and you’ll be surprised where you end up.
5: AVOID CONVERSATIONAL NARCISSISM

While I’m a huge advocate for it, sometimes storytelling is not the best option.

I first learned about conversational narcissism when reading “We Need To Talk.” And we are not talking about this enough.

Sociologist Charles Derber describes this as: the desire to take over a conversation, do most of the talking, and to turn the focus of the exchange to yourself. It’s often subtle and unconscious.

I know you’ve stopped listening to a podcast before because of this. It’s the host who talks because she likes the sound of her voice. It’s the host who has to bring everything back to her or her business. It’s the host who has to interrupt because - oh my gosh, YES, me too!

Even though it feels natural to draw some connection by relating to what someone shares, it’s not always necessary. And it may actually hinder your understanding of what they’re describing.

When someone talks about hating their job so much and you pipe in with how much you hated your job and how they’ll get through it because you did and everyone does, does that make them feel better? Does it make them feel more seen? Probably not.

I’m not saying avoid empathizing all together, but do so with intention. Ask yourself if you’re connecting it back to yourself to acknowledge and normalize what someone’s saying or to draw the attention back to you.

And my last tip is..
LEAVE THEM WANTING MORE

Your job is not to cover everything that possibly could be covered with your guest.

I've heard from quite a few hosts that they feel it’s their job to help the guest share what they do and how people can find them. But I disagree. Your job is to provide entertainment and education for your listeners. Nothing more.

This means you have to keep it focused and likely end before your guest is ready.

Most of my guests comment on how the recording flew by and they had so much more to share. But that’s okay. At this point I know how long I can hold my listeners’ attention and I'd rather go deep than wide.

I made this mistake early on in my podcasting career trying to tackle two big topics with the same guest. It went well over an hour and I split it into two episodes. She’s the only person I’ve ever done that with and I still feel a little weird now about the optics of her getting two episodes.

I should have focused on the first topic and closed when the momentum was high.

Remember, you're producing a show, not a memoir.
INTERESTED IN MORE?

These are all things I’ve learned in the process of podcasting. And I mention that because I wouldn’t have become better at it if I didn’t practice it.

So many of us want to be great without putting in the work to figure out our greatness. You don’t find your voice when things are easy. You find it when you get feedback, stumble, and pivot.

If you could use support in sharing your message, let’s have a chat. Reach out at kim@patternofpurpose.com

To better conversations,
Kim