

PROFESSIONAL
TROUBLEMAKER
with LUVVIE AJAYI JONES

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[00:00:17] Hey y'all, welcome back to another episode of Professional Troublemaker. And today I'm excited to speak with a powerhouse guest who's a brilliant businesswoman and is building a mission driven media empire. Morgan Debaun is the Founder and CEO of Blavity Inc, a leading media company created by and for black millennials.

[00:01:51] As a serial entrepreneur and passionate advocate for diversity and inclusion in tech and media, Morgan has turned Blavity into a juggernaut, okay, from its humble beginnings, and her brand portfolio continues to grow. Morgan got all the things under her belt, like she's Forbes 30 under 30, America's top 50 women in tech, was named, part of the Route 100.

[00:02:13] Morgan is brilliant at this. And I really wanted to bring her to the table to talk about how she has built and sustained such a big business. So technically. Blavity is considered a small business because she still has less than a thousand employees, but Morgan's company is not no small cookies, right?

[00:02:31] So I wanted to have her come on and really talk about how she has made it sustainable and how she's allowed herself to design a life where now her business can run even without her constant presence. So it was really cool. And it was really important for me to bring her on. And here's the cool thing.

[00:02:53] Morgan also hosts her own podcast called The Journey, where she explores the past of purpose driven individuals striving to live their best life. So we're pulling a double this week. I'm a guest on her podcast, The Journey, and she is on Professional Troublemaker at the same time. So be sure to check out our conversation there too because we talk about something different like she's interviewing me over there I'm interviewing her over here.

[00:03:17] So let's jump into it So. Morgan, uh, you started Blavity 10 years ago. How did you even get to the point where you were like, I want to start a media company because what madness were you going through? Cause I had to say madness, obviously.

[00:03:30] **Morgan:** I definitely didn't know any better. I started Blavity when I was 24 years old. I was still working in Silicon Valley at the time. And really what I wanted to do was build a platform for black voices, black people, black, to solve black problems. And living in the Bay Area and living in Silicon Valley, You know, I was in the epicenter of innovation, everyone around me, including even like your Lyft driver had an app, you know, everybody was building something.

[00:03:57] So I was surrounded by people who were thinking about building things at scale for millions and millions of people. And yet it was insane to me that nobody was targeting this demographic that nobody was thinking about. How do I solve the problems for this community? And. You know, one of the things that I've learned over time is the best ideas are typically the things that are the most obvious that people just have not done well yet.

[00:04:23] So, Blavity really started with, let me figure out how to get massive amounts of black folks together. And then collective greatness will happen from there. I did not seek out to build a media company, actually, if there's probably a really early interview at some point where I was like, we are not a media company.

[00:04:41] We are a platform because being a media company, I knew this, that it was a really tough business. Like it's a tough revenue model. And so we've actually, I've focused. Early on on diversifying our business. We built AfroTech, we've done acquisitions and I wanted to build Blavity in an untraditional way so that we had more freedom and how we were going to scale and how we were going to grow and build this business.

[00:05:07] **Luvvie:** So when you decided you were going to start this platform, what was the first step you took?

[00:05:12] **Morgan:** So the first step when starting the platform was to build the MVP minority, my the minimum viable product. and the MVP for us was a newsletter. So we were early in the newsletter game. Um, and we were curating content from all over the Internet. This is before, you know, all the tools will be used today really looked very different back then.

[00:05:34] 10 years ago, you know, Facebook, you had videos like Upworthy videos that we're doing really well. All the BuzzFeed the buzzfeed era. Um, but nobody was really making content or curating content for the culture. This was also the time when like, scandal was crazy. Like, I mean, you, I, I read your

blog. You and Very Smart Brothers and a few other blogs are like the ones that I'm like, all right, like this conversational content.

[00:05:59] Is more than just about the, you know, typing on the screen. It's about community. It's about conversations that are happening in text threads, in Google lists, in Reddit threads, and bringing it forward onto this platform. And Blavity really was the first company to do that for our demographic. Uh, all the other black legacy media brands like Essence or Black Enterprise, They had their place, um, and they still do, but they weren't necessarily catering to the young black audience at the time.

[00:06:27] **Luvvie:** So when you got started, how did people react to you? Like in terms of when you went out to whether you were pitching for AfroTech and you are this young black woman in Silicon Valley, what was the responses that you were getting?

[00:06:41] **Morgan:** I mean, I have a lot of haters. I had a lot of haters then. I still got a lot of haters now, but I had like a lot of people who were kind of like, who is this little girl? Who's running around the Bay area, like doing stuff, you know, cause I did crazy stuff. Like I rented an entire pier in San Francisco for like year two of AfroTech.

[00:07:00] You know, I was like

[00:07:02] **Luvvie:** I think I was there for that.

[00:07:04] **Morgan:** Yeah. You were there for year two.

[00:07:05] **Luvvie:** I was there for that. I was,

[00:07:07] yeah, I remember that. pier Mm-Hmm.

[00:07:09] **Morgan:** was the keynote at the end.

[00:07:11] **Luvvie:** Uh huh. Uh huh.

[00:07:13] **Morgan:** You know, so we were, I was doing things that people were definitely like, she has not paid her dues. She has not like done the steps. She has not kissed the ring. She's like very difficult to work with.

[00:07:24] She, you know, is very ambitious. Um, and so it rubbed a lot of people along the wrong way because particularly in black media and just like legacy black industries and networks, there's very much like the powers that be the king makers and queen makers, the people you kind of have to, like, you know, bow down to respectfully.

[00:07:45] and. They're still existing, like, right. Like they're still here. So you'd kind of have to wait your turn. That's what, that's, what's expected of us. That was what was expected of me. and obviously I did not wait my turn at all. Hey, I was like, if you guys don't want to come to this, you don't have to, like, if you don't want to participate in Blavity's growth, if you don't want to be a customer, if, because we didn't invite you to speak on stage, if you, if you don't want to participate in our ecosystem, because we're not.

[00:08:14] or I'm not, following whatever rules you have. That's okay. Because the audience is with us. The readers are with us. The techies are with us. And as long as we, as a company continue to super serve our demographic and solve their problems, everything else should work itself out. I actually think it's a much riskier business to build a business based off of permission and.

[00:08:41] Like acceptance from the powers that be. It's actually more risky because you're then highly dependent on them as you're growing your business. You're dependent on them for contracts. You're dependent on their approvals, if they like you or not, as opposed to if you're providing value or not.

[00:09:00] **Luvvie:** Mm. So as you are facing this resistance and opposition, were there any things that you activated to go around it? Like how did you go, you know what? Even if I'm being blocked or if I'm being hated on, I'm still going to get this done. What were the things you activated?

[00:09:16] **Morgan:** Yeah. So when I went out to fundraise, I failed the first time I went out to fundraise with black VCs that look like me, that were able to, that I thought would understand the problem that I was solving and that was Of course, therefore be willing to spend money and put money behind it. That was not the case.

[00:09:30] So I went around this and you've actually talked about this before and you know, where I'm going with this. Do you know who gave me my first check? Not black people.

[00:09:36] **Luvvie:** White women, white women. Yup.

[00:09:39] **Morgan:** Um, and then, and then white men.

[00:09:41] and. And so I got investors from what we call a social impact investors, investors who care about the progressive nature of our business and our mission, not only about our profits.

[00:09:54] And that was one of the reasons why I was able to continue to be mission driven in the beginning of the company and, and do things like, Hey, AfroTech existing is going to advance equity within the black community, because we're going to be able to apply more pressure to these companies as a collective group.

[00:10:08] We're going to create more jobs because they're going to be held accountable to if they actually did what they said they're going to do. And by that happening, all boats will rise. And there's, there are people who care about that and are willing to invest in that. in itself

[00:10:24] **Luvvie:** So that's actually a really good point that I want to dig into. I feel like culturally black people have this interesting relationship with money. one that looks like we are very risk averse because understandably, because we've been so traumatized, because we've been so cheated, so taken advantage of, we feel like money is this finite resource, like the scarcity of it all.

[00:10:49] I feel like makes us risk averse, which is why like I have a family member who I just had to three years ago had to convince to get a bank account. And I was like, bruh, I promise they're not coming for your \$4. Like, so when you talk about when you went out to fundraise, And you tried to get money from wealthy black people who are VCs and the people who gave you money were white women.

[00:11:15] I've heard that story from a lot of different founders. I've heard that story a lot where people are like, no, I wanted us. I wanted my investors to look like us. And I went looking for us and we said no. And then I basically got yeses from people who didn't look like me. Talk more about that whole thing.

[00:11:35] Yeah.

[00:11:35] **Morgan:** I mean, it's really, for me, it was actually really like heartbreaking. I think it's probably heartbreaking for most of us because we do have this ideal version. If you're building a mission based company, you have this idealistic point of view on like how you want everything to run. You want the people who have equity in your company to reflect your audience.

[00:11:52] You want the people who are controlling interest in your company to reflect your audience. You know, like It is something that I was very militant about. Uh, you know, I grew up in a pretty blackity-black black, black household. So it was hard for me, I think, to reconcile, well, you know what, would you rather have an all black cap table, meaning all of the owners of Blavity are black, but then the company doesn't ever raise another round because.

[00:12:19] They're not actually going to support you as you continue to grow this business. Or would you rather have a diverse cap table who all care about you, the audience and the interest that their interests align and their equity aligned. And they're going to rock with you because they don't actually even really need the money or the return on investment. And so they're going to let you do what you want to

[00:12:37] do business because they don't have a scarcity mindset. Obviously, you know, which one I went with.

[00:12:42] **Luvvie:** Listen, here's the thing. You know what? I'm just like, I have so much to even ask and dig into on this. So one, the devastation of the visual of like, I want to be able to really have the story that says like my company's backed by people who look like me. And then you try, you try, you try.

[00:13:03] It doesn't happen.

[00:13:05] **Morgan:** Yeah,

[00:13:06] **Luvvie:** And then you end up with people who are like, listen, take the money. I don't care what you do with it. I trust you because I really don't need it for real.

[00:13:14] That's right. And although in the, in the cultural zeitgeist, it is an amazing story to be like, Oh my gosh, yes, all of my investors. And it feels good for the spirit, but then we can't tell that story because one, the pipeline is low because how many wealthy black people really exist enough to be able to compete in this way.

[00:13:33] That's number one. And then two, the ones that do exist. A lot of times they're just getting the money. So for them, they're still doing everything to protect it. So they really can't take a lot of risk in the way the old money white people can.

[00:13:47] **Morgan:** That's exactly right. And I had to understand and have empathy for those people who are now all my friends, like some of them have come back in now that Blavity is derisked you know, some of them are partners, like we work together on AfroTech, like they're in, they go to AfroTech, they speak at AfroTech, right?

[00:14:01] Like, it's all love, but I, in the, in the moment when there's that power dynamic, like, I didn't feel love. I felt like what the heck is going on? You know, um, now that I've accepted it and I acknowledge that we're all on this struggle together, that we're all fighting our own fights and everyone, even if they're in power, has their own sense of insecurity and wants to feel secure.

[00:14:25] Like that has, released All of the emotional part of being an entrepreneur that I think I felt as a founder, when I like look at, at the people, even someone like a bank, right? Like if we have a line of credit and the bank needs to follow these guidelines and we're not following the guidelines, so they need to reduce the line of credit.

[00:14:43] Like if there's things like that happening, I have to look at it from an individual perspective versus the institution. Cause if you look at an institution, whether it's VCs or quote unquote banks or quote unquote, Finance years, we're screwed everywhere we turn. So you can live as an entrepreneur, particularly a black entrepreneur, particularly a black woman entrepreneur and be like, is trash.

[00:15:05] Everything sucks. It's so much harder for me. You know, you could sit in that for years and I've seen founders do that. And I'm like, you got to get out of it because these people don't give a shit about you. So either you can be miserable and be a victim or you can be. At least stable and secure and just go accomplish whatever you were set to accomplish.

[00:15:25] **Luvvie:** That's such a good point. Cause again, we often, I think, I think about how we will often define ourselves and think so hard about the margins that we inhabit. The fact that we're black, the fact that we're women and how the fact that the stats are like 1%, less than 1 percent of VC funding, but individually, when you break yourself out of it, now understanding that the systems have been set up to make this so much harder for us on the individual level.

[00:15:53] Many of us are operating in a space now where we are actually being able to have access to the rooms, to the people. And when the individual is able

to win in that way and how we're able to move, I think the people who break out of it are also the people who find a way. To shirk the scarcity mindset of it all.

[00:16:14] Um, in spite, like it's, that's also why I call it madness because it's not logical. Right? Like it's not based in data for you to shirk the scarcity mindset, because all the data tells you that there's very little chance for you to actually be successful. So it actually is a form of madness to believe so much in your own work and your own purpose that you're like, no, no, no, it's going to work for me. How'd you do that? How'd you, cause that again, form of madness. How did you do that? As you're facing all this opposition, as you're getting all the no's of the first round.

[00:16:48] **Morgan:** I mean, I still am doing that now. Like, you know, we have a music festival and I just did my third acquisition last fall while being pregnant. Like, people constantly, the data is, no, you probably shouldn't do an acquisition while you're pregnant. You know, you probably should like stay low key. And I'm like, no, I think we're going to do this deal and we're going to get it done and we're going to get it done before I go on mat leave.

[00:17:09] And then we're going to do a music festival. one of the hardest things to pull off, like what I tell myself is one, it's okay to fail. For everything that I've been successful at, I could give you a laundry list of things that Blavity has failed at. Summit 21 did not succeed. It was a beautiful experience.

[00:17:26] We had an Atlanta multiple years. I think you spoke at the one, maybe the first one that was in New York. I can't remember, but our, it didn't work. You know, the business. Profit margin was not there. It was great from a consumer perspective. It was bad from a client perspective. Um, I had the work smart podcast, my first podcast.

[00:17:45] It didn't work. I relaunched the journey podcast so much better top business podcast now. So like part of it is. Me building the personal resilience to put my world out publicly, my brain out publicly with different ideas, different product offerings, different things. And then when something fails, like move on, you know, if it's not working, don't just keep running up against a brick wall.

[00:18:10] And I think that's the other thing that really is challenging. I think for us as a community is like failing and failing publicly and saying like, it's okay, I'm moving on. Like I'm, I'm doing something else, and. My success rate is probably the same as everybody else's, but my output is ten times higher.

[00:18:27] **Luvvie:** Your success rate is the same as everybody's, but your output is higher, which basically means you just try more things. look, the law of averages says you go and wait. So if you try 30 things, yes, six will work. The problem is that people will try two things and be like, it didn't work and they'll quit.

[00:18:44] And be like,

[00:18:45] I'm a fail. No,

[00:18:46] quit

[00:18:46] **Morgan:** It didn't work for me.

[00:18:47] It's so

[00:18:48] **Luvvie:** Oh, that's the other P like the self pitying that we'd be doing too much. It's just, we'd be spending so much time in the failure of it all. As in like, we will wallow in it for a long time.

[00:18:59] Like, Oh my gosh, I'm gonna put my head, I'm gonna just disappear from society for five years because I, I, I failed at this

[00:19:06] one

[00:19:06] thing.

[00:19:06] Yeah,

[00:19:07] **Morgan:** Yeah, the longest I've ever disappeared was like maybe two weeks,

[00:19:11] **Luvvie:** I've disappeared for a month. Well, I didn't feel like being on social because I just wanted to get my brain back, but like, I've disappeared for a month, so yeah. Yeah. And I think people hear it all the time. That whole idea of like the difference between somebody who's successful and somebody who's not, is that successful people fail all the time.

[00:19:26] And it sounds really buzzwordy and Ted talk speak, but it's actually true.

[00:19:31] **Morgan:** Yeah,

[00:19:32] **Luvvie:** Like it's, I can name eight things I've done that failed. I'm like, yeah, no, that didn't work. I, at one point I had like a membership program, Fairfax squad did not work. I did launches that did not work. Like, I'm just go, what did we learn bet?

[00:19:44] Let's not make that mistake again. Great. The next time let's do it better. Awesome.

[00:19:48] **Morgan:** that's right. It's just like reps, just like an athlete, right? An athlete is putting in crazy reps. So when it's game time, their averages goes up, but it's also because they probably missed a million shots. We never saw cause they were shooting at home, in the gym, in the morning, at night. Like they don't stop.

[00:20:04] **Luvvie:** yes, yes. And I think, um, to your point, the willingness to fail now, like that's a choice that I think a lot of people need to, to make like the willingness to fail That means you are. Okay. With failing. People are so afraid of failing. What would you tell them if they were like, I just don't want to fail. I don't want to look stupid.

[00:20:26] **Morgan:** Yeah. I, um, have this thing that I talk about with my work smart community, which is practice failing in low stakes environments. So for example, get a hobby and be really bad at it. So like I'm a bad gardener. Last year, I planted a bunch of carrots. I found a random carrot in like November. It's like, Oh, one of them made it, you know, and I'm okay with it.

[00:20:48] I'm okay with being bad at it. I am, I do Pilates. I'm, I can't do half the things the Pilate girlies can do. I can't do it, you know, but I'm there and I'm falling, I'm tripping. You know, it's so bad. I only go to the same instructor so that I don't have to like reintroduce how bad I am to every instructor.

[00:21:08] I'm like, these are the girls. Okay. that's okay

[00:21:12] **Luvvie:** Right. The girl who's got to know I'm only bad here.

[00:21:14] **Morgan:** yeah, like this is it. She Morgan is going to do the modification. 100 percent of the time. Okay. Um, and. That's okay. I, having areas where I've accepted and practiced not being the best at something and being mediocre and or less than mediocre is actually really helpful for me because then it builds that grit and builds that resilience.

[00:21:36] And I would encourage anybody if they haven't already to figure out what your hobby is and don't just pick a hobby that you're good at. brings you joy, provides value to yourself, um, you know, I have a list of hobbies people can check out on my website, but like It's really critical that you have something that you do just for you.

[00:21:56] That's not tied to making money. That's not tied to some sort of external input or affirmations or value exchange that you get. You know, that's genuinely just for you. Just for fun.

[00:22:08] **Luvvie:** My, one of my hobbies is playing the Sims

[00:22:10] And I decorate the houses crazy. Let me tell you something right now. I can't play The Sims more than a couple of times a month because then I don't want to do anything else in my life. I just to sit there and play The Sims lives and decorate their homes and put them in chaos.

[00:22:25] Like one of my Sims happened to be dating an alien. It's a whole thing. It's a whole thing. So, the hobbies of it all? Yes, please. Find more. But I think that's such a major key though. Find something that you're going to be terrible at and be okay with being terrible at it because those of us who are type A control freaks, high achiever, as perfectionist people, we hate being bad at stuff.

[00:22:47] We, it is, we are, we are terrible at

[00:22:49] being bad at stuff,

[00:22:50] and I think about all the ways in which like who we are personally bleeds into business. Right. And I think this is one of those ways, like who we are personally as these perfectionists, then makes us super fail averse, which means in business, we're not taking big risks that can have big rewards. How are you in your personal growth watching you one, I actually would say in the last 10 years, how do you think you, the person. Has grown or changed.

[00:23:20] **Morgan:** Yeah, I used to be really hard on myself when, um, I would take big risks and it wouldn't work out as relates to like the team, because as you get bigger, you become responsible for people's live livelihood. You become responsible for, uh, you know, their kids dental plans, right? Like, you know, we have full benefits for one K matching, you know, pat leave maternity leave all the things.

[00:23:44] Um, and so. I take my job very seriously and the responsibility that I have very seriously. And I think when you take big leaps in business and it fails, it tends to impact people's livelihoods. So I don't, I think in the beginning I was very cautious. I hadn't done a, I never did a layoff until COVID. And even then we did like a, Partial, you have an option to leave if you want to leave.

[00:24:08] We'll even pay you to go type situation. Um, I took the biggest salary cut during COVID, you know, for the company. And, I think, but then having gone through that experience. And also freed, freed up the business. Like we had a lot of people who was probably time for them to go. Like it was time to move on.

[00:24:28] And so coming back off of COVID remember, you know, George Floyd was murdered that summer. So it was a really weird time to be a black owned business because we were going through a reduction in workforce because of COVID slowdown. And then at the same time, there was a lot of interest. Like three to four months later from big companies who wanted to engage with black owned companies, including our own.

[00:24:50] So we had to really quickly re engage people and say, Hey, glad we did a furlough, not of layoff because you're welcome to come back if you want, you know, we have work to do now. Um, and I think that experience helped me. Redefine my relationship with, it's okay for people to graduate out of Blavity. It's okay for people to become alumni of Blavity as a company.

[00:25:12] And therefore, when I'm hiring people now, I am really clear upfront. This is the work that you're going to be doing. Here's the risk involved in the work that we're going to be doing. Here's the compensation and transaction for said risk. You're fairly compensated. Um, but these are the things that are, these are our goals.

[00:25:33] And I talk about our goals upfront in the hiring process. I talk about what we're trying to do upfront in the hiring process, because I never want someone to sign up to work and make a decision to spend their quality time, I mean, eight hours a day of their life working on this business and working on this mission that we're moving towards, and then they don't understand, or they don't know.

[00:25:53] What to expect once they get here. No, you need to know exactly what we're doing, the risks that we're taking, because I am trying to be ambitious.

[00:26:00] **Luvvie:** Have you changed as a leader?

[00:26:02] **Morgan:** Oh, I'm way more transparent. I mean, I'm way more communicative and unapologetic in my communication. I think before I used to tiptoe around a lot of things, um, and just, and just my vocabulary, because I was scared to be perceived certain ways and, That has, now I'm like, this is, this is who I am, and this is how to work with me, and this is how to communicate with me, and, and I tell people up front, when I'm direct, or I'm, like, I don't use a lot of words, often times in communication, so I'm like, yes, great, thank you, now people know, that's not a personal thing, that's just how Morgan operates.

[00:26:40] At work. 'cause it's efficiency, right? I don't need to write Hi hope all is well. Hope you had a great weekend. Da da.

[00:26:46] **Luvvie:** hate that.

[00:26:48] **Morgan:** Not to my own team internally. I don't have time for that, kind. I'm pleasant.

[00:26:53] **Luvvie:** I hate that so much. I, I

[00:26:55] can I just,

[00:26:56] **Morgan:** I like, why do I have to do that with 200 employees? I would spend all my time. Hi, how are you? So, you know, I used to spend a lot of time, I think, doing the things that I thought people needed me to do. in order for them to do their best work, and I've stopped doing that. And what I found, Luvvie is that by being me and saying, this is what it means when I say it this way, it's actually not an attack on you.

[00:27:22] This is what I'm trying to say. What it means now is that I've seen other people at the company and other leaders model that behavior. And now we have a much less toxic workforce where people aren't tiptoeing around everything all the time. In fact, it's so funny because this happened recently. I had a middle manager call me because she was having a hard time and the meetings with some of the senior leaders.

[00:27:44] And I said, well, what's going on? She said, well, I just feel like there's a lot of politics and bureaucracy. And I said, well, I observed you in that meeting and you were participating Bureaucracy and politics by not being direct. You were continuing the redirects and you were continuing to tip toe and walk on eggshells, which just reinforces the behavior.

[00:28:03] So we're a small company, you know? So if we don't want this behavior to happen, we have to stop it. I can't control how so and so operates, but you can control how you respond to bureaucracy if you see it. Okay. So just teaching people how to take personal responsibility and then Being an active participant in that.

[00:28:23] **Luvvie:** That's such a good point. Cause let me tell you something right now. The reason why I know I would not be successful in corporate, I'd be fired like after three months, cause they'd be like, she's not a team player. I can't do the compliment sandwich shit. I can't do the, Oh my God. I just love your hair today.

[00:28:38] Can I need that thing by 5 PM? Love your shoes, girl. I can't do it. I need to be able to talk to you directly because I'm an adult who doesn't have all this time to waste. I can't put eight emojis in the email to you just to soften my tone because I don't have a tone on this end. So you projecting tone to me.

[00:28:57] Ain't got nothing to do with me. This is why also me as a leader, it was one of my challenges to have to learn how to soften just a little bit. But I was like, I'm not softening all the way because I don't know how to be like, hope you're well girl. Can you give me this thing? But why we got to do all of that?

[00:29:12] **Morgan:** yeah, I, I just respond in GIF sometimes, like sometimes I'm like GIF, you know, and Slack has the like GIF y, GIF y, uh, little

[00:29:23] automation. So I'll just be like, good morning via GIF. And then I go into my thing. That's

[00:29:28] **Luvvie:** that's it because I mean, here's the thing too, as like black women, I think because of how people already project tone on us and attitude or whatever the thing is, now we're on the hook even more to try to be different, but I'm like, that takes energy that I don't, I can't afford to give to you because you have soft feelings.

[00:29:48] I also do it in interviews too. I tell people all the time, I'm always like, I am direct, but my direct is not. With tone, like when I say, Hey, I need this by 5 PM. I'm not mad when I say it, I actually just told you what I just needed. So being clear about that as a leader, and I think that's also another thing about like hiring that's been, um, that's difficult that is

[00:30:13] that we got to talk about as leaders.

[00:30:14] so it's not even always about skill. Like it's about fit personality fit. I always know that whoever needs to be my executive assistant can not be. Somebody who's super sensitive because I'm going to rattle off things to you very quickly, and I'm going to expect you to not be feeling, having feelings for you for team management.

[00:30:32] What are the things that you look for in somebody's personality? What has, how has Blavity team being built? That has not just been about skills.

[00:30:41] **Morgan:** I would say like, year 4, 5, 6 was pretty hard for us. And for me personally, because the company was small enough, like 50 to 75 employees where I knew everybody and everybody wanted proximity to me and not big enough that there could be like, that I could just say, No, I don't need to be in this meeting.

[00:30:59] This, this 200 person level is actually perfect for me because I don't have to meet with everybody anymore. So that's one thing that I've have adjusted. One of the things I had to acknowledge was the power dynamic that even if I don't feel like I'm in a meeting and I'm actually genuinely listening and it's not my meeting, I'm still the CEO and I still have power in this space.

[00:31:18] And even if There were times when I didn't feel that because I'm like, I'm a founder, not a CEO. I really had to transition from a founder mindset to a CEO and absolutely own it. And that's something I talk about a lot like in all the things that I do in the podcast. It's like making that transition from founder To CEO is actually critical for my organizational success and for many companies success, because once you acknowledge, okay, it's no longer just me and my friends, like trying to build this thing, this is a business and I have responsibility and my, my job.

[00:31:55] As a CEO, I have a job description for myself as CEO. Then I stopped participating in things that were not CEO level work. And that I think gave me the freedom and my own employees of freedom to say, great. Like if someone sends me an email and it's like, why are you sending this to the CEO? You know, like that's like, sometimes I'm like, Hmm, this is interesting.

[00:32:17] And then I reflect on myself. I say, Hmm, is there some signal that I've given that this would be appropriate? Like, this is the kind of DM that I should be getting, or this is the kind of message I should be getting. Or you give me a presentation and there's a bunch of errors in it. And then I say, Hey, did you send this to your manager beforehand before you sent it to me?

[00:32:36] No. Hmm. Is there something about me that's signaling that I don't expect a really good first draft been approved by your manager before you send it to the CEO? So I always viewed as a like, let me check myself first. And I think that has made me less reactive when it comes to my employees and building good relationships with people and setting expectations of like, this is what I expect.

[00:32:59] This is what good looks like in business. This is what good looks like to me and my expectation. And that has been an evolution.

[00:33:09] **Luvvie:** So what is a great team building tip that you have? Cause I think people really should people, me struggle with that joint of like really figuring out right people.

[00:33:20] **Morgan:** Yeah. Hiring is really hard. I don't always get hiring. Right. Um, and hiring is our biggest responsibility as business owners, because if you put the right people in place, everything else should feel easy, but the wrong people in place, you wind up working around those people or fixing the gaps and putting in more people to fill in the gaps of the people that you've got, and it's just a nightmare.

[00:33:40] what I've learned is that when writing a job description. Sometimes it's best to write the job description for the job that you have in the next three to six months. Not always the job to, that you have in that very moment, and never the job that you think you're going to have in a year from now.

[00:34:00] There's a window. A lot of times people are trying to solve a problem that they have right now, but then once that problem is solved, you've only hired someone who can be a problem solver and not an operator. Does that make sense? And then you're like, wait, why can't you operate it? Why can't you be consistent?

[00:34:15] Why can't you do these things? And they're like, well, I solved the problem. And you're like, yeah, but it needs like the work needs to continue or vice versa. You hire someone who's an operator, but they actually can't set up the system. They can't solve the problem in the beginning. And so then you're just, you're like, wait, why is this so hard for you?

[00:34:32] And it's like, Oh, like once the system is set up, if we're launching a new product, once the product is launched. You can maintain it. You can grow it. Once the brand is launched, you can maintain it. You can grow it. If we're

launching a new brand, I typically don't use the people who are going to maintain it and grow it.

[00:34:47] We use a special group of people within the company, or we hire externally to build the new thing, set it up, and then people can maintain it.

[00:34:55] **Luvvie:** because those are two different people, because some of the people, so builders are not always sustainer. So the person who can execute is not the one who can just run it, which is really a good point. cause I think what ends up happening is.

[00:35:07] I think we probably hire people for general roles too often. And because of that, like the lack of ownership, the lack of lanes, which is actually something I actually tried to do again. I try to write the ship of like, all right, everybody, you own this. This is what you're good at. But I think for small businesses, really tiny businesses, because you can, you said our business is small.

[00:35:28] You said 50 to 75 girl,

[00:35:30] **Morgan:** It's all, it's all relative. You know, my competitors have a thousand employees, 3000 employees.

[00:35:37] **Luvvie:** Facts, facts, facts, facts. So you at 200, you considered small in the media, but even though y'all are running a massive, um, budget. Yeah, I think team building is where a lot of people get wrong, but I think, um, One of the things that I'm realizing in team building is just the importance of personality fit.

[00:35:59] cause I, okay, actually, no, there's this question I'm going to ask you about Gen Z. has Gen Z been, um, as people to manage for you? I

[00:36:08] **Morgan:** personally do not manage Gen Z because I don't think that would work for my personality type.

[00:36:14] **Luvvie:** Yeah.

[00:36:14] We have Gen Z-ers but I

[00:36:16] **Morgan:** think as full time employees, it can be challenging. And I admire Gen Z but really the ethos is I want to work so that I can gain skills and I can get a consistent paycheck so that I can go do something else. I mean, that's

like the narrative that's been consistent. And so how I've operated, it's like, great, let's be a good place for people to work where they can get skills, where we, they can learn how to do pitch decks where they can understand how a business is run, where they can have projects that they own autonomously and feel proud of and be okay with in four years or three years or two years or a year them saying, I'm going to go do something else.

[00:36:55] Or even giving some people the option at times to say, Oh, you want to be a contractor. You don't want to be a full time salaried employee because you want more flexibility. Here's an option for a contract. We've even done that where we reverse convert people and they're happier. You know, I think that people who have challenges are people who want to make a lot of money.

[00:37:17] Have a lot of freedom, work on work that they love, and don't have the skillset to demand freedom and the pay. It is a privilege to have remote work, make a lot of money and work on work that you love. You need to actually be able to deliver the result. That's the part gap that I've seen consistently, unfortunately with Gen Z.

[00:37:40] **Luvvie:** Those are amazing points. And yes, that's the part that they be stressing us about. You cannot ask for a raise when you ain't did your deadline. Like when you made most of your deadlines, that's not how this works.

[00:37:49] **Morgan:** I I admire it.

[00:37:49] **Luvvie:** It's an interesting, it's an interesting generational gap. They said, they said every generation has this generational gap.

[00:37:55] And I was like, yeah, we're officially the cantankerous aunties who were like, uh, we don't understand y'all, like what, how y'all operating. So we, so we're officially there. Like

[00:38:04] the, the the geriatric millennials

[00:38:06] **Morgan:** And

[00:38:06] I understand where they're coming from. They're like, we should get a raise just for existing because the world is more expensive just Because Because we're existing and I don't disagree with them.

[00:38:15] **Luvvie:** I don't disagree with them, but I will give you the raise if you make my money worth it, because you can't, I can't give you the raise and then you, you like, yeah, I just want to, I'm taking a mental health break in the middle of a launch. It's going to be a problem.

[00:38:26] **Morgan:** I agree.

[00:38:27] one thing for Gen Z is a little empathy for them. They've they've had a weird upbringing in

[00:38:34] **Luvvie:** They've been through it. They've been through it. They've been through it.

[00:38:37] So for people who are intended to enter this whole entrepreneurship space and running a company for themselves, what are some key practices that you think they should be implementing in their daily lives?

[00:38:49] **Morgan:** Yeah. You know, I think it's over 90 percent of entrepreneurs and black entrepreneurs are solo entrepreneurs. They're a team of one. So my best piece of advice for

[00:38:59] **Luvvie:** I

[00:38:59] **Morgan:** the majority of people who are considering entrepreneurship is if you're going to be a team of one, then you need to maximize you, you need to be the best employee you can be, and that means buying back your time.

[00:39:09] That means being like. Unapologetic about your boundaries so that you spend more time working on your business, not just working in your business. And that may mean you need to hire contractors and hire help so that you have more time. I would try to remind people oftentimes, like you are the biggest rainmaker for your business.

[00:39:26] Luvvie, you probably are the person driving the most business for your business. And so you have to protect your rainmaker. You

[00:39:33] have to

[00:39:33] protect.

[00:39:33] **Luvvie:** uh, guaranteed.

[00:39:35] **Morgan:** Yeah, it's not your agents. It's not all these other people like it's you you're driving the business. So why are we spending time as the main person the main rainmaker

[00:39:48] doing all this other stuff like folding laundry Like think about how much time we spend doing things we shouldn't be doing as entrepreneurs and you're actually the biggest money maker for your company and for your business. And so that would be my biggest piece of advice for folks who are like just getting started or considering on entrepreneurship is consider how you can buy back your time so you can spend more time working on your business and be a rainmaker for your company.

[00:40:15] **Luvvie:** So great point, I don't believe in solopreneurs, no shade to anybody who's a solopreneur. Here's why I'm always like, yikes, and I officially run If somebody is a solopreneur and they say, I am a team of one, I will run. I will not hire them anymore. I have worked with solopreneurs. It's not about how good you are at your work.

[00:40:37] It's not about how passionate you are at your work. If you are a team of one, everything lives or dies with you, which means you go on vacation, you get sick. You decide to have one day where you just don't feel like doing nothing. And everything falls apart. If there is not one more person in your business, even if it's a part time virtual assistant.

[00:41:05] That even matters if you are a person of one, it is so risky to the point where I, as the person who was engaging you and wanting to give you money, I'd be nervous just because I've also experienced what happens when solopreneurs literally life lifes, and they go, yeah, I couldn't pay the bills. Uh, excuse me,

[00:41:28] **Morgan:** Yeah.

[00:41:29] **Luvvie:** not an option.

[00:41:29] So like, if you were listening to, and I've been seeing a lot of things on Threads, Threads has been like hyping up solopreneurs recently. And I've been like, y'all are getting set up for

[00:41:38] Failure. Being a solopreneur, don't do it. Please. get somebody on Fiverr or get somebody on Upwork, even if it's 50 a week and you are using somebody for three hours, that matters.

[00:41:53] You cannot be solo in your company. It is a trap.

[00:41:57] **Morgan:** It is definitely a trap. I think, I think you're absolutely right. I mean, a virtual assistant, even to this day, I've got three virtual assistants. You know what I'm saying? Like, because people are good at different things. I got somebody who helps me with my travel. I got somebody who helps me with, social like automations and things like that.

[00:42:14] And it, it's okay to be a full time employee of one. But to have only you on your team is going to burn you out. It's going to make you feel resentful to your business. You're going to feel like you're not in control of your time and your life. And it's, it's something that I think people are scared to hire.

[00:42:32] And I understand hiring is scary. And it can feel like you're making a commitment to, you know, someone else's livelihood, but you can start small. Like Luvvie is saying, you can start with a hundred dollars a week. You can start with 200 a week. You can start with an hourly contract. It doesn't have to be a full time salaried person with benefits.

[00:42:50] **Luvvie:** right, right. And I think that's, we think zero to a hundred, like literally, if you were listening to this, if you don't take nothing else, I need you to go find a virtual assistant. On the internet, there's websites like Pineapple Staffing, Get Magic, there's Fiverr, there's Upwork. There's so many different ways, and I think people will talk themselves out of what they need for business or life in general because they automatically think it's too expensive.

[00:43:13] So, even the laundry. We send out our laundry. I've been sending out my laundry for four years. I can't be sitting here spending a whole day doing laundry!

[00:43:23] **Morgan:** I I'm not folding nothing.

[00:43:24] **Luvvie:** Because even if I don't have work, even if I don't have work to do, there's other ways I can spend my time that will bring me actual joy. So like people might be like, Oh my God, that's bougie.

[00:43:34] Sometimes I'll send out my laundry and it'll be three weeks of laundry and I will spend 75 bucks,

[00:43:40] which how much is my time worth?

[00:43:43] **Morgan:** Way more than that per

[00:43:44] **Luvvie:** hour.

[00:43:44] Like, how much is my actual time worth? Way more than, when I get on a speaking stage, my time is worth

[00:43:49] **Morgan:** \$1,000

[00:43:50] a minute,

[00:43:51] **Luvvie:** So Fat period. Like that's it. It literally, I'm trying to tell you.

[00:43:56] So people need to understand that, like, find the ways in which you can make your life a little bit easier. And then I found a question for you. If there's one thing, yeah. If there's one thing you want people to take away from this, from. You from, if they don't have nothing else to hold on to, what is the one thing you want them to remember that will set them up for success in business or life?

[00:44:20] **Morgan:** The one thing that I think people should remember is it's okay to be bad at something and to aim big and try to be your most ambitious self. you know, my podcast is called The Journey because I believe life is a journey and we're all navigating through life for the first time. And I think that part of that is giving yourself the permission to be a 10 at every level of your life.

[00:44:46] You know, be someone who is going to have the family that you want, work on the work that you think is important in the world, have a hobby that you feel passionate about. It's okay to be ambitious and you don't have to throttle yourself. But part of that is then being okay when things don't work out.

[00:45:04] And making sure that you are secure in that, especially if you're going to go into the world of entrepreneurship, you've got to be proactive in setting up these different parts of your life. So that ultimately that's going to help you drive more success for yourself in the future.

[00:45:18] **Luvvie:** Yes. And y'all, I'm also going to be on Morgan's podcast, The Journey. If you care about business, about life, about leadership, her

podcast, amazing. So check it out. So we're doing a little switch. So I'm looking forward to being on your pod.

[00:45:35] **Morgan:** Yes. And seeing what you got for me.

[00:45:37] We're talking to all things books. the show. I'm so excited for you to be there because you guys know I've been writing my book. I was working on my cover and I didn't like it. So I called Luvvie and was like, Luvvie can I book time with you and pay you for your time?

[00:45:50] Because I, I need you to me the things. Also, I have new covers for you, by the way. We've totally changed

[00:45:56] **Luvvie:** everything again.

[00:45:57] Ooh, I can't wait to see it.

[00:45:58] **Morgan:** I know.

[00:45:58] **Luvvie:** Ooh, I can't wait to see it. I saw her, I saw her cover and I was like, Morgan, send me your cover. Where's your cover.

[00:46:03] **Morgan:** It was not good. so, so yes, I'm really excited for our conversation. And I think, you know, for a lot of people who listen to both of our shows, part of the reason why I think people follow you is because of your authenticity. You know, it's not often that someone starts a whole new season of a podcast show talking about all the things that they had to struggle with over these last few years at your level of success, four times New York Times bestselling author.

[00:46:27] Like that's insane. And I think part of going through this life and the privilege that we have is that we can be vulnerable about all the things we're messing up on and still be successful. That is actually the dream, in my opinion.

[00:46:41] **Luvvie:** The dream because we don't got a lot like, and I think when we are afraid to talk about the ways that we're dropping the balls, cause we don't think we've already won.

[00:46:49] **Morgan:** That's right.

[00:46:49] **Luvvie:** So I'm like, I'm like, I can tell y'all the ways in which I'm raggedy because I'm still excellent.

[00:46:55] **Morgan:** I'm still going to defy the odds every single time, but sometimes I will lose.

[00:46:58] **Luvvie:** Every time, sometimes I will lose, but I'm going to win the, the, the averages, okay. The averages, because we're going to constantly be trying the averages will work out in my favor. So yeah, I'm excited for that. Morgan, thank you so much for joining me. I am excited to be on The Journey. Y'all go check out The Journey and then we'll talk more.

[00:47:20] And I'll tell y'all about the episode that I'm on with Morgan.

[00:47:22] **Morgan:** A hundred percent. This is so great. It was so great talking to you about all of the things, particularly entrepreneurship and making sure that people understand you don't have to be perfect to be successful.