TROUBLEMAKER

[00:00:00] **Luvvie:** I'm so glad we're able to have this conversation. Making sure you properly is Longe right. Or do you say.

[00:00:11] **Fisayo Longe:** Fisayo Longe.

[00:00:13] **Luvvie:** Lange. Yeah. Okay. My fellow Yoruba, I just want to make sure. Yes. Ifeoluwa is my first

[00:00:22] Fisayo Longe: Oh wow. Say that again.

[00:00:25] Luvvie: Ifeoluwa is my

[00:00:27] Fisayo Longe: Yoruba. Oyo Yoruba.

[00:00:29] Luvvie: Uh huh.

[00:00:31] **Fisayo Longe:** Yeah, my mom's Yoruba. My dad is Edo.

[00:00:34] Luvvie: Oh,

[00:00:36] Fisayo Longe: Yeah.

[00:00:38] Luvvie: That's why I wanted to make sure the Lange was right.

[00:00:41] **Fisayo Longe:** Yeah. So the, the Longa is not, the Longa is a long story. That was not my original surname, but it is my surname now.

[00:00:49] **Luvvie:** Fun fact, my original surname was also supposed to be different. So I know exactly how we roll. Yeah. It was

[00:00:55] **Fisayo Longe:** Oh wow.

[00:00:56] **Luvvie:** So my original, so Ajayi is what my, my surname is now, but. Turns out my dad really changed. He took it on as a last name sometime in his 20s. I don't know. I don't know why Nigerians just switch names like this.

[00:01:10] **Fisayo Longe:** Yeah. My, so my great grandpa went to live somewhere in like one of the Yoruba states, somewhere Yoruba land, and they couldn't pronounce his name. It was Ojehomo. So they started calling him Lungenye, as in that tall person. He was really tall. Lungenye. And then that's how our name became Longe.

[00:01:28] **Luvvie:** I love it. See, I just love the etymology of all our stuff. We just, the thing about us, we're going to have multiple names, multiple names. So I'm gonna get started with the intro and then you you'll be, it'll give you the context to, of, um, What we're up to, because this whole season I have really focused on telling the truth about the glory and the grit of entrepreneurship.

[00:01:52] So I was like, you're the right one to come on. So we'll just have a good conversation. Like we're going to tell some stories. My audience wants to just know really, um, I want to pull the curtain because I feel like people just glorify entrepreneurship too much. They don't tell the truth. And it's, and it's setting people up for failure.

[00:02:10] So,

[00:02:11] Fisayo Longe: Yeah.

[00:02:13] **Luvvie:** Hey y'all, it's Lovey back with another episode of professional troublemaker, where I dive into the highs, the lows, and plot twists of entrepreneurship. And we've been focusing on my worst year of business, which was 2023. And. I talked about how I almost lost my business in 2023 and y'all have all sent such amazing feedback about how hearing my journey has made you feel less alone and less raggedy, which is truly what I've wanted.

[00:02:41] And the guests I'm speaking with this season are also entrepreneurs who are going to tell the truth about their glory and their grit. And one person I did not want to miss out on an interview with is this Nigerian British queen, Fisayo Lange, who is the founder of Kai Collective. A London based brand of attainable clothing with luxury aesthetics.

[00:03:03] She's been featured in Vogue, Elle, Forbes, and her brand is driven by sisterhood, feminism, femininity, and female power. And why I wanted to talk to her is that she's been openly talking about the struggles of entrepreneurship and how she's almost lost all her money pursuing this passion purpose project that is bigger than her. [00:03:25] And I think it's really good to see that it can happen to anyone at any time. And I also think it's important to showcase stories from other successful, influential women who are building purpose driven brands. And so you can see that, you know, the lows of it all doesn't discriminate. So you say, I really loved your transparency and talking about your mistakes has been so refreshing and I love your newsletter, many mentors.

[00:03:49] I am a subscriber, so let's jump into it. Welcome to the podcast.

[00:03:56] **Fisayo Longe:** Thank you. Thank you for having me. I am so excited to be here. Lovie.

[00:04:00] **Luvvie:** Listen, I am a huge fan of your brand. I I'm a Kai girl. Okay. I'm a certified Kai girl. I am a Kai girl. Y'all need to look up Kaicollective after this. We'll put all the links in the show notes. So. Fisayo, you are the queen of aesthetics and vibes and Kai Collective is such a girl's girl brand, which is for me, such a high compliment because you're like, how can we feel seen and that commitment.

[00:04:32] In your designs to make us feel seen in our clothes and how we're showing up is so dope. So I want to find out about your origin story.

[00:04:40] Fisayo Longe: Yeah.

[00:04:41] **Luvvie:** you get started with Kai collective? Like what was your, why?

[00:04:45] **Fisayo Longe:** Yeah. So I grew up in Nigeria, um, had an amazing Kaildhood, moved to England when I was about 15 years old, went to school, all of that. But then I ended up not making the grades I was meant to make to do the course I was meant to do at university. I missed it by one grade. And so I decided to take a gap year.

[00:05:06] In that gap here, I started a fashion blog that was like the heyday of Tumblr. Fashion blogs were just becoming a thing. And I just wanted somewhere where I could document my outfits and my travels. I've always loved fashion and traveling. And so I started that blog. When I go traveling, I love shopping for fabric.

[00:05:25] So I would buy fabric, make stuff. to the fabric, post them on my blog, on Instagram. And people would always ask me where I got them from. And that made me realize that I could actually sell these clothes. I've always

been an entrepreneurial person. So I was the girl who sold everything on eBay, like in school.

[00:05:43] If my friends had something to sell, I would help them sell it on eBay. I would take a cut. Like I've always been entrepreneurial. That was why I started Kai. Um, I didn't one thing I didn't realize how important it would be to, for your business to fill a gap or solve a problem. So I started it just very casually because people were asking me where I got my clothes from.

[00:06:06] But soon after starting, I realized that, okay, back to the drawing board, this business is not special enough. We have to fill a gap in the market. We have to think more about problem solving. So I kind of worked backwards from that. And I was like, okay, what is missing? It was a time where everything was very minimalist.

[00:06:24] You know, everyone's home was gray. Like it was just very minimalist. So I was like, okay. We're going to do prints. We're going to do bright colors inspired by my upbringing in Lagos, Nigeria, loved my Kaild was vibrant. It was full of beauty, great memories. It was loud. It was vivacious. And I decided to bring that into the brand

[00:06:44] Luvvie: And what year was that?

[00:06:47] **Fisayo Longe:** that I started in 2016. I. Finally came to this realization in about, I mean, it was brewing from 2017, but like 2018 was the, when I was like, okay, I need to make a change and really have a brand that stands for something. It's always been women centered. So women are my life. I am a heterosexual woman, but women are like all my life.

[00:07:10] I've just gravitated more towards women. I identify so much with our experience, our struggles. My mom said when I was five years old, I asked her, mom, why do men not like women? Like, I've just always had this. I don't remember it. I've just always had this, maybe it was growing up in Nigeria and seeing all the misogyny.

[00:07:30] I've just always had this huge passion for women. So anything I do is always centered around.

[00:07:36] **Luvvie:** I love that when you went back to a drawing board and said, what is the problem that my business solves? And what were your old collections like before you asked yourself that question?

[00:07:49] **Fisayo Longe:** Yeah. They were like, my first collection was okay. I did have one print in it, but that print is not a print that I would carry now. It was just, it was. My first collection was stuff that I wanted in my closet, but it wasn't necessarily stuff that anyone else wanted. And it lacked print. It lacked high, like it lacked fire.

[00:08:13] Yeah.

[00:08:14] **Luvvie:** Yeah, so you're in commerce, fashion to be specific, and that can be a really volatile industry because with the trends, with the seasons, things like supply chain, a lot of things can go wrong. Do you remember your first major mistake with Kai collective?

[00:08:34] **Fisayo Longe:** My first mistake wasn't even mine. And that was what was so frustrating about it. So I had spent like the entire summer in Turkey, just sitting in the, like sitting in the factory. Just watKaing them make the stuff to make sure that there were no mistakes. And there was one final piece that they hadn't yet made, but the sample was perfect.

[00:08:55] So I was like, I had to go back to London because I was just paying for a hotel for so many weeks. And then I was like, okay, the sample is perfect. So just, you know, replicate it, like make the same thing, you know, and then the stock arrived in London and the entire style was wrong. Like it was just different from the sample.

[00:09:15] And I could not afford for that mistake to happen because I had no money. I put everything into Kai. I really had no money and, but I also could not sell it. So that was my first major disappointment. Yeah. And then when I launched it, also, I thought at the time I had like 40, 000 followers, I thought because I had followers, like I thought it was going to be rich immediately.

[00:09:40] I was looking at the like big house. I was going to buy the day after launch. I really thought that it was just going to be like an immediate success. That didn't happen. So I already had the disappointment from that. And then I had a whole style that I couldn't sell. So like my, from the day I launched the brand was already so difficult.

[00:10:01] Like it's just been so much struggle.

[00:10:05] **Luvvie:** So wait, what did you do with the, with all the product that you couldn't sell?

[00:10:09] **Fisayo Longe:** Yeah. I couldn't sell it at all. Had to give it to charity. Couldn't sell it. Yeah. No one would buy it. It wasn't, it was an odd shape. It looked like a sack. I just, there was nothing we could do.

[00:10:21] Luvvie: Oh my God. And how much did you lose in that process?

[00:10:25] **Fisayo Longe:** That was probably about 4, 000, which doesn't sound like a lot, like maybe, but to me at that time,

[00:10:33] Luvvie: yes.

[00:10:34] Fisayo Longe: it was, it was my life.

[00:10:38] **Luvvie:** So then what happened next? Well, how were you able to pivot after losing 4, 000, which is all you had?

[00:10:46] **Fisayo Longe:** Yeah. Um, we, I mean, the rest of the collection still launched and we just kept going, didn't have a lot of money. Like everything I had, everything I was earning from like being an influencer, I was putting straights into Kai. Everything was a struggle. Like every bill was a struggle to pay, but I just kept on putting everything into it.

[00:11:06] Um, I had helped once in a while from my mom as well. Like mom, peace. Can you loan me 2000 pounds? Sure. I'm gonna be like, she was very supportive. Um, from the beginning and that really, really helped me because sometimes a check will come like something I need to pay and I didn't have any idea, like a customs bill or something that I did not anticipate.

[00:11:25] And I'm like, okay, I'm actually on zero. So honestly, between 2016 and 2019 were a huge struggle. In 2019, we launched one dress that, okay, things started to pick up a little bit, but still not enough to fund like my, even just like my life, like my basic necessities and the business. Um, but it was much better.

[00:11:47] And then in 2020, we dropped our guy address and like, nothing was the same. Yeah. So 2020 was when things started to make sense

[00:11:57] **Luvvie:** 2020 was the year of the global pandemic. And what was interesting is as the world shut down, as everybody was panicking for a lot of people, it was great for business and it's really

[00:12:09] Fisayo Longe: didn't realize

[00:12:10] Luvvie: Yeah. Yeah.

[00:12:12] **Fisayo Longe:** it would be great. So I hugely panic. I'm like finding in my business has started to grow. And then this happens, like, how could this happen to me? So as soon as like we started seeing like, okay, hearing about lockdown, I moved all our stock into a room, into my second room.

[00:12:29] Um, and so I knew that I would send orders from home during lockdown. Um, which is what I did. I did it. I felt, I don't know if you remember how weird we all felt at that time. Like, Oh, The world, like you can't be selling things. People are dying. Every day was like, the whole is this, this, everything was so fear driven.

[00:12:50] So I was like, I can't launch something at this time. But then every day people will be asking for it. People will be asking for it. People will be asking for it. So I'm like, you know what? I can't wait. Cause now we don't know when this is ending. At first people said three weeks and three months. So I was like, I'm just going to drop it.

[00:13:05] And it did so well. In fact, like that was such a boom for e commerce and so many businesses. Have seen like a significant dip in revenue since then we didn't realize that it was kind of an artificial blue. Yeah,

[00:13:23] **Luvvie:** lot of businesses went up. Everybody was like, Oh, snap, it's not. So now it's correcting itself. So I have, I

[00:13:32] Fisayo Longe: So,

[00:13:33] **Luvvie:** have the guy attorney. I want you to actually describe Gaia for the people who are listening to this. You, cause you, you created what became a trademark of yours. And I think every business.

[00:13:47] Starts to really find it's like footing when it can create a trademark and you got one. How did Gaia come to be?

[00:13:56] **Fisayo Longe:** yeah, so I created it with this Nigerian lady. She's a print designer. Her name is Adebo Sola. And, um, I just, we just together, I sat down and I was like, okay, this is what I want. I don't want something really colorful, chaotic. I did a mood board, just gave her all of these different prompts. And I, I just really wanted something that reflected my heritage.

[00:14:17] I wanted chaos. I wanted something that was not the time. Yes. I want to chaos trouble.

[00:14:25] Luvvie: Wildlife

[00:14:26] **Fisayo Longe:** Um, yeah, and that was how it came about and the first time I saw it, I thought this is interesting, but I didn't immediately know that. Okay. This is going to be something, but I, I knew that I wanted to sample like, because it was like a tattoo, like it looks like a tattoo.

[00:14:46] So I wanted to like sample something that was like very fitted on the body that would look like you were, you were tattooed all over. So I sampled that style. And from the first time I posted it, okay. Like the response, I knew that, okay, this is something, and this is going to change my brand. I didn't know it was going to change it as much as it did.

[00:15:07] Okay. Without Gaia, I'm not sure that Kai would be what it is today. Like we've had hits after Gaia, but we needed that. We really needed that. And I'm so grateful for that. And that was part. Yeah.

[00:15:23] **Luvvie:** is so nice. It just makes you feel all instantly feminine. Like I have the red one that has like the gray and blue weaving through, and it just instantly makes you feel like, Oh, I got to go outside and show out. I have to go outside and

[00:15:39] **Fisayo Longe:** I love that.

[00:15:40] Luvvie: what year did Gaia come out? That was 2020. You said,

[00:15:44] **Fisayo Longe: 20**. Yes.

[00:15:45] Luvvie: so then what happens next?

[00:15:46] Cause I watched a video of yours where, so you've been doing these videos on Instagram where you're really drilling into your journey and telling different stories because you've also talked about how you didn't have any mentors. So. You were basically learning by trial by fire. And I think a lot of people, it's also humanized Kai to really show that the human behind the designs is a real, real person who has all these lessons.

[00:16:13] So one of the ones that I love that you shared was about the shipment that got lost and where you lost 4, 000 before this time you lost six figures. So let's talk about that.

[00:16:31] **Fisayo Longe:** Yeah. Just on the point of having new mentors. Um, I just, I just have to mention that there's a lady called Fiye Laniyo. She's the founder. I don't know if you know Virgo's Lounge. So although I didn't have a mentor, mentor, she's helped me so much in my journey. Cause she had a brand long before me. Um, and so, yeah, I didn't want to not mention that help that I got.

[00:16:53] **Luvvie:** So that actually is a mentor, even though they weren't formalized as mentor. You actually did have that. Yeah.

[00:16:59] **Fisayo Longe:** yes. You know, ask questions, you know, pricing or dates, like, you know, just you, the thing about entrepreneurship, I don't know about anyone else. I could not have done this alone. I could not like friends, family. I'm always asking questions. I'm always asking questions. So I can't even take all the glory for anything that I've aKaieved.

[00:17:23] Um, but yes, onto the last statement.

[00:17:26] Luvvie: Ooh.

[00:17:27] **Fisayo Longe:** So this was, I think, December, 2022, the thing is. Because the shipment was late, we actually were going to go ahead with the launch. And I think it was going to arrive on the day of the launch. Cause that happens sometimes the shipment is late. So you just launch and then it arrives the day after or two days after you ship it all good. So that day we were meant to launch. I think, no, the launch was the next day. And I think it was, we were meant to receive 11 boxes. We received one box and 10 empty envelopes. Like it did not make any sense. So I thought, Oh, this is obviously a mistake. So I go to the UPS warehouse. I'm like, please give me my packages.

[00:18:09] Like, I don't have time just like give me my packages. And they're like, no, this is really weird. Why would there be empty envelopes? This looks like fraud. I'm like, well, it can't be fraud because this is a manufacturer that I've worked. I still work with her to this day. Um, I trust her. There's, there's no reason why she would defraud us. Long story short, it turns out she shipped with someone she hadn't shipped with before. They were very unreliable. They didn't, they were trying to cut corners and they did not label the boxes properly.

And so they just didn't come. 120, 000 pounds. I, at the time it happened, I was so burned out. So after 2020, after that boom, I really burned out.

[00:18:55] I was, I've been burned out from 2021 till end of 2023. That whole time I've been burned out.

[00:19:05] Luvvie: Actually let's

[00:19:05] Fisayo Longe: was so,

[00:19:06] **Luvvie:** Let's stay there actually. You were burned out because of this boom, which I understand. And you were burned out for two years. So this is a point that we don't talk about the burnout that comes with entrepreneurship, that be wiping you out.

[00:19:19] **Fisayo Longe:** Three years, 2021, 2020, 2023. Yeah. Burnout is deep. Burnout affected every part of my life. Um, yeah, every part, even parts that I can't discuss. Yeah, like every mental, physical relationship, intimacy, everything. Like, yeah, I burned out bad.

[00:19:42] Luvvie: Wow. Okay. So continue the story. Well, yeah. Oh, for 120,

[00:19:48] **Fisayo Longe:** so yeah, it didn't adapt. I was already so burned out and I was on the, I was trying to heal. So I was like, okay, I've lost the ship. Christmas is about to be here. I need to, you know, we're going to shut down for Christmas. I don't want this to dictate my entire holiday period being, you know, miserable.

[00:20:06] So I'm like, you know what, I'm going to let it go. But then I realized that a part of me was convinced that we would find it like by January, when we come back February, it will be here. Like, so I didn't really. I was very disappointed because we needed the money, but I was like, it's Christmas. Like I'm going, I'm going off.

[00:20:24] Um, when I come back, I'll figure it out. And then came back. Okay. No, even yes, I was in Houston in February. And by this time, you know, we're all back from the holidays. So I'm talking to the shippers being like, we need to find this thing. Where is it? What has happened every day? The story was changing. And then one day they were just like, we're closing the case. When you can't find it, I think it was 1, 200 compensation. Something like that.

[00:20:53] Luvvie: 000 shipment pound shipment.

[00:20:56] **Fisayo Longe:** 1, 000 compensation, something like that. Less than 3, 000 compensation. Yeah. So that day I, that was the day I realized that I had been holding on to this hope and I just broke down crying. Like I would just, I was just crying is not a rarity for me. I'm a crier. That's how I let out my emotions. Um, yeah, but that day was just like, it was just exhaustion, sadness, every negative emotion.

[00:21:31] I'm just like, I just have given so much of my life for this business. And this is just too much for me. But that day after I cried, I released it.

[00:21:40] Luvvie: Really?

[00:21:41] **Fisayo Longe:** after that I released it. I was like, okay, it's gone. Where do we go from here? And I think one thing that I've really, really, I'm grateful for my journey is every time that I've been like, okay.

[00:21:52] There's no money for the next collection, you know, that we're small business. So every 120, 000 pounds goes into the next collection.

[00:21:59] Luvvie: Yeah.

[00:22:01] **Fisayo Longe:** Somehow the money has come from somewhere, like whether it's, you know, this brand will, will, um, will place a custom order of our scars for their PR mailers. There's just always something unexpected at every time when I think.

[00:22:18] Where do I go from here? I'm throwing a lifeline

[00:22:21] Luvvie: Yeah.

[00:22:23] **Fisayo Longe:** happened. So I truly released it. I released that shipment. And then a year later, I turned up.

[00:22:31] **Luvvie:** That's the part that got me. So when you really, first of all, also, it's really impressive that you were able to, like, you cried out and surrendered this thing and said, you know what, it's done because that in itself shows levels of faith and also just purpose and anchoring. That is, is deep. Yeah. A year later, the thing randomly shows up.

[00:22:57] **Fisayo Longe:** Yeah, except one box. It just showed up. No, no, it was just delivered unceremoniously. We didn't even see the delivery man. It just got delivered to the warehouse. Um, my warehouse team opened the park. I saw

these and they send them to, they send the picture to me. Like, look what just arrived. And at that point, I think I read the message and I just like, even not that I forgot, but you know, when you've really released something, I couldn't even get excited because that's something that I find when you truly release something, like I couldn't, I wasn't going to now start shouting now that the thing had come back because I had truly let it go.

[00:23:32] But I'm glad it came back. We sold it. It did well, but yeah, I had let it go.

[00:23:38] **Luvvie:** I ordered from that collection. It was the silk, the yellows and the purples. I got a yellow

[00:23:45] **Fisayo Longe:** yeah. Yeah. I wear it all the time. It's such great quality. The fabric I'm like, I'm really glad that this showed up, but it cost us so much to make. So once it was gone, there was no way that we were going to like order it again. It wasn't, it wasn't financially possible. So I'm really glad that it turned up.

[00:24:02] Yeah.

[00:24:09] **Luvvie:** because you dropped the video and then was like, it's going to be available in three days. Everybody was like, wait. Sign me up, sign me up immediately. And that's one of the things about Kai that's actually really, um, that I've been watKaing and studying is how you've used community to really build the commerce of your company.

[00:24:32] But I'll get back to that. I want to go back to this burnout piece. You were burned out for three years. Felt. Okay. I, I feel like I am in burnout recovery myself and same. I think I was burnt out for probably the same amount of time and the same effects that you're alluding to. Absolutely felt. When did you hit the wall and then what have you been doing to recover and heal?

[00:25:00] **Fisayo Longe:** mm So I think the thing with burnout is that I don't even remember a time when I like hit the wall because I'm such a go person. Like, I, I'm always gonna go. And I, I, to be honest, I always still went even through recovery because I've never really had the chance not to. I change certain things. But I've never been able to be like, I mean, there was a time when I closed the business, I think for nine weeks.

[00:25:25] Well, to the public, like we were not shipping goods. Cause too many things were going wrong. And I was just like, you know what I can't, I can't deal

with the external thing going wrong to like pissing off customers. I can't do it. I can't do it. The customers are all we have. Let's just sort ourselves out first and shut the down the website.

[00:25:47] But, um, yeah, I was never really able to stop. Um, just gradually, I just started, like, I just wasn't on myself anymore. I never had any energy. And then I would think that, Oh, I'm feeling better. You know, I'd go on a holiday and I'm like, Oh, I'm feeling better. And then I would get to the office or get around people and be so sad and so tired.

[00:26:07] Like this tiredness, this exhaustion that no nap could solve. the thing I say about is like. Everyone is like, Oh, you need a break. Go on holiday. Forget about holiday. Holidays are nice. Go on holiday short, but that is not going to kill your burnouts. Even one bit like to heal burnout. I had to change things, change processes, automate things, hire people.

[00:26:34] So after that was okay, I need to hire designer. All the things that were stressing me out the most. I had to figure them out. Then I had to figure out in therapy. Separating my identity from the identity of the business. Cause that was bringing me up

[00:26:49] Luvvie: Yes.

[00:26:50] **Fisayo Longe:** the fact that I had wrapped my identity so strongly in this business and it's good.

[00:26:57] It's always difficult as an entrepreneur to separate completely, but I have made progress now. Like, you know, if, if something goes wrong. Whereas before I might be in bed for a whole day. Like I might just be a zombie. Now, maybe it'll be one hour. I'll just be a little bit down. But at the end of the day, I realized that it's not me.

[00:27:18] Like when my therapist told me, take a piece of paper. I write who you are. Don't mention business. Don't mention friends. Don't mention boyfriend. Don't mention anything. And everything I wanted to write was about business, was about goals, was about aKaievements. And she's like, no, who are you? And those were the things that healed me gradually. Very, very slowly.

[00:27:45] **Luvvie:** Hmm. Who are you without your titles in your relationships? Like who are you in the silence? Who are you when nobody's watKaing and nobody's there? Who are you when you have nothing to offer anybody? That is something that's really hard for a lot of people to answer.

[00:28:05] **Fisayo Longe:** It's still, it was so hard for me and even now it is because, okay, I'm like, okay, forget business. Oh, I'm Fisayo. Oh, I have great friends. I love them. none of that. Who are you?

[00:28:17] **Luvvie:** Who are you? Ooh. And actually, who are you? Tell us what your name means.

[00:28:25] **Fisayo Longe:** So Oluwa Fisayo means God has added joy to my heart.

[00:28:32] **Luvvie:** Yes, yes, yes. So like for whenever we talk about like knowing ourselves, I always go, what can we learn from our names? Like, what can we, so like my first name is Ifeoluwa, which means God's love. Right. So I'm always like, okay, in the moments when I am forgetting, you know, based on my titles, the speaker, the author, I'm like, wait, nope, nope.

[00:28:56] Bring it down to the. To the real center of it, your God's love. Okay. And that burnout piece is something that has been coming up a lot for people. And I think it's become buzzword worthy. So it's kind of lost, like what it actually means, which is it knocks us on our ass sometimes. You know,

[00:29:15] Fisayo Longe: hope.

[00:29:16] **Luvvie:** it's, it's hard because you will be, a lot of people are anxious now.

[00:29:20] They're depressed. Meanwhile, it's really burnout that you're dealing with and being able to find things. I'm so glad you mentioned therapy because we're actually going to have, um, Dr. Joy of therapies for black girls on next because I'm like, Especially as black women who are trying to run businesses in this world, there's a lot of things that we have to contend.

[00:29:42] And there's a lot of things that we have to work through that if we don't, it makes our life harder. So I love hearing how you had to separate yourself from the identity of the business. And then similarly, I see how closely aligned you are because how you tell them your story is a form of marketing for you.

[00:30:00] Fisayo Longe: Um,

[00:30:02] Luvvie: marketing?

[00:30:06] **Fisayo Longe:** it changes, it changes. I think our thing right now is we don't have a huge marketing budget because we're a small business. And even though, even in the moments where we do well, we're never going to give Mark Zuckerberg like a hundred thousand every month. It's just never going to happen. So our best marketing tool is storytelling and it's about connecting just real human experiences and connection, right?

[00:30:33] And people love the journey. People love to see that you're a person just like them. And so we just, everything is storytelling. And. I have, even though like I, I'm in a lot of the marketing in terms of like a lot of the imagery and stuff, I have slowly started to take a backseat on that, but when it comes to like launches and things like that, I always make sure that people are hearing from me.

[00:31:00] Because they want to, they want to know why we made what we made. Actually, before you called me, I was just filming a talk through of our next drop and content, um, is just the greatest tool that we have right now. And that is what everyone has. I neglected to talk. I still, I'm finding it difficult to do that.

[00:31:22] Honestly, that's just how I feel about it. Like, what is this? But recently I did a video on there that did really well. And I saw how it brought so many new customers to our site. We have an amazing returning customer rates. Like most of our customers will come back a second time. But it's like how your business is not sustainable if you don't reach new people.

[00:31:44] So it's like, how can we reach new people? And so for us, that's sharing our brand story and storytelling on all the social media platforms, unfortunately, including TikTok.

[00:31:55] **Luvvie:** Yeah. TikTok is also confusing to me half the time. I just threw up a video there and I'm like, the marketer in me feels guilty about it cause I'm like, you're supposed to use it. People are like, Oh my God, it's another platform. Cause I remember the Tumblr days. I used to be on Tumblr. I had like four Tumblr blogs.

[00:32:12] **Fisayo Longe:** I still go on from time to time because some people still update and it just takes, I go back through my tumblr arKaive and it just reminds me of, you know, even just seeing vintage pieces. This, I find it very inspirational tumblr.

[00:32:25] Luvvie: Hmm. So team building. Oh man. How has that been for you?

[00:32:36] **Fisayo Longe:** a people person. I'm an introvert and I am not the nicest person. I'm kind, but I'm not nice. So, so I don't, I've been learning because honestly, you won't get far in life if you don't know how to deliver things to people. And I didn't know how to deliver things to people.

[00:33:00] So whereas I can appreciate bluntness, um, many people don't. So you have to, I've, I've had to learn. How to deliver things to different people to get the best out of them. So whereas some people I'll be like, I don't like this. You haven't, like, you haven't applied yourself. Please do it again. Some people will be, you'll be like, so what do you think?

[00:33:23] Let's take this different approach. Like you've done a great job, but it's just not hitting the spots yet. You know, you have to like dress it up a little bit. And I didn't realize. That's really how you get the best out of people. My goal is to have an MD and not have to do that because that makes me really tired because I'm an introvert.

[00:33:42] I find it extremely, extremely exhausting. And I think that my team will thrive more with someone with better people skills, if I'm being honest. But I've been lucky, definitely had some horrible hires. For sure. I had to have difficult conversations to let people go. I've had some nightmares, but I've also been very lucky.

[00:34:01] Like one of my team members, Yasmin, who's kind of like my right hand man. She's about to be four years with me. And. I can say categorically without her, Kai would not be where it is today. No doubt about it would not be where it is today. And once in a while you find that kind of person to build your business with.

[00:34:21] And I think it's just a luck because. I didn't, she wasn't even, I was like, you know, I had my hiring processes in order and I didn't even have it together. And then I was just very lucky. Um, and so, yeah, so she's been very, very helpful in this journey.

[00:34:38] **Luvvie:** Let me tell you something right now. I love your honesty because the whole not being a people person thing, I'm also an introvert with an extrovert's job. Like people always surprise me whenever I say I'm an introvert. I'm like, no, no, no. My job is just very extroverted. I,

[00:34:51] **Fisayo Longe:** It's easy to sit behind the camera that like, that is so that's fine. It's not the

[00:34:57] Luvvie: like

[00:34:58] Fisayo Longe: same.

[00:34:59] **Luvvie:** All the time you have to manage people. So how many people on the Kaiteam,

[00:35:05] **Fisayo Longe:** Right now we have six full time. So it's still quite small.

[00:35:12] **Luvvie:** still quite small, but mighty team. And what have you found besides giving feedback? What have you found hardest about team building?

[00:35:25] **Fisayo Longe:** Just the fact that not everyone is like this super ambitious do or die, do my best kind of person. I found that very difficult because I don't know, my mom was the same as me. My friends are really, really ambitious. I've just always. Surrounded myself with like ambition for better or for worse. Like you do need people who don't want to die on the line for work.

[00:35:53] Like they are necessary. It's just a shame when it's in your own business, but you do need people who have a healthy work life balance, who don't want to work till 10 PM. You need it in this life. But yeah, that's my thing. Like people who don't understand the importance of hard work and excellence. I find it very irritating, very irritating people who don't people who are not thorough like, yeah, I tip I find it difficult not to take it personally because I'm like, I've worked so hard to get to this point.

[00:36:27] This customer is fuming and you're not doing everything you can to make them happy and make it up to them. Like, I take it very personally. I feel like. I'm being attacked. Like you're trying to ruin my business. Therefore you're trying to ruin my life. You hate me.

[00:36:45] Luvvie: That's the Nigerian in you. the Nigerian in you through and through.

[00:36:51] **Fisayo Longe:** So some people don't want to die on the line and that's fine. But I found that difficult to deal with sometimes. Um, and

[00:37:00] **Luvvie:** my toxic trait is I expect everybody to operate at the level I do. And I had to start lowering my expectations because I started realizing, and this is the flex for a lot of entrepreneurs. The reason why we run our own companies is because we are extraordinary. and I realized that a lot of us run really fast.

[00:37:24] Like we think fast, we execute fast. We have deep vision that actually is mostly good. And that's actually what uniquely positions us to build companies that solve problems. But then other people can't keep up and it's not their fault. It's just, we are running, we're like Sonic the Hedgehog. Everybody can't be Sonic.

[00:37:46] So Sonic has to sometimes go down.

[00:37:49] **Fisayo Longe:** and they don't get all the rewards you do from, you know, your business. So there's no reason for us to expect them to be excellent, but still, man, just be excellent. Please. Yeah.

[00:38:08] **Luvvie:** Minus one, only one person's left fired. My whole team wiped six people who are full time and kept one. Who's been amazing. Who's been with me for three years. And basically I'm in a rebuild.

[00:38:20] Process right now where I'm like, I'm still in the messy middle of it all. So this season has been in the middle of the messy middle, but I think processing it in real time is actually helpful. Um, what is one myth about entrepreneurship that you want to dispel?

[00:38:43] **Fisayo Longe:** One myth about entrepreneurship. I actually think I've heard this reason. I think people have figured out you know how you say Okay, I don't want to work for anyone. I just want my freedom if you run a small business It depends on how even if you run a big business In the early days, you don't really have freedom.

[00:39:08] So you might have been running away from your job for freedom, but you end up in a situation where you have even less freedom. Or actually, I think one that I really realized and I regretted actually was So I used to work on as, as an accountant, uh, one of the big four. And I remember when I was like, although I thought the company was a great company, I found my job very, very boring and I wasn't the best at my job.

[00:39:36] And I regret it every day because I demand excellence from people. And honestly, a lot of the time I was not excellent. And it has something I'm very embarrassed about. Cause I'm like, I worked with such great people that even things like advice, funding. Anything, if I was better, I would probably have been able to go out and meet those people, but just all the things I learned from my job that at that time, I was like, Oh, I don't want to do this Excel.

[00:40:03] I don't want to do this. All these things I thought were boring have needed all of them in this business. have needed an Excel spreadsheet. I have needed Excel formulas, all those things that I did every day that I hated doing. And I never applied myself to become a pro at. I've needed them. You can't run away from the boring stuff. You can't run away from unglamorous tasks. You can't run away from hard work, no matter what you do, no matter what industry you're at. Like go and be an entrepreneur. You cannot run away from the work that is not sexy. And so I think that a lot of people think entrepreneurs get to choose what you work on.

[00:40:50] And you know, maybe you will, if you're running a big business, you've raised a lot of money. Maybe you can have just hire people. But if let's say you're bootstrapped like most black women are most women are not even just black women get what is it 2 percent of funding if you're bootstrapped you will have to do all of that work and I regret not Picking up and soaking in everything I could at that job because I, I didn't escape the things that I didn't like doing.

[00:41:19] **Luvvie:** That's such a good point. I actually took an Excel, uh, class in high school. I've recently talked about that too. Like there's so many things about running a business that go beyond the ideas person. Now you have to like read P and L's and you have to read revenue reports and expense reports. Meanwhile, you're like, I just want to design stuff.

[00:41:36] I'm like, can I just write my books in peace? I'm like, I just want to write my books. Meanwhile, now I got to like, Look at finance reports, but all of that is critical. All of that is critical stuff. And I think we can't leave it behind. So one of the things that I would say I've learned a lot about entrepreneurship is the insistence of like how those of us who are pragmatic, but still creative end up finding our groove, right?

[00:42:00] Cause you can't just be creative to your point of like learning all the unsexy stuff, it ain't just about the ideas, because if it was just about how beautiful, how beautiful you can make the clothes. Yeah, Kai would get to a certain level, but would you be able to pay the bills?

[00:42:15] **Fisayo Longe:** I love hiring people who are ex corporate. That's my thing. Cause they understand excellence. They on this, like, you'll be shocked how many creatives don't know how to write an email. Like they don't know how to write hello, blah, blah, blah. Hope you're well, best wishes. It's like. They'll just run, run online.

[00:42:32] Just no false, no punctuation. And I find it shocking, but those were the things I took for granted when I worked in corporate, you know, I have a question for you. Um, I'm going to go back and listen to this season just quickly. I'm curious about why. 2023 was so difficult for you. And if you also face that boom during the pandemic, and then had to deal with like the decline, because we've experienced it.

[00:42:57] Yeah.

[00:43:05] **Luvvie:** house. I was wearing pajama pants and a blazer. I was like, so that speaker speaking really, um, went up, especially for those of us who are known as thought leaders. And then because I didn't have a lot of expenses, I didn't have to travel.

[00:43:17] I didn't have hotel. So I was keeping a lot of the money, um, and then 2023, so basically what happened after pandemic, I literally told my team, I said, I'm not building the team just because I'm speaking, because here's the thing is. Because of my Ted talk, which has 9 million views, it's the best lead magnet for my speaking.

[00:43:35] Right. So I don't, I get speaking inquiries. I've gotten 500 this year or like, so I was like, yeah, I was like, speaking is going to happen with or without me having a whole team around me. And I'm represented by a UTA. So they manage. That's speaking arm. So I built a team because I was like, let's activate the other pieces of my revenue.

[00:44:03] So brand partnerships, merge, collaboration, stuff like that. So I'm like, you guys helped me execute that while speaking is basically running. But ultimately my thing was that's risky. Right? So the reason why I also built that team was because any company that depends on one person's presence at all times.

[00:44:24] That's a risky business model. So I was like, y'all don't take speaking for granted now. Yes, it's paying your payroll, but help me make more money on this side. 2023 happened. They had their mandates. They did none, none of it

like executed zero other revenue streams. It was the speaking that did not need them.

[00:44:43] That was still paying the bills. So one by one, I was firing people for not being productive mistakes, lack of excellence, and incompetence became company culture, which is dangerous.

[00:44:56] Fisayo Longe: Yeah,

[00:44:59] **Luvvie:** mistakes are being made and you having to constantly chase after them, it becomes company culture.

[00:45:05] And I was like, that's so anti me. And a lot of people were like, yo, we did not know all of that was happening on the front. And I said, cause I didn't let it show. I

[00:45:16] **Fisayo Longe:** the tool that you, the fact that you have to check everything, and then I started to wonder like, cause I'm very introspective. Maybe it's something I've done,

[00:45:29] Luvvie: Yes.

[00:45:30] **Fisayo Longe:** what, why, why did you ever think that this was okay? It must be me. It must be me. And then you start to fix things. You start to do, okay, a better onboarding process, you know, one to one to ones, you know, feedback, all of these things.

[00:45:46] And some people just don't have it.

[00:45:48] **Luvvie:** That's exactly it. I literally was like, am I the drama? When all the mistakes were happening? I was like, okay, okay. It gotta be me because I'm the one at the top. I gotta take the blame. I gotta take the credit. It gotta be me. So I was like talking to my therapist, like, help me understand. I was talking to my friends who were also entrepreneurs.

[00:46:05] I'm like, check me if I'm wrong here. And. I even had, I had an executive coach. I had an HR consultant because I was like, surely it would be easy. If you tell me I'm the one that's the problem, because then I can fix it. But when I couldn't figure out what the problem was, when it wasn't me, it was especially maddening because I was like, now I don't know how to fix it. So there was a point last year where I ended up in bed for a week and that had never happened. I had a conference in Hawaii the night before the conference. I

literally was like, I'm, I can't, I'm just going to lay right here because it wiped me out. Like wipe me out.

[00:46:47] **Fisayo Longe:** It stops you from being able to walk into a room with your head held high. For me, that was my experience. I now had so much, I was carrying so much shame cause I'm like, ah, I don't know what impression these people have on me now because of this email, because of this mistake. And shame is such an unpleasant emotion and it would get to a point where I would go out and I'll be that asshole wearing sunglasses in the club because I just, I just felt so scared and like, because things were not going well, I'm like, I don't want anyone to see me.

[00:47:20] Like, what if someone has had a bad experience? All of this shame.

[00:47:25] **Luvvie:** I'm so glad you mentioned that I remember one day when my old EA sent an email to somebody and spelled their name wrong. And as somebody who was so sensitive to it, like being Nigerian in America and seeing how people have butchered my name for decades, I am hypersensitive to names. Like I always want to make sure I get people's names, right?

[00:47:46] I do not want to ever see a misspelling of somebody's name on my behalf. I was embarrassed. I was embarrassed and I had to be like, yo, now you're making me look like this goes against my values. And at that point is when I started, I started firing people quicker where I was like, don't give the grace for that.

[00:48:05] Cause they already know this is something that is like. A heart value of yours. So I absolutely understand that shame when people do things that don't represent you. And because our names are so prominent on the door, we have to take the blame, even for the moments when it's not our fault.

[00:48:23] Fisayo Longe: Yeah.

[00:48:25] **Luvvie:** I was like, that's, that's also why I'm getting back to joy because I think, um, a lot of what entrepreneurship will teach us is all our wounds and our triggers and our scars.

[00:48:36] **Fisayo Longe:** Yeah. That's one good thing about it. It's so, there are many things that can really make you, um, introspective and make you look at yourself no matter how much healing you've done, like certain relationships will point out things that you still, you know, there's only so much you can figure out

alone. But one of those things is entrepreneurships that will point out to you what you need to work more on your triggers.

[00:49:00] I'm grateful for how much has taught me about myself, how much has taught me about other people, how much has told me about how to speak to people, how to get the best out of people. Yeah. I, I, I. Sometimes I hate it because it's so hard, but honestly, I really, really love it. I really do. It's been, yeah, it's been life defining.

[00:49:22] **Luvvie:** Life defining. I love that. Where. And right now you just, you just launched this dress, this, and I was watKaing you. So one thing that Fisayo does, she'll post a picture on Instagram stories, not give us no context. And meanwhile, everybody's looking in the background, like, is that going to be in the next collection?

[00:49:43] Really

[00:49:48] **Fisayo Longe:** and everyone went crazy about like that dress. So I'll post it. I won't say anything, but you don't know about the ones that posted and nobody said anything. So I was like, it's, it's validation. It's a validation process. To see if an item is just me, maybe it's just me who likes it, or if it's going to catch on.

[00:50:10] **Luvvie:** a focus group in real time and the white one caught on, by the way, I don't know if anybody else said it. I said it in the comments, your first sample of the white dress, the one that was the pink top, but the black middle, I literally was like, um, can you just make that a top because that as a top by itself was also fire.

[00:50:29] I don't know if anybody else said it, but if you decide to do that, I will be a fan. Put the red up top. It's yeah, I'm a fan of the top. I'm just saying, I'm just gonna put it

[00:50:39] Fisayo Longe: Thank you.

[00:50:40] **Luvvie:** That's my vote. That's my vote. And the one you're wearing right now, are you, um, is that part of a new collection?

[00:50:47] Fisayo Longe: Yeah, on Friday.

[00:50:49] **Luvvie:** This one.

[00:50:50] Fisayo Longe: This Friday, yeah.

[00:50:51] **Luvvie:** love the jewel tone. Oh, I love the, by the time this episode comes out, what she's wearing, it probably will be sold out, but you should probably check it out. It's like jewel tone, green and green and blue is bomb. That's my, that's my vibe. That's my vibe. So what is your wish for Kaicollective? Like what's your wish for your company?

[00:51:13] Yeah, yeah,

[00:51:17] **Fisayo Longe:** my wish for Kai Collective is that On a personal level. First, I'll start with personal that it becomes less of a source of stress for me and more of a source of joy. It makes me joyful, but my joy is mostly seeing how it makes women feel when they wear it, which is amazing. To be honest, that's for me when, when, like, when I reflect back on my life, I do think that would be one of my greatest aKaievements.

[00:51:45] The, you know, the women who wore it on their birthdays. All these special days and have all these special memories attached to it. But personally, I would, my wish is that it gives me more peace of mind than stress because I'm not there that it becomes a source of peace of mind. That's my personal wish.

[00:52:05] My wish for my team is that no matter how long they stay. It is, they always remember it as a place that sometimes it was tough, but it pushed them beyond what they thought they could ever aKaieve. Like it pushed them to reach a different level in their careers, in their mind, that it really brought the best out of them.

[00:52:30] And they left feeling more confident, more experienced, more excellence. That's my wish for my team.

[00:52:36] Luvvie: yeah,

[00:52:37] **Fisayo Longe:** My wish for the women who wear us is that every time that they wear us, they feel proud. They know that we stand for something, we believe in them, and it just makes them more confident. Makes them, makes a bad day less bad because they knew that they looked good.

[00:52:54] You know? Yeah. And to make some more money, please. I'm tired. Yes.

[00:52:59] **Luvvie:** I'm telling you, you have rich auntie goals. I understand. Okay. I understand you have rich auntie goals and, and, and Kai collective can help you get there. And I think for one thing I've loved about your products and what you have, it gives grown woman. Okay. It just gives grown confident. I'm stepping into a soft era.

[00:53:25] Like it is, that's why I was like, it's the, it's the queen of vibes. Like your stuff makes you feel so instantly feminine, but also powerful at the same time.

[00:53:34] **Fisayo Longe:** I love that.

[00:53:35] Luvvie: it is just like, I love your stuff. The color, the boldness, like,

[00:53:40] Fisayo Longe: Thank

[00:53:41] **Luvvie:** it's the antithesis to a lot of what we're seeing now, which is the, the grays and the Browns.

[00:53:45] I'm always like, Brown is cute.

[00:53:47] **Fisayo Longe:** that's what I want us to be. Your luxury does not have to be quiet.

[00:53:51] Luvvie: Ooh,

[00:53:51] **Fisayo Longe:** don't have to dig deep down, because, you know, we believe in this thing, you know, it's, what's, what's it called? The, like, the, basically, if you're really loud, you're not that smart. What is it? There's a proverb,

[00:54:01] Luvvie: It's like Gaudi.

[00:54:03] **Fisayo Longe:** Yeah, can't remember.

[00:54:05] That thing. Um, no. Sometimes some of us are meant to be loud. Some of us are meant to be bold, we're meant to be colorful, we're not meant to shrink, and you don't need to shrink, like some, someone like me, I'm an introvert, but my voice is loud, I'm, I'm a lot, you know, and that's okay, that's okay, yeah, I want there to, I, I don't want, I want us, women like me to know that, Because you didn't shrink yourself to make other people feel better. [00:54:35] It doesn't make you any less feminine. It doesn't make you less of a woman. It doesn't make you less deserving of love. It doesn't make you less deserving of tenderness. It's okay to be bold. It's okay to have a loud voice. It's okay to have opinions.

[00:54:49] Luvvie: Yeah.

[00:54:49] Fisayo Longe: Yeah.

[00:54:50] **Luvvie:** And your brand absolutely gives permission for women to do that. If you are afraid of color, it forces you to wear some color. It, you mismatch patterns all the time. And I think even that is a form of revolution. I think even that is a form of protest to be loud in a world that constantly wants us to be quiet.

[00:55:12] So, Even if we're not speaking, if our clothes can speak for us and say, I am here and I'm going to take up space. I think that is a revolution. So thank you for your work.

[00:55:22] **Fisayo Longe:** Thank you. Thank you.

[00:55:24] Luvvie: Listen,

[00:55:25] Fisayo Longe: so easy to

[00:55:28] **Luvvie:** hope so. And you, the, I'm telling you the truth, the truth that you share, like I'm telling it is the feedback that I've been getting this, this season lets me know how thirsty people are for the truth of what is really happening in our lives. Like the way. People are like, this makes me feel less alone.

[00:55:45] Your story is going to make people feel so seen because man, to know that you are still flourishing, of course, still thriving, but in the background, you're fighting all sorts of dragons and winning. Okay. You're winning. the fights. It's, it's good. Right. Sometimes I got hands, the dragons got hands, but we ultimately will win and we are winning.

[00:56:11] And, um, I'm inspired. Um, I love to see what you're up to in this world. I'm cheering you on from Chicago. And, um, I'm a proud Kai girl. Thank you for joining me.

[00:56:24] **Fisayo Longe:** Thank you for having me. What is your, I know it's me, but what is your wish for

[00:56:29] **Luvvie:** Ooh, that's so okay. My wish for my business is that it constantly gives people courage to take bold action in their lives, whatever that is. So whenever people see me, whether it's my books, whether it's my podcasts, uh, my social, my hope is that I really do give courage at first. I used to say lone courage, but I don't want the courage back.

[00:56:52] I want to give. I want you to keep it right. And use it over and over again to do whatever might feel scary for you, but feels right. So that's really my goal. And then of course, like I wanted to fund my rich auntie life. Like, listen, listen, I want to. I wanna have my vacation homes, but as I fund, as it funds my rich auntie life, I'll also fund the world and make sure that, like, I wanna be able to fund upcoming entrepreneurs right?

[00:57:20] To like, if they ever need money because they can't get payroll. So I really wanna use my gifts to be in service of other people and of myself.

[00:57:29] Fisayo Longe: And

[00:57:30] Luvvie: That's, that's the goal over here. So

[00:57:33] **Fisayo Longe:** you're doing it. And thank you for giving so many of us a platform to share who we are and what we believe in. Thank you. And for helping so many people believe in themselves. Yeah. It's not easy to be, to be, to be honest.

[00:57:48] **Luvvie:** no, it's not. No, it's not. It's not. We get penalized for it sometimes. Mm-Hmm.

[00:57:55] **Fisayo Longe:** but I think it's so important that people like you exist to show that it works for you. You know, at the end of the day, you're still signed by one of the biggest agencies like, you know, you can still thrive. You don't need everyone on your journey.

[00:58:11] **Luvvie:** Everyone is not supposed to come with us because we don't like everybody. So why, why is everybody supposed to like us? I was like, how does that work? So, yes. And we, I would say for you all, if you were listening to this, um, of course go to Kaicollective. com, but also sign up for many mentors. com. Like that's Fisayo's weekly newsletter.

[00:58:30] It's really good. It's actionable. She gives you products to click on things she's thinking about. Cause I do believe that the mentor that you want is already there. Just watch what they're doing. And this last, um, issue you talked about how, whenever you want to have a mentor, you go find. all their different interviews and listen to it.

[00:58:49] Yes. Yes. That's,

[00:58:52] Fisayo Longe: Absolutely.

[00:58:53] **Luvvie:** that's a major key. So I invite y'all if you're listening to go sign up for that newsletter and support Kai collective emphasize work. So thank you for coming. Indeed.

[00:59:04] **Fisayo Longe:** Thank you for having.