



Alanna Levenson
Sales and Business Coaching
Career and Leadership Development

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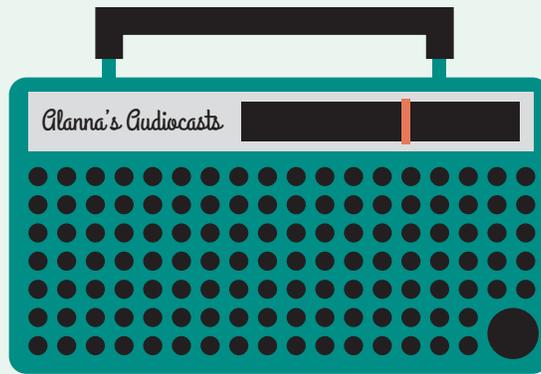
Interviewer: Alanna Levenson, Founder of I Love My Life! Coaching

Interviewee: Grace Cohen, Owner of SGBS Consulting

SGBS Consulting Information: In business for over 20 years, 4 part-time employees, and \$175,000 in revenue

Below are the highlights of our conversation where she shares what she has learned, and what has impacted her results.





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Alanna Levenson: Hi. This is Alanna Levenson with I Love My Life Coaching. I also have with me Grace Cohen with SGBS Consulting. I'm going to actually have her introduce herself. Grace, tell us a little bit about you and your business.

Grace Cohen: Thank you. Thank you for having me and inviting me into this interview. I really appreciate it. I've been in business as a bookkeeper and doing bookkeeping systems for companies for over 20 years. We have about four employees at any given time. We work with small companies all the way up to publicly traded companies in helping them put their financial statements together, understanding their numbers.

"It's really been very helpful working with you to get the tools to work in a very productive manner to get the client not only to pay me, but realize that they're getting a lot of benefits from the work that we've done together."

Really breaking the accounting systems down into layman's terms, so that the average man, average woman can understand where their money is going, how they're spending it, and if they're spending it for example on marketing, if the marketing is working, if they're getting a good return on their investment. That's what we really are about, and helping our clients.

Alanna Levenson: I actually work with Grace. She's helped me tremendously in my business and has helped me be more conscious now with things that I just wasn't before. I totally appreciate what you do for people.

Grace Cohen: Thank you.

Alanna Levenson: Grace, tell us what made you decide to hire a coach?

Structure and Framework

Grace Cohen: Well I've heard a lot of great feedback from people that we know, people we know together about working with you and how great it was. How they were able to increase their sales, how they were able to better manage their employees, manager their clients, how to be better in

communication, and I was seeing results from our collective friends in working with you. I thought, “You know what? I need this for myself. I know a lot of things, but I don’t put all of those things, those tools into action.” For me, I work better. I know now I work better with a coach who gets me and who’s helped. You can really flow with me in terms of getting me on to the path that we had talked about in terms of goal setting.

Alanna Levenson: Before we started to work together, what would you say your challenges were, concerns that you had, or things that might keep you up at night?

Increase Accounts Receivable and Getting Paid; Improving Cash Flow

Grace Cohen: Before we start working together, I think my accounts receivables were really high, people who owed me money because I’m not a person that likes asking for money. I love getting into work and doing the work. I’m not necessarily the best advocate for going and collecting the money for myself. I can go and collect it for my client, but for whatever reason for myself, I just put it to the side like, “Oh, they’ll pay me when they get a chance.”

Working with Alanna, I realized that if I don’t speak up enough for what I need, and make really strong boundaries, and change some of the ways that I do my billing, I’m always going to set myself up where I don’t have a great cash flow, and that’s me doing that. I can’t necessarily blame the client because they’re not going to do ... People don’t ... I guess people are funny like they ... Sometimes they need pushing, and you have to. With working with you, it’s really helped me learn how to navigate that in a professional manner, in a productive manner, not in a counterproductive manner.

It’s really been very helpful working with you to get the tools to work in a very productive manner to get the client not only to pay me, but realize that they’re getting a lot of benefits from the work that we’ve done together. That’s really through learning how to be a better communicator of my needs as a business owner.

Alanna Levenson: You’re not alone. I’ve worked on that with a lot of people before, and it’s something that people have a hard time doing. I can appreciate that here

you are a bookkeeper working with other people on their financials, and then to look at, “Oh, gosh. This is an area I could use some help in, in my business.”

Grace Cohen: It’s really redefining it because I think it has to do with the setup of the relationship. I’ve been learning from working with you that it’s beneficial to set up, really get clear about how you want to set up your boundaries with the client, so that the expectation, they have an expectation of what product they’re going to receive, and they know that you have an expectation that you’re going to get paid by such and such date or prior to the work. That’s really clear, and it keeps the line of communication clear, so nobody gets me in that fuzzy, funky area where you’re like, “Hey. Why haven’t you paid me?”

Clear Communication and Setting Expectations with Clients and Employees

Alanna Levenson: It’s all about setting expectations. To be able to set expectations, it requires you being able to communicate them clearly and having the comfort level of being able to ask for it.

Grace Cohen: My time with you has been really valuable and strengthening that communication skill for me.

Alanna Levenson: Thank you. Perfect. If someone else were to ask you why did you decide to work with Alanna, what would you tell them?

Grace Cohen: I would tell them why they want to work with Alanna is because she offers an amazing professional ... She brings an amazing professionalism to the game, to the table, and really helps the “coachee”, the person being coached, helps them to look at the bigger picture, so it takes it out of the smallness, the pettiness, and brings it into more of the realm of how do we make these all work and in a productive manner. It brings a level of professionalism that I think is one of the key pieces to who you are.

I also feel like you’re intuitive in terms of understanding what’s going on with the client, so that you’re not going to push them or have an expectation of pushing them. When you see the bigger picture, you’re like, “Wait a minute. You’ve got so many things going on. Let’s break it down to understand what can we really hold you accountable for

because if you're accountable for ten million things, you're going to fail." You've been instrumental in my life in pointing out, "Okay. You've over committed. Why are you beating yourself up that you've over committed?"

"Let's look at what we really want to commit to, so that we become more productive in getting that thing done, and put ... Not to like lose the other things, but to like perpetually put them in the back burner for another time that's more directive to get that done successfully." I think those are ... Yeah. Go ahead.

Alanna Levenson: I was just going to say it's harder to see those things when we're in it.

Grace Cohen: Yeah, it is. You feel like you're just drowning. Really, I can only relate to feeling like I'm drowning. I'm like grasping at straws. It's just a wonderful refreshing experience when you come out of a session with you, and there's clarity of like, "Oh, that's what I'm feeling." Identifying it, and then coming up with a resourceful plan to come back to something that was really nice that I think that I've fought you on, and struggled with.

Alanna Levenson: What is that?

Time Management Skills, Effective Scheduling, and Prioritizing Time

Grace Cohen: With the scheduling. I think we talked about the scheduling probably like a while ago. Finally, I just surrendered and did the schedule, and it is much easier. I do have a thing where I can just go now like, "Oh, here's a piece of paper, and it's telling me what I need to do. I don't need to think anymore." I'm like, "Oh, I need to remind myself. I'm just going to follow my schedule;" and realizing that nobody is going to look at the schedule and grace me for perfection.

I think that was my ... That was my big rejection to the schedule is I have to be perfect to the schedule, and that makes me crazy. I guess through our work together, I finally letting go of the perfection of it in just knowing that this is a place to come back to, to realign to.

Alanna Levenson: The term “time management” is one of the most common things that comes up. It’s hard to realize, “Oh, gosh. We can’t manage time.” Time is time. It’s really about prioritizing. I think people have a hard time doing that too because they’re worried about prioritizing it to the wrong thing. I congratulate you on being open to that. When you are ready for it, you are ready for it.

Grace Cohen: Getting back to your original question. Those are the reasons, knowing you’re intuitive, but you also give structure. It’s a beautiful yin and yang of this intuitive flowing ability to flow with me like when I’m going to and argue with time as well as giving me structure in times when it’s like, “Okay. I think you’re ready for the structure, so that you can have your building blocks to move forward towards your goal once you gotten out of whatever life ...”

“I think at first, it’s always a little trepidatious if you’ve never coached before, but the reward of working with a professional like Alanna is invaluable because these are tools that you can come back to time and time again not only in your professional life, but in your personal life. They’re interchangeable.”

Through our time together, there’s so many life challenges that have come up that have thrown me off course, but that’s the beautiful nature of working with you is the fluctuation to like, “Oh, okay. Well, let’s deal with that, and then we’ll come back to what we were dealing with, our goal that we’re going with.”

Alanna Levenson: You described this a little bit, but how would you describe coaching to someone else who hasn’t worked with a coach before?

Grace Cohen: I would call it a process. It’s a process that at first you might think, “Oh, this is ridiculous. I’m spinning wheels. You may have naysayers in your life that are negative and ask, “Why are you spending the time and money? You should be putting your efforts towards something else.” To those naysayers, I would say, you know what? They are counterproductive in your life and having a coach is one of the best investments in yourself because a coach can see things, the bigger picture outside of you, number one.

Number two, they're going to be rooting for the goal that you have, that you've brought to the table. If you come to a coach, and you bring your ... What you feel like you want to go for, what the goals are, and then you work with them. The more and more you work with a coach, the more and more you trust them. You build that trust. Inside building that trust, then you also build the tools that they're giving you to go to the next level and to go to the next level.

I think at first, it's always a little trepidatious if you've never coached before, but the reward of working with a professional like Alanna is invaluable because these are tools that you can come back to time and time again not only in your professional life, but in your personal life. They're interchangeable.

Alanna Levenson: Yeah, because people think that they can compartmentalize themselves effectively and we can't. I appreciate you pointing out that trust is a big part of this relationship, and that it works both ways for us to be productive together and to collaborate on behalf of your success. I also appreciate you acknowledging that there's a way of getting to that next level and then the next one because you can always evolve to another stage in your growth. I think people have this picture that it stops at some point, but really, it doesn't have to.

Grace Cohen: No. I think that it's a place where people can come and go. They can be continuous. I like being continuous because I think there's always room for me to grow, but I also think there's other people that like to come and get a good chunk of it, go away experience it, get stuck, and then come back. There's always ... It's just the nature of this. I know there's other people in my life where they get good stuff from the coach, and then they go out, and they try it, and they do well for a little bit, and then they get stuck, and then they keep beating their head up against the wall, and then they remember, "Oh, yeah. I think I should go talk to a coach about this."

Alanna Levenson: That brings me to my next question is, why retain a working relationship, and why stick with the process?

Grace Cohen: Because really sticking with the process helps you. It gets you into being accountable for your life, accountable for what you're saying you're going to do. Too often, people ... I equate it to losing weight. Too often, people constantly say, "I want to lose weight," and they even victimize themselves as to why they can't lose weight. When they start working with a coach, they actually start to surrender to, "Okay. I'm going to give my craziness over to this person, and follow what they're telling me to do." Then, they start to get results, and they're like, "Oh, my god. Why did I wait to do this? I'm not a victim anymore." It empowers.

Empowerment and Getting Out Of Your Own Way

They become empowered by the coach in learning how to use these tools that they may not have known, or they might have known, but they didn't use them. In your case, it's like having that person there keeping you accountable for what you say you want to do, helps you keep on track to get to that end goal because there's so many things in life that takes your attention, from the TV to Facebook, and internet, and texting. Everybody wants your attention. The next thing you know, you haven't done what you said you wanted to do like write the next great novel. You haven't done it because you've allowed 10,000,000 things to get in your way.

By having a coach that will say, "Okay. What are going to be accountable for, for this, or writing this novel?" By having someone like yourself and having you be that coach is what makes it that much more powerful because then you're being accountable - like you sending the first pages to you of chapters in a novel. You, the client will be disappointed in yourself because if you said in two weeks you're going to give them one chapter, then somehow being accountable for that and having to be ... and let that person know why you didn't do it.

It's both empowering because it will force you to like stick to it, or if you don't do it, there's also a lot to be learned because you are wonderful in getting into that dark space of, "Okay. Why did we not do it? What got in the way? What's procrastination? What was the fear? What was the thing that was allowed to take up the space instead of doing the writing that we had agreed to do?" I think that that's why the continuation and the signing up for it makes it so powerful.

Alanna Levenson: It's that consistency and continuity that I talk about with people at the very beginning. It's just super important to not only get into the process to keep the momentum going.

Grace Cohen: I also think should I be concerned, and a thought is that because there's a continuity, there's a time when you're ... I think Chris Rock makes a joke about this when you go on, one day, you bring your representative. You don't show up, your representative shows up. When I first started working with you, my representative showed up, and I'm going to be perfect. I'm perfectly reacting to you, so there's no reason for me to really coach, but that's not true because it takes a while for me to stop bringing the representative to the coaching session, and actually bringing myself in what is really the problem, so that we could actually address it.

Alanna Levenson: Actually, people say to me, "Well, I have to do this and this to get ready to be able to coach with you." I understand it, and I think it's funny because that separation for wanting to do it is actually what they can get out of this process.

"...my knee-jerk reaction since I was a child, is it's always my fault. I always leave the situation going it's my fault. Through working with you, it really helped me to, be keen in my listening to say, "Oh, wait a minute. This person is complaining about something, and it does not having anything to do with me. It's not me that they're complaining about."

Grace Cohen: It's breaking down the barriers of, "Okay. Don't worry about being an ass or ..." For better lack of term. It's okay like you are ... As a coach, I find you as a coach very refreshing and gentle, and being stern when you need to be, but gentle in terms of like getting into the depth of why we're not doing what we say we want to do because there's always something there that is keeping ourselves from doing it. It's nobody else outside of us. It's us that's allowing other people or other things to get in our way. You're really great and intuitive in getting in there, and help us help our self.

Useful and Practical Tools for Your Work Life and Personal Life

Alanna Levenson: Thank you. How would you say coaching has been positive and productive in terms in your business?

Grace Cohen: Through coaching with Alanna, it's really helped me grow professionally through being a clear communicator not only with my clients, but with my employees in terms of what I expect from them and what they can expect from me as an employer. It helped me on a creative level because I'm not just one thing, and being able to integrate all the different sides of my personality from being a creative person to a business owner, to a mother, to a daughter. All the things that we've worked with over the years, I think that they've ... It's all been integrated through the process, and has made me a better person through being able to recognize what I'm going through, and being able to really like see the picture.

Also, I think one of the things that I really enjoyed doing with you recently was the ... Doing the goals for the year and working out the different compartments in my life on the poster board. I felt like that was one of those key moments of just visually being able to see the different parts of my life, and seeing how it can integrate together, and how what steps we wanted to take, and what timeframe. It was just a beautiful experience, and also an awakening of like, "Oh, wow. These things are actually just happening organically just by putting the focus there."

Alanna Levenson: That's I think one of the biggest surprises people experience in this process is how they start to happen organically, and they never thought that that was possible before. I know we've worked on a lot of different things and have gone into a couple of different directions depending on what's present for you. Overall, what would you say has changed for you?

Responding vs. Reacting

Grace Cohen: There's so many things, and I'm trying to sum it up in my head. I guess I would have to say change, being able to ride the change, the changes. I think one of the big ones for me on a very personal level is to be able to recognize when other people are projecting their upset on me, like it's not my upset. I'm talking about something that I am speaking of what

my needs are, and they start talking back to me in terms of responding to me in an angry way, and realizing after working with you that sometimes when they're responding that way, they're not responding to me, Grace. They're responding to their own upset about a similar situation if that makes sense.

Alanna Levenson: It makes perfect sense. Having that ability requires having a good level of listening which is something that has to be practiced.

Grace Cohen: Yeah, because my knee-jerk reaction since I was a child, is it's always my fault. I always leave the situation going it's my fault. Through working with you, it really helped me to, be keen in my listening to say, "Oh, wait a minute. This person is complaining about something, and it does not have anything to do with me. It's not me that they're complaining about." There are certain things ... There could be things that people can complain about me. Yes, of course, because there's always room for improvement.

In certain situations, there're actually people that are upset, and they're not upset at me. They're upset over whatever was their experience that made them upset years and years ago. They haven't resolved it, and it has nothing to actually do with me. I know that seems really confusing, how I said it, but probably ... I don't know. What do you think? Is there a better way to assess that or to say that?

Alanna Levenson: No, because it's ... I appreciate the way that you're expressing it because that's your experience. Whoever is going to be listening to this or reading this study, there's certain people out there that will listen to it or read it and say, "I resonate with that. I relate to that. That's how I experienced it too, and that's all that matters." You know what I mean?

Grace Cohen: Right. It's being able to like deal with people that are angry, that they were angry before they even came here, and it has literally nothing to do with you, but they're spewing their anger and upset on to you and on to the situation that you guys are dealing with. That doesn't really need to be there, but you have to deal with it because it's in your space. In order to get the project done or to get the deal done, you have to resolve it in a professional manner that you don't lose the deal or lose the client, but also to be able to make a clear communication that, "Wait. Let's break this down because this is not me."

Alanna Levenson: To not take it personally. Yeah. What else would you want someone know about coaching and working with me, so they are leveraged to benefit from it?

Grace Cohen: I think if the potential people out there who are considering working with you, if they can realize what a gift you are, and that by going on the journey with you, it's a partnership. It's not a one-way street. You're not a person who's going to dictate to them how they're going to get to wherever they're going, but you actually work with them as partners to streamline the steps to the goal through what is going to motivate them, and that's what they have to bring to the table. It's what are those gears that are going to help you to motivate them; and that by working with you, they will see the changes in their lives. It's not going to happen overnight because it takes work.

Persistence and Commitment

If you want to see change in your life, it takes work. It takes commitment and persistence of showing up every day doing a little something to get closer and closer to the goal because you can't move a mountain in a night, but you can move a pile of dirt every day, swimming pool by swimming pool. The next thing you know, you have moved a mountain, and reformatted it to look and feel the way you want your life to be. I think that that is definitely a partnership with a coach, in my experience anyway.

Alanna Levenson: One last question for you. What is the most important thing you've learned about yourself from business coaching?

Grace Cohen: That I have a lot to bring to the game.

Alanna Levenson: That you bring your value?

Understanding Her Value and Worth

Grace Cohen: Yeah. I'm a valuable partner to my clients and to my life, to the people in my life. I am hugely a value in their life because I love to give, I love to help, I am excited when I see people succeed, and I'm rooting for them. I know that I see that value more clearly now working with you than before.

Alanna Levenson: I personally resonate with that because I feel like that's what is important to me as a coach as well, is for you to get that, and so that really speaks to me. It makes me so happy to be able to do my job. Grace, thank you so much for taking the time.

"If you want to see change in your life, it takes work. It takes commitment and persistence of showing up every day doing a little something to get closer and closer to the goal because you can't move a mountain in a night, but you can move a pile of dirt every day, swimming pool by swimming pool. The next thing you know, you have moved a mountain..."

Grace Cohen: Thank you. Thank you for having me do this. It's wonderful to look at the growth that we've had together.

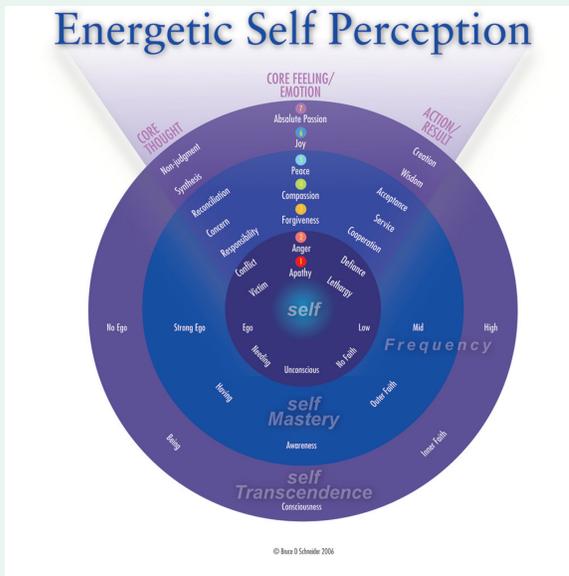
Alanna Levenson: Likewise.

Grace Cohen: I'm excited about our partnership.

Alanna Levenson: Yes, absolutely. Great. Thank you again. For those of you listening to this, if you have any questions for me, send me an email, and there'll be more. Thank you.

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