

A Fitness Community Rooted in Experience and Education

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Behind the Review host and Yelp's Small Business Expert, Emily Washcovick, shares a look at this week's episode of the podcast.

The nature of a small business means it cannot be all things to all people. If you are a jack-of-all trades, then chances are you are the master of none. The strength of a successful small business is to be true to who you are, what you do, and why you do it.

For West Texas Strength owners Amanda Volker and Juan Martinez, that means building and maintaining a welcoming gym designed for a specific customer base—the serious powerlifters and bodybuilders—who often feel shut out of typical gyms or don't want the extras provided by fitness chains. The pair noticed an absence in the marketplace because they felt it themselves, so they moved in to fill the gap, which is how many small businesses are born.

"Because we weren't a part of a particular group that had particular goals or saw a certain viewpoint on certain things, we didn't feel welcome in the gym. We tried changing different times, changing different gyms; we would go into your more standard commercial gym," said Juan. "It just made something that we love and we're passionate for less enjoyable."

So along with his partner Amanda, Juan created a space for

heavy strength training, weight lifting, and powerlifting—and in the beginning, they were flying by the seat of their pants. Amanda had a business degree, and Juan was a strength coach and personal trainer, but neither had owned a small business before. That didn't stop them from starting a 24-hour gym.

West Texas Strength is not the flashiest gym in San Angelo, Texas. It's not luxurious. There are no fancy shampoos in the locker room. And that's exactly how customers like it.

Our Yelp reviewer Josh H. was looking for exactly this kind of gym. "I joined two weeks after moving to Texas in need of a nearby gym that had flexible hours, good equipment for powerlifting, and functional training most of all. I could see on my first visit, this gym had that in spades."

While the facility checked a number of boxes for Josh, the thing that kept him coming back wasn't the quality of the weights or number of barbells—it was Juan and Amanda themselves. The beauty of a small business is the ability to really get to know your customers and show them you care. One-on-one conversations or remembering customers by name isn't possible in most large businesses.

"I met Juan and Amanda, the two co-owners, and meshed with them instantly. They got me, my needs, my wants, and my own background in powerlifting and strength conditioning. This landed deeply for me to understand it, to be listened to, to not be pushed, pressed, and sold for a membership alone," said Josh, who is an avid food blogger, competitive athlete, and military strength coach.

In addition to filling a need and really knowing their customer base, Amanda and Juan play to each other's strengths, both in the gym, at home, and on the business side. While it can be difficult to share a home and a business, they make it work.

"It can be difficult at times, just like any other business,

but I think when you're mixing a relationship into a business, it is even harder. But we try to divide tasks and conquer," said Amanda. "I mainly do taxes, the book, the paperwork. I'm not here [at the gym] all the time. He's mainly here. And he does the personal training, getting the clients, talking to the people, social media."

They've learned through their own experiences what really matters in building a strong small business. Here are a few other key takeaways from the episode:

- **Find the hole and fill it up.** Is the marketplace missing something that you know how to do? If you're wanting something else out of a business, chances are there are more people like you missing those same things. Take what you want as a customer and build it into a small business.
- **Make sure customers know you care.** Genuine concern for your customers goes a long way, even if your product is already exactly what they want. A personal touch, remembering names, and listening to customer feedback builds loyal patrons and positive reviewers.
- **If you're part of a team, play to your strengths.** Let the partner who loves numbers handle the books while the creative partner takes care of the big ideas. By dividing and conquering the business tasks, you'll build both a stronger business and partnership.

Listen to the episode below to hear directly from Amanda, Juan, and Josh, and subscribe to *Behind the Review* for more from new business owners and reviewers every Thursday.

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