



EPISODE 005 – With Special Guest Pamela Slim

You're listening to episode five of the Fun and Profit for the Active Entrepreneur Podcast. Today my guest is **Pamela Slim**. This is the start of our guest series. I couldn't think of a better guest to kick us off than Pam. I have been following and been inspired by Pam since the ever so slight embers in my mind started around potentially leaving corporate and being in my own business. Her work, her integrity, and just her smarts and ability to connect people have always really been a tremendous source of both inspiration and knowledge to me. I'm excited that for thirty minutes we're going to talk to her. Our conversation covers the gamut with some really insightful thoughts about what it takes to live thoughtfully and achieve goals in a really meaningful way. Without further ado, let's get to our recent conversation.

Welcome to the Fun & Profit for the Active Entrepreneur podcast. I'm your host, Paula G. Join me as we explore what it takes to get you out from behind your desk and endless to-do's so you're feeling more vibrant, alive, and engaged in your business and in your life.

Paula: Hi, Pam.

Pamela: Hi.

Paula: Thanks so much for taking time now that you're off the road from your #commtour to talk with us.

Pamela: I am so glad to do it. Off for a few days. I step into the great State of Texas next week. The next couple months I'll be on the road, but it feels good to be home this week.

Paula: We'll be talking about that in a bit. People who might be new to you and to this podcast, finding out about you for the first time, just give us a little cliff-note version of who you are and what you're up to in the world of your work.

Pamela: Awesome. I am somebody who has always been super passionate about the world of work. Everybody has their thing of interest they keep coming back to. For me, what really gets me excited is looking at how people express themselves through work that they do, both from a perspective of finding work that's really fulfilling, and also from a broader societal piece of seeing how, when we are doing great work, when we're working together, when we're creating great things and our economy is stronger, our community is stronger, individual families in our community are stronger. That's kind of been the heart of what I care about and what I've done over the last couple of decades.

My journey has taken me from pretty much every work mode you can imagine, from nonprofit into corporate. My last real job was the director of training and development at Barclays Global Investors in 1996. That's when I quit to start my own consulting business, which I did for about ten years, working inside companies on the human side of business, executive coaching, change management, teambuilding, those kinds of things. I did that for about ten years with great joy. Then I found that there were people in those environments who were really interested in doing what I did and quitting their job to start a business. That's when I spent the next ten years at ***Escape from Cubicle Nation***, which was my site where I worked with individuals in corporate who were interested in quitting their job to start a business.

Paula: I discovered you then when I was stuck in my cubicle.

Pamela: It's so neat because that tends to be the point of connection for many people. You might have stumbled upon my blog or my book. That was kind of great job doing that work for ten years. Now I'm just at another point of transition of really being excited about focusing on helping to really share the message, which definitely will come in the form of a book, about how we can think in a broader way about the ecosystem in which we do our work. It's not just trying to find one to one, you getting a job or you getting one client, but really understanding what are opportunities for connecting one to many.

Paula: That's cool. I always love hearing that. I think either I'm just getting older or perhaps better like a fine cabernet. I listen and I'm like: Yeah, that was way back when. That's when I started discovering your work and following your work and sitting in my cubicle and being maybe the only person on the community call and really cool things. It's exciting to learn the point of entry. Let's talk a little bit about -- I know *Escape from Cubicle Nation* was part of the conversation there, and how that flowed into your second book, *Body of Work*, and how that thread has shown itself in your life and in what you're doing now.

Pamela: The way that I tend to approach my work is that, as I said, I know in general I'm always going to be interested in **how people express themselves through work**. I think I'm a bit more leaning of the artist side rather than the businessperson side for my initial inspiration for how I decide to move into different parts of my body of work. Maybe it's a little bit more of a blend. What I mean by that is, as I'm engaged in doing work and I'm beginning to notice what are some of the deeper patterns, what are people interested in, what's missing. That, for example, was the trend that started to appear very clearly as I was working as a consultant to large corporations. There were all these people who just had these aspirations to leave but there was something very specific about their experience growing up in corporate that made it feel like it was really

impossible to start a business. You kind of get that thread, you see that piece, and then it led me to create something that would be a solution for it.

Body of Work came out of a similar type of experience of doing ten years of early-stage startup consulting, and recognizing, especially towards the end, that I was beginning to see widespread, what I felt to be inaccurate, views being put forth which said you can only be creative if you work for yourself. You can only be free if you have your own business. You and I know very well that it is not easy at all to work for yourself. It can be super rewarding. It can be wonderful, and it can be terrifying. It can be hard. You can go through periods of really low cash flow and anxiety.

Paula: Sometimes instead of freedom you get slavery.

Pamela: It's a strong term. We do have choice in the different work modes that we have. **There's nothing magic about any work mode.** What I was finding in having conversations with entrepreneurs is sometimes people were feeling shame if they had tried the path of entrepreneurship and found that it wasn't for them. They felt like: I'm slinking back to corporate. I'm just giving up on my dreams. They felt ashamed for that. That just feels ridiculous to me. What we care about is creating great work. The purpose of our lives is to create a body of work that we're proud of, right? In doing that, we can choose a whole variety of different work modes. I also didn't want to leave out of the conversation people who were in different work modes, working in academia or corporate or different ways that we can all think of. What's a new framework for how it is that we can think about careers in the new world of work? That's kind of where *Body of Work* came from, addressing an issue or a problem.

In a similar way, you notice it tends to be seven- to ten-year periods that I'll focus on something and notice trends that lead to the next. I think the next piece, which I'm excited about, in this work I'm doing right now is recognizing that no matter what the situation is, if I have a business owner who's coming to me who is trying to get more

clients when they're starting out, if I have a jobseeker I'm talking with who is trying to figure out the strategy for getting work, if I'm talking to a senior manager in a corporation about how it is that they can be expanding into new markets, I always come back to this framework of thinking in a bigger ecosystem. By having hundreds of those conversations, I realize most people don't do that and don't know how to think that way. When you begin to do that, it just changes everything. It changes the way you see yourself. It totally changes the number of opportunities that come up. On the positive side, which you know because we had the experience together, it also brings you closer to other really wonderful people, where you feel like you're not alone on the journey. I think connecting in community is one of the most fundamental needs that we have as human beings.

Paula: I love how you share, because I've coached people where they hired me to find out: How do I get my business running? By the time we got done working, they're like: Hell no, I do not want to be a business owner. This would not be for me. It was sort of a sad parting, but that was about the best investment you made because you did it before you quit your job and tortured yourself with it. Instead, you discover what it is about your thing you want to do and where you can do it.

Pamela: That's a great outcome. I always felt really good when people would make that decision. They're making an informed decision based on really examining the risks and rewards that are related to their own unique situation. I've known so many people in my own family -- my dad is a passionate photographer who worked for an organization his whole career, and now is still working as a freelancer at the age of almost 81 years old, for said corporation. My brother and sister-in-law are both professors of geology at the University of Pittsburgh. They're totally passionate about what they do, totally nerding out in science as they do and doing their research. To imagine, even in my own family, not to mention the literally thousands of people I've met throughout the years in different work modes, there are plenty of people who are really doing exciting work. Everything is about tradeoffs. You can have -- definitely there are

some of us, and I would include myself, who really do love having the creative flexibility where you can just say: Okay, it's really time to be exploring something new, so let me create a new portion of my business to address that; as opposed to thinking: My gosh, now I have to change careers and get training and go back and interview for a brand-new job.

Paula: I think that's really perfect for -- when I started this podcast and the idea of active entrepreneur, which I'll ask your take on it near the end, but that idea of we don't just want to be stuck staring at our work even if we love our work, because there's so much more to it. **There's the essence of that thread** that's important to us, how we express that perhaps in the way we make a living, and the other important parts of what we love about our lives. Part of what I've always admired about you as a successful business owner who I've obviously looked up to for a decade-plus now, is that there's so much more to you. When you read your story, you were deep into the martial arts. Your creative side, your side projects, and just how at the forefront and engaged you are with your cool family. I've been lucky enough to meet some of them. I can bona fide stamp them as really cool people.

Pamela: Thank you. I'm a little biased myself when it comes to that.

Paula: I've always admired that. It can be so easy to be tunnel vision about an income goal or building something and losing sight of so many other pieces that make us human.

Pamela: The definition of body of work that I used for the book is **that your body of work is everything that you create, contribute, affect, and impact throughout the course of your life.** When you think of that, that's where each individual is going to make a choice about what that looks like for you. The more years and decades now that I am involved as being a career advisor and mentor, the more I really believe that that is such an individual determination. All that matters is that you really take time to

understand: **What does that picture look like for you?** For me, the picture includes lots of deep connection with my family, a total joy in nerding out sometimes at thinking about how my work and my husband's perspective -- my husband, as you know, is Navajo, grew up on the Navajo Nation. He has wonderful training and insight as a medicine person, somebody familiar with his cultural ways. We nerd out all the time.

This morning on the way to work we were talking about how we create an environment in our home that can be so enriching and engaging for the kids in the neighborhood to come visit. How can we be super conscious about how it is that we're talking to our kids, how we help them to address issues and challenges that come up. Those kinds of things are super interesting to me. I love to think of all the different ways in which my work can apply. How do team dynamics apply when you're the new family joining the soccer club? How do I manage that and apply what I've learned through my work to building a connection with new people? It just kind of never ends.

That, for me, is part of what's really interesting, and being connected with a lot of people and not solely looking at my success metric, reaching a certain income goal or growing my business to an extent that would mean needing to take time away from being a super active and present parent. It's just a really interesting journey. One of the things that I really reflected on when I was writing *Body of Work*, I did a chapter about "Your Definition of Success." It really is only something that you individually can determine. The way you know it's the right vision of success is when you do define whatever those metrics are of that vision, that when you achieve those you feel good and peaceful and satisfied.

So many people that I know just live their lives constantly being unsatisfied. They reach one goal and it's like: That's not enough. Now I have to go for the next one. It's awesome. I'm goal-oriented, too. I love that. **If you don't have those moments of just being deeply satisfied and really appreciating the work that you've done and appreciating the quality of relationships that you've built, what's the point?** It's

sad and scary. Our lives can end at any point sometimes. I just lost a dear young friend a couple weeks ago, Scott Dinsmore, who was just beginning his life really. We don't know. We need to really be enjoying ourselves while we're living our lives.

Paula: I didn't know him specifically, but, of course, I saw your post and some others and started reading a few of his posts. His thought around the priceless pause was actually the topic of my last podcast. I was talking about that, and the book *The Shallows*, about how we get stuck in this way of thinking. When it comes to me for goals or things that you're intending to create, if you can't feel the way you want to feel along the way, you're not going to feel good when you get there, either. You want to create that, not just as part of the goal accomplishment but as the journey, too, which is what you are saying.

Pamela: It's true. In order to do that, **it's like a full-contact zen, martial art, mindful mastery.** It is really deep and complex when you start to do that. It seems like it's simple, right? What's the big deal? Enjoy your life while you're living it. Again, my husband and I spend so much time in deep conversation about that. What does that really look like in any given moment? Really, circumstance neutral, during the worst of times, which we've had some. Believe me, when the economy crashed, we were hit so hard and just had huge implications of that for your family.

Paula: I know that feeling with my partner when she was out of work for 14, 16 months.

Pamela: In those moments, those are the moments where you do actually want to be calling upon all the different teachings and practices and everything you have, again, to know that as a human being, regardless of what a circumstance is, knowing that in the realm of things, we are living with such tremendous privilege. Even in the hardest of times, in my own experience, when I see some of the challenges I've had, there are the majority of the world that faces much, much bigger challenges on an ongoing basis. How can we practice that? How can we practice really being grateful and present and

just thankful for our lives no matter what's happening? That's a good practice. It's really worth doing.

Paula: And to be willing to realize while you're walking a path towards a particular goal, whatever that goal might be, that it's okay not to be digging that hole, creating that path 24 / 7 / 365. There's more to you than that, and there's more to your body of work than that. It's all the components. Tell me a little bit about how the Community Tour came about. For those who aren't familiar, Pam has been hot trotting across the US in various regional chunks, from my understanding, and doing 21 cities, of which I was blessed to go to Philly and attend these cool half-day sessions. How did it come about?

Pamela: I was at my sister's house in California. She just bought a really wonderful lake house. They moved from Texas to California. We used to spend our summers there on camping trips. It's called Lake Almanor. We were there on vacation with my family. I was sitting, my favorite thing to do, sitting on the deck looking out at the lake. There is just nothing better with a hot cup of coffee.

Paula: The only thing better is kayaking on the lake, in my opinion.

Pamela: That's right. I was trying to think of -- I knew the general arena of the work that I wanted to be tackling next, which was this whole idea in the big picture of thinking about ourselves in the broader context of where it is that we fit within our local, national, and global communities. I was thinking: How do I want to approach it? Is it first more from a research perspective where then I kind of flesh out the idea for a book? Writing books tends to be a good way for me to get the idea really crystallized and be able to do some research around it.

I knew also that I wanted to be focusing my services and the focus of my business around those areas, too. I realized that the way I learn the best is actually in conversation with people. I hadn't actually been out on the road since my first book

came out, *Escape from Cubicle Nation*, in 2009. I did kind of a similar thing. I went around to a number of different cities and taught workshops. I love that experience. I'm still very connected with people who I met on that tour, because there's nothing like meeting people in person in their home cities and learning something about that. I just got this feeling, that whole big vision. I actually went on Facebook and said: I'm thinking about going on a tour. Where should I go?

Paula: I know I was right in there: Philly! Philly!

Pamela: See, you were one of the reasons I went to Philly. I'd never been to Philly before. I just gathered all the names and my assistant, Sheila, created a spreadsheet. We just started to map it out. There are a number of different purposes. One of them is to get out and reconnect with people in person in their cities and really get a feel for what's going on there. What are some of the amazing things people are doing so I can learn more firsthand, not just stuck behind my computer monitor, always doing things virtually. The other thing was to be providing a helpful frame of reference for people so they can begin to think differently about how it is that they were managing their career or business, to really think about a way to connect with each other.

I am very lucky in that I do tend to attract really wonderful people who come to my events and programs and things like that. I knew when I hosted workshops in local places that there would be great people who probably wouldn't all know each other who would attend the live event so I could help to stimulate some of that connection between the participants in the local area. That's something that's so powerful and has been in my own life as well. I have local mastermind partners. I know you've been in masterminds where I am connected with people in my local area who can really help me think about my business and we all support each other. It's like a gigantic research project where I could test ideas, get feedback, begin to really understand: What is this nugget of the idea that I want to start to build into the big idea for a book? It's this whole combination of things. It's funny, I thought about it yesterday when I was describing it to

somebody. It's kind of doing the reverse order. Instead of writing a book and going out on tour, I'm doing the book tour first.

Paula: Is anything happening from the tour that you didn't expect? Is there some exciting thing that you're like: Aha! I didn't go into this tour with this as an intention, but this is kind of a cool observation, result?

Pamela: I think that it definitely -- I think some of the connections of just meeting people that I didn't necessarily know were part of my community. I might now have met them before, or in some cases they're spouses of clients of mine. It's really fun. I've had parent-child combos. I've had siblings. I've had spouses and partners together, which has been so cool to get to meet people that way and have them experience the workshop together. There have been some opportunities that have come out from that experience where I've met people who I wouldn't have normally met. The way they're interpreting the material that I'm putting out there is leading to some really interesting possibilities in terms of some work that I can be doing, and in areas that I probably never would have thought about. I think that's part of it.

And then definitely in the process of discovery and research, I really do feel like I've touched upon what I think is the essence of the big idea, which is kind of a subset of what it is that I'm introducing in the community model. That's just exciting and relieving, too. As much as it's fun and interesting to be in the middle of trying to discover what a big idea is, it's also really wonderful to begin to get that crystallized. That was the gift that *Escape from Cubicle Nation* was for me. It's such a very clear focus and a portion of work that people could really relate to and understand that made sense. That's really what I'm looking forward to, is having that same kind of clarity moving forward.

Paula: One comment you made at the #commtour that continues to stick with me is, you share, your personality was this "raging extrovert" was the term that you used. I thought it was really interesting because of some of the work you've done with Susan

Cain and the Quiet Revolution. When I look at something like the #commtour, I think that would be so exhausting. I think for myself, when it comes to creating community -- and perhaps you're more of a, I don't know about raging introvert, but pretty happy being an introvert myself -- from what you've observed, how do you help others tap into what's unique for you, whether you're an introvert or extrovert? It doesn't need to look a certain way I guess is something I always preach. Sometimes I wonder: What's the way that it could look for the introvert that's not going to be as brave as you to just go city to city?

Pamela: That's an example. I know myself and I know what my strengths are. I have a huge tolerance for risk. I travel really well. I traveled a lot when I was younger. It's easy for me to do. I am an extrovert. Believe me, I get very tired. Last week when I was in four states in four days --

Paula: And you were driving, too.

Pamela: Driving between Sioux Falls and Fargo and staying with a new person every night, it requires a lot of energy. That's an example of something that I did that was matched on right place, right time, right strengths for my own ingredients. When I think about intentional community design -- and I've talked a lot about this with Susan Cain, as you said, who did amazing research for her book *Quiet*. I've worked with her and her business partner to create her Quiet Revolution, which is a whole business that's really grown up around celebrating the natural strengths of introverts and really helping us to understand how we've, I think in many ways, been describing introversion in a totally inaccurate way, both scientifically and otherwise.

When you are somebody who identifies as introverted, it means that you have a different way of really getting energized. You get more energy when you're by yourself, kind of reflecting on ideas. And many introverts actually enjoy speaking. Many introverts are great, like Susan, at speaking in front of very large groups of people when

you have the chance to really focus your message and plan and prepare. Intentional community design, if you know that by your nature you may get exhausted by too much interaction, who you're interacting with, how you're interacting, which relationships are critical for you are even more important when you are somebody who is more introverted. To me, so much of what I am beginning to discover is it's about intentional strategic design. Who really are you identifying as key people that can help you to fulfill the mission that you have for the work that you care about in the world?

Also, what are the types of people that can be complimenting your specific skills? As I look at somebody like Susan who is an amazing person and totally brilliant and a genius for sure, she makes choices sometimes to be around people when she's out on her tour. She's been very strategic about who it is that she has hired to have around her in order to grow her business. She's been able to create a position for herself where she's able to do what she really does best, to really be reflecting and coming up with ideas and content. Then she has a really strong team around her who's able to be doing a lot more of the activities that require a lot of interaction with people.

Paula: I don't know if that's just more of you reinforcing things I already say to people or there's pieces in there that I'm like: I really needed to hear that today. There was a little nugget in there somewhere that I'm now chewing on. I'll have to listen to the recording so I don't go into: What happened to the host? She's thinking and reflecting. The introvert is reflecting.

Pamela: That's right. You need to go off by yourself quietly for a while and really reflect on it.

Paula: I always ask people this question. Since this is the first live interview I'm doing in this incarnation of the Fun & Profit for the Active Entrepreneur podcast, what does it mean to you, the term "active entrepreneur"? What makes you come alive?

Pamela: To me the term, when I hear active entrepreneur, I think about somebody who is being strategic, somebody who is being proactive, somebody who is engaged. I call it **full-color, full-contact living where you're present in what you're doing.** You're excited by your work. You're present with your clients. You are actively always working in order to not just keep up with the flow. It's very easy to get in the mindset of having a bunch of bricks that are constantly falling on your head when there are so many things to juggle as an entrepreneur.

It's interesting, just yesterday in a number of different coaching sessions I was doing with clients, I just realized how much is being really rigorous and clear with yourself, to take the time out sometimes amidst the scramble of day-to-day life, to really step back and make sure that you have a clear strategy, that you're focused on building the right things, that you have a holistic business model where you're making the right amount of profit for what your goals are. You don't just get swept away in reactive mode. That's kind of how I interpret what that term means. It's claiming, owning your choices, and not just struggling to keep up and react but really staying ahead of the game, which is easier said than done, believe me.

Paula: One of your original teachings of the life plan comes before the business plan falls right into that.

Pamela: It does.

Paula: Thank you for that. Tell my listeners, where can they connect with you, find out more about the cool stuff you're up to?

Pamela: You can find me at PamelaSlim.com. That's where I have all my social connections on LinkedIn or Facebook or Twitter. Also right on the homepage, if you happen to be in a city where the tour is coming next, I hit Texas next week and will be in southern California and Denver and then Charlotte, Raleigh, Atlanta, and Orlando. You

can get that information right on the homepage of my site, or just go to PamelaSlim.com/Tour.

Paula: Any time spent with you is well worth the effort and travel. Having recently come off the Community Tour, it's a fine way to spend a day. That's what I can say.

Pamela: Awesome. I'm so glad that you were there. I appreciate it.

Paula: I am, too. Thanks so much for coming and being my – I couldn't think of a better inaugural guest for my interview portion of the podcast series. Thanks.

Pamela: Thank you.

I couldn't be more grateful for Pam taking time out of her busy schedule in the midst of her Community Tour to be with us. If you've listened this far, I would love for you to help others find this great conversation as well. If you've enjoyed this podcast, please head on over to iTunes. Give us a little review, a little rating, and that way other people just like you can find it and do their most important work in the world. It's one little step you can take to building community that you might not ever directly know. Thank you so much. It helps us and helps others. As I always say, create a great day!