



TRANSCENDING LOSS

Sandy Hansen-Wolff, owner and CEO of AgVenture Feed & Seed, shares her biggest life lessons

BY SUE HAWKES | PHOTO BY TATE CARLSON

Speaking with Sandy Hansen-Wolff, owner of AgVenture Feed & Seed, is inspirational. She puts her heart into everything she does, whether serving AgVenture customers, providing agribusiness support, animal management and farm supplies, or speaking to an audience about her story. You see, Sandy is no stranger to heartbreak and loss. Fourteen years ago, while still a newlywed, Sandy's husband passed away from cancer, leaving her with AgVenture — a nearly bankrupt business she knew nothing about. She was a young widow, grieving the death of her husband, and suddenly she became a business-owner as well. Sandy reflects, "I felt like the rug got pulled out from under me," yet

she knew she had to persevere. She became determined to make AgVenture flourish, not only to honor her late husband's memory, but to honor the employees, vendors and customers who were faithful to the business.

Sandy believes we all have the choice "to either dig deep or give up," and she made the choice to dig deep. "I've realized that having an intuition about something and then putting some literal steps behind it has really served me well," Sandy shares. That's not to say it was an easy journey. At first she felt like she was in survival mode, and worked to just get through the day. Eventually, it became easier with the help of true friends, family and strong faith. "The power of tapping into a Higher Power,"

says Sandy, "was the number-one resource that I held to and still do today." Now, Sandy has come to view her past not as a tragedy, but as a gift of life lessons she can share with others.

Learning from loss:

The power of mindset. When Sandy first took over AgVenture, it was on the brink of bankruptcy. She met with her accountant every month, and each time she was more nervous than the last. One day her accountant said, "Okay, you have ten minutes to talk about the worst case scenario if this doesn't work out." After those ten minutes were up, he said, "Now, I want you to go to work every morning and say, 'how am I going to make this work?'" This paradigm shift changed everything for Sandy. "When I started looking at it through a different, more positive lens, I don't think our red numbers lasted more than a few months."

Tragedy teaches what a real challenge is.

"To say things don't ever both me would be untrue," says Sandy. "But I know how bad things can get, and that's my baseline. I went through this tragedy early in my life, and it shaped me for everything that followed; until you've gone through it, you don't get those revelations."

Say yes to what was once unthinkable.

"It takes saying 'yes' to what is being requested of you, even when you thought at one point that would be a 'never,'" she shares. For Sandy, that "never" was public speaking. Growing up she was very uncomfortable in front of groups, but as she turned AgVenture around, the speaking requests started coming in. Although her first inclination was to say no, Sandy was motivated by her life goal of giving back to help others have an easier path. "If that means that I speak in front of a group to ignite their fire for their own business or life, then I'm going to do that," says Sandy. "That doesn't mean I don't still get a little bit anxious before I go on stage."

It doesn't pay to work your whole life away.

Sandy sat for months at the hospital during her husband's illness, watching the world happen without her. "There aren't many times that you're plucked out of your life and can look at it from the outside and make it different when you re-enter," says Sandy. "What I still carry with me is that it really doesn't pay to work your whole life away." Although Sandy enjoys



her work and is motivated by it, her most beautiful moments have come outside of work. "It's not all about work and success, because when that is ripped away from you, you need to really look in the mirror and see what else you have left," she says.

Redefining success

Evaluating life after her husband's death caused Sandy to create her definition of success — one that isn't defined as simply as a dollar amount or title on a business card. "Success to me," says Sandy, "is moving the needle forward and having plenty of time to enjoy it." She routinely asks, "Am I feeling content? Am I feeling peaceful in my relationships? Professionally, am I moving the needle forward in my business for my community, employees and customers?"

She credits Tim Ferriss' book, *The Four Hour Work Week*, with helping her realize she didn't need to work 80 hours a week to feel successful. "Success doesn't always mean a huge indulgent trip," Sandy says. "Sometimes it's sitting at home on a beautiful evening and watching the sunset instead of attending the next networking function."

Practices that help Sandy evaluate and recalibrate (she acknowledges some days are less balanced than others) include meditation and a daily morning reflection. She spends thirty minutes each morning thinking and examining where things are flowing versus being forced. Sandy believes "we tend to be more in force than flow. If we take a step back, even for five or ten minutes each morning, we can determine how we want the day to go." Sandy also advocates self-care, especially in the forms of daily exercise and healthy eating habits. "We cannot be our highest self or give our highest potential to the world if we do not take care of ourselves," she says. "It seems like it might be selfish, but really it's selfless because you can give so much more when you're at your best." 🐾



SUE HAWKES, CEO of YESS!, is a Certified EOS Implementer, Certified Business Coach, WPO Chapter Chair, bestselling author and award-winning entrepreneur. She has been helping entrepreneurs and leadership teams succeed for the past 20+ years.

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