



Season 3, Episode 12 - Transcript

Hot Mess Express with Kalilah Wright

Nicole:

Hey, friends, I am so excited about today. You can hear it in my voice. I know. You can hear the enthusiasm, my voice and the reason why is I am not in studio alone. Today's chat I'm inviting someone extra to hang out with us. So whether you are sitting in the parking lot at Target, or you are throwing together dinner or in the carpool line, like we have got an extra friend who's gonna be chatting with us today. So I am so excited because you guys know I didn't really do the interview thing. I mean, everybody else does. I only bring people in when they're my best good friends when I know there's someone you need to meet. And above all else, when I know that their story and their message and their perspective is going to change your life. So today I have, hanging out with us, my dear dear friend Kalilah Wright.

Kalilah:

Hey, everyone. I'm so excited for this moment.

Nicole:

I'm so glad you're here. I'm so so glad you're here. Now what you guys may not know is that Kalilah is an incredible business owner. She owns the company Mess in a bottle. And it is an incredible apparel line. It is so so so amazing. I don't even know how to explain to you guys the growth that this business has, the ingenuity, the creativity, the impact. You've seen her work and may not even know that you've seen her work because it is everywhere. And I'm just grateful she took the time to pop in. And you want to talk about what's so amazing, besides being stylish and smart and brilliant and an impeccable businesswoman. She's also an awesome mama, which means that we actually have, because y'all know me, her little one is in with us also so I'm gonna have Caden shout out and say hello to us real quick.

Caden:

Hello everyone!

Nicole:

There we go. And he's awesome. He's hanging out with us. So you might hear a little kiddo sound in the background, and we're just gonna throw some goldfish crackers and keep it moving. Y'all know how it works.

So, all that being said, Kalilah can you tell us a little bit about your business where you started where you're from, and then we're actually going to get into y'all, our real life chat. You've heard a million of those interviews before, where people are just kind of like, what's your strong point? What's your struggle, we're not doing that we're gonna have a real conversation like we always do. You're gonna hear things here today that you may not have heard anywhere else. And you know what, it's all going to be valuable. So again, Kalilah, can you tell us all about you and your usual schpeel so we can get into the good stuff.

Kalilah:

So mess in a bottle, we're an apparel company, we put messages on T shirts, and they come packaged in a reusable bottle. I started the company in 2016, shortly after the Freddie Gray O'Brien uprising in Baltimore, Maryland. So Freddie Gray an African American male he died while in police custody. And this caused a lot of like, uproar in my community. And I was like, Look, we need a voice, we need a message. And that is how mess a bottle was birthed. And so it was birthed in Baltimore, Maryland. I'm from Brooklyn, New York, born in Kingston, Jamaica, so I'm an immigrant girl. And, you know, this company, we started it with less than \$500. And I've grown into a multi million dollar company in less than five years. So I've been really, you know, excited and you know, and just going through this journey, it's been such a journey and like the last six years of, you know, having the company.

Nicole:

Oh my gosh, so you guys can't tell or maybe you can tell I'm beaming over here. I am just grinning it up. I'm so beyond proud to be here in this moment. I'm actually now I'm tipping the scale of almost tears. I'm like trying not to cry.

Kalilah:

Don't do it. Are makeup looks too good right now.

Nicole:

We're not trying to have floating lashes. So just to start getting real right out of the gate. The reason why I'm so emotional about it is, you know, I'm a Baltimore girl, too, you know, we both kind of resettled there, you know, Kalilah came from New York, I came from DC. And, you know, and that's where we kind of intersected. And we both started our businesses. And I think I was just a couple years before, you know, Kalilah, but we were both out there kind of hustling and grinding and working at the same time. And the blessing that I had was I was able to intersect with Kalilah at a time where she was seeking the knowledge that I had, you know, and she's always been intersected with my life because she's always got the style that I want. So it's been a beautiful relationship, but I love this woman, she is a sister to me. And I have seen her come

from that \$500 to that multi million and I never, ever doubted for a moment that we'd be sitting here.

And I never doubted for a moment that this is just the beginning of where we are now and where we're going to be. I mean it. I know it. I love it. I'm excited for this to be our first interview. I can't wait to catch you on the couches for the TV show later. Right? Yeah.

Kalilah:

It was amazing. Because every time when I felt like, it's Nicole, sure, cuz you used to be like, You are worthy you. And I'm like, Girl, what you're seeing that? I don't know. Because right now I'm feeling like I'm falling off the top of a building, and I don't know how I'm gonna land on this cushion. And you're like, No, you are gonna land just perfectly, you're gonna stick the landing. And I'm, I'm always, like, amazed, because almost everything that you said, you know, everything that you've kind of guided me towards has happened. And it's made sense. And that has been a, you know, like, it's been so like pouring into someone. And just being in that position, it's needed.

Nicole:

You are so deserving. And your gift is so real. And it's been so easy for me to not just speaking to you, because and this guys, I think everyone could hear and benefit from this. There is one element of me just being a cheerleader. I love people. I'm always like, team, you're great. You're excellent. You can do it. You know, I really do believe that I'm a believer in people. But the other side of it is just math and numbers. You know what I mean? And one thing that I think we've always talked about is just sort of knowing your numbers in your business, and is the math mathing and letting that data help drive your decisions. And that's just education. Like I have the knowledge, it was easy for me to give it to you because you're humble, you're willing, you're a hard worker, you're coachable. And all of those things are just a piece of cake for me, you know, because you're like, I just need to know. And if I know that I'd like to do it a better way, right? You're a prime example of a dream client like dream, because honestly, if someone has a trash product, I'm gonna be completely honest, you can't save it.

Kalilah:

Yeah.

Nicole:

But not only is your product exceptional, it literally is the type of thing where all it needs is more eyes. You see it, you want it, right. It's not that complicated. It's very easy to understand. And mathematically, it's just about how do we scale? How do we grow? How do we do it strategically? And that part of it is, again math, you know, and so I was just excited to lend my gifts to amplify yours because you're so deserving. So alright, praise party. You guys heard it. I love you. You're great. You're pretty. You're smart. You're wonderful. Okay, we did all that. But I just want to dive in. Typically, we follow our normal format, where we have our q&a, and then we do Don't make yourself content, like, smash it all together. Because I got a great question in

from Sharon. And I was gonna answer it myself but Kalilah was in LA. And I was like, oh, there's no one who could speak better to this than her. Let me grab her and bring her into our chat so she can answer it with me.

So the question I got in from Sharon, is, Nicole, I am paralyzed in fear. I have been running my business for years and have the seasons where everything seems like it's going great. And I feel comfortable, and I feel confident. And then before I know it, fear pops up again. I don't understand what I can do to make this thing go away once and for all. You seem so confident, you seem so aware, you seem so ready for the next thing that's coming. What is the secret to hiding and getting rid of the fear?

Kalilah:

The true secret is believing in yourself.

Nicole:

[exhale]

Kalilah:

Because you're going to have to do it with fear.

Nicole:

Yes.

Kalilah:

And I think also being confident with being okay with failure. And that's something I'm learning now later in the business with, like, don't be afraid to fail. Like, it's not a bad thing. You know, I think we associate failure and you feel like, if you failed, you've just done a terrible thing. But I think if you failed, you actually did a great thing.

Nicole:

That's so good.

Kalilah:

Because we know that that failure is going to impact you to move forward. And I think that you have to be okay with the failure with the fear of failing. And those are the things that will give you the confidence to be like, Look, you know, if this thing happens, it's alright, you know, like, you're not going to and my therapist, I'm a big advocate for therapy.

Nicole:

Yes, we are. We love therapists!

Kalilah:

Ya know, my therapist has said, you know, she's like, you're now doing it from experience. So even if you fail, you're not going to land on the first floor. You may just land on the sixth. So if you're all in from the 10, you're not going to go all the way back down to zero and also feeling like, you know, I think the confidence I have is knowing that if I fail I can pick myself back up.

Nicole:

That's so good. So there are two key points here that I definitely want to call out. The first one is failure is an event, not a person, right? So this is something that I think we always are trying to distinguish for ourselves, we feel like if we fail, it is everything. We wrapped up so much validation and our worth in our numbers, our stats.

Kalilah:

Our business!

Nicole:

Our likes, our you know, all of that, everything. Instead of understanding that look, any failure that occurs is an isolated occurrence. It doesn't do anything about our worth.

Kalilah:

Right, I started to think like, You're horrible. You're failing. I was like, No. And I was like, no, yeah. And also you're learning, you know, I had to really tell myself, like, I am just learning how to be a business owner. Like always, parents didn't do this. They didn't have a million dollars in their bank account, you know, so I had to tell myself, like, don't think that this is something new to you and to everybody else, the numbers in your account is new.

Nicole:

It's new!

Kalilah:

It seems appetizing to everyone. So you know, I'm just learning that and giving myself at least a little bit of grace.

Nicole:

Yes, grant yourself some grace. And I think that one of the things that is a great call out here is that it's always going to be new. So a lot of us feel like there's some magic milestone or point where suddenly we're going to know everything or have it figured out or more awareness. But listen, I want to tell you all that while I'm very excited for it to happen, I have never been a billionaire before, but I'm sure I will figure it out.

I receive that I will make it work when the time comes. However, when that moment arrives, you better believe I'm gonna be like, Wow, this is new. You're gonna have a billion dollars in the bank and literally be like, am I gonna keep it? Is it okay? Will it be enough? There was a comment that someone dropped in my DMs yesterday when I posted about Steve Harvey, he had a

situation with his accountant where his accountant passed and hadn't filed his taxes for seven years.

Kalilah:
Wow.

Nicole:

To the tune of \$22 million in back taxes, fees, whatever else and when he found out I mean, he you don't have a choice. You just got to pay those taxes or go to jail. You know what I mean? These are the options and so, of course he's you know, I'm gonna pay these taxes. Well, fast forward the person in my DMs, what they took away from that message was, oh, must be nice to be so wealthy that you don't even worry about 22 million. Okay, so I said to her, first of all, I was like, I hear you on that perspective and that's what it looks like when you don't have the 22 million dollars.

Kalilah:

But no one even wants to give away anything, especially with the fees and things you could have avoided. \$22 mil could have been 22,000. But who knows?

Nicole:

And also when you work as an entrepreneur, look, Steve Harvey did not wake up with 22 million in the bank. He did not wake up. He started about a math into some he feels it. Yeah, every dollar that goes out still. So I imagine that even as a billionaire, you know, you lose 100 million on something you feel that 100 million. Sure, you know, and so it's, um, you know, I'm not trying to do the boohoo, you know, privilege problems. Obviously, it's a lot less of an impact that when you lose \$100, and you can't pay a light bill, like, make no mistake, we both grew up with nothing. Children of immigrants, we understand that. But it doesn't change the fact that it doesn't matter how hard you work or how much you attain, you will be fearful.

Kalilah:

It's still a hit. You will feel that, yeah.

Nicole:

You will still have a connection to it. And that's why you can't be afraid to start, right. I think that so many of us think we're not going to weather that storm when something negative happens that we're just like, I'm just gonna avoid it altogether.

Kalilah:

I just had a girlfriend. Um, it's so ironic. And so full circle right now. And I just told someone in my DMs, I'm happy, I was able to see this moment, because I didn't know that this moment could be here, you know, and I always thought about giving up.

Nicole:

I think about giving up every day, I thought about giving up this morning. I was like, listen, I was like, do I want to do LA traffic? Why? How bad do I need a podcast? You know, but I'm also like my friends, so I'm coming through.

Kalilah:

My girlfriend, she you know, she said to me recently on the phone, she's like, I'm happy you didn't listen to me. Because she was like, you know, I was one of the naysayers and not that she didn't believe in me, but she was just like, are you really gonna leave your job? Is this really what you're gonna do? And she's like, look at where you are. Now she's like, imagine if you didn't take that jump. And if you and now she's contemplating leaving her full time job, she's worked out for 15 years, you know, thinking about and she's looking at me for advice and trying to figure out how do I get past the fear? And that was the thing. I've always like listened to my gut. I've always listened to like, you know, just knowing that there was I've always felt like, there was this thing pulling at me where I'm like, There's bigger, there's something that I should be going towards. And I was just like, where I'm at is stifling me.

Nicole:

Sure.

Kalilah:

And I was just like, it just doesn't feel right.

Nicole:

Where were you? What were you doing before?

Kalilah:

I was an architect and designer for a major retail company. I loved it, it felt like oh, my gosh, I'm working. I'm doing six figures. And it felt like, you know, this was the stability that I needed.

Nicole:

Well, that's what we think it is. That's what we think, but there's no such thing as stability.

Kalilah:

None.

Nicole:

In entrepreneurship or your nine to five.

Kalilah:

None. And you know, I just didn't feel complete. And I still even though I made money, I had student loans. I was a single mom, I was still trying to make ends meet. And I was just like, this can't be it. Sure. So I'm like, I just have to rely on what I know. And what this thing that's pulling,

you know, pulling me towards it. And I'm like, I have to just try. And you know, and I always tell people, I'm like, start even if it's not perfect.

Nicole:

Yes start messy.

Kalilah:

Yeah, like start messy. You gotta you know, make something out of the mess and make the message. And you know, I encourage everyone all the time, because you don't know the amazingness that's around the corner.

Nicole:

Yes, this is so good. The other thing that I'm pulling out here is we all have our own fear. So it sounds like you know, people will try to lend their fear to you. I know, I don't need anyone's extra, you know, so you have people who will literally pick up the phone. It's funny because I have a similar story. Where and I don't think I've ever shared this on the podcast, I only shared it with friends where I was in the natural hair space when I first started, which for those you guys aren't familiar, it's where black women or women of color, curly haired women will cut their hair off if it's been heat treated, or chemically treated, and then document kind of growing it back. That journey of getting back to your natural textures. And so I was doing that online, you know, almost a decade ago now. So I don't even know how that math is. I mean, I'm 25, that does not add up to me, but whatever. So because, you know, that's where I started. And I was part of several communities online and in person, you know, where we'd have these events are great things, and actually, I think used to come to those events and sell at those events and all that. And I will never forget when I started making the shift to opening up my own consulting company, how many people were uncomfortable with it. And I say uncomfortable with it, meaning they vocalize like, you know, why are you doing what you're doing? And there's no way she's making the money she's claiming to make and there's no way that her business is gonna be successful. And she's too boisterous about, you know, earning money and the way to do it and all those things and I just remember, at the time, feeling like garbage. I felt...

Kalilah:

Because they're passing on how they feel about themselves to you! Oh my god. I had the same revelation and I understood it. Even with travel. Like my friends used to be like, Well, why are you going to Africa? Why are you going to these islands? And like, you know, who do you think you are?

Nicole:

Yep.

Kalilah:

And I started to ask myself, who am I? What do I do? Is it too much?

Nicole:

Which is nuts because people are asking you that from home.

Kalilah:

Sitting on their couch, hating the life that they have...

Nicole:

Asking you what you're doing going someplace. It was crazy. And when that happened to me, I mean, it's already fearful enough starting a business. So for anyone who's listening and saying to themselves, I don't know if I should do it because no one supports me. Everyone around me has something to say, please recognize that if someone is speaking out on your destination, but they don't even know how you want to get there. They can't dictate what path and steps you're supposed to take. They've never been there before. They don't know where you're going. So be very careful. Consider the source of the message being shared with you.

Kalilah:

Definitely. And your journey is not their journey.

Nicole:

Listen our journeys aren't even. We're both multimillionaires and yet such different journeys, so I have not a lick of style. I buy off the mannequin. I don't know what I'm doing.

Kalilah:

I like what you're stylist is doing!

Nicole:

Listen, stylist. Okay, that's what I do is I delegate, oh, when I don't know how to do it. Business tip, little slide, the little tips in here that were just sliding in there. But it's true. And I saw, you know, wrapping up that previous story just like you, maybe three to five years in, I had one person in particular who fixed their face to and this is me using my southern Sass right now fix their face to pick up their phone to call me and say your business is going to fail. You're talking about money too much. I have more followers than you. How dare you think you make that much money? Like none of this is true. I know you're a fraud, fixe face to pick up the phone and say these words to me. I'm not kidding. When I say I was in tears. I was in tears afterwards because I thought this person was my friend. And five years later calls me up and is like, I just want to let you know, that was my own stuff. I'm branching into entrepreneurship now. I had a scarcity mindset versus an abundance mindset. I've learned what those things mean now, and I'm calling to apologize.

Kalilah:

But what's sad about that is just the fact that they don't know how much they could have broken your spirit.

Nicole:
Broken my spirit.

Kalilah:
That's how I felt with my friend. I'm like, it's great that you're realizing this now, I was like, but you literally was passing on so much fear and doubt for me where I'm like, should I not do this? Does this not make sense?

Nicole:
You're echoing the worst fears that I had in my mind. So I mean, for those you guys were listening on both sides, you know, there's nothing wrong with supporting your friend, but there's certain ways to do it. You know, if you have concerns, ask them questions about their plan. Say, so what's your strategy for this? Or maybe you want to look into this? All those things are far more valuable than sitting there saying that's not going to work. Why would you do that? Are you fearful? Don't echo the worst parts of them uplift the best parts of them. We all have an opportunity to dictate how we want to show up in someone's life. You don't want to be a villain in their story because make no mistake I got a book deal now. Okay, so understand that between the book deal and the podcast Some of y'all who are listening right now know very well who you're going to be in that story. The person who made that whole situation, she knows she's this person. Yeah, it does not feel good to be this person and have to listen to this story. You don't want to be you know, you don't want to be that. So, so so good.

Now, the next thing I want to touch on here, which I think is pretty big is so we've both crossed certain milestones. I remember how hard it was to get to that first million dollars. I remember how hard it was to get to that second and third million dollars and so on and so forth. Eight figures, hard. You know I don't even know what nine figures is like yet, but when I do I imagine it's gonna be like blood sweat and tears you know? All that being said, did you ever hit a financial milestone where you suddenly were like, I am good, I am comfortable, there is ease, I have no worries, I can do and buy and show up any way I want to and it'll be totally fine.

Kalilah:
No, I'm scared every single day. No, no, no. Let me get some more in the bank. Also I think the biggest thing especially you being more in the financial space, I come from a design world. I just know colors and pretty things. I don't know dollar signs and coins. Okay!

Nicole:
Well what did you do then? Because so many people say well I don't know that stuff so I can't start?

Kalilah:
I have to learn it and I also give myself every day I'm like start over, budget again. Try again, you know go back to it, you know and get resources. Get help. There's people that you can ask.

Friends who you know are trustworthy people who are like, I just want to help someone budget their money and I want to support you, you know. Find those good people, those good groups, those good business, you know, resources that can really support you. So I mean, I remember when my business made the first \$1 million dollars. I remember you know, not too long ago and it was actually my house anniversary yesterday.

Nicole:

Omgsh, are you serious?

Kalilah:

One year I closed on my house.

Nicole:

That is such a big deal!

Kalilah:

I know!

Nicole:

You are going to make me cry. I'm not going to make it through this podcast without crying.

Kalilah:

One year and I did a whole little YouTube. I was trying to upload it now so I can show it to you. Like I'm watching the video, and I even put like my old space and BABY.

Nicole:

Let's get real right now. So let me explain, friends, so you can understand why I'm having this moment. One of the things, I am really trying not to get too choked up and cry about this because one of the first things you said to me, when we met, was how important it was for you to have a safe home for you and your son. And this is so meaningful to me because growing up as a first generation, I remember sleeping on a couch while I was 12. You know, in a one bedroom apartment and just not having enough. And you know, I've been to Ghana, I lived in and went to school in Ghana for over a year, you know, so I know what it's like to truly have nothing. And I also recognize what it means to have a house. My goal growing up was I want a house with stairs inside. That was the goal, because I couldn't imagine people living on two levels, you know, and when you came to me and you said look like I'm working hard day in and day out, but I'm hustling because it's about me having a home that is safe for my son. I don't want gunshots coming through the window. I don't want to worry about dealers outside, I want to make sure that everything is good and great. The idea that we are now just five years later, first of all, look at God. Wow. Just five years later, that we are sitting here celebrating the one year because I also remember the fear going into signing...

Kalilah:

And I've been paying my mortgage on time, in full. Okay. And early!

Nicole:

And it's yours and you did it. Do you love your home?

Kalilah:

Love, love!

Nicole:

Without compromise.

Kalilah:

Love!

Nicole:

Now granted, y'all don't know how many houses she sent me. And I was like, not this one.

Kalilah:

Try again. I would demo this, she's like, then you just need to build a whole new house.

Nicole:

If we're moving walls, you need a different house. Like yes, but congratulations.

Kalilah:

I am saying I can't believe like, it's been one year since I signed. And the fact is, I went into that as a single mom, my sole income, entrepreneurship, you know, pay stubs, like it was the fact that I was able to and I was watching my video kind of choked up because and I'm happy I like documented it because literally, you know. I wanted to only stay in the space that I was in for one year. And I remember Nicole said, hold on, don't do it. And I was like, maybe I could rent a space, go to a condo, do this. And she's like, stay put, stick it out. And I remember the last couple of months, we had a rodent infestation. It was uh, the lights went out. It was just like, I was like, girl, get out of there. And I just was like, All right, let me hold on, you know, and that's where again, the fear, and you have to just hold on through a storm, you just don't and you know, and be patient. And that's what I did. And I like love my house. And it's been one year and I'm like, it's just been, it was a grateful experience. Great process. And it was smooth.

Nicole:

You're so deserving. I mean, and I think this is something that calls out a really big thing that I think, you know, we could probably wrap up on this, you know, is that life and business and everything. It's all hard. Friends, it's hard. The question is, what hard do you want to choose? Do you want to choose the hard of staying in your nine to five every day? And determining whether or not that's right for you? Do you want to choose the hard of staying in the difficult home that you know is rodent infested? And difficult, but you know that there's a means to an end? So that

hard is legitimate and fruitful and worthy? It's a suffering that makes sense, you know, for a short amount of time? Or do you want to choose the hard of trying?

Kalilah:
Right.

Nicole:
You know, of leaning in? And on that note Kalilah, is there a hard that you think that you're waiting to try or that you're a little nervous about that maybe we can speak into existence and then come back a year later and talk about how we've done. What big dream is on your heart?

Kalilah:
Right now I'm ready to buy more homes. I'm ready to expand my business the way, I'm ready to move out of the CEO seat. Or like be the CEO that is not the CEO and COO and the marketing person.

Nicole:
Yes.

Kalilah:
That part of, so maybe I'll still be a CEO and a driver, but I just don't want to, you know, be taken on the whole plane. Oh, so I think that is that's the biggest thing right now is just being able to transition my business that way and be comfortable with, you know, all the pieces the next step, the next step of me and being able to, you know, explore that and being okay with it.

Nicole:
I love it. So it sounds like you want to choose the hard of giving up a little bit of the reins, so that you can use your talents and your gifts in other ways.

Kalilah:
Yeah, I'm ready!

Nicole:
Look, I'm excited for you. But either way, it's a new type of hard and I really hope that everyone who is listening today and spending this time with us understands that everything in front of you is hard. So let's just be intentional about the gift to choose which one we're going to take. And, and I hope this also answers your question, Sharon, and this expanded q&a that we had here today with Kalilah, you know about it being difficult every single day and knowing that it's still worthy work. And I'm so so grateful that we had this time together. Kalilah, gosh, we're gonna get lunch after this. I can talk to you for days. But where can people find out more about your work and they grab your shirts? Everyone you need one of these. Where can they get your stuff and learn more about you?

Kalilah:

We are on Messinabottle.com. You can visit us on Instagram, YouTube, all that good stuff.

Nicole:

I love it. And y'all, she's been in Target. She's been in stores. She's been in your favorite movies. Her celebrities wear her, I think wasn't it Serena Williams. She was wearing your stuff.

Kalilah:

Go get some mess.

Nicole:

It's a good mess. We're all a mess. So thank you so much for being here. You mean the world to me and I love you so much. Y'all keep listening. We have so many good things, go back, take notes. This was a good one. And I'll chat with you next week.