

# Transcript

Krystal Hobbs 0:04

Welcome to Beyond the Tools, the podcast that helps contractors attract more leads, grow their business, and finally get off the tools. In each episode, you'll discover marketing tactics that work. You'll get actionable insights from other successful contractors, and connect with experts to help you grow. I'm your host, Krystal Hobbs, owner of a social media agency that helps contractors attract and convert more leads. Get ready to take your business to the next level so you can finally enjoy the fruits of your hard labor. Ready, let's go!

Hey, contractors, welcome back to Beyond the Tools. I'm your host, Krystal Hobbs, and today, I couldn't be more excited to bring to you our guest. Today's guest is Tony Fraser-Jones of Profitable Tradie. He's based in New Zealand. And luckily, despite all timezone differences, we were able to hop on a call. And I was so thrilled to get Tony's insights because he's worked with literally hundreds of businesses over 876 businesses in the trades. And he specializes in helping business owners improve their bottom lines and their work-life balance. Tony has dedicated his life to providing clarity to business owners who have mastered their trade but struggled to conquer the day-to-day difficulties of running a business. And in today's episode, we really talk about what the winners do that is different from everybody else. So if you want to be one of the most successful companies in the trades, this is the episode for you. Let's head on over to Tony.

Krystal Hobbs 2:04

I am so thrilled to welcome today's guest, Tony Fraser-Jones of Profitable Tradie. Welcome to the show, Tony.

Tony Fraser-Jones 2:12

Hey, Krystal, how are you doing? awesome to be here. Looking forward to hanging out and shooting the breeze?

Krystal Hobbs 2:18

Absolutely. So I'm sure a lot of our listeners have probably heard a little bit about you before. But just in case, do you want to tell us a little bit about how Profitable Tradie started and where your guys are at today?

Tony Fraser-Jones 2:33

Sure. So Profitable Tradie is a business coaching company that helps plumbers, electricians, and painters, tilers, all the sub subcontract or service businesses help make more money. That's what we call Profitable Tradie, and also make business easy to run, putting in good systems and just make life and business a whole lot more fun. So really passionate about that. And we've been doing this for about 12 years, I think. Actually, I got into this, I used to buy and sell houses and renovate houses. And I had a bunch of traders and contractors that we were working with. And I think it was in the GFC. Just before the end of the GFC, which is like 2008 and 2009, that business wasn't going so well because you couldn't sell any houses. And so I remember going to a business coaching seminar, trying to figure out what I was going to do with my business. And I said to myself that I'd like to do that. So I did and I've been working with contractors and tradies the whole time. So that's sort of where I kicked off. And it's sort of gone from there, which is kind of cool. So we started in little old New Zealand, which is at the bottom of the world. And now we work in New Zealand, Australia, and right across the US and Canada as well — which is just super cool.

Krystal Hobbs 3:55

Amazing. You've got that global thing going for you.

Tony Fraser-Jones 3:59

So pretty exciting, isn't it with the technology and stuff? The fact that we can have a chat today is super good.

Krystal Hobbs 4:06

Absolutely. So, Tony, I know you've worked with something like 876 businesses, so I get that right.

Tony Fraser-Jones 4:14

Look, I've honestly lost count. But it's 1000s.

Krystal Hobbs 4:19

So you've really seen all sorts of different stages of businesses and what's going on in their world? What have you seen as being in common amongst the most successful companies that you've worked with?

Tony Fraser-Jones 4:36

It's a big question. And there are probably two, two levels to it. So I think the most successful people do some stuff that's kind of not on the surface, but they do some pretty common stuff. Like they're great at understanding their financial numbers. They're

across their profitability. They really understand Their pricing, they're really proactive with the team. So they put a lot of effort into growing, nurturing, training, their team building, great culture, all that sort of stuff, which is, which is massive, and they also excellent at putting systems and processes and to their businesses. So, McDonald's has a bunch of systems 16-year-olds can run, and they can't even tidy their room up. So they, they sort of try and do that sort of thing, which is, which is getting the business out of their head, get it on paper, get some good checklists, processes, scripts, templates. And they use technology really well as well. So they automate stuff, which is amazing in the world we live in now you can automate the whole process, right from the inquiry through to the putting the materials through to the merchant through to invoicing and collection, you can streamline the whole process. So definitely really strong at that.

And I think to other things that they do so good at leadership to other things they do really well, which I think a lot don't, are they understand that sales and marketing and getting new leads, and being excellent at actually converting leads is really critical. And I think so they really invest in marketing and their sales ability.

And that's important because that often, you get kicked around with clients wanting to shop around on price, and you feel like you can't sort of, you've got to just take what they what they're offering. But people who really market well and are good at sales realize that they've got some power and choice around who they work with. And so they tend to share the bottom feeder clients, the cheaper nasty ones. And they're always working with better clients. So I think that's on a visible level, but this, there's something underneath it, because that seems obvious to do that stuff. But a lot of people actually can't do it. And that's really because of what's going on, probably between their ears. And I don't mean that like nothing is going on, a lot is going on. But actually, those successful people, see the world in a different way. And that allows them to take the action that they need to take. And I think that's really the real key to success is — I talked about mindset, which sounds a bit woolly and fluffy. It's just the way you see the world. And in the end the winners. They see it really differently. And then the people who who are the not winners, who struggle, the people who fight I find who are constantly cash poor, that time pour the having team hassles all the time that can't find good people, they can't get away on vacation or take a break, because they're under the pump all the time. And that's probably the difference. I think that level.

Krystal Hobbs 7:57

So when you start to work with a client that is in that space where business feels really heard, they're overwhelmed. How do you work with them through that?

Tony Fraser-Jones 8:11

I think the key thing is that people need a plan. And that sounds really sort of simple. And it is but most people don't have it. And most stuff in business is actually pretty simple. It's just not always easy to do. So when people join our now we have run a coaching program called the Million Dollar Tradie. And the aim is to take people to a million dollars net profit, which we have people do, which is cool. Not everyone's going to do that. But the people can do that. And it's possible, for sure. For the first six weeks, we actually map out a plan for what they need to work on. And typically, that is the same for everyone in the first six weeks, because pretty much everyone has the same issues. And there are some foundations for success. And the two areas we really focus on our time. So how to be more effective with using your time and make better choices about using your time. So that's one thing.

And the other thing is numbers. So actually starting to understand the profitability of your business. So your gross margins, where your revenues, it actually costing jobs, that's a massive thing to do if you can cost your jobs, figure out what your profitability is, all of a sudden, you'd be like, flipping here like I'm not making any money off for this builder and that builder, and this person, we're just not making money, right? And so you make changes. And you may not be making money for all sorts of reasons, maybe your pricing is not where it needs to be. Or maybe you're just really inefficient, lots of trips to the site. Lots of rework, all sorts of stuff. So having a plan is really important. But underneath that, we start to challenge people in the way they look at the world. And we talk about a concept called above and below the line, and it's really simple and I think probably just going through it will be helpful. So you imagine this just a line across the middle of the paid and above the line. That's where people take ownership of their outcomes, they are responsible for the results they get. So, that's super important, and they're accountable. So what that means is anything that's going on in their business and their life, they take ownership of it effectively. And if you think about the little acronym, ownership, accountability, and responsibility, or so you basically got what you're going to steer your ship with. And then below the line is where people blame other people. They make excuses. And they operate in denial. I love the dog, by the way. It's awesome. What's the dog's name?

Krystal Hobbs 10:49

My dog is named Buddy.

Tony Fraser-Jones 10:51

I love Buddy. So they operate below the line. So blame, they blame other people for

their problems. They make excuses and they operate in denial. So denial, to the cheesy dad joke is not a river in Egypt, it's a real problem. And so, what happens when people operate below the line, they like the victim, they feel like business is rough. They feel that the economy's fault. Or there's no good stuff out, no good tradespeople or technicians to employ. It's difficult or a big below the line. Mine's is I don't have time. If you're listening, and you own a business, I understand how you can feel like that, because I feel like that too. And I'm sure you do Krystal as well. But when you think about that comment, it's kind of crazy, because you don't have time as what you've got less than 24 hours a day is like someone flagged some of your time, like did God give you fewer hours in the day than everyone else? I don't know, like, you look special, but I don't think you're that special. And so that that sets up, Well, basically what we want people to do is rather than blame people for their problems, they take responsibility. And if you blame people, you feel like a victim, you feel overwhelmed, you feel burnt out anxious, and stressed, it's not a nice place to feel. And I mean, if you're listening, you probably felt like that. And I'm sure you will have what it means as you basically give up in a way it's like, well, there's nothing I can do about it. That's the key thing. There's nothing I can do about it. So I'll just carry on and see what happens. And if it comes, right, well, that's luck. If it doesn't, well, whatever. But if you operate above the line, you're actually like, well, I'm going to I can control us to some extent. And so a great example might be, look, it's hard to find good team members. And, it is often hard to find quality tradespeople that like hen's teeth are pretty scarce at times. So if you have a below-the-line attitude, you'll be like, "Well, I've advertised and there's no one out there. And it's too hard. And, all the people apply already." It's like I gotta give up, I'll stay the same, which is never staying the same, you kind of getting worse if you'd stay in the same because things change. But if you're operating above the line, you'll be like, right, well, I've advertised for two months and haven't found anyone, that's frustrating, what can I do differently? And then you might be like, well, actually, why don't I look at my employment ad? Perhaps I need to offer some different benefits? Why don't I look at what I'm doing to promote my hiring brand? What am I doing to be an employer of choice? What sort of stuff am I putting on my socials and on my web page that makes us look like an epic place to work? What am I doing to build a culture of my business so that when my apprentices go to take or TAFE or where they go to study to do some courses, they talk to their friends about how amazing it is here. And that's a completely different approach. And it feels different too, right? You feel like you have got the opportunity to make a change to be in control of things. And you can because there's always something you can control. And that's what the winners do. They're looking at

what they can control, and what they can influence, even if it's only 30%. Because they'll make a bit of a change, and then they will find someone to hire, and their business gets a little bit better, and they get a bit more confidence. And they know that they can make things happen. So they keep trying and they keep building and their confidence grows. Whereas the ones who operate below the line, get into that vicious circle of blame, excuses, and denial, which is basically the pathway to burnout. So I think that's a big difference that I see.

Krystal Hobbs 14:46

That's interesting, Tony, I feel like even you saying that in my experience and correct me if I'm wrong, you need a certain level of self-awareness to realize if you are living more below the line? Have you seen that as well? Do you find that some of your clients aren't aware that they're in that mindset?

Tony Fraser-Jones 15:11

100%. And that's a key part of us, as a coach and as a guide, through our programs we're trying to help people sort of becoming aware of actually, I have no I can stand upside myself and look at what's going on, see that I can actually make some changes. It sounds a bit woo-woo. But it's like actually a pretty precious gift that you can get, once you get that insight. So awareness is huge. And I, anyone who's listening, you've got to be really careful about the stories you tell yourself, about your business. And this is quite deep, it's not about getting out on site and smashing out a job. Most people are great. And if you're listening to a podcast like this, you're going to be one of the people who are kind of motivated, because otherwise, you wouldn't be listening to this, you'd be watching Netflix or on your phone or at the pub chillaxing, whatever. So self-awareness is massive. When you find yourself making excuses, or blaming other people are complaining, you're below the line. And you need to step back and say, Hey, actually, how can I make a change? Or what can I actually control here? And I think that is a great question, Krystal. Like, that's probably the actual key to success underneath all of this is when you're actually able to be self-aware and conscious of what you're doing, and how that's creating the results that you're getting. So you've been able to stand back is absolutely critical.

Krystal Hobbs 16:39

So let's say, I'm a business owner and listening to this, I recognize that, Okay, I'm complaining, I'm feeling overwhelmed, all of these things, what are some practical things that they can do to change or to start living more above the line?

Tony Fraser-Jones 17:03

I think learning is a critical one. So actually committing to learning. So listening to podcasts is a great way to do that. These audiobooks are another epic way of learning and getting a fresh perspective. I drive around with audiobooks on all the time, and they're easy, you can use them in your truck, your UD van, or whatever, just get an audible subscription. And there are some great books on business, productivity, and all that sort of stuff, which will help, I think maybe joining an association, maybe it's a Master Plumbers Association, or whatever it is something like that. Maybe getting some coaching, there are lots of people who can help you with that as well, is important, your attitude to time as well is really important. So what you want to do is come with someone who makes choices about what you do. And what I mean by that is, I actually had someone tell me the story once about time, if you say you don't have time to do something, really what you're saying is, that's not a priority. So, let's say I got four kids, which keeps us pretty busy. Let's say one of our children was in a car accident. And someone rang up and said, Hey, like Jackson hospital, he's really crook, really sick. Would I say, I don't have time to go and see him? Well, of course not. I would drop all the jobs I have to do, I put the tools down, or jump in my van, and I'd go straight to the hospital because it's a priority. And so this is the thing with our businesses. And this is another thing that the winners do is that they focus not just on doing the jobs and the projects, they focus on building their business as a project. So a subtle difference. If someone's going to ring up, and maybe it's a plumbing business, and the hot water cylinder is you get a call about hot water cylinder that's burst and needs replacing, well, let's say you're the owner of the business, and maybe you got four or five people in your business, you still do some work out in the field, you take that call, and all the rest of your team are busy. And you're like, "Okay, I can go do that job. Maybe I'll make a couple of grand." But let's say you also had for that afternoon plan to visit three building contractors who could potentially give you 500,000 a million dollars worth of work over the next year or two. But you kind of push that one to the side just to go and do this urgent job.

Well, if you say I don't have time to work on marketing and building those relationships, that's not actually true. What you're actually saying is, it's a priority for me just to go and fix this thing, and I'll get a couple of grand now. And so you've got to back that up and say, "Well, actually, it's a priority; it's not a priority for me to go and visit these building contractors." If you say that to yourself, you will react, "That's crazy. That's insane. Of course, it's a priority, this other thing is not a priority." And that's how you start to make

some choices about what you're doing. Because when you feel you don't have a choice, that makes you feel pretty rubbish and burn. And that probably leads to the next thing I think the winners are really good at being assertive. So that doesn't mean they are hard out, busting heads. They are good at saying no, or not now. And that means that they're able to kind of emotionally push back against the demands from the clients particularly. I know, it's really tough. When you're running a business, you got clients ringing up screaming at your building contractors, building managers, and real estate people, and I feel like I should help them all. And it's great customer service, I should be there for them. And don't get me wrong, you should provide great service. I mean, that's important. Obviously, you won't have a good business if you don't do that. But if you continually let everyone else, kind of pull the strings of your life and your business, that's not what the winners do, because it leaves no time to actually work on improving your business and growing your business and creating a lifestyle and building your team and systems and structure. And it does take some effort to do that. But that's what the winners do. They're able to say, "No, I can't do that right now." Or, "Hey, look, man, we're flat out the next couple of days, but we can get there on Monday night, would that work for you?" So I think that's a huge thing I've seen people can learn that. But it can take a bit of effort.

Krystal Hobbs 21:33

And that makes sense. I mean, especially anybody in the trades, a lot of it is urgency, right? So there's always going to be things coming up. But being able to look at something and say, of course, there are these urgent things, but like what's really important in terms of long term?

Tony Fraser-Jones 21:52

And like, this is not something I invented, that's for sure. Stephen Covey is like the godfather of this stuff. And if you haven't read a book called Seven Habits of Highly Effective People, I highly recommend you read it. Unfortunately, he's dead just now. But the wisdom that he had lived on. And that's exceptionally good. I can't read what the chapter is. But there's that quadrant of urgent versus not important. If you can read that, it'll be amazing. Because it helps you understand that sometimes the urgent stuff if that's all you ever do, that's all you'll ever end up doing. You don't take some time to build your business, work on your systems. And I know this is tricky to do. But this is what the winners do because they're out there kind of emotionally able to look at life in a long-term way. And not just in a short term. What do I need to do to get this project finished way? And that's tricky for tradespeople right like that.

Krystal Hobbs 22:46

I mean, a lot of them start in the trades, because they're good at the thing. They're good at the technical, fixing the pipes, installing the new AC, whatever that is. How have you seen, in your experience working with these types of clients, like, how they kind of evolve their mindset to be less of the technician and more of the CEO kind of thing?

Tony Fraser-Jones 23:16

Huge question. Look, it is a process that takes some time for a lot of people in your right. It's often about identity, actually. So this is quite deep. And if you're listening, you might be thinking about identity, what's that got to do with fixing our business? Well turns out it's kind of everything. So what I mean by identity is how you view your place in the world and how you get significance as a person. So what tends to happen is, as tradespeople, we are good at getting jobs done with our hands, and making people happy because we solve their problems, or we build their house or landscape, their gardens, or whatever. And so we get a lot of significance from doing that. And, when there's a problem in our business, even if we've got five people, 10 people, 15 people if something pops up, and we need more hands to get work done, we often find ourselves jumping in there and doing it because we'll get it done, and it feels good. And I feel I'm making progress. I feel significant. And I get a charge off that like you probably. And that's all good. But if you always fill in the gaps with your own sort of sweat equity, then it's really hard for your business to grow. Because you're not actually focusing on the growth part of your business. I think you have to start to look at where you get your significance and meaning from as a person in a different way. It's sort of a different level. It's more like Well, hey, how can I grow a team of people that can help our clients get the results they want? How can I inspire my team and create an environment where they all can grow as people and they can provide great results for our clients. So, that's quite significant work.

Krystal Hobbs 25:02

I think that's a really important point too because I know a lot of business owners that I talk to about some of their long-term goals. It's either like, I want to leave a legacy, or I want generational wealth, or I want to provide a livelihood for other people, and you can't do any of those things if you're always the one that's jumping in to do things.

Tony Fraser-Jones 25:28

It's making that sort of jump from being a doer to almost an enabler. So your job as the CEO of a business, maybe you've got 15, 20, 50, 100 employees, whatever it is, is to enable them to do the work. In fact, the bigger your business becomes, the more your

job is removed from the day-to-day, and it's about actually creating the environment for other people to succeed. And it's, it's incredibly rewarding when you get there. And a great thing to do, because most people don't actually realize that that's even a thing that can happen. And so that's why it's important to hang out with some people who are maybe a bit further down the road than you are and learn from them. And talk to them about their experience. And the fact that, hey, this is amazing, like, I've got this business that makes money that runs well, I can actually take some vacations, I can go away for six weeks or eight weeks, and things will carry on. And I've got these great people that I've brought up, and I'm actually creating income jobs for them. And the satisfaction you get as a person is an important thing as well.

Krystal Hobbs 26:38

Absolutely. I love that. So obviously, there's a lot here that we've talked about in terms of the way you should think, as an entrepreneur, how you view the world, making sure you're living above the line, and even practical things about like what you do with your time and delegating to your team, I guess, is there anything else? Or any last words of wisdom to anybody listening? Who is in true theme, with our show, trying to get beyond the tools and grow their business? Is there anything you'd like to share as well?

Tony Fraser-Jones 27:15

Yes, there is one. One last thing, which I think is incredibly powerful. Even when your business is working really well, those people typically are always looking at what they can do next, which is part of what makes them successful. And so that kind of stress about what's next kind of never really goes away. Unless you do one thing, which is super important, it's really important to look back at how far you've come. And this is important for your own mental health as well. And something I've had to learn because I was, I was terrible at this, you have to learn to be grateful. And what I mean by that is, even if you look back, it's like if you're climbing up a mountain, if you get if it's a two-day hike, and you get the first day, you've got to camp at the first day, which is halfway new, like, it's been hard. And it's brutal, and you look up and you're like, all the rest of it is even more brutal, right? So if, two people are doing this, let's say a couple of friends are making this hike. And they get to the first day. And one of the friends looks back, and it's like, wow, we've come a long way. This is awesome. Look at the view, like we've done well, today, that person's like feeling pretty satisfied, they feel like they can control their destiny and that they're on the front foot, the other person looks up the hill, and they're like leptonic, like, that's, that's killer, like, I'm exhausted today, I don't know how I'm going to do that. And that sets their frame of reference, like they, they're stressed out.

So I think if you're listening, and all of this sounds a bit much, and maybe it has, there's like, Just pat yourself on the back for what you've done so far in your business. And then every week, look at what you've done. And it might be a small thing, it might be a call you've made or someone you followed up ahead and paid your money, whatever it is, pat yourself on the back because as a business owner, no one else is going to do that. And it's important that we do that because it really helps us with the process of actually growing as well.

Krystal Hobbs 29:07

I love that. And I think it's so true of all humans, but especially if you're a business owner, that you're always looking to where you can go and not thinking about like you said, everything that you've done to get to where you are. So I love that I think that's beautiful. Amazing. So, Tony, I know our listeners are going to want to connect with you and learn more about Profitable Tradie. What's the best way for them to do that?

Tony Fraser-Jones 29:35

We've got a book which might be really helpful for people it's called the Profitable Tradie and it goes through seven ways to earn more while working a lot less and those really practical ways which are helpful. So love it if you want to grab a copy, we've got a free copy organized, there'll be a link in the session notes. I think we're still you just pop it in there. So grabbing a copy of this is probably a great way to connect as well. And, hopefully, you'll find that super helpful.

Krystal Hobbs 30:02

Well, yes, we will absolutely put that in the show notes as well as some links to Profitable Tradie. And you guys have a podcast as well, right?

Tony Fraser-Jones 30:11

We do. So that's a lot of fun. So maybe we can put a link to that in the notes as well for sure.

Krystal Hobbs 30:19

Absolutely. Well, thank you, Tony. This has been amazing as I expect it would be and I know our listeners are going to love this. So really appreciate you coming on here.

Tony Fraser-Jones 30:31

It's been fun. Loved it!

Krystal Hobbs 30:37

Thank you so much for listening to this episode of Beyond the Tools. If you liked what

you heard, please subscribe, rate, and review wherever you get your podcast. I'd love it if you could also share this episode with a fellow contractor who is ready to get off the tools and grow their business. And if you want more leads, sign up for our email list at [reflectivemarketing.com](https://reflectivemarketing.com) where we share weekly marketing insights that you can't get anywhere else. I'm Krystal Hobbs and I hope you'll join me on the next episode of Beyond the Tools. See you next time!