



Failing Forward: How to Have the Ultimate Comeback

Based on Nearly Losing It All and Bouncing Back Fiercely

Ellen Rohr and [Nancy Michaels](#)

Ellen: Hi, it's Ellen Rohr, the plumber's wife turned business makeover expert. Welcome to Business Makeover 2014. Here we are. This is our opportunity to make this year our best year yet, our breakout year – 21 experts, 21 days, a chance to crack and break and get rid of those old habits and instill some new thinking, some inspired thinking and new ways of action so that we can make this our quantum leap year, to makeover our lives, to reinvent ourselves.

This interview today is really on topic. Our title is Failing Forward: How to Have the Ultimate Comeback Based on Nearly Losing It All and Bouncing Back Fiercely. Nancy Michaels, that means you. You have the ultimate comeback story. I'm so happy to have you here today.

Nancy: I'm thrilled to be here and I just love the failing forward. I think that you saw me, at one point, falling forward.

Ellen: We have an incredible history. We have been friends for about 100 years. Let me share with the folks who have not met you yet how accomplished you are. Nancy Michaels is the CEO and Founder of Grow Your Business Network, the place where businesses grow up. She's been coined America's number one Fortune 500 consultant. Her client is awesome.

She's been globally recognized as a development coach and author of five books, including *Perfecting Your Pitch* and *Off-The-Wall Marketing*, which I have dog-eared on my shelf right here. She's a speaker and consultant to all sizes of businesses and she has been published in Entrepreneur magazine, US News & World Report, Business Week and Fortune. I love you so much, Miss Nancy. I'm so glad we're here.

I want to share this story of when we first met and I wasn't even there. There's even a term that's not even used that much – solo summit, solopreneurs. We don't use that term very much but it was really the beginning of the Internet being in every home and people realizing that you could work from home, like the world was getting flat and the traditional corporate America was kind of breaking down. Different things were happening in the world of business.

I didn't go, but two people representing the Bare Bones biz team went – Marla and Missy. I called them and I said how's it going at the summit? They said oh the summit's good but you have got to meet Nancy Michaels; she is your new best friend. They set us up. They hooked us up.

Nancy: I know and I'm so grateful they did. It really was one of the best takeaways.

Ellen: We were virtual friends for years and we finally met. Wasn't it when you came and presented at Benjamin Franklin, the punctual plumber? You did a publicity and marketing event for us that is still one of my favorite things ever and I still use some of those tools – how do you keep your team from destroying your company should they get caught in a bad publicity situation or in something where the press gets involved and now your team members are representing you.

Oh my, you've taught me so much over the years about marketing and about publicity, and most importantly you have the ultimate comeback story. Tell me a little bit about what happened to you. I think it was back in 2004?

Nancy: Yes, I guess it started there. After a long-term marriage, at least by Massachusetts standards, just needed a deadline, 16 years from their 15th year cutoff. I became suddenly single and probably should have seen it coming but it was still a shock at the time. I had three young kids. I had just redone the big house, as my son likes to call it.

I had a massive renovation going on just prior to the separation, which probably added to it. I just had an incredible amount of stress going on in my life and didn't even realize how stressed I was until I ended up in the hospital literally not being able to walk off the plane after a speaking engagement in Atlantic City, New Jersey. I knew that I had to get back to Boston. Thankfully a friend picked me up at the airport and took me right to my local ER. I think within 12 hours I was transferred out of there and went to **04:59** Medical Center to the ICU unit where I stayed for three months, two of which I was in a coma.

I had an emergent liver transplant about one week after I got to the hospital. It was a non-compatible blood type organ and I coded twice during the surgery. They found an abscess on my brain two weeks after the surgery, so I had emergency brain surgery when I was in a coma.

Ellen: This is like let's kick you while you're down, sister. You have a failing liver, so let's just add a brain tumor to the mix.

Nancy: Yes, it was a tsunami. Meanwhile I wasn't speaking with my ex-husband. Thank God I changed my health care proxy my parents because it could have been Terri Schiavo revisited story. I did have friends of mine when I left the hospital to change my health care proxy. It was just really a horrible six months.

I was in there for three months and then I went to Spalding rehab, because I had to learn how to do everything all over again – brush my teeth, stand, and walk. I couldn't feed myself. I couldn't get dressed. So, I was there for six weeks and then I got readmitted back to **06:26** for failure to thrive, which is usually a diagnosis they give to premie babies.

Ellen: That's right, like little babies who just don't get bigger or better.

Nancy: I just wasn't getting any better, so I was there another six weeks and then finally was released. I had to move in with my parents, who I like to say I don't know how many of you have spent a weekend with your parents recently. Believe me, I'm totally blessed and lucky that they were there and took such good care of me. I moved in with them basically for six months. I went back to the hospital 10 more times during that six-month period.

Ellen: In the meantime your kids are little. Your kids are only a couple years apart or a year apart. What are their ages?

Nancy: They were 18 months apart. That's another interesting story. This is how life works. I didn't think I could get pregnant. I went to China and adopted my daughter. I don't know if I even told you this. Literally that weekend I went to drop our application off again to go back to China and I found out I was pregnant that week.

Ellen: So, because you didn't want to have an only child and if I've got an adopted daughter from China maybe I could add a sister from China. Was that your thinking?

Nancy: Right.

Ellen: Then you found out you were pregnant and Noah is right in the middle of these two, right?

Nancy: Yes. I obviously slowed that adoption down but I did continue it and we did, so that's why they're all so close together. Be careful what you wish for, I always say, because you just might get it.

Ellen: I remember too when this was happening and you had some speaking engagements, and it was absolutely my pleasure to help you with one of them, but you had friends kind of help you make good on the agreements that you had. You had wonderful support. Brittany was your assistant.

The magic that you sewed prior to getting sick was really evident because a lot of people really supported you when you didn't even know they were there. It was really neat to see people rally around you. I know it must drive you crazy to be at your parents'. My mom would drive me crazy too if I had to do that, but it was a testimony to your character how many people were there waiting for you to thrive again.

Do you remember that moment? What turned the corner for you in your recovery?

Nancy: I do think that the event that you and I attended, which was one that my client Office Depot had, I had worked on for many years prior to this. I think just deciding that I was going to do that when I was really not ready for prime time.

Ellen: It was so great to spend time with you. This was like a big event with thousands of people, and Nancy and her team were responsible for putting the event on, and you were fragile yet you were there. It was so awesome to spend time with you.

I don't think you realized or I realized that that might have been a little much to try to pull off, but having something like that to go to work on, do you think that was part of what helped you climb back from such a devastating health crisis?

Nancy: Yes, I think I just needed to be seen again. Do you know what I mean? Because I felt like a year was just taken away. Of course when I saw the looks on people's faces when they saw me – you know when you have a different perception of someone? I'm wearing a wig because I shaved my head after the brain surgery, and I was probably 25 pounds less than what I am now.

I used to say Weight Watchers would have been a more preferably way to have lost the weight, but unfortunately that wasn't in the cards. I remember literally going to the spa and coming off the elevator and tripping. Do you remember the face plant that I did?

Ellen: Yes, you hit your face.

Nancy: I literally was falling forward, failing forward, but I think probably for me it was what I needed to do to legitimize that I was going to come back.

Ellen: I think what would be of value to folks listening on the phone is – I work with a lot of clients, small business owners who tell me you don't understand, we have to make this work. I'm thinking it doesn't necessarily have to work, not everything is within your control and what you might be doing here is sacrificing your health by getting so wound up about this business. I deal with that a lot. I think some people don't realize that they're marching in the direction of a major health crisis, and sometimes it can be the best thing that happens because it causes them to slow down.

You really got a one, two, three, four punch combo. What led up to that? As you look back on it now, do you see that maybe that was inevitable or that you were headed in that direction? How do you reflect on that moment now prior to getting as sick as you got?

Nancy: I think everything looks so much better from the outside looking in. Do you know what I mean? I was traveling all over the country and doing these seminars. My business was doing very well but I would come home and my kids were like Velcro to me because they hadn't seen me Monday through Thursday. It was all I could do to throw a little laundry in and go to the dry cleaners to get ready for the next week. It just was not a very conducive lifestyle for me at the time.

Ellen: So, in some ways it looked like you were living the dream and there was a lot of success. Like you said, a lot of the things that you wanted had come to you – a great gig with the office supply company and a lot of glamour – and yet it was starting to wear on you.

Nancy: Yes. I don't know that it was even that glamorous. I mean you know full well too doing the traveling. You're very rarely able to enjoy where you are. You're really trying to navigate getting from point A to point B most of the time. I just think it took its toll. Unfortunately, my separation and divorce was very unfriendly, so it was just adding insult to injury to try to keep it all together, to maintain that big house, to continue to work every day and be around for my kids. I'm not surprised that it happened. I think something had to give.

Ellen: Then you were in a coma. We think we don't have enough time, we've got all this stuff and then you're in a coma, so you didn't get it done. I remember Al Gore saying something about his kid getting in a car accident and he said you don't have any time, but all of the sudden now we're at the hospital all day. We had the time to do that. Who would have thought that we could have added that to our lives, but then that becomes this big U-turn, this big change in direction.

When you woke up from a two-month coma, what were you thinking?

Nancy: I knew what happened. I mean I didn't know that I had brain surgery, but I remember the doctors telling me that I needed to have it and an emergent liver transplant and that they were hoping one would become available. That was my big fear. It was almost surreal to even hear those words. It's like are you kidding me? What is that about? What does that even mean? I just couldn't get my head wrapped around it.

I think the hard part for me and one of the worst months was to be trached and be awake. I couldn't ask him questions or talk to anybody about it, and that was by far the most miserable months I think of the whole process.

Ellen: So, they kept you on a tracheotomy for a whole month?

Nancy: I was on it actually for almost three months because they trached me right after the surgery.

Ellen: So, you could think but you couldn't speak. What are the kinds of thoughts were going around in your head at that point?

Nancy: Oh my God, nothing good. The other thing too was my medication was making me – I would literally think that I was seeing things on TV that were going to be happening and I would be trying to warn the nurses so that they could do something.

Ellen: That happened to my niece too. I think I told you that my niece had a heart transplant and the sheer terror of some of the things that were happening to her that she was unable to communicate, that later on when she could share with us it was just so heartbreaking for us that we didn't realize how scary and how much reaction you have to those kinds of medications.

As you make it through that and you start to reclaim your life, did you think you were going to work again? Did you want to?

Nancy: This is how crazy – I guess I've always been more of an A Type overachiever kind of person, but I literally asked for Brittany to come in and give me the names of the CEO's of the pharmaceutical companies for the meds that I was on. I don't know what I thought. Was I going to pitch them on doing some kind of – do you know what I mean?

Ellen: Just knowing you, you were just so creative to think I've got a story for them.

Nancy: Yes, I thought I had found a cure for cancer with the meds that I was on. Fear Factor – the nurses would leave these ridiculous shows on and I would go into these panic attacks thinking I was actually on the show eating the roaches.

Ellen: Another one of our experts on this Business Makeover 2014 program talks about – I don't know if you know Robin Palmer of My Wake Up Call alarm clock. Her expertise is – so the first five minutes of your day and the last five minutes of your day – how to bookend your life. She's done a lot of sleep research and has a deep understanding of how malleable we are coming in and out of alpha state. I'm sure that we don't need those shows on in hospital rooms to completely flip out people, but I suppose we're getting off piece a little bit.

Nancy: And the noises and everything else that's going on, it's really the most un-restful place you could ever be.

Ellen: When you started to come back into yourself and started to reclaim your health and started to thrive again, reclaiming your place in your family with your kids and reclaiming your place at the table as far as business goes, do you have some advice for someone who is trying to bounce back from a serious health situation? Even if it's not advice, do you have any insight from your experience?

Nancy: I think that the best thing that you can do is to take baby steps in terms of thinking about what can you be grateful for right in this moment? At first it was not easy. I was literally almost suicidal, just not able to fathom how I was going to recreate my life and get my kids back. I was in a bitter custody dispute with my ex-husband. It was just a really tough time.

I kept thinking okay what can I be grateful about today? It would start out where I could just lie on the couch and watch mindless television and my mother's here and she's going to make my

meals. I don't have to take care of anybody. I can just be here. Or, I can sleep. I can take a nap if I'm not feeling well.

Then it got bigger and bigger. Do you know what I mean? It was like okay I got to go out and I saw a movie today. I'm grateful for that. Or somebody came and visited, or I finally got on the computer and wrote something on Karen Bridges, which people had set up for me, and I could see what people were writing. It was really baby steps.

Ellen: A lot of folks I know had some real serious bouts with cancer and chemo and then they're coming back. Was it awkward for you to see people? Like you said, when you went to the Office Depot event and you hadn't seen people for a while. Had they moved on? Was it weird to try to take your place back in the conversation?

Nancy: Fortunately, I just have great clients. Literally a friend of mine said I should do a seminar on coma-proof marketing because Office Depot continued to pay my retainer fee while I was in a coma.

Ellen: Like I said before, I think that's such a testimony to what value you provided to your clients that they were willing to support you like that, and your friends and Brittany. The fact that Office Depot paid your retainer is so awesome.

Nancy: It is it's unbelievable.

Ellen: Thank Office Depot for that.

Nancy: Brittany, thank God. What I didn't realize I was doing and I'm so grateful that I did – but I actually had some systems in place that she was very well versed in and trained in. I remember calling her and saying Brittany you've got to clear my schedule and get replacements for as many of the dates as you can because I don't think I'm going to be working for a while.

I just knew that something really serious was going on. I didn't know what. Thankfully she called you, she called another colleague of mine – Doug 20:43– and she filled many of those dates that were on the calendar. I had Xerox as a client then too and they were sponsoring this 24 city tour. It was crazy. It was right in the middle of that.

Ellen: I love hearing that you had systems in place already so that your business was actually coma-proofed. That is a great name for a seminar.

Nancy: That's one thing though that everybody can do. If this happens, you do this.

Ellen: We think at least then if you have systems in place, we could take a day off, we could go to the beach, we could go on vacation but you could actually survive a serious illness if you've got some systems in place and someone could find the binder.

Nancy: And the right people there too is huge, obviously. I just was totally lucky with her and that she knew all the people who ultimately filled in for me too and she reached out.

Ellen: In hindsight, if you could advise someone on the call today who is headed for a life crisis – suppose they haven't got the big kaboom, the illness or the accident yet. What are some signs that you should watch for, and what advice would you give someone to ward off having to have such a big lesson landed in their lap?

Nancy: Fortunately there were things that I had in order. I had some ducks in a row but not all. I was 41 when this happened and I was healthy up until that point. I didn't have any long-term

disability insurance, which I wish that I had had and now I'm ineligible for. Thankfully I did have great medical coverage and Blue Cross Blue Shield might not agree with me, and God knows what might happen with what's going on with healthcare right now but I really would have had to declare bankruptcy. There was no way that I could have ever paid for those medical bills.

I was changing my health care proxy and then I made a joke about it, but those are the things you really want to do ideally before you're in a crisis situation. Having a good accountant or financial planner or an attorney to set up Wills and all of those things – it's really peace of mind. That's what you're buying when you're doing those things. You're protecting whatever you potentially could leave behind.

Ellen: What I'm hearing you say is that it's one thing if someone is really overweight or really has some serious addiction challenges coming on. You can kind of see this chronic illness building, but in your case you were healthy. This was kind of a bizarre virus but an accident could create the situation. I've heard of people being in a car accident or having a traumatic brain injury or something that causes the same kind of life upheaval.

It's interesting that the tips you're giving are very meat and potatoes – get your ducks in a row. You don't know what disaster or lesson that for some reason you're karmically creating here could descend and that these are things that in hindsight would have made the transition earlier or that you're grateful that you did have the foresight to engage.

Nancy: Right. I really do think it's not something I'm not at all morbid and never ever felt my mortality at all until that moment of being that ill. I think that if you get those kinds of things off your plate and taken care of, it really just buys you peace of mind and that's worth a lot in my opinion.

Ellen: If you were going to bounce back – let's take this conversation in this direction now. It could be an illness. It could be an accident that causes your business to have this big chunk of time, this chunk of energy that's now been removed from the business. As you come back to your business and you're trying to build your business back up, maybe it's the result of an economic situation – the big plant in town shut down. I mean sometimes things happen that are going to cause your business to take a big blow.

What are some of the first steps you can take to create a comeback in your business and in your career?

Nancy: I think looking at what your key competencies are. Can you actually target a different market? Can you work virtually or with anyone? Just think about those things. What are people asking for now that they weren't before? We saw a lot of that with the big dotcom bottle, which you referenced. It was right around that time of that solo business summit.

Ellen: That's right. Remember the magazine Fast Company was like a Vogue Magazine September issue? It was that thick and then kaboom, they lost all those advertisers and that magazine itself had to redefine itself in terms of what it was going to represent to the market place. Things will happen that will cause you to say am I relevant anymore now that my company has taken a hit like this?

Did you have someone that you talked to? Did you do a retreat? Did you figure this out on your own?

Nancy: I had a lot of time to think about it. I really didn't fully come back until at least two years later, and that was incredibly difficult because my life was in such a limbo at the time too. I wasn't

even officially divorced until 2007, so it was a very uncomfortable tough time of being in that middle space of not knowing.

The good thing was that fortunately I had an ongoing client paying me a retainer, so I had some freedom and flexibility to sort of figure out what my next step would be. In a way, Ellen, I sort of came back full circle. I originally started my business working with small business owners who didn't have a marketing person or a PR person but needed one, at least even part time.

I would go in and I'd make the recommendations and I implemented much of it. Then through writing and speaking more, that's when I really started to target the large companies and that was great for a long time. I did that for probably 15 years pretty consistently. I didn't have a lot of small business customers as clients, but I was always speaking to them and I was always writing for them, so I was definitely in touch because they were my audience, but they weren't my client base anymore.

I think that for me I was able to go back and say this is how I started my business and I certainly know what issues are facing small business owners because I am one, and to a large degree that's why companies like Office Depot and UPS and Xerox hired me because I was a voice of their primary customer base that they really couldn't speak to.

Ellen: That's kind of cool that you had that full circle moment. The initial dream that you had in your business is what you immersed yourself in to resurrect your business, to reinvent it. Let me get back to basics. Let me get back to who I am and what I know I can do.

Nancy: Yes and the beauty of working with small business owners is that we make decisions quickly, and if we're motivated and want to do well, I don't have to go through a bureaucracy of 20 people within a company to get approval on something.

Ellen: You know that I'm a big fan of business planning. To me, writing it down and putting things in a binder is kind of how I move from inside my head where it gets kind of muddled and confusing into something that is going to take form and helps me move into clarity.

Do you write things down? Did you create a business plan? Did you put a marketing plan together? What's your process?

Nancy: The things that I was doing more of what was the email marketing. I had worked with someone. Unfortunately it wasn't a huge success but what it did do was sort of just reinvigorated my list initially. I did a bunch of teleclasses, just whatever I could do that I could do from home and not have to travel.

I think really that was the beauty of the work that I did with Office Depot is that I finally figured that out after literally traveling the entire country which Staples doing in-store seminars when they were opening up all over the place between 1997 and 2001. I'm glad that I changed. Now I have the foresight to think this has got to be done a different way. Most of the work that I do now is virtual.

Ellen: Let's jump into that. With your permission, what I'd like to do is transition our conversation a little bit. I wanted to spend some time with you exploring how you bounce back from a life, health and career crisis like you had because you really have the story to tell. When someone says I can top that story – not many people can top your story.

That is so inspiring to me. What you did then and what you do now is you help people with their marketing. You help get people to call them and refine their niche and their brand and make a big splash. Like I said, your book *Off-The-Wall Marketing* idea is just a bible of low-cost, high-impact

fun ways that you can do marketing and I've learned a lot from you over the years being friends, as well as I go back to that book all the time.

Let's talk a little bit about marketing, and maybe you could share some of the tips and tricks and strategies that you've got for marketing small businesses for the rest of our call. Are you in?

Nancy: I'm in.

Ellen: Let's talk about this. Here's a question for you. Suppose it isn't a health crisis we're bouncing back from. Suppose we really blew it with a big client, with a favorite customer. We didn't show up. We blew up their boiler. We can really make a big mistake.

You've got some really candid fun ways of making a bad situation your shining moment. Let's talk about that a little bit.

Nancy: I think that things happen in life and business, and I think the key is whatever the issue is – I mean I remember I used this example in some of my other materials. I remember picking up an invitation for a travel agency that I was doing an event for, and I found a typo when I picked up the invites.

Everybody had looked at it, including myself, including the client. We all signed off on it but ultimately that's on me. It's my job to make sure that that doesn't happen, so I immediately figured out how to correct it. I told the printer to rerun the job and I paid for it to be rerun. Then I called the client and I had a giant eraser delivered to them saying so sorry, wish we could have erased this earlier, just found it, the invitations will be running tomorrow and I will make sure that I get them to you.

Ellen: So, number one you didn't say oh I hope nobody notices. You just went right in there and said this is what happened.

Nancy: You've got to own it. You've got to fix it. You've got let them know. I just think the eraser was really to show that I've got a sense of humor about it but I took care of it. That would not have been funny had I not taken care of it.

Ellen: Yes, the eraser with the typo still in it and everyone just saying wait, what – that would not have been darling at all.

Nancy: No.

Ellen: So, you've got to make good on it but it's important to be the guy who's not going to run away when disaster hits.

Nancy: It's still tempting. I mean nobody loves to admit that they've screwed up, but it's absolutely necessary to own the issue whatever it is.

Ellen: Do you remember the movie Apollo 13 with Tom Hanks and Ed Harris is the mission control character?

Nancy: Yes.

Ellen: Apollo 13 is completely unraveling. This mission doesn't look good. It looks like everybody's going to die, a big disaster, and his boss says this is the worst thing that's ever happened to NASA and he says on the contrary, I believe this will be our finest hour. That to me

was the most important part of that movie and that event. They chose that disaster to be the time that they rallied around and said this will be our legacy, that we fix this, we survive this and we did our very best in a compromised situation.

Nancy: Right, and I think that you really see somebody's true colors too when something does happen and how they handle it.

Ellen: So, you let them know that you've got a sense of humor about it and you're going to fix it, and then underline it with something fun and creative. You are really good at marketing in ways that get people's attention. Instead of a Christmas card every year, I get something different. I remember one of my favorite things from you was a giant fortune cookie.

Nancy: Yes, I love Chinese New Year's and July 4th. Those are two holidays that I tend to celebrate. It's funny now having two daughters from China and my son was born on the 4th of July. I always say it was the only thing he's ever done on time and he induced, but that was his actual due date.

Ellen: That's funny.

Nancy: Those are just two holidays that I celebrated even before I had them in my life. I think you do something that's going to separate yourself. I think marketing can be great but I think a lot of it is like a Chinese menu – you don't want to eat everything on the menu, you have to pick and choose. I think you're much better off doing the things that you're actually going to follow through on.

Ellen: Instead of having a million great ideas and not acting on any of them.

Nancy: Right. I think we get tripped up on that as small business owners because we have to do a lot of what we do in running our business.

Ellen: Let's talk about that tactically. I've got a couple questions cued up here. One is when it comes to creating a marketing plan, I hear all the time you need a marketing plan. I know a lot about business but the marketing piece of it eludes me a lot of the time. I end up with a zillion to-do's and a lot of things don't get done or I don't realize was that the best use of my money? Was that any good? Did it work? It kind of overwhelms me.

Those of you who are paying attention will notice that that's why we have so many marketers as part of our Business Makeover 2014 summit. Help me from a strategic standpoint. When I say marketing plan, what does a marketing plan look like for you?

Nancy: Marketing is what I call having VCR, which is visibility, consistency and repetition among your target market, so it's outreach and frequency. You want to be present and appear in the minds of your ideal clients – your existing clients and your prospects.

Ellen: So, V is visibility. Consistency is C and R is repetition.

Nancy: It's like Coke and Pepsi continue to advertise for one reason. If one of them stopped, the other would gain market share simply because they're top of mind. If we see Coke being advertised far more than Pepsi, we may just gravitate towards that product.

Ellen: Is a marketing plan a binder? Is it on your calendar? How do you keep organized? If I come up with some great ideas and I decide that I'm going to pick four or five of these

ideas to engage, and I develop a message that I think is consistent, how do I make sure that it actually gets done? What tools do you recommend for disciplining yourself?

Nancy: Honestly, what I do is use a calendar. What I try to do is think with the end in mind. If I need to send something out on this date, what are all the steps needed to make sure that that's going to happen?

Ellen: So, you put the date on – we're going to send out a 4th of July card, so we don't want it to come out on Labor Day.

Nancy: Right, exactly. What you need to do is figure out okay I'd like to get it in the mail on June 28th, so I need to have it designed. I need to have it printed. I need to either hire a mail hound to get someone to hand address these and get them out. Who am I going to send them to? In my database, I have different categories – my current and past clients, my prospects, my colleagues or referral sources, and then just people who are on my email list or they may not be.

They could be a prospect that I might not even know. They might never even be qualified. I think what you want to always do is the 80/20 rule. You get 80% of your business usually from 20% of your clients, so why would you market to everybody the same way?

Ellen: So, you identify those clients who...

Nancy: Those who are spending the most money with me get the most marketing from me.

Ellen: What I love about this tip is that you're making it easy. Don't be crazy about it. Go for the low-hanging fruit. These people like you already. Be nice to them.

Nancy: It's also so much easier to retain a client and get more business from an existing client than it is to get a new one.

Ellen: Will you talk to those clients about what kinds of things that they want? If they bought from you before, how do you know what else you could offer them? Where do you come up with that?

Nancy: I actually hired a woman to do a survey of my existing clients to find out what do they like about me, what were they not sure about, were they aware of all the things that I could do for them and how did they view me or see me? It was really telling. I think the great thing about having an outside company do this is that your clients will tell someone else what they think of you.

Ellen: Did she call them or was it like a survey monkey?

Nancy: Here's what we did. I sent a letter out to everybody saying I've hired this person to do a survey of my existing clients to determine how we can improve our level of service, our service offerings, etc. Would you be willing to spend 15 minutes with her on the phone?

Everybody agreed to spend 15 minutes and many people spent more, but we really did try to keep it to a 15-minute conversation. From that information, I found out a lot about what people were aware of and were not aware of about what I had to offer. My comeback to everybody was I'm just so grateful that you took the time. This is the collective feedback I got and here's the direction I'm going in now that I have this information. Thank you for sharing this.

Ellen: As you describe it, the feeling that washes over me is really validating. It was really kind that you responded like you did. It was neat that you asked me. I think that alone is a neat marketing tool. What you did probably created some customer loyalty with you.

Nancy: Yes, the fact that I cared enough to hear from them and not just the good stuff. I mean I wanted to hear everything.

Ellen: Is that how you then would start? If you've got the calendar and you've got the discipline with a system that's going to help you make sure that this marketing goes out, when it comes to visibility and consistency, how do you help your clients nail those things down? I feel really overwhelmed trying to come up with a marketing piece or identify a marketing message that I think is going to resonate, and then I'm afraid to stick with it long enough sometimes for it to really land.

How do you work with your clients to identify what message they should be sharing in their marketing?

Nancy: It can be really difficult because I think a lot of it too is that you want to test it to tweak it. Do you know what I mean? Are people responding to this? We've been trying to get that out ourselves because it's always much easier for me to help somebody else do that than to do it for myself.

Ellen: I love hearing you say that.

Nancy: It's so true. What is second nature for me to tell you to do, I couldn't come up with the same response for myself in my business, which is why I have coaches and I have people who I work with who can see things more clearly and objectively than I can because I'm just so close to it. I think that's just how we all are, especially as business owners. I think that for me it's about testing some of the messaging and finding out what is resonating with people. Are they responding to this? I did a rant, which I know you were very kind in actually forwarding this.

Ellen: I know what you're talking about. This rant really resonated with me.

Nancy: Basically, what it was is really just my opinion. I take on people within our industry who I think just do things in a way that doesn't resonate with me that I don't want to be associated with, and I didn't name names. I wouldn't do that for professional reasons, but I got more response to that than I have to any email I've ever sent out.

One person was not happy with it, but I would say about 50 something responded. What was interesting is that one person who wasn't happy with it, she went back and opened it up twice after she wanted to get off my list.

Ellen: She kept getting back on the list as a result?

Nancy: No, she kept getting back to look at the email, to opening it up again and reading it.

Ellen: What do you think about that rant was so powerful? Let's talk about this as testing something that worked.

Nancy: I think it was sort of like calling people out on something. There's a tactic I think in the marketing world that the more we make you feel less than, the more you're going to want or feel like you need us. I just feel that that is completely not my philosophy when working with a client.

I think if you resonate with people who have been tempted or thought maybe I really should be working with them. I think in a way it was validating for them to hear somebody, a colleague of these people, to say something completely oppositional. So, I do think sometimes taking a contrary point of view on something generates a lot of thought and a lot of action for people.

Ellen: It was contrary but it was absolutely authentic to you. I mean that is how you feel, so you were ripping open your chest and letting us see your heart. This was an important issue for you. Were you aware that it was going to have such a resonating effect, or was it a happy accident?

Nancy: It was a happy accident. Honestly, we are going to do one a month as opposed to one every week.

Ellen: I know that one. Somebody told me I'm supposed to blog like three or four times a week and I'm thinking gosh how do you have time to do all that? I understand. I think overall it's another reason why I feel insecure about marketing. I know our time is going to be winding up here, so let me ask these two questions.

One is has marketing significantly changed because we're now e-marketing, and the second follow-up question is if you were to identify two or three things that you could consistently do with high visibility and with the appropriate amount of discipline and repetition, what three or four things would you do now in terms of marketing?

Those are two big questions. Is e-marketing significantly different from other kinds of marketing and, what are your favorite marketing vehicles?

Nancy: I think yes and no.

Ellen: Let's hear that.

Nancy: Now you can get information instantaneously. I think that the key for anybody who's using email marketing or their website or a blog to market themselves is that you've got to be incredibly current and relevant. I think relevant is the big thing. Content is everywhere, so you want to be as relevant to your target market as you can be so that they will continue to go and seek you out.

One of my hobbies is interior decorating. I am on the blogs. I am going to Young House Love checking daily to see what they're up to because it's an escape for me, and they change it every day. That's their entire business. Do you know what I mean? They're writers and bloggers. That's what they do.

I do not blog every day. I do send an email out at least once a week and I'm pretty disciplined about that. I have seen my numbers increase and my list gets stronger and more responsive when I increase that to a weekly level. For me that just works. The other thing that I do is that the clients that I do have, I want to recognize and do nice things for because I think that they're my greatest sources of referrals, testimonials, endorsements and I potentially have more business to do with them.

Ellen: I love that. I kind of ran into testimonials as a way to market because I didn't know better, but I thought no bad thing would come from my clients bragging on me and talking about the great experiences that we've had, and someone else might be reassured by that. I will underline that as an absolutely great thing to ground your marketing is to get your existing customers to tell other people how much they love you. Boy, does that help.

Nancy: It's the best way to generate word of mouth marketing. When people say all my marketing is word of mouth, then they're getting their clients to say nice things about them. Clearly they're doing a good job.

Ellen: With a picture where it's not just I liked working with Nancy, but a good solid paragraph of why you're just fantastic.

Nancy: I think we've talked about this before too, but I think you want to get a testimonial on steroids, which is an endorsement, like a letter that goes from your client to your list of prospects. It's something that you can certainly excerpt out of, put on your website or in your other marketing materials, but I think that that is the most powerful form of marketing in my mind.

That's how I got a six-figure contract with Xerox. Bruce Nelson wrote a note to Ann Mulkayhee at the end of a letter saying I really think you should look into this.

Ellen: You got the CEO to send a letter bragging on you to another CEO.

Nancy: Yes.

Ellen: Now that is a testimonial on steroids. How did that come about?

Nancy: I asked.

Ellen: Nancy, why are you making so easy on us?

Nancy: It's just amazing. I think that we sort of get intimidated. I didn't ask on day one of working with him. I had a history of delivering and I had seen him at several events. I had bid on lunch with him at the first Success Strategy conference that I went to for Office Depot, which is how I got that initial meeting, which is how I ended up with a lunch that cost me \$1,050 but brought me more than \$1 million over the course of the next 10 years.

Ellen: Let me just repeat this. You went to an auction where you bid on a lunch with the CEO?

Nancy: It was a silent auction and it all went to charity – Count Me In, which I know you and I have talked about.

Ellen: We love Count Me In.

Nancy: It was a tax write-off for me. I flew down there a month later and we talked about all the things that we had in common. He has an adopted son and a biological daughter. I had a biological son and two adopted daughters. We really just had a very nice lunch and it wasn't until the last five minutes that he said okay you've got to be selling me something here, so what is it?

I told him what I had done at Staples and said I think that we can do this on the web. You're much further along than they are with your online presence and why can't we do these seminars for your small business customers online? He introduced me to Monica and the rest is history. I think we did our first webinar series in November of that same year.

Ellen: That is a ballsy move and yet it's so elegant and simple. If you're going to go to the charity event, you might as well leverage your activities to see who you could meet and what could happen as a result of it. I just love that story so much.

Nancy, we are running low on time and it makes me sad. I'm glad we're best friends forever because I'm just going to call you every day. This recording has been absolutely magical and I'm so happy we get to share it as part of the Business Makeover 2014.

You also have some absolutely amazing loot for us. As you can guess, the price tag is \$97. We made this easy. All of the experts are going to put together a package, and the rule that I gave them was it's got to be rocking fantastic and it's got to be \$97.

Could you tell us a little bit about your Ultimate Guide to High Level Networking? You just gave us a little tip, a little hint of what's to come with the story about the Office Depot CEO, so let's hear about the Ultimate Guide to High Level Networking.

Nancy: Actually it's the Ultimate Off-The-Wall Marketing System.

Ellen: By the way, if you see that button right there, we're going to have all the details on our website right here at BusinessMakeover2014.com/Michaels. Nancy's last name is Michaels. If you're listening, write that down. Give us the details, Nancy.

Nancy: It's a four-part series that we recently did, and we're actually offering it on our site for \$297. We're doing this for you for \$97, Ellen, because you are my BFF.

Ellen: You are awesome. Thank you.

Nancy: Out to as many people as possible. Part one is about stop chasing and start jump-starting your sales with some off-the-wall marketing ideas. We'll talk a lot about the out-of-the-box marketing. Some of the things we've talked about today, but ways to really stand out. Also, how I managed to get the undivided attention of CEO's and my ideal clients because I think these are things that anybody can do. It's just putting the ask together. Also I'm not a big fan of cold calls or chasing down prospects, so you're going to get some ways for you to get them to reach you.

Ellen: Nice.

Nancy: Part two is about renewing contracts with ease and how to turn bad situations into long-term clients, a little bit about what we teased here today. Part three is the Ultimate Follow-Up System, and this is honestly where I think most people fail. We have the best of intentions, we get the postcards designed, but we don't follow through or follow up or send out the second one or the third one. It's really about having a follow-up system in place and implementing it.

Part four is your golden rolodex so that you become absolutely unforgettable in the minds of your prospects. I feel very lucky and I know that you've done this too, Ellen. I work with companies for long periods of time usually and that's just so much easier when you're thinking about doing your own marketing tailored to develop more business.

Ellen: This is a business model you're developing, when you go back to people and you're familiar with their homes as a home service contractor, it's just so much easier to pick up the conversation and say you know this won't work because remember we've got that going on in this part of the house, and this is what's going to be a better idea. You just don't start from scratch and your customers really appreciate that you stay in touch and you continue to provide service to them.

This is really awesome, and you also get the Ultimate Guide to Networking so that you can go to an event and make it fun.

Nancy: This is really about something we didn't talk at all about today, but how to go to a tradeshow and not spend a fortune on a booth, but how to really work your magic when you're there. There's a three-step process to that too. What do you do before to get prepared? What do you do while you're there? What do you do to follow-up?

Ellen: You are so amazing. This is an awesome package and I've learned so much from you. Thank you for spending time today. It's not just a matter of putting your plan together and then connecting the dots and making your dream come true. Sometimes life really knocks you out, and Nancy your comeback, your reinvention is inspiring to me and I'm sure it has been to so many people today. Your meat and potatoes solid marketing concepts are awesome, and the Off-The-Wall marketing System is absolutely invaluable, so thanks for making it available to us for \$97. Are you ready for the sexy outro music?

Nancy: Absolutely.

Ellen: It's coming your way. Get ready. Honey, I love you so much. Thanks for playing with me today.

Nancy: Thank you. I loved it.