

GMSB 213

[00:00:00] **Antony Whitaker:** Welcome to the Grow My Salon Business podcast, where we focus on the business side of hairdressing. I'm your host, Antony Whitaker, and I'll be talking to thought leaders in the hairdressing industry, discussing insightful, provocative, and inspiring ideas that matter. So get ready to learn, get ready to be challenged, get ready to be inspired, and most importantly, get ready to grow your salon business.

[00:00:29] **Antony Whitaker:** Hello and welcome to today's episode of the Grow My Salon Business podcast. I'm your host, Antony Whitaker, and as I always say, it's great to have you here with us today. Thank you for all the reviews for the podcast. I really do appreciate it. And if you haven't already yet left us a review, then I would be very grateful if you did over on the Apple podcast app, the ratings and reviews are extremely helpful and greatly appreciated.

[00:00:55] **Antony Whitaker:** They do matter in the rankings of the show and they help other people to find the podcast. And I also love to hear what's been helpful to you. All you need to do is go to the Apple podcast app, search, grow my salon business, scroll to the bottom of the page and leave a review. And we would be very much appreciative.

[00:01:12] **Antony Whitaker:** So with that said, on with today's show. Now, I often say that Being a business owner is a great education because it really forces you to learn a range of new skills, whether it's people management or financial management and marketing, and all those things will push you out of your comfort zone, but you will grow as a business person and as a person as a result.

[00:01:36] **Antony Whitaker:** But one thing I haven't really talked about before is the simple life skills and those aspects of humanity that being a business owner exposes you to. So my guest on today's episode is a former Londoner, but for the last 30 plus years, he's been a native of Chicago. He's a hairdresser, former salon owner, coach, and educator, Alex Ioannou.

[00:02:00] **Antony Whitaker:** And in today's podcast, amongst other things, we're going to talk about the journey of Alex's career, but mostly we're going to talk about the life lessons that he's learned in hairdressing. So without further ado, welcome to the show, my old friend, Alex Ioannou.

[00:02:16] **Alex Ioannou:** Antony, thank you so much for having me. It's a pleasure to be on with you. Cheers.

[00:02:21] **Antony Whitaker:** It's great to have this opportunity to talk to you. I've wanted to have you on the show for a long time and you've given me the perfect excuse to. But before we get into that, um, can you just sort of give us an overview of who is Alex Ioannou? Give us your sort of two minute backstory so that people know a little bit more about you.

[00:02:37] **Alex Ioannou:** You got it. We'll squeeze it into two. Uh, so I'm Greek. I was born in Cyprus, a Greek Cypriot, uh, raised in London. And, I worked with, uh, Vidal Sassoon in London, which is where I met Antony and, moved to Chicago in 1986, became the artistic director at Sassoon. Eventually opened up three salons called Trio, and right before the pandemic, we shut down.

[00:03:02] **Alex Ioannou:** and we merged with a very prominent salon on Chicago's very fashionable Oak Street. And now I work behind the chair a couple of days a week doing clients. And, um, the other time. Doing some training, setting up curriculums, doing a little bit of coaching, doing, you know, a little bit of this and a little bit of that.

[00:03:23] **Alex Ioannou:** And some writing.

[00:03:25] **Antony Whitaker:** Okay. So that was a good, way to condense 40 years. So that's how long we've known each other, which is a bit frightening, isn't it? But there you go. Yeah. Now, um, in the intro, I mentioned that phrase, life lessons, that being a hairdresser or salon owner, uh, teaches you and

[00:03:42] **Antony Whitaker:** You've compiled a number of anecdotes and stories that have happened to you in your career as a salon owner, and you've called it, don't be late, clean your brushes. Can we start off talking about that? What was the impetus behind putting that sort of collection of life lessons together?

[00:03:58] **Alex Ioannou:** Sure. Well, uh, don't be late clean your brushes was a little phrase that I'd always start with our monthly staff meetings and became a little bit of a giggle because, before I could even get it out after a period of time, the staff would always yell. Don't be late clean your brushes. And, you know, we, we know, uh, that these two Yeah.

[00:04:21] **Alex Ioannou:** statements are pillars of success, right? Uh, in order to build your clientele, you cannot be late, right? It's disrespectful if you're late. Um, you know, to the other person and you have to clean your brushes. You can't charge a hundred, 150. Or ten dollars for a service and pull out a dirty brush. So that was the premise behind our staff meetings.

[00:04:44] **Alex Ioannou:** Don't be late, clean your brushes and, you know, do good work. Um, the book itself was, it's been, quoted as a friendly reminder. of how to treat each other on like Antony said, you know, it's a it's a collection of short stories, anecdotes, experiences, that really talks of about the humanity of what we do and a gentle reminder that it's not always percentages and ratios and numbers, you know, it's like it's the human factor, which I think we need in order to be successful.

[00:05:21] **Antony Whitaker:** Yeah, definitely. It's, you know, what you just said then is what I was going to go into and say that, I often talk about, all those, you know, percentages and ratios and what you need to be doing to build a successful business. And, for a long part of my career where I was, teaching the sort of the technical creative side of hairdressing, that was where my obsession lay, but really it's sort of about.

[00:05:44] **Antony Whitaker:** Those three things combined, isn't it? It is about the technical creative. It is about the business skills, but it's so important to not forget that we're in the people business. And it's so much about relationships and experiences and all that sort of stuff. And I think that your little collection of short stories there really captures that.

[00:06:05] **Antony Whitaker:** And so, Thank you. As soon as I read it, I thought, right now is definitely the time to get Alex on the podcast because I wanted you to, you know, come on the podcast for a while, but it was all about sort of positioning. And what am I going to talk to you about? And I just loved some of the messaging that was in that collection of short stories.

[00:06:23] **Antony Whitaker:** And so I want to make today's podcast episode very much focused on those things. So I pulled out, I think I pulled out six that I thought were Um, well, they were my six favorites. I know, I'm not sure how many are in there. I think there's a 10 or 15 or something. I'm not sure. But, um, um, so, so let's go through the ones that were my favorites.

[00:06:43] **Antony Whitaker:** The first one, uh, and I think it might even be the first one in the book, is called the Mayor of Wabash. Um, so yeah, so look, I'm going to pass that over to you. What is the Mayor of Wabash? What's that all about?

[00:06:56] **Alex Ioannou:** Alright. So, uh, it's actually pronounced Wabash and Wabash Yeah. Is the street that we were on, you know. Um, and you know, before, before I get into the story, I, you know, just wanna touch on something, on something that you said. It is so important to have all those three elements together. You know, the technical and the business side, and of course the niceties because we all know.

[00:07:19] **Alex Ioannou:** Those really talented, technical, brilliant hairdressers that are not busy. Because there's something, there's something lacking there. And, um, you know, indeed I've seen hairdressers that are probably not that good and they're jammed every single day. So, you know, there's gotta be a nice balance between, between the three, but I digress the mayor of Wabash, uh, our salon was on, uh, Wabash Avenue for 15 years.

[00:07:49] **Alex Ioannou:** And, um, the running joke was I would be outside whenever I was quiet. And I'd, and I'd be on my phone and I would usually pace up and down outside the windows looking in and inevitably people would walk by and I'd nod and I'd say hi and I'd stop and, you know, pet their dogs or whatever the deal is. And, um. You know, they dubbed me the mayor of Wabash because I would always, be outside talking to people and, hugging people and, you know, doing that stuff.

[00:08:18] **Alex Ioannou:** And, um, you know, just those little friendly gestures would have people coming in and say, Oh, I have to get my hair done, you know, let me go in and make an appointment or, uh, it just. Created a closeness, I guess with the, uh, with the community. You know, people knew that we were there and, you know, I was, the nice man walking up and down with, with his phone all the time, so,

[00:08:41] **Antony Whitaker:** Okay, well. Yeah, I was lucky enough or had been lucky enough to go into your salon on more than one occasion. And for those people who, who don't know Wabash Street, it's in your, we're talking downtown Chicago. It's the middle of Chicago, so to speak. Uh, so it's, it's a busy part of the world.

[00:08:58] **Antony Whitaker:** It's a great location. And Uh, you know, every time I went in there, the humanity, I can't think of a better word for it than that. The sort of the humanity element that really radiates from you, because I think, you know, a business in so many ways, it's a reflection of its, of its leader and that Part of your personality is very dominant and it really, impacted, on everyone on your team and the environment that was in there, whereas a lot of salons can sometimes be quite intimidating for people.

[00:09:30] **Antony Whitaker:** So, yeah, the mayor of Wabash,

[00:09:34] **Alex Ioannou:** we tried very, very specifically because we were downtown and we were very, uh, I guess, you know, visual and very prominent. We had a lot of celebrities coming in and out and all that stuff. And, it was important that everyone liked each other and got to know each other. We weren't just workmates, we were mates and, that fostered that environment of, of likeability, if you like.

[00:09:59] **Antony Whitaker:** Yeah, definitely. What about an apple a day? What's that all about?

[00:10:04] **Alex Ioannou:** Apple a day is one of my favorites. so an apple a day, I was, I was part of a panel at a, school. And, uh, you know, the new graduates were in the audience and people were asking questions, you know, what do you guys look for? And, what's important for, you know, to be hired and all that stuff.

[00:10:24] **Alex Ioannou:** And, um, you know, the other salon owners were quite serious, and if you can't tell, I'm not so serious all the time. And so, uh, when it came... You know, for me to say my bit, I said, well, of course, don't be late, uh, clean your brushes. And if you bring me a shiny apple, you have a better chance.

[00:10:43] **Alex Ioannou:** And everyone had a giggle. And we finished the day. And, uh, several months later, a young lady came in for an interview. And, uh, she was on time and she looked great. And we had a very nice conversation. And, uh, I mean, I knew at that point. She was definitely on the list to be hired. And as we said, our goodbyes, she said, Oh, and reached into her bag and pulled out a shiny apple and guess who got hired on the spot?

[00:11:11] **Alex Ioannou:** I mean, it was, it was great. And I get goosebumps, you know, when I share stories like that all the time, because she listened and, it wasn't about the apple. But it was about the attention to detail and that she showed up prepared, ready. We hired her, you know, immediately. And, uh, she was great. She stayed with us for a long time.

[00:11:32] **Antony Whitaker:** It's, yeah, it's funny, a lot of these, you know, they're just little things, but they're not always things that you can teach. But it's when you hear them being spoken about, you realize how important they are. They're the sort of undercurrent of what makes a business and individuals successful.

[00:11:50] **Antony Whitaker:** Um, there's another one in there that I liked called, simply called Coffee Talk.

[00:11:54] **Alex Ioannou:** Yeah.

[00:11:55] **Antony Whitaker:** and that certainly made me smile. Uh, so, so tell us about Coffee Talk. What's that all about?

[00:12:00] **Alex Ioannou:** So coffee talk was, um, you know, was another one of my favorites. Um, because what I would do is I would go to one of my staff members and I'd say, Hey, let's go have a cup of coffee. The coffee shop was across the street. So that five minutes between leaving the front door to go to the coffee shop must've been so scary and frightful for the, uh, employee because, you know, they thought.

[00:12:28] **Alex Ioannou:** I'm in trouble. I'm going to get fired. What did I do wrong? Um, you know, am I dressed properly? You know, there was all this stuff going, through their heads. And I remember one, one girl in particular, where I said, do you want to go for coffee? And she said, yes. And she sat through our meeting and she, you know, she drank her coffee and she said that was the first cup of coffee that she's ever had because she doesn't drink coffee. But, um, coffee talk for me was about getting to know my staff. You know, it wasn't that anyone was in trouble. I wanted to find out about them.

[00:13:05] **Alex Ioannou:** What music did they like? What books were they reading? Uh, you know, I learned about pets and marriages and deaths and all of that stuff. And, uh, uh, you know, it brought us close, you know, again, we

became friends and I knew my staff. And, um, every now and then I'd say, Oh, you know, yeah.

[00:13:27] **Alex Ioannou:** How's little, uh, you know, Bobby or, you know, whatever the case may be. And, uh, it was a good way to really connect with people in a, in a true and genuine way,

[00:13:37] **Antony Whitaker:** Yeah. Yeah. I, I used to do that as well when I had my salons, I often tell people to do that, to get them out of the salon, get them out of the staff room and, and whether you meet them for breakfast or you take someone out for lunch on their birthday, or you just pop next door with them for a coffee, you know, providing there's a coffee shop next door, it's that getting to know the person on a.

[00:13:57] **Antony Whitaker:** Personal level, you know, it's, it's very valuable. And sometimes people, when you talk to someone else about that, they go, Antony, I haven't got time to do all that. And I say to them, no, you, you haven't got time not to do it because, you know, it's all about

[00:14:12] **Alex Ioannou:** just as important.

[00:14:14] **Antony Whitaker:** exactly.

[00:14:15] **Antony Whitaker:** And really, really getting people to, you know, to bond with you and for you to understand what their life's all about. Because, you know, Sometimes I know for me in my early days of salon ownership, sometimes someone would do something wrong. Let's just say something simple like they've turned up late for work frequently, um, and, and you've told them about it and they turn up late the next day and, you get a bit upset as

[00:14:43] **Antony Whitaker:** the owner, you know, you're entitled to maybe, but even then it's important to, I learned this the hard way to sort of, um, Not react without thinking first.

[00:14:55] **Antony Whitaker:** So, you know, I'm thinking of a particular incident for me where I said to someone, let's go next door and have a coffee. And, uh, so we went next door and I said, listen, you know, we got a coffee and I said, um, you know, we spoke about your timekeeping and here you are again, like, I don't know what you, what you.

[00:15:14] **Antony Whitaker:** They are expecting me to do, but I said, I just can't have you rocking in 10 minutes after start time when your clients already sat there, uh, at which point, she sort of burst into tears and started telling me about some major, you know, Domestic issue that she was having at home that that made my timekeeping issue of your 10 minutes late to work again, just completely insignificant.

[00:15:40] **Antony Whitaker:** Do you know what I mean? This was potential, you know, life and death sort of stuff. Um, and it's important to be reminded that your team have a life outside of the salon as well. And, you know, whether it's elderly parents or children that have health issues or. You know, financial problems, the husband being laid off work or whatever it is.

[00:16:02] **Antony Whitaker:** There can be any one of a number of things. And it's what you've just said that it's not just a cup of coffee, it's bonding. It's building a relationship and, and opening the door to have all sorts of other conversations. So, yeah,

[00:16:15] **Alex Ioannou:** it was funny because when I first started it, people were hesitant, you know, it was almost like I'd ask a question and they kind of give me a little answer and wait for the, for the shoe to drop. And then when the shoe never dropped, you know, I often, I would have people come up to me after and say, are we having coffee?

[00:16:34] **Alex Ioannou:** I'm like, yeah, let's go have coffee. You know, so yeah, exactly.

[00:16:40] **Antony Whitaker:** Yeah,

[00:16:41] **Antony Whitaker:** The one that really made me laugh was tighten the bolt, because, um, I totally Related to that because, you know, and again, it's not something usually that anyone talks about, but sometimes we have these little things that we do in private that are just our little idiosyncrasy and, uh, we sort of share an idiosyncrasy on that.

[00:17:03] **Antony Whitaker:** So tell us about tighten the bolt.

[00:17:05] **Alex Ioannou:** Well, uh, at the beginning of the story, I think, I think I started off with the old saying, integrity is doing the right thing, even though no one's watching.

[00:17:15] **Antony Whitaker:** Yes, yes.

[00:17:16] **Alex Ioannou:** so tighten the bolt. Um, basically is, me, uh, you might call it OCD. I don't know what it is, but often I'd go into a bathroom and then find that the seat was wiggly.

[00:17:32] **Alex Ioannou:** You know, and right underneath the seat, there's usually a couple of screws and so I would always reach under tighten the seat so that it wouldn't be, you know, wiggly.

[00:17:42] **Antony Whitaker:** So this is in a, this is in a public bathroom. You'll do this public lavatory,

[00:17:46] **Antony Whitaker:** right? Okay.

[00:17:47] **Alex Ioannou:** a restaurant or, you know, or even my own sometimes, you know, I'd go in and I'd see this wiggly seat so I'd have to tighten it.

[00:17:55] **Alex Ioannou:** Of course, it's pretty gross, you know, so I have to, you know, wash my hands several times after but I just felt really awkward. Um, about leaving, you know, the seat wiggly, uh, or if there was paper on the floor, or if someone had used a bar of soap and it was black with bubbles, I'd wash it off, you know.

[00:18:13] **Alex Ioannou:** So, um, the story is, if you can find um, or train, or coach, or, or develop a group of bolt tighteners, um, in your salon. You never have to worry, really. Um, so whether it's a dirty vase, or whether it's a towel on the floor, or whether it's, um, you know, a light bulb that's gone, someone will see it and, and have the wherewithal to fix it.

[00:18:46] **Antony Whitaker:** Yeah.

[00:18:47] **Alex Ioannou:** Um, you know, and it really boils down to true success is your business growing when you're not there. And, um, I couldn't always tighten the bolt, you know, but, um, eventually my team. You know, we do that. Of course, I always had one jokester who knew I was going to go into the restroom and then really loosen, loosen the toilet seat, you know, but essentially that was it.

[00:19:14] **Alex Ioannou:** Tighten the bolt, you know, create a group, um, where everyone realizes they're responsible, whether, you know, down to the, the nitty gritty of things in the salon.

[00:19:25] **Antony Whitaker:** Yeah. it's a very good metaphor for there's, as you were telling me that story the first time I was thinking about our former employer, um, in London and the CEO, the general manager, the

[00:19:39] **Alex Ioannou:** yes, yes.

[00:19:40] **Antony Whitaker:** the company. And, um, there was an incident that I had with him where there's something that I hadn't noticed, um, you know, the equivalent of the bolt, so to speak.

[00:19:51] **Antony Whitaker:** And he took great umbrage to it.

[00:19:56] **Alex Ioannou:** Yes.

[00:19:57] **Antony Whitaker:** He, he wanted to know why I hadn't seen this problem and fixed it. And I was a 24 year old smart aleck, I suppose at the time. And so I said to him, how do you notice these things? And he looked at me and he said, it's because I care more.

[00:20:14] **Alex Ioannou:** Mm.

[00:20:14] **Antony Whitaker:** at the time I laughed and then five years after that I was a salon owner of my own business and all of a sudden his words, and here I am 40 years later still repeating them, his words rang true.

[00:20:28] **Antony Whitaker:** And that's what a lot of it is all about, isn't it? It's like what you said at the beginning. Integrity is, is doing something when no one

[00:20:35] **Alex Ioannou:** No one's watching. Doing, yeah, doing the

[00:20:37] **Alex Ioannou:** right

[00:20:37] **Antony Whitaker:** thing.

[00:20:38] **Antony Whitaker:** Yeah, exactly. No, that's good.

[00:20:40] **Antony Whitaker:** And what, about the elephant in the room?

[00:20:43] **Alex Ioannou:** the elephant in the room. we all know that, uh, adage and, um, you know, inevitably in every salon, there's going to be some type of conflict. Um, some type of issue that needs resolution. And I call it the elephant in the room because, um, many times. I'd walk into the staff room and it would go quiet, and I was like, all right, and I would say, should I step out and come back in or what, you know, what's going on?

[00:21:13] **Alex Ioannou:** And. You know, many times people don't want to address an issue because they think it's going to lead into confrontation and no one wants to be confronted. And no one, at least I don't, you know, I don't want to have a fight with anyone, you know, so, but there are issues that need to be, uh, addressed. and so looking for that elephant in the room and, uh, Having the right tools, if you like, where you can strike up the conversation where no one has to be blamed and no one has to take, um, accountability. Responsibility, yes, but perhaps not accountability. And, As a group or as a couple, uh, you can address, you know, whatever's happening and, recognize that elephant in the room because if you don't address it, it could turn into something really huge. I had one, uh, client You know, asked me one time about, issues and I said, Oh, it's just so many little things.

[00:22:15] **Alex Ioannou:** It's like no big deal. And she said to me, Alex, a raindrop by itself is irrelevant. But if there's a whole bunch of them, it could be a thunderstorm. I was like, I love you. So, yeah, address the issues that are appearing before they become really, really huge. And, uh, um, you know, for me, I found as the boss, I had to be the,

[00:22:39] **Alex Ioannou:** you know, the person in between many times. Yeah, because, you know, one would have an issue with this one. And inevitably, it wasn't anything that anyone did. It was usually what someone said or how someone said it. You know, whenever I get into anything with anyone, the first thing I say to them and I love this is, I'm sorry you feel that way. Sorry you feel that way. I had, I got nothing to do with it.

[00:23:06] **Antony Whitaker:** yeah,

[00:23:07] **Antony Whitaker:** good words of wisdom there. Um, probably my favorite out of the six is the story of Concha.

[00:23:15] **Antony Whitaker:** Um, tell us about Concha. I love that.

[00:23:18] **Alex Ioannou:** I love Contra and, uh, um, I gave her the book and, um, you know, there's a photograph of her that I took and I wrote the story and I gave it to her and then I left, I left the room and then, uh, next thing I know. Her granddaughter who works at the salon that we're currently at came out and she's crying and I was like, is everything okay?

[00:23:44] **Alex Ioannou:** And then Concha came out and she's crying and I go, oh no, it's the book. Did I, did I write something wrong? And then she's, no, no, it was so lovely and she gave me a hug and all of this stuff. And then I go into the staff room and there's three other people that are crying. So, The basic story of Concha is, uh, when, when I had my salon, we needed, um, an assistant and my wife had suggested Concha because she had worked with her, uh, at another salon.

[00:24:11] **Alex Ioannou:** And she said to me, but she's in her seventies, you know? And, uh, I said, oh, you know, Jerry, my wife, I go, you know, we're We're funky little salon. We're trendy. We're, you know, 70. And she says, well, just talk to her. So I said, okay, fine. So, uh, by the way, the closer I get to 70, the younger it looks, uh, the younger it feels.

[00:24:35] **Alex Ioannou:** So, so I said, Oh, I have culture come in at 930 and, um, you know, I showed up at nine. And Concha was there and all the laundry was done, the gowns were hanging, the floors had been swept, the towels were folded, and she had a toothbrush in her hand. I'm not kidding. She had a toothbrush in her hand and she was going to do the baseboards.

[00:25:00] **Alex Ioannou:** And she says, Im, Concha, I clean for you. And I was like, you're hired. And, uh, she said, Oh, thank you. And then I said, you know, it's not, it's an assistant position. It's only X amount of dollars. And she said, okay. And then I looked at it and I said, all right, I'll pay you 5 more. And she says, okay. And then three weeks down the road. I said, I'm gonna pay you another 5. She goes, okay, great.

[00:25:29] **Alex Ioannou:** And she set the tone for the entire salon, entire salon. The youngsters couldn't keep up with it. And, um, she's with us now. So she was part of the crew that came over to the new salon. And, uh, you know, that was, that was five, six years ago. And she shows up in her hairdresser black. Makeup on point, hair done, and she is like a tornado in that room, keep

it, keeping the place clean and tidy, and she brings food, and she, uh, helps out with her church, and she does donations, and, personally, I don't know how we ever survived without Concha, and, um, my lesson was, don't judge that book by its cover, you know, um, because you'll be very, very surprised.

[00:26:21] **Alex Ioannou:** And she just opened up my eyes to, that stuff. And now, you know, at my age, I look at what I know and what I've done and, uh, I think back to my 30 year old self or 40 year old self, and I just want to slap myself. You know, behind the head because I didn't know nothing, you know, so the experience and, um, the things I've been able to witness and be part of and, and learn from, I just tenfold from that, from that age.

[00:26:54] **Antony Whitaker:** Yeah,

[00:26:55] **Alex Ioannou:** I was a youngster. So Concha, Concha is still, is still kicking and still shampooing and still knocking things out. And, you know, I walk in and she gives me a hug still, and she's the only one that will shampoo my clients. And, uh, and that's that,

[00:27:08] **Alex Ioannou:** you know?

[00:27:09] **Antony Whitaker:** fabulous, Yeah, I mean, I often say to people these days that you know, the hairdressing industry in the time we've been in it, uh, and you know, we have a lot of experience. We've been in the industry a long time. And you see how it's evolved and changed. And one of the great challenges now is that, you know, there's a shortage in many places of getting, uh, young people into the industry, uh, and or getting them to stay in the industry.

[00:27:35] **Antony Whitaker:** Once they do start, there's a lot of people that in the U. S. go to beauty school and then never end up working. in a salon and the, there's a lot of people in the UK, Australia, and every other country that, that, uh, you know, don't complete apprenticeships and, they're in and out of the industry in a year or two.

[00:27:50] **Antony Whitaker:** And oftentimes one of the reasons, and you know, whether you like it or not, it's sort of irrelevant. But one of the reasons is that young people go, I don't want to be sweeping and cleaning and shampooing and folding towels. I want to be a hairdresser. And it's easy for people of our generation to go.

[00:28:09] **Antony Whitaker:** Well, that's just not how it is. That's you know, when I was your age, this is what I have to do. But well, the reality is that no one cares about what you had to do when you were their age. It's a different world that we live in now. And so I'm often saying to people that you should look at employing.

[00:28:28] **Antony Whitaker:** Other people to specialize in those areas, and so they know that they're not going to be a hairdresser. They know they're going to be a housekeeper, or, you know, a cleaner or whatever the term is, shampoo assistant, uh, that you want to call them and, um, I've got two stories on the go here now, but I need to throw in that one.

[00:28:48] **Antony Whitaker:** I just mentioned housekeeper because I went into someone's salon once and They were introducing me to their staff and then they introduced me to this older woman, a concha, basically, uh, the equivalent of your concha. And, uh, they said, this is, this is Mary. And I said, Oh, hello, Mary. Nice to meet you. And they said, Mary's a housekeeper.

[00:29:06] **Antony Whitaker:** And then we parted company. They went down, Mary went downstairs and I went upstairs with the owner. And I said, so what does a housekeeper do? Because I'd never heard of a housekeeper in a hairdressing salon, and he said to me, well, she's a cleaner, um, amongst other things. And I was like, Oh, great. And it just occurred to me how much more, there's nothing wrong with being a cleaner and there's nothing wrong with being called a cleaner, but.

[00:29:33] **Antony Whitaker:** It gives people so much more dignity to call them the housekeeper, and it makes her feel better about her job and the way other people relate to her, whether it was me or the staff or even clients. So titles are really important like that. And, you know, the other benefit with it is that it changes the dynamic.

[00:29:53] **Antony Whitaker:** And you've just alluded to this. about the values that then exist in the staff room. Because when you put an older woman into the staff room, it sort of becomes a motherly figure or in some cases a grandmotherly figure when they're as old as what Concha is. And it changes the dynamic and the energy in the break room.

[00:30:16] **Antony Whitaker:** And I'm going to suggest for the better more often than not, it sort of grounds people a little bit and makes them feel, you

know, more. I don't know, family orientated or it just takes all the, the ego. That's what the word I'm looking for. It takes all that unnecessary ego out of the room and sort of makes it more real.

[00:30:34] **Antony Whitaker:** So yeah, as soon as I read about Concha and I saw the picture of her, I thought, oh, that's, that's a brilliant story. Beautiful.

[00:30:40] **Alex Ioannou:** It, it totally becomes a little bit more respectful, if you like. And, um, you know, people were talking to each other better, you know.

[00:30:50] **Alex Ioannou:** Less, less F bombs flying around, you know, stuff like that. So, uh, you know, and, and many times it's just unnecessary, and I love [00:31:00] the relationship that she, uh, developed with the clients as well,

[00:31:05] **Alex Ioannou:** something you mentioned about the training, um, you know, you're 100 percent right. It's like, we cannot train people. Now, today, the way that you and I were trained, it's a completely different, expectation, uh, and a completely different era. And so, um, just like everything else in your company, whether it's insurance or, you know, workman's comp or, uh, the type of coffee you buy, you have to evaluate and re evaluate and, um, update.

[00:31:40] **Alex Ioannou:** So we ended up changing our program. I can't tell you how many times, um, not just out of necessity, but because we wanted to, um, and we changed it around to suit the temperament of the time, all right? We did not do things the old way. We did not want to be the dinosaur in the room, you know? So we, um, you know, I mentioned earlier, training curriculums, um, and, I like to do that.

[00:32:10] **Alex Ioannou:** I go in and I have a look and see what each salon's need is, and we create a curriculum based on that salon's need. So someone, for example, might, you know, might want someone on the floor in, in six months. It's doable, provided you have the right curriculum, right? Back in our day, it was one class every week until 10 o'clock at night, and it took you 18 months.

[00:32:37] **Alex Ioannou:** Assistance these days are not going to wait 18 months.

[00:32:40] **Antony Whitaker:** on, did you say one class? You,

[00:32:43] **Antony Whitaker:** you got off

[00:32:44] **Alex Ioannou:** wasn't it? Yeah, it's two. It was two

[00:32:47] **Antony Whitaker:** It was two, sometimes three. Yeah, until ten o'clock at night. Yeah, exactly.

[00:32:51] **Alex Ioannou:** I remember taking the tube home really late, but, and then inevitably I'd go home and my mum would have three friends waiting for me to [00:33:00] cut their hair.

[00:33:03] **Antony Whitaker:** Yeah.

[00:33:04] **Antony Whitaker:** Yeah.

[00:33:05] **Alex Ioannou:** so, uh, yeah, you know, updating your curriculum is key. Right. And you have to stay on point. You have to, we talked earlier about the words are relevant, uh, and being in tune, you have to be in tune to what's going on, you know, many times I think, you know, and I'm sorry, we're You know, I don't want to go off the subject, but many times, you know, I find that, students come out of beauty schools with unrealistic expectations. Um, not blaming the beauty schools, but somewhere, some, somehow along the line, they're told, Oh, you're going to come out of school. You'll be earning a hundred thousand dollars a year in your first year and blah, blah, blah.

[00:33:47] **Antony Whitaker:** Yeah, it's a thing called social media.

[00:33:50] **Antony Whitaker:** Yeah, you know.

[00:33:51] **Alex Ioannou:** Unrealistic.

[00:33:52] **Antony Whitaker:** Yeah, exactly. Which is a shame, because we all know there are people who do manage to do that. But it's, it's the one in a hundred and then we wonder why there's such a great, um, dropout rate of apprenticeships, uh, or, you know, people not lasting in the industry when they come out of beauty school and it's because their expectations aren't being met and their expectations aren't being met because they're, sold a dream, which,

um, I'm never going to say it doesn't exist because it does exist for some people.

[00:34:24] **Antony Whitaker:** But social media doesn't often you know, portray that it portrays it as this is what's going to happen to everybody. And it doesn't happen to everybody. It happens to some people and, it happens to, more than just some people when they put in the hard yards and the.

[00:34:42] **Antony Whitaker:** Years of work in behind it, but it doesn't happen straight off the bat. And I think that's, you know, one of the downsides of social media that it paints unrealistic expectations that then I've met. Um,

[00:34:55] **Alex Ioannou:** What I like about your podcast, Antony, and, I listen to them all the time. Um, you bring some, you bring a realism. To the table. and in our pre talks, you kept it really real with, you know, I mean, we've known each other for whatever, but you kept it real. And, I think we're all smart enough to know where there's fluff and, tiddlywinks and stuff like that.

[00:35:18] **Alex Ioannou:** Right. But, um, keeping a realism, with your audience and, you know, asking Pertinent questions, uh, from your interviewees, is what it's about, right? And I think it's key, this is how we're going to educate people and people going to learn, you know, what the, true story is about what we do.

[00:35:39] **Alex Ioannou:** It's not just, rock star stuff and all

[00:35:42] **Antony Whitaker:** Yeah, yeah. Well, I think everybody has something special and valuable and it's about finding what is the real value that. You know, because we're all hairdressers, we can all talk about cutting hair and coloring hair and running a business and coming at it from different angles. But it's, I think you should always look for the, the sort of unique quality that any individual has unique story or whatever that they've got to bring to the table that can inspire others.

[00:36:10] **Antony Whitaker:** Um, well, one of the things, I know there are other stories in the, the book that I haven't touched on. Is there any of them that you'd want to. Or can I go on to something else?

[00:36:22] **Alex Ioannou:** Um, well, a lot, a lot of the stories are on my website. Uh, alexhaircoach. com. Excuse the shameless plug. Um, there's a lot more

stories on there. Um, you know, I find myself constantly writing, so there'll probably be another Don't Be Late, Clean Your Brushes Part 2,

[00:36:43] **Antony Whitaker:** Right. Okay,

[00:36:44] **Antony Whitaker:** there's one story you didn't tell and because I have known you for a long time. I'm surprised that you didn't mention it because I can't. Well, obviously it would have had a big impact on you and your life and professionally and personally. And I think, you know, where I'm going with this, but, you've done a lot of firsts, on the podcast.

[00:37:06] **Antony Whitaker:** Uh, but one thing that I've never had before is I've never featured someone on the podcast who's been shot. Um, in real life and you have unfortunately been shot, and that really, must have, knocked the, well, I don't know what the, I was going to say, knock the wind out of you. That's going to be putting it mildly, but tell us about that and how has that impacted on you as a person, professionally, personally, whatever, um, as much or as little as you'd like to

[00:37:36] **Alex Ioannou:** Sure. Well, that was a crazy story and a crazy, crazy experience. And, Essentially, I was coming home late, late one night. I'd gone to see a movie, um, ironically Tombstone. So, uh, I'd gone to see this movie and I just parked my car and I was walking home and it was about midnight and, uh, you know, back then my hair was really long and it was summer, so I had my little, you know, vest on and.

[00:38:07] **Alex Ioannou:** My tattoos were showing and stuff like that. So if I was going to mug anyone, it wouldn't be me, right? Not because I'm big and tough, but I'd probably go get a little old lady or something, but anyway, so, uh, I'm walking home and a car drives by and it stops, you know, about, a hundred yards up, up front and two guys jump out.

[00:38:27] **Alex Ioannou:** And the car drives off and they start walking towards me. And you know when you get that feeling and I'm just like, ah, this, this isn't, this isn't right. You know, one's in the middle of the road, one's on the pavement walking towards me, but I'm very close to my door and I couldn't turn around. So as we walked past each other, The kid says something and I turn around and he pulls out this gun, cocks it, puts it right in my face.

[00:38:54] **Alex Ioannou:** And you know, you don't know how you're going to react. And I would advise everyone, do not do what I did because it was stupid. Uh, but it was my initial reaction. And I was like, get the F out of here. You know, and I turned around and I was right at my door and I had the key in my hand. And somehow this kid was in front of me with his mate.

[00:39:20] **Alex Ioannou:** You know, next to me and he's got the gun, at my chest and, um, you know, we had some, some words and I told him to get the F out and I turned around. Now, I went to put the key in the door and it was as if time stopped and I heard a bang. And as I looked, could swear, I saw this bullet hit the vestibule and bounce on the floor.

[00:39:44] **Alex Ioannou:** And as I looked down, I see a little blood coming out of my, um, side here, my little love handle. And, uh, I thought, oh shit, I really like these pants, you know, these trousers. So as I turn around, they're running down the street and I gave him some more choice words. And, uh, and what was really sad was that they just shot me.

[00:40:11] **Alex Ioannou:** They didn't even wait to see if I was dead, if I'd been hit. They didn't even take anything, they just ran off. So it was basically a gang initiation. So I go upstairs and my roommate at the time, Jimmy, was there and he said, Was that you shouting and screaming? And, um, I said, Yeah, I just got shot. And my girlfriend was there and, she came out and I looked at her and I said, You know, I took off my shirt and I looked down, I go, Oh, I've got a hole in the front and she's crying.

[00:40:41] **Alex Ioannou:** She says, you've got a hole in the back too. So I have a look. So the bullet literally went into my side and came out the front and I was so lucky. So, so lucky. And I got through this with a lot of humor. But really, if that, if that gun had been an inch over or an inch higher. Um, I mean, I turned my back on him.

[00:41:08] **Alex Ioannou:** He could have put the gun to the back of my head and blew, and blew my brains out. I mean, it was just so ridiculous. And so, we, we, uh, go to the emergency room. And, uh, you know, the doctor looks at it and says, yeah, so through and through, they call it. I was like, oh, okay. And, uh, he puts a Band Aid on it and he says, you're done.

[00:41:31] **Alex Ioannou:** No stitches. No, nothing. I guess it's the most, you know, it's a very sterile thing, a hot bullet, burning through your, your skin. He

said, you were very lucky. I said, uh, yeah, thank you. And of course I had to speak to a policeman, um, and all of that stuff. And, we went back home and I found the bullet and I wish I would have kept it because I would have made a little necklace

[00:41:55] **Antony Whitaker:** Yeah, yeah.

[00:41:57] **Alex Ioannou:** know, stuck it in my tooth or something like that.
[00:42:00] Um, And, uh, but of course I had to give it to, you know, the police. But, um, like I said, I got, I got through it with, uh, humor and, uh, I went to work the next day and of course my roommate had told everyone and everyone's like, Jesus, what do we have to do to take a To get a day off around here and I go, I took a bullet for you guys. So, um, you know, we went through this thing and, uh, probably a couple of weeks later is when it started really bothering me because, um, actually a few days later, cause I started getting some black and blue swelling and, um, you know, where I got hit was in, was in the, the love handle. And so the black and blue swelling started to work its way down.

[00:42:47] **Alex Ioannou:** And, uh, let's say. I was concerned of, about the jewels, if you know what I mean. So, uh, I took, I took a day off and, uh, um, you know. And that's when I started, writing. So I wrote about the experience and it actually got published in a Chicago magazine. And I had one client who wanted to take it to, uh, Sundance and make a movie.

[00:43:12] **Alex Ioannou:** And I was like, oh, Jesus Christ, no. So, but it was humbling in a way in that your life can change in the blink of an eye, you know, and, um, my wife said to me the other day, what do you want your legacy to be? in this industry, blah, blah, blah. And I said, well, it's not really about the industry, is it? It's really about who you want to be remembered as, as a person.

[00:43:39] **Alex Ioannou:** Um, and you know, without getting too zenny here, but who you want to be remembered as, as a person and the good that you've been able to impart and leave and, uh, the positive influences that you can, uh, put, put on others, you know, like you, I'm married, I've got two children, two young girls, and, uh, those are my legacy, you know, and I want to make sure that, you know, some of the things that I share with them will stay with them for the rest of their lives and more.

[00:44:11] **Alex Ioannou:** So,

[00:44:13] **Antony Whitaker:** Yeah, I mean, I suppose if that's never happened to you, you can't imagine.

[00:44:19] **Antony Whitaker:** What that would feel like what that would be like, but I just sort of imagine that it is something that really at some level makes you think about life and think about your, you know, your purpose and and what you value.

[00:44:34] **Alex Ioannou:** yeah,

[00:44:36] **Antony Whitaker:** in a different way, you know, and, and, and ego and all sorts of things must, must get addressed and reassessed and thought about, when something like that happens, especially when you're young.

[00:44:47] **Antony Whitaker:** Cause you were only what, how old were you then? 30?

[00:44:50] **Alex Ioannou:** Yeah. Around that,

[00:44:52] **Antony Whitaker:** Around about 30.

[00:44:52] **Antony Whitaker:** Yeah.

[00:44:53] **Alex Ioannou:** Third ish. Um, and it, and it was good because. You know, it no longer became about the salon.

[00:45:01] **Antony Whitaker:** Hmm.

[00:45:01] **Alex Ioannou:** became about the people in the salon, became about the people that I worked with, you know, and, uh, I'm so proud of my, you know, I still call them my team. I mean, we, we ended up having Naha nominees, Naha winners, uh, Goldwell Global winners, um, you know, like I said earlier, we had celebrities come in and all, and all of that was great.

[00:45:26] **Alex Ioannou:** And it was wonderful opportunities for. You know, the staff that work there. But the most important thing was, uh, after I merged with, George on, Oak Street. I went to Florida for two years and I was

managing a, uh, a, a pretty large salon spa wellness center, um, uh, in Key Largo, Florida. Uh, very exclusive, you know, very.

[00:45:52] **Alex Ioannou:** Very affluent place. Um, and, uh, you know, it was great. And, I was there for two years, traveling back and forth, blah, blah, blah. And I learned a lot and, uh, I was able to write, to write a lot. But, um, you know, when I came back, um, my team, if you like, the people from Trio, were still together. No one left.

[00:46:15] **Alex Ioannou:** So.

[00:46:16] **Antony Whitaker:** Yeah.

[00:46:17] **Alex Ioannou:** To me, that's legacy where you can build a culture and build a group and build a team where they like, they like each other enough to continue with each other, even though I wasn't there. And, uh, and there's still always very respectful. Uh, you're my best boss. Uh, you're this, you're that, you know, which is, which is, you know, great.

[00:46:36] **Alex Ioannou:** But, you know, the most important part is, is that, is that, you know, we, We paved this path. And, um, you know, I see my staff, some that started as assistants are now charging more than I am for a haircut.

[00:46:52] **Antony Whitaker:** Wow.

[00:46:53] **Alex Ioannou:** More.

[00:46:54] **Antony Whitaker:** Fabulous.

[00:46:55] **Alex Ioannou:** And I love that. I love that.

[00:46:57] **Alex Ioannou:** You know, so be around people that are better than you, that are smarter than you, because that's how you're going to learn.

[00:47:05] **Alex Ioannou:** And that's how you're going to grow. You know, if you're the smartest person in the room, think twice.

[00:47:11] **Antony Whitaker:** yeah. You've sort of answered this question I want to ask you now from different angles already, but I just want to really focus it on this. And that is about... Your own journey and staying relevant

because, you know, through the course of ownership and, then selling your business and, and, um, you know, managing another establishment now coming back to doing what you're doing now and doing a mixture of coaching, et cetera, et cetera.

[00:47:37] **Antony Whitaker:** What, what's the key to reinventing yourself? What's the key to staying relevant all the time?

[00:47:44] **Alex Ioannou:** Gotcha. I think, I think the important thing for me is to build on the experiences that I've had, right? Um, to take what I've learned and what I've seen and to somehow make it relevant to today's world. Um, we would often say you've got to stay one step ahead of the ball. That's impossible. Now, impossible.

[00:48:09] **Alex Ioannou:** If you can keep up with the ball, you're lucky at this point. Um, you know, I read something that university students that are studying computer science, when they graduate, when they come out, everything that they've learned is obsolete.

[00:48:26] **Antony Whitaker:** Hmm.

[00:48:27] **Alex Ioannou:** It's insane. So, stay... Stay with with the ball, you know, um, the other thing.

[00:48:36] **Alex Ioannou:** Yeah, keep chasing it. The other thing that I learned too is that, um, you know, what I did when in my twenties or thirties, I don't particularly do now, but I'm not working any less. I may only be behind the chair two days a week, but I'm doing other things that are probably more important to me. relevant to, to me and my age and my experiences and stuff that I can share.

[00:49:00] **Alex Ioannou:** So you don't always have to be doing the same thing as long as you're doing. And as long as you're moving, I look around a lot. Um, I hated social media at the beginning, but now you have to know social media. You have to know it. and, um, you know, where I get my lessons from.

[00:49:20] **Alex Ioannou:** My kids.

[00:49:20] **Antony Whitaker:** Yeah, I was going to say, you kids. Yeah.

[00:49:22] **Alex Ioannou:** My 16 year old? Whip, whip, whip, whip. You know, I'm like, wow. Okay. My young one changes the ringtone. So, you know, I always carry my phone with me and I know that sometimes that's a no no. But occasionally I'll get, you know, you know, ducks or, uh, you know, or a train in my pants or something. You know, so that's always fun.

[00:49:49] **Antony Whitaker:** Okay. Alright. Well listen, before we, before we wrap up, just one thing I wanna ask you about is what, what would be the most important sort of nugget, the most important, but a wisdom that you'd pass on that you've learned as a salon owner? As a salon manager? What would, what, would there be one thing that you'd pass on to someone else?

[00:50:13] **Alex Ioannou:** I think, um, understanding what you don't know is key. And the way to fix it is to hire the people that can help you with it. Right? And this isn't a pitch for me. It's not a pitch for Antony. But hire people that can help you.

[00:50:30] **Alex Ioannou:** Even the president has an advisor.

[00:50:33] **Antony Whitaker:** Hmm.

[00:50:34] **Alex Ioannou:** Say that again. Even the president has an advisor. So, a coach, a trainer, a consultant, a book, um, something that is going to give you a different perspective, um, an empathy, if you like, on what it is that you're doing. Um, there's not one book, there's not one coach, there's not one
[00:51:00] consultant that will fix things for you, but a little bit of this and a little bit of that is good.

[00:51:04] **Alex Ioannou:** You know, we talked about training, you know, a new curriculum, you know, Antony's got these three books, which I love, and they're written in a way that anyone can understand them, you

[00:51:14] **Antony Whitaker:** And there's four of them.

[00:51:16] **Alex Ioannou:** Oh, there's four now. Well, I'm behind, I'm behind the ball.

[00:51:19] **Antony Whitaker:** for a while. I thought you had all four of them, but

[00:51:22] **Alex Ioannou:** I'm behind the eight ball again. Here we go. So there you go.

[00:51:26] **Alex Ioannou:** Time management, as we said. So, um, the bit of wisdom, I guess the nugget is, is to really, is to be humble enough to tell yourself, I don't know this, or I need help with this.

[00:51:42] **Antony Whitaker:** mm

[00:51:43] **Alex Ioannou:** And, um, the minute you do that, Your life will change, you know, I put myself, uh, on my website. I say hiring a coach or a consultant or whatever is like going to the gym.

[00:51:56] **Alex Ioannou:** You've been to the gym a thousand times. You know what to do, right? But the minute you hire a personal trainer, he or she is going to tell you. Okay, why don't you hold the bar this way or why don't you, put your, your hands there and you will get the results that you want quicker with less damage with, without an injury because you've got someone looking over your shoulder and don't be afraid, um, to do that, you know, you know, people say, Oh, I can't afford it.

[00:52:29] **Alex Ioannou:** I'm going to take your words. You can't afford not to do it, especially now, especially because people are moving at such a fast pace. Um, reinvention, reevaluation, restructuring is key. We were the Madonna of hair salons. Every, every two years we'd paint the place or we'd get new furniture or create a new system or, you know,

[00:52:52] **Antony Whitaker:** Yeah. So important reinvention.

[00:52:54] **Alex Ioannou:** to, you have to stay on it. I mean, I look at some of the places, you know, that we talked about before that have just done the same thing for years and they've lost relevance.

[00:53:06] **Antony Whitaker:** exactly.

[00:53:06] **Alex Ioannou:** enough.

[00:53:08] **Antony Whitaker:** Okay. Well, listen, on that note, um, we better, uh, wrap up here because we're running out of time, but where can people connect with you on Instagram or other social media channels on your

website? I know you said that most of those stories are on your website as well. Um, so what, where can they, um, connect with you and find out more

[00:53:24] **Alex Ioannou:** Thank you. Alex Hair Coach. Um, I changed it. It's way easier than trying to spell out my last name. Alex Hair Coach. dot com or I'm on Instagram. Um, Facebook. So, you know, and I'm available. I offer a complimentary 30 minute, chit chat to see if there's a love connection.

[00:53:45] **Alex Ioannou:** And, I view myself as the baby steps Um, with all due respect to Antony.

[00:53:54] **Alex Ioannou:** So I don't have what Antony has and, um, he, you know, I was complimenting him earlier because it's bloody genius and I'm jealous, but, uh, yeah, I offer the baby steps to that. So

[00:54:09] **Antony Whitaker:** Well, don't, um, underestimate what you do bring to it because you bring a uniqueness to it, to your approach, your experience, because that's the thing you were just talking about before with, having a coach or something is it's, it's like, I've never thought of it in the context that you just said about even the president has an advisor, but even a, uh, I often talk about it in the context of a tennis players that like, you know, a tennis player has a coach.

[00:54:36] **Antony Whitaker:** Now, that doesn't mean that their coach is better at playing tennis than them, because if they were, then they wouldn't be coaching. They'd be on the court

[00:54:43] **Antony Whitaker:** because

[00:54:43] **Alex Ioannou:** be winning

[00:54:44] **Antony Whitaker:** more money. Do you know what I mean? But, but they bring a different insight to it. They bring a different perspective to it.

[00:54:50] **Antony Whitaker:** And, and anytime you've got someone that can do that in any capacity that can only make you Stronger for, you know, having gone through that process. So listen, I'll put those links on, uh, the growmysalonbusiness. website and the show notes for today's podcast. Um, if you're listening to this podcast with Alex and you've enjoyed it, then do me a favor, take a screenshot on your phone, share it to your Instagram stories.

[00:55:15] **Antony Whitaker:** And don't forget to subscribe and leave us a rating and review on the Apple podcast app. So, uh, to wrap up, Alex, um, thank you very much for being on this week's episode of the Grow My Salon Business podcast.

[00:55:27] **Alex Ioannou:** Thank you very much, my friend. I hope to see you again soon in Chicago.

[00:55:31] **Antony Whitaker:** Thank you. I'll look forward to it, but I'll be looking over my shoulder. Okay. All right. Good to see you.

[00:55:41] **Antony Whitaker:** Cheers.

[00:55:42] **Antony Whitaker:** Thank you for listening to today's podcast. If you'd like to connect with us, you'll find us at [Grow My Salon business.com](https://growmysalonbusiness.com) or on Facebook and Instagram at [Grow My Salon business](https://www.facebook.com/growmysalonbusiness). And if you enjoy tuning into our podcast, make sure that you subscribe, like, and share it with your friends. Until next time, this is Antony Whitaker wishing you continued success.