

GMSB 251

[00:00:00] **Antony Whitaker:** Hello and welcome to today's episode of the Grow My Salon Business Podcast. I'm your host, Antony Whitaker, and as always, it's great to have you here with us today. I've been a hairdresser for many years and I've had the privilege of working in many different countries. I've had a great career and I 100 percent believe that salon owners are the backbone of the industry and you survive and thrive through determination and hard work and you deserve to win and you deserve to succeed.

[00:00:31] **Antony Whitaker:** Because every day. You get up and you do it all again by serving and taking care of your clients and serving and taking care of your team and coming up with new ideas about what it takes to run a successful salon business. And we are here to help you in any way that we can. So thank you for joining us here again today.

[00:00:51] **Antony Whitaker:** Video versions of our podcasts are now also available on our YouTube channel. So if you want to put faces to the names, then head on over to Grow My Salon Business on YouTube and like and subscribe to the channel. Or if you're listening on your favorite podcasting app, leave us a review or share the podcast with those who you know will benefit from our message.

[00:01:10] **Antony Whitaker:** So with that said, on with today's show. Now, my guest today is Hellen Ward, who, as well as being a hairdresser, she's a wife, a mother, author, lecturer, educator. And she's also the managing director and co-founder, along with her husband, Richard Ward, of the Richard Ward Hair and Metro Spa, located in the heart of London's Chelsea.

[00:01:32] **Antony Whitaker:** Hellen is highly regarded in the industry, not just for having built a great business, but also for her passion and commitment and common-sense insights and advice when it comes to the UK hairdressing industry. In today's podcast, we're going to discuss the meaning of luxury in the salon industry, having royalty as part of your clientele and the challenges and opportunities that the industry is facing today and into the future and lots more.

[00:02:00] **Antony Whitaker:** So without further ado, welcome to the podcast, Hellen.

[00:02:03] **Hellen Ward:** Lovely to see you. At last, we get to do this. We were going to do it in lockdown,

[00:02:08] **Antony Whitaker:** That was a long time ago, wasn't it? That was a, that's the world had before and after moments and lockdown is definitely a, uh, well, that was the cause of the before and after. It's a reference for everything, uh, that we do now, isn't it? Yeah. Okay. So listen, I am going to jump in and throw a question at you, which is a little bit of a curve ball, but I know that you probably haven't been asked it before and that you'll very comfortably be able to answer it.

[00:02:33] **Antony Whitaker:** So here it is. If Richard Ward Was it clothing brand? Which one would it be?

[00:02:39] **Hellen Ward:** Oh, that's a very good question. Um. I'd like to say Chanel or Zadig and Voltaire, but they're too, I think they're a bit too highbrow, so I would say it would probably be a Belstaff.

[00:02:54] **Antony Whitaker:** Okay, all right, you surprised me there. What about magazine? If you were a magazine, what magazine would you be?

[00:03:00] **Hellen Ward:** I've gotta say Vogue, haven't I

[00:03:01] **Antony Whitaker:** I thought you'd go with Vogue, uh, or maybe Harper's Bazaar. Um, restaurant?

[00:03:06] **Hellen Ward:** too snooty, too snooty Harper's Bazaar

[00:03:09] **Antony Whitaker:** Right, okay.

[00:03:09] **Hellen Ward:** Restaurant. Well, it was my daughter's birthday yesterday and we went to Langan's and I'm an old-fashioned girl. I like the Ritz, I like Langan's. I like the Wolseley. So yes, one of those three

[00:03:21] **Antony Whitaker:** all right, I would have said you were the Wolseley without a doubt. Or, you know, throw the Ritz in there as well. Um, okay, well, you know, I often use those analogies when I talk to salon owners to get them to anchor in their mind who their target market is and to recognise that their target market isn't everyone.

[00:03:40] **Antony Whitaker:** And I would, uh, I suppose what I'm doing is here is I'm introducing Richard Ward because you've obviously positioned Richard Ward as a luxury brand and you do it really well. So the question I wanna start off with asking you is how do you define what luxury means in the hairdressing sector?

[00:03:58] **Hellen Ward:** Wow, what a good question. And interestingly, when I do my consultancy work, I do the same thing, Antony. I say, if you were an airline or a supermarket, which one would you be? Because I don't believe that there's anything, there's any wrong answer in that

[00:04:14] **Antony Whitaker:** No, there's not.

[00:04:15] **Hellen Ward:** you can be, you can be cheap, and you can be, uh, fast.

[00:04:19] **Hellen Ward:** What you can't be is cheap, fast and good. You can't be all three. So you've got to pick two. So, we try to be good. We just aim at good, right? Let's just have it there. We aim at good. Because, I think there is, there's a real, I think we've seen a massive, um, decrease in the people doing the luxury premium end of things in our sector.

[00:04:47] **Hellen Ward:** And that's sad. You know, when you see a big name disappear, it's even if they're a rival of ours, it's never a good thing. I don't like to see any of these high-profile luxury brands not exist anymore. This is not good for anybody. And people will remember I had an argument with the GM of a very big manufacturers, one that we deal with a lot, at the, uh, when there was the insurgent of all the blow dry bars.

[00:05:20] **Hellen Ward:** And he was saying, this is the future. People want to be in and out. They want a blow dry bar This is the future of hairdressing. And I said, that's like the future of flying is only EasyJet or Ryanair. Because to assume that people want to be cheap and fast is so incorrect. Let people decide for themselves.

[00:05:46] **Hellen Ward:** Because price doesn't sort of equate to value, in my opinion. So, the meal we had last night, Langan's, very expensive, gorgeous. You know, but worth every penny. The service was impeccable, the food was delicious. I didn't have to remind them it was her birthday. Everything was laid out for us when we got there.

[00:06:09] **Hellen Ward:** So, was it value for money? Yes, it was value for money. And I think Richard Ward has, we set out to be just, to, to give the type of hairdressing that people really wanted from where we are. We're in Chelsea. We're a Chelsea brand. We've always been known for that. And our clientele want a luxury experience and they want beautiful couture hair.

[00:06:42] **Hellen Ward:** And that's what we give them. And, you know, Richard was up many times in his career for British hairdresser of the year. He never won. And if you ask him why he didn't win, he would say, I don't care about the sort of hair like those other people do, like Angelo, people like Angelo, who I just hold up there in my, you know, who I just think is just the master of our, of our craft.

[00:07:08] **Hellen Ward:** But you know, Angelo Seminara, Lives eats and breathes that very technical cutting hairdressing Avant Garde type of work. It's not what we do Um, and and so I think we've always sort of by the industry been sort of dissed a little bit for the fact that we are high end beautiful blow dryers, luxury hair, it's quite long, the sort of hair we're known for.

[00:07:36] **Hellen Ward:** We are not spiky little geometric bobs, it's not what we do. And I get it that someone else wants to be really good at that, but it's not what we do.

[00:07:45] **Antony Whitaker:** Yeah, no, and I think that what's important is to understand who you are and who your target market is and, and what, you know, what positioning you want to take in the industry. And I think you have clearly defined, you know, what the Richard Ward brand is all about, but I'm aware that For, you know, this podcast that we have a lot of listeners in the UK, but we also have a lot of listeners in the United States, uh, and Australia.

[00:08:08] **Antony Whitaker:** We've got listeners in over 70 different countries every week. And so a lot of them will not understand, uh, or will not know necessarily about Richard Ward, um, hair and Metro Spa. So, before we dig into the detail for the rest of the podcast, can you just give us an overview of what the Richard Ward salon is all about, how big it is, how many staff, how many clients you do, what sort of general, uh, you know, revenue you'd turn over in a year, just so that people get some context to everything else that we speak about.

[00:08:41] **Hellen Ward:** Sure. So we're in the heart of Chelsea. We're in Sloane Square. We have one site, only one salon. Um, the salon is 5, 000 square feet. It turns over six and a half million pounds gross a year out of the one site. That's not including, um, our wet line that we sell in Waitrose, our shampoo range or anything like that.

[00:09:03] **Hellen Ward:** That's just turnover from services in that shop, in that salon. Um, we, I suppose our ethos is that we have this very amazing long-standing team. So most of the senior team have been with us. either since we started or we have grown them up. So it's not unusual for a senior stylist, for example, to have had 20 years' service with us.

[00:09:32] **Hellen Ward:** In fact, most of the team have. So we have this, um, I'm going to say, when sometimes when I'm asked what I do, I say, I run a, I run a kindergarten for grownups because anyone who's in our industry knows what a family, it's a family business. We are a family and with a family comes fallouts. You know, there is never a time when everybody is speaking to everybody, but being the largest independent hair and beauty salon in the UK, which we are, You know, you've got to expect that.

[00:10:08] **Hellen Ward:** So I'm like the matriarch. Um, I just want all my siblings, all my babies, all my children to love each other. Um, most of the time they do. But like when siblings fall out, we're fiercely protective. So even if one person isn't speaking to another person, if anyone else was to slag off that person, it would be Fisticuffs, you know.

[00:10:31] **Hellen Ward:** It's a great environment. They're a lovely bunch. We've all been together so long. And it is a real family business. And I know we're not a family business like the Mascolos, for instance, but in our own way, we are. Um, Nando, Fiona, Gavin, you know, Julie, they've all been with us since the day we started. And from then they've trained and, you know, we've just

[00:10:57] **Hellen Ward:** bloomed from this team of five to now we have shy, just shy of 100 employees, 6.

[00:11:03] **Antony Whitaker:** And when you said just for reference for our predominantly American audience, when you said revenue of six point something million a year.

[00:11:13] **Hellen Ward:** 5 million gross.

[00:11:15] **Antony Whitaker:** So that's about 8 million US dollars. Um, and I always, uh, I always qualify what you mean when you say turnover because in the UK and Australia, a lot of the world, we use the word turnover, whereas Americans tend to not use that.

[00:11:30] **Antony Whitaker:** They use the word revenue or total sales because when you say turnover, they think that you're talking about staff leaving. Um, so, so it's, it's, Always interesting how we use the same, we speak the same language, but sometimes we use words in completely different contexts. So, so

[00:11:46] **Hellen Ward:** So let's just clarify it's six and a half million British UK pounds going into our till

[00:11:53] **Antony Whitaker:** in one salon.

[00:11:54] **Hellen Ward:** and we do 1300 services a

[00:11:58] **Antony Whitaker:** Wow. Okay. So that is a big business and a very busy business. So, uh, in terms of price point, just give me one reference for, say a haircut and a blow dry. What I know you've got a range of prices, but what would a haircut and a blow dry start at? What would the bottom price be? What would the top price be?

[00:12:18] **Hellen Ward:** So 50 is the cheapest and 350 with Richard is the most expensive. So we've really, the price tiering thing, how we remain affordable is we, we have an ethos which, which is that I don't believe any hairdresser can be a jack of all trades. Right. And a master of none. So they have to decide when we're training them.

[00:12:41] **Hellen Ward:** After they've completed our Richard Ward Level 1, our trainees, they have to decide whether they're going to do cutting and styling or whether they're going to do technical. And they cannot do both. So they have to decide what they're going to be. And it's pretty much based on if you go, would go to, would go to any wonderful restaurant, Marcus Waring, for instance, You wouldn't have the grill chef trying to make, be the pastry chef.

[00:13:08] **Hellen Ward:** You wouldn't have the sous chef trying to be the grill chef. You would have your area of expertise. Now the whole expertise thing, the reason we've encouraged that is twofold. One is because, um, We can enable our customers to pick the price point for them. So for instance, if someone's cut is the most important thing and they want to see Nando, who I believe is the best hairdresser of his generation.

[00:13:37] **Hellen Ward:** even better than Richard, which Richard would say himself. Um, so Nando would be like one down from Richard, and Cristiano, artistic director, either of them. They could choose that price point, but if their highlights were not that important to them, they could choose a graduate, technician to make it affordable and that goes all ways round.

[00:13:59] **Hellen Ward:** So that's one reason it keeps it affordable for the customer. Now it could be that they want to see our technical director and our education director and of course then it's going to be a higher price point. It could be that they want to see an apprentice stylist and a graduate so that they can make it as affordable as they like.

[00:14:18] **Hellen Ward:** But the most important reason we do that is not really. Just for the customer and the price point. It is so that If somebody were to leave us, one of the team, which is very rare, touch wood, I'm touching wood as I say this, um, then there are X many more reasons to stay. So if one of my senior stylists were to leave, the client would then have that decision to make, well yes they have gone, but I do like the way David does my highlights, and I like the way Gina does my waxing, and Vita does my nails.

[00:14:55] **Hellen Ward:** And Kat's done my blow dry before, so really it's only someone for the cut, so I could choose someone else. And that is for customer retention.

[00:15:02] **Antony Whitaker:** Yeah, yeah, that's a very good point

[00:15:04] **Hellen Ward:** So it's strategic.

[00:15:05] **Antony Whitaker:** Yes. You just mentioned a whole list of different hair and beauty services. Um, the name of the business is the Richard Ward, Ward, sorry, Hair and Metro Spa. Um, So just, just explain what that covers because I've been on your website and it covers an awful lot.

[00:15:26] **Antony Whitaker:** You do, you offer a lot of different services. You offer everything that you could possibly want basically. Um, so, so I'll just,

[00:15:33] **Hellen Ward:** including Reiki and acupuncture and all of those things. Um, so Metro Spa, what, when, beauty has always been important to me. It doesn't bring in lots of money. It's a different beast financially to hair. Um, the numbers are completely different. I dispute anyone trying to tell me the beauty industry is the same as the hair industry, it's not.

[00:15:56] **Hellen Ward:** Um, but the reason we have beauty is for all the reasons I've said. So we offer quick treatments. We offer facials, body treatments, nails. Uh, lashes, waxing, etc. And so I was trying to find a word when we moved into the space in 2005, because this is our third site. The one we're in now in Duke of York Square.

[00:16:21] **Hellen Ward:** I was trying to find a word that would, set the stall out and market the business correctly for us from the get go. And I didn't want to make people think they were coming into some sort of Champney style health farm and it was going to be like oxygen tanks and mudslinging and people wearing robes and all the rest of it.

[00:16:40] **Hellen Ward:** So it's not that. So I, I actually was in a Tesco Metro. And I've, and I, Tesco Metro, for the people that are overseas will understand, it's Tesco, biggest supermarket, but it's a version that you often find on a high street where it's a very condensed version. So, you know, there's three different types of tea bags instead of 27 different types of tea bags.

[00:17:04] **Hellen Ward:** And it's for the people that are coming home from work and they just want key things, uh, but they know that it's not the full service. And I thought Metro Spa, so I put the words, two words together and trademarked it.

[00:17:15] **Antony Whitaker:** Okay. Got it. Now, when you talk, you talk about the brand as being luxury, but you'll often drop in that word, affordable luxury before it, uh, which is a good thing. And I see from your price perspective that it is affordable luxury as well. Um, but what are some of the service experience touches that make a salon visit a luxury experience.

[00:17:40] **Antony Whitaker:** What are the things that you do in Richard Ward that you are maybe not going to find in a more, you know, mid-price point,

middle of the road or value salon? What are some of the examples that you could share with us?

[00:17:53] **Hellen Ward:** Right, I think it is, I think it's predominantly the standard of your team and, you know, we have Gavin on the front desk, Gavin is our *maître d* he knows all the clients. names. He knows what they like. He knows what the name of their dog is. You know, the preachers that are coming in, um, the expertise of the team, but also the customer service element is really important.

[00:18:19] **Hellen Ward:** I mean, Nick, who runs our bar, he's been with us for 28 years. Our barman, you know,

[00:18:25] **Antony Whitaker:** Okay. Now you can't, you can't just gloss over the fact that you

[00:18:28] **Hellen Ward:** Sorry.

[00:18:29] **Antony Whitaker:** a licensed bar with a barman in it. Okay. Uh, or that I,

[00:18:34] **Hellen Ward:** Fully licensed bar, and chef Alex is

[00:18:37] **Antony Whitaker:** Right. Okay,

[00:18:38] **Hellen Ward:** So we're just, you know, clients are sometimes in for a long time or they're working so they might want breakfast, they might want a a, a sandwich or, or a wrap or something at lunchtime.

[00:18:47] **Hellen Ward:** The licensed bar, um, when we moved into our current site in 2005, was something that was really important for me to get, and if anyone. out there can sort of chime with this. I'm not bad at filling in forms. I've just filled in my golden visa so I can spend a bit more time in Spain. Nothing is like filling in an alcohol license. It's trees and trees of paper, um, in the UK anyway. But it was worth it because I wanted to be able to bundle up and do a top to toe day and include a glass of champagne, you know. Um, so, that was really important for us. But, you know, when clients do come into the bar, which is where they wait, you know, Nick will very often get their order for them before them having to ask.

[00:19:40] **Hellen Ward:** Oh yeah, it's an extra dry cappuccino, extra hot, isn't it? You know, and he'll do it for us. So it's the service, it's the people. The lack of staff turnover is massively important to that, because people want to come in, they want to see the same people, they want to feel free. We have a free to roam policy, you know, go to whoever you want to go to.

[00:20:03] **Hellen Ward:** And we encourage that, we actively encourage that. You know, so if you want to switch from Nando to Cristiano, do it. Nobody's gonna, you know, which can be a problem in some salons. It can be a problem. Um, but I think people feel very comfortable and, you know, for instance, um, we have, you know, Joey, Tommy, they're our next generation of sort of Nando.

[00:20:29] **Hellen Ward:** Electra is an amazing hairdresser. They've all been Richard's junior, Nando's junior, so the clients all know them, they feel very comfortable. And I think that's the key to the retention rate.

[00:20:40] **Antony Whitaker:** Yeah. I was thinking as you were, I, I'd written down the word *maître d* uh, I love the fact that you refer to Gavin as the *maître d* and I was just wondering to myself, what is his job focus? Is it to focus on the client experience? Because if you've got, you know, approximately a hundred staff, I can imagine that at any one time you might have, I'm going to take a guess, 50, 60, 70, 80 potential clients in there at one time.

[00:21:07] **Antony Whitaker:** So as a *maître d*, like a good *maître d* in a restaurant, they're over everything, but they're very much focused on the on the client experience as opposed to if he was called the general manager, um, would he be more focused

[00:21:22] **Hellen Ward:** Well, that's Julie. I do

[00:21:24] **Antony Whitaker:** Ah, so you have a

[00:21:24] **Hellen Ward:** I do have a gm, so Julie is my GM in the office, and she is accounts, finance, ordering stock. She's not a people person in that sense. She's a bloody good admin, you know? Um, Gavin being the *maître d* his role, what he, it's interesting is that because when he, Gavin came, Gavin was a hairdresser that trained with Richard.

[00:21:49] **Hellen Ward:** back in the Kings Road Neville Daniel back in the day, um, which was a whole another story. But Gavin, um, was a fabulous hairdresser and he left to be personal hairdresser to Anita Roddick, who was the founder of, uh, Body Shop and went all over the world with her. Then when, um, when that sort of came to its end, he, he would sort of moonlight a little bit in London, but he was doing a degree in women's psychology.

[00:22:18] **Hellen Ward:** Um, and. I begged him constantly when we first opened to come and work with us. He completely said no, no, no, I don't want to do hairdressing anymore. He'd been through a really difficult life experience. One of his best friends had died

[00:22:32] **Hellen Ward:** so he'd wanted to refocus and he didn't want to do hairdressing anymore. He wanted to do something quite meaningful, as you do when you go through something like that. I just said to him. And he just said, you're driving me mad. I said, you're going to have to come and work with us. Just, just do it.

[00:22:48] **Hellen Ward:** So I said, I want you to be front of house. And in those days we didn't really that we were like one of the first salons to have that. I mean, they'd had it before in the super salons of the seventies, like the house of Leonard and all of those had had that sort of thing, but, but it sort of gone away from that a little bit.

[00:23:05] **Hellen Ward:** And I wanted to get back to that cause I loved that idea. And so he says, well, what do you want me to do? And I said, well, I'll give you a one-word job description. And that's schmooze. Schmooze everything. Schmooze the team, schmooze the clients, schmooze the staff, make sure it's running properly. And he likens his role to carrying the Olympic torch. He says to the team, when you've got clients visiting the salon for multiple services, of course, the problem that you're going to get is timing issues and the client coming back late or early or somebody else doesn't know where the client is. So Nick is great in the bar because he's keeping an eye on who's sitting there, if they've been sitting there too long.

[00:23:48] **Hellen Ward:** He's wonderful for that and everybody adores him. Um, but Gavin's role is to really remind the team that when they're taking control of that, Client, they're carrying the Olympic torch. Right, and all the time that client is in their care, who they're going to next, whether their food

has arrived, if they're on time, whether their dog wants a bowl of water, everything is their responsibility.

[00:24:15] **Hellen Ward:** And so that's how we train the team to say that customer is in your care, you, everything about that customer during the time she's with you is your responsibility, everything. And I suppose that's how we are able to get the service. that we want, that we have to have, because we don't get the price point unless we get the

[00:24:36] **Antony Whitaker:** Yeah, exactly. Okay. Now, in line with that, a lot of UK hairdressers will know that you have some of the Royal Family as clients. Um, so two things. Can you talk to us a little bit about that? Uh, and, and what, what sort of impact does that have on your business as well as it being a great privilege and an honor to be, you know, having those, the Royal Family as clients, you know, does that have a business impact?

[00:25:02] **Hellen Ward:** It would have much more of a business impact if we could actually talk about what they have done, which is such a shame that we can't. But of course, we're bound by very strict confidentiality agreements. I think the interesting thing, so, so we do, um, Catherine, um, Princess of Wales, uh, Sophie, the Duchess of Edinburgh.

[00:25:24] **Hellen Ward:** Um, we do Prince William and we do the children. Catherine and William's children. Um, and other members of the royal family. That's that. There are other members of the royal family that do as well. So the interesting thing about our price tiering is that originally Catherine's mother came in and Catherine would go and see the younger people in the salon.

[00:25:51] **Hellen Ward:** Uh, you know, and this is what we find with a lot of our clients that they the mums come in and because we've got the cheaper price point, their children will go to the cheaper price point and then they will move up with those stylists as they go up the ranks. And that's really the job when we have our young people coming in.

[00:26:11] **Hellen Ward:** We say to them, you know, you will get a lot of clients because you're on a cheaper price point, but as you move up the ranks, it's your job to keep those customers with you. I digress. But yes, we're very, very proud of that. So Richard, um, We're very proud that we've been doing Catherine since, you know, before she went up to, before she met Prince William, before any of that happened.

[00:26:35] **Hellen Ward:** Um, and it's wonderful and it's a privilege and, you know, it was really sad because, um, Richard's mum passed away quite a while ago, but Richard's dad died just before the Royal Wedding and he'd have been so proud of him.

[00:26:52] **Antony Whitaker:** I'm sure, I'm sure, who wouldn't be? How does that work out of curiosity? Do, do they come into the salon? Do you have like private rooms? Or is it a home visit that you do? What's the sort of

[00:27:03] **Hellen Ward:** We do have private rooms, um, but unfortunately these days it's harder and harder. So no, we see them outside of the salon. Some, sometimes in the salon, but, but predominantly outside of

[00:27:16] **Antony Whitaker:** right. And is it the same person that they have all the time?

[00:27:20] **Hellen Ward:** Um, no, interestingly, um, which is just goes to show that our ethos works because we have a small team so that if someone's not available, somebody else can look

[00:27:33] **Antony Whitaker:** yeah, yeah. Okay. It's interesting.

[00:27:35] **Hellen Ward:** they have their favorites,

[00:27:37] **Antony Whitaker:** course they do. Yeah, yeah. Um, you mentioned before you were talking about, uh, general manager and different roles, you know, back-office people. Um, can you talk to us a little bit about that? I'm sort of thinking that, you know, you have a big business, like, you know, a hundred odd staff under one roof.

[00:27:55] **Antony Whitaker:** When you've got that sort of infrastructure, um, You obviously have to have a lot of, you know, there's someone looking after marketing, there's someone looking after payroll, there's someone looking after PR, et cetera. Um, what, what are some of

[00:28:08] **Hellen Ward:** that's me.

[00:28:09] **Antony Whitaker:** Okay. So, so is that just your job description I've so far touched on?

[00:28:13] **Hellen Ward:** Um, well, you know what it's like, Antony, you've been there. Yeah, we have roles and responsibilities, but when it's a family business like that, and it's your own business, you know, if the toilet's blocked, the toilet's blocked. Whoever's free to go and unblock the toilet will unblock

[00:28:29] **Antony Whitaker:** Right. Okay.

[00:28:30] **Hellen Ward:** So I'll be doing very, I'll be unpacking boxes sometimes, you know, but yes, we try and stick to our roles and responsibilities.

[00:28:38] **Hellen Ward:** I think the business before COVID, we did have an in-house PR. We had an in-house marketing. We had to make redundancies. We had to trim the business right back. And we've never really scaled back up again, because I think what we've realized is that I think with social media as well, the tone of voice has to be right.

[00:29:02] **Hellen Ward:** So outsourcing any of that, it's very difficult for someone to get your tone of voice right. So, Sam, who works alongside me, she does all our IT, uh, will do the website. But I'll write the content of the website. Um, Julie's GM, so she's bills and HR. I mean, we all do a bit of everything. Um, but. Yeah, I think I prefer, I think we all prefer to work like that because we're much more. Sometimes it, I think it turns into a bit of a monster, before, and, and, sometimes you can feel quite out of touch, and when you feel a bit out of touch and not in control of things, that's not good for someone like me, because I need to be in control.

[00:29:45] **Hellen Ward:** But, I think I have learnt, pushing 57 as I am now, that you can't, you can't keep playing all the bloody instruments yourself, you've got to learn to be the conductor

[00:29:58] **Antony Whitaker:** Yeah. Yeah. That's a good way of putting it. Um, I know that you have an office in the salon. Um,

[00:30:06] **Hellen Ward:** that's really

[00:30:06] **Antony Whitaker:** yeah, I was going

[00:30:08] **Antony Whitaker:** I can imagine that or, or if not at home off site, you need to be in where the action is. Um, I suppose I was going to ask you was this. Is it? Most people don't have a salon with a hundred staff.

[00:30:22] **Antony Whitaker:** Most people have got five, six, seven, eight, you know, maybe 10 staff, whatever it is. And a challenge that salon owners always grapple with is how do they let go of certain stuff? How do they outsource? How do they delegate? When do they employ an office manager? That sort of stuff. I know that you've written books.

[00:30:41] **Antony Whitaker:** I know that you work as an educator and you know, you do speaking engagements, et cetera, to the industry. How do you advise a salon owner to grow into those positions as their business is growing.

[00:30:56] **Hellen Ward:** Yes, it's, it's a challenge, isn't it? I mean, it's, it's my pet hate when someone says I'm a hairdresser and you go, right, so hold on. So when are you making time to do your, because let's just have it right. Whatever issues I have, I would have the same issues if I had three staff as if I had a hundred and three staff.

[00:31:19] **Hellen Ward:** The scale is just bigger and I think I'm not a lover of ego, right? So that when I'm normally on stage, the first thing I say is, It's really hard running a salon. I'm not a person that says, Oh, do what I did. It's so easy. I hate that. I hate hearing about people's successes. I'd, I learned, I'm a person that learns more from hearing about people's failures.

[00:31:47] **Hellen Ward:** Business people's failures. I like to hear I face this issue. This is how I got over it. Then aren't I fantastic? It doesn't I can't relate to that. So going back what I say to Everyone that I teach and consult with is to say will go into work tomorrow and face exactly the same issues as everybody else I'll have exactly the same issues.

[00:32:14] **Hellen Ward:** The scale of them will just be larger. So I don't think the next thing I say is the minute you're, you've become a business owner and people ask you what you do. You are not a hairdresser anymore. You are a business owner who happens to work in the hairdressing sector. And if you reframe what you're doing on a day-to-day basis in that way, you will realize that you have to have time to run your business.

[00:32:48] **Hellen Ward:** Richard Branson does not push the drinks trolley up and down the Virgin flight to New York. He doesn't do it. He has to delegate

[00:32:56] **Antony Whitaker:** Yeah.

[00:32:59] **Hellen Ward:** know, what you will do is catch him on the odd flight, checking out everything's all right. So I think when people say,

[00:33:05] **Antony Whitaker:** Yeah.

[00:33:07] **Hellen Ward:** because I'm running a column of clients and I'm fully booked and I'm putting money in the till, and I go, but you are Not a hairdresser anymore.

[00:33:18] **Hellen Ward:** You can still do your clients, but unless you cut your hours down, more for your time, delegate your customers to your team, because as long as they're coming into the salon, it doesn't really matter that they're not seeing you anymore. And actually, take the time to get to grips with the business.

[00:33:37] **Hellen Ward:** You know, nothing runs itself, not even a tap. Nothing runs itself. So I'm not a believer in, well, I'm a hairdresser and I haven't got time to do it all. The first thing I say to people, unless you are willing to start your first client at 11 and finish at four and delegate those clients that can't get in with you to other people and take a bit longer on your clients and have some time in between each one to deal with the stuff that goes on, you'll burn out and you'll be useless.

[00:34:07] **Hellen Ward:** And you'll be a burnt-out hairdresser. trying to run a business and falling apart. You have to make time. And it's interesting because hairdressers have a mental block with that a lot of the time. And somebody I once, that came on my call said, she said, Oh, you're so true. She said, but you know, the other day I, I, I marked myself out for the morning, went into the office in, in her business.

[00:34:31] **Hellen Ward:** I can't remember where it was, small, small business somewhere. And she said, and when I came back out in the afternoon, Um, a couple of the teams said, Oh, you've had an easy morning then, in the office. I said easy morning. How do they know that you haven't been sitting there thinking how you're going to pay the rent?

[00:34:52] **Antony Whitaker:** Yeah, exactly.

[00:34:53] **Hellen Ward:** No, that's your fault that they have that perception, because you can't, you can't be a good boss unless you give yourself the time to do it.

[00:35:00] **Antony Whitaker:** Hmm. What was the first position as your business grew that you delegated back-office job? What was the first role that you got someone else to take on

[00:35:14] **Hellen Ward:** Uh, so that would have been payroll?

[00:35:17] **Antony Whitaker:** Right. Okay. Yeah. Yeah.

[00:35:19] **Hellen Ward:** Because I think it's payroll is a bit of a useless use of your time. I think VAT returns, um, accounts, any of that is, is really useful because you've, you know, even processing the numbers, you get a real feel for it. But working out someone's wages, it's just not, it's not a productive use of, of time.

[00:35:40] **Hellen Ward:** So I'd always outsource payroll. And that was definitely

[00:35:44] **Antony Whitaker:** Okay. Um, when I was looking through your website, I, I came across. Category called guest artist and I thought well that's interesting. So I had a little dig in there to see what a guest artist was talk to us about that because that that I was intrigued by that and I hadn't seen that in the UK.

[00:36:02] **Antony Whitaker:** I know there's a bit more of that in the US but tell us what a guest artist means in your business and how it came about.

[00:36:09] **Hellen Ward:** So basically, that is people who want to come into the salon and maybe have, um, a room for a day, a treatment room for a day to do acupuncture or Reiki or, um, um, um, um, um, they are predominantly doing, running a business somewhere else. Or Alexander, for instance, he's on our guest artist page. He, he lives in Manchester, but he'll come down and do a column of clients.

[00:36:32] **Hellen Ward:** So it's people that are not sort of full time. They're not in the business all the time. And we just, we couldn't really figure out how to market people so that the people were really clear. Customers were really clear that people are not in the salon all the time. And we also wanted to sort of diversify.

[00:36:50] **Hellen Ward:** I mean, if, if I'm not very good at, if we're going to do something, I want to get someone who's really, really good. So for instance, Imran was my acupuncturist after my first pregnancy. And I basically just said, I need to see you and I'm going to have to give you a treatment room because I haven't got time to come and see you otherwise.

[00:37:11] **Hellen Ward:** And so, and he's been with us for 20 years. Um, so it's that sort of thing and he just comes and does his clients a couple of days a week. Um, and it sort of works well with us and we've had some really interesting, you know, um, contributions to our, our service offering through doing that.

[00:37:32] **Antony Whitaker:** So are they, they have their own business elsewhere or they work elsewhere as well? So like, for example, I think, I think you said his name is Alexander. He lives in Manchester. Does he work in a salon in Manchester two or three days a week and then work in London

[00:37:45] **Hellen Ward:** yeah. He works maybe from home and does his own thing and then just comes to see us and when he's in London, he'll, he'll work with us

[00:37:53] **Hellen Ward:** So it works

[00:37:54] **Antony Whitaker:** is that a thing that you see happening more and more now?

[00:37:59] **Hellen Ward:** Well, I, unfortunately I do, you know, in the UK we have, seen such a decline, such a rise in chair rental businesses and I think there is a real need for clarification. Um, I just need to sort of, because some of your viewers, listeners might I know that I do a lot, a lot of work. I have, I formed Salmon Employers Association and we've just formed the British hairdressing consortium so that we're all coming together as a voice for the industry, um, just to make sure that we Get the guidance we need and it's not that I'm anti change or anti, um, self-employment.

[00:38:50] **Hellen Ward:** I'm not. I just want it to be done properly and so that it's fair. And I don't think that salon owners have the right information. There's not enough clarity around what that needs to look like for it to be successful. And that really needs to happen urgently in the UK, because if we don't get to grips with this and sort it out, what we'll see is a rise in disguised employment.

[00:39:19] **Hellen Ward:** And that's not fair to the employee.

[00:39:23] **Antony Whitaker:** Yeah.

[00:39:24] **Hellen Ward:** So if you have Hairstyle on A and Hairstyle on B and Hairstyle on A is proper PAYE and people are employed and even if they're on a, I mean, all of my staff earn a basic or a percentage, um, and they take whichever is the greater amount. So it's, it's sort of, it means that there's no cap on their earnings and they can, you know, earn what they like.

[00:39:47] **Hellen Ward:** And our top employer has a turnover and, you know, puts 10, 000 a week in the till. So they do very nicely thank you out of that, which is great. Um, but if you have Salon A operating like that, or even just paying National Minimum Wage. And you have Salon B, where the owner says, Right, you're all self-employed, but I tell you what, you need to work Tuesday, and you can't have Wednesday off, and you've got to come in on Friday.

[00:40:17] **Hellen Ward:** That's disguised employment. And that causes an issue for Salon Owner A. Because Salon Owner A then has the a lot of their staff saying, well, I'd like to be self-employed. But what they don't realize is that someone on a B, if they're not doing it properly, and this is where there needs to be a lot more guidelines, because the guidelines are so outdated.

[00:40:39] **Hellen Ward:** If they're not doing it correctly, The liability for any unpaid NI falls not just with the landlord, who is now a landlord at Salon B, but the people that are working in Salon B. So, putting all that aside, the biggest issue is that Salon B, with the chair rental, cannot, unless they run a PAYE system, employ apprentices.

[00:41:09] **Hellen Ward:** So we're seeing this massive downturn. In the number of apprenticeships and pre COVID it was something like 19, 000 and the latest figures we have is now 5, 000 young people taking up a hairdressing apprenticeship a year. So a quarter of what it was just four, five years ago. Now that isn't a red flag to the government.

[00:41:32] **Hellen Ward:** And, and, and isn't something that people like me need to constantly be reinforcing and telling them you will not get those numbers back. Now, that's not all due to Salon B and Salon A. A lot of that is due to the mindset of COVID and young people and how they want to live their lives. But we need to be very aware of it because the chair rental and the work hub thing, they're not going to employ an apprentice.

[00:42:02] **Hellen Ward:** Thank you They're just not.

[00:42:06] **Antony Whitaker:** I agree with you now. I want to dig into something but I was I didn't want to interrupt you there while you're in midflow. But you mentioned Ni people outside the UK won't be aware of what you mean.

[00:42:17] **Hellen Ward:** Okay, so that's National Insurance. So that's National Insurance contributions which you would pay. Um, and that's your contribution towards your state pension when you get it. And all the government things like, you know, the rates and the roads and hospitals and everything else.

[00:42:33] **Antony Whitaker:** Okay. Well, listen, I do want to dig into some of those other areas around that. But before I move on to that, I just want to ask you one thing. You've talked a lot about, and I know you've got amazing team retention, which is fantastic. And people, when they hear that you've got staff that have been with you for 20 plus years, et cetera, um, you know, they'll be sort of thinking, Oh, my God, how on earth do you manage to do that?

[00:42:54] **Antony Whitaker:** So what's the most important thing that you've learned? Just as a quick summary of, of, about being a great leader and building a great team. Like, what is the essence of what you need to do to do that as a saddle learner?

[00:43:11] **Hellen Ward:** I think you have to, um, the lesson I learned with this really appreciating people's skill sets and not trying to make the perfect person. You know, if someone isn't good at X, but they're brilliant at Y, embrace the Y bit and forget about the X bit. Stop trying to correct. So even in terms of Technically, if someone shows an aptitude for like bridal hair, send them on every bridal hair course there is.

[00:43:49] **Hellen Ward:** You know, cultivate that skill. So then you get an expert. Instead of saying you're good at bridal hair, but your barbering is not very good. So let's worry about the barbering. That took me a long time because you need students that not only with their technical side and their skill set and let some things go.

[00:44:10] **Hellen Ward:** So I'm very much, not just with their technical skillsets, but with their, their emotional skillsets, their managerial skillsets.

[00:44:20] **Hellen Ward:** You know, some people are brilliant educators, but they don't like admin. Um, take the admin off them. And I think that I learned that That actually, it's better for everyone to go, You don't like that, so don't do it. You do like that, so do do it. And then upskill on the bits they like, rather than trying to upskill on the bits they're not

[00:44:41] **Antony Whitaker:** Okay, well,

[00:44:42] **Hellen Ward:** When that penny dropped with me, that's what changed our

[00:44:46] **Antony Whitaker:** okay. What about, uh, taking that same logic and applying it to some, well, applying it to, say, retail? Rebooking? Treatments all that really sexy glamorous stuff that as a salon owner. You're looking at those numbers and looking at those metrics You're not gonna tell me that you see that Antony's a stylist and he does zero and retail one week And you know Marianne next to him is a stylist and she's doing five or six hundred pound a week and retail You're not gonna shrug your shoulders and go ho hum Antony's not good at retail

[00:45:18] **Hellen Ward:** Oh, but you know what? That's why you're wrong

[00:45:20] **Antony Whitaker:** Really okay Wow, okay

[00:45:24] **Hellen Ward:** Nando doesn't sell any retail at all. He hasn't got time. If you're going to turn over 10 grand a week,

[00:45:31] **Antony Whitaker:** Yeah.

[00:45:32] **Hellen Ward:** forget it. I'm not going to bust his B A L L S for not selling any retail. So, no, of course I want it. Of course I will do what I call the, um safety check.

[00:45:47] **Hellen Ward:** Now that is, you know, when you get on a flight and they go, oxygen mask will come from the ceiling, fasten your seatbelt, la, la, la, la, la. I'm still going to say it, but I'm also going to just go, you know what? You do you.

[00:46:02] **Antony Whitaker:** If you're making up for it in another area, I used to do something similar. I had, you know, five metrics that I would look at and I'd say, look, as long as you're hitting four out of five of them. So yeah, look, their retail may not have been good. But their treatments or their rebooking or their, you know, average bill or something.

[00:46:19] **Antony Whitaker:** Yeah, exactly. So, so it's, it's a little bit of give and take

[00:46:22] **Hellen Ward:** So I, and I just think, you know, it's flex, isn't it? It's some people just, it's like the, um, I don't know if you've seen Wolf of Wall Street when he says, sell me the pen. And the bloke just starts laughing. And then says, give me your phone number. Oh, I need a pen.

[00:46:39] **Hellen Ward:** And that's how people need a pen. You can't, you've got to sell the need rather than sell me the pen.

[00:46:45] **Antony Whitaker:** Great movie. Yeah.

[00:46:47] **Hellen Ward:** get, uh, get the Wolf of Wall Street bit and they go, I can't sell them any products. Whereas if they were doing my hair and they just said, and then I said, Oh, what do you think I need?

[00:46:56] **Hellen Ward:** You know, do I need a bit of Oribe

[00:46:57] **Antony Whitaker:** Yeah,

[00:46:58] **Hellen Ward:** They happily go, Oh, that's perfect for you. So I just think it's that. And I try and just go, you know what?

[00:47:07] **Antony Whitaker:** but retail, retail is a big part of your business. If, um, the imagery of how big the retail area area is, I mean, so, so as a percentage of your total revenue, how much of it will come from retail? Wow. Okay. So. Oh yeah, definitely. I thought you would have been like, you know, 10, 12, 15 percent whatever, because you know, you've got a lot of retail there, different brands, beauty and hair, et cetera.

[00:47:37] **Antony Whitaker:** So I would have thought there'd be more than that. So that's interesting. Yeah. You mentioned the word flex before, and before we have to start wrapping up, you know, I We've both been in the industry a while and we've seen lots of different business models come and go. We see the industry evolving and changing and that's just part of the course.

[00:47:56] **Antony Whitaker:** Uh, you can't stop that. You have to embrace it and look for ways to make it work. So if you're talking today about today's young 20 year old. I mean, when I was 20 or when you were 20, it was a very different, I mean, we weren't 20 at the same time, just to be clear on that. You were a glint in someone's eye.

[00:48:18] **Hellen Ward:** Oh, I

[00:48:20] **Antony Whitaker:** But the point of what I'm saying is that the 20-year-old you're employing today, they have a very different needs and expectations about work life balance, mental health, yada, yada, yada, uh, compared to the 20-year-old that you employed in the eighties and nineties. So how has your business. evolved in terms of catering for, you know, flexibility.

[00:48:47] **Antony Whitaker:** What flexibility do you offer people? Can they work two days a week, three days a week? Can they, you know, like, well, you tell me, what is the flexibility at Richard Ward for employees?

[00:48:56] **Hellen Ward:** I think, I think when I became a mum, I really realized that the way I want to work is going to be an ever changing thing, you know. And I'm very flexible with anyone with their work life balance. You know, I feel that people, you have to be these days. What we have, we have two dynamics. We have. A lot of our female employers are becoming mums and dads, parents, and the men are taking time off for that as well.

[00:49:28] **Hellen Ward:** And we have also, the fact that we're all getting on a bit, we all want to work in a different way. So, you know, some of my teams have got a place, you know, bought a home abroad, or their parents are elderly and they're looking after them, and so the way they want to work is different. They know, I think I let them lead it.

[00:49:50] **Hellen Ward:** Because they know how much money they need to make, to make things work. And they know whether they can make that any, that money, save money, if they do less days or do full days and less days per week or, you know, maybe start at 11 and finish at 4 or, I leave it to them. I really honestly do. I think we've all been together so long.

[00:50:14] **Hellen Ward:** Don't do anything you don't want to do. Do what suits you. And especially The parents who are, all our lives are constantly changing. But I particularly pick on the mums and say, you know, when my children were very small, I needed to go in every day but could only do a few hours. As they grew up, it was actually easier to go, actually, I want to do more full days.

[00:50:38] **Hellen Ward:** and have two or three days off a week, complete days off. So we're very flexible. I absolutely let the team lead it. What I'm also flexible about with my young people, for instance, Kat, she's, uh, she did her qualification, she qualified with us, did like four years training and then said, I want to have, have a gap time.

[00:51:01] **Hellen Ward:** I want to go off. I want to see that. I just want to do it. And I said, okay, okay. Do it. I'll leave your job open for you. Take three, four months, however long you want. And if you don't want to come back, don't come back. And if you do want to come back, I'll hold your job

[00:51:16] **Antony Whitaker:** Right. Okay. And

[00:51:18] **Hellen Ward:** And I don't think I could be a more fairer employer than that.

[00:51:22] **Antony Whitaker:** Yeah, okay. Um, so what about for young employees? You say, well, I really want to, I want to do hairdressing, but I don't want to do Saturdays. How does that go down?

[00:51:31] **Hellen Ward:** Well, it's okay. I mean, look, length of service is important to me, so it, I would, I would let the people that have been with me

the longest decide what they want to do, and other people would have to fit around that. But, you know, Thursday's our busiest day of the week now, since Covid.

[00:51:51] **Hellen Ward:** Thursday's mobbed. Saturday is not as busy as it ever used to be. It's still busy, but it's not as busy. And I think, interestingly, you know, my children are 24 and 21, uh, 23 and 21, and they, having them as a sounding board is really helpful because they know the world as it is now. This Gen Z or Millennials or whatever, they, they know the world as they're experiencing it now. It's very difficult for someone of my age to make any sort of comment on the mindset of young people because when I was their age, I knew the world as I knew it then, and it was a different place. So I, I'm very fortunate that I have them as a sounding board. to say, you know, what do you think about that?

[00:52:48] **Hellen Ward:** Do you think that's fair? Would you, if we did that, if we made that a company rule, would you think that's okay or not? And they have been a brilliant sounding board for me and their minds work in a totally different way. And I say to a lot of my older team, you know, we're giraffes and they're zebras. And, and so we have to understand we're, we're different.

[00:53:12] **Hellen Ward:** And as long as we know we're different and we think in a different way, and there's no point going, when I did my training, I got a click around the ear with a hairbrush, if I didn't do it right, which I did, um, because they're going to go, what?

[00:53:25] **Antony Whitaker:** Who cares?

[00:53:26] **Hellen Ward:** know, so I think you do have to, if you want to be an employer in this, in this, in this, Modern world with, especially with a young workforce, which our sector traditionally has.

[00:53:38] **Hellen Ward:** You do have to embrace the fact that you're different. There's no wrong. There's no right, but you will not think in the same way as they

[00:53:45] **Antony Whitaker:** Yeah, exactly. I think that's a, that's a good way, a good place to finish up on things. Um, whereabouts can people connect with you on Instagram or, you know, website, other social

[00:53:57] **Hellen Ward:** Yes, Helen Ward Limited is my Instagram and I have got a website called Helen Ward as well. Um, I, I do, uh, my books are on Amazon. Um, But yeah, um, I don't tend to do much, uh, education anymore because my parents are elderly and I'm at that stage of my life where I'm sort of, I've, I've wedged in the middle of looking after elderly parents, pre grandchildren, got to get out there and live a life before the grandchildren come, um, and try and run the business as well.

[00:54:34] **Hellen Ward:** So I'm a busy girl, let's put it like that. But yes, connect.

[00:54:38] **Antony Whitaker:** I'll, I'll put those, uh, links on our website, growmysalonbusiness.com and in the show notes for today's podcast. So if you're listening to this podcast with Helen and you have enjoyed it as much as I have, do me a favor, share it to your social media platforms or, uh, friends that you know who would benefit from it.

[00:54:55] **Antony Whitaker:** Cause I think there's a lot of great wisdom there and don't forget to subscribe and leave us a rating and review on the Apple podcast app. So, uh, to wrap up. Helen Ward, any final words before I let you go?

[00:55:09] **Hellen Ward:** Yes, I just want to say, just to dispel a myth, I am actually a hairdresser because people don't know that about me. And we didn't go about, we didn't even get time to talk about how I started, but I did start as a hairdresser and I am a hairdresser. I'm a, I'm a, I'm the world's worst hairdresser, don't go anywhere near me.

[00:55:27] **Hellen Ward:** But, I think that has been a massive part of our success that I have put a colour on. I do know how to run a column, I've cut hair, I can do all those things. And I do think being at that sort of coalface is really important as a background to then growing your business. I think you have to have lived every experience on that salon floor to be really good at your job.

[00:55:51] **Antony Whitaker:** Okay. Well, thank you, Hellen Ward, for being on this week's episode of the Grow My Salon Business Podcast.

[00:55:58] **Hellen Ward:** Thanks so much. It's been a joy.