

“Where Are They Now” Series: Brittany Long

Intro: This is the Work at Home Heroes podcast. Your host, Caitlin Pyle, digs deep with people from all over the world who make money from home. Get ready to wake up to a world of possibility for freedom, flexibility, and a life you'll love.

Caitlin: Hey everybody. Welcome back to the Work-At-Home Heroes podcast. We are back and we've decided to mix it up. If you've been following along so far in the second season, we're doing a series of 10 episodes, each with a different topic as usual but all related to working at home. And so we've kind of titled the series, "Where are They Now?" when we're bringing back previously featured guests to take a look at their progress since we last had them on the show and hear their journey as it's been. So you're going to find a link to the previous interview with each guest in the show notes. So join us now as we follow up with Work-At-Home Hero, Brittany Long. Welcome back to the show, Brittany.

Brittany: Thanks. I'm happy to be here, Caitlin.

Caitlin: So Brittany has been working at home for just 18 months and really since the last time that we interviewed her, she's had some side hustles, but in addition to her current work now as a digital marketer where she's focusing on copywriting, email marketing, and funnel building, she and her husband -- who's also working at home now, so I can't wait to go into that -- you're running a business that helps teachers and both you and your husband are former teachers and they're helping teachers now figure out what they want to do next when they transition out of teaching safely and securely into a new career. They love Brittany from Life After Teaching -- so excited to have you back. So it's only been 18 months. Are you serious?

Brittany: Yeah, I know. I can hardly believe it too. It feels like a lifetime ago because so much has changed.

Caitlin: So much has changed and I am certainly just in shock it's only been 18 months, but you've kind of had a bootcamp of sorts where you just got thrown into the fire and you learned how to make yourself warm and make me warm because we'll just disclose our working relationship. Brittany and I have been friends for a long time, but we've been working together for a couple of years now. You've been able to “be me” in a time when I just needed to step back and figure out who me was and you were able to do that for me and ... Oh, I'm tearing up a little bit just talking about it. But Brittany is my best friend in the whole world, so she's on the show and she's also the friend that I've had the longest and that's really cool. It's really cool to see how we've both grown and gone through so much and really just the last two years, but it was since we've known each other since 2012, we've seen a lot and we've seen each other go through a lot. I consider you way more mentally stable than me, but I'll let you take it from here. Tell our listeners what you've been doing over the last 18 months and what ... Well, give a little synopsis, where you were in your mind 18 months ago and then we'll start there.

Brittany: 18 months ago, I was just getting ready to leave teaching and I was terrified. And actually, I don't know if I ever told you this Caitlin, I almost said no to doing more work for you guys because I was so terrified that I wouldn't be able to do it. And I was like still in this mindset of, "I'm a teacher and what if I can do anything besides this?" And so I actually almost stayed in teaching because I was so scared of making that leap out of it. And it's funny now to think about because I mean, if I didn't have that moment of courage, my life would just look so different. So when I first started working at home, I was, well actually, even before that, I guess the six months leading up to it, I was teaching full time. I was doing my side hustle with my sign shop, which we talked about last time I was on a show and then I was doing side hustle work as well with graphic design stuff and things like that and I was really tired all the time and because it was a solid like 14, 16 hour days, most days. But I was confident, slash, I guess confidence is the right word or I was hopeful. I was hopeful that what I was doing was going to pay off and I kept telling myself, "You've seen other people make it. Why can't you make it also if you put in the work, if you put in the time, if you learn the skills?" So that's kind of how that started. And then from there, I started learning new skills. I learned how to do copywriting, email marketing, funnel building, and then some other things too. But that's really what I landed on that I really, really enjoyed. Since then, I've had the opportunity, of course, to work with you. I've had the opportunity to work with a few other influencers and bloggers and it's been really neat to see how much has changed in these 18 months because I took action and because I felt that fear and just decided to kind of take a leap anyway and focus on learning new skills.

Caitlin: I think it's one thing that I've learned about fear and courage is that there is no courage without fear. And so you're always going to feel fear when you take those steps. And it really just takes one moment of courage where you're like, "You know what I'm going to do the thing and see what happens." And kind of being unattached to outcomes is helpful. And there's a lot of, I think talk in the wellness community these days about just being unattached to outcomes and not being, not feeling like you have to control what happens, but thing when we embark into wanting to make it work on our own and not having to return to a traditional nine to five or a teaching position where someone else is in complete and utter control of your life, let's face it, it's basically, if you get two weeks of vacation a year or whether it's three months over the summer, you're still kind of in a cog in a wheel that's going to keep turning whether you're with it or not. And so wanting to take control of our lives and facing, you might tell yourself, "This has to work because there's no way I can go back to that," and I was the one in that position. I got fired from my last real job in 2011 I'm like, "There's no way I'm going back to this and ever putting myself in this position again for anyone to have the opportunity to take away my income and for me to not be in control of it." And so we kind of have to be attached to the outcome if we know that there's no way you're going back. It's not that we couldn't go back, but it's just why would we want to once you've tasted that sweet freedom. And so for me, I've had that fear of, "Oh my gosh, what happened?"

And then I got divorced last year and things just got really scary for me. I was like, "What if I have to go back one day and get a regular job?" because the only thing I know how to do is

what I'm doing now. I know I could probably reapply those skills and do it for other people, but it's so nice to not do that. And so nice to not do that, to be more and more in control. So I just can't believe it. So you were in the show a year and a half ago when you were still a teacher then, and your side also was making hand painted signs, is that right?

Brittany: Yeah, that's right.

Caitlin: And you didn't love it. Is that right? You were good at it, but you didn't love it?

Brittany: Right. As a hobby, it was fun. But as getting paid for it and having a deadline and all this fear and perfectionism really kicked in for me that I didn't expect. And so I'd be working on a single sign for hours and hours and hours and I'd get to the end, I'd be ready to package it up and send it out. Which also, I mean there's that cost as well that I didn't really anticipate, but I'd be getting ready to send it out and I notice a little smudge or a little something that was off and, nobody else probably would have been able to notice it, but I did. And so I scrubbed it and I redid it and I would do that again and again and again and I realized I'm spending all of this time and all of this money and I'm not really making much in return. And so I realized I was really trading time for money and it was not sustainable. And I wanted it to be sustainable because I wanted so badly to get out of teaching. I knew it wasn't for me anymore, but I thought this is the only thing I can do. I'm creative, this is the only thing I can do. There were times I felt really hopeless because I thought if I can't make this work, then what else is there for me? I'm just going to have to stay in teaching. So that's kind of where it was when I first was introduced to the idea of digital marketing and the idea of graphic design and using skills that I had been applying them in a new way.

Caitlin: And this is really creating new pathways of possibility in your mind because if you had committed to being a teacher and you kind of identified yourself as a teacher and the certain environment, teaching certain, I was going to say genre, but a type of human being, middle schoolers, and science. and then all of a sudden, you're kind of introduced to the possibility that it might not always have to be like that. And it's super scary because you can't imagine anything other than what is currently in front of you. And I think that's the source of fear is that we have these certain expectations, whether they're low expectations or high expectations, and then it's just not as flowery or as content. You don't feel as contented as that, maybe expected you would or you kind of look around, like, "Why am I not happy with this?" And then you've got to take some steps to move forward. Now, you mentioned in your little survey that we have our guests take before you came on the show that you made videos of yourself during some of those tough times. Can you tell me about those?

Brittany: Yeah, and I actually still do this too. Anytime I'm having a rough day or anytime where I feel like something's impossible, I'll make a video of myself and it's a little embarrassing. I don't know if I would ever really show anybody else them because they're really raw, they're really emotional and I'm usually at some point crying because I'm just so frustrated or fed up. It's usually when I'm like at a point where I'm trying something new and I can't seem to figure it out

and I'm like, "What if I can't ever figure it out?" It kind of goes back to that old mindset for a second. I have to catch myself, but making the video helps me catch myself. And I'm really glad I did it too when I was teaching because you mentioned not being happy and for a long time when I was teaching I thought well maybe there's something wrong with me. Maybe I just am not writing in my gratitude journal enough or maybe I just need to have a more positive attitude. But when I started to look at it objectively, there are a lot of things that happen in teaching that I'm like, "This isn't okay." The more that I started to really see that and be okay with stepping out of that identity, it really helped. But making those videos help me to see that as well, to see that I'm saying and doing something that's no longer the right fit for me. I'm crying a lot and it's not benefiting me. It's not benefiting my students. There has to be something else. And so making those videos really kind of has helped me. It's like self therapy in a way because it kind of helps me see things more objectively. But it also helps me look back at it years later now and be like, "Wow, I made it through that time. That was difficult for me. I made it through that. Imagine what else I can do." And so anytime I come up against something that's a little bit hard or I'm like, "Oh, this is a new skill, I'm not sure about this." I watch those videos and I'm like, "All right, if past Brittany can do this, then future Brittany can figure this out."

Caitlin: Well this is a really smart idea and something that I feel ... It's one of those things where I'm like, "I want to try that." I think I've done that once where I've just made a video for myself and then I just can't bring myself to look at it again because I feel like I would not like the person on the screen and I deal with self-judgment a lot. So I think that's great that you're able to push past that and find value in those videos and use them as a tool to remind yourself that, hey, you made it through that time. And it was a time where I didn't think I was going to get through and I did. And what is it that made you make the videos in the first place?

Brittany: I think I was just feeling so down and I was like, "It can't be this way forever." One of the ones that I made too was when I found out I had diabetes and that one's a really hard one for me to watch because it's like I feel the pain still. Because it's still fairly recent, but I feel the pain and it's still ... and I guess I kind of wanted to feel that in a way. I wanted it to be able to look back on that time and feel how I felt and sit in it and be like, "I don't want to feel that way ever again. So what do I need to do so that I'm not in that same position a year from now?" And so I thought maybe just, I guess two reasons. One, I thought maybe this will help me kind of work through how I'm feeling, but I was also thinking, maybe it's going to help me push forward and push past it and use it to propel me forward." Because I think it's easy to go through a hard time and then things get easier again and you get kind of complacent and you're like, "Oh, I can stop working so hard" or, "I can stop taking action daily." And I wanted that reminder of "this is how you felt. If you don't want to feel this way again, you have to do this and this and this." And so that I think was really the motivating factor for me.

Caitlin: I think it can be exhausting to ... it feels like a lot. And so even though you know the things that are making you feel better, it's that maintenance. It's almost like as women, when we do our hair and we realize we have to keep doing our hair, if we want it to keep looking good. It's exhausting. And then you kind of wonder, why? Why are we doing all of this? Why are

we doing all this? So maybe that's a segue into the next question I have for you is -- why do you do what you do?

Brittany: That's changed also, I guess over this time. When I first started doing what I did, when I first started taking action consistently, it was because I wanted to give up teaching. It really was that avoidance of "I don't love what I'm doing." I had a cancer scare a few years ago and it really kind of pushed me for it. It slapped me in the face of my own mortality and I was like, "All right, if this is my last year on earth, am I okay doing what I'm doing now?" And the answer was a resounding no. And so I thought, "Okay, if I'm not okay with that, I need to figure out something different." Really, it was this avoidance of that's not what I want to do. I want to get out of that and I want to avoid how I'm feeling and that's really where they started. I mean I felt those kinds of things before, but it never really stuck. Having that cancer scare kind of pushed me forward, pushed me out of that, I think. And then when I started to see what was possible and started to earn more and started to have a taste of that freedom, I realized I don't ever want to go back to a world where I don't have that freedom. And so then it went from I'm scared that I'm going to die doing something that's not the right fit for me to I want more freedom. And it was a lot more fun I guess. I'm thinking of it as chasing after freedom. And then now for me, we have a daughter on the way and I just really like having that freedom, but I just want to live a full and meaningful life, as full as I can. And so that's part of it. Something that's really important to me is leaving a legacy. I know if I can continue to stay focused, if I can continue to take action, even when I don't feel like it, I'm going to earn more. And part of that earning more means that I can give more also. And so places like Rapha House, I really want to be able to give extravagantly too. And I know that if I don't take the action daily, I'm not going to be able to. And so it's been kind of cool because it's gone from fear to chasing freedom to now giving back to others also. And none of that would be possible if I was still teaching to be completely honest. So that's the whole circle of it really.

Caitlin: I think that's amazing. And to be able to see the entire full circle and know that your "why" can change and to look back and see that, "Either I stay where I'm at and this is what I do for the last year I'm earth or I make it more meaningful." And you said you wanted to have as full of a life as possible. What does that look like? What does that mean to have a full life?

Brittany: Pretty much what I'm doing now, which is really nice, which means I'm getting to work in the way that I want, with the people that I want, doing what I want, making a difference. Doing some kind of work that I feel like is making a difference and I feel like I get to do that every single day and that is huge for me. It also means traveling with my family when I want to and we've been able to do that whereas with teaching it was just in the summer, just on breaks. And then you would come back and you'd be so exhausted. You'd be like, "I'm never doing that again." And so just having that freedom and flexibility to do that and then to be able to feel like I'm leaving a legacy, so feel like I'm doing something to help others on a larger scale. All of those things, that's what a full and meaningful life looks like to me is making an impact, being able to travel and see the world with my family and being able to do what I love with the people that I love.

Caitlin: I love that and it pays off too. We usually touch on this towards the beginning of the episode and I just completely forgot, but it's paid off. You chasing that little voice and you quieting the fear just enough to take steps forward and then more steps forward. It's paid off. About a year and a half ago, I guess 18 months ago, you were averaging about \$2,500 a month. And can you tell us now how your income has increased since your skills increased?

Brittany: When I started, like you said, \$2,500 a month, and some of that was from my sign business, so it really wasn't a lot. But I remember feeling like, "Oh my gosh, there's no way I'll ever be able to make more than this." But on average right now I'm making about \$15,500 a month and there have been some months where I made over \$30,000 a month, which is more almost what I got paid teaching an entire year.

Caitlin: That's incredible.

Brittany: I know. It still blows my mind. I just, wow. Yeah.

Caitlin: The thing about that, I mean you could work one month out of the year and still be able to live in the way that you were living when you were working as a teacher and that's amazing. And so that gives you a lot more flexibility as well. More peace of mind. You can do house projects, have fun on vacation, go on ... You and I, we've done work trips or we've gone on things and had some fun while we were there, but still got work done. And yeah, I think that's great.

Brittany: I really like it. And my husband has family. There's a funeral in the family and we were at a conference and normally, something like that ... First of all, if we were still teaching, we wouldn't have been able to go to the conference because of the time factor because you only get so many days off during the year and even then they can turn it down, which has happened to me before. So we wouldn't be in the conference to begin with and because we wouldn't be able to afford it. But then we were able to go to the funeral from the conference and not have to worry about money, not have to worry about where that was coming from, or can we be able to make it or anything like that and paying for hotel and those kinds of things. It was just so nice to have that freedom to be there with family without worrying about, "Oh, how will this affect our bills? How will this affect our food?"

Caitlin: At a lower income, a lot of those things come to mind and a lot of those worries go away with your income increase for sure. And of course, things ... When you have more money, you got more problems. But in some ways I think it's worth it because you have more options and you're not alone and you can afford to hire some help if you need to and you have more options. And I think applying the same wisdom of managing your money when you have less of it towards your money when you have more of it, that kind of dissipates a little bit of that stress and anxiety that could arise with increase in income, especially if it increases as quickly as it's increased for you. So tell us more than about what your life looks like now. What ways

specifically has life improved for you? You've talked about your income, you talked about your just work environment, the freedom that you've been able to experience because of it. What else have you seen improve in your life? There's so much.

Brittany: There is so much. We've been able to pay off over \$60,000 in debt in eight months, which is insane because we were paying that off for, I don't know, probably eight years at that point. And it just never seemed to be going down. And I remember telling Zach one day, I was like, "Why are we even paying this off? I'm just going to have this debt until we die, so why bother paying it off?" I mean I understand that's not the right way to look at it, but I was so frustrated that I was paying towards it every month and then the interest would kick back in. So we paid off over \$60,000 in debt. During this past 18 months, I actually found out I had type-2 diabetes, but it was great because I use the same principles that helped me figure things out with my work-at-home career to figure out what works for me and adjust and I have been able to lower my A1C, get out of the diabetic range. And even though it's been hard, I'm really thankful for all the hard things that came with figuring out how to work from home because it really helped me through my diagnosis and through figuring out how I can reverse it too. I've lost 50 pounds since then. I've significantly improved my health. I've been able to get pregnant, which is something that we wanted to do for over five years and it just hadn't happened. And some of it was my health and I just didn't realize it. I've learned new skills and I mean I've learned so many new skills, I don't even know if I could list them all, but my pay, you mentioned that, my confidence has improved. I've written and published one book. I have another one on the way. We launched our first summit with the Life After Teaching blog. I've been on a few different podcasts and various blogs. I've got the best boss and I really love what I do every day. And that's not something that I ever really thought I could say because I mean there were of course good days, even good weeks or good months while I was teaching, but I don't think I've ever been like, "Oh, I consistently love my job." Every single day I get excited about going to work. Well, "going" quote unquote because I just go to my office. But just the quality of life has improved so much and it's been interesting that that one domino of being able to work from home has really toppled over all of these other dominoes that I wanted to work on for years, but I didn't think anything was really going to change.

Caitlin: Well things definitely change and it starts with just that one step and realizing that you're the one building the staircase and knowing that the staircase isn't going to be there until you build it. I think that's probably the biggest mental hurdle that people have to get over when they embark on the work-at-home journey. I certainly did. I was like, "Well, I'm not doing this," and they're like, "No, it's going to work." And so, so many people come through. Now, on Proofread Anywhere and Work-At-Home school. And I mean you've seen the emails in our support inbox of people every day that are like, "Well, is there a guarantee?" And I'm like, "Well, I can't guarantee that you're going to do it. Is there a guarantee? You tell me." And it's a total mindset shift and our minds can play so many tricks on us. I know even in the same 18-month span that we're talking about, I've gone from feeling like it is inevitable. Everything is going to go wrong. I just know it and it's just a matter of time -- why am I even bothering and where those thoughts come from, I don't know. I don't think that they were all mine. And I have definitely

made some growth spiritually and learning about what influences what we think. And it's not always, we'll put it this way, it's not always the way we were raised, but some of it is. And so recognizing those patterns and where we were raised and the environment we were raised in and how we learned to think about ourselves and about other people, I think, completely influences what we believe about what we're capable of. And it takes a long time and it's not linear. It's not like our progress here is linear. We take steps back, we take steps forward, we make strides from day to day, during the day even. I mean every day I realized is a journey, we get up and things could happen that completely derail us and could send us into a fear spiral, a shame spiral, anxiety when we're building the staircase. Sometimes the staircase isn't up into the right. Sometimes it's down a little bit, sometimes it's off to the side. Sometimes there's a nice long landing where you are not making any upper progress at all. It's so not linear and I'm certain you all listening at home and Brittany, I know you've seen it, that meme or graphic where there's a comparison between what we think success is supposed to be and it's this nice long line up into the right, linear. And then what success really looks like on the other side where it is a general trend up into the right, but in the middle of that line, it's just all over the place. It's just all over the place. Backwards, forwards, running circles for what seems like ages, not making any progress at all. But over time, if you step back, you see that your general trend is up and to the right. And when you're in that, and I've likened it to a painting a lot, when your nose is smushed up against something that's really, really ugly and you think that this is all there is, and I think it's really the same as not being able to see the forest through the trees. You're smushed up against this tree and it maybe hurts your nose a little bit and all you can see is this ugly brown bark and it hurts. But if you take a step back, you begin to see that, hey, there's more to it than this. And I think our human limitations in our minds and what we're told about our minds, what we believe because of what we're told is possible for us. It's hard for us to realize that there's more to it and that we're not seeing the whole big picture and it's so easy for our brains to try to simplify it, to break it down, to understand it. Because I mean, that's our greatest human need is to be understood and to be able to figure things out. Humans don't do well with uncertainty. And so that's not a skill, I don't think it's a skill that any of us are born with being able to handle, is uncertainty. And so I think it's a lifelong journey to learn how to deal with that uncertainty. And I guess becoming a parent, you guys are going to become parents soon. How has that impacted, I'm sure you have less uncertainty now than you would have had if you'd gotten pregnant 18 months ago.

Brittany: Oh my gosh. Yeah, I would have been freaking out, just from a financial standpoint. It's nice not having to worry about the finances part of it. That kind of takes one of the stressors off the plate. And I'm in a group for other people that are due around the same time I am and they're talking about how stressful it is and how they're fighting all the time with their spouse. And I was telling Zach we haven't really fought much at all and it's been really nice. I really enjoyed being pregnant. I really enjoyed, I mean other than like the sickness and stuff like that, but it's been really nice and I think it strengthened our relationship and I think it would've been a lot harder if we didn't have that, the finances and stuff. That's been really a great part of it. It's also been incredibly motivating for me because I'm like, "Man, I get to show her what's possible when you work hard, when you take action consistently." And knowing that

has really made me look at my habits, make sure they're habits that I'm excited to pass on. And so those are two major things I think that I wouldn't have even thought about if I was still teaching because I think I would have been in such a survival mode that my focus would have just been on, "Oh my gosh, how can we make ends meet?" And "I'm going to get another job and Zach's getting another job," and it just would've been so stressful.

Caitlin: Way easier now. I'm so glad to hear that being pregnant and that new stuff and you guys, this journey has brought you closer together. And yeah, taking away the financial stress with having the flexibility of both of you guys working from home. Wow, it's really the perfect time for this. You had mentioned that you were struggling for five years to get pregnant and now I bet you're like, "I get it now." You needed to make that progress. And a perfect segue, you mentioned habits that you'd like to pass on. What habits are you, maybe one or two, are you most excited about passing on to Gracie, your daughter?

Brittany: I think the biggest one is taking action even when you're scared and even when it feels uncomfortable because I think taking action when it's something that's meaningful is always going to feel a little bit scared and a little bit like, "Oh my gosh, can I do this?" And I think that's usually a good indication it's something you should go after, something you should do. But that one, and then I'd also say having the mindset of how can I figure this out? Instead of looking for ways you can't, or looking for reasons it's not going to work, or looking for reasons you're not smart enough or whatever enough because that's what I used to do. And so I'm really excited to pass on this mindset of how can I figure it out or what's the next step I need to take to figure this out? And looking at life that way I think is going to be ... I'm really excited about passing that one on.

Caitlin: And looking for ways to make it happen and not letting your worries about ability or inability, lack of ability. But looking around and seeing who's in your corner, knowing that you're not going through it alone. And that's a big reason why this podcast is in existence, is so we can show people, not just me, but all the guests that come on and our whole community, show people what's possible and to get people thinking, "Hey, if this person was where they were 18 months ago," or the first season that we did the show, we brought on people who had been working from home six months to two years. People who are just starting out. And now I thought for the second season, we're going to bring back those people. And just kind of continues getting the juices flowing for the people who listened the first time. And then they'll say like, "Oh, wow. Look, they're still going. They didn't give up. What if I started today?" And continuing to push people to take that first step because it really is about just getting started. That's the hardest part. And once you get started and you kind of see, "Okay, they weren't lying. They were lying that it is freaky, scary. They weren't lying about it being worth it either."

Well folks, we're out of time. I loved this episode probably more than all the others, but I end up feeling that way about most of the people I talk to. But it's definitely been special because of our relationship that goes back as many years as it does and how we've gotten closer over the years. And we're going to be tagging you Brittany on Work-At-Home Heroes Facebook group.

So as the folks at home are listening to this, you can go over to Work-A-Home Heroes Facebook group and talk to Brittany about her episode. You can find her at lifeafterteaching.com as well.

You can also get the first five chapters of my book Work At Home, which Brittany has. She has a copy of that at home. And you can get a copy of her book over at her website lifeafterteaching.com. And if you liked the first chapters of Work at Home by me, you can go to workathomeschool.com/book. Like and follow this podcast on whichever platform and leave us a review on iTunes or your other platform, whichever. I think iTunes is most popular. It definitely will help us reach more people and bring in more great content on the show.

You can find more episodes, including Britany's first episode, at workathomeschool.com/podcast. Thank you so much for being on the show.

Brittany: Thanks for having me.