

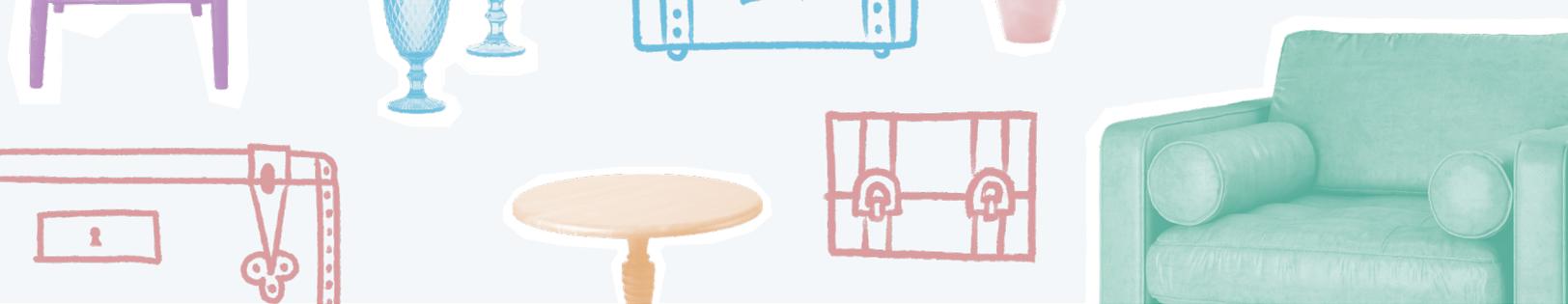
The **TRUNK SHOW**

With RW ELEPHANT

SEASON 4 EPISODE 5



**SEASONAL STRATEGY AND SCALABLE
GROWTH WITH ANNA SAMODAROV OF
MEMORABLE EVENTS RENTALS AND
ERICA TROMBETTI OF LA AFFITTO**



WELCOME BACK TO THE TRUNK SHOW,

hosted by Allison Howell and brought to you by RW Elephant. We're kicking off our 5th episode of Season 4 with **Anna Samodarov of Memorable Events Rentals** and **Erica Trombetti of La Affitto**. They share experiences on seasonal strategy and scalable growth.

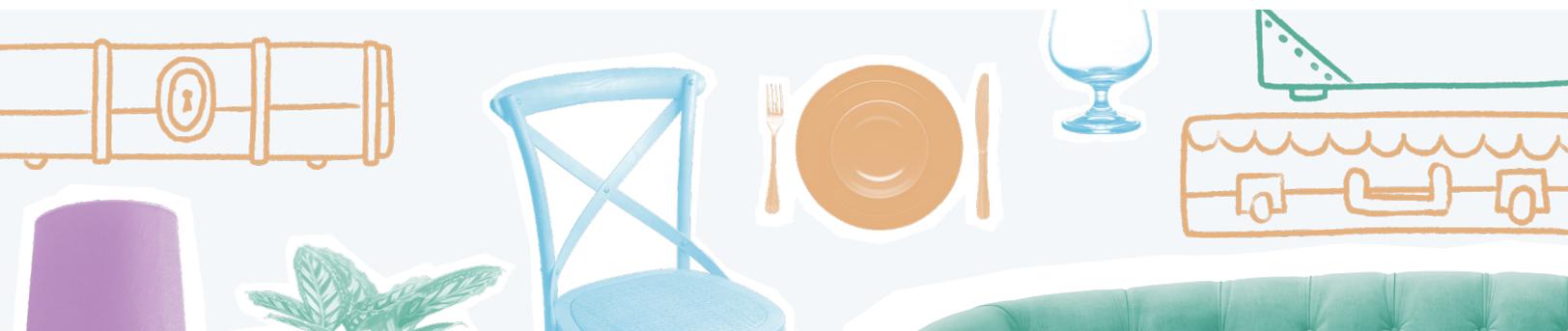


Anna Samodarov is the founder of **Memorable Events Rentals**, a full-time enterprise she built from a garage-based side hustle. A former surgical nurse, Anna transitioned to the event industry to pursue the flexibility of homeschooling her children. **Erica Trombetti** is the founder of **La Affitto**, a boutique rental company designed to elevate tablescape aesthetics for clients and creatives. Drawing on her expertise as a wedding planner, she curates custom collections that serve as the foundation for high-end event design.



What's in this episode

- Navigating Seasonal Cashflow
- Flexible Staffing Models for Scheduling & Hiring
- The "Utilization" Test for Inventory
- Leveraging Industry Relationships
- Implementing Damage Waivers
- Strategic Saying Yes to New Inventory



QUOTES:

"During the slow season [...], let's really make more appointment time slots available and **focus on making those bookings.**" — Anna Samodarov

"If these pieces **aren't paying their rent**, they don't get to stay here on the shelf." — Allison Howell

"...that's how business works, **it's always a risk**, you have to make these decisions and be okay with whatever happens." — Anna Samodarov

"**One inquiry does not equal cash in the bank**, right? Even if someone asks about it, that doesn't mean they were actually going to book it." — Allison Howell

"You will not grow, you will burn out. You will hate what you're doing if you don't hire help, **if you don't learn how to delegate.**" — Anna Samodarov

"If you insist on being there with them, then **you become the bottleneck** for your growth." — Allison Howell

"We didn't want to have what big box companies had. **We wanted to be something completely different.** So that was our focus." — Erica Trombetti

"Being a smaller rental company, **every cup counts**, every plate counts." — Erica Trombetti

"What was happening was we were using all of our profits to buy all of our inventory. And we got to the point where like, okay, **we just can't anymore.**" — Erica Trombetti

The tricky part about it is if you just keep buying, then the things you currently own aren't going to rent, right? The hope is if you say no, that they actually rent something that you do own. **But the risk is if they say no** that they get what they want somewhere else. — Allison Howell

how can we reach out and target those clients for now? Because weddings are not as much happening as during the busy season.

Allison: OK, so you're trying to get cash flow from smaller events or events that are more prominent during those off months. What about holidays? Are you doing a lot of holiday promotions or trying to get, sort of in-home events at holiday time?

Anna: We actually did like a promotion and packages and a reel that focused on how that works, that it's like a pre-designed package for Thanksgiving and a pre-designed package for Christmas and this is how. And honestly, it has not been such a big, big hit because people do use what they have at home. And we've had, it's not like that we haven't, but it wasn't like, okay, this is. This is big and this is helping us get through the season. And something else that I've noticed is when it is slower, making more availability for showroom appointments, because when people come in and plan and they're booking for their events, whether it's anniversary or a wedding, they are putting a deposit down, like half of their amount. So that helps as well. So really focusing and getting clients in.

Allison: So even if you're not executing the events, you're focusing on booking those events.

Anna: Exactly and I think that's when again during busy season I feel like our showroom appointments were not available as much because we're so busy; we still do showroom meetings but we're like we're not as flexible because we are so hands-on and slow season it's like let's really make more appointment time slots available and focus on making those bookings.

Allison: Right. The tricky part, though, in a seasonal business is that staffing piece, right? So, when you're really busy, you have to have a lot of staff on hand to execute the events. But in the slower season, it's sometimes hard to keep that staff on and to justify paying them. How do you juggle the staffing piece of the seasonality?

Anna: So that is absolutely a struggle. So, I do have someone that is more permanent and stable. She's really essential and important, helping run everything. And then some of the other team members that I hire, they know going into this that this is seasonal. They're part-time and hours will fluctuate. They can get a lot of hours during the weddings wedding season and they are aware we let them know up front that once it's off season there will not be as many. So, what we do is we technically those people we don't hire them as this is going to be a Monday to Friday 9-5 kind of a job. So, you know that these are the days and we'll let you know where we... so hiring, being transparent and letting people know how this business runs and you have. And some people are like, oh, you know this works great for me. For somebody who's maybe the main provider in the family, let's say, that would be a hard thing. But for somebody who is kind of getting away, making money, and they're okay with flexibility and all that. So, it just really depends but you to find those kinds of people.



Allison: I know a lot of people find it's difficult to find dependable crew members who are in that position, right, to have that flexibility, but on the other hand, who are dependable for you. So is there a particular kind of pool of people or a referral base that you've gone to find that kind of labor market that has been dependable for you?

Anna: Yes, so number one thing for me that I've noticed is going by referrals. I admit it's scary hiring through some kind of a big website or somebody puts in a resume and application, you know, nothing more. It is scary because we had a situation where I would be here with another girl until, you know, 4 a.m because we can't have things fall through. The weddings have to happen. Things have to get done. So, it would definitely be going based on referral.

And I think what also helps is hiring some on-call. So, giving them a few projects here and there with no commitment, just on-call positions. And if you're seeing, I can really see this person is somebody that I would want to keep. Then you give them more hours and, and as somebody, you're like, okay, this is not somebody I can really depend on, your kind of slowly weed them out.

Allison: No, that's interesting that you bring up the idea of on-call, because I think that is something that is really often used in the restaurant industry and in retail, especially when you're first starting out in a position, is that you get these on-call shifts, right? That you kind of don't get a very stable schedule at first. But in rentals, sometimes we feel desperate. Like, "oh, I need a bunch of guys for this weekend. And so I'm just going to promise them the world." But if you can slowly add people to your crew with on-call shifts, then you have a little bit more flexibility to test people out, right? And then you give yourself a little but more margin to say, "OK, I'm going to schedule five people plus one on call in case something happens and I need them." Right? You have that backup. And that gives you the ability to add somebody at the last minute if you need them.

Anna: Yeah.

Allison: Well, what other issues have you run into with a seasonal business besides cash flow and staffing? Are there other challenges that you've encountered because of the seasonality of your business?

Anna: Yeah, I mean, of course, I don't know if this would be in the same category as it would be, you know, paying for your paying the rent for the business, like the location that we rent out.

Allison: Right, your expenses stay the same in a lot of ways. There are a lot fixed expenses even when everything else is variable.

Anna: Yeah, you have, you know, inventory loans and all of that and they don't say, well, you're a seasonal business so we're going to take these, take these away. So it's keeping everything, keeping everything running. So, it's just really. Budgeting, managing, and planning ahead.



knowing what's actually making you money and what's not is really the key to answering that question, when is enough, enough?

Anna: Yes. Absolutely. And I think, and you, you can, I think giving one more season, that's still a long period of time. What are you going to do? Where are you going to store things? Maybe you have not been promoting that item enough. So go ahead, maybe do some kind of a mock-up, promote it. And if it's still not working, then you just need to let it go.

Allison: Oh, I know. Cut ties, man. That breakup is really hard to do, isn't it?

Anna: Absolutely. It really is.

Allison: Have you had any experiences where you got rid of some inventory, retired some inventory and then sort of immediately regretted it? Or conversely, got rid something and then immediately felt like, "ugh, that was the right thing to do. I'm so glad I did it" because it opened up new opportunities for you.

Anna: Yeah, I think both. But one of them, it was very short. For example, you get rid of something and let's say it hasn't gone out in a year, it's just been sitting collecting dust and not paying rent. And then immediately someone emails and requires that specific thing. You know, and that's usually. But then you have to mentally say, okay, maybe one event, what are the chances anybody else is going to want this? So. Just kind of say that's how business works, it's always a risk, you have to make these decisions and be okay with whatever happens.

Allison: One inquiry does not equal cash in the bank, right? Even if someone asks about it, that doesn't mean they were actually going to book it. And hopefully, you can turn that inquiry into a booking of something else you actually do have in stock, right?

Anna: Absolutely.

Allison: Well, let's talk about some triumphs. I know in this industry, especially as a creative entrepreneur, it can be really a big struggle to delegate and let go. How have you learned to hire help so that you can focus on more important things that only you can do in your event rental business?

Anna: I'm the kind that it's like, I'm going to do it all. And then of course, there's not enough hours in a day. And I'm so thankful for my husband, my business partner. He is really good. He's been running other businesses. So, he had a lot more experience than me. And he is the one that said, look, sat me down and said, "You will not grow. You will burn out. You will hate what you're doing, if you don't hire help, if you don't learn how to delegate."

Allison: Such great advice!



Anna: It is, I would love working in the back at organizing dishes. And he said, “well, it makes sense. There's a lot of people who can do that, but there's not a lot of people who can do the online stuff, meet with clients, show them. There's not lot of people who could do that. So, you need to,” and that's been some of the best advice, absolutely.

Allison: Yeah, and so, obviously, you heard that advice and you took it to heart. But there are people who could do that and then try and then feel like, “oh, those people aren't doing it right.” How did you kind of get over that hurdle?

Anna: So, when my husband told me that, and I think I was getting close to a burnout, so I was blessed to find someone who really, we clicked in relationship-wise, she figured things out, she had a lot of similarities to me. So, and again, it was just kind of like, “hey, here's like a little gig, help me here,” and then it's like, “wow, I like her, she really gets me.” And so, she went from that to really managing the place over the course of years we've been together. And so, as we hire these on calls and such so she's able to if I'm out working in a storefront, she's out in the back and she says “hey, you know so-and-so came in um, I don't know let's give this person a little time or Another person. Hey, we've given them some trials. Let's schedule them less. They're really not getting this.”

Anna: So having that least you can have that one person that you can fully trust and rely on and they can manage those things. If I'm not working in the back a lot, if I'm here in the front doing other things, I can't see how things are going, who's making mistakes or who's not. So having that one key person that you can rely on, I think is so crucial.

Allison: The second pair of eyes.

Anna: Yes.

Allison: Yeah, well, I'm glad you've been able to do that, because I think there are a lot of people who kind of shoot themselves in the foot by saying, “I have to be the one to check every order,” or “I have to be the one to deliver everything,” or I have to be at every set up. And that really prevents them from growing. And in rentals, one of the best things about this business is that your pieces can be in lots of places at one time making you money. But if you insist on being there with them, then you become the bottleneck for your growth, right?

Anna: Absolutely.

Allison: And so, part of the process is getting to a place where you can have systems in place and have people that you trust, and get to a point where you can delegate. Because if you can't do that, then you really prevent yourself from growing. And then you have a warehouse full of stuff that can't go out because you can't be in all the places, right?



Transition: Thank you Anna for encouraging us to persevere through the tough moments. We all need a reminder of why we do what we do—to create beauty. Next, we'll hear from an East Coast rental biz with its own set of challenges, some familiar, some not. Erica of La Affitto Rentals will peel back the curtain to show us how she deals with damages and built a business that prioritizes quality.

Erica: My name is Erica Trombetti and I own La Affitto Rentals. It was started out of a need, so I have 10 years as a wedding planner and we were planning and looking for rentals that we just didn't have in our area and we just wanted to do something different and kind of curated and that's kind of how La Affitto was born... Was out of a need. So, we started to curate it and kind of blew up the last few years, which has been great. It's very different than wedding planning, being on the rental side of it. But for me, it's nice because all the planners know me. So, it's great to chat with them and communicate and they'll know like, just simple stuff, like, you know, orders and how many counts you need and kind being a planner too and having that connection was really helpful for us.

Allison: And so, which, what regions do you serve?

Erica: So we're just New England-based right now. So mostly in Newport. We've been tapping out into Boston and on the horizon is kind of going more to Vermont, Maine, Connecticut, New York. So that's in our goal plan to kind of branch out, but it's mostly Newport and Cape Cod, New England, kind of Massachusetts area.

Allison: Got it. And so many planners who transition to rentals sort of add their rentals because they see the need. But sometimes they also do that because they feel like they've hit the ceiling on their own sort of scalability of their planning business. Did you feel that at all yourself, or was it really just you saw this need and you wanted to fill it?

Erica: I would say I hit a top, right, with wedding planning. At that time, I'm 15 years in, and while I love it and had a great run, I felt that I needed something more and something different. And when we started the rental company, it was more like, I remember Ashley and I very vividly, it was June. And we were like, had no weddings, and we were, like, you know, "we have no weddings. What should we do? Like, we'll start a rental company." I mean, not really, like realizing at all the back end of it. But, and like that just ignited another passion in me that I felt like wedding planning has topped. And during that time, I was working really hard to build my team. Ashley was one of them. We brought on Lisa, and we just brought on Nina. So the girls are so wonderful, they do such a great job. They're producing events that are magnificent and I am happy to take a step back. And by them letting me do that, I'm able to focus on La Affitto and I love that portion of it.

Allison: Right. Well, and it seems like you really were able to harness the relationships you've built over the years in the industry as well, right? So you didn't just say, "oh, I'm going to do something totally different." Instead, you said, "I have all these relationships with these planners and with other vendors" who are now referring you to their clients.



It only happened once last season where we forgot a whole crate, which was great once out of the season. And then our guy did help us and go and deliver it because we were local enough. That's another thing too. I don't know if, I know we had talked briefly about this, but finding a warehouse and a space like where that is, because we're so close to Newport that we got there in 15 minutes. It was easy. But if we were way out, it would take us longer, which other companies do have way out that's taking longer to get to us on the planner side.

Allison: And that's the tricky thing about expansion, right? It seems like, "oh, well, I'm close enough. I could expand. I could service all these other areas." But the risk is higher, right? The broader the service area, the riskier it is that you could have another crate. And then instead of it feeling like, "oh, that was a good deal," you're paying a driver to take out one crate of glassware two hours.

Erica: Exactly.

Allison: Let's talk about those damages for a second. You mentioned breakage. Tell us your damage policy. Everybody's got a different one.

Erica: Yes. So we are a damage waiver at the front end of contracting. So you do 8% on hand that just kind of covers it. We've had rental companies accidentally take our items, they just weren't sorted properly. We kind of, that was our first second year headaches, but now it seems to be working, knock on wood. Anything that kind of exceeds the damage waiver, then obviously we would try to collect payment after that. I mean, this has to be like 400 forks missing or damaged. That's just something that's not normal, but we do a percentage on the front end and that does cover us. Sometimes if things are like missing or if they're purposely taken by someone else and we can't retrieve it, that's not covered by the damage waiver. It's completely different and that's kind of its own price point for replacements for the crates and the product.

Because I know everybody else feels the same way, crates are expensive. They're also a part of the product. They're not just there because. So that has also been in consideration in our contract. We haven't had to use it, which is great.

But one thing I did learn last year, and I don't know if other people have felt this way and I'd love to hear everybody's thoughts on this, was we got asked to do a lot of styled shoots and a lot of promotional work. And it's so great. Until things were coming back damaged or missing or broken and we were doing it complimentary. So we initiated a security deposit and upon pickup and then upon pickup, they pay for it. And then upon return, once everything's accounted for, not damaged or broken, they would get the fully refundable deposit back. It was great to be a part of it, but when things were back like broken, missing, or damaged, it was kind of like, "Oh, man." And being a smaller rental company, every, as I say, every cup counts, every plate counts, right? So we implemented that this year and that has been super helpful.



you try to recoup damages, and that's just like a whole other beast. And we've been in that situation before and it's like, whose fault is it? But the caterer is like, I didn't sign the contract, but then how do you have the, you know audacity to charge the client all of that missing, but they did sign the contract. So that is still something that's very murky, I feel like.

And then as far as preparing for it, I kind of have an idea of how many events we can handle in a weekend or in a day, and I try to make sure that we have enough to service everybody. Our planners are very early on planners, and they're all securing their orders at least six months in advance which has been super helpful.

Allison: How?

Erica: I know, right? I know. Should I knock on wood again? You're gonna tell me this is not gonna happen? Is this not true? Anyway, I always know that we could have ordered more. We were in a situation where a client needed an extra course and we didn't have enough, but I did order for her and we got it in time. Like I was able to do that and they paid the difference, which was great. So knock on wood we have a good backing if we need stuff kind of fast. I honestly have never lost anything yet and then had to service. I know it will probably come one day, it just hasn't happened yet.

Allison: Yeah, you mentioned sort of buying for a particular client in a situation where they wanted to add a course. Let's talk about scaling without sacrificing.

Erica : Yes.

Allison: It's hard to grow. It's hard to say no when clients want things and you don't have them. But it's also hard to say yes when you feel like, "OK, if I say yes to this, that means no to other things. Or I can't just keep saying yes, yes, yes, yes," because if you just keep buying, buying, buying, you might not be able to service those people at the level that you want to. And the other side of that is, you know, you'll spend all your profit if you just keep buying, buying, buying to grow for growth's sake. So how have you balanced that as you've kind of had an explosive growth in the rental side? Talk to me about the pace of your scaling.

Erica: Yeah, great question. So that happened early on. We had an incident where I had a client, a vendor reach out, wanted to purchase X, Y, and Z, was going to move forward. And I know we had a limited time of ordering production and quality control. So I went ahead and I ordered it and then they never moved forward. So, I learned that early, early on and to be kind of upfront about how long it takes to order if we don't have it. We can absolutely produce this for you, X, Y, and Z amount of a deposit. We take a higher deposit amount. I also was a very "yes, yes, yes," and then I went into "no, no, no," and you feel bad for saying "no, no, no," then you're like, "oh no. No one's gonna wanna use you. You should go back to saying yes, yes, yes." So I think that is just the cycle. Everyone kind of goes up and down in business and trying to feel what works best.



you could get lost in just the buying, buying, buying, buying trying to get the new one. But if we try to focus and when we curate our inventory that if we can get at least five looks out of it with our already inventory in-house, I think that's a win for us. So we can service them different ways.

Allison: Yeah, and there's something beautiful about constraints, right? There's something really interesting about practicing creativity with constraints and being able to say, "OK, here's what you have. Think about 10 ways to use this differently." Instead of, "OK, I have no limits. I'm just going to create new things constantly." There's something interesting about, you know, creating new out of what you already have.

Well, tell me about some of the wins you've experienced as you've grown the La Affitto brand. What are you really proud of?

Erica: I'm so proud of us. Our second season, we had 87 events, which I could not believe. I know everyone's like, wait until you hit 200. I'm like, 87 was good, but that was great. I am so proud of that. I'm so proud that We've built something. It's amazing to think that this was just idea and it came to life and we built something. When we started La Affitto and it's thriving, we have our ups and downs like everybody, nothing's ever perfect, but I can't believe that we built something that is something that people need or want. And our reaction from our planners and our community have been so great and just kind of keeping up with the moment. I think that's also keeping everything fresh and perspective back to our comment before about having different looks within your collection.

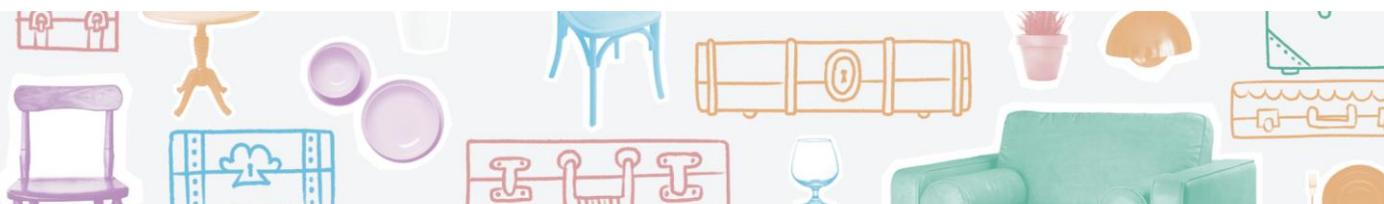
And also, too, just like asking what they want next or what they're looking for and being a planner and having the girls on the Infinite side, it's nice to know what they are planning next, what they were seeing, what are they wanting, what are they needing. You know, our goals I think for the next few years is to kind of build our inventory to more than just plates and more just glassware. So kind of building upon that. And I think that's just also coming from a need in quality control and different looks. I don't know why, but you guys always have the first and we're always the last to have the new designs.

Allison: You mean on the West Coast?

Erica: On the West coast, yes. You guys are always the first.

Allison : It's interesting. Things start on the coasts often and move in. But I don't know. Australia, New Zealand, they're pretty trendsetting, too.

Erica : Yeah, we're at the end part of it. So I do follow a lot. I get inspired when we went and we did your conference, which was awesome. I met so many wonderful people and just so open, which is so nice because they never felt like competition. They felt like I can help you. You know, it was so great.



Allison: Oh, good. I wanted to ask you about that, because I know you've attended professional conferences throughout the years as a planner. And we originally met when you started as an RW Elephant customer, client. But I was so glad to meet you in person when you came to Lend and Gather in Nashville. So what brought you to Lend and Gather? What brought you our rental-specific conference after having all this education in the event industry in general?

Erica: Yeah, great question. You guys were more focused on rentals and was intimate, and I really loved the lineup and the speaking portions of it, and I thought everything that you presented did benefit my business in some way, shape, or form, and I love the intimacy of it. I've done a lot of conferences, mostly focused on planners and planning. Nothing ever rental. If it was a rental, I was not paying attention at that time when I did do our conferences. And I really enjoyed just the meet and greet and I became very friendly and unto like a, like, "Where did you get your silverware?" "I'll tell you." And I was like, wow, this is so nice. This is great. Like we're not even in the same, they're West coast or East coast, but they were so open and just sharing their secrets. And I loved it really. And I just started to look into going to some buying shows. So that's new on the horizon.

Your conference was more educational where like conferencing that I go to now I think would be for buying and kind of what works best. So I loved that it was educational. I always looked for that in conferences. Some I've gone to and some I look for education. It was not that. It was just parties. And which was great. But I love having the education piece. I actually refer back to it. I have my little booklet in the drawer and I was talking like if I ever have a thought and I thought that we talked about it. I had just referenced it back when I talked to Jill. She was great, she was informative, and she gave me a bunch of tidbits and notes. I just referred back to it. Something that might not have clicked then, but as I grow, it's starting to click more. So no, I loved your conference. I thought it was great. I can't wait for the next one. I know you do every two years, right?

Allison: Yeah, yeah. Well, I'm so glad you were there. I feel like it's such a valuable thing for people who do rentals, specialty rentals like you, to be able to be in the same room and talk about the challenges they've had and say, "what have you done in this situation?" Or "how do you solve this problem?" Or "you've got to hear this story," and have other people say, "oh, my goodness, I can totally relate to that." You know, because... You don't have people in your life who know what it's like to drive, you know, a van in the middle of the night to do a pickup at 3 a.m. Because the forks were missing and then somebody called you. I mean, like you get to relate to people in a different way. You know, your friends don't get it. Your family doesn't get it. Your other vendor friends don't get it. But now you have people all over the country who get it.

Erica: And I'm so happy that you did something like that. As far as like you too, you branched out in different avenues of your RW Elephant and then now you do the conferencing and you have the software and you do the education. Like you are so much more to it and it's so nice to have someone like you to do all this and connect us



all and do these educational things and do these podcasts. Because I don't feel like a lot of people are doing that or I don't know of. I know of you.

Allison: The community is my favorite part. Well, Erica, thank you so much for sharing with us.

Erica: Thank you.

Outro: We may not have identical experiences, but we can all certainly relate to forgetting a crate. It is encouraging to hear how both of these women have overcome and grown even stronger businesses as a result of the challenges they've faced. Anna and Erica have learned from their trials and now have that knowledge in their back pockets.

May you all also feel empowered by what you've endured and rejoice in every triumph. I'll look forward to sharing more stories of rental adventures with you again soon. Happy renting!



RESOURCES:

The [RW Elephant mailing list](#) features more event industry resources and happenings—including announcements about new Trunk Show episodes!

Learn what to do with an underperforming piece in your collection with [RW's Utilization & Liquidation Worksheet](#)

Learn what Erica learned at our conference by grabbing your spot for [Lend & Gather Online!](#)

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