#179: The Healing Entrepreneur: An Interview with Sara Ashman on Transforming Autoimmune Struggles into a Mission-Driven Coaching Business

FULL EPISODE TRANSCRIPT

With Your Host
Debbie Sassen

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You're listening to *The Jewish Entrepreneur Podcast* with Debbie Sassen — Episode 179.

“Hello, Sara. Welcome to the show. I can’t wait for all of my listeners to meet you and hear your story.”

“Thanks, Debbie. I’m so excited to be here especially given everything that’s going on. I’m really glad we could make this work today.”

And that “everything” wasn’t an exaggeration. As we were recording, we were in the middle of a war with Iran. A missile attack could have happened at any moment. There could’ve been a siren, and we might’ve had to hit pause — but we powered through anyway. That’s how committed Sara was to sharing her story.

We first connected through Chosen, an advocacy group for Jews around the world led by Ariella Coleman. What bonded us even further was our shared passion for Israel, our backgrounds in singing, and our professional pivots.

Sara was a performer as a child — the kid who put on living room concerts for guests and did seven-minute-long Celine Dion lip-syncs. That early love for performing never fully left her. She learned to use it in unexpected ways, including public speaking during her time with AIPAC, where she worked with high school students.

Sara shared how those first few talks were all seriousness and no connection. “I’d walk them through Syria, Iran, Hezbollah, Hamas… and they’d just fall asleep.” A boss pulled her aside and told her bluntly, “That was horrible.” So she pivoted. Instead of trying to be the most knowledgeable person in the room, she leaned into what made her magnetic: humour, presence, and motivation. She added humour, swore just enough to make the kids laugh, and let herself be real. That’s how she learned the power of connection and authenticity on stage.

Sara’s advocacy work with AIPAC began back in 2012, and though she’s still involved as a lay leader today, her career journey took her in new directions — not all of them planned.

After two years at AIPAC, Sara had a moment of clarity. At a policy conference, she found herself staring at the board of directors. She didn’t want to be the CEO. But when

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she looked at Betsy Korn — then a board member, not yet president — she thought, *That's who I want to be.* That moment sparked a turning point.

She quit her job without a backup plan, moved back in with her parents, and gave herself time to reflect. She cooked, worked out, and explored her interests. Eventually, she landed in software sales — a field she thrived in for over a decade. She worked for startups, big tech, and everything in between, selling products from HR software to cutting-edge eCommerce AI tools.

In 2022, she achieved a major milestone: she closed her dream client. It was the deal she had once put on her "career bucket list." But instead of feeling satisfied, she felt… done. She'd climbed the sales ladder, achieved everything she set out to do — and still, something was missing.

When she looked around again, this time at the women she admired, she noticed a pattern. They were no longer climbing corporate ladders. They were building their own businesses. Creating something from scratch. Sara knew it was time to do the same.

So she walked away — again. But this time, it wasn't just a leap. It was a return to something deeply personal.

Sara always had expensive taste — something she talks about with humor and zero shame. She's a lover of beautiful art, high-quality shoes, luxury handbags, and investing in a lifestyle that feels good. "I enjoy materialistic things," she said. "And I like being able to support that in a financially sustainable way."

But that honesty isn't just about money. It's about owning who she is, what she values, and building a life that reflects it. That level of self-acceptance became essential when she began the next phase of her career: becoming a nutrition and wellness coach for high-achieving women.

And she didn't take the typical path.

She grew up watching her parents pivot again and again — from surgery and special education to biotech, consulting, and even launching a brand muffin business. For Sara, entrepreneurship wasn't foreign. It was normal. She learned early on that it's okay to pivot, to reinvent, to follow the inner compass even if the path doesn't look linear.

So when her dream job no longer aligned with her vision, she trusted herself — and made the leap.

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Sara's pivot into wellness and nutrition wasn't just strategic — it was deeply personal. She had struggled for years with disordered eating, over-exercising, and chasing the size-zero ideal. "I definitely had a very disordered relationship with food and exercise," she shared. "I thought I had to earn my meals. I tried every fad diet. My body was under constant stress."

That stress caught up with her in the form of an autoimmune diagnosis: Hashimoto's thyroiditis. And while doctors acknowledged her fluctuating thyroid levels, the standard treatment fell short. Symptoms like severe PMDD, strange joint pain, persistent rashes, and sensitivity to wine were dismissed — until she started connecting the dots herself.

Working with a functional nutritionist in 2021 changed everything. She began to understand her body's unique needs and triggers. Eventually, she discovered she had histamine intolerance — a lesser-known, often-misunderstood condition where the body struggles to process histamine, leading to systemic inflammation and unpredictable symptoms.

For Sara, this journey was more than a health transformation — it was a calling. As friends began reaching out for advice, she realized: *Maybe I should be charging for this.* But it wasn't until she was unexpectedly laid off from her tech job in 2023 that she made the decision. She enrolled in a certification program and built her practice — quietly, intentionally, without telling anyone but her parents and her mentor.

Why? Because she didn't want the energy of doubt or fear to derail her vision. "I knew if I asked friends or colleagues, they'd talk me out of it. But I didn't want to hear 'what if it fails?' I wanted to focus on, 'what if it goes really well?'"

Today, Sara works with women across the globe — especially those who feel dismissed or lost in traditional medical systems. Many of her clients come to her with mystery symptoms, weight gain they can't explain, or autoimmune issues like PCOS and histamine intolerance.

She has a particular gift for helping high-achieving women who struggle with emotional eating and binge eating. "I've been in the dirt. I've had the lived experience," she says. That depth of empathy allows her to hold space for her clients in a way that's rare — practical, compassionate, and deeply validating.

But healing isn't just about nutrition. It's also about stress.

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Sara and Debbie explored how modern life — particularly in fast-paced cities like New York — keeps our nervous systems in a constant state of activation. From family trauma to global tension to daily micro-stressors, our bodies rarely get a break. And when we don't complete the stress cycle physically — through movement, breath, or connection — our systems suffer.

"Walking, sunshine, breathing — they sound basic, but they regulate the nervous system," Sara explains. "Emotional eating, in many ways, is the body's attempt to feel safe again."

Sara's background in sales didn't just shape her career — it shaped her mindset as a business owner.

Before launching her coaching practice, she spent 10 years in tech sales, working with startups, large companies, and everything in between. She sold everything from HR software to AI-powered eCommerce tools — and she did it well. She wasn't afraid of cold calls, rejection, or chasing down deals. "I started by making 60 to 100 cold calls a day," she said. "You get used to hearing 'no' fast."

That thick skin served her well as she transitioned into selling something entirely different: herself.

Selling coaching services, Sara says, can feel more personal than selling software — especially when you're the product. But her time in tech helped her frame rejection differently. "No isn't personal, and no isn't forever. That mindset changed everything. My job isn't to convince someone to buy from me — it's to filter through the people who aren't the right fit so I can find the ones who are."

That mindset also shaped how she approached pricing.

In the beginning, Sara offered a four-month coaching package with 10 sessions and backend support for $1,875. Her first client said yes quickly — too quickly. That's when she realized she had underpriced her services. With encouragement from her mentor, she doubled her rates and hasn't looked back.

"When you feel properly compensated, it's easier to show up fully for your clients," she said. "Discounted clients often got the same results, but I felt the energetic difference. When the price matches the value, it's better for both of us."

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And Sara doesn't believe in the phrase *charge what you're worth* — because worth is infinite. Instead, she encourages entrepreneurs to think about sustainability, boundaries, and energy. "If you're going to feel resentment at that price point, it's too low. Raise it."

Underpinning all of this is a deep belief in self-leadership — a value she learned from her parents and has now fully embodied herself.

Sara doesn't crowdsource decisions. She doesn't wait for consensus. When she decided to start her business, she didn't tell anyone except her parents and her mentor. "I knew I had to protect the seed while it was growing. If I'd shared too soon, I would've absorbed everyone else's fear and doubt. I wanted to stay in the energy of possibility."

That self-trust — that willingness to walk a less-traveled road — is what ultimately led her here.

As we wrapped up the conversation, Sara shared one more piece of her journey — one that grounds everything she does: her deep Jewish identity and trust in Hashem.

"Yes, we've talked about my advocacy, my career shifts, and how I built this business," she said, "but none of it would be possible without Bitachon — the belief that Hashem will provide."

For Sara, building a business isn't just about strategy or visibility. It's about showing up, doing the reps, and trusting that when you align with purpose and take consistent action, Hashem handles the rest. "You can't just sit back and expect miracles, but if you're doing your part — truly doing the work — there's magic in what unfolds."

This spiritual foundation helps her navigate everything from pricing to pivots to the emotional weight of supporting women through difficult health journeys. It also gives her the courage to keep going — even when things are uncertain or challenging.

Sara's approach is both practical and deeply personal. She's built a practice that not only helps women with autoimmune and hormonal health issues, but also honors the complexity of what it means to be a woman navigating stress, body image, and identity in today's world.

Whether you're dealing with binge eating, Hashimoto's, PMDD, or simply feeling like your body is betraying you — Sara sees you. She's lived it. And now, she's here to help others reclaim their health with compassion, humour, and a no-nonsense approach.

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Sara works with women worldwide through Zoom-based coaching. Her specialty includes:

- Hashimoto's and autoimmune health
- Histamine intolerance
- Emotional eating and binge eating
- Hormonal imbalances, perimenopause, and PCOS
- Support for women who feel dismissed by the traditional medical system

You can follow her [Instagram handle] (coming soon!) for nourishing recipes, hormone-balancing tips, and — yes — maybe even a little Celine Dion lip-syncing.

Thank you so much for tuning in to *The Jewish Entrepreneur Podcast*. If you loved this episode, share it with a friend who's navigating their own career pivot or health transformation. We'll see you next week!