

## Louise Sverud

**00:02-00:27: GL:**

Hello and welcome back to the Applecart. My guest today is Louise Sverud. As you'll notice, she has a Scandinavian name like mine, except she really is Scandinavian. She's not just pretending like me.

Originally from Sweden and now based in the Canary Islands, Louise is a multilingual business specialist, supporting clients based internationally, often in the educational field. But not always.

And yeah, I think it's going to be a really interesting conversation. Just to hear about how Louise does things a little bit differently and how she manages across different time zones and clients across different areas. So Louise, welcome to The Apple Cart! Thank you for being here. How are you?

**LS:** I'm fine and thank you for having me. And you pronounce my name really well. I must say.

**GL:** Thank you. I don't want the Vikings coming for me. No, you don't want them, especially not before Christmas.

**LS:** Definitely not, no.

**GL:** So, Louise, first of all, tell me. Tell us a little bit about how you ended up in the Canaries, and you know, a little bit about what you do and how that came about as well.

**LS:** Yeah, well, I've been in the Canaries for a very long time. I've lived here for 25 years, so that is a long time, so I can hardly remember how I ended up here. No, I do remember. It was the classical syndrome of falling in love with a man and that prompted me to stay here.

It was a little bit sort of back and forth in the beginning. But I also at the time was actually on sick leave. From my super-duper career in Sweden, where I had quite a good managerial position for a big union where I was responsible for education and communication.

And I suffered a burnout and I was a pioneer in the area because 25 years ago it was kind of not heard of. But I met a really good doctor who realised what it was and put me on sick leave. And while I was on that sick leave, I went through in my head. What am I going to do to change my life?

Because I realised that I can't just go back into that same workplace and my life as it was before. So that's where I started thinking about, what can I do? And one of the things I was thinking was I could move to another country. Why not? And I was moving to London because I had a friend there.

But I did quite quickly realise that London might not be the best place if you're suffering from stress. So in the meantime, I went on holiday to Lanzarote, where I am now. I realised I'm like, Oh my god, this is a beautiful place, it's so calm, it's all 'Mañana'.

You don't have to stress. So, in combination with meeting the boy, it became quite a natural step to try and live here. And never in my life did I think I was going to stay here forever, but 25 years later, here I still am. The man is gone and all of that, but I'm still here.

Yeah, and my business came about four years ago, just after the pandemic. I worked in tourism industry, but in an office environment, but still a tour operator, and obviously tourism died, so we didn't have any jobs. And again, because I think that's a little bit how I am.

I'm like, Okay, what do I got to do now? It becomes like a project. What do I got to do now? To solve this problem? I've got two teenagers living at home, I need to have an income, yeah. And I had heard about this virtual assistant thingy, and I thought, well, actually.

I've worked in offices, in back offices all my life. So it's one thing I do know is how to do admin. So I looked into it and that's when my business was born. And I have never looked back. That was the best thing that could ever have happened, really.

**GL:** What kind of help do you give to your clients? Is there a typical client, a typical working day for them, or is it very varied?

**LS:** Super varied, because it all depends on the client, obviously. It's basically like having your own business operations person, like a secretary. Basically, whatever you want me to do, I can do it. If I can do it, and if I can't do it, I'll be honest and say, actually, I can't do that.

I focus mostly on like what we call general admin, which is a bit sort of vague what that is. But that is basically, if you started working in an office anyway, as an employee, you will be given certain tasks.

And that's exactly how it is for a virtual assistant as well. It's up to the person to tell me what they want done. Then, quite often, they want help with social media and stuff like that. And I don't call myself a social media virtual assistant, but I do a lot of social media because I know how to do it.

I've always worked in in design and layout and editing and stuff like that anyway in my background.

**GL:** Yeah, yeah, that must really help, and obviously being multilingual will be a big advantage. I mean, I'm presuming that obviously you, you speak. What is it Spanish in the Canaries?

**05:28-05:54: LS:** Yeah. My three languages is Swedish, Spanish and English. Obviously, as you can hear, and because my business owners that I help quite often. As you said before, they're international businesses, they quite often need a couple of languages to do their business.

So for an English person running a business in Spain, obviously you need a VA who can actually understand Spanish, because some of the paperwork will be in Spanish.

**GL:** Yeah, yeah, yeah, and I think, yeah. Being able to speak more than one language is a massive advantage. I mean, my French is fairly rubbish, but I can order a drink in five languages. I just can't have a conversation, that's bad.

**06:09-06:30: LS:**

I can swear in quite a few languages.

**GL:** Well, that's always going to come in handy, isn't it? You never know what sort of situation you're going to find yourself in. So, yeah, I'd imagine that that that'll give you an advantage over other people. For an international audience.

**LS:** I think so, because there's not that many VAS who offer who has different languages under their belts. UK VAs work mostly in the UK, etc. I have clients all over the place. You know, I have a big school over in what their organisation is based in Canada, for example. And then I've got people in Spain, I've got people in Sweden, I've got in the UK.

**GL:** But that must also be quite nice. Because then it adds to the variety of the types of clients and the types of work you're doing.

**LS:** It does. And also I always endeavour to try and meet all my clients in person at least once. So it takes me around the world. That is a good idea, right?

**GL:** Note to self for 2025 international clients go and meet them. I have had international clients, but I haven't met most of them.

**LS:** It does something, especially if you work online, it does something to your relationship if you actually met in person. Because it's all right sitting like this on Zoom, but to actually meet them physically in real life, it makes a difference.

And sometimes you go like, Oh my God, you're short because you don't realise when you're sitting down in front of a Zoom, do you?

**GL:** Yeah, no, that's true. I think that's a really good point, and I think it's something that I think. Over the last four years, as everybody's got more used to working online, that that human element, that person to person, has really been lost.

And I think for younger people coming into business that that they're really the disadvantage because they're not used to interacting with people face to face. And yeah, you, like you said,

you sit down with somebody and you get to know them personally and it makes a massive difference. And I always say that with my clients.

**LS:** I mean, the clients I've worked with for a long time, they're like friends, you know what I mean? I know them, I know their problems, and I've met their family, perhaps if I've gone and visited them and stuff like that.

Which makes the dynamic in your client provider relation different. And also that means probably that that client is going to stay with you a lot longer than if you just deal with each other like this, yeah, and it shows that you care about them.

You know, you've gone to the trouble of going to meet them, but you've also found out about their family. Because we're all, you know, we're business owners, we're all also people, aren't we at the end of the day?

**08:51-08:55: GL:** Exactly, exactly, Yeah, I think that's, I think that's a really nice idea. Yeah, yes, I will go and make a note of that, go and visit my foreign clients.

**LS:** And you can also meet colleagues as well. So you have to come to Lanzarote and meet me, right?

**GL:** I'm putting that on the list. Lanzarote, Yeah, put that on the list as well. Yeah, but check my passport, it's definitely up to date. Yeah, that as well. Yeah, yeah. I like the because for me being out in France, and because not only is my French. Not up to meeting with other business owners yet.

Most French businesses are a little bit further behind when it comes to marketing and content marketing. So it's kind of difficult to talk about what I do. So I'm finding online networking and online events, which is how you and I met, and I'm finding that really, really helpful. Because otherwise it's isolating, and it is isolating, isn't it, when you're a solo person?

**09:49-10:09: LS:**

I have the same problem. I live on a very small island in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean, and, as you say, here in the Canaries. There are a few I have met, a couple stumbled upon, a couple who work online like I do, but very few do.

And like you say, then, you don't have where you live, I don't, I don't have any business here. I don't do business with anybody in the Canaries. Yeah, so, like you say, it becomes a bit lonely. So I also do a lot of online networking.

**11:38-11:55: GL**

Yeah, it's. yeah, it's a challenge, but it's a good. I'm quite sociable, so I don't mind meeting people online. I like it.

**LS:** No, so do I. I mean, I am sociable, but also slightly introvert. I'm sort of a mixed, I'm a hybrid.

**11:56-12:15 GL:**

Yeah, I'm very definitely an extroverted extrovert as anybody who's met me...

**LS:** Okay, yeah, no. I always thought I was in my, you know, younger days, and then I've just realised now that I probably am not. Because I don't like big crowds, I don't like parties and stuff like that. It exhausts me.

**GL:** Oh see, I really thrive on that, I get, I really feel energised at big events and meeting people and stuff like that. I'm obviously just a bit of a show off and honest, I'm not.

And so one of the things I wanted to ask you about was your Instagram, because I don't use Instagram for business. And as a writer, I never feel like I'm very visual, but I love what you're doing on Instagram. Tell me how you, how you come up with your ideas and where you get your inspiration from.

**LS:** Well, first of all, thank you. It's been a work in progress. Because when I started, I did have an Instagram, but I wasn't very active. I was more like a Facebook person. For, you know, keep, especially when you live abroad, Facebook is great for keeping in touch with family and friends and all of that, so I was a Facebook girl.

And obviously my generation is Facebook, isn't it as well, let's face it, and Instagram was for the young people, but. But I started an Instagram. And I listened to. Obviously those experts out there who said you need to have a strategy, you need to commit to a certain amount of days, etc.

So I decided, what's doable for me? And I said, Okay, three times a week I'm going to be posting. Yeah, and I've stuck to that since then. And sometimes I really have to, sort of like, Oh, shit, I haven't got anything for Friday.

And I just need to. But and if you look back, if you were to scroll right back to the beginning of my Instagram, you will see it looks different. Because obviously, I wasn't at all sure of what I was doing in the beginning.

And I was just trying, maybe to do a little bit what everybody else was doing. And following some kind of pattern. And it was going to be looking pretty and all of that. But then I just thought, This isn't me really, is it?

That's not my personality, is not me at all, so I just started being a little bit more. Braver say so to say. First of all, putting silly photos on, maybe putting photos on where I didn't look my best. And yeah, and also a pinch of humour into it, and a bit bolder the colours to make it stand out a little bit more.

And I'm actually really, quite happy with how it looks now, and I think it reflects me, basically, and my brand. But coming up with ideas, it happens whenever. All of a sudden I was just the other day, I was thinking, I need to use Christmas as a...

You know how you deal with planning for Christmas? That's exactly how you need to plan your business week as well. You know, like, so I've got a post in my head for that. I haven't done it yet and sometimes, unfortunately, I keep too much in my head. Don't write it down and I forget it, so then I can't recreate it.

But I do have a big notepad next to my desk. Oh, very good. Yeah. Oh, look at that, just little squares, yeah, the squares. So three a week, as you can see, usually I have a whole page full, but this time there's only six so far.

But I add to that, so I just go like, Okay, I need a video that day and I just have it next to me. So that it's easy to jot down some ideas. And also, thanks to Instagram, I haven't actually made it easier as well now.

Because you can write text straight on your picture if you just do a static post. Which you weren't able to do before because you had to go to Canva and create the text and then upload it. But because of this new feature, I find it quite easy just pick a photo, put some sentences on and write a caption.

It comes easy to me to formulate myself in text, so obviously that's an advantage. Not everybody has that, but yeah, it's just a bit sort of like whatever pops into my mind and I can use. I mean, I don't know if this is important or if this is to do with something as well, but I have a master in psychology.

So I use human behaviour and psychology quite a lot as my backbone. If you know what I mean, I can hear something on the radio. They're talking about the imposter syndrome, and that's another idea I've got in my head as well about why we have imposter syndrome.

And it was actually a guy talking about that in Swedish. Unfortunately, I can't share it with anybody about how it's not to do with. And he wasn't. He's not a psychologist or anything like, I think he's a language professor or something like that.

But he still had a very good theory about imposter syndrome. So that's living in the back of my head at the moment. Now will probably come out as a post that's somehow.

**GL:** yeah, I can imagine that that background will be really useful actually in business. What language do you use when you're posting on Instagram? Do you use all of your languages? No, I, that's another thing I used to do.

I used to try and mix in a bit of Swedish mixing, but it got it too scattered. The feed was, too. You know, it wasn't this or that, it was a mix of everything, so I took that away. I only post in English now,.

I'm quite active on LinkedIn. I write in English there. But now and again, I just want to say something, and I want to say it in Swedish. And, funnily enough, the effect of those Swedish posts that I do now and again are enormous.

And somebody told me, it's because when I started my LinkedIn, I was living in Sweden. Yes, so I have a Swedish profile, so to say, even if it's in English. And therefore, a Swedish post will get more reach.

**GL:** Oh okay, that's interesting and I think what I really like about your Instagram, what you've been saying there about how it's evolved is that when you're new to business and when you're still experimenting, it's really easy to follow the advice of people who are experts because they know a bit more than you.

But if you have to stand out, you know, and if you can, show your personality again. Going back to what we were saying earlier about people. Your potential clients and your existing clients need to know who you are as a person. And you have to be a bit brave, don't you?

And actually say, yeah, this particular format might be what's recommended by the experts. But it doesn't work for me because actually, this is who I am. And I think you do have to be bold and brave and do that.

You'll agree and you'll have examples. But it actually makes a big difference once you step into that form of a better phrase.

**LS:** Yeah, but it takes a bit of time for you to do that. I think if, because in the beginning you are not quite sure of who you are as a business person either, are you? I mean, I think now, four years down the line, I can say that, yes, I do know what kind of businesses.

And another trap. I'm slightly changing the subject here, but we're talking about how you listen to these experts. There was a thing starting maybe two years ago about passive income, everybody needed passive income.

Or you should sell your expertise, not your time. And blah, blah, blah and all of this, all the coaches talking about this. And I went on that bandwagon as well, and I'm like, Yes, of course, I need to have a course, I need to have this, I need to have that.

And I spent ages working with a coach as well, paying all that money to develop my product and everything I got. The product, I've got it all lined up, I've got a launch process ready to go. But last summer, I took some time off and I sat there and thinking, Is this really what I want to do?

And I'm like, No, it isn't actually. And there we go, been sure, and then just right down there and it's gonna stay there because it's not me. That's not what I don't want to have masses of people and teaching them something.

I want to do this, I want to be in your face, I want that personal connection. Like I said, going to see my clients and meeting their family, that's completely different. And also, I want to help these small business owners, actually help them in their business.

I don't want to just grow and sell lots of courses and sit there and take my money and then not help anybody. I mean, I know they will get help of that product as well. Yeah, but not in the same way, yeah.

**20:49-21:14: GL:**

My business has evolved over the last decade. I mean, I remember, because my parents always, almost always been self-employed. My dad said to me, what you start out with now won't be what your business is like in six months.

And actually, I started out as a VA because I'd worked in admin for a decade. Even though all of my background, my degree and everything is comms is writing. But I've done a lot of admin work and I was good at it. But I was a terrible VA because I lacked that.

What I was good at was being told what to do and being efficient in the environment, and I didn't, it wasn't my strength. So even in the first six months to a year, I'd gone from intending to be a VA. I wasn't quite efficient and organised enough to help my clients to become a writer.

**LS:** So I think you've got to be prepared for that, haven't you? That you evolve and your business evolves, sometimes with it, sometimes separately, and you've just kind of got to go with it. Yeah, and I think that's fine.

But I think it is important to actually stop and think, because it's also easy to just follow trends or follow what everybody's talking about. But you need to feel aligned with that yourself, you need to feel like, OK, this is what I actually want to do.

**GL:** and passive income, it's a great idea, but there is a lot of work involved. Because even if you're not, if your service isn't an active, you know, time bound thing. You've got to do a lot of promotion, you've got to do a lot of promotion, getting into groups and things like that.

And also not everybody wants that from the business. I don't. I would like to have a couple more clients and some more income, but I don't want an agency business where I've got to be thinking about the needs of the team.

**LS:** This is another thing, because, yeah, clients, quite a bit of people were saying to me. Now that you are at the stage where you need to take on associates because you can't grow otherwise. And I'm like, Well, who says I want to grow?

I'm quite happy, I'm like Ferdinand, I sit here under the tree smelling the flowers. I'm happy having my five or six clients, you know, as long as they stay with me. And you know, sometimes it happens, clients go, but usually there's another one waiting in the doorway because I can always go out and work to get more clients.

At the moment, I'm not really. Why I'm posting regularly is just to keep my name visible. Because when that day comes and I need another client, then hopefully there are some waiting.



**GL:** Yeah, and it's really, I think it's really good to be able to say that, that actually, I've got half a dozen clients and I'm happy with that. Because you want to have a life as well, you know, your business should support that. It shouldn't be the other way around that you live for your business

**LS:** Exactly that's always been my reasoning anyway. That's why I moved abroad, because I didn't want the stress. That's why I worked part-time when my children were young, you know, because it doesn't cost any money to go to the beach.

That was always my motto. So, you know, don't have to earn that much money because I can take my kids to the beach all afternoon and it doesn't cost me a penny. Yeah, yeah, that's nice.

**24:14-24:26: GL:**

I'm going to completely change the subject. Obviously, we're recording a podcast so nobody can see, but you're wearing two pairs of spectacles.

**LS:** Yes, that's one of my gimmicks.

**GL:** It's a very good one, I like that.

**LS: 24:26-24:44**

And I have another pair here now I am actually well known for. Look, here's another pair. One day I took at a party, we had an online Christmas party. I took all the glasses I had lying around my head, just where I'm sitting, and I put them all on. And I took a photo and it looked absolutely ridiculous. But I do always wear two, yes.

**24:45-24:58: GL:**

It makes you memorable, and it's a. And do you wear two pairs of glasses in your Instagram? Or do you just sometimes...

**LS:** yeah, I do make a post about my glasses? I don't know if you've noticed. If you scroll through the proper couple now and again. I don't do it all the time, but quite often I am wearing two pairs anyway. But I've made a reel about when I'm polishing my two pairs of glasses before I start working and stuff like that.

**GL:** And do you alternate between them, you know, do you have them on your eyes, or do you just keep one on your head?

**25:17-25:31: LS:**

Yeah, no, they are different strengths, that's the thing. Yeah, they are different strengths, and that's how it all came about. These are my very expensive computer glasses, which I have to use when I do anything with a computer.

**25:31-25:45**

But then the other pairs that are floating around. They're just normal, cheap reading glasses that I got from, like whatever cheaper shop, and I need them when I read text.

**GL:** Yeah, yeah, I think I might suggest this to my mum because she's always losing it. We spend half of our lives hunting around for her glasses. So I think, yeah, but that's why I have so many. They're just floating about everywhere. I mean, I have a whole stash of them there, I mean. And now it's actually become a thing.

So I'm also collecting sunglasses now, so I've got a whole stash of them as well. Because that's another thing you lose constantly, and when you live in a sunny climate like me, you have to have sunglasses all the time. But yeah, it has become a bit of my gimmick and my brand, so yeah.

**26:14-26:34: GL:**

Yeah, I like it because you see a lot of advice where people say, Oh, do something to stand out, you know, and some people can. I used to know somebody who I used to meet at events. And she always wore her brand colours.

Which looked a bit odd when she was standing beside her banner, and she was the same colour as the banner. But you see, I'm not consistent enough for that. I would forget quite quickly.

**LS:** I quite often wear pink because pink is one of my colours as well, so I do, and I do like pink, I have a pink clothes, yeah.

**26:47-27:10: GL:**

Yeah, that probably helps. What would you say to somebody who feels like they're a bit stuck at where they are? Because obviously you've done some quite different things from where you started out.

What would you say to somebody who said, Gosh, Louise, I wish I could start Instagram, I wish I could go and spend time in another country. I wish I could take the kids to the beach for the day. What advice would you give somebody who's feeling a little bit constricted?

**LS:** Yeah, the thing is you're probably it's only you that's constricting you. If you know what I mean, it's you who holds yourself back. It's the same as with everything. You are the one who has to make the decision.

When I was on my burnout and I was so miserable and I was feeling so ill, I was obviously getting to see a therapist through work as a rehabilitation. And I remember sitting in his sofa saying, Is this my life? Is this going to be like this now? And he says, Well, that's up to you.

And I'm like, Oh God's sake, is it me who have to solve this problem? And then I thought, Well, actually, it is. So if you want to try Instagram, try it. What's the worst that can happen? Nothing you know, you can just test it out.

And just because you go do it in a certain way to start with, there's nothing to say, you have to keep doing it like that. You can just change it and you don't even have to delete all the old posts.

Because I did work with one girl and she's like, Oh, we need to delete those because I don't like them anymore, I just keep them there. Does it matter? I don't think it matters in the long run.

And another tip - I am known as the tip lady as well, I always come up with little tips. Another tip is to think about your future self. So what would Louise five years from now benefit from me doing this now?

It doesn't have to be five years, but you know next month, what would Louise next month think is really good that I did this month. Yeah, instead of looking what other people don't, use external gratifications, use yourself as your (inspiration). The person who's gonna say, Oh, I'm really glad I did that last month now.

**GL:** Yeah, yeah, I love that, and I think you're thinking about your future self is really good. I'm often pleasantly surprised by things that past Gudrun did and I'd forgotten all about. And I go, Oh, look, you've already done that.

**LS:** And then you can give yourself a pat on the shoulder and say well done.

**GL:** And you feel like a sense of achievement for something you don't even remember doing, and it makes your life easier.

**LS:** And if you're suffering from imposter syndrome, which we all do, I would say 99 of the people in the world do suffer from imposter syndrome from time to time. And apart from the one who said, always says, no, not me, not me.

There's always the one, but most people do, and just remember that, that. If you're looking at somebody else and thinking, Oh my God, I can't do this. Because they are doing it so well again, they are looking at somebody else thinking exactly the same.

nothing good ever coming out of comparing yourself with others. Yeah, I would say just always compare with yourself.

**30:23-30:40: GL:**

Yeah, I think that's really good advice, and yeah, everybody does get imposter syndrome. But at the end of the day, you're the person in it, so you're the one who's affected or who benefits from it. So so, yeah, it's, it's really good.

And also one good piece of advice that I have had from experts is that thing where... When you're comparing yourself to somebody, you're probably actually comparing where they are now to where you are now.

But they're not equal, that could have been a business five years, 10 years, they might have completely changed what they're doing. So, on the surface, it looks like you're comparing yourself at the same time, but they're at a different point in their journey.

**31:10-31:27: LS:**

Exactly, that's absolutely right. I was sat in the cafe in Ikea yesterday, obviously with my two Swedish friends who also live here. And we were appalled by the way that they didn't have any cinnamon buns on offer. I know, terrible.

But we were talking. So me, I'm a my own business, my friend has a shop, so she's a business owner as well, although it's a physical product. And then the third friend is employed and my friend with a shop. She was saying, Oh, I think I might close on Christmas Eve.

And I said, Yeah, you, you don't normally get any customers on Christmas? And she said, Well, I do, because the tourists are here and they still buy. And I'm like, Yeah, I suppose. And we were. I'm in an hour in about this. And then my third friend, who isn't a business owner, she said, Oh, for God's sake, you decide you're the boss.

Isn't that the benefit of being your own boss? Right? And she said, Yeah, of course, I'm closing.

**GL:** What's the point of being your own boss and having your own business? If you can't go to Ikea in the middle of the day?

Louise, this has been absolutely brilliant. Thank you so much for your time. If people wanted to find out more about you, where should they be looking? Maybe on your Instagram, for instance?

**LS:** Yeah, I would love to get more people. I'm on a mission to get to a thousand followers, so please help me out, right?

**32:38-32:56: GL:**

Let's all go and follow Louise, I already do follow you, obviously, so that's I've already made a contribution. And obviously.

**LS:** My business name is quite easy because it's my initial LS, and then I'm a VA, so VA LS VA, which actually stands for Language Service Virtual Assistance. But it happens to be my initials as well.

Brilliant. So I am on Instagram, I am at LSVA Underscore, which is so nice. yep, and people can find me on LinkedIn as well. As I said, I quite like LinkedIn. I think LinkedIn is a great platform for networking.

I also decided myself that because a lot of people post the same thing all over all channels, I don't do that. I started off having a Facebook page and I posted there as well, but I don't anymore.

It's just whatever gets cross fed from Instagram now. But LinkedIn is a completely different ballgame. I post completely different things there, so I do two different types of content.

**GL:** Yeah, I'm impressed with it... I only post on LinkedIn, but I do remember that in the past, people saying you should or you shouldn't.. If I ever use Instagram, I'll have to make sure I use different content just for the benefit of my audience.