

## MEANS AND MATTERS PODCAST

**EPISODE TITLE: Matcha for the Masses: Launching a Wellness Brand for the Rest of Us**

**GUEST: Trinity Mouzon Wofford, CEO and co-founder of Golde**

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**[Music]**

**Trinity Mouzon Wofford:** *[00:00:01]* We did more in revenue in the month of June 2020 than we did in the entire year of 2019. And I think people don't talk enough about the challenges of something like that. Of like, how you can suddenly you're trying to buy up all this inventory because there's so much demand, blah, blah, blah, and then the demand goes away. What do you do? And that can bankrupt a company, all because suddenly the world wanted to support black people for like 60 days.

**Leah Thomas:** *[00:00:36]* Hi and welcome to the Means and Matters podcast, presented by Bank of the West. I'm Leah Thomas, environmental justice advocate, educator, creative, founder of Intersectional Environmentalist, Bank of the West ambassador and your host.

My guest today is Trinity Mouzon Wofford, CEO and co-founder of Golde. Golde – that's spelled "gold" with an "e" on the end – is making self-care more accessible and fun. They sell health and beauty products that are easy to use and packed with superfoods like turmeric and matcha. And their beautiful Instagram feed is filled with fun tips, recipes, and stories from people of all backgrounds.

Trinity started Golde with her partner, Issey Kobori, in 2017. They self-funded their business, and ran it out of their one-bedroom apartment in New York. Today, you can find Golde at over a dozen retailers, including Sephora and Target stores nationwide. An amazing growth trajectory.

I had such a good time talking with Trinity because I could relate to her story as a young Black woman entrepreneur and learned a lot from her journey.

**[Music]**

**Leah:** *[00:01:51]* Hey Trinity. I'm super excited to have you here. So you started Golde in 2017 at the age of 23. I left my job in corporate America. Well, it's kind of sustainable fashion. Patagonia, hey Patagonia. I left my job around the same age and went on the journey of starting a nonprofit, which was pretty scary. So walk me through that leap of faith for you, what it looked like and what was the seed of your inspiration to go out on your own at 23?

**Trinity:** *[00:02:21]* At the time, I was a year, a little over a year out of college. I first got into this whole thing because my mom has a really severe autoimmune disease. And when I was a

teenager, she switched over to seeing this more holistically minded doctor. And long story short, she saw this incredible improvement in her symptoms. And that was like the pivotal moment for me of like, this is going to be my career path. I'm going to be a doctor, you know, practice medicine through this sort of holistic lens. I was pre med in college, all was well. And I found out from my mom that she actually had to stop seeing this doctor because she just couldn't afford to pay the fees anymore. Because, of course, that stuff isn't covered by insurance. And that really forced me to pause and just consider what exactly it was that I wanted to do in the world of wellness and how this piece of accessibility played into it. So, you know, I graduated from college. I wasn't exactly sure what I was going to do. I kind of like fell into a marketing career at a tech startup in New York and absolutely loved it, but was definitely that friend or coworker who was recommending various herbal remedies to you, depending on how you were feeling. So I knew I had to get back to that. And that was sort of like all the stuff that was going on in my head, like as I was thinking about launching this. And when we actually got started, I mean, it was like one product. It was myself and my partner, Issey, and it wasn't like one big leap. We started working on it while we were still at our full time jobs. We launched it while we were still working full time. For us, it was kind of like these continual little jumps so that you could kind of get one step further toward being completely focused on the business versus like pulling the plug all at once.

**Leah:** [00:04:13] That's really good advice that I feel like a lot of people should hear. I guess there are other ways to go about it than just like completely like leaving your old life behind and then going out. Like, that's one way to do it. But you can also take many leaps along the way. But one of my really good friends, Deedee, she always says, "I heard that you're supposed to start before you're ready." And I was wondering how much of a plan did you have before you took those many leaves or did you kind of just, like you said, figure it out along the way? And is there anything you wish you knew before you got started?

**Trinity:** [00:04:49] It was a lot of figuring it out along the way and not a lot of planning. I think that in the end I don't regret not planning that much because I didn't know enough to really make a plan like I had never built a business before when we started this business, we didn't have like a big vision of like we're going to be in Target and we're going to be selling all these products. We started this business and we were like, wouldn't it be so cool to do something great together that also brought this sense of like fun and accessibility to wellness. Like if we weren't just another, you know, product offering or brand making wellness feel inaccessible to most people. And our whole goal for that was to be able to pay our rent. I think that in hindsight, it would have been really beneficial for me to have spent a little bit more time really going through the list and understanding, you know, what are my different revenue channels going to be? And then like, how do those things scale out? Like, I wish that I had, like, maybe taken like a quick class on, like, you know, financial modeling or something so that I could have been a little bit more adept at that. But honestly, the business has transformed so much over the past nearly five years now since it launched that I don't know that, like, anchoring myself into a plan would have really served me that well anyways.

**Leah:** [00:06:22] Yeah, I mean, who needs plans anyway, right. <laughter>

**Trinity:** [00:06:27] Just have fun with it.

**Leah:** [00:06:29] So, I feel like I just started seeing you like everywhere a couple of years ago, which is so cool. But wait, so how did you make the transition of suddenly being in Target and Sephora and getting people to listen? Is there a team that's helping you do this? Because I know a lot of entrepreneurs really dream of making that transition from making things at home are kind of smaller operations and then getting into larger distribution. So how did that happen for you?

**Trinity:** [00:07:02] Our journey was that we launched early 2017. We had a little website on Squarespace that we built ourselves. We did everything ourselves. Branding product photography. We were like mixing up tumeric latte blends by hand in our apartment, which was questionably legal at the time, we don't still do that. We sold on our website and we also, like the majority of our sales were coming from these partnerships that we had with like independent retailers.

And so that was really how we built the business for like the first two plus years was just, you know, we built out a network of wholesale accounts, which was awesome because, I mean, that's profitable. You know, you're not paying to, like, acquire those customers on Facebook or anything like that. And you're working often times with other small businesses. So frequently you're working directly with the owner of that little shop and they believe in your product. They know your story. You're like stopping by to drop off samples. And so they're in a really good position to educate their consumer about you and the product and to, like, drive those sales.

So, I 110% always recommend that when a brand is just starting out, especially if they don't have the resources or the team to, like, go right into like a major retailer, start there. It's profitable, it's scalable, and don't feel the pressure to go big too soon. Build those relationships over time and like launch when you're ready.

**Leah:** [00:08:33] I'm snapping. You probably can't hear <laughter> in the background. So you said that one of the reasons for starting Golde was to create a brand that appealed to everyone, especially young people of color. Tell me how you design your marketing and outreach to appeal to groups that have felt traditionally shut out of the wellness space?

**Trinity:** [00:08:55] We never set out to build a brand that was explicitly for like any one community. We really just wanted to build a brand that we felt could speak to anyone. And so with that, we were really just looking at our own experiences as consumers in wellness. And like I was feeling the sense that, like when you thought about wellness, you didn't you didn't picture black people, which I thought was ridiculous.

And there was this sense of kind of, you know, when I spoke to friends, you know, in the black community that, like, wellness was this thing to, like, roll your eyes out, like it's not for us, whatever. And like that just felt like so upside down to me. So for us, it's like how are we going to make sure that our community is, in fact, representative of who we want to speak to? And how do we make sure that, like the customers that are tagging us on Instagram are from all

different backgrounds? Like how do we make sure we're actually getting in front of these people in a meaningful way so that, like, we're truly creating something that feels accessible and, you know, beyond just like the marketing piece, thinking about price point. And so we really try to like sit in this kind of friendly price point of like around like 20 to 30 bucks, as opposed to those like 50 dollar plus supplements, which I mean, they're fun. And I think that there's value in those supplements. But I mean, I don't know who can really afford that.

So we kind of look at it across all of these different metrics and just always keep in mind that there's always more we can do and we always need to strive to be better. We can never sort of like rest on our laurels and say like, oh, like we're an inclusive brand. Like that's where you stop making progress and that's where you stop noticing that, like you're actually not talking to everyone the way that you should.

**[Music]**

**Leah:** [00:11:03] I'm just kind of curious. So, sometimes I think when people see marketing campaigns or they know that a brand is becoming like kind of popular in their circles, they might incorrectly assume that the brand has more infrastructure, I guess, than it does. Have you ever had people kind of make assumptions about where you are with the brand? Because you do have a beautifully curated Instagram feed, lots of press coverage, but, yeah, does that ever happen to you?

**Trinity:** [00:11:34] Yes. And it's so, I feel like I have no right to complain about that because it really just speaks to how much we've been able to do with so little. But it can be frustrating at times when you feel like you have put all this energy into creating something that's really special and you've like literally poured, you know, blood, sweat and tears into it. And someone's kind of assuming that you're just another business that, like, raised 30 million dollars to make it happen overnight. When in reality, like, I just started paying myself a salary last year.

So to some extent. I think, like, we try to respond to that by telling our story. There are real founders. It's a family business. You know, we love our team and we're still really, really small. We're like less than 10 people altogether. And so I think telling that story is important and telling the story of like mine and Issey's heritage and, you know, making sure that people know.

**Leah:** [00:12:30] And as you're creating new products, where does the inspiration come from? Are you looking at the marketplace, responding to customers, or are you saying like, hey, I want to do this, so I'm going to do it.

**Trinity:** [00:12:44] A little bit of all three. Customers, definitely number one. We love to talk to our customers and we try to do surveys every so often where we're just like, hey, what superfoods are you into? What's your wellness routine look like? Then from there, for sure, we're looking at like market trends. And we're using our gut instinct and we're thinking about what feels like Golde and you know, what our values are.

You know, we always lead with a superfood in any of our products. So you're never going to see us put out a product that's like, I don't know, a hand cream that has like an extract of like one

superfood and like such a small amount that like it doesn't even matter. You know, we really want the superfoods to have a spotlight and to really tell the story through that lens. and to kind of like toe that line between being like very naturally formulated and not filled with a bunch of, like, artificial junk, but also being, like, really easy to use and really delicious.

**Leah:** [00:13:48] So one of your distribution partners is Goop, shout out to Goop, the wellness brand started by Gwyneth Paltrow. I think they are so unapologetically themselves in a way that is kind of like, funny. But your inclusive approach to prices and marketing seems to differ slightly. How did you decide to partner with them? And yeah, and I like it. I was in Goop once. They're good people.

**Trinity:** [00:14:18] Yeah, I agree. I think they're really awesome people. I think that there's room for everybody at the table of wellness. You know, Goop actually reached out to us when we were a very small business and the purchase order that we got from them was like our largest ever. And they launched us with like a big story and like really like gave us a lot of visibility. But I think that it's actually really telling that a big business like Goop is partnering with a brand like Golde. I think that making products accessible doesn't mean that you can't also offer them to that like hardcore wellness warrior. I think that, you know, it's really about like for us, like truly like making something for everyone.

**Leah:** [00:15:08] That's a great answer. And I think sometimes people can be a little critical, and not always as understanding, I guess, when it comes to, you know, black owned businesses especially, you know. So you can't make everybody happy, but it seems like you're making most everybody happy because I see you everywhere. So that's good, right? That's cool.

**Trinity:** [00:15:29] Thank you. Yeah I mean well, there's a balance. You know, it's like you want to be, I think, unapologetically yourself. But like you also don't want to, like, intentionally antagonize.

**Leah:** [00:15:42] I agree. I feel like that's the perfect caveat to that. So, dear listeners, listen to the caveat. <laughter>

[Music]

**Leah:** After a short break, we'll dive into what it takes to land business funding, and why Trinity loves mentoring.

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**Leah:** [00:16:24] Back into business things. So when you started the business with your partner, with your own funding, many investors turned you down when you approached them for funding. Why do you think this was?

**Trinity:** [00:16:37] Oh, my gosh, there's a few reasons. I think definitely in the early days, I mean, still now, like black people are not getting funding. That's like number one. You know, I think a lot of progress has been made with women. And I'm now really starting to see the tide

shift on, you know, minorities and especially black people getting funding as well. But here's the way that investors work. They're not that into taking big risks. They want to replicate a success that they've already seen before.

So, if they see that like this business in the past successfully raised all this money and, you know, generated a big return for the investors, whatever, they want to copy what happened there. They want the same type of founder. They want the same type of, you know, marketing story. And that's why as consumers now we're like, you know, you sit on the subway and you're like, "How come this brand sounds exactly the same way as the other brand that's advertising on the other side of subway?" Because there's this kind of, like, groupthink that starts to happen of like, well, this worked for this one company. So let's just be the like, you know, let's be the like. This is a constant thing that you hear in, like, investor pitches where it's like, "I'm the Warby Parker of this." Right?

And so I think that, you know, minority status definitely doesn't make it easy. But I think that one of the biggest challenges was that overall we were just doing something very differently. You know, we had self-funded our business to start and we didn't have these sort of glitzy business backgrounds. We were like two kids who I mean, we went to NYU, it was a good school. But, you know, it's not like we're like that, like Harvard dropout story that like everyone loves. And so, you know, I think if you are a small business owner and you're looking to go out and raise capital, a hundred percent, it will be significantly more difficult if nobody on your team has a proven track record. If you don't have a crazy network of, like, people who will, like, throw in the first, like, you know, a few hundred thousand dollars in checks, you know. They call these things friends and family rounds, which I think is just like nepotism at its finest. Then like that's a count against you.

And so, there's a lot of things that you're going to have to power through to eventually hit enough proof points to get someone to write that check. And so, at the end of the day, what we ended up deciding to do was to just keep building our business the way we had always known to build our business, which was, you know, we built it to be profitable. We built it to be lean. And I think that allowed us to like start to hit enough milestones that people were like, holy moly, how did you do all of this with like no money?

**Leah:** [00:19:38] The secret world of funders. That's, so, I think that info will be super valuable for people who are trying to be entrepreneurs in this space. And another little nugget of advice. So growth is something that can be a bit of a double edged sword, especially as a small business that suddenly sees its profile raised and sales skyrocket because that can be hard to plan for. Like we talked about earlier, what's you know, what do you need plans for? Because there's so many things that you can't even plan for. But as your business has grown and continues to grow, how have you developed guardrails to make sure that you remain true to your core mission and values?

**Trinity:** [00:20:16] I found that again and again. What I've had to do is come back to those core values and think about why we started it, why we're building it, and, you know, what we hope to achieve. And just making sure that, yeah, those service guardrails for yourself. Because you will

have people knocking on your door telling you, oh my gosh, I love what you've done. Now you just need to pivot into this direction and it'll be perfect. And you need to be confident enough to say no.

It also matters a lot when you're building a team. Being really true to your values and like finding people who feel very aligned and finding people who really, like, get it at the core, especially those early hires, like it's so important.

**Leah:** [00:21:05] That brings me to a slightly different question. But during the, you know, Black Lives Matter movement, well, which has been around for quite some time, but in 2020, there is all of a sudden just extreme focus on black owned businesses, black influencers, black creatives, things like that. And you were interviewed about how Golde was receiving increased attention and you said that, "It can be challenging to separate the profound from the performative." Which, just gotta sit with that, because I completely agree. But how have you avoided being tokenized and you have advice for other entrepreneurs of color? And to go off of that? I feel like it's been so interesting in this last year, and that's something that I feel like I personally need to unpack. And a lot of other, you know, black people who are entrepreneurs probably need to unpack, just suddenly having people embracing you in a way that you don't know if it's performative or if it's genuine, and then that support is kind of decreasing in some ways, now, a year later.

**Trinity:** [00:22:09] Yeah, no, it has been such madness. And, you know, to see. I mean, for all of us to have lived through endless, you know, generations of stuff, but now especially, you know, what happened with George Floyd. I remember getting on a zoom call with our little team and, you know, like the day after something like that, having to kind of like say, hey, here's where we're at. And I mean, just like trying not to cry on the call. I mean, and then meanwhile, your business is starting to blow up-- like it's a lot to process. And I had some people reach out and just be like, "Oh, my God, congratulations." And it's like, man, I mean, yeah, I guess this is good, but like, I don't feel that great right now. And I don't know how to manage this level of influx, we didn't plan for it. You know, we did more in revenue in the month of June in 2020 than we did in the entire year of 2019. And we were like a team of two full time and two part time.

But I will say that as far as the impact on the business, it certainly didn't maintain that absurd level of like everybody shouting you out, you know. But we did find that it did create like a shift for our business that like we've never gone back from. We had a new audience that really stuck with us. And I feel very grateful for that because I know there are a lot of black owned businesses, creators, et cetera, that kind of felt like they had that moment and then it was like pulled away from them. And I think people don't talk enough about the challenges of something like that. Of like how you can suddenly you're trying to buy up all this inventory because there's so much demand, blah, blah, blah, and then the demand goes away. What do you do? I mean, that can bankrupt a company, all because suddenly the world wanted to support black people for like 60 days.

So, I don't know if I have an answer. It's something that I'm still observing and kind of trying to unpack. And I think similarly to the pandemic that we're still living through, I'm just still trying to

fully understand what happened, what is happening now, and like how we truly move forward through this in a way that creates meaningful equity for black people in this country.

**Leah:** [00:24:45] I'm right there with you. I think I don't know. There needs to be some sort of healing circle or something where a lot of people can just unpack this last year because it's just been, you know, so draining. But also I've seen great prosperity with so many black owned businesses. But prosperity doesn't outweigh the trauma. And it's just, you know, it goes on and on and on. But thank you for sharing with us. I think they'll be really helpful for a lot of people.

### [Music]

**Leah:** [00:25:34] So you've developed two really cool programs, Mentor Mondays and #Office\_Hours to help other entrepreneurs build and scale their businesses. As you're forming and launching Golde, who are your mentors?

**Trinity:** [00:25:52] First off actually, my partner Issey's father, hopefully soon to be my father in law, depending on when Issey and I ever officially get married. Covid has really derailed that plan.

Issey's parents actually like operate like a small candle business that they started out of their garage like twenty five plus years ago. And so both of his parents really were very much like our first mentors as far as helping us figure out, like, how do we incorporate this thing and like, oh my gosh, supply chain challenge, what do we do?

And then another person that I actually really sought out was Tristan Walker, the founder of Bevell. I cold D.M.'d him on Instagram probably like three or four years ago now, and was like, 'Hey, I really would love the chance to talk with you if you ever have a moment.' And I kind of gave, like, my quick little pitch. And to my utter delight and surprise, he got back to me. And, you know, we got on a call a few weeks later. And now every so often, you know, we just like check in and, you know, catch up. And he's been incredible for just being, like, the most transparent about the process and everything.

**Leah:** [00:27:11] And then what are you personally gaining out of mentoring?

**Trinity:** [00:27:15] Oh, man. The last Mentor Mondays cohort that we did, I really felt this, like, this re-energizing, you know. There's something so beautiful about someone who's in the early stages and they're still just kind of like thinking about things and like they don't have the complications that come from, like having a larger business that like now has like employees on payroll and, you know, retail partners and whatever. Like there's such a magic in that very early stage. And you don't even realize how much wisdom you've started to accumulate. You know, like you kind of take it for granted. But getting the chance to talk with other founders not only re-energizes me, but it reminds me of how far I've come.

**Leah:** [00:28:01] OK, so this is my favorite part of the interview. So before I let you go, I want to ask you five questions for my lightning round. Ready, set, go. OK, what advice would you give to your younger self



**Trinity:** [00:28:13] Know when you're lucky.

**Leah:** [00:28:15] That's a word. I feel like we should stay on that, but I have to get going. <laughter> OK, what's the one thing that you do to take care of yourself?

**Trinity:** [00:28:24] Go for long walks and don't have my phone on me at night.

**Leah:** [00:28:28] What's the best advice you've received from a mentor?

**Trinity:** [00:28:31] Stay true to yourself and don't raise too much money.

**Leah:** [00:28:33] What is your favorite book or a book that you're reading right now?

**Trinity:** [00:28:37] I just read this book from Jane Goodall that's like a few years old now, that is called I think it's *Seeds of Hope*. And it's all about like the planet and like plants and like how we have used plants forever. Sorry, this answer too long. Anyways, that's my that's one of my favorite books of the year. It was so insightful. I loved it.

**Leah:** [00:28:58] And lastly, what's a gadget or device that you can't live without?

**Trinity:** [00:29:03] OK, sorry, basic answer, but my iPhone.

**Leah:** [00:29:05] Relatable. <laughter> Well, thank you so much for joining us today and I wish you all the best. I'm sure I'll see you around. And yeah, this is a lovely conversation.

**Trinity:** [00:29:18] Thanks, Leah. I had so much fun.

### [Music]

**Leah:**[00:29:23] You can follow Trinity as she continues the real talk about what it's like to be a small business owner on Instagram @TrinityMouzon or @Golde with an "e", to learn more about their awesome products.

To find out more about Trinity and the other women that we are profiling on our show, visit [meansandmatters.com/podcast](https://meansandmatters.com/podcast).

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