

## Ep #6: Top 5 Mistakes Introverts Make When Starting a Biz



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With Your Host

**Rachel Cannon**

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Welcome to *Loudmouth Introvert*, a podcast for helping creative introverted entrepreneurs thrive, despite living in a world that's designed for extroverts to succeed. If you're ready to make more money and build the creative business you've been dreaming of, you're in the right place. I'm your host Rachel Cannon.

Y'all. I can't even believe that 2019 has flown by as quickly as it has. Here we are heading into the holiday season, and I feel like I just hit my stride with things this year! I know I say this every year, but I really don't believe how quickly time flies as an adult. I will tell you that November and December are my two favorite months, but that's always been because of food, and the ceremonial way we organize the next two months around food. But, I adopted a keto diet in April, and now all I can think about is "what exactly am I going to eat during the holidays?!" Cornbread dressing? Out. Gravy? Out. Sweet potato pie, broccoli casserole, gumbo??? Out, out, out. I fully expect the next two months drag on and on while I wistfully watch friends and family inhale all of my favorite foods. Or maybe I'll try to come up with low-carb/no-sugar alternatives to all of those foods! In that case, the next two months will fly by! When I was a kid, I felt like time just CRAWLED by at a snail's pace. School years seemed like they took an eternity. Of course, summers flew by, and maybe that's why it seems like time is flying now – because as an adult, I have learned to have fun and enjoy my days (kinda like when I was a kid and it was summer).

And this year in particular has been kind of a monumental one. I turned 40, my business turned 10, I launched my creative consulting business, and I launched this podcast! In the last episode, we discussed the dangers of getting stuck in our thought patterns and never taking action. Well, I can tell you that 2019 was not the year I got lost in a maze of my own making! I put some plans in place and took the steps to making them happen! And as a business owner of 10 years, I feel immensely better about the start of my new ventures than I did when I began my interior design business in 2009. That's because I had help from trusted coaches and incredibly capable

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team members, and they all helped me avoid some very detrimental mistakes I could have made. In fact, when I started my interior design business in 2009, I made some doozies. So in today's episode, I want to talk to you about the five most common mistakes creative introverts make when we decide to start a business.

### Mistake #1:

Trying to appeal to everyone

When I decided I was going to “start a business,” I had no idea who I was trying to reach. I incorrectly assumed that I wanted to work with everyone, and that everyone should want to work with me! I wasted soooo much of my very valuable energy trying to convince people who weren't a right fit for the service I was offering that they needed to hire me. I hadn't done anything to establish how my method of delivering a beautiful room (which is what the client thought they were paying for) was different than everyone else who appeared to do the same thing. And really, what they're paying for is my unique method. Unlike other interior designers who can thrive in chaos, I'm a very organized, linear thinker. I had done nothing to communicate that to potential clients, so I was being sized up, based on incorrect assumptions about my profession as a whole. I also was doing nothing to help clients understand that because of my linear thinking patterns, I preferred to follow a very logical order of steps during the design phase. And if they were used to other designers who were prone to

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sporadic meetings and impromptu time management, they were really confused when I didn't run my business that way.

I should have been marketing my services as the opposite of that assumption about interior designers – that we're all flaky, unable to show up anywhere on time, can't finish a task before getting distracted by the next one. If that's what they were expecting from a designer – someone they had to babysit – I was most definitely NOT their girl. In fact, I really hate to be micromanaged. It literally makes me the opposite of productive.

Finally, I started just marketing my business in the right way, and the right clients found me. As my friend (and client), Meredith told me "Girl I'm pickin up what you puttin down!" I was showing ahead of time that I had the unique answer to my ideal client's unique problem.

Trying to appeal to everyone simply causes confusion. When we skip over the step of determining what's unique about our offerings, we end up saying yes to a lot of clients who aren't really a fit. We spend valuable energy wrestling with them to let us be in control, and trying to get them to fit into our way of doing things. Which, really, was something they never wanted to begin with!

By trying to appeal to everyone, we deter good clients by blending in with all the other people who appear to do what we do. We cause confusion by not being able to say why we're the solution to their problem - and a confused mind always says no.

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### Mistake #2:

Assuming that because the creative work is fun, running a business will be fun

I see this all the time, especially from interior designers. I get it – from the outside, this does look like the most awesome career on the planet, and it seems fairly easy. Pick some paint colors, make the client buy the furniture you tell them to, take pretty pics, and move on, right? I'm sorry, but no. People are enamored of creative minds because we're interesting! In fact, it's attractive BECAUSE it's not something everyone can do. And not everyone SHOULD do it.

I can't tell you the number of people I've talked with who made those exact assumptions and jumped into starting a business, only to realize after a certain amount of time that it was not as glamorous and exciting as they assumed it would be. That's because the creative work is awesome – but it's the running of the business itself that throws us for a loop. We go in with no plan to grow, no strategy to maximize profits, and no idea that we're going to wake up at some point and feel like we've made a big fat mistake.

I know this because I did it. Of course, I didn't realize that I was doing it at the time, and the recession had hit, and thought I was freelancing until the economy picked up. But I absolutely thought to myself, "I know how to run a design firm, I mean, how hard could it be? I've already been doing this work for 5 years!" Only, I hadn't been doing that work for 5 years. I'd been doing the work of the employee for 5 years. I had not been the person responsible for EVERY aspect of the business. Attracting new clients, maintaining current client relationships, managing client expectations, billing and invoicing, tracking down clients who decided not to pay, ordering

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product, receiving product, inspecting product, arranging for product to be delivered, overseeing the delivery of the product, assuring clients that yes this is the one you approved...and on top of all of that, trying to find a way to make the business profitable!

Now, I'm not someone who likes to deal with most of that stuff; in fact, confrontation is my actual living nightmare. So instead of staying stuck there, I knew had to make changes. Like most creative introverts, I got into this business because it was something I enjoyed. I have a natural ability, and I assumed that because the creative work was fun for me, it would be easy to build a business around it. But when we try to make a living doing something we love, suddenly we realize that it's a lot harder than we expected. That's because we're trying to build a business by working in it, not on it.

Growing your business requires more than just the tasks that we are obligated to our clients to complete. It requires a strategic plan (with measurable goals) that includes methods that solves clients' problems better than they could for themselves, and creating client experiences that crush the competition. I spend a minimum of 6 hours a week working ON my business. Not doing the tasks that are related to design projects, but on marketing, finances, goal setting, fine-tuning our processes. If we don't allow ourselves time to be the CEO – the big visionary – for our businesses, we'll always stay small, and frustrated that the work turned out to be more of a headache than a joy.

Mistake #3:

Allowing clients to run the show

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Again, guilty. And truthfully, the clients are not to blame. Like many creative introverts, I was so ready to get each project rolling, I never stopped and took the time to establish some ground rules. I would just jump right in and start working, and then get annoyed when a client would contact me for an update. Like, god, leave me alone! I can't think when you're constantly asking me 20 million questions in 50 million emails a day! Well, like I said – it wasn't their fault. They didn't know how this process worked, and I was doing a pretty bad job of keeping them informed. I hadn't set up any framework to educate them on how my process worked. So – because interior designers have a reputation for being a little flaky – they felt like if they weren't calling the shots, NOTHING was going to get done.

You already know that this behavior is the precise opposite of what creative introverts need to do their best work. I'm sure I'm preaching to the choir. You know exactly what I'm talking about, and how awkward it is, midway through a project to be like, "Hey, chill. You're the worst." LOL Kidding, of course you wouldn't say that to your client, but you've thought it! You may not have figured out a way to say anything at all – so you trudge through, trying to be polite and nice, but inside you're a crucible about to explode. Again, this is a waste of your very limited energy, so we have to educate our clients from the start on how we work.

Many of us suffer from a lack of boundaries with clients. I see many creative introverts allowing their clients to steer the ship because they don't realize it all could have been avoided with some simple terms established from the beginning. We don't want to seem controlling, or we don't want to create conflict – because we already know that a conflict will drain us of all of our creativity and our energy. Sometimes the client takeover happens so gradually, we don't notice until it's too late. We wake up one day and realize we've become their assistant. And I don't know about you, but I didn't start my business to be treated like anyone's assistant. I could easily go get a job anywhere as an assistant and leave all the stress at the door when I clock out everyday!

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No, it just isn't worth it to stay stuck in that pattern. I decided that we would start educating clients long before we ever took them on about how we work. We're in the driver's seat from day one – because we established a step-by-step process that takes them through initial contact, to an in-home consultation, to their design service proposal review and contract signing, to the first 4 or 5 meetings, to their design concept review, right down to when we install the last piece of furniture in their home. They have peace of mind, because they see that we know what we're doing, and they rarely – if ever – try to step outside the boundaries we've set. It's amazing. It makes the work so much easier!

So, start by telling your clients from day one how you work and what the process is. Even better, start marketing your process so that you can attract the clients that it appeals to. It wouldn't hurt to create a little marketing document that describes how you work that you can give them to read after your first consultation (this is what we do). The key to setting (and keeping) boundaries is to make sure that your client understands them.

Sidenote: Don't give clients your personal number, and establish early on that you don't communicate via text. Trust me on this one introverts.

Mistake #4:

Pricing services too low



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Oh, were you under the assumption that I never did this? You would be wrong. So wrong.

I absolutely did it. I wasn't sure how to charge and I didn't want to scare anyone away, so I chose a number that was way too low (and I was charging hourly, which I haven't done in 9 years, and that is a podcast for another day), and then I felt scared to say it out loud. There was always a little catch in my throat before I eeked it out. Then I just braced myself for their reaction. I wasn't confident and they could tell, which usually led to a horrible negotiation session that I never asked for. One time someone offered me a quarter of my hourly rate! I mean. Girl bye.

If you've been in a creative industry for any length of time, you've probably heard the saying "some money is better than no money." It's a horrible saying, and you might have even felt that way from time to time. Like, you know it's not a good fit but you desperately need the money. Y'all, nobody but us is responsible for that mess! We get ourselves into situations where we are negotiating on price. We allow the conversation to go there with potential clients. Then once the project starts we hate to admit, but we know we accepted far too little money for far too much service. Have you ever felt like "God, I basically gave them that project for free." That's a horrible feeling, and it's not the way to grow your business or make any money!!

Instead, offer tiered pricing for very clearly defined services (and deliverables), and let them choose what works best. You can't offer a top-tier service for at a rock bottom price.

Mistake #5:

Avoiding clear policies and practices

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Avoiding clarity on how you work is a one-way ticket to misery. We mistakenly assume that if we tell the client how we work, they'll decide not to work with us. And yes, I did this too! I mean, I knew how I preferred to work, but they didn't. And then I'd stay annoyed that they were constantly checking in, asking what was next. I remember thinking "geez people, just wait till you hear from me."

It was actually my mom who helped me see why that was not a good plan. She'd worked with a designer when I was in high school, and she said "well, people just want to know what you're doing. I mean, they've paid you for something and when they don't hear from you or see you in a few days, it makes them worry." Well that was the eye opening I needed. Clear policies and practices build trust. And trust is the pinnacle of nurturing your client relationships. If trust is lost – even momentarily, it's really difficult to try to establish it again. An effective policy we established – because we do so much ordering of furnishings for our clients – was how we'd communicate the status of their orders. They'd give us their money, and we'd say "It's an 8-10 week lead time" and we'd still get an email the next day to find out when it would all be in. Those emails were the bane of my existence because (a) I already told you and I really hate to repeat myself, and (b) they never stopped coming. Finally it took a really awesome client suggesting that we create a way for them to just check the status themselves because they felt like (ie, they knew) that they were bothering us.

Simplest solution in the world: A shared Google doc with all the info on every product that they could log into and see at any time and get the most current info on their things.

LIFE CHANGING.

You can't blame clients for not understanding how your business works if you haven't taken the time to tell them. And you can't blame them for asking questions. Clarity is part of the reason they've hired your business in the first place, so it only makes sense that if they feel they aren't clear on something, they're going to ask you about it. Save yourself the headache

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and preserve your energy by describing to them before you ever even take them on as clients how your process works. And while we're on this subject, keep in mind that you can't afford to be in business without terms of agreement that clients read, understand, and sign. Terms and contracts only exist to settle any misunderstandings that may occur during a project, so develop them with an attorney, and use them every time!

Don't leave this episode feeling like you're bound to fail. You're not! In fact, I hope you feel better now that you've heard that I (and many creatives like me and you!) also made every single one of these mistakes in my business.

As creative introverts, we'll burn out so quickly if we can't make changes when we see that something is draining us of our ability to do our jobs. The important thing is to know how to identify what's hindering your business and then take the steps needed to fix it, so that we can spend less energy on putting out fires, and more energy being the creative geniuses we are supposed to be!

I also have a great bonus for you today. If you need help with these same mistakes, head on over to \_\_\_\_\_ and download the guide to avoiding them! It's chock full of helpful tips and advice to help you get your head above water and start working in a way that won't exhaust you or tap out all of your creativity!

Hey, y'all, if you love the show and you find it useful, I would really appreciate it if you would leave me a rating and a review on Apple Podcasts, or iTunes if you're an Android or Windows user. Your feedback helps other creative introverted entrepreneurs find the show and it helps me create an awesome show that provides tons of value.

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