

Ep #7: Selling as the Creative



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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.

Have you ever thought to yourself, "I'm not a salesperson." Or better yet, have you told someone that? Like, out loud? (Or, "aloud" as my elementary teachers were fond of saying. Do people even still say "aloud" anymore, or has that gone the way of words like "whilst"? Hm. Conversation for another day.) It's probably the number one thing I hear from my creative introverted consulting clients. They really, really hate sales. And they really, really, REALLY hate selling. And if you work for someone else, then you're semi-off the hook here. But if you own a business? Guess what. You're in sales. And rather than avoiding this kind of major, crucial part of owning a business, and leaving it all up to chance, the best thing you can do is adopt a sales strategy that works for you. We'll talk about that in a minute, but first, let's examine why creative introverts hate sales.

1. It feels fake. And if there is anything an introvert cannot stomach, it is phoniness. We don't like feeling fake and we don't like when other people act fake because it wastes our energy.
2. It seems distasteful. We don't like feeling pressured. And we don't like pressuring others. Because we'll make up our minds when we're good and ready (ie., after we've explored every possible outcome), and we wouldn't like it if someone kept trying to close a sale on us by applying more pressure. (In fact, I'm highly likely to walk away from the table when I feel pressured.)
3. It's exhausting. We believe that, in order to sell, we have to be "on." That would be great if being "on" made us feel energized and pumped, like it does for our extroverted friends. But it doesn't. It makes us feel depleted and worn out.

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Selling is not something that came naturally to me. I felt all of these same things and had many moments in the early phases of owning my business where I questioned whether or not I'd ever get it right. Again, this was me, trying to function as an extrovert and sell the way an extrovert would sell - and you know by now that this does not work for us! All of the over functioning drained me, and as a result, made me believe I was bad at being a business owner.

So before we get into some sales strategies that WORK for introverts, we need to really talk about why it's important for us to distinguish between how WE can excel versus how extroverted creatives can sell. One thing we, as creative introverts, have got to remember is this: ENERGY SPENT IS ENERGY LOST. And since our energy is a valuable resource for us, we can't go around spending energy to no avail. We have to have some kind of return to show for it! When we spend energy, and have nothing to show for it, we find ourselves drained and frustrated. In contrast, our extroverted friends find it exciting to sell. They don't internalize rejection like we do, and the challenge of selling is thrilling in and of itself for them. (That's not to say they don't also like to close a sale, obviously they do, but they're like wind-powered electricity. The more energy they expend, the more they have. We're more like batteries that have to be recharged.)

Creative introverted entrepreneurs: you have to be able to sell in order to stay in business. And selling feels icky for us and we hate it because we are going about it the wrong way. We're probably not really following any kind of sales process or strategy, which is strike one. We focus on ourselves, try to appeal to everyone, and are unclear on our core values, and that all feels icky and unnatural for us. Instead, we, as creative introverts have to create sales processes that support OUR personalities - and that means turning the focus off of ourselves and onto our clients, knowing who we serve and why, and staying true to our core values at every turn. So let's break these down a little bit.

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1. Escape: Focusing on ourselves | Arrival: Focus on the client/problem/solution

First, I often hear from other creative introverts that the part they hate the most about selling is talking about themselves. I actually really hate to talk about myself. (I know. Shocking.) It just feels uncomfortable if it hasn't come about in an organic way. I was at dinner a few weeks ago and a friend announced to the table "Rachel is starting a podcast." And then he turned to me, expecting me to fill them all in on this news. All eyes on me, I surveyed the table and realized that what I was doing with this podcast would not resonate with a single person there, so I said "Oh, we don't have to talk about it." Because really. Energy spent is energy lost. I couldn't spare a single drop of energy that night. I chose to just shut the conversation down because what's worse than one person asking me to tell them about myself? A whole table of people waiting for me to talk about myself. Horrifying.

We feel this same way about selling because we assume we have to talk about ourselves to sell what we're offering. And that's super uncomfortable for us. I know a lot of you struggle with social media and marketing for this same reason - we only want to share when there is something interesting to say, and in the other times we panic, thinking we're coming off as full of ourselves because we think we sound pompous or conceited. So instead, we don't market or post anything, in effect, shutting down the conversation - which is different than how I shut down the conversation at the table that night. I saw only energy lost in trying to communicate, whereas, when we choose NEVER to market ourselves, we shut down any and all conversations and cut off any opportunity to take our business to the next level.

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The problem with this thinking, as it relates to selling, is that in order to grow your business, you're going to have to sell at some point. That's a tough pill to swallow, but trust me, you will be so glad you learned how and to whom you want to sell, because it actually becomes easy and fun! So, here's the great news. You don't have to talk about yourself! Instead, turn the focus onto the client, their problem, and your solution. When you can communicate to them that you understand them by articulating EXACTLY what THEY want, you preserve precious energy and selling becomes no big deal. Put the client first, in the spotlight so that it is no longer on you, you, you - and you can breathe a little easier. You no longer have to feel like you have to list all of your good qualities and talents, which feels SO weird and gross, and instead, you get to have a meaningful conversation with them about what THEY WANT.

Sidenote, as it relates to social media - social media is the PERFECT place for introverts and creatives to sell because we get to think about what we want to say and get it just perfect before we post! I have a podcast coming up about social media for all of you who hate it, so stay tuned for that!

Think of yourself as the teacher. When people are curious about what you do, see this as an opportunity to educate them about the ins and outs of your business. Don't worry so much about talking about yourself. Turn the attention to the types of clients you work with and how your services solve their problem, and be an active listener. Let them tell you what they want, and listen for cues that give you the opportunity to educate them on how what you do is the answer to their problem.

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Escape: Appealing to Everyone | Arrival: Know who you serve and to what end and speak directly to them

...Which leads me to: number 2. The idea that we must appeal to everyone in order to find clients. We don't. And in fact, we shouldn't. So even though I just told you how to get over the uncomfortable feeling of talking about yourself by talking about your clients instead, you absolutely have the right to gauge whether or not anything you have to say will resonate with the person you're speaking with. At that dinner where I was put on the spot, I knew everyone at the table was not my target audience, so I just opted not to share what I was doing because I couldn't bare the thought of fielding more questions when I hadn't prepared to talk about this topic that night in the first place. It was just too exhausting to try to start from the beginning, when what I really want to do is have people connect to my messaging right away. I don't have the energy to explain to everyone who introverts are and what creatives do and why we are so unique in the challenges we face as entrepreneurs. You either get it or you don't.

The same goes for your messaging to your clients. If you aren't 100% crystal clear on who your target audience is, and how you offer the one and only solution to their unique problem, you will waste precious energy trying to appeal to everyone. This is not productive and you'll eventually start to think you don't have anything unique to offer. But you do!!

Appealing to everyone creates a transactional culture, not loyalty culture. And transactions take place in the grocery store, where everyone is just looking for the lowest possible price on commodities...loyalty is where service industries (such as creative industries) excel. So none of us need to be bothered with trying to be the end-all, be-all for every potential client. Introverts want to form deep connections, not shallow ones - both with our clients and in life, so our messaging has to be clear. Our audience should hear it and have an instant recognition that you "get them." Clear

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messaging means we get to skip the small talk, which, no surprise, drains us of our energy. For example, when I announced to my followers that I was offering business consulting services to other creative, introverted entrepreneurs, the response was overwhelming because my messaging let them know that I understood them and could help! If I'd just announced that I was offering business consulting services, my message would have been too broad, and thus, would have reached no one. I would have fielded questions that made me repeat myself over and over again, as I tried to determine how I could work with anyone and everyone, rather than crafting the message once, and putting it out to MY people. And MY people - you - immediately responded saying that you knew what I was talking about, that you saw yourself in what I was saying!

Messaging that attempts to appeal to everyone is only going to cause confusion, and a confused mind always says no. Not to mention, you'll be worn out from trying to convince lots of un-ideal clients that you're the answer to their problem. Even worse, you might actually succeed and get a few of them, and then find yourself wishing you hadn't because they're making your professional life miserable! You'll be much more successful at selling when your messaging is clear and targeted, and you will only have to craft that message once for YOUR ideal audience- instead of over and over again, trying to appeal to everyone.

Escape: Unclear core values | Arrival: Identifying how potential clients/opportunities align with you

And third, as creative introverts, we already know that we get drained really easily. But have you considered that by not knowing your core values and

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then making sure all of your opportunities align with them, you're actually creating the mental drain yourself? When we say yes to things that don't align with our core values, we put ourselves in situations where we're forced to "fake it". I know you've heard that saying before - Fake it till you make it. I don't believe in faking it. I'd much rather be an open book, honest with myself and about my business, than trying to create the illusion that everything is fabulous and I'm not exhausted because I've agreed to do a bunch of things that I don't really believe in.

My core values are pretty clear. Truth, gratitude, generosity, freedom, security, acknowledgement, experience, and efficiency. These are the things that, if nobody was watching, I would still stand for. When an opportunity or a potential client comes my way and does not align with these values, I don't have to waste a single second trying to get them to understand or align with me. I'd much rather use my energy to bring my authentic message to the world, and have the people who understand it naturally gravitate to it. That's much more meaningful to me.

Knowing our core values helps us stop the cycle of negotiating with ourselves on those pop up opportunities and potential clients. If an opportunity doesn't align with every core value, I say no to it. Because I don't want to have to talk myself into wanting to be excited about it. A certain tv network is always sending inquiries about having my design firm do the design work for its shows, but we will not be given credit; the "host of the show" will be given credit. That's in direct contradiction to my core values of acknowledgement, experience, truth, security, and gratitude. It doesn't matter how starry eyed I might be about the idea of saying I got to work on a tv show - if I can't be honest and tell people and get the recognition I deserve for my intellectual property, what's the point? I would not be able to sleep.

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The same goes for selling your creative services. If you sense, at any moment, that the client or project does not align with your core values, you have the right to save your energy and not sell. (Again, back to my example at the dinner table. It was a cold audience who I barely knew. I saw blank faces staring back at me, and I just thought, “Nope.”) Because when the right opportunity comes your way, that client will automatically respond to what you’re saying because it rings true to them - because their core values align with yours. And you don’t want to have wasted all of your energy on trying to sell to someone who doesn’t want what you’re offering when that right client comes along. You want to save your energy for that client.

Can you see how, as a creative introvert, you can’t attempt to function as an extrovert because the ways we get energized are completely different? Both introverts and extroverts can benefit from adopting a sales strategy that moves potential clients through our process, but it’s especially crucial for US introverts because it helps us preserve our energy! How?

Sticking to a sales strategy every time we get a new lead naturally weeds some potential clients out, because rather than selling OURSELVES, we focus on THEM instead. Putting the spotlight on them helps us spot the “looky-loos” and the ones who are just looking for the cheapest solution to their problem because we’ve allowed the conversation to be about THEIR needs, and not about US! (A relief for introverts worldwide!) I think the best strategies start by vetting the potential client with a quick discovery call. You can gauge interest, seriousness, and realistic expectations all in that call, and you never have to talk about your services at all if you can already tell they aren’t a good fit.

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A sales strategy helps us avoid wasting energy when getting potential clients to say yes to our proposal for services. This is because when we are very clear on WHO we work with, we already know how to appeal to them in THEIR language. Rather than trying to sell them on all of the things we're great at, we can tell them, without any doubt, that we have the answer to their problem. This is called positioning - where we communicate to the client that we understand them and have the solution, thus preparing them to say "yes" to the next step. So the client intake process at my design firm looks like this: discovery call, in-home consultation, design proposal review, contract signing, and project kickoff. At the end of every step we position them to say yes to the next one...so that by the time we ask for their financial commitment, they've been ready to say yes for awhile. (And it's important to note there are five steps that have to take place before we ever even begin work on their project! This saves us not just energy, but time and money, too!

And finally, developing a sales strategy will help creative introverts stick to our guns because ultimately, this is about ensuring that we get to work the way WE want to work. I happen to be a very linear thinker, so it's natural to me to want to follow steps to get to my end goal. My sales strategy is very linear as well, because it helps me stay focused on the task at hand - vetting the potential client and getting them to say yes to working with us. Knowing who I am helps me determine if clients align with that from the beginning. If they want to jump ahead or work around the sales funnel, chances are they won't be any better once they've signed on as a client. If they appreciate the clarity and order in how we move them through the sales process, chances are they will also appreciate the structured process we follow when designing for them. And this might sound self-serving, but I only want to work the way I want to work! I can only deliver my best work if I'm able to follow my linear thought process. So if that's self serving, it's also beneficial for the client - because they've hired me with the hopes of receiving my best.

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Think about how you can create a strategy that allows you to save your energy by selling to the target audience you're trying to reach. That means really getting to know your ideal client. Once I really figured out who my ideal client is - and I mean everything about her, her age, her financial status, her relationship status, where she shops, where she travels, what she prioritizes and will spend money on, and her core values - creating the sales strategy I use to sell my services to her became so clear. And it actually made selling part of my job that I enjoy, because I get to start by creating a deep connection, rather than a shallow one. People say yes when they know, like, and trust you. So forego the extroverted sales methods and find what works for you so that your target client can get to know, like, and trust you and say yes faster - saving your energy for the creative work that you'll do together.

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