

## Ep #9: Stop Negotiating with Yourself



### Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

**Rachel Cannon**

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## Ep #9: Stop Negotiating with Yourself

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.

IT'S FINALLY FALL, Y'ALL! How fall is it? I am wearing a sweater, tights, and boots today. This is maje in Louisiana. I don't know where you're listening from today, but I hope you feel as cozy and cute as I do. It's important to feel cute. I think it makes us more productive when we feel good about ourselves! In fact, I was on a coaching call with one of my private clients last week, and we had to work through a bit of a stumbling block she was having about how she was feeling about herself. It's not uncommon for creative introverts to be a little more empathic than others, so we have to be careful of taking on things that aren't meant for us to deal with. The emotional toll of trying to get her business to be what she called "legit" had left her tired, unmotivated, and frustrated. And as a result, she'd begun to feel bad about herself. Her confidence had plummeted after a few what she called "failures" and she couldn't pull herself out of it.

What I noticed as we were talking was that she had begun making these little negotiations with herself.

"If I can get this client who has a small project to hire me, I'm going to give them a discount so that when they do that big remodel, I'll get that job."

"If I can get the sitter to pick my son up from school and take him to practice, I'll be able to meet with those clients who can only meet after hours or on the weekend. At least until the project is underway, and then I'll ask them to meet during regular hours."

"If they say yes to me helping them, I'm going to push a few other project deadlines back because their budget is bigger."

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They seem like innocuous statements, but when you think about it, she was rearranging her whole life to placate people who weren't even her clients yet. And she was creating these little deals in her mind where she was going to give them something for nothing up front, with the hopes that they would be appreciative later when she needed something from them.

That, my friends, is a one-sided negotiation. She had it all worked out in her head that the "win" for her would be to get their business. But isn't that what the baseline of a negotiation is? Obviously, she wants their business – that's why we hang a sign with our name on it. We are in business to get business. But throwing offers at people who haven't brought anything above just their business to the table? That's where we creative introverts get into big time trouble.

We negotiate with ourselves, and not the client, and since we'd rather do anything other than be salesy, we rely on what is known as a manipulation to get their business. Most often, we do this by lowering our prices or giving up our time to be accommodating, thinking the client will be grateful and that this little gift we've given them will make them easier to work with. What we do is take our creative service, that nobody can do the way we can – which is the whole reason they came to us in the first place – and turn it into a commodity. And commodities are not seen as special or unique; in fact, when we commoditize our intellectual property, we basically start a price war instead of a negotiation.

Sure, there might be some small gains in the beginning when a few of those clients say yes to our offer – but there are multiple problems with that. One, we wrongly assume that this is the only way to get clients to say yes, so we do it more and more without even realizing that we're devaluing our own creative genius. Two, clients are conditioned to get everything we have to give them for next to nothing (and this includes the value of our time, which they assume is up for grabs when we bend into a pretzel to work ourselves into their schedule). And three, over time, your business will be weakened by – not clients – but you, creating these scenarios in your

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mind where you've negotiating something that actually only benefits one of the parties involved, and that party is not you.

For the sake of accuracy, let's establish what a negotiation actually is. The basic definition is "a discussion aimed at reaching an agreement." Seems to me that the words "discussion" and "agreement" automatically signal that there is more than one party involved. The best negotiation would mean that both parties get something above and beyond the basic transaction. In my business, that would be design services in exchange for design fees. Most commonly, the client wants to discuss the possibility of lowering our fees. If the integrity of the project won't be sacrificed by doing that, I'm open to discussing it – but I'm also going to ask for something from them in exchange. Complete creative control is a request I will commonly make, because remember – we've begun discussing what would sweeten this deal for both parties. Lowering my fees, and offering the same kind of service I'd give to someone paying top dollar doesn't make any sense.

So thinking back to my consulting client, it's not difficult to understand why she'd been feeling down in the dumps about her abilities as a business owner. Her negotiations were all taking place with her and only her, and the clients had no idea she was conceding anything to them by lowering her fees, working outside of normal hours, or putting other clients projects on hold to prioritize the new ones. Naturally, they assumed this was just how she worked, and the value of something is perceived the way it comes to us. When people win something for free, the value of that item is zero dollars. When we give our services, time, and intellectual property away without asking for something above and beyond payment in return, the value of those additional things in the client's eye is zero. And that's not their fault! We can't be upset with them for not knowing we're doing extra things for them if we don't actually say it. The resentment building inside of her was aimed at the clients, and I was sorry to have to tell her that it really wasn't their fault, but hers.

Negotiating with ourselves is detrimental to building a business because it lays a foundation that is based on mistrust. That mistrust is something

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created by US – even though we’re doing it with the best intentions! We think we’re being altruistic. We’re making concessions the client hasn’t really asked for, and in turn, we expect them to be so grateful, they’ll behave and just say yes to everything we plan for them. And then, when they don’t...we lose it. Never in front of them, but underneath the surface, where the frustration just seethes and we are all worked up into a tizzy of disbelief at how they are treating us!

Y’all. This is NOT their fault. It’s our fault. Creative introverts would rather do almost anything than have a confrontation, so we think we’ll just get out in front of that possibility and start out by offering concessions to the client in the hopes that we’ll get no pushback at all. Honestly, it would be better to have an up-front conversation about everyone’s expectations before anyone makes a request and anyone concedes to it. Because people are people! If they don’t know that you’d rather take the big remodel job, but only at the same time as the small one; or that you actually don’t work after hours or on weekends; or that your production list naturally adds the newest clients to the end of the line, how are they supposed to know you’ve done something benevolent for them when you make accommodations for them outside of those policies? They can’t. And we can’t hold that against them.

Eventually, this kind of one-sided negotiating will lead to us internalizing the frustration we feel. As creative introverts, we don’t even realize we’re doing it, but we do. And the internalization of the mistrust we create leads to disjointed business practices, mismanagement of our time, and a cycle of undercharging and over-delivering...all of which builds uncertainty in us about our abilities as business owners.

1. Disjointed business practices: it’s not unusual for creative businesses to operate on a little looser framework than more corporate ones. But if you learn anything from this podcast, I hope that it’s this: in order to be successful in business, you must run it like a business. When creative introverts allow ourselves to be sort of free-spirited and laid-back about our business practices, we also allow ourselves to be lumped in with the

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thousands of other creatives who are perceived as “flaky” and “easy to manipulate.” I had a client one time tell me that he was pleasantly surprised that I wasn’t like “all those other creatives who can’t get anything done.” It’s one thing for your creative process to be organic, but business is business. Solid business practices build trust, which is the foundation of a successful business. Your business practices can’t be negotiated in your mind with every potential client you encounter, all in the hopes that you land their business. Operating as if every day is Day One of your business will never get you any traction, and you’ll always feel like you’re just starting out – even after years of being in business. That’s the kind of feeling my consulting client was having last week, and it made her question whether or not this was even worth it! I hate to hear that because it’s something that can be fixed so easily, but has taken such a toll on her.

2. Mismanagement of our time: You’re going to hear me say this more than once on this podcast, so commit it to memory now. We are conditioned from an early age to believe that money is our most valuable resource, and that we should do everything we can to hold on to it. Now, I’m all for being smart about how we spend and save, and I’m not saying blow through your money until it’s gone. But money is not our most valuable resource. Can you guess what is our most valuable resource? My consulting clients have already begun learning this. Time is our most valuable resource because it’s the one thing we can’t get or make more of. Once time is gone, it’s gone forever. But we can always go make more money. When we put a value of zero on our time, we are actually giving away the most precious thing we have while we’re on this earth. No wonder so many creative introverts feel burnt-out and unappreciated! We’re quick to identify when someone else has wasted our time, but we are blind to the hundreds of thousands of ways we waste our time by literally giving it away and not being willing to ask for something in return for it. My client and I had to really work through this point because she was still of the mindset that if she worked some weekends or some weekdays after 5, she really hadn’t lost anything. But my argument was that she had, because she already had seen how other instances where she’d done this had not resulted in her reaching her financial or personal goals, so why would any



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of the future instances be different? Not to mention, the dark cloud she was under when she reached out for my help – it was almost visible in her posture and facial expressions! This type of thing will – and does – take its toll on us! It literally took us counting up the days and nights she'd worked for clients outside of the hours she really wanted to be working for her to see that she'd given away almost a full month of time. And she hadn't charged extra for those meetings or for the work she'd done at home for them. A month of her son's life that she won't get back. Not to be morose, but ask someone who has a month to live how much that time is worth to them, and I think your perspective will change dramatically on this point.

3. The cycle of undercharging and overdelivering: Ah, the creative introvert's biggest challenge. As creatives, we have no idea what anyone is willing to pay for our services. And as introverts, we'd rather die than not exceed expectations. So what do we do? We put a price tag that is far too low on our most complicated and involved services in the hopes that we'll get our foot in the door. Most of us are charging hourly – and if you'd like to know more about why I moved to flat fees almost 10 years ago, please send me an email and we can discuss a strategy session to help you out of that misery – and when we do, we don't charge for all the hours we work. We shave time off because we don't want the clients to get mad at us. But we still do our dead-level best to deliver amazing, mind-blowing results to them. And we want them to be grateful. (This is another one-sided negotiation!) But what usually happens? They still question if we "actually spent that much time" on our work. This, again, is why my client felt so discouraged. When our integrity is constantly called into question, we become dismayed with people and situations, but we can't help but take that feeling and turn it inwards on ourselves. We allow that mistrust to creep in, causing us to feel helpless to change things.

I want you to stop negotiating with yourself. If you're going to negotiate with clients at all, you need to know your limits and understand why you set them. A negotiation should be mutually beneficial. If clients are constantly

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asking for lower fees, create services at different price points that you can offer them, but know what the terms are before you get started. Know what you can deliver for that amount of money – and communicate that to them. As the price point goes down, so does the level of service. That's completely normal in business! Our goal should never be to do business with anyone and everyone who wants to do business with us – no matter what the risks or rewards might be. That's how my client got herself into that dark place to begin with. She was giving everything and getting not a whole lot in return. That can absolutely drive us into a bad place, mentally. We feel drained just from trying!

As creative introverts, we will reach that point so much faster than others will. Burn out is a real thing. All of these things compound on top of each other, making us actually feel bad about ourselves. We can attempt to suppress the warning signs, but we will eventually have no choice but to acknowledge that things aren't working out the way we want them to. And the worst part is this: we create this circumstance ourselves, and we actually do it with the best intentions! We're trying to be good people when we have these little negotiations with ourselves!

But breaking that habit is going to lead to some real break throughs for you, I can promise you. The 40,000-foot view looks like this: Ending negotiations with yourself means you'll gain simplicity, privacy, and clarity.

Doesn't that sound amazing? I like all of those words. I want all of them in my business and in my life.



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No more one-sided negotiations means that you can simply just say “no” when something isn’t a good fit. In my client’s case, she really enjoys working on remodels much more than she does on small re-design or decorating projects. Her client was dangling the bigger project as a promise down the road if she would take on the small project now. I’ve been in business long enough to know that type of promise is hollow and rarely – if ever – works out. The truth was that the small project was more involved than what her client was willing to pay, and so if my client had already created some sort of service that she could have offered them, it might have worked out for her to make the money she deserved now, and then if the other project never came up, she hadn’t lost out. But ultimately, we’re after simplicity. If it’s just not a fit for the way you work, you can simply say no. I know it sounds alarming to think that we would turn down work, but remember – we’re not a commodity. As creative introverts, we’re after loyalty and relationships, and transactions don’t build either of those.

And putting a stop to one-sided negotiations means you can re-claim your life back. Your personal time and your privacy are non-negotiables, plain and simple. This is another area where creative entrepreneurs allow things to get really blurry. Have you ever called your doctor on her cell phone on the weekend? Or have you ever insisted that your financial planner make a house call at 7 pm once your kids’ activities were done for the day? I feel like if you’re listening to this podcast, you are my people, and you are horrified at even the thought of yourself doing something like that. Yet, we agree to do it for our clients and then don’t understand why they keep asking this of us. We were only ever going to do it that one time, but now it’s all out of control and we’re aggravated and we’re too far in to tell them that we don’t actually do that. Because, apparently, we do. We can never lose sight of the fact that as introverts, we MUST have some separation between our careers and our personal lives. Our personal, private time is where we recharge and get inspired to do amazing things in our careers. If we don’t have that, we are attempting to run on empty, and that’s not a sustainable plan.

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And finally, pulling the plug on those self-negotiations means we have the opportunity to just be clear about what it is that we do for our clients. Clarity = easy in my book. I want things to be easy. I don't like it when things are hard. Huge part of the reason I did not choose to become a mathematician, I mean I still count on my fingers for God's sake. I prefer to do things I enjoy, and for them to come naturally to me. Is that selfish? Hm. I feel like it's enlightened. There are plenty of challenges we'll face in life, so why do we insist on making our own businesses one of the hardest ones to deal with?? And y'all, our clients want clarity. It makes their lives easier too! That is truly a win-win for everyone involved. Negotiating with ourselves complicates everything. We can't expect ourselves to be full of excitement and creativity when we've allowed things to get fuzzy and complicated. In fact, we can expect to feel dread, anxiety, irritation, and dissatisfaction...and none of those are qualities anyone is looking for when they want to hire a professional.

Alright, my creative, introverted friends. Now that you've listened to this episode, I hope you'll begin to see how you've also been negotiating with yourself in ways you didn't even realize. But once you're aware of that habit, you can make mindful efforts to stop it. Ultimately, you want to be firing on all cylinders for your clients, and you can already see how we set ourselves up to collapse into a spiral of self-doubt when we allow those one-sided negotiations to guide our thinking. I don't want any of us to internalize those feelings and let limiting beliefs stunt our growth! You have the ability to change the outlook for your business in major ways – and it all starts with you coming to one agreement with yourself: no more self-negotiations!

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

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