

Ep #11: Community and Collaboration, Introvert Style



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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.

Hey hey! Welcome back to the podcast, y'all! I hope you had a fabulous Thanksgiving. Who here is like me, and prefers to avoid Black Friday? I have some friends who literally start on Thanksgiving afternoon when the first stores open up and then do a full 24 hours of shopping - without stopping - to get the best deals. They basically traverse the lower part of the state of Louisiana, like the toe of the boot, for an entire day. It's crazy. I prefer to shop online for as much as I can, but then I also like to buy at least one gift for everyone from a locally owned-store. I guess I just feel like, as a small business owner, I know how important it is to support the other small business owners in my community. In fact, the idea of community has become really important to me since starting this podcast and realizing that so many of us are wishing we had a place where we could feel seen and heard without judgement.

I've loved hearing the relief in the emails and reviews you've been leaving, and so today's Loudmouth Letter comes from Lindsey Stewart, who writes:

"Priceless Insight

THANK YOU! Where should I send my co-pay for your therapy sessions?! This podcast is such a huge help. I seriously appreciate your knowledge on this topic. It puts me at ease knowing it's okay to be true to myself, instead of forcing myself to be too extroverted/fake."

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Lindsey happens to be one of my good friends, and, like me, she is as real as it gets. She also owns not one, but two small businesses, and is an introvert - so she completely identifies with the whole energy-out-is-energy-lost idea. There is no pretending with her, which I appreciate because I don't have the energy for my friendships to feel like guessing games! And forcing ourselves to be extroverted really does waste precious energy. I much more prefer a what-you-see-is-what-you-get dynamic with my relationships. I think that's how we can find that network that allows us to be ourselves without the worry of wondering how we're being perceived by others.

In fact, this reminds me of a conversation I had with one of my private business consulting clients last week. We were talking about how she needed to hire an employee, and although it was something we discussed before, she still had not taken any action to determine what role this person would fill. Her reasoning was this: "What happens when I hire this person and spend the time to train them, and then later they leave me and become my competition?" This is the same consulting client who won't work with locally owned stores for her interior design projects because she's worried that she'll get cut out of the equation because her clients can buy directly from the store. She is keeping herself in a cycle of frustration/burnout by making excuses about why she can't change her business model to alleviate some of the stress. Y'all. We introverts are famous for this behavior! But it's important for us to acknowledge that we need people. We need help, and that's okay!

Digging deeper, we uncovered that at the root of all of her excuses, there was fear. She's fearful that she'll train someone so well that they'll go start a business that rivals hers. She's fearful that by outsourcing some of the product procurement for her jobs, that her clients will cut her out of the process completely. And while her fear is real to her, it's also based on assumptions. And these assumptions have everything to do with her beliefs

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about community and collaboration. She has positioned herself and her business in her city as an island. She has no businesses she can collaborate with because of what she assumes will happen if she did – that she'll be perceived as unable to be the one-woman-show (which, btw, is COMPLETELY overrated). She has limited help in her business because of what she assumes will happen if she trains someone to do a great job. Her beliefs are that community and collaboration are hindrances to her success, as opposed to opportunities to thrive.

She's isolated herself into a place of operating out of anxiety. One of my favorite speakers, Joyce Meyer, says that anxiety is a down payment on a scenario that hasn't even happened yet. And I would add - a scenario that might not even happen at all. The anxiety, worry, and fear she's allowing to guide her decision making is actually playing a significant role in her constant exhaustion...and we know that this is partially because she's created a business that places her at the center, which means no matter how financially successful it becomes, she's still self-employed. (And if you haven't listened to episode 8 about being self-employed versus owning a business, now is a great time to go back and listen to that episode!) The down payment we make in the form of fear or anxiety about what might happen is to blame for our inability to move from being self-employed to owning a business. And ultimately, it's our pride that stands in the way of us building a community or being willing to collaborate...and wouldn't it be so much better to just drop the pretense that we can do it all, all the time, and reach out when we need help?? We could actually be experiencing real pride in our work, and there is nothing - repeat, nothing - wrong with wanting community or collaboration.

Ask yourself if you've ever operated from this position. If you have - and most of us have, at one point or another - we've allowed fear to become the driving force behind our decisions. We isolate ourselves because we believe that it's better for us to do all the work alone than risk the worst-

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case scenario if we were to reach out for help by hiring and training a new employee or by collaborating with other businesses. The truth is that as creative introverts, we experience this more than we'd probably like to admit. We are so used to working out the kinks of all possible outcomes in our minds that when it comes time to do the real work, we naturally step into all the roles that must be filled. We're used to working in solitude, therefore, we have an inclination to continue to do so long after it's a useful method of success for us.

I was in the car with one of my design clients one day when she told me about a deep sea fishing trip she'd been on. Evidently someone on their boat caught a shark, and it wrestled with the person who'd caught it for a really long time. The fisher was exhausted at trying to reel the shark in, and eventually had to hand the reel to someone else on the boat. She told me, "I just that story a lot to remind myself that I don't have to be the one doing everything. I need to be okay asking for help. Sometimes the shark is just too big to reel in on your own." Her friend could have chosen to believe that handing off the reel to the next person would have resulted in the catch being lost. It's possible that ego and pride could have taken over because appearing to be capable was more important than actually catching the shark. But the exhaustion won out and reeling it in alone was no longer an option.

Friends, don't let your business get so exhausting because you choose to believe the worst might happen if you finally decide to open yourself up to collaborating and building a community.

Here's what happens with a community:

-You get to focus on the things you like most, that energize you

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-Small failures are actually steps toward moving you forward, because you have the opportunity to get feedback, hear suggestion, and learn from others' experiences

-You get to take your "Industry goggles" off and experience the joy of being recognized as having an amazing talent

Let's unpack these for a minute.

I didn't always understand the importance of a community of like-minded colleagues. There was a time when the interior design industry was cutthroat. I experienced some of that as a new design grad, but really the worst of those days came in the 80s and 90s. Designers did not collaborate. They did not share resources. They wouldn't dare to breathe a word of their success to any other designer. In essence, everyone was an island, and as a result, the industry has taken several major hits and we've all had to continue to figure out how we were going to stay profitable in a world where even our top-secret sources are now available to the public. Many interior designers have seen this as a threat to their businesses, and many have attempted to run their businesses the way they always have - but I've taken this as an opportunity to focus on the parts that I actually enjoy and feel inspired by doing. It's totally fine with me if a client buys something online, or from another store - as long as it fits the design direction I created for them. In the end, it's a win-win for both me and the client whether I procure everything for them or if they take on some of that responsibility themselves - because in each scenario, their needs are being met. So a community that rallies together and supports each other, which is what I've found since starting my own design business 10 years ago, is actually one of the keystones of my business now. I regularly coach my business consulting clients to only do the parts of their jobs that they like most and outsource as much of the rest as they can, and to be willing to

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collaborate and build a network outside of their businesses to add value and support to them.

And while nobody likes to fail, it is just a natural part of being in business. You will try some things that don't work. And that is totally fine! The great part about being willing to collaborate on projects or be part of a community is that failures don't have to be only about the negative aspects. Sharing our experiences with each other gives everyone an opportunity to learn and grow. And in the long run, that only helps strengthen your industry as a whole. You can begin to see how small failures are valuable to your education as a business owner, and you'll see how each one can actually be a step forward for your business - but only when we can all be open and honest about them with each other. Of course, we introverts are extremely resistant to the idea of failing, because of the enormous amounts of time we spend thinking things through and perfecting them in our minds before we'll attempt them. But we have to get comfortable understanding that trying something that doesn't work out exactly the way we'd planned does not mean that WE are failures. It does mean we have exceptional data now that we can use to build our next idea, and when we have a community we can bounce those ideas off of, we position ourselves to always be propelling our businesses forward, rather than wallowing in frustration or embarrassment from backfired attempts. So don't be resistant to the notion of a trusted group of colleagues and friends who can be your accountability partners - even those who are in the same industry and in the same city as you are.

Let's assume for a moment that you have crossed the bridge into allowing some collaboration and community into your life. You've been able to focus on the parts of your work that you love most, and you've delegated other parts to either employees or your network that you've built. You are rocking and rolling on the work you're doing. And because you're preserving your energy, your creativity is at an all-time high. Imagine how energized you'd

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feel, knowing that you get to keep pushing the limits of what your mind can create, and your work is the shining example of the genius that lives inside your brain when it isn't bogged down with menial tasks. Up to now, you've seen everything through industry-specific lenses that dictate "the way" your kind of business is run. You didn't realize it, but those lenses have limited your growth because they are the ones telling you that if you don't have a hand in every single aspect and task of your day-to-day operations, things will fall apart. Now, imagine someone has taken those lenses off of your eyes, and you're experiencing that high of living in a world where community and collaboration have propelled you into the next sphere of your impact on the world. You're able to outdo yourself again and again, and before you know it, you're being hailed as one of the creative geniuses of your area. The recognition you worked so hard for before (when you were all alone on that island, where it felt like no one could see or hear you) is now coming to you from places beyond just your clients and friends and family.

This isn't just a nice thought, y'all, this is real life. It's my real life, and many of my friends' real lives who have been willing to open themselves up to building the community and collaborative network they need to keep their businesses leveling up again and again. Why would we continue to wrestle with that shark, when there are others who might actually be able to do it better than we can, or maybe hand it off to someone who isn't exhausted from the effort? It doesn't make any sense, except when we keep those industry lenses on and choose to believe the worst will happen if we hand some of the work off to someone else.

I know we talk a lot about how introverts and creatives need our space and quiet time to recharge and do our best work. And that's true. If you're like me, you need total silence, no distractions, and a few hours of solitude to achieve deep focus. I'm not saying you have to give that up. No, in fact, what I'm saying is you can actually maximize your productivity during those

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times if you're willing to reach outside of yourself and ask for help from others who are more than capable of doing an excellent job. You'll have more success by being open to the possibility that you could bounce an idea off of a trusted colleague without worrying if they're going to steal your idea. Imagine how awesome it would be if, during our time where we are focused on our most highly creative tasks, we can be confident in knowing that we've built a network - either through employees, a virtual team, or even partnerships with other businesses in our area - that can handle the other parts that we don't particularly want to do or enjoy doing, and that they can do an incredible job at them.

To me, that sounds like relief. It's the same sentiment I hear in the messages you've sent about the podcast. "Finally, someone understands me and what I need!" And yes, this podcast community is incredible, but it's important for us to know that we need to build that type of atmosphere in real life. You know, in our businesses so that we can know the relief of working with capable partners who strengthen our businesses and allow us to work in the depths of our creativity. I don't want us to lose sight of the fact that, as much as we introverts are awesome at working alone, we also need a community. When we release our fears and choose to believe that we can build collaborative relationships with others, we strengthen our position in our respective industries. It just takes us acknowledging that the shark is too big for us to reel in by ourselves.

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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