

Ep #17: Business: The Creative Introvert's Achilles Heel



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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.

Hey y'all! I am so excited to share this episode with you today because while I was working on it, I had some revelations about myself as a business owner. I know a lot of my listeners are creative introverts who don't necessarily own their own businesses, but if you're an entrepreneur like me, I think you will relate on a very deep level when I say this: being in business means constantly being willing to work on yourself, your mindset, your flaws. I'm always a little weary of other business owners who aren't willing to admit mistakes or be honest about the reality of things. Not that I think we need to all sit in a circle and air our grievances when we get together (although that can be helpful too, when you share with close friends and colleagues), but I'm talking about those entrepreneurs who are unwilling to ever share a peek behind the curtain. Because truthfully, owning a business comes with a HUGE learning curve - I don't care how long you've been in business, every day is a new day and there will always be a new challenge to face. So people who come off as if there is not a care in the world are always a little suspect to me. Like, we're on the same side. I know what's behind the curtain, so let's just see how we can support each other....

One of my favorite Loudmouth Letters touched on this subject recently, so I wanted to share it with you. Hhooper444 says "Today was a really hard day professionally. This podcast touched on so many of today's issues for me and was exactly what I needed to hear. I can't wait to listen more! Thank you!" Thank YOU for that feedback. I never want to project an image of someone who can't relate to other people. Instead, I love to share my experiences with you so that you can know you're not alone, and also to offer you a little perspective on how I've dealt with being a business owner.

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I will tell you that I'm big on reading books that speak to my specific scenarios and experiences. One of my favorites is "Banish Your Inner Critic" by Denise Jacobs, which is specifically written for creatives. I re-read it over the Christmas holiday last year, and it led to me pulling out some relevant content for today's episode. In it, she describes certain behaviors as Achilles heels - and I connected with that immediately. I can look back over my life and see where I've developed certain "Achilles heels" and that's where I had my deepest revelations. Some of these are still with me, chief among them being my hatred for math. Y'all. I'm 40. Shouldn't I be past this by now?

So in putting this episode together, I settled on one over-arching idea. I believe that for many creative introverted entrepreneurs, the biggest Achilles heel is our inclination to put creativity ahead of business, rather than vice versa. We like to talk about being business owners, but we actually run our businesses as if we are the employee of that business. Episode 8 was a deep dive into the difference between being self-employed and being a business owner, so if you haven't listened to that episode, this is a great time to do that, then come back to this episode and jump in here, because this content is so helpful and goes even deeper into how we limit ourselves as business owners.

In the book "Banish Your Inner Critic," author Denise Jacobs does a masterful job of pulling apart the way our inner critic works against us. There were three points that I felt resonated with me personally, which I wanted to share with all of you. Now that I've been in business for 10 years, I can look back and see how I avoided confronting these obstacles until I had to face them head-on because I had no choice. They're going to sound like nonsense as I list them here, but we're going to go into each one and I'll give specific examples of how they've shown up for me and some of my consulting clients. The three big Achilles heels I want to talk to you about are Overwhelm Obstruction, Proficiency Anxiety, and Self-Criticism,

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because I believe they play a direct role in many creative introverts' inability to jump the hurdle of functioning as a business owner, rather than continuing in the employee-mindset. And I highly recommend getting a copy of "Banish Your Inner Critic" because there are more than these three that you might personally benefit from reading about, but for the sake of today's episode, I only want to highlight these for you.

In my own experience, and now as a business consultant working with other creative introverted entrepreneurs, Overwhelm Obstruction is the number one Achilles heel that jumped off the page to me. So, what does that mean? In a nutshell: It's easier for us to ignore the business side or let it take care of itself rather than stepping into that role early on. In the beginning, trying to "learn how to run a business" can be intimidating. Often, it gets pushed to the bottom of our priority list, which is already full of projects, deadlines, and other tasks that seem to take precedence. The prospect of creating structure for many creative introverts feels like a futile task. Especially when you're fortunate enough to have a lot of work consistently. You're obviously doing something right if you stay so busy, right?? We think in order to learn how to run a "real" business, we need to go back to school to get a business degree. The problem with this kind of Achilles heel is that eventually, you will construct the creative block known as burn out. When we say we're too busy to work on the business, or so slammed because the creative work takes up all of our time, we are operating in something Jacobs calls "Imposition Mentality," - a scenario we create in which we are powerless to do anything to change it. Overwhelm obstruction does not affect new business owners only. I hear from so many creative entrepreneurs all the time who aren't hurting for work, but the work is killing them. Some of them have been in business for years, and from the outside, it appears that they are very happy and successful. The dirty secret is that they are exhausted and disillusioned with work because the actual business itself is a complete mess. They dabble with the business just enough to keep it afloat, but things never can get to where they run seamlessly. There's always a new challenge to encounter, which sends

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them into panic mode, which in turn stifles creativity, which in turn causes the introvert to internalize everything. They ride out the wave until it subsides, hoping and praying there's no next time, rather than developing systems, policies, and procedures that would help them get out in front of these things. And when the business side of things always feel that way, we can see how it would be difficult to want to devote time or energy focusing on it. We equate the business side with stress, so we do what's fun instead, which is to be creative. We use that channel to disconnect from reality, and we justify it by thinking that just doing the creative work is the same as running our business. (It's not.)

Second to Overwhelm Obstruction is Proficiency Anxiety. When we don't exactly feel accomplished as business owners, and we bury ourselves in the creative role, we experience what many refer to as smoke and mirrors. Or imposter syndrome. We want to project an image of total proficiency to the world and to potential clients, but we'd be horrified if anyone knew the truth. This is a tough pill to swallow, but what this boils down to is this: a deep seated belief that you're not good enough. Ouch. Many of my business consulting clients confess this fear to me: that they don't know enough about business to be good at running a business. They assume they can't learn how to run a business AND be creative, or that they can't get their business into shape fast enough, or their industry evolves too quickly for them to keep up. So instead of trying, they neglect it altogether. It isn't that this stuff is too complicated for us to master, it's that our self-doubt gets the best of us. If you remember Episode 2 of the podcast, I talked about how we as introverts often feel like the world is drowning us out, but more likely, it's our inner voice that's silencing us. You might not even be aware of it, but self-doubt is an undercurrent of negativity. I struggle with this too! Outright negativity is a little more recognizable, so that's why it likes to go incognito as self-doubt, which is a little harder to identify. You might not ever say out loud "I'm not good enough" but you might say "I don't have time to..." or "I can't right now" - anything to avoid facing the areas of your business where you know you need to confront

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some harsh truths. I am guilty of doing this with the financial side of my business. I'm very fortunate in that I have the most trustworthy bookkeeper on the planet - my mother - at the helm. And since I was not a math whiz in school, that negative bias towards numbers has stuck with me. In a call with my business coach right before Christmas, my mom and I were going over the numbers with her, and she asked a specific question that I did not have the answer to. And she said "You are ten years past needing to know this." OUCH, that did not go down easy, but she was right. I had abdicated that responsibility and was hoping that it would just all be okay without my attention. While I'm aware of the finances at a high level, I'd made the choice to focus my attention on other areas that weren't so charged with negative emotion for me. I didn't even feel like I was experiencing imposter syndrome until I confronted my behavior. I don't feel proficient in the math so I dip in and dip out and had convinced myself that I only needed the high-level rundown of the numbers. Again, this kind of Achilles heel works against us in the long term. We put off the hard work (thinking like a business owner and in my case, having an intimate knowledge of my numbers) in the hope that things will just somehow stay on track, but eventually it catches up with us. Thankfully, miraculously, my neglect had not become a problem, but we can't count on that. When it catches up with us, our proficiency anxiety is reinforced because we make mistakes or encounter problems, which makes us feel like we don't know what we're doing, which makes us feel inadequate, which in turn makes us want to focus harder on the creative work because we feel like recognition there will solve the business stuff...but it's a vicious cycle. As my coach said, "if you don't take control of this now, you're destined to find yourself in a famine mindset" ...so guess what I'm doing this year?? I'm becoming a big girl and confronting this Achilles heel with laser precision. Besides, how can I consult with other business owners if I choose to continue with a blind spot??

And finally, while Self Criticism feels the most familiar, I think it's actually the result of the first two. We attempt to project a business like exterior, but

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when it backfires - like when we encounter conflict or pushback from clients - we fall back into a people-pleaser mindset rather than standing our ground. Who's experienced this before? A situation arises where you have been treated badly, and you make the choice to stand up for yourself, to be a business owner. And you feel strong because it's the right thing to do. And then, it all goes haywire. You get even MORE conflict (which you were trying to avoid to begin with) or pushback, but you were only standing up for what you know to be right! What happens in the fallout after that, behind closed doors? We rake ourselves over the coals for causing more problems, wishing we'd just kept our mouths shut, and taken the injustice that we were dealt. But where does that put us? Right back into the employee mindset, like we were just reprimanded by our boss, rather than like the business owner we want to be. You know that self-criticism is harmful. It's also really difficult to keep in check, and when we aren't focused enough to be aware of it, we end up in a rut. We've discussed how introverts like to ruminate on ideas, which we like to think of as being cautious...but really, we're procrastinating and with every minute that ticks by, we're growing more and more accustomed to that critical self-talk. If you need a refresher on this, go back and listen to Episode 5: "Stop Thinking, Start Doing." This kind of Achilles heel has us constantly revisiting past mistakes, questioning our decisions, etc. and that leads to a whopper of a realization: A life and career that feels, on the whole, underwhelming. Self-criticism leads to us putting up walls where we feel we fall short in our abilities. Rather than reaching out for help or taking time to overcome them, we'd prefer they stay hidden and out of view. People ask "how's business?" And we force ourselves to say "great!" Even though that might not really be the truth. We're critical of our abilities as business owners, and we prefer to stay in denial about that, because what we've constructed looks really great from the outside. It would be a tragedy if people found out the truth - that although we appear to have more work than we can handle, we're actually still living paycheck to paycheck - that is, if we're even paying ourselves at all, which so many entrepreneurs don't do. (Probably project-to-project or client-to-client.) It's really kind of amazing what our minds do to try to protect us...it's uncomfortable to feel inadequate in any area, so our mind just moves in and keeps us from wandering over there to take a good hard

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look at things. But the problem with that is this: we have a morbid curiosity about ourselves. Like it or not, you already know where you need to improve, and the cycle of avoidance just means you're not allowing yourself to feel the inadequacy long enough to move past it. You're brushing up against it long enough to know it feels uncomfortable, and just long enough for some self-critical thoughts to form, but not long enough to push past that and actually deal with the problem itself.

Do any of these sound familiar to you? It's okay if they do. I can assure you that if you're willing to admit to feeling this way, you're in a safe space. And I can also assure you that the vast majority of creative, introverted entrepreneurs have experienced the same things. (Hence why I'm so suspicious of any business owner who makes it seem like it's always rainbows and sunshine!) As always, I don't want to just drop all of this in your lap and then leave you with no way to process and overcome it. How can we shift our mindset from working as the employee of our business into that of the owner of our business?

Jacobs says in her book, "with Overwhelm Obstruction, we feel too overburdened by work and life to be creative." If you've ever experienced even the smallest tinge of burnout, you know what that's like. It's AWFUL. I experienced a very full onset of burnout in my own business. I wallowed in it for far too long and became very disgusted with myself. I'm really not into self-pity, so it behooved me to do something to change it. I started by admitting how I felt. Words like "uninspired, exhausted, over it," poured out of me. But once I freed myself from having all of that bottled up, I didn't want to keep revisiting those feelings. As my therapist would say "don't be like a dog returning to its vomit." A very repulsive metaphor, but one that painted a very real image for me and motivated me to make some changes.

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As Jacobs puts it, “shift out of an imposition mentality and into an opportunity disposition.” Remember, Imposition Mentality is where we have created a self-imposed powerlessness through our words - “too busy” “so slammed” “can’t right now” - which takes the ability to choose out of our hands and puts it into the control of external forces. Instead, we want to harness our ability to control our destiny. We get to choose what we have time for. We get to choose what we’ll work on. It’s our choice to make a change. It was my choice to get myself out of burnout and find a path to freeing myself of those feelings.

When I did her exercise in the book during my burnout phase, I loved this framework for talking myself through this challenge, and clearing my mindset of the belief that working on getting my business into shape was a total drag.

I’m privileged to [blank] because [blank].

I’m grateful I get to [blank] because [blank].

I choose to [blank] because [blank].

I still use this when I’m experiencing that old pile of vomit I used to call “feeling uninspired”.

I’m privileged to [write and produce my podcast] because [I’m helping others like me to reach their potential].

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When it comes to Proficiency Anxiety, I like Jacobs' take on this too. She lists the four stages of competency as: (1) Unconscious incompetence (where you don't know what you don't know, or ignorance is bliss); (2) Conscious incompetence (where you see what you're doing incorrectly and experience some frustration as you try to learn new skills); (3) Conscious competence (where you've become proficient, but must put in constant effort to maintain it); and (4) Unconscious competence (the skill is second nature and you can access it easily - this is what creativity is for most of us, and why we slide into that as a way to buffer from feeling the frustration in Conscious Incompetence).

That all boils down to this: it's a process. It has to begin with you being willing to admit where you're lacking a skill. The first step is admitting that you have a problem! There is so much freedom in letting go of the illusion that we have it all together. You might be a creative genius, but without being willing to admit that maybe some of that genius didn't spill over into your ability to be successful at owning a business where you sell that creative skill, you're going to find yourself in situation after situation where the truth catches up with you. The great news is that you get to choose to learn new things about yourself and about how to build a business, and that's an amazing privilege! (See what I did there?)

And finally, the Self-Criticism that so many of us battle, unfortunately, on a near-daily basis. I absolutely love Jacobs' method for dealing with this. She suggests giving your inner critic a name because trying to simply ignore it isn't going to work. She describes it as trying to wreak havoc on your consciousness, which cracks me up because all of the sudden I find my inner critic to be quite the jerk, and just denying that it's there doesn't do anything to change how it makes me feel! My inner critic is named after someone who bullied me in school, so it's incredibly easy for me to recognize that behavior. I know that personality because I remember that girl. She was insecure and did everything she could to deflect attention

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from her inadequacies by pointing out mine. Just a real pied piper of meanness. So now, when I experience an episode of self criticism, I say that name out loud and tell her to have several seats.

I especially like this because it gives me the opportunity to be creative again. I gained emotional distance between myself and my inner critic by giving it a name and a backstory. And, as Jacobs puts it in her book, "it opened up the space to extend compassion to the part of my psyche that feels attacked and needs comforting."

Y'all, you will experience tough days in owning a business. That's a given. But what I want you to do is make a commitment to yourself right now that you won't continue to function like an ostrich with its head in the sand when it comes to confronting your inadequacies. You wouldn't break a limb and then attempt to function as usual without getting some medical attention would you? Of course not. By making the choice to take control and deal with the issues of Overwhelm Obstacles, Proficiency Anxiety, and Self-Criticism, you put yourself in a much more powerful position than if you continue to attempt to focus only on the creative side of your business and keep your fingers crossed that the rest will work out.

I've linked to the book in my show notes today, so be sure to get a copy of it and see what other Achilles heels you might need to work on in your business. And like always, remember that you're not alone. You can join our private Facebook community by going to my Instagram (@rclinteriors) and tapping on the Podcast Highlights in my profile.

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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