

Ep #18: Be the Boss, Not the Assistant



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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.

Well hello, loudmouths! I want to share a personal win with you, right here at the top of the show. For those of you who don't know, last year, I finally got serious about my weight and health, and I cut out sugar and carbs and started following a keto lifestyle. I tracked the weight loss very closely at the beginning, but then as my clothes started getting too big, I just stopped worrying so much about the scale. So I haven't weighed myself in awhile, but I tried on a pair of pants this morning that I just bought last year, and they were HUGE. (Sidenote: have any of you used Poshmark to resell your clothes? I did a major closet clean out at the end of 2019 to get rid of stuff that either couldn't be altered to fit, or that it just wasn't worth it to tailor, and I am LOVING it. Kinda wish I'd been doing this for a few years, rather than just giving stuff away...but, I digress...) So anyway, my curiosity got the better of me, and right before I sat down to start working on this episode, I weighed myself again. Y'all. I'm not going to say the number, because I don't really think it's all that important, but I will just say this: I saw, before me, a number I last remember from my 20s. It had been so long since I saw this number, I'd begun to wonder if it had been discontinued. And I'm sharing that with you just to encourage you if you've set any personal health goals for this year. I actually had coffee with a friend this morning and she hasn't seen me in (sadly) about two years, and she freaked out. She told me I was "half a person!" (Which I received in the spirit in which it was intended, which was kindness!) Stick with it, whatever it was you committed to for at least a year. I've still got 4 months to go before I hit the 1-year mark, and everything that happened today has given me a little boost of encouragement!

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And in the spirit of encouragement, I need to say thank you to everyone who has rated and taken the time to write a review of the show. Not only does this help others like us find the show, but it also is a great source of encouragement to me. Like this one, from Aribell, "I listen to Rachel's podcast faithfully each week because she is one of the only voices I hear speaking specifically to people like me - a creative introvert. I appreciate her willingness to share the real deal in a way that is totally relatable, and although I leave each episode rooting for her, I also feel like she's rooting for me, too. If you haven't taken the time to listen, please do so. You won't regret it. And be sure to subscribe so you get her nuggets delivered directly to your device each week!" Thank you, thank you, thank you!! And yes, I AM rooting for you. I'm rooting for creative introverts as a whole. I want us all to creative meaningful work and relationships, be respected for our talents, and make a phenomenal living doing it!

The truth, though, is that many of us are struggling with those very things. And I know from the feedback I've gotten from a lot of you that part of this is due to the fact that you feel you're always in a reactionary position. In other words, you feel like you're constantly scrambling to address client requests or - worst case scenario - demands, and it's costing you meaningful work, relationships, respect, and profits. And trust me, I've been there, and it's not fun. And, it always seems like just as you hit a groove with your work, something gets called into question, or there's a fire to put out, and it totally throws your ability to be creative out of whack. Y'all, I know that the vast majority of us are earnestly doing our best to do a good job for our clients. We feel like we have a good mastery of how things should go, and all we want is for them to trust us and let us do our thing, right?? For example, if you went to the dentist, and they told you you needed extensive dental work, and then they told you the order in which it needed to take place, you probably wouldn't question that at all, would you? You'd trust that they know what they're talking about and you wouldn't step in and suggest doing it a different way. Cause you don't want jacked up teeth. And that's all you want from your clients, and you feel like you

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can't ever seem to get out in front of things, and thus, you always feel a little bit like their assistant, instead of the boss.

Did that hit a nerve?

Good. Stay with me.

If you think of your business as a ship, and you as the captain, then you're the person who knows how to steer the ship the best. If someone who didn't know what they were doing took the wheel from you and started steering, it would be catastrophic. In that case, I bet you'd do everything you could to avoid having someone takeover the wheel. So our business is the ship, our creative process is the wheel, and our services are the precious cargo we're trying to deliver. When a client takes over the creative process and starts calling the shots, they've hijacked your ship. Unfortunately, this happens ALL THE TIME to creative introverts. And if this were actually a ship, nobody would win if someone with no experience started steering. It would be wreckage from stem to stern, there would likely be a body count, and the survivors would be bitter, and the precious cargo was damaged.

Who is to blame for the hijacking of your ship? I think you already know where I'm going with this, but just in case you don't, I'll tell you. It's you.

How are we to avoid being treated like the client's assistant? If you remember the example I gave you about the dental work, you'll notice I made a point to say that when they told you that you needed extensive

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work, they also told you the order in which it needed to take place. Because as the patient, you might look at the total and think, “can I just start with the cheapest item on here?” And while you could, your dentist would probably tell you that you could, but that you’d probably end up spending more money in the long run once you do all the work. Example: the crown is the least expensive thing, but you also need veneers, which won’t be the current color of your teeth, so you might end up replacing the crown later so it will work with the color of the veneers. As the captain of his ship, he’s not allowing you to take the wheel and steer because he knows you’ll be dissatisfied in the long run if you attempt to hijack the ship. He’s the expert. He’s the boss. Not your assistant.

My point is this: a clear process will help you get out in front of this problem. Many of us creatives don’t like to define what our process is by listing the steps because we feel like there are too many to list, so we’d rather just do our thing. This is where clients start to feel like they need to step in. They certainly don’t know the process, and since you didn’t take time to explain it to them, they feel like you must need their help in getting things done. Not to mention, you can’t just tell them what the process is once, you must articulate it up front, and again and again, and then position the client to say yes at each milestone.

Let’s break this down into bite-sized pieces, shall we?

First, do you even know your process? If you had to tell me your process, could you accurately list the steps it takes you to deliver your service to your clients? Or do you know steps one and two, and then it becomes kinda messy and unclear, and then voila, the project is done? If so, that’s a problem. You’re not establishing any kind of trust with your client if you can’t concisely tell them how you do what you do. Now, if your business is

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anything like my interior design business, there are A MILLION tiny steps that it takes to get the client to the finished product, and that's why so many of us hesitate on listing them. By the time we're finished telling them all that, they could just do it themselves, right?? Well, no, they can't. And I'm also not saying to list every single minute detail of your process. Give them the milestones. Show them how, with you at the wheel, they will move through this experience with minimal hiccups. Don't neutralize bumps completely because then we set ourselves up for failure, but show them how, since you have the lay of the land, you know where to expect some turbulence and rough patches and prepare them for it. By establishing early on that you can expertly guide them through this process, you're actually solving more than just their initial problem – in my case, they want to change the way their home looks – because you're going to navigate for them. You already know the places where things get tricky, and you're going to help them through it. Highlighting the milestones might be as simple as three key steps. Maybe it's more detailed and closer to ten steps. In any event, it helps you and the client to know what those steps are, and the order they come in. For example, many of our potential clients think that once they make contact with us to inquire about design services, we will immediately get to work on their project. But we first need to see the space, create the project scope, and then determine which service they might be a good fit for. So when I'm on the phone with them in our initial preliminary call, I start to lay the groundwork that helps them know what to expect next. And think about it – how many times have clients asked you “what's next?” If we stammer and answer vaguely, it doesn't build trust. We must know what our process is, and we must be able to articulate it to our clients. To do that, I recommend you list every milestone of a client experience, but start at the end, and imagine the client is so enthralled, they are willing to pay you more money for a job well done. Then back up one milestone and consider what would need to happen at that step in order for the one that follows it to go perfectly. This exercise is going to help you see where you might have been falling short, and it will give you the opportunity to streamline your process to maximize the enjoyment your client will take out of the experience.

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Next, you can't rely on just telling someone something one time, and then counting on them to remember it. In business, consistency and repetition win. Always. Your process must be consistent, and you must repeat it again and again in order for clients to learn to trust it. How many times have you said "Trust the process!" but you've done nothing to help them know what that process is? What your client hears in that case is this: "I've shown you absolutely no reason to trust me whatsoever, and it's not worth my time to reassure you, so please stop bothering me, get out of the way, and let me work!" I wouldn't want to work with someone who spoke to me that way. When a client questions how things are going, take that as a sign that they need reassurance – and rather than getting wrapped up in the emotional support that could accompany reassuring them, go back to the process, and gently remind them how it works again. Remember that knowing your process is another way you market to your clients – at the before, during, and after working with them. We even went so far as to create marketing materials that we use for our clients so they can refer to it themselves if they ever need to! The kicker is that you have to actually follow the process you outline for them, or they will call you on it! Consistency wins. Don't just throw together a process that you think sounds like what they want to hear, because if it's not how you actually work, they'll pick up on it right away...and that erodes trust. And when trust erodes, they want to do what's natural – step in and take control. When they feel like you might not have a clear idea of what you're doing, they want to make sure things don't go awry. That's human nature! Unfortunately, it's also how you end up being treated like their assistant! And the biggest problem with it is that once they take the leadership role, it's almost impossible for you to reclaim it. Unless you're willing to confront them, but we all know how hard that can be, and we probably already feel a little bit like a dog with its tail tucked between its legs, because we know we're guilty of not doing a good enough job on communicating to begin with. So get out in front of it and write that process down, and use it consistently and repetitively to build trust and confidence in your client.

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And finally, think about what it would be like, if every time you made a suggestion to your client, they said yes. How much easier would your job and life be if they said yes to everything you asked of them? If you feel like that can't possibly be a reality, then you need to work on your process. Because ultimately, knowing your process is about knowing how to position your client to say yes to the next step. This includes the phases of a relationship at the very beginning, when you're just trying to get them to say yes to hiring you. When you know what the next step is, you can craft your messaging to ensure they understand it and want to move to that step. This is also called a "moves management system" or a "sales funnel." I know we hate that word "sales" because we creative introverts love to tell people that we're not salesmen, but like I've said before – if you own a business, you're in sales. You're placing an emphasis on moving a client from casual engagement with your business, to convinced. This is known as the "funnel of engagement" and it does not stop when you get a client to say yes to working with you. In order to move a client through that funnel, they must get to know, like, and trust you. Here is how that works:

- Level 1: Casual | No expectations, dipping a toe to see what you're all about
 - o Investment: Free
 - o Blog, articles, quotes, freebies, resources, bookstore, social media – where you talk about your process and give examples of how it works
 - o CAREFULLY consider how much you want to feed the freebie monster

- Level 2: Connected | Awareness growing, they've "heard of you" maybe even bought an entry level service like a consultation

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- o Investment: Minimal
- o Give enough info that they are convinced to move to Committed phase – position them to say yes to continuing to work with you
- Level 3: Committed | You've got the job!
- o Investment: Meaningful (aka, more money)
- o They've hired for your unique service/product delivery
- Client has decided to trust you, after getting to know and like you
- Commitment is deeper and more personal
- You provide structured, but flexible, service/product package that includes terms, deliverables, and clear expectations, which you will continue to communicate to them throughout the life of their project.

But it doesn't stop here. Most business owners assume that once a client has successfully moved through their funnel, their work is done, and they can move on to the next client. Wrong. The true test of earning a client's trust is if you can get them to Level 4. Where they're convinced there is nobody better than you out there, and that EVERYONE needs to work with you.

- Level 4: Convinced | Becomes an advocate of your brand, tells others about you
- o Investment: Significant

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- o High-end, have bought your premium offerings, has entered into a long-term relationship with you, and is a source of referrals for your business, and advocates for people to hire you
- o This is the ultimate result of the client knowing, liking, and trusting you
- At this level, it's less about you asking for the sale, and more about potential clients asking if you will take them on

Can you see how important it is to communicate to your client about your process, and then consistently drive that point home by positioning them to say yes to the next step? If we go back to the example I gave you earlier about the dentist, the one thing I said they did when they told you the price was to also tell you the order in which the work needed to be done in order to maximize the money you'd spend. Here's the magic of knowing what that process is, and being unwilling to compromise it, no matter what. It gives the client (or patient in that scenario) the choice to say no. Because even though they understand the process, and they trust you, they may not want to spend that money now, or maybe they don't have it to spend – but because the process is so clear, they won't spend time trying to find ways around what you do to get a cheaper price. If it's clear that your process works best, and any money they spend doing it another way would be a waste, then they can give you a no. And in business a no is just as good as a yes. A no is also an affirmative answer, and when you hear it, you don't have to wonder if you did something wrong or if you could have landed that sale by saying something you didn't think of. If you've clearly communicated how your process works, and you've consistently stuck to that process with proven results, and you've brought the client back to those steps each time they've had questions, then you're doing everything you can to position them to say yes to how you work. The ones who say no probably weren't a fit anyway – and in order to keep propelling your business forward, you don't want to take them on anyway.

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Today's episode touches on some key points for creative, introverted entrepreneurs who want to improve their businesses this year. I'm hosting a free webinar on this topic, and more, on February 19, 2020. If you'd like to join us – and I don't see why you wouldn't! – please mark that date in your calendar and stay tuned for more details on how to participate! 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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