

Ep #31: Is Your Creativity Taking a Hit?



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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! How is everyone doing? I certainly hope that you're all safe and healthy. These are strange times for all of us during a global pandemic, trying to practice social distancing, trying to take care of our families, trying to maintain some sense of normalcy for our sanity's sake. And listen, I appreciate the "we're all in this together" sentiment, but if we're being real – some of us are more in this than others. People who have become sick are deeply in it, along with the doctors and nurses treating them, and all of those people's families. And then there are those of us who have lost employment because of this virus. Two of my friends' husbands have been laid off in the last week. They're experiencing this on a different level. And there are those of us like me – the small business owners who have been trying to figure out how to cope with all of these threats, and the majority of us are getting hit - hard. I've seen small businesses in my home town shuttered up and out of business already. So...yeah, we're all going through this at the same time, but frankly, we're not all in this together. We're all in it, for sure, but it's affecting us all in different ways.

Now, I don't want to be a Debbie downer, but my coping mechanism when faced with a challenge has always been to problem solve. I'm not one who can pretend the problem doesn't exist. In fact, I'm probably overly aware of it, which has always worked in my favor. Literally nobody saw this coming, but even though we all feel unsure about the future, panic and worry isn't going to get you anywhere. And this is coming from someone with Olympic-level worrying skills. Because the thing is, you have zero control over COVID-19. So don't spend your time thinking about it, or how it's going to affect the economy. Instead, shift your focus on how you can find opportunities right now explore the new ways you can operate your business.

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So before I get into the real content here, I want to make sure that you understand that I'm not telling you to reinvent your brand, your business, or try to change who you serve. All of those things are still incredibly important. The riskiest thing you can do right now is try to "invent" a new offering and sell it to a wider audience than the one you know is authentically YOUR niche. No, what you want to do is ask yourself how you can meet your clients/audience/tribe who have been with you up till now, and offer them something they actually want or need. We're not going to be straying at all from what I've shared with you in past episodes about knowing who you serve, and to what end. If you haven't identified your target audience or ideal client, it's critical that to do that now. It's going to make getting through this pandemic a whole lot easier.

And something I want you to keep in mind as you listen to this episode is this: don't be so short sighted in how you serve your clients now that you lose your long-term vision for your business. Instead, think about all of this through the lens of: what will be the new norm? Because the way we all do business is about to get rocked, and if you're unwilling to go where it goes, you'll be struggling to stay relevant! So here are some things for you to consider while you make the most of your time in quarantine:

#1: How can you maintain your structure, but be flexible?

The pandemic is temporary, but effects of it will not be. Already, in my business we've started to realize how many meetings with our clients could actually be Zoom calls. This has also made me realize how much time we spend getting to and from those meetings, which is time that could be spent doing more productive things. I had concerns about meeting this way, I won't kid you. I've done things a certain way for so long, that I felt positive that any disruption to how I did it would complicate everything. Guess what? Your clients are savvier than you give them credit for, and they also appreciate flexibility. So being willing to still follow my process for delivering design to our clients hasn't changed at all. We've done several presentations via Zoom in the last few weeks, and the client experience didn't change at all except that we weren't in the same room. We still sent

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them a set of samples so they could follow along, we still delivered the same caliber of design, documentation, and organization. What's different now is that I've had to be flexible so that we could maintain progress on these projects. I had to ask myself, what do my clients need more of right now? It turns out, they needed me to be confident that I could still guide them through the design process, but that I just had to find the way to do it. I had to be accommodating. So think about how you can be accommodating – without being a pushover – for your current clients, as well as for your audience.

#2: The new norm will be in selling your intellectual property.

Online courses are not new. In fact, they've been around for a long time, and the early adopters are gazillionaires right now. It can feel overwhelming to find the entrepreneurial opportunity for your business because most creatives are offering a service. But what the thousands of entrepreneurs who jumped into digital asset sales early on realized is that people will pay you for what's in your head. It's not the same as you doing it, or providing your expertise as part of your service, but it's just as valuable. So think about what you do for clients now, and start to peel back the layers. Each step of my design process could technically be taught as online classes – either live, as workshops, or as pre-recorded courses. So think about all the things you do that represent a small slice of a broader concept. How can you create informational resources that you can sell? Remember, you're not trying to think of the thing everyone in America needs to learn right now. You're looking for the one thing that people have asked you for again and again that you've been hesitant to share. For me, it's paint colors. People want to know what paint color I've used in my clients' homes. And the truth is that I'm not at liberty to give that information away for free, because my clients have paid for it. But what I can do is create a class on choosing paint color. Now, you might think, there are dozens of classes that can teach that. That's not new. No, it's not. But I'm talking about creating a class that would speak directly to my audience. How do introverts with demanding schedules want to use color? I'm still identifying their pain points and speaking directly to them with what I create – it's just

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that instead of me selecting their color for them, I'm teaching them how to do it for themselves. And there is value in that!!

#3: Diverse offerings are the future of small business.

Years ago, I developed a “menu of services” for my design clients. I was switching from hourly rates to flat fees, and the best way to do that was to get really clear on what I was offering. Nowadays, this is called a value ladder. If you've been hyper-focused on only the highest paying clients, now is a great time to re-evaluate your value ladder and find where you've left money on the table. Many creative service providers are convinced that the hourly rate is the way to go – and they're offering consultations at that rate (or worse, no rate at all). Instead of getting paid an hourly wage to demonstrate your expertise, how can you shift that offering into one that provides a lot of value for the client and also a better pay-off for you? For example, if you're an interior designer and you've been selecting paint colors and charging an hourly rate, what happens when it doesn't take you a whole hour? The client asks you if they have to pay for the whole thing. My solution to that was to offer color consultations at a much higher flat rate, with very clear deliverables and terms for the client. So examine the things you've been struggling with making money on and make a choice to package and market them differently.

So are we all in this together? If you also feel like coronavirus economically unsettling, socially unsettling, and personally unsettling, then yes...we're all in the same boat. The important thing is for you not to dwell on any of that. Put on your thinking cap and spend some time working on your business, rather than in it. This event is actually providing us all with numerous opportunities to refine our businesses into ones that can swiftly adapt and become sustainable, regardless of world events.

Seize this day. Become a Coronapreneur.

If one podcast a week just isn't enough for you, I want to encourage you to interact with our community in our private Facebook group! To find it, go to

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facebook.com/groups/loudmouthintrovert and request access! It's a great group of like-minded entrepreneurs who are eager to build their businesses without having to transform themselves into extroverts. I've hosted some live chats and we share all kinds of funny and interesting things there, so come check us out! Welcome back to the podcast, y'all! What day is it? Is it still April? Is this real life? How are you? I mean really how are you. Now, before you assume I'm going to tell you that I've been sitting inside my house for close to two months, in pajamas, not showering, because we're in quarantine, let me stop you because I have a confession. I have gone to work every. Single. Day. Of this ordeal. I had to. I attempted to work from home and you know what? No. I hate it. I like my office, I like having a place to GO TO, and so while everyone else has been working remotely, I have gotten up, gotten dressed, and gone to work. And we've been SO BUSY. I assumed, at first, that everything would come to a screeching halt. But then I realized, no, our clients want to keep going, so we're going to keep going! This has not been a vacation for me. And I've been fine with that. I've actually gotten eight new clients this month! That's a record.

But here's what's happening. I've been concentrating on making sure marketing efforts and messaging are clear and signaling to my ideal clients that they NEED to hire us and my mind basically won't shift from that to actually working on design. So on the one hand, YAY for highly targeted marketing efforts that are converting people into paying clients! What a win!! Especially in these times. However, other things are getting pushed to the side. I'm having a problem switching back and forth between the high-level tasks that are going to carry my business through this pandemic, and the more day-to-day tasks that will ensure my clients don't experience a disruption in the level of service they've come to expect from us. Now, I LOVE to work with fabrics. But I've been finding it difficult to get into that creative mindset since all of this started. So yes, business is actually booming, but I really think it's because I've been spending my energy resources ON the business and not IN it. How is it that right now, while the entire world has hit "pause," in my universe, the work is steadily ramping up and I'm busier than I've ever been? I'm not complaining AT ALL. I'm thrilled! I want to design! I want to feel creative! But I have to admit that

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until last week, I'd been feeling torn between needing to ensure that my business will survive these circumstances. Surely I'm not the only one.

I had to pull back and examine what I was doing that was getting me in this scattered head space. First of all, I knew I couldn't blame it on the fact that the rest of my team was working remotely. Nope. That's not fair, and the truth is that I've kind of enjoyed having the office all to myself. Never in my wildest dreams did I imagine myself sitting at my desk in a baseball cap and a slip-on sneaker, and yet, here I am, happier than a pig in mud. So then I started thinking, maybe it's because I've allowed myself to dress so casually that I'm not able to get it all done. Okay, that's crazy. No more excuses!! The truth of the matter is, very simply put, I needed to get my act together! I needed to stop waiting for the other shoe to drop. I needed to get my head in the game and carry on as if it were business as usual. Because isn't that the goal for all of us? For things to return to normal? And for me, normal means I'm checking things off my list and running a tight ship. And I don't like it when I feel myself slipping.

So today, I'm going to outline my plan for you on how I'm going to harness my creativity so that I get to spend some of my time doing what I love to do – and not just the things I need to do to keep my business functioning right now!

(1) The first thing I knew I had to examine was the way I was structuring my days. Time blocking has always been the most effective way for me to feel accomplished at the end of the day. I looked back over the past month to see what I'd put on my schedule and compared it to what I'd actually accomplished. What I found surprised me. I've continued to use time blocking during quarantine to keep our company's production schedule moving forward, but looking at my schedule, I saw that I was filling my days switching back and forth between business-related tasks and client-related tasks. Probably because I felt like the business-related stuff was more important. So I made a choice to shift into blocking off creative days and business days. As I've tried to balance both on my plate, with my team working remotely, I've realized that the business side of things tends to

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consume my entire day, leaving the creative work to get pushed to another day of the week. Not cool. And not cool for my clients at all! By blocking off days to work on either business or creative tasks, I'm allowing my mind to achieve deep focus – a must for introverts – and that way, I can be more effective on a daily basis.

(2) As I was examining my schedule, I noticed that when I had to rearrange it, I was pushing the creative tasks towards the end of the day. I know it's because I felt like I "had to" get that business stuff done first. So I would devote morning energy to the business stuff – working on marketing, drafting emails to go out to our email list, speaking with my bookkeeper and accountant... But the problem with that is that late in the afternoon is the worst time to try to be creative. I was expending all of my best energy early in the day on other things, and then by the time I needed to tap into my creativity, I was already wiped out. So instead, creative work is going to take place first thing in the morning, before I even check email. It freaks me out to even say that, but right now, in the interest of making sure I can focus deeply on creative tasks, I can't have unresolved email questions rolling around in my brain. AND, I can't risk sitting down and opening emails (aka, Pandora's Box) and having the creative work get pushed back yet again. So in addition to blocking off days to be business minded and days to be creative minded, I'm also making it a point to come in and immediately be creative before I sit down and look at my emails. That way I can devote the creative juices needed into designing for my clients, and then when I feel my creativity waning, I can move on to other client-related tasks, like scheduling meetings, checking in, etc.

(3) Since the weeks are evolving in real time at the moment, it's crucial for me to set daily goals. Not a ton – just 3 big goals per day that, whether or not I get anything else done, I am sure to get those things done. The point is not to just put everything on my to-do list on my daily goals list. That defeats the purpose of prioritizing things, because obviously, everything can't be the most important thing. By making time to do this every day, it's going to eliminate the risk that I forget to do something. And that includes everything that has to do with the creative side of my

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business! Because when I'm in creative mode, I don't want to be jolted out of my train of thought by a reminder that I forgot to do something! That is just going to derail me all over again, and I for one am ready to kick quarantine brain to the curb.

If you've been experiencing this same kind of back-and-forth feeling, I encourage you to take a look at how you're structuring your days. Or if you're even structuring your days at all! My business really can't function without a clear weekly calendar of everything we have to get done. Truthfully, I'm looking forward to adopting this new kind of time blocking because I already think it's going to be a great way to continue working even after COVID-19 is over. If you'd like to talk a little more about how you can work on your schedule, come join my private Facebook community for podcast listeners only! Just go to facebook.com/groups/loudmouthintrovert and request to be added to the group! And when you get there, introduce yourself (it's a safe space full of other introverts, I promise) and tell us what you've learned from listening to the podcast! And as always, you can follow me on Instagram at [@rclinteriors](https://instagram.com/rclinteriors) – I've been cooking a lot during quarantine, and I've started learning how to play the guitar and all of that (and pretty rooms) are there to keep you entertained!

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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