

## Ep #37: Tiny but Mighty: Bouncing Back in a Small, Creative Business



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With Your Host

**Rachel Cannon**

[Loudmouth Introvert](#) with 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.

We've moved into a new phase of the pandemic, some states are opening up, so what does that mean for small business? I think it means opportunity. We're quick to think that we're most at risk when it comes to major global events, especially ones that affect the economy. And while any business that hasn't been structured properly is at risk (all the time, actually), small businesses have some key advantages that big businesses don't. Big businesses have to restructure, go through several rounds of cuts, lose long-time employees, and generally have a much more difficult time moving nimbly in a crisis. Small businesses have advantages in three important areas, but we as owners have to identify our worry and anxiety in order to leverage our strengths. And worry and anxiety often show up for us like this:

A persistent belief that your small business is at the mercy of the economy. If you weathered the recession of 2008-2009, you have good reason to feel this way. Those were rough times, and that experience has imprinted on many of us in ways that we may not even realize. For me, even hearing the word "recession" gives me a knot in my stomach. When the headlines start to read "this will cripple the economy," I can't help but remember what it was like last time, and that can cause some worry.

And worry can easily turn into fear that your business won't be able to recover from a recession. And again, it's not that these feelings are completely unfounded, because the reality is that many businesses do, in

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fact, have to fold in times of economic hardship. The small business owner - especially creative introverts - can feel a little like the cards are stacked against us because we are truly the littlest of the little guys. And fear prompts us to find an answer as to why we might not recover, and do you know where that leads us?

To a place that would have us compare our businesses to others, and lead us to determine that the reason for all of this is that we're just "not big enough."

I know this feeling. The feeling of being stuck in a loop of wrong beliefs, worry, and fear. But I want you to think for a minute about the ways that small businesses are actually at an advantage in a moment like this. First, small businesses are built on relationships, and relationships are not at the mercy of the economy. Second, small businesses can adapt much more easily than big businesses can (and when I say small, I mean TINY, not the government's assumption that any biz with up to 500 employees is a small biz). And third, small businesses have much more flexibility in how we serve our clients than big ones do, which gives us almost a layer of insulation that we might not even realize we have.

1. Have you ever had to call your power company? How often have you actually spoken to a person, not an automated system? I don't think I've

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ever actually spoken to a person at my power company. There's literally zero relationship there. So if the economy were tanking, and all of the sudden they started reaching out with personal phone calls, it would be super weird, right? The most I got during the COVID-19 pandemic was a boilerplate email telling me how they were putting everyone's safety first. Big companies are purely based on transactions. But we, as small business owners, have the upper hand here because we actually CAN put clients and customers first, ask them DIRECTLY for what they need, and be willing to accommodate them in a way that works for both parties. Part of the beauty of being a small business is that your clients actually know YOU by name. I don't know anyone's name at Entergy. Stay in touch with your clients on a personal level, because your business has been built on relationships. How many times have we talked about that on this podcast? Relationships of any kind require attention, and that includes the one you have with your clients, so make sure you are cultivating and tending to them (even if you have a healthy sense of reality or worry about the economy - because I can't tell you not to worry, it's human nature!). We can't control what the economy does. We can only control what we do, and in order to be in a good position to bounce back, be proactive, not reactive. And start with your clients and how you serve them.

2. A business coach once told me that a small ship can course correct much faster than a big one can. That has stuck with me ever since then, and it's guided my philosophy about what I want my business to be. I didn't want to grow into this giant, clunky piece of machinery. I wanted to keep my business small so that in times like this, I'm not having to go through several rounds of layoffs, cutting the fat, and restructuring. As small business owners, we can't dedicate the time required to making those kinds of plans - because all of our time would be spent doing that, and not working with our clients. This is a major advantage of being a small business. In fact, not much changed in my business this year, other than the fact that the team worked remotely. I continued to go to the office everyday and focus on our design projects, rather than devoting days and

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weeks to figuring out who'd be in the first round of layoffs, the second, etc. And since I didn't have to go through layoffs, our clients experienced no disruption in our services. Sure, we met virtually and did design presentations virtually, but nothing came to a screeching halt so that the company could get whittled down to a skeleton crew. We pretty much are a skeleton crew, so we just shifted where the work was taking place. And of course, this means that when the world goes back to normal, we're not faced with having to interview and vet possible new employees to fill the positions we had to cut. Being a small business actually saves us so much more time than big businesses lose in a moment like this - and remember what we've discussed before: time is your most precious resource because it's the one thing you can't get back.

3. While I'm big on structure and processes, I also think it's important to be flexible with your clients. This pandemic has proven that to me in so many ways. What I don't mean is that you change HOW you do your best work or provide your best services to them. That process does not have to change, but the delivery method took on a whole new appearance for us. Things I was convinced would never work - virtual presentations, sending clients a duplicate set of all of their fabric samples and paint samples and finish samples, communicating ideas to them without being in the room with them, selecting paint colors for them without being at their homes. Those were all things that, before March of this year, I would have told you were impossible. I see now how small minded that was of me to think that way! A Photographer in Baton Rouge began the Front Porch Project where she took family portraits on peoples' front porches (from a safe distance, with a zoom lens) and asked, rather than payment for the session, that we support a local small business. It took off and she had to enlist other photographers to accommodate all of the requests. We participated, and supported restaurants, boutiques, my salon - but also bought the photos from the session. That was a genius way to do some good, but be flexible in how she delivered her service - and she still made money at the end of the day because everyone bought digital and printed copies of their

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portraits. Think about what you've learned you can do differently during this time, and create a strategy you can use to harness those possibilities in the future. I think I've had an epiphany about working with clients outside of my area - that they don't have to be able to fly me in and out, we can do the work virtually. It's a great way I can be flexible AND cast a wider net.

It's natural for small businesses to feel a little like David, going toe-to-toe with Goliath when we think about the economic fallout of something like COVID-19. And I really do understand your worry, anxiety, and fear. Trust me, I do. But I hope that you've turned a corner today by seeing how your small business has many advantages over big businesses in our personal relationships with our clients, our ability to quickly recover from sudden changes in the economy, and the opportunities we have to be flexible and accommodating with our clients. These are all very positive things, and as the country starts to move towards re-opening, I hope you'll focus on them, rather than on the news cycle or the headlines. Because remember, David slayed Goliath with just a rock and a slingshot.

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