

Being Seen As Yourself: Managing Visibility Fears & Rejection Sensitivity with Ruth Poundwhite (she/her)

Who am I?

I am a soulful sales and mindset coach. I help ambitious and driven service-based business owners to run their businesses in a way that honors their whole selves unapologetically, which includes your brain, your feelings, your energy, and your capacity.

I was a copywriter for over a decade before this. I'm also the author of the book *Quietly Ambitious* published in 2022. I'm the host of the *Soulful Sales Show* podcast and founder of the Soulful Growth Club and Soulful Sales Society memberships.

My business philosophy in a nutshell is that I am a huge believer in business as a vehicle for self-expression and meaningful impact on the world. I actually believe that if we can fully express ourselves, that in itself makes the world a better place.

Here's what we're talking about today

- Why being visible can be more challenging for neurodivergent humans with rejection sensitivity.
- What is visibility and how to embrace your version of visibility.
- How to know when it is worth stretching and getting uncomfortable.
- My three-step process to work through the fears that you may have about being more visible so that you can expand your comfort zone in a sustainable and self-compassionate way.

Why being visible can be more challenging for neurodivergent humans with rejection sensitivity

When I started that first business at the age of 21, I didn't even know I was an introvert, let alone the fact that I was neurodivergent. I also had a lot of ups and downs with my mental health and it didn't even cross my mind to design my business to support my unique needs as a human.

I cannot emphasize enough how terrified I was to show up as myself in my business.

I thought there was something wrong with me for finding it all hard. I found it really, really hard to share my personality, and my opinions. I even found it hard to show my face in a profile picture.

I really wasn't visible at all in that business, except for my email newsletter. *Thank goodness for email.*

Even then, I didn't share my personality in the words that I wrote to my subscribers. I was super sensitive to anybody potentially not liking what I shared, that I stayed totally vanilla.

It worked to an extent, but it led to a lot of work that I didn't love. It also led to a disconnect between how I felt inside and what I was presenting on the outside.

I think it's really important for me to say all of this and to really, really emphasize how scared I was, because it's so easy for a super confident person to come and tell you how to get over your visibility fears, right?

It's so hard to believe that it's actually possible for you to do that if you don't relate to the person sharing the story.

It was only about five years ago that I decided to get truly visible as myself. Four years before that, I had known that I wanted to change my business. Five years ago, six years ago, when I had my son, that was really the catalyst that set it off, me actually making it happen.

How I embraced my version of visibility

In this business, I did things differently from day one. I learned from my past mistakes and challenges, I shared my opinions, I shared my face, I shared my voice.

Yes, there was a big part of my brain that was telling me, "You are not worth listening to," and, "Why does anyone care what you have to say?" I felt that nudge, as I call it, in my heart, and I shared it anyway. I also shared that I was scared. I was really shocked, actually, when that honesty ended up truly connecting me with people.

Yes, it was very, very scary, especially when I started my podcast and I started interviewing other people on my podcast. It was so worth the discomfort that comes with moving through those fears.

In my first business, I was uncomfortable because I was trying to force myself into a box. That wasn't me.

I was trying to learn from the marketing experts who weren't like me. I was beating myself up for finding it hard.

In my second business, I learned that I get to rewrite the rules. I stretched in the right way for me to find a way to be visible that would work for me.

For example, focusing mainly on email marketing and my client-only Facebook group. I am so much happier to show my face because I did it all imperfectly myself from day one. People knew who I was from day one. They knew the imperfections and that made it so much easier for me.

It has led to a much more fulfilling experience and has helped me to now work with over 6,000 core students and hundreds of coaching clients.

I constantly surprise myself with what I am capable of. I also trust that the parts of me that I most wanted to fix back then are actually some of my biggest strengths and some of the things that connect me most with my "right" people.

It's important for me to say, I am still not always confident.

I still have imposter syndrome. I still get tired of showing up sometimes. I still have vulnerability hangovers. I still use loads and loads of notes for my presentations and when I go live. I still want to hide sometimes but I am growing and connecting with my audience all the time and it feels amazing.

I used to ignore and push through my fears for a long time and it never led to lasting change, it actually led to burnout.

How I actually got to this point where I am now where I can show up and be visible in my unique way was with real work, self-compassion, and learning to understand myself which is what we are talking about today.

Reflection prompt: How do you currently feel about being visible in your business?

What is visibility?

Let me first be clear on what I even mean by visibility. We are all part of a summit here that is about doing things differently, changing the rules, and tweaking things to work for us and that absolutely applies to getting visible too.

When I talk about visibility it doesn't mean that there's just one way to do it. It doesn't mean you have to do it on a consistent schedule. It doesn't mean you have to be on social media or go live or any one thing that counts as visibility.

What I mean is visibility in the broader sense, which means showing up for your business in a way that means that people know that you exist.

They know enough about you and your brand to connect with you and they know that you have something to sell because you show up and you share it. You are visible with your business and your offers.

There are obviously a *million* ways that you could be visible to help people get to know you and your brand. We all get to figure out our unique way that works for us with our unique personality, energy, and values.

Reflection prompt: In the context of your unique business, how do you currently feel about being visible, to let people know about you and your offers? Give yourself a score from 1 to 10.

1 being don't feel great or not being visible at all and 10 being feeling amazing about it. Just write that down quickly. We're not really going to do anything with it, it's just to start this process of awareness.

If you do have any specific stories or feelings that come up alongside that, perhaps note them down too. It could be something like, "Visibility is exhausting." "I am not the right kind of person to be more visible." "I need to do more than I'm currently doing." Anything.

Any feelings are welcome and totally normal. We are just bringing them to awareness so we can work through them.

How to work through your visibility fears so you can show up as your true self

What do fears look like?

Let's talk about what fears can look like. Avoidance is the obvious way that we think that they will manifest. But here a couple of different examples of how visibility fears can manifest:

- You have been wanting to put yourself out there in a specific way for a long time but you just keep putting it off, maybe there's never a right time
- "Something" always comes up to get in the way
- There's always more that you need to learn
- There are always more ways that you need to prepare
- You have started and you keep stopping before you can build real momentum.

Now, another manifestation of visibility fears that is maybe less commonly thought of as a manifestation of fear is that you might be overdoing it.

- You are actually doing all the things.
- You are showing up in all the places, but you're also burning yourself out to make sure everything is perfect

- You're going really above and beyond for your audience members, which might look great on the outside, but the place that you're doing it from is to avoid any possibility that someone might not like what you do
- You are over-delivering in your offers, you never feel safe to rest
- You're constantly moving on to the next thing and the next thing and the next thing so you don't have to sit with and feel the discomfort of what is coming up.

My fears actually often do manifest in this second way now, and I have to be really mindful of catching myself and reminding myself that it's okay not to be perfect. It's *okay* to drop the ball. It's *okay* to rest.

However your fears manifest for you, just know that it is never sustainable in the long run to just ignore them and to push through.

I think a lot of us have the tendency to do that because it's really frustrating to experience these manifestations of fear, right? I hope that what I'm about to share will make it really, really clear why it's so important not to ignore them and push through.

Fear versus the wrong strategy

Obviously, as I've said, not all visibility strategies are going to work for all humans. It is okay not to be visible in certain ways. However, another manifestation of visibility fears can present very, very logically, it could feel like a fact.

For example, telling yourself that a strategy is just not for you or is plain wrong when actually, it could be something you could benefit from trying.

Just to give you an example, I used to say that I would never go live; I would never do a webinar, I would never do a challenge. Now I've actually done all of these things.

Yes, they did make me uncomfortable, but it wasn't a fact that they weren't for me, I just had to try them, see how it felt, and tweak them to do them my way.

I actually didn't even know how much I would love podcasting until I did it.

Believe me when I say that voice of fear came up with so many good reasons why I shouldn't even bother starting my podcast. I'm so glad that I dug deeper into that and I tried it anyway, because now podcasting is one of my favorite things ever. It's also really within my comfort zone.

Obviously, I do have a few nerves sometimes before guest interviews or when I'm sharing something a bit different or particularly vulnerable, but that's normal. Generally, I'm so grateful for my past self for being open to things that previously I didn't think were for me.

How to know when it is worth stretching and getting uncomfortable

So, how do you know when a visibility strategy, or any strategy for that matter, just isn't right for you versus it being an opportunity to stretch your comfort zone and explore something new that might actually become the thing that is right for you, even though it's scary?

The key is to do some digging before you write off a strategy, using the tools that I'm going to give you in the next section. Sometimes showing up in service of the bigger vision in your heart does mean getting uncomfortable.

Stretching your comfort zone is part of being a business owner and it is so worth it. It's all about stretching it in the right direction, not in the way I was doing it in my first business, trying to fit myself into this box that I can never fit into, but stretching in the direction of what was in my heart.

Discomfort alone is not a reason not to do something.

Your comfort zone absolutely will and can stretch. This is about what's aligned and some things are plain wrong for you, but some things are worth opening your mind to and stretching for.

Bear this in mind as you consider what visibility looks like for you.

I am not about forcing you to be someone you're not. It's all about getting closer to the person we really are underneath the fears, underneath the conditioning, underneath the societal expectations. A lot of this work involves getting honest, getting self-aware, and listening to our intuition to figure it out.

Your visibility fears are absolutely natural and normal

Especially as a neurodivergent human! It's so easy to beat ourselves up for having fears in the first place. It took me so long to accept that I just find certain things harder. Of course, there are times I wish I just found things easier, but accepting my personality and my brain has helped me a huge amount.

Now the truth is that any person can have visibility fears for very valid reasons. When we are using our voice, when we are taking up space, when we are sharing opinions or being vulnerable in our business and our lives, there is a risk involved with that. Where there is risk, there is fear.

The risk might not be as big as our brain thinks it is, but it is risky to just be ourselves. What if we are rejected? What if people don't understand? What if we are disappointed with the results of what we do?

Plus, a lot of us will have experienced things throughout our life, maybe in childhood, that taught us that it wasn't safe to be ourselves, or maybe we've even had tricky

experiences where things went really, really well, but then we were too visible and had too many eyes on us, and then things fell apart.

Now, on top of all those really natural and normal fears, neurodivergent humans specifically might face unique extra challenges thanks to a few different factors, including masking, energy management, and rejection-sensitive dysphoria, or RSD.

RSD is basically a heightened version of that sensitivity to rejection and all of those risks that we all face when putting ourselves out there.

We might more easily interpret feedback as criticism, we might be more critical of ourselves, and we might be more sensitive to failure or potential failure.

Now obviously nobody likes to experience these things, but the pain might be heightened for those of us with RSD. We also tend to spend a lot of time anticipating the pain, and therefore avoiding the things that could potentially trigger the pain as a self-protection mechanism.

Any fears or resistance you have to being more visible are totally justified.

Seeing the manifestations of our visibility fears as self-sabotage is not a compassionate way to look at this situation.

Simply because, the truth of the matter is our brains are doing a really important job of keeping us safe and helping us to avoid these difficult feelings, and avoid repeating any past hurts, which is why you'll hear me refer to this behavior not as self-sabotage, but as self-protection.

The key is to listen to ourselves with compassion, to understand what exactly we are trying to protect ourselves from, and then to take brave steps to stretch in a way that doesn't totally overwhelm us. Don't worry, that is exactly what I'm going to guide you through next.

Now that you understand your fears a little bit better, you're already in so much of a better position to work through them in a compassionate way, which is going to make the results you get and the actions you take so much more sustainable.

My three-step process to work through the fears

I have three steps to help you work through your visibility fears. Of course, some of these fears are going to run really, really deep, and they're going to need repeated work, or maybe even extra help.

These steps are basically the framework I use to support and coach my clients. You can use them to support and coach yourself through whatever is going on.

They are designed to be used before you do the thing. If you notice yourself avoiding something, or wanting to overdo it and get it just right, this is the perfect time to use this process.

You can also use these steps in the middle of doing the thing, or if you have received some feedback that is challenging you, again, you can use these steps to help you process how you feel about that.

By the way, I also have a freebie to help you figure out your best actions going forward when you work through these steps, which I'm going to share more about later.

Step 1 - Awareness.

We often think that we know exactly what we're afraid of. The truth is that we're not actually allowing ourselves to go there beyond the surface-level story. There's so much more to understand underneath it.

The first step is to start by writing down a list of what you're afraid of.

You can begin with any surface-level fears and just keep asking yourself, "Why?" or, "What then?"

As an example, if you have a fear that people aren't going to buy your offer, or not going to like your offer when you start sharing it, you can ask yourself, "Okay, well, what then? What am I afraid of if that happens?"

Then answer the question.

Maybe you're going to uncover some layers and you might come to something like, "I'm afraid of letting people down. I'm afraid I'm not good enough," or even, "I'm afraid my business is going to fail."

You can also ask yourself questions based on what you are or aren't doing.

Earlier on, I talked about different manifestations of fear that can make you do things or avoid things.

Ask yourself questions about things you're doing or avoiding. For example, "Why am I avoiding releasing this new course? Why do I feel so afraid every time I check my comments on Instagram?"

This isn't actually about asking the perfect questions. It's about letting yourself explore, letting yourself have space to go a bit deeper than the surface level.

In coaching, we call this *thickening* the story.

You might start with a thin story like, "Nobody likes my content," or, "I'm not cut out for this," which is actually quite vague. You'll end up by asking yourself these questions and allowing yourself to sit with them and explore them. You'll end up with a much clearer picture of what's actually going on underneath that.

Step 2 - Offer yourself compassion for having those fears.

You have brought them to the surface, you've uncovered new layers of the fears. Often you'll find that through this process of bringing this stuff to awareness, the self-compassion just happens, it just shifts naturally without any extra work.

If I realize, for example, that the reason I'm avoiding sharing about my new offer online is because I'm really tired and I need to process feelings from a previous flopped launch, then I usually just immediately have a feeling that it makes sense.

When I know that it makes sense, that brings with it compassion for having the feeling and I'll often stop resisting that feeling.

Sometimes you will need a little bit of extra help.

If you want to work through this in a more structured way, you can make a list of the top fears that came up in one column, then beside them, write down why that fear makes sense in another column of the table.

When I say, "Why the fear makes sense," it doesn't necessarily mean that your reaction makes sense.

For example, logically, it's easy to push our fears away because they seem overblown.

For example, we might be reacting with anxiety, but there are no tigers chasing us, so it doesn't make sense that we feel anxious when we go to share on social media.

It does actually make sense when you put it in the context of past experiences, or deeper underlying fears of being good enough. Maybe you feel like you're overreacting, but it still makes sense on some level.

As well as noting down either mentally in your head or on paper, why the fear makes sense, this is also your opportunity to reassure yourself. For every fear that comes up, and why it makes sense, you'll often find again that it happens naturally, but you can also write down a note for yourself.

For example, if I am afraid that nobody is paying attention to what I'm sharing, I will reassure myself with a statement like, "The right people need to hear what I have to say," or remind myself that so many people lurk and don't necessarily even leave any visible indication that my work is making a difference.

I may even remind myself that nobody can benefit from my work unless I share it.

Your reassurance might also be a reminder to do it *your* way.

For example, if a part of you wants to run a free webinar, but another part of you really hates the way that webinars have been done by other people, you get to remind yourself that you can deviate from the traditional webinar sales pitch structure, and you can do it your way.

Now, there's no perfect way to do this exercise, and it doesn't need to take hours. It's more about giving yourself time and space to fully explore your fears, to listen to the protective part of you, and to give it the reassurance it needs.

Step 3 - Taking action.

You may, again, naturally just feel more equipped to take action after completing Steps 1 and 2, or maybe you don't even need to complete this step, you just needed some space to process your feelings. If you are trying to figure out what to do next, here is a process for deciding on your next steps if you need it.

Firstly, I do recommend just taking a moment to tune into your bigger why.

The fears that you have are *real*.

There is risk involved with putting yourself out there and being more visible, but it's often not as big as it first feels.

There is so much benefit to getting uncomfortable and stretching, which is why I want you to remind yourself of why you're doing this in the first place. Why do you do what you do? Why does your work matter? Why does it matter to your right people that you are the one they get to learn from or work with?

That last one, by the way, is a really big one.

The thing is we often see more confident or who we think are more qualified people doing what we do.

Then we wonder why anyone would choose us when there are so many other people doing what we do. It's often because of some of our perceived weaknesses that people want to work with us specifically.

For example, I help people to get visible and I am not a super confident human myself.

That is actually inspiring to the people who are where I was a few years ago. Sure, they could go and learn from that super confident, charismatic, and extroverted speaker who's talking about getting over visibility fears.

I have a feeling that actually, it's much more believable and empowering hearing it from me, hearing it from someone who has been through what they are going through.

Do you see what I mean? Tune into why your work matters and why you are uniquely equipped to help the right people.

Next, choose your next step.

This should be something that is a little bit of a stretch in alignment with your bigger vision.

It is something that your self-compassion has empowered you to do. It should not be something that feels totally overwhelming.

Each small step taken after each small step is what will ultimately teach us that A, many of our fears just aren't true.

It's that reaction to a tiger chasing us, but the tiger's not there. We get to teach our body that even though our mind already knows it.

We can handle it when things go wrong. We can handle it when things feel hard. We're taking steps to help us believe in and trust in ourselves in the future. What is your one next step?

There you have it. Three steps to work through your visibility fears and get visible as your unique self without just pushing through or having to pretend to be different.

As you can tell, this is not a magic bullet. It is something you're probably going to have to repeat again and again. Just when you think a fear has gone, it is probably going to rear its head again in a really sneaky and frustrating new way.

This is what leads to lasting change.

This is you learning to truly trust in yourself, now and in the future. This is also what helps you to trust in your way to experiment, to take small steps, to do things differently, and to get that information back to rewire your system to learn that, "Actually, it's safe for me to do things my own way."

That is a powerful way to show up for your right people because being yourself is exactly what is going to help you to stand out to the people who need to hear exactly what it is that you have to say in the way that only you can say it because "you" are the right person for your right people.

Getting visible in this way, processing your fears, and experimenting with being yourself is only going to draw those right people to you.

Free resource

Before I share the key takeaways and next steps, I wanted to let about an additional free resource I have to help you find your right way to be visible. You can download it [here](#).

You're going to get my free intuition and aligned action-taking bundle to help you connect with your intuition and understand your right way of being visible because unfortunately, there is no visibility checklist of actions I can give you that's going to suit each and every person watching this.

In this free bundle, there is a quick exercise called The Art of Aligned Action Taking. That one is particularly useful for Step 3 of the process for figuring out how to put this

into practical action in a way that stretches you in the name of the bigger vision but doesn't stretch you too far.

Plus, I've also got a bonus collection of affirmations and journal prompts to connect you to your intuition and what's right for you. Go and download that for free at ruthpoundwhite.com/neurodiverse.

Key takeaways

Firstly, the fact that your visibility fears make complete sense. They are not sabotaging you, they are here to protect you. If you can listen to them, you can help yourself move forward and build that self trust and belief for lasting change.

Your comfort zone gets to stretch forever, and it gets to be so, so good when it does. Keep practicing this three-step process, it's not an instant fix, it is a muscle that you get to build.

If there's one thing that you can take away from this, I hope that it is the reminder that you are the right person for your right people, imperfections, and all.