

**Maggie Patterson:** Everyone, welcome to my presentation for the summit here called From Overwhelmed to Empowered: Navigating Neurodiversity as a Service Business Owner. Let's just go ahead and dive in. Here's the thing if you run a service business, if you're a coach, a consultant, a creative, you have probably experienced the feeling of, ooh, these things don't really work for me.

What I have had to arrive at personally is, and with my clients, is that how we're taught to run our service-based business, it doesn't serve us. We run ourselves ragged trying to do all these things for our clients, trying to fit in these little molds. A lot of what we're going to talk about today is a twofold thing of like the typical advice doesn't work necessary if you're a neurodivergent, and a lot of the online business advice doesn't always adapt well for a service-based business.

If you run a service-based business and you're like, "Okay, I am here because I need help with this." You might feel you're doing it wrong. I hear this a lot from my clients, like, "I feel like I just can't get it right." Honestly, we need to let go of what is right and wrong and we're going to talk a lot about that today. Common advice doesn't work for you. I 100% I am someone where a lot of the common advice about running a service business doesn't work for my brain very well. It doesn't necessarily fit how I approach things and how I think.

It leaves us feeling frustrated. It might leave you feeling frazzled. It might leave you feeling burnt out. I know I have felt all these things at different junctures in my very long business career. If you felt any of those things or you're simply starting out with our service business, you've been running for a while and you want to improve on things, you are 100% in the right place here with this presentation today.

A little bit about me. I am Maggie Patterson. I'm the creator of BS-Free Business. Just a little bit of background. I have 25 years of communications and marketing experience. Yes, I've been around for a while, and I have been self-employed for 18 years. What's really interesting is I did okay in corporate as a neurodivergent person, but I think a lot of it was because it was an entrepreneurial culture and I was able to do things my way. I would be like, "Hey, let's break this, let's do this differently."

I've been in the online space for 10 years now, so I've seen a lot of things. I also own an agency called Scoop Studios and I've mentored over 100 service business owners. I don't count anymore. I know it's over 100. Yes, I am neurodivergent. My specific flavor of neurodivergency is I have ADHD, I have anxiety and depression, which like anyone with anxiety and depression, it's a cycle. I also have dyscalculia and if you're not familiar with that, I basically have numerical dyslexia, so numbers are challenging.

You read me a sequence of numbers, I'm going to look at you like this. I reverse numbers a lot. It's a bit of a challenge, but for some reason money numbers work for my brain, which is good as a business owner. Okay, so here's the deal. Like I talked about off the top, you can't run a service business if you can't serve yourself. Something I see a lot of, and I've observed a lot over the last 10 years in the online business space, a lot

of people run themselves into the ground serving clients. They really feel like working with clients is the problem.

Listen, if you don't want to work with clients, that's totally fine, but I feel like what happens is we run ourselves into the ground trying to be everything to everyone, offer too many services, working too much and then what happens is we can't run our service business effectively so then the lure, the siren call of a lot of different ways of doing business that maybe aren't going to service any better become very appealing.

I'm talking about like, we're like, "Oh, I'm going to create a course, I'm going to create a community," because those things the way they're positioned and taught in the online business world seem a lot easier. They're not always that way. Honestly, I deeply believe and anyone who's familiar with me and my approach to things, you know how deep this belief is for me.

I believe that online business does service business owners dirty because a lot of what we see in online business is a lot of trash talk about service businesses, a lot of myth about service businesses and honestly, those things are designed to make us feel bad about ourselves, abandon our service business, and buy expensive things. Listen, I've bought my share of things, I've invested in my share of things, I've sold my share fair share of things.

From my perspective, when it comes to service businesses, a lot of the people talking to service businesses don't even run a service business anymore. What they're doing is positioning service businesses, positioning client work, all those things as the villain and it doesn't need to be that way. The other part of this is, I believe if you are ND, a lot of the advice, I have a lot of concerns about advice in general, but the way advice is dispensed there's a lot of rigid frameworks sort of things.

I know for me, and if I look at some of the investments I've made over the years, I felt misunderstood. I felt like the advice wouldn't work for me. I would try and try and try and I would feel really frustrated. I am someone who I'm not an A++ student, but I'm a good solid A-, B+ student and I would really put my effort and it would just not connect, and it's because those things were not great for me as a service business owner, and also too, it wasn't great for me as someone who's not neurotypical.

Because what we fall into is the I did it and you can too culture. This is everywhere. This is an online business but this is a larger systemic problem, especially in North American culture. It's the idea that you should be able to figure it out, pull yourself up by your bootstraps because we all start from the same place, and this is toxic. That's a lot of what is going to move you from feeling where you are today to feeling much better about how you run your service business and figuring out a way forward that it can work for you.

Because nobody needs cookie-cutter solutions. Nobody needs to be told things, they're doing it wrong. I have zero time for that and zero patience and especially when so many things that are taught are actually harmful to anyone with any sort of difference. As a Neurodiverse Entrepreneur Summit | All Rights Reserved 2023

neurodivergent person, you cannot necessarily approach things the same way, so it's like you must follow this five-step formula and this is the way you're going to do it. You might muddle through it, but it might feel terrible for you, or you might be someone that looks at that and you respond well to that, but in my experience, most of us do not.

If you are someone, bless you because I'm a little bit jealous. I want you to just know, before we dive into the meat and potatoes of this, is that this is not a you thing. This is a symptom of much greater forces in the industry. Service of businesses are the villain, cookie-cutter advice, the I did it and you can too culture it makes a lot of assumptions about us. We're all unique individuals. I love this quote because this is really the heart of what we're going to talk about today.

My goal in this is not to provide prescriptive advice, it's to give you a jumping-off point for you to explore and give yourself a little bit of permission. This quote is from one of my absolute favorite podcasters, Michael Hobbes. He's the co-host of *If Books Could Kill* and *Maintenance Phase* podcasts, if you don't listen them, I highly recommend them. He said this in a recent episode *If Books Could Kill*. "The only thing that's available is this generic take the stairs instead of the elevator advice. You cannot meaningfully help people unless you understand the specifics of their situation."

If you are not working with someone who understands the specifics of your situation, who is providing one-on-one support, who understands what it's like to be neurodivergent, these things are going to become a little more challenging. I don't want to sit in a place of judgment, but this is the experience I think so many of us have. I've heard this time and time again from my clients, I know I've personally experienced it. What I don't want to do is say, "Hey everyone, welcome my presentation and I'm going to tell you exactly what to do." No, there's not going to be any of that today.

I want to talk about some specific examples of some of this typical business advice we see. I'm sure many of you would be nodding along. Planning should be done quarterly or yearly. There's a obsession with quarterly planning, and I have come to realize, for me, I don't like to quarterly plan as much as I used to, I like to seasonally plan because I need to account for certain things. A lot of my flavor of depression is I am more depressed in the winter months. I live in Canada. It is cold. There is not a lot of sun. I need to plan accordingly for that time of year. I cannot be expecting high performance in that segment of the year.

That season, winter, thumbs down for me and I plan accordingly. You need to have specific days of the week for work. This works really well for my brain. It does not work well for a lot of my clients. They're like, "I can't just do marketing on Monday that's not how my energetic cycles work." I feel these types of things you're working with a coach, you're in a program, they're going to look at you like, "Why can't you do that?" Maybe it just doesn't work for you.

There's this assumption you're being taught you have to have calls with clients. Now, I do feel strongly you should talk to your clients, but I can think of multiple instances of

my clients who-- I have one client who does all her sales conversations asynchronously, works great for her for a variety of reasons. I have another client that she basically has an upcharge if you want to she anticipates the client is going to require a lot of calls because there is an energetic tool, so she charges them more. That is just the way she estimates the projects because she needs to know that this is going to work for her brain, or you need to market in a certain way.

I am a marketer through and through. There are so many ways to market your business and so many of the ways that are pushed, you need to do webinars, you need to do this, that, or the other thing, you need to be on social. It's not going to work for necessary for everybody. Part of what I want to explore with you today is really letting you figure out the way this is going to work for you in terms of your energy, your sensory capacity, all those types of things.

You need to create content and be everywhere to be successful. This is a one way to get to burnout for a lot of people, and it's not actually true. If you run a service business, you're not a content creator. You know what you are, you're a service business owner and the content is a marketing channel and we often lose sight of that. I see a lot of people compare themselves to creators. I'm like, "That is their literal full-time job. That's not your literal full-time job."

You need to use X, Y, Z tool or system. We've all seen this systems come and go. You need to use this for project management. You need to use whatever. Notion was one about 18 months ago. Everyone's like, "You need to use Notion." If Notion works for you, great, but you might look at it and be like, "This is not for me." I feel like that is really important for you to be able to totally embrace. Or my favorite, you need to scale your service business with the program.

I'm here to tell you, if you want to do this, great, but if you don't want to do this, you don't have to. This is one of the most common misconceptions in this when it comes to a service business. I just want to say to you, every single example I just shared, none of this is required. I repeat, none of it, not a single thing. You can choose your own adventure when it comes to running your service business, and you can do it in a way that is going to be in service of you, let you show up for your clients, and let you run a business that's actually going to work for your brain, and more importantly, as well, your life.

Because here's the thing, all this advice, the I did this and you should do this too, it's reductive and it leaves us feeling overwhelmed. I can't even tell you how many times I have started working with someone and there's the biggest side of relief when I'm like, "Why are you doing that? You don't have to do that." So many times we are inundated with messages that tell us we need to do certain things a certain way. It really is harmful to us in a lot of different aspects.

I want to just take a beat here. I'd love to know from you in the chat what typical business advice simply doesn't work for you. I'll share one. One that really doesn't work

for me is there's certain project management systems that I know when I was exploring project management systems about two years ago, I would get in there. Me and my team, we try out a whole bunch of them. I would get in there and my team would be so excited about it. Nope, or another piece of typical business advice, I really need to build one-to-one relationships with clients, so the idea of a program that scales and removes me, it's not for me.

For me to truly connect with people, I need that actual smaller group experience, and that's why I don't have a massively scale program. That, to me, energetically, it just doesn't work in so many ways. I'd love to see in the chat, and we'll definitely check those out in a second. Ultimately, typical teachings rely on reductive, overly simplistic peer solutions. Honestly, if you take nothing else away from this today, I just want you to have this little part of your brain that challenges every time something is taught to you.

It's not to say you can't use it or that you won't use it. Instead of saying, "Oh, that's not going to work for me. Why doesn't that work for me?" Just be like, "Okay, I'm going to be curious about this. Let me figure out why this maybe doesn't jive for me." A lot of the reason it may not jive for you is that it is this true blanket, one-size-fits-all advice is the take the stairs instead of the elevator advice of online business. Because here's the thing, you get to choose what works for you and leave the rest.

We are going to talk about some very specific exercises for you to go through to think about these things. For all the rule followers who are having a little moment right now, I have created you a little permission slip. Feel free to reach out to me if you want your very own copy to sign it, put it by your desk. This is really and truly like this is a permission slip. This is something we sometimes need external someone to say, "You know what, you don't need to do that." Same thing I do with my clients.

I'm sure many of you do this for your clients, so I'm going to do this for you right now. If you are a person who needs that permission, this permission slip is for you. Here's the thing. We have dispensed the traditional business advice. We've thrown some of that away. You may be like being like, "What do I do instead?" A lot of this starts back to going to really foundational things. I just want to impress upon you, you're in a service business, you're a consultant, you're a coach, you're creative, you're some service professional, like a lawyer or accountant, you can do this in a way that works for you because a service business should be simple.

I don't mean simple in the way this advice is, but it's simple in that the business itself is about marketing, it's about selling, and it's about serving. There shouldn't be a lot of extra scaffolding around a service business, which lets you really tune in on these things. Start by figuring out what does work for you. Really taking a second right now and be like, "Okay, what does work for you?" If you want to share that in the chat, please do. What's one thing that really truly works for you?

One thing that has really truly worked for me is I don't work on Fridays. My brain, it doesn't do five days. That's not even a function of wanting to have a day off, it's that I

need to strain my capacity because I only have that much energy and emotional capacity in a given week. Also, really thinking about for you, if you had to get up on stage right now and do a TED talk, let's just call it a three-minute TED talk, what's one thing that you know without fail really works for you in your business, really works for your brain, really lets you feel like, "Yes, I've got this."

It's got to be at least one thing that you can look at right now and what you need in your business is more of that and less of this other stuff. Really thinking about, "Hey, what can I learn from that?" We'll just take a real quick second here. What's that thing that works really well for you and what can you learn from that? For me, with the Fridays off, the energetic capacity thing, I have learned my energetic capacity is not what it used to be five years ago. It's just not, so I need to reinvent my systems.

I need to reinvent my approaches and also adjust my expectations and be kind to myself in terms of what I can or maybe not going to do in a given week. Ultimately, the best place for you to start, and this is getting really curious about various types of capacity. We often talk about capacity in the context of time. We talk about it about workloads. We're very clinical about it. Like, "Okay, my capacity is I can work 20 hours a week and 10 of that can be client work." There's way more to capacity than that.

The first thing is energetic capacity. I'm sure every single one of you here, you are no stranger to this. Energetic capacity might be your work schedule. Maybe you don't start work till noon. Maybe you work, only take calls one day a week. Maybe you don't take calls till four o'clock. Maybe you take calls in the morning and knowing what's really going to work for you, also the types of work. If you do a lot of creative, a lot of strategy work, you might need very specific parameters about what you can do, because one of the things I feel like we often think as service business owner is, "Okay, I'm going to work 20 hours a week. That means I've got 20 billable hours," or client hours, if you will. That's not a realistic thing. Some of you might be like, if you're doing heavy creative strategy work, you may need time for rituals and ideation. You may need times where you can only do seven hours in a week and being very realistic about how you're going to create those conditions, and more importantly, what you can actually do. Being honest about your need for rest and recovery. Maybe after you do a presentation, you need a whole day to recover. Maybe you need longer weekends. It doesn't really matter what it is, but being very realistic. Also, just knowing daily ups and downs or seasonal cycles.

You might have things because of how your neurodivergent shows up for you where you know, hey, one week a month, I need to really dial it down, or I know in the winter season, I need to dial it down. Knowing where you can flex up or down on energy and being very cognizant of that. None of this is designed to be a quick fix for you to go walk away today and be immediately like, "Oh, I'm going to fix all these things." I would encourage you to look at one of the things we're going to talk about in the next few slides about capacity and consider where you might be running into a bit of a roadblock and starting to really focus on that.

If you start messing with all of these all at once, you're not going to know which one actually worked because you're just going to be like, "Oh, I'm doing this one and this one." Or doing what I would do is hyper-focus. I would watch this presentation and I would try to do them all because I'd be like, "I am going to get my capacity handled. Look at me." No, that's not what we want to do. All right, so emotional capacity.

This is very much impacted by the types of work you do. I feel like we talk so much about energetic capacity, but we don't talk about emotional capacity. This might be the type of work you do where it's-- maybe you have a lot of really taxing client interactions. I don't mean taxing in that they're toxic clients, like taxing in like, if you're a therapist, there's only so many hours a week you can receive that, and it might be the expectations of the types of clients you work for.

I will give you an example. I used to work a lot with clients in the online space. I found for me, personally, that was not a great fit just because their businesses, and these were some big-name people, their businesses were so precious and the way they would-- I felt like I was always on the emotional roller coaster with them, and that was really unhealthy for me. By me working with corporate clients in our agency, I am able to protect my emotional capacity because I just don't have that same investment.

The director of marketing is not doing what the owner of a multi seven-figure business is doing. They're two different beasts, if you will. Understanding for you like, "Hey, maybe this type of client is not great for me because there is an emotional piece of this." It might be receiving feedback. If you have issues with rejection. Another one's anxious, you're thinking your clients hate you, that's taking up a lot of emotional capacity and I see that a lot. Also, being seen and being visible. There is so much that goes with being visible and being seen. If you don't have that emotional capacity or the preparation so you feel safe, so you feel that you can really do this, that's also to be considered.

I know my buddy, **[unintelligible 00:23:51]** who is presenting in another session, she talks about this beautifully. I don't feel like we talk about this enough, the emotional toll of sometimes our marketing activities. It's, oh, play bigger, stop playing small. Again, more neurotypical advice that makes us feel like crap. Also our sensory capacity. Maybe there's things you need to do in your workplace. Maybe you need to noise dampening. Maybe you need special earplugs, your level of peopleing. Also, maybe your communication system. I'm sure most of you do this, but something I cannot hear notifications. Notifications, like if I'm just like this, my anxiety spikes immediately.

It's the same thing when someone says to me, "Can I call you right now?" I'm like, "Oh." It's an immediate anxiety spike. I have literally turned off every single notification, absolutely every single thing to the point where I've made my partner turn off his notifications because I can hear them from my office, from his office, and it's not good for me. Understanding sensory-wise where you need to adjust. If this is not something you've actively worked on, I feel like getting really curious, maybe you need to show up to group calls with your camera off. Maybe you need more time to process information. I have a bit of a challenge sometimes processing information.

I do a lot of writing. If someone is giving me line edits on a call, I can't do it. That is something I have had to draw a hard boundary with clients. I cannot do edits on a call, and I've literally lost clients over this. I'm okay with this because it is so not okay for my brain. It creates a level of dissonance I cannot deal with. There may be things like that for you and I'm sure there are, it's okay for you to create those processes to communicate that this is-- for example, I now communicate in contracts as an agency. This is how we receive feedback. We do not receive feedback on a call. You can create those boundaries.

If that feels really like a lot for you, I just want you to really think about where it can make small improvements to make things feel like they're serving you better. Incremental improvements over time do add up. Next, I also want you to explore what things might be causing friction for you in your business. There's so many things on a day-to-day basis that are just like tiny chipping away at you, day in, day out. There might be specific tools you use. Maybe you're using a project management system that someone set up for you that does not work for your brain, so you don't use it, so things slip by.

There might be client processes that you have in place that you need to be changing or refining. Again, the level of peopleing you have in your business, if you can energetically handle, let's say, seven calls in a week or five calls or three calls, or whatever that is, you need to try to build your business in a way that can sustain that. You might need to slowly, with new clients, migrate them to communicating with Voxer. You might need to decrease the number of check-ins you have. There are ways to do this. Your communication systems are really important as well as your communication styles.

It's very common, we all have different processing. I'm a person who reads. There's a lot of verbal processing processors. I'm not someone who can have-- I can handle verbal processors, but I can't have all my clients be verbal processors. It just would not work for my-- it would amp up my nervous system over time. Understanding what are the best ways and systems for you to communicate, and also what are the styles?

Also, friction points. Maybe there's marketing you're doing that just does not-- you feel exposed, you feel unsafe, you feel like it's energetically too taxing for you. There are always different ways of doing things, and that is really the heart of when I want to drive home today, is there is another way to do things. Maybe you haven't thought of it yet, but more importantly, you probably had and did this, "I don't think everyone's going to go for that."

I just want to say, yes, I have a strong personality and yes, I am assertive, but I struggled with all of these things at different times, and I have often thought, "This won't work." Guess what I found? It did work. I had to pull the rip cord and actually do it. Guess what? I don't fantasize about abandoning my service business. I love running a service business. I want people to love it as much as I do if they are going to choose to run one.

In all of this, those friction points, the energy, the capacity, focus on observation. This is not a judgment. I know many of us have very unkind voices in our head, downright nasty sometimes, that will be like, "Why can't you do this? Everyone else can." No, not everyone else can. Everyone here in this summit has different ways they do things, and you would not judge them as harshly, so please don't judge yourself. This is not about being good or bad, it just is.

I want to encourage all of you as we wrap up to commit to experimenting and see what might work for you. You may be surprised what works for you, but going back and looking at your energy, your emotional capacity, your sensory capacity, and looking for those friction points. I really hope that for each of you, this has given you the permission, it has given you the inspiration, if you will, to know that you can do this in a way that works for you, or that small things can make a big difference. Ultimately, so that we don't have that universal you must do typical business advice, you must do-- No, there is no you must do. You can figure out a way to do this that will indeed work for you. Finally, the reason I didn't give you prescriptive advice because what works for my neurodivergent brain may not work for yours. Your friend over here, that's also in the summit, what works for them may not work for you. Be open to seeing what might work for other people.

It's really important, we don't put the expectation that we're not trying to be super prescriptive, and that we understand how our special flavors, if you will, make each of us unique, which means we need unique solutions to our individual challenges, or how our brain functions on a day-to-day basis. Honestly, I feel like all these things have made me better at what I do. I feel like they've made me much more aware of how things work for my clients, and it's very much the same for you.

I will say unwittingly, the more have done these things in my business, on the BS-Free business sites, the more I tend to work with people who are neurodivergent and that is not by design. That is just a happy accident because they understand that I get it and how I'm not going to jam this typical advice down their throat. Ultimately, do what you need to do to support you as a business owner, the rest you can figure out.

I will say this, used to love quarterly planning, not so much. I'm all about the seasonal planning now. What you need and what works for you will likely change and evolve over time. Be a really attentive, curious person to say, "Hmm, that's interesting. That's not working for me the way it used to be. Is there something else going on? Has something shifted? Do I need to make updates or iterate on this?"

Ultimately, stop worrying about how other people are doing it. It doesn't matter. If something works for you, it does not matter. With that, I'd love to connect with you. You can find me over-- I have an email list at the [bsfreebusiness.com/newsletter](https://bsfreebusiness.com/newsletter). I have a podcast *The BS Free Service Business* podcast. If you run a service business, that's a great place for you, and also you can find me over on Instagram [@bsfreebusiness](https://www.instagram.com/bsfreebusiness). I look forward to chatting with more of you and thank you so much for checking this out.

**[00:32:31] [END OF AUDIO]**