

Ep #149: Why ADHD is Your Business-Building Superpower with Megan Kierstead

Full Episode Transcript



With Your Host

Simone Grace Seol

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Welcome to *Joyful Marketing*! I'm Simone Seol, and I teach you how to get your life coaching practice fully booked without having to pay for ads, buy Instagram followers, or complicated sales funnels. It's not rocket science and you can do it too. Listen on to find out how.

Welcome to Neurodiversity Month in the Joyful Marketing world. We declare August to be the month in which we celebrate and support all the coaches in our community who fall under the neurodiversity spectrum.

That is anyone who's brains don't quite work in that straight and narrow, logical and linear, unemotional, color-inside-the-lines, focus-from-nine-to-five sort of way. Now, I'm showcasing examples of clients of mine who created successful AF businesses with brains that don't conform to that neurotypical standard.

And I'm so proud to bring you their stories by having each of them take over my podcast for each week of this month. Today, I'm proud to introduce to you Megan Kierstead, a social scientist with over a decade of experience researching humans and how to improve their lives.

This mostly happened in the tech industry for her where she specialized in human-centered research for new products. Translation, in startup land. And now, in her first year of business, she has become a six-figure intersectional business coach, pretty much a super badass.

In this episode, she breaks down what ADHD means, dispelling a lot of the common myths. And as someone who has ADHD myself, I found myself nodding along vigorously, breathing sighs of relief and generally being super excited to have my "condition" be spoken of in such an affirmative and positive light.

And plus, with lots of scientific support to back up those claims. Meg lays down some brilliant tips on how to work with the ADHD brain, how to use it to your advantage, because it really is like having a different operating

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system. And Meg gives you a wonderful kind of owner's manual to the unique operating systems that we ADHD humans have.

And as another life coach who built a thriving business with ADHD, I wholeheartedly approve of every single part of her message and think everyone in the world who themselves experience it or have loved one who experience ADHD should hear it.

So inside the Joyful Marketing community, Megan is going to be hosting the weekly live coaching call this Wednesday evening and if you want to be coached live by her personally and get access to the tools that she and other coaches in the community created to help you build your business with ADHD, the time to enroll in Joyful Marketing is today.

But first, here's her takeover of the podcast today.

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Megan: Hey Joyful Marketers. I'm Meg Kierstead and I'm going to be talking to you today about how to create a successful business with ADHD. I'm completely honored and excited to be guest hosting. I've known Simone for a while and worked with her one-on-one when she was still doing that.

And it's not an overstatement to say that she's fundamentally changed the entire trajectory of my life. I didn't even know coaching was a thing until I was in her orbit and learned about what she was doing. And then I started working with her and coaching became the thing that essentially saved my life.

And now I'm actually a coach myself. I'm actually about to wrap up my first year in business, which has been enormously successful and gratifying and wonderful and all of those warm, fuzzy feelings that you want to have when you're running a business.

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I've gotten to six figures, I work less than I ever have in my life, I am helping more people than I ever have before, and I'm doing it all with a severely ADHD brain. My story is actually very similar to a lot of high-achieving women.

I did not get diagnosed with ADHD until after college. This is very common. Particularly gifted women are under-diagnosed with ADHD, especially because we've conventionally thought of it as a mental disorder associated with hyperactivity.

And women, because of various cultural bullshit, tend to be less hyperactive, at least outwardly. So many of us don't get diagnosed until later in life and realize the ADHD explains a lot about the struggles we've had and the stories we have about ourselves and being lazy and unproductive and unable to be successful.

So let's talk for a second about what ADHD actually is. ADHD stands for attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, which pretty much all of us, including doctors, kind of hate as a name because it doesn't really describe ADHD accurately.

I'm guessing that 100 years from now, we aren't even going to think of ADHD as a disorder. We're going to just think of it as another type of brain, which is actually the point of the neurodiversity movement. Namely, there are natural variations in what our brains and nervous systems look like and function as.

So it's not a disorder just because you aren't like the average brain, the most typical brain. So what ADHD actually is is a physiological disorder. We can actually look at MRIs of people's brains and see differences in certain structures that are associated with ADHD.

I'm not going to go into the science too much but it's not something you can change. Our bodies and brains are just different. It's like standing in your

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yard flapping your arms and then being surprised when you can't fly. And then feeling guilty about it.

That's one of the things that's most common. We really try to function in a way that everyone else does, that society expects us to. But the reality is that ADHD is only considered to be a disorder because we do not fit society's definition of productive, obedient, task-oriented humans. We do not match a model of productivity that allows things to be made on an industrial assembly line.

And if you have ADHD, you internalize a lot of this. You come to believe that because you don't function in the same way as everyone else, that you're less than, that you're unreliable, that you're selfish, that you're forgetful, that you don't know how to commit to things. That's a really common story.

When it just turns out your brain is motivated by different things. It's motivated by things that really challenge and interest it. There's this idea from a psychiatrist who specializes in ADHD, William Dodson, that ADHD is actually just an interest-based nervous system.

So neurotypical peeps who are estimated to be about 90% of the world's population are motivated by three things. One, if something feels important, so if you need to pay your bills so you have to go to the bank, so that feels important. Or if someone else thinks it's important, that's the second thing. That's like, if your boss tells you you need to do something or maybe your partner is like, wash the dishes because we need stuff for tomorrow.

And then the third thing is rewards and punishment, which makes up a lot of the things that we often think of as motivational techniques. Like, if you run a mile, you'll get five dollars, that's a reward. Or punishment being like your boss will scold you if you don't do something.

But ADHD brains, down to the chemical level as far as we can tell are motivated by different things. For us, we see this importance in these

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rewards and punishment and we are like, I recognize that, I mean, I get it, but then your brain kind of shrugs. It's like, okay, so what?

So instead, what we get motivated by are things being challenging or interesting or compelling or meaningful. These are the things that are essentially prerequisites for you actually doing something and wanting to do something when you have ADHD.

So realize that 90% of the world thinks you should be able to do stuff just because it's important or just because you're going to be rewarded for it. And when your brain sort of shrugs at that and needs something else, you internalize the idea that you should be motivated by something else, you should be able to still do stuff just because someone else thinks it's important.

But you can't. It's you flapping your arms and expecting yourself to fly. So if you think about how much of the world is really structured around the idea of doing things because someone tells you it's important or because you'll be rewarded or punished, you realize how much you are told on a daily basis that you should be more productive than you are.

Think about school. You don't have assignments most of the time because you think they're meaningful or challenging or interesting. You get assignments because a teacher tells you this is what you're going to do and you're going to learn some stuff from it.

So it's no surprise that people with ADHD really struggle with the idea that they're lazy or unmotivated or fickle. We really get messages all the time from essentially birth that we should be functioning in a different way than we do. We should want to do things like everyone else.

But what if us having different brains, of having different ways of engaging with the world is actually contributing not just to our personal growth but to the growth of society?

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There's some really interesting research about how diversity in both genetics and behavior actually contributes to the propagation of a species. When things are going fine, it's totally cool to be in [inaudible]. So they did these experiments with what amounts to green and they introduce some variation in the traits and I don't think it's particularly important what they were.

But during normal times where there was enough food and enough resources and enough space, the traits that were the most common, those were the ones that tended to be most useful. But when things got fucked up and there was limited food and catastrophes and whatever they did in their experiment, the 10% that was different, that the outliers, those were the ones that actually thrived and survived and allowed the species to continue to exist.

I just love the idea that my brain might be the things that allows the human race to continue to exist. This actually brings me to my first point about how to have a successful business with ADHD, which is learn to love your ADHD. It isn't a disorder, it's just a different way of being.

I struggled with this for a long time. I really believed that because of the limitations to my executive function, which is really around things like organizing and planning, I would be worse at everything I do, which is just a straight up lie. It is a lie that our brains tell us.

You're actually incredibly good at things that are often really hard for a lot of people. As Simone teaches in the Joyful Marketing curriculum, one of the things that we do as business owners, as entrepreneurs, as marketers is partner with our brain and body and nervous system.

And you can't be in a partnership with something if you don't love it, if you're constantly beating it up, if you're constantly telling it to be different than the way that it is. So it's crucial to learn to love the gifts of your brain, your nervous system, your way of looking at the world.

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And there really are gifts. There are some things that are absolutely going to be harder. But oftentimes, they're boring shit. The rest of the world can do the boring shit. Your brain and body are destined for greatness. They're destined for creative brilliance, rather than doing boring, mundane stuff.

So what can you do to really love your brain? You need to respect it, you need to understand it, and you need to embrace how it works. So for me, one of the big things has been really not expecting myself to do boring, mundane shit.

I have entirely off loaded the things that I find boring, mundane, and of course, it doesn't mean there aren't things that I don't want to do on a daily basis that I still have to do. But there is a difference between things that are boring and mundane and things that are say, emotionally challenging for you.

You still have to do the emotionally challenging things, you still have to lean into that. But you don't have to work on spreadsheets, you don't have to do laundry. I paid someone to do my laundry for a long period of time because it was causing me so much drama to do laundry because I had to get quarters and getting quarters was really hard because when I remembered to do laundry it was the weekend or the evening.

So you know what? After struggling against my brain for a good six months, I just was like, you know what, I'm going to pay someone to do my laundry for me. And don't feel guilty about this. Your body just has different interests. It's motivated by different things.

I pay someone to clean the house, I obviously outsource some of my finances around running my business, and certainly as my business continues to grow, I really am going to focus on the things I'm good at, which are creative thinking and writing and coaching and connecting with people.

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I'm not going to let myself feel guilty over the fact that I'm not the person who has a content calendar all planned out for the next month. That's not who I am and that's okay. And part of really working with your ADHD and building a business that thrives because of who you are is really not pushing yourself to be someone that you're not.

And you're not going to be as good at some of these planning, organizational things that a lot of other people are really good at. Let them be good at it. Be good at the things that you're good at.

So from what we understand, our brains actually have fewer filters. One of the things we don't realize is that just by existing, we're filtering out information. If you are constantly taking in all of the information that you have when your eyes are open, when you can hear things, with your mouth, you get overwhelmed very, very quickly.

This happens when people get sensory overload. From what we can tell, if you have ADHD, you actually have fewer filters. So essentially, more information actually makes it into our brain, which is why we get overwhelmed very easily, why open offices are the 10th circle of hell for some of us.

I had to work in an open office for a long period of time, I was in the tech industry, don't get me started on open offices. But essentially, this means your brain just has this really rich inner landscape and you actually notice more than other people.

This means you're better able to make connections and see patterns and notice things that otherwise people might overlook. You have what one of my partners calls an associative superpower. You can see the patterns and make sense of things that really lead to creative brilliance.

For me, a lot of times this manifests as taking really complex ideas, boiling them down to something simple, and coming up with a wacky metaphor

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about say, animals, because that's who I am. Also, cute animals make me happy.

Another way you can really learn to respect and love your ADHD is follow your curiosity with complete abandon. I truly believe the fact that I bounce around and I'm interested in almost everything is one of the reasons that I have been so successful.

It's because I've seen many different perspectives. I mean, over the course of my career, I started out thinking I was going to get a PhD in nuclear security. Then I realized I didn't want to do that, so I went in as a business consultant and I kind of hated that.

And then I dug into environmental design and the design of ecosystems for sustainable farming, and then I thought about urban planning, and then I thought about landscape architecture and spatial information systems. And then I ended up in the tech industry for about a decade studying people and how to build better experiences for humans and better products for humans.

But even there, I bounced around between companies, I founded my own consultancy, I worked at big companies, I worked at startups, I really just let the whims of myself and the universe direct me in where to go. And I had this really interesting experience about a year ago that actually set me on the path to be a coach, which is I had a friend come over and we had known each other professionally and spent time outside of work together.

But she hadn't like, interacted with me in a more personal way. So she came over to my apartment and I cooked for her and I showed her my bunnies and I was talking to her about birdwatching and photography and art and she just stopped me at some point and was like, "Wow, you realize that being a researcher," which is what I was in tech and how she knew me, "is 1% of who you are. People are going to want to work with you not because of that but because of the 99% of you that you don't talk about,

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that you don't represent. You're so much more interesting than just your job, so why don't you talk about that more?"

So I really took that to heart and that was the thing that directly led me to being a coach. And I've tried to show up and represent the whole part of me as much as possible because that's what people see and want to work with. So in your marketing, your ADHD can create a richness and a complexity and a diversity of identity that really is going to attract people in a way that just good copy isn't. They want to work with you because of who you are and who you are is a lot of really different, interesting, fabulous things.

Respecting your ADHD also means not just accepting this complexity and brilliance of who you are, but also recognizing that your nervous system is going to be more able to be overstimulated than a lot of people. So for me, this means I have to be really thoughtful about the time of day I'm doing work and also how much I'm working each day.

I have really carved out a schedule that works for me. I'm a bit of a schedule anarchist overall. But I approximately work each day between say 8am and 3pm at the max. So essentially, all of my client calls happen between that time and usually if I'm writing content, if I'm marketing, if I'm putting anything together, it's going to be in that time.

I don't work straight eight to three every day. In fact, most days I don't. But that is the time of day I have found I am most productive, most energized, and most able to really tap into that creative zeitgeist that happens when you're letting the ideas flow.

Realize that you aren't probably going to have the same nine to five cadence that the average office worker is. You probably need more breaks, you probably need more rest, you probably need more time to let ideas marinate.

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So be really kind to yourself about the expectations you have around productivity. And productivity is something that as a concept we often use against ourselves. This is true of people who have ADHD and people who don't.

The idea of productivity and work and contributing to society really is something that as far as I can tell for a lot of us really produces a lot of shame and guilt when we feel like we aren't measuring up to some outside magical definition of what productivity is.

Of course, there is no magical judge sitting out there in the universe essentially watching everything you do and measuring how productive you are. That isn't happening. Productivity is a thought.

Because productivity is a thought, you can decide what is productive for you. So for me, productivity includes anything that is helping me take care of myself. It's anything that's helping me lean into the creativity of my brain. It's anything that helps my body feel better. It's anything that allows me to serve my clients and my people, which means it's not always going to be things like writing content.

It's going to be things like resting and sleeping and eating good food and all sorts of things. These are actually part of my definition of productivity. So what is your definition of productivity? Define productivity for yourself so that when you find yourself on the hamster wheel, really pushing yourself, you can step back and be like, oh, I don't have to be productive in the way that everyone else is.

So my second recommendation and learning for having a successful business with ADHD is to question every fucking should your brain ever tells you. Because as I discussed earlier, you have been told your entire life that you should be a certain way, you should be obedient, you should be quiet, you should sit still, you should not speak up.

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But these shoulds are coming from someone else's rulebook. I call it the man book sometimes, that I'm reading from the man book if I find myself trying to push myself to be more masculine in some way shape or form. But make sure that the rules you're applying to yourself are coming from your rulebook, not someone else's.

So any time you hear the word should in your brain, I should be more like this, I should do this, I should speak up more, I should not speak up more, every should in your brain is a big red flashing light that should signal to you that you're probably adopting someone else's rules.

And you need to make up your own rules. Your existence is different. Your life is different than everyone else's, and this is true whether you have ADHD, whether you have a neurotypical brain, whether you have anxiety, everyone should create their own manual for their life.

And that means really sort of throwing a Molotov cocktail on all the ways you function that don't work for you and really building from the ground up again. One of the things I've really done in my life is essentially question everything and build it back up from scratch myself, which I won't lie, can be kind of a pain in the butt sometimes.

It's nice to have someone build the things for you so you don't have to build them yourself, but I mean, one very clear example of this from myself is my love life. After my divorce, which was very amicable and probably as positive as any divorce can be, I really had to step back and look at my romantic expectations and decide what I really wanted.

And after examining every assumption I had about dating and romance and marriage and kids and all these kinds of things, at some point I realized, oh, a lot of the typical structures just don't work for me, or don't feel as good and fun as some of the others.

So I now am ethically non-monogamous, I live with my ex-husband who is now my platonic best friend, life partner person, and I have another partner

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who is more romantic than I date, he's married. And when you question all of the rules in your life, you can do stuff like that.

Because the rules aren't, once again, out being arbitrated by some magical judge. There's no rules. You get to make up your own rules. And this is particularly true if you have ADHD. Experiment, play, see what feels good. See what feels fun.

I've probably tried every planner on the face of the planet, every organizational technique, every app, program, mental technique that exists to organize myself. And at the end of the day, the thing that ended up working best is occasionally writing some lists and being completely agnostic about where things go and not forcing myself to use any particular system.

So the last thing I want to talk about is really leaning into your interests. I've already talked about this a little bit but I'm going to pull it out as its own point because it is so crucial and important.

All because something isn't 100% in your current wheelhouse doesn't mean you can't do it. Really follow the threads of your curiosity and pull and tug on them as often as possible. Never know where those threads are going to go.

An example of this is that I game. I love my old school roleplaying games like the Final Fantasy games and I play Pokémon Go and at some point, I was looking something up and I noticed one of the articles was written by a middle school friend/crush who I hadn't talked to in probably 15 plus years.

So I ended up reaching out to him and we reconnected and there will probably be some professional collaboration around that. And your ADHD brain is going to give you so many of these opportunities. You're creating these opportunities all the time by going out and exploring and learning new things and trying new things and having new hobbies.

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I have taken classes in professional cake decorating and pastry and bouquet making, flower arranging, all sorts of things. And they've all led to wonderful places, some of which are professionally beneficial, but every single one of them has enriched my life. And having a rich life is one of the things that's going to make you a really good coach and a really good marketer.

It's just a lot more fun to do things that are enjoyable and interesting to you. I mean, that's self-explanatory, but don't do things if they aren't fun and if they are fun, go out and do them even if they're weird and wacky and crazy and seem completely unrelated to the rest of your life. I promise, it will all come together in some sort of weird, crazy, beautiful way at some point.

This has happened so many times in my life now where I'm like, oh my God, it's all connected. So really just lean into the fact that you have an interest-based nervous system. Lean into the fact that for you, you have a super laser-focused ability to follow your passions, which is something that people are envious of and should be envious of.

It's a gift to be able to go out and just see the world and be so excited by so many things. Alright, that's all I got for now, Joyful Marketers. This was fabulous and I really enjoyed it and I hope you learned a lot about how to love your unique, weird brain, regardless of whether or not you have ADHD.

And I really just encourage you to be your whole, messy, complicated, weird, diverse, eccentric self. Those are the kind of coaches I know I love to work with, so really let your weird brain flag fly.

And if you want to learn more about what I do, my website and my social media links will be in the show notes. I'm pretty easy to find. There aren't very many Meg Kiersteads on the planet. I work with people one on one really to liberate themselves from a lot of the constructs that we talked about today, all those expectations that we put on ourselves because of the

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bullshit society tells us around our identities, patriarchy, capitalism, ableism, all that kind of fun stuff.

So I work with people to unpack that to make sure that you can create the life and business that really suits your unique brain. I also am going to be launching an intersectional entrepreneurship mastermind this fall, which I am super, super, super excited about.

The idea being very similar, we're going to work on liberating ourselves from a lot of the expectations that society puts on us and use that to create liberating businesses that are going to change the world. So if you're interested, I'd love to hear from you and have a great rest of your day.

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