

# Ep #150: Chronic Illness and Million Dollar Brains with Monet Combs

## Full Episode Transcript



With Your Host

**Simone Grace Seol**

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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 you to Monet Florence Combs, who is the host of The Visibility Podcast, and as a coach, she helps folks who are struggling to share their truth and be themselves become free to be themselves in their businesses.

Monet tells the story of her particular chronic illnesses, one of which wasn't actually diagnosed until recently in her adult life, but nonetheless might have started affecting her since she was a little kid and made school very difficult for her and left her thinking that she was, well, dumb.

Even though as you'll hear quite clearly, she's anything but. What she always perceived as a character flaw all of her life because of the way she didn't quite fit into the way that institutions expected her to behave was actually just a biological difference in the way that her brain and body worked.

And Monet talks about what she learned in order to thrive with the brain that she had in the realm of business. She shares beautiful wisdom about how to manage your energy and grow a strong business when you have chronic illness, and more than one actually, and it'll be of profound service to you I know if you have chronic illness that impacts your capacity differently than other people. And honestly, it'll serve you profoundly even if you don't.

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Inside the Joyful Marketing community, Money is going to be hosting the weekly live coaching call this Wednesday evening. If you want to be coached live by her personally and other coaches who fall under neurodiversity spectrum and get access to all the tools that she and other coaches created to help you build your business with chronic illness or ADHD or depression, the time to enroll in Joyful Marketing is now.

What a good time. But first, here is Monet's takeover of the podcast today.

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Monet: Hello, hello, hello. This is Monet Florence Combs, and I'm so excited to be here talking to you all about neurodiversity and building a coaching business with a neurodiverse brain.

So my specific form of neurodiversity, I would say that it is a little bit different than what you would conventionally lump under the term neurodiverse. Neurodiverse usually refers to how the neurons communicate to each other within the brain and we usually think of things like ADHD or autism.

We think of the typical neurodiverse spectrum or sensory processing disorders. Those all kind of fall under the umbrella of neurodiversity. So here I am, I'm kind of a - I guess my own little umbrella, but it certainly affects my brain.

So I am talking about it from the standpoint of chronic illness and cognition. So let me tell you what I mean by that. I have a cluster of chronic illnesses, my two main ones being POTS, if you've heard of that, stands for postural orthostatic tachycardia syndrome.

And that one, basically what happens is postural, whenever I stand, all blood in my body kind of leaves my brain and it goes to my feet, my extremities, and my heart has little tizzy fit, starts beating like crazy, and

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you can imagine if you have lack of blood flow to your brain, if you're standing, it might be hard to process information.

So there's that. But what I'm going to focus mainly on is actually my other chronic illness, which is - gosh, I'm going to botch this. Idiopathic intracranial hypertension. There we go. I got it. Also known as high intracranial pressure.

So this one has impacted my brain in a very big way my whole life. I was only recently diagnosed with it this year but there is - my medical team thinks that I have probably had it since I was a baby. And I had my first symptoms of it in toddlerhood.

So this is very interesting right now in my life. I'm actually currently in the process of reframing my whole life based on what I had always perceived as a character flaw is actually something that's a biological difference.

So if you look at my brain on an MRI, what you will see is - if you look at it where you kind of slice it in half, what you'll see is in my skull, I've got a pocket of cerebral spinal fluid. I got a big pocket of that up near the top of my skull.

And you can also see it over in my pituitary gland. You can see it looks like it's kind of flattened. So you see spots of it in my brain. And what that does, it's the effect of the pressure, it causes my - you'll see at the bottom of my brain, where my brain stem is located, on the outlet of my skull, it's very crowded over there.

So my cerebellum, my brain stem, it's all kind of smushed in there with a corking effect. So I've got this pressure situation going on and my cerebral spinal fluid doesn't drain very well. So it's kind of this vicious cycle and what it does is it causes a lack of blood flow to my brain all the time.

Now I'm being medicated for it, though I have fluctuations within how the medicine works day to day. But my whole life I've had this, so it affects the

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short term, if I'm doing something like writing an email or sitting down to do something, doing a task, it affects how effectively my brain is able to process the information and complete the task.

But it also has a long-term compounding effect. If you look at my brain at a different angle in the MRI, what you'll actually see is you'll see the long-term effect, which is you will see there's some cloudiness, some grey, some white cloudiness on the tissue, and you can see that there's actually tissue death on my brain over three decades of just where I didn't get enough blood flow, enough oxygen so it just straight up died.

So it's this compounding effect where over time, it's effecting my brain in that way as well. So the way that this affected me growing up was significant. School was always very, very difficult for me. I never quite fit in to the norms within the institution of a typical school.

I always had a hard time finishing things, finishing projects on time. Things took me so much longer than other kids. There was that aspect, and then also it was very difficult for me to do anything that had a sequence.

So say a math problem that has multiple steps. Because my brain wasn't able to effectively lead itself through the sequence without skipping something. So I notoriously struggled in every single math class I was in from grade school to college.

Got lots of - I flunked a lot of classes because I would think I know the material, I would conceptually understand it, but when it came time to actually do the problem, my brain couldn't follow the train of thought, the steps from beginning to end without making an error.

So that was very difficult. The other aspect was reading. If we think about it, reading is a sequence too. Reading was extraordinarily difficult for me. I conceptually knew how to read but it took me so long to do it.

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I remember when we transitioned from little kid books to chapter books, I just fell off. I fell off the - I don't even know what the expression is, the bandwagon? I don't know. I dropped off as far as what other kids were able to do and what I was able to do.

So I got really good at faking assignments. I learned how to read the first sentence of something and the last sentence of the paragraph or the chapter, and just kind of make shit up and fill in the blanks and get an A or a B without giving too much detail.

I got really good at being creative. Strengthen my creativity muscle because I literally could not do it unless I wanted to spend a whole month reading a chapter book and I could not keep up with the pace.

And I can count on one hand the number of chapter books I've read from grade school through college. Because I could only get through them if I really enjoyed them and still it took me a long time at least for school.

I was really big into - side note, tangent, here we go. I was really big into Harry Potter. That's kind of what saved my life when it came to reading in high school. And so I learned to enjoy reading finally and as an adult I love reading now.

But everything about school, I just hated it. I hated it. I never felt like I fit in. And I got to a point in middle school where I was up - every night, I was up until 3am every single night just trying to get my homework done. I was taking honors classes for English.

I think I was in remedial algebra but I was taking honors classes for English and I could not keep up with the workload. And every night I was up until 3am every single night. And it got so hard that I remember at one point just thinking like, if this is what my life is like at 13, how am I going to get through high school? How am I going to go to college?

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That was the expectation at the time. And I remember I would have these suicidal ideations because I could not imagine possibly getting through the next few years of school. And there didn't seem to be any other option for me and that was probably my darkest moment in my life when it comes to school. I just felt hopeless.

But then fortunately, in high school - high school was better because I was able to find classes that I really loved, like theatre, music, and arts. Anything where I was creative, I really excelled in that.

And then I started hanging out with one of my very best friends who has ADHD. And we started hanging out in homeroom every day and she would just not do her work. If she couldn't get to something because it was hard for her to get her work done too, instead of staying up until 3am, she just wouldn't do it.

And I was like, huh, like, I'd never considered that that was an option. And that kind of blew my mind and I was like, okay, well, that'll work. And so I stopped trying to overwork myself and it was the first time I felt agency in my life I think, where I felt like, you know what, I don't know why I'm taking this AP history class but if I don't pass it because I can't get the assignments done, I can choose to do that and choose to accept the consequences and still excel in the classes that I loved.

So that changed how I approached academics. And by some miracle, I got into college. I actually was going to become an opera singer; I have a strong background in voice and had been studying classical voice for many years.

And so I was able to do that and I went to college and it was just as difficult as high school and middle school, except I kind of developed a binge-drinking habit to escape from all of the pressure of having to perform well on my music theory classes, which are a lot like math if you've ever taken that.



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And I failed a lot of classes and I retook a lot of classes. And so a four-year degree took me five and a half years but after college, the typical trajectory for an opera singer, if you're going to make it your career, is to go to grad school.

And in that moment, I thought a lot about it but I chose to love myself and what that meant for me was to not pursue my master's because once I was out, I was never going back to school, ever. I decided I never was going to put myself through that again. It wasn't worth it for my mental health.

And so I just kind of was like, well, I'm going to do some theatre locally and figure out what I want to do. And what ended up happening was I was hired by a tech startup company that was looking to hire salespeople fresh out of college. And I had some sales experience and so I went for it.

And this is what really kind of changed my life was working in business. This is what would inform my coaching practice a decade later. I was really good at sales. I didn't have to read; I didn't have to solve any math problems. All I had to do is talk to people.

And I was really good at it. And it was kind of fun. And I enjoyed it. And I got to talk to people from all over the country and I became the top salesperson at the company, which was cool. It was like, hey, I'm good at this, I'm kind of good at this.

So then I started to work my way up into different roles and they started handing over some creative projects to me. And I did really well with them and I got to the point where I started being involved in business development and the VPs and the CEO and all these people who were above me were calling me into their office to pick my brain and to bring me in on projects and to help them make decisions about the future of the company and the direction that they were going in.

And that's when it hit me. I had been going through my life thinking that I was stupid. I had thought I was dumb because the institution of school,



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academics, it was not made for my brain. My brain doesn't do math. My brain doesn't read textbooks. But my brain makes high-level decisions and thinks creatively and is able to zoom out and look at everything from at a macro level to make million-dollar decisions, and I have a million-dollar brain.

And that was the moment where I was like, fuck, I'm really good at business. I love business and I'm really fucking smart. And I had been spending my whole life thinking I was dumb, and it wasn't my fault.

It was that I was not - my brain was not valued within this box of institutionalized learning. So that was a huge moment for me. And I realized that number one, I love business. It's really fun for me. The high-level stuff. I love that. I love anything I can do to learn how to think at a high level and to help people and to solve problems. I love that and I'm good at it.

And number two, I wanted to own my own business. And I wasn't sure what that was going to be yet, but I knew that that was the path I wanted to take. So after that I went to work for a biotech company and I ran their marketing and it was a smaller company so I got to learn more intimately the ins and outs of running a business.

And after I left there, I had a couple kids and I became a birth doula. That was my first real kind of venture on my own as a solo business owner. I became a birth doula and I did that for four years now. I still do a birth here and there.

And that was another opportunity where I realized that I'm really good at this. It's like working one on one with people to help them to feel confident and to decolonize everything that they think they know about birth and about the institution of childbirth and hospitals and all of that so they can forge their own path and do what feels right for them based on evidence and intuition and all of those good things.

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And helping them during the birth as well, problem solving. Sometimes it was how do we get this baby out? And I loved it. Then after I learned about thought work and coaching, I started incorporating that into my doula practice and seeing crazy results where my clients were able to use the tools that I taught them to help them have births that they felt really good about.

And so then I just kind of naturally transitioned into being a life coach and got certified. And it's been a really wonderful place for me to use all of my strengths that my brain is equipped with to help people, and to be able to have a business that works with my brain instead of against it.

So let me give you some actionable things that you can use in your own business that I use within mine. And these will be helpful for you whether you fall under the umbrella of neurodiversity or not.

So sometimes I deal with a flare of my high pressure. When this happens, sometimes it's because of the weather, sometimes it's just due to the nature of the medication I take, it wears off and then I have to adjust the dosage.

And when my pressure goes up, what it feels like is, it's like somebody took a bicycle pump and stuck it into my ear and gave it a couple pumps. And so I experience all these wacky symptoms. It feels like I can just feel the amount of pressure in my head increase. It feels like my head is a balloon that's going to pop.

And it affects my vision. Sometimes I get hallucinations, which is very weird. I get really wild tinnitus, so I'll hear all sorts of stuff in my ears. I hear my heartbeat really loud, I hear all of a sudden the - it'll be a really loud, and then all the sound will just go away. And I'm just like, what is going on?

And then I also get really bad sensitivity to sound. And I have a three and a five-year-old, so that makes things a little difficult because it's just chaos all the time at home. So I have to kind of isolate myself sometimes and I get

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nausea and food aversions. It feels like first trimester pregnancy where you just feel sick and terrible.

So that's what happens when I get a high pressure flare. It's not fun. I get about sometimes it's like one a month. And when that happens, it really affects my work because I can't sit there and stare at a screen for hours.

So I have my kind of emergency backup plan of what am I going to do, how am I going to handle this. So if I'm feeling well enough, I coach my clients because that's something that I can handle. I can handle one on one conversations are great.

One on many, nope. I'm just going to zone out. But one on one I can do. And I think of it this way; here's what I do. I have two modes in my business. I have a receiving mode and I have action mode. In receiving mode, I am clearing space for my brain to allow any sort of new ideas, new creativity, new information, downloads to come in about where I want to go.

That's like how I came up with my offer. It's like, I get these really cool downloads when I'm in receiving mode. You can't be in receiving mode if you're in action mode. So I use this time to just step back and go okay, I'm going to take - I'm not going to work besides coaching my clients. I'm just going to rest and I'm going to allow, make space in my brain to allow for any new ideas to come through.

And receiving mode is valuable. And it is because we make money with our brains. And when we allow the valuable thoughts to come in, the ideas that will help our clients, help reach more people, and help serve them better, then that's all you need sometimes. That's more valuable than sitting down and forcing yourself to write 10 Instagram posts or whatever that don't feel aligned with how you're feeling at the moment just because you have to. It's a different energy.

So that's my receiving mode. I let that happen. And when I get - if I get a download or a hit or whatever it is of a new idea, I allow myself to work on it

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but when I reach my wall and it all comes through me, I stop. And I don't judge myself for it.

And that's enough. I think of it like my brain is a lemon. Or maybe this idea is a lemon. It's a little lemon. And I've just been handed this lemon. And I squeeze all the juice out. Sometimes all the juice comes out really fast. I get everything I need from it.

And then there I have this little beautiful little lemon juice and I've squeezed everything I can of the lemon, and then I just thank it and I'm done. As opposed to I get this lemon in front of me and then I squeeze it and then I keep going and I'm like, there must be more in here, there must be more in here. I'm forcing myself to keep working, keep working, keep going, keep going.

But there was never meant to be any more juice. That's just - it's perfect just as it is. And it's okay to step away and allow yourself to continue to rest.

Another idea that I like to use is when I'm in receiving mode, feel like crap, I will get - I think of it as I get little seeds. Because sometimes I'm not well enough to take action on something. But if I have an idea, something comes to me or an idea for something to talk about, then it's like I have a little seed and I just hold on to the seed and I just kind of collect seeds.

So that when I'm physically able to, I can plant them and water them and nurture them and I can give them what they need to grow into a beautiful garden and bear fruit, as opposed to getting the seed, putting it in the ground, and not having the stamina to be able to water it and nurture it and give it everything it needs right now.

I used to be a huge vegetable gardening nerd. I'm really into heirloom gardening, but this is the first year that I am not doing it, a vegetable garden, in a few years because of my POTS has just been really bad this year so I'm not doing it.

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But I have this little air-locked container, waterproof, airtight container of heirloom seeds that I've been collecting over the years. And most of them are still viable. I've got heirloom tomatoes like chocolate pear cherry tomato and Napa chardonnay cherry tomato and I've got these heirloom flowers.

I love cosmos flowers and I have some that are called dancing petticoats, this old variety, and they're really beautiful and frilly and all shades of pink. I've got this beautiful little collection of all these seeds and I know that they're safe in there and that when I'm physically able to, I will have this amazing garden again.

And it's okay that I'm not trying to force it right now because what will happen is you get a few small half-dead plants that have a couple tomatoes on them and then it's like, that didn't turn out well because you didn't have the stamina or the time or the energy to put the compost on it and keep it nice and evenly watered and all that stuff and keep the tomato hornworms off and the slugs.

So it's knowing that even if you don't feel well, whether you're feeling anxious or you're feeling depressed, or you're having a hard time focusing, knowing that your whole business and all of your ideas, and everything, it's all coming from your brain and all of that is safe for when it's time to come back to it and get to work. And once you do and you have the capacity to do it, you will have this beautiful lush fruitful garden.

So if you are like me and you have a history of struggling academically or with work, with these conventional institutions, your work is to go back to that child or that younger version of you, or maybe you're currently struggling with this, go to that version of yourself and love them.

Give them what they need. Give them what they needed then, give them that now. Give them that radical self-compassion that you didn't get from your parents or your teachers or your peers or yourself. Spend some time

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with that younger version of you and let them know that they are worthy and perfect and whole exactly as they are.

And that it was never their fault. It was never your fault that you did not fit in or succeed the way that you were “supposed” to. Having a brain that works differently from others is a gift. And it’s hard to see that in the moment.

I go back to 13-year-old Monet who dreamed of ending her life because she was suffering so much. And at the moment, she sure as hell wasn’t thinking her brain was a gift, but now I see it. And I wouldn’t trade my brain for anybody else’s because even though I am always doing - I struggle. I struggle.

Day to day with life, I’m always leaving the keys in the ignition and locking myself out of the house and putting the mug in the microwave with the teabag without any water in it and setting it on fire. I do shit like that like every day.

My brain doesn’t always work how it would be nice for it to. But I wouldn’t trade it because my brain is a gift. I’m a genius in my own way. I’m able to help people with my brain and see people and really understand them and have compassion for people and walk them through difficult journeys and hold space for them and see things from a higher level that they can’t see because they’re in it.

And I wouldn’t trade that for anything. So I hope that you can give that same compassion to yourself. The world needs more people who are visible, who can be that light to somebody who is currently struggling, and be sharing our stories, and bringing them to the surface and integrating them into who we are and our businesses.

That’s the work that I feel really called to do here. Because when we thrive openly with all of our struggle and all of our history, that is the revolution. That is what the world needs. Thank you for listening to my today.

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If you take anything away from today's podcast, I want you to know that you are not going to succeed despite the brain you are given. You are going to succeed because of it.

Hey, if you want a shot of fresh inspiration and actionable tips to improve your marketing every single week in your inbox, you'd better get on my email list. Sign up to receive my free e-book called *20 Unsolicited Copy Tips*. It's been known to get people to come out of the woodwork and ask to work with you. So get on that. Link in the show notes, and I'll see you in your inbox next time.