

# Ep #234: How I Approach Collaborations

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**Simone Grace Seol**

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## Ep #234: How I Approach Collaborations

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.

Hey friends, today I want to talk about collaborations. I've gotten quite a few questions in recent months about how I think about collaborations and how I approach them. I think I have some ideas to share that will be useful for you.

I see a lot of people making decisions on collaborations, and I'm not going to lie, I see some red flags. I'm like, "Ooh, don't do that." Not so much like, doing that is bad. But you're going to see some of that backfire, when you choose for this kind of reason over that kind of reason. And so basically, I want to share with you what I observe, what I think, and how I personally make decisions around collaborations.

I want to be careful to say, I'm not saying that my way is the only right way. I'm not saying that everyone who does anything different is doing it wrong or doing it bad. I'm not saying that my way is the best way. However, this is my podcast, and I'm going to talk about what works for me.

So, if you don't agree 100% with my approach, that is 100% cool. And just listen for any nuggets that do make sense to you, and resonate with you. Because like I always say, you are the number one authority on your business. You are literally the boss. You get to decide. And just because I said something, and you like me, it doesn't mean you have to change your mind.

Think critically. Be your own person. Make your own decisions. If you're ever conflicted about something, go put your ideas to the test and gather data. Never have someone else replace your ultimate authority to make decisions for your own business. So, I make that caveat, because it's very important to me to remind people to not substitute their judgments with my own.

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With that said, let me tell you my thoughts on collaborations. I kind of have four bullet points I jotted down before I started to record. Four larger categories of thoughts that I have.

Here's number one, I think that I see a lot of people do collabs that are self-interested. Meaning, "Ooh, if I collaborate with this person, I'll get access to their audience. If I collab with that this person, I'll be able to get this." You also get a lot of pitches for collaborations that are basically like, "If you collaborate with me, you will get this."

I mean, some of it is normal, obviously, right? None of us is completely selfless. That doesn't even make sense when it comes to business or you. You want to look out for yourself, obviously. But that is not really how I approach collabs.

I don't do self-interested collabs. By which I mean, I don't approach them thinking, "Ooh, what am I going to get out of it? I bet I'm going to get this and this and this. I bet I can take advantage of this person's this and that." I struggled to think of what to call the alternative. Because I thought selfless collabs. And I'm like, that's not really about being selfless. It's not about being a Mother Teresa.

I really think of it more as service-centered collaborations. Where you are asking yourself, where can I give? Where can I be the most useful? Where can I lend what I have, to support someone else?

Most recently, if you've been following me for the past, I don't know half a year, you can see that I have done two major pieces of collaborations. I have done one, in the fall of last year, with David Bedrick of the course on shame. And I have been doing my current collaboration with Melissa Tiers on *The Best Fucking Coaching Course*.

With both of them, when the idea of the collaboration was floated for the first time, it wasn't like, "Ooh, I bet it would benefit me if I work with them to

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do this.” It was always like, “Oh my gosh,” for both of them, right? I was like, “David's work is so fucking amazing. The world needs to know about it. And if I can lend my talents and my platform in any way, so that this work can find more people and benefit the world. It would be an honor.” Right? That is honestly what I thought about collabing with David.

And that is exactly what I think about collaborating with Melissa as well, right now on the coaching course. From the first moment it was brought up I was like, “It would be an honor. Because what you do is so fucking amazing. And, the world needs to know it. If I can help towards that, absolutely.”

It was very much wanting to support something really worthy. Wanting to promote something that is a worthy of promotion. And it was sort of about wanting to prop up something that I deeply believed in, as opposed to an energy of ‘what do I get out of this?’ I hope that makes sense.

I don't really know what to call it. I was like, do I call it service-centered mindedness? I don't know. I don't love the word selfless because it's not really about that. Obviously, I do it because I get some kind of benefit from it.

However, to me, what has always driven me towards collaborations is, when I find something, when I find someone, where I believe in their work so fucking much, that I would just be happy. I'd be so happy to serve the mission. Right? Maybe they can call it mission-based collabs. I don't know.

I don't know why I'm so obsessed with naming things. I'm like, “Everything has to have a name.” But not everything has to have a name. And, I think you know what I'm talking about. Where I'm not asking myself, what can I get from this? How does this benefit me?

But rather, this is so worthy, and I want to serve this mission. I want to serve this person's work. I want to help this person, it would be a pleasure

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for me. And, an honor for me to be part of this work flowering in the world. That, I think, has brought so much joy to me from doing these collaborations. And, so much of business collaborations are way more fun when you're in giving energy. When you're in serving energy, as opposed to I want to get-get-get energy.

So, that's the first thing; don't do self-interested collabs. Don't do collabs from a 'I want to get-get-get energy.' Do it from an energy of wanting to serve something that is really meaningful to you, that you super-duper believe in, that is bigger than you. That's number one.

Number two, I see this a lot amongst new practitioners, newbies, in business and marketing. Where I see a lot of people going for collaborations with their peers, because they aren't confident carrying something on their own.

I remember I was coaching this person on designing their brand-new program that they wanted to create with another creator. And I was asking, "Why are you collaborating with this person?" I mean, I was just curious, right? Like, "Oh, who is this other person? Why are you doing this together?"

And at first, that person was like, "It's because we are very aligned and..." The way that she was talking about it, I was like, "Hmm, there's something that's not matching up here." I just intuitively asked the question, "Would you not trust yourself to do this on your own? Because I'm hearing you talk about it, and you are the real expert on this. And so, what are you gaining from this collaboration? I don't understand." Like, I literally didn't understand.

She kind of had a laughing/also breaking down at the same time moment. She was like, "Oh, my God, you're right. I'm believing that I'm not enough. It's not attractive enough if it's just me. I'm not powerful enough. I'm not

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whatever enough to carry it on my own. Even though I know I am the real expert.”

That always stayed with me, her face, when she realized, “What I thought was this great collaboration was actually just me not being able to believe in myself.” And listen, I have so been there. I can't even tell you the number of collaborations I did much earlier in my career. I don't want to say they're bad, at all. I learned a lot from many of them. I had fun with a lot of them. And, a lot of them are good.

One thing I always say, is that when you're in the earlier stages of business, meaning when you are before the stage where you are consistently bringing in the income that you want through your business. I think earlier than that, I say that you're in the growth stage. Mess around, try stuff, and so what if it fails? So what if it doesn't, you know, whatever? Just be willing to try stuff.

I'm very much against like being too precious about doing the right thing at that point, because you just want to experiment as much as possible, to get a sense of who you are and how you like to work and how you best deliver your gifts.

So, I'm not saying don't do collaborations. However, just notice if you're doing collaborations because you don't trust yourself to carry it on your own. Right? It's like there's a party, “Ooh, I feel kind of shy going by myself. So, I'm going to ask my best friend to come with me. There's a new club, and I feel weird going alone, I'm going to tag along with these people.” That's totally fine in normal life.

But think about it; you are a change worker, you are a leader. If you want to sell a service of this kind, you are offering yourself to lead people and to help them. You're saying, “Hey, I have your back. I have the expertise. Trust me.” You have that going on. And on the side, what you also have going on is, “But I don't really trust myself. So, I'm going to use this other

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collaboration partner as a crutch. Because I'm not sure I got this on my own.”

Do you see the dissonance there? That is not 100% congruent energy, and therefore it's going to be problems. And the thing is, if you want to thrive as an entrepreneur... If you want to be consistently generating income... If you want to really expand into your full potential to make an impact, make money, all the things...

You really want to, ultimately, develop the muscles of going by yourself; of trusting yourself, having your own back. Letting some things fail sometimes. And allow yourself to experience disappointment and challenges, and learn how to be resilient and creative and resourceful through all of that. Ultimately, that is what's going to carry you. Right?

I also was just rereading Rachel Rogers book *We should All Be Millionaires*, the fabulous Rachel Rogers. For some reason I think I skipped this chapter earlier. But one of the chapters she talks about something really big and, kind of the way I see it, traumatic happened. I don't know if she sees it as traumatic; I don't know if she'd use that word. But I was like, damn, this is...

So, it was exactly this story, that earlier on in her career, when she was still an attorney, and she was kind of starting to sell courses at the same time, someone suggested that they do a collaboration and split the profit 50/50. Rachel, in the book, talks about how one of her friends said, “Hey, the proposal is that you split 50/50. But in reality, it's all your intellectual property. It's mostly your work. So, why are you splitting 50/50? You should just do it on your own.”

And Rachel, in the book, talks about how she heard that friend's advice, and it was still like, “Oh, well, I don't know. I don't have her audience. It'll help me...” And so, Rachel talked herself into thinking that she needs the

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other partner in order to be able to get the business. Even though the work was 100% hers; the intellectual property was 100% hers.

Then, it turned into a thing where it ended up not being fair to her. It turned into a giant lawsuit that dragged out multiple years. And they had to work out.... So, Rachel, in the book, tells us a warning story. I just remembered it, because I was literally just rereading this chapter, just like three days ago.

It's a perfect example of what it could cost you. Right? Rachael actually specifically talks about, "That it cost me so much money, only because I didn't believe in myself enough to think that I could own my intellectual property. That I could be the one to sell it."

The minute that she launched on her own, it was just as successful as it had been with the other person. So, I don't know all the details. I mean, I don't want to misremember somebody else's details. But you know what I mean? That, it just really nailed the point home for me.

You have no idea how much you might be giving up. You have no idea how much you might be underserving, underselling, yourself by thinking, "Ooh, I could benefit from this collaboration. I need this person to... I need this person's audience. I need this person's reach. I need this person's expertise."

Without devaluing the other person, what if we revalue you? What if you, on your own, for your own ideal clients, is better than you with any other collaborator? Right? Obviously, this is not me being anti-collaboration, but it is me being anti-collaboration that is undertaken in the spirit of 'I'm not enough on my own.' Okay, so that's a big one. That's the second point about collaborations.

And third, I think this is pretty obvious, but I just have to say it because I've seen it. Please don't ever do a collaboration as a favor to someone. Or,



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because you want to be nice to them. Or, because they asked really, really nicely and you just wanted to help them out. I have just talked to way too many people that said yes to things, because they wanted to be nice. And it just didn't end well. Just don't do it. Okay?

The other person, whoever it is, they don't need you to be their savior. If you ever feel yourself in that, being in that emotional state of like, 'oh, I want to do them a favor,' unless you don't mind if it turns out very unlike you think, just don't do it.

Okay, I do have to add this as a caveat. There's a big difference between where you are 100% just like... If you can hear my baby crying, I'm sorry. "I'm doing this as a favor. And 100% of me is feeling joyful about it. It brings joy, unadulterated joy, in my heart to be able to help someone out," do it.

But what I'm really talking about, is the kind of thing where you want to do them a favor, but that feeling is slightly mixed in with a little bit of savior, resent, a little bit of pity. Like, oh, they need this from you.

And on the one hand, it feels good to help. And on the other hand, you feel a little bit like, 'oh, they need my help.' Like, that kind of thing. That's what I'm talking about. Don't do that. If you want to help someone out, and no matter what happens, you would just 100% be so happy to help them out, do that.

That's different from what I'm seeing. What I'm talking about, is when that is mixed in with something else. Where you'd be resentful if they weren't, whatever... If there's any potential for resentment, don't do it.

Last one, the fourth point, I want to tell you how I feel about how I make decisions with all the invitations for collaborations that I get. How do I decide? What do I say yes to? What do I say no to? Here's my criteria for filtering collaboration requests. When I say collaboration requests, I'm

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covering everything from, “Hey, let's do a course together,” to “Let's do a podcast collaboration. Let's do a masterclass. Let's do whatever.”

It's like anything. There's a lot of stuff on the spectrum. And let me tell you, I figured this out the hard way. And once again, I'm not saying this is the only right way. I'm not saying you should do what I do. I'm just saying this is what I landed on that is right for me, and has been for a good while.

My criteria for filtering collaboration requests are, if it's not something where I'd be delighted to do it for free and for no personal benefit to me, I don't do it at all. I say no. Let me give you an example. I get a lot of invitations to teach in other people's containers. And, I am really grateful and honored to receive them. I have to decline a lot of them because there's just only so much room in my calendar.

However, one time, I guest-instructed, guest-coached, taught, at a container by my Norwegian colleague, Ida Jackson. It was like a Q&A kind of thing, right? It was a lot of her people had known of me, and they were all in the region. So, part of it was they were talking in Norwegian. I'm like, “What is happening?” But a lot of it was in English.

I don't know if you're listening, Ida, but I love you and I love your community. What I'm trying to say, is that when I was finished teaching that class and being with her people, I was so fucking filled up in my soul. I was like, “Aah, that was so delicious.” I loved that so much, I feel like I got paid.

I was paid in actual money, but I feel like, more than that, I feel like I got paid in soul nourishment. It felt so good. It felt so good. I feel like I got paid so richly in soul nourishment that I didn't even need the money, right? I mean, I still received the money. But to me, I felt like even if I did this for free, I would be grateful to them because of how wonderful it feels to be with those people and have those conversations. So, credit to you Ida for creating such an amazing space.

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And so, after that, when Ida asked me to come back and do it again, I was like, no-brainer. It was not doing it for the money. Not doing it to, whatever. But I would do this for free, and you're going to pay me? the payment is just cherry on top of the cake.

Another relationship where I have this, is with my colleague, Sunny Smith's program, *Empowering Women Physicians*. I have gone in and given a couple of talks in there. Same thing. I don't know, these people are like soul sisters to me. And every time I go talk to their people, I'm like, "I don't even care if I get paid or not. This is just so... It's good for me to be here."

And for a while, I was actively noodling on how I create more of a business where I feel at home. And where I feel so comfortable and I feel a sense of belonging, and it's easy and pleasurable and joyful.

And one of the criteria for me, was doing things like speaking at Ida's or Sunny's groups. Where it wasn't about, "I get paid, and I get good exposure." If those things happen, that's great. But really, I would do this for free. Because, wow, it gives me so much in my soul, to be able to have those experiences.

If it doesn't feel like, "Fuck, I'd be delighted to do that for free. It would be an honor for me to be there." A lot of the times, I'm obviously not against being paid, I love being paid, actually. But my favorite, is when the payment just feels like a nice bonus, and it's not the main thing. If I wouldn't be delighted to do it for free, I don't do it at all.

In tying it into the first point I made, with my sort of bigger, more significant, longer-term collaborations that I did with David Bedrick and Melissa Tiers, I was honestly doing it from a mental place of, "I would work for Melissa, I would work for David, for free."

And in the spirit of, "I have so much respect for them. I have so much admiration for them. I think the world of their work. And I thank my heavenly

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stars that I ever met them. That I ever got to benefit from their work. That I ever got to be friends with them. And, oh my gosh, if all I get paid in is good karma and feeling good in my soul, I would be so happy to lend whatever I have, to help their work reach more people.” Right?

So again, it's all versions of, “I'm saying, yes, to this collaboration with David. I'm saying, yes, to this collaboration with Melissa. Because I'd fucking do it for free.” And the fact that I make a bunch of money from it even better, but it feels like the cherry on top of the cake. To me, that is always my favorite way to make money, cherry on top of the cake.

By the way, this is another reason that I've always, consistently said no to people who make collaboration requests. Their leading sort of point, like what they lead with is, “We have 500 million people listening to this podcast, and we have the 10 million people on the email list. And if you participate in this summit, then your name will be blasted to...”

When that's the primary selling point, it's almost always a reflexive no for me. Because, I am sorry, I don't really care to get in front of 10 million people on your email list. Like, I don't know who those people are. I don't know if they're aligned with me. Listen, I'm not saying that I'm above wanting lots of people to hear my message; definitely, not at all.

But to me that, in and of itself, is not a soul stirring reason at all. And the thing is, if I let myself make decisions based on, consistently, based on where I can get the most exposure, where I can get the greatest amount of eyeballs, I have found that what quickly happens, is that my schedule, my calendar, turns into something that I don't really want to be in.

I'm like, whose calendar is this? I don't like this calendar. Right? It just doesn't feel good to me to be in a kind of audience hustling mode. That never felt good to me. And guess what? That has never been necessary. That has never been necessary. Just to go after all the biggest numbers as

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possible. You really can create the business you want, while prioritizing quality over quantity of people.

Now, having said all that, I want to say there was a time, and a part of me, I'm going to be honest with y'all. A part of me being able to do this, is that now I'm at a point where I have more people interested in my work that I can say yes to. I have more invitations and requests that I get, that I can say yes to. I'm in a place to be able to filter. And, that's a privilege. Not everyone's in this position, and I feel very fortunate.

For a long time, saying yes to everything was my strategy. Saying yes to whatever opportunity, seeking out whatever opportunity, that is what you should do. I'm always very careful with the word "should", but you know what I mean? That's a nice thing to do when you're building your business. When nobody knows who you are, and you just want to be able to spread the word wherever you can.

And like I said, the most important thing you can do when you're in that growth phase, is to just have as many different experiences as possible. So, you can get a sharper kind of self-awareness for who you are as a practitioner, and as an entrepreneur.

So, do I think that being a lot more liberal about taking on collaborations when you're starting out, when you're building your practice, is a good, smart thing? Fucking absolutely. That's what I would recommend for everyone. Right?

Well, not everyone, most people. I'm so careful, you guys can tell I'm paranoid to give advice, because one size of advice definitely does not fit all. Even if you are starting out, you're going to want to exercise some discernment and say, "There's all these opportunities available to me. But I have certain criteria for value alignment."

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Because you might not be making millions of dollars, but that also doesn't mean you have infinite energy and time to give to whoever asks, right? So, you can, and totally should, have your own filtering criteria. But being more kind of fearless, and going in with a spirit of experimentation, and spirit of service. Like, "Wherever I show up, wherever I am invited to collaborate, I'm going to bring the best in me. I'm going to serve." That's great, too.

I think if I were to sum it all up, it's to come from a spirit of generosity, and to do things that really, do collaborations, that really make your heart sing, that really nourish your soul. And also, to make a point of really trusting yourself to be enough. Trusting that you are enough of a star on your own, to be able to carry anything you want. And if that requires some trial and error, it's worth it. Your business is worth it. Your gifts are worth it. I hope that helps.

And, I'll talk to you next week.

Hey, if you want a shot of fresh inspiration and actionable tips to improve your marketing every single week in your inbox, you 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.