



The Deliberate Creative Podcast with Amy Climer Transcript for Episode #011: Creativity and Risk Taking

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Amy Climer: Hey everyone. Welcome to the Deliberate Creative Podcast [episode #011](#). On today's episode, we're going to talk about stepping out of your comfort zone in order to be more creative. This is all about taking risks in order to be more creative. There's a strong connection between creativity and risk taking. In fact one of the hardest things about creativity is that it requires taking risks. Risk means there's an unknown outcome and that outcome can be a bit scary.

Let's define risk. Risk is the exposure to the possibility of some loss including a physical or emotional trauma. We tend to want to avoid physical and emotional traumas, but on the flipside, the idea of taking a risk can lead to significant gains – whether those are physical gains, emotional, financial, spiritual, etc.

Because creativity is about doing something where you don't know the outcome, that means it's about taking a risk. It also means that being creative can have significant gains and there can be significant losses as well. In essence, you cannot be creative while remaining completely safe. I think that's where some of us tend to get stumped a bit because that is a little bit scary.

There are two types of risks that I'm going to talk about today relevant to creativity. There are inherent risks and perceived risks. Inherent risks are risks that are an integral part of the activity. If they were removed, the nature of the activity and the expectation of it would be significantly modified. For example, rock climbing. If you removed all risks related to rock climbing, it wouldn't really be rock climbing anymore. On the other hand, if you are someone who is going to be rock climbing, you want to be thoughtful about managing those risks. When we're talking about inherent risk, it doesn't mean that you're careless or not paying attention and you're goofing off. It means that you're managing those risks and you're being thoughtful about them yet knowing that at the same time they still exist.

If you're a rock climber, you're conscious about your gear and taking care of your gear, about setting up the climbs and the routes in a thoughtful responsible way - in a way that's going to keep you safe, in a way that if you fall, you're not going to actually hit the ground, and potentially that could lead to death or very serious injury. Those are the risks that you are trying



to mitigate and manage, but if they are not present, you don't really have rock climbing. I don't know what you would have. That's an example of an inherent risk.

Another example might be the stock market. There's always the risk if you're buying and selling stocks that you could lose money, but there's also the potential to gain a lot of money. That is why people participate in and play with the stock market because of the positive outcome. Going back to rock climbing, the positive outcome is the sense of being in flow, the sense of being able to push yourself physically, to go into places that you wouldn't be able to go if you weren't rock climbing.

Anytime there's an inherent risk, there usually is also an inherent gain. If there is not, then maybe I would question why you're doing that in the first place. The gain is really what drives us and motivates us to do things that tend to be risky – whether it's a small risk or a big risk. Those are inherent risks.

The other type of risk that is important for us to talk about is perceived risks. These are risks where they are sometimes just in our head. We think that there's a big risk but the reality is there's really not. There's a level of uncertainty and there's a fear that the action that we might take won't be worth it. I think often perceived risks are built up to be much bigger than they are.

Talking about perceived risks, I want to give you an example from my own life. This happened to me about four or five years ago, in 2012. Some of you have heard me talk about Climer Cards. You know about this deck of cards that I sell. Climer Cards look like a set of playing cards but they are designed to help groups be more creative with each other, to help instigate conversations and deepen dialogue.

When I was first developing Climer Cards, I put them up on [Kickstarter.com](https://www.kickstarter.com). For those who don't know, Kickstarter is a website that helps fund creative projects. There is a perceived risk when you're putting something up on Kickstarter. The real risk, the inherent risk is that you're going to put something up there and it's not going to get funded, and then you've lost. What makes it a perceived risk is you don't really lose anything.

The way it works is I put my project up on Kickstarter. They approve it to go on their site. I put it up there and then people can pay money into the project. In this case, a deck of Climer Cards was \$25. If people gave me \$25, if I reached my goal, which was \$2,500, then I would be able to produce the product and if they gave at least \$25, they got a deck of Climer Cards. But really



the way Kickstarter is set up is it's kind of a win-win and the risk is really low for both the project designer, myself, or people who are investing in the project because if I don't reach my goal of \$2,500, they get all their money back and I don't get any money.

It makes sense because let's say I need \$2,500 in order to produce the first batch of cards, but I only get \$1,500. Now I'm short of \$1,000. What do I do with this \$1,500 and where do I get this extra \$1,000? It creates this awkward situation between me as the designer and the investors. Kickstarter I think has come up with this brilliant solution.

I will say when I was putting together my project and before, there was this moment where I was about to publish the whole thing. I can remember, I had my hand on the mouse and I felt really nervous. When I look back, what I was really nervous about was the perceived risk. I was afraid that I was going to put this project up there and it wasn't going to get funded. But really at the end of the day, if it didn't get funded, it's not like I lost anything.

I guess you could say I lost some time and the energy that I put into it, but I didn't lose anything financial. If anything, maybe it was just a bit of ego. My ego might have been bruised a little bit. That's what a perceived risk is. The risk is maybe less tangible. I think often the perceived risk is ego driven. Not always, sometimes it could you're nervous about something and you're nervous because you're afraid of a physical harm even though the chance of harm is just miniscule.

Perceived risks are significant in the world of creativity. Often, we're not taking risks and we're not being creative because we've made up this story about what's going to happen if we step out and share an idea or if we try a new project and it fails. Often, the story that we make up is much bigger, more elaborate, and more horrible than what really might happen.

That is a great transition into talking about our comfort zones. Most of you have probably heard the saying, "Oh just step out of your comfort zone." In some ways, that saying has become a bit cliché and perhaps overused, but I want to talk about what it really means. Let's first define what a comfort zone is.

Comfort zone is the space that you're in, not a physical space although it could be, but this metaphorical space that you're in that is predictable, it's familiar, it's known. It feels very safe and secure. For most people, an example would be hanging out in their house, lying on the couch watching TV, reading a book. You're in your comfort zone. You're not doing anything risky or scary. You're relaxed. Hanging out with your best friend might be an example of being in your comfort zone, something that you're very familiar with.



I want you to imagine three concentric circles, like a bull's eye and in the very center is the comfort zone. The next zone, the next circle beyond the comfort zone is called the growth zone or the stretch zone. These are those unexplored aspects of our lives and really these are where our future successes live, but the growth zone tends to be unfamiliar, unpredictable. It can be a bit uncomfortable because it's unknown. We might feel insecure in the growth zone but that's also where growth and learning happens.

Beyond the growth zone, the third zone is called the panic zone. The panic zone is a bit too far. This is where often you can't even think. All you care about is getting back into that comfort zone as fast as you can. We tend to get into this fight or flight response and we're freaked out. That's the panic zone. That's not such a helpful place to be. Learning does not necessarily occur there. Whenever we're doing new things or trying to sort of step out of our comfort zone, the goal is to go into the growth zone and not get so far into the panic zone.

There's also that edge, that space between the comfort and growth zone and thinking about what feelings come up in that moment. When you're in kind of that edge where you're about to move into the growth zone, your palms might get a bit sweaty, your mouth might be dry, you might be feeling nervous, anxious, or unsure, insecure. Think about what helps you move into that growth zone. What thoughts go through your head, what actions, who do you think of, who reassures you, who can support you into moving into that growth zone?

The value of the growth zone is that's where we learn, that's where creativity happens, that's where we grow, we stretch ourselves, and I think ultimately, it's where we become better people. Often when I'm teaching in person about the different zones, I'll do an activity that I'm going to describe to you.

I lay down two or three ropes on the ground in concentric circles. I explain the three zones just like I did with you and then I read out a series of statements and ask people to physically stand in whichever zone they would be in if they were doing that activity. Let's do this for a minute. I'm going to just read out some things. I want you to think about where would you be in doing these activities.

The first one is going for a walk with a good friend. What zone would you be in? Most of you would probably be in the comfort zone.

Rock climbing,



sharing an idea with your boss,

speaking up in class or in a work meeting to contribute to a discussion,

leading a new initiative at work,

giving a speech in front of 100 people,

giving a toast at your best friend's wedding.

Just a quick comment on those two as far as giving a speech in front of 100 people and giving a toast at your best friend's wedding, what I see is that some people are in the comfort zone for one of them and in the growth zone for the other, and then often they switch places. Some people feel like, "Oh, if I don't know the people, I'm going to be totally fine," whereas other people feel like, "Well, if I don't know the people, that makes me more nervous and if I know them, then I'm going to be more comfortable." Some people feel like, "If I know then, there's more pressure and so I'm going to be more uncomfortable and more likely in that growth zone."

The point is that we're all in different zones even in the same activity. Think about that. If you're doing something with some colleagues, let's say you're having a brainstorming session or you're having some sort of work meeting where you're trying to come up with creative ideas. For some people, that would be really easy and they are completely in their comfort zone whereas other people, speaking up in a meeting or contributing to the discussion might make them a little bit nervous.

They might be more in their growth zone. Hopefully, they are not in their panic zone although that can happen as well. So think about if you're in your comfort zone, what can you do to help other people you're working with also come into that comfort zone. You get the idea that we're all in different zones with different things. I think this is important to know when it comes to creativity.

Let's imagine that there is something that you're wanting to do but you're really nervous about it. Perhaps it's something that might put you into your growth zone or panic zone, but you know that you need to do it and it's going to help you be more creative and become a better person, be a better leader, better team member.

The reality is our fears and limitations hold us back all the time and I think it's important to take small steps and really be thoughtful about how you can dismantle that fear and expand your



comfort zone. That's the cool thing. It's like the more you take risks and do things, the bigger your comfort zone gets and the more things you're comfortable doing.

Let's say you have a fear of sharing a new idea with your boss. You're afraid that they are going to think that the idea is stupid or consequently they are going to think that you're incompetent. You're going to start by testing your assumptions and you're going to start really small with some miniscule, not that important tests essentially to see, is your perception valid because so many times what happens is we have these completely inaccurate perceptions of what we think is reality.

If you think, "If I shared an idea with my boss, they are just going to give me the evil eye or blow up and tell me how it's ridiculous." If that's the situation, I want you to come up with something you can do to test that but it needs to be a test where even if they do give you the evil eye, it's not that big a deal. Come up with a small idea that you can share with your boss to see how he or she reacts, and let's see what happens. Do they give you the evil eye? Do they actually blow up and tell you how ridiculous you are or do they consider the idea and thank you for it?

Remember, you're not testing whether the idea gets used or if it's good. You're testing whether your fear about being labeled as incompetent is accurate or not. Think about that. What are some things that you can do to test your assumptions that prevent you from stepping out of your comfort zone? Going back to that you're not testing whether the ideas gets used or it's good, you're testing whether your fear is accurate, if you share an idea and it doesn't get used, don't overreact. Don't decide that "well, I shared an idea last week and it still hasn't been used so there's no point in me sharing any other ideas."

I have heard people say that. When I hear that, I think, "That's really egotistical." The ego is ultimately there to protect you but you have to push back and try again. If you want to be creative, it requires taking risks. It requires stepping out of that comfort zone, into that growth zone. You have to share ideas and then you have to try to implement those ideas. Perhaps you're someone who ideas come really easily to but it's that implementation that's really difficult.

I definitely felt that during the Climer Cards project where the idea was piece of cake but putting it out there to the world to see what would happen was a little bit nerve wracking, a little bit scary. It definitely pushed me into my growth zone. But then the outcome has been amazing. In fact, I just got an email from somebody a couple of days ago. She's in Hong Kong and she was telling me that a friend of hers had used Climer Cards in Bhutan.



This is so cool. Halfway around the world, this deck of cards I created is being used by students over in Asia. That is just super cool. It never would have happened had I not pushed myself and stepped out of my comfort zone and push the publish button on that Kickstarter campaign so many years ago.

Think about what are some tests you can come up with. What is it that you want to experiment with and try? What can you move into your comfort zones? Essentially, there is something that you can experiment with going into your growth zone and get to the point where you're more comfortable doing whatever that thing that will help you be more creative.

Your weekly challenge is to choose one way you can step out of your comfort zone this week to be more creative. I also challenge you to go to the show notes, ClimerConsulting.com/011 for [episode #011](#) and share what happened. Write me a comment. Tell me what happened. I will publish that on the show notes so other people can read it. It will be great to get a dialogue going and sharing from a variety of people.

I could also add that there's the potential for failure and that there's a potential that you'll try something and it will backfire. Don't give up. Keep going. Try it again. Analyze what happened. Was the timing wrong? Is it something you said? Is it how you approached it? How can you keep going and just be really careful about not creating inaccurate stories about what happened.

I hope that's helpful. I hope that you'll go out and challenge yourself. Take some risks this week. You got to take risks if you want to be creative as they go hand in hand. I look forward to hearing from you. Have an awesome week, everyone. Until next time, bye!