



The Deliberate Creative Podcast with Amy Climer

Transcript for Episode #016: How Wikipedia is Democratizing Innovation

September 10, 2015

Amy Climer: Welcome to the Deliberate Creative Podcast [episode #016](#). Today's episode is an interview with Rosemary Rein, the director of Global Learning and Evaluation for the Wikimedia Foundation, which is the organization that produces Wikipedia amongst many other free creative comments products. Just to give you a little background, I met Rosemary in June at the Creative Problem Solving Institute and I invited her to be on the podcast. She enthusiastically agreed, which I was very excited about. Wikipedia is incredibly innovative and has had a huge impact on the entire planet. I have been very excited to learn more about what she's doing at Wikipedia to lead her teams to be more innovative. We had a great conversation, which I think you'll enjoy and learn a lot from. She's going to talk about the strategies, processes and tools she uses with her teams at Wikimedia. Some of the things she talks about have been explored in previous episodes, particularly the Creative Problem Solving Process, which was explained in depth at [episodes #003](#) through [#007](#). I think you'll appreciate hearing more of how she uses certain techniques especially if you are facilitating a team. Throughout the episode, she mentions several resources and I have all of them linked in the show notes. The show notes can be found at ClimerConsulting.com/016. Head on over to that website and you'll find the show notes for this episode, but you'll also find links to all of the previous episodes as well. All right, let's dive in and talk to Rosemary.

Rosemary, welcome to the Deliberate Creative Podcast. I'm so excited to have you here today.

Rosemary Rein: I am excited to be with you, Amy. I'm excited to connect about how to use creativity and getting teams to think creatively and innovate and solve all kinds of problems.

Amy Climer: That's awesome. That's what we're going to have a great conversation about today. To start off, tell me a little bit about your background and what you do.

Rosemary Rein: Well it's an interesting and diverse background. I guess I'm shooting for maybe 15 careers in a lifetime. I began as a communications journalist and found that I wanted to transition into training. I loved being able to work with teams. I worked in the financial service





industry, both insurance and banking and getting them to be more customer oriented, more productive and by helping them to really get it when they were coming in new to a job and get it quickly as well as add their contributions. I was Vice President for Training and Development within financial services.

Then I decided that I wanted to open a Bed and Breakfast Inn. I had this lifelong dream so I became an innkeeper. After I built this and converted this 1840 Victorian Inn into a Bed and Breakfast Inn in Cape May, New Jersey I was ready for the next chapter. So I continued my work in consulting and bringing creativity and leadership to organizations and then I decided for the big bold Raiders of the Lost Ark adventure and I moved to Costa Rica where I began work in global consulting both for nonprofits as well as the Young Presidents' Organization and the Entrepreneurs Organization, but I always had this focus on I really wanted to apply creativity to make the world a better place and so I found myself as Director of Learning and Knowledge Exchange for United Way Worldwide and I celebrated five years with them before being recruited to join the Wikimedia Foundation. Yes, those folks that have brought you Wikipedia as well as Wiki Quotes and a variety of other tools so that we can have the sharing of knowledge around the world for all regardless of income, location in the world. We can all connect and learn from each other.

Amy Climer: That's awesome. So tell me a little more about what do you do for Wikimedia now.

Rosemary Rein: I am the Director of Learning and Evaluation for the Wikimedia program which means basically we have over 230 languages around the world who create Wikipedia in their language as well as other programs. We have programs in education, we have partnerships with museums. We have a variety of tools – everything from documenting your travel adventure. So what we do is - believe it or not, a lot of people don't know - that Wikipedia and its projects are written by volunteers. My team works with capacity building in local communities. So we give you tools where you can really engage volunteers to create the sum of all human knowledge in your own language. My team works on helping them with how you recruit and retain volunteers, how do we learn from each other. So what happens in Bulgaria, we can learn from that and bring that to Wikipedia Argentina.

Amy Climer: That seems like a natural progression from United Way, which is the volunteer focus and very exciting. I know that you're using Creative Problem Solving and some other





strategies with your teams that you work with. Can you talk a little bit about that? What do you do as far as creativity and helping teams develop creativity?

Rosemary Rein: It's interesting because if you think about an encyclopedia, we're all about getting it right currently and so it's sometimes difficult to comprehend that in order to get it right, sometimes you need to really separate what we call divergent thinking from let's think of wild ideas before we evaluate them into converging on the right solution. For example, with all of my teams, both at United Way as well as now with the Wikimedia Foundation, as well as all the corporate clients I've worked with throughout the years, we really use this process so that not the person that has the first idea do we celebrate. We say "Great idea" and run with that, but we recognize that in order to get to the best idea that we really need to make sure that there is what we call democratized innovation, which is everyone has an opportunity to contribute in a safe way and then we use criteria in order to select the best option and move from creativity to actual implementation.

The Creative Problem Solving Process that we use, I use it in my team, I use it when we're looking at how do we create what is going to be our focus areas so that we make sure that our donor investments, people that contribute to Wikimedia projects, we make sure that we're making the best strategic investment. We use, for example, criteria. How are we going to define what is going to grow our movement? How do we define where we're going to provide resources and we use the convergence criteria to do that. We also use in coaching with professional development plans for the team. We use Creative Problem Solving to make sure that we have an actionable professional development plan for each member of the team.

Throughout my career, I have found that it is one tool that I can bring into any organization and this applied to my clients as well. I worked I pharmaceuticals, insurance, international women and coffee. I can have that tool in my pocket and if I bring into a group, they know that they have this secret weapon for tackling any challenge that we have and coming up with a creative solution.

Amy Climer: I love it. There are a couple of things you mentioned in there that I'm wondering if you can expand on and maybe give an example. The first one was, I love the term "democratized innovation." That's great. You also talked about convergence criteria in relation to that. I'm wondering, do you have an example of a situation, a team that you worked with where you went through that and you saw the Creative Problem Solving and this democratized innovation, and using the convergent criteria where you saw it work really well?



Rosemary Rein: Sure, great question. One of the things you need to recognize is particularly in organizations you have this hierarchy of structure. There is a real and democratized talent which is if you think it, ink it using the power of the Post-It, which means that before sharing and vocalizing your idea, which, by the way, there are people in the room, if you're the CEO of a company or you're the team leader, when you provide an idea, everyone might be willing to say, "Okay yeah. That's a great idea because you're the boss." When you use this silent brain writing or the power of the Post-It and you pose a question, for example, when you're creating a work plan in our team, what are the three most important priorities for this team to accomplish this year? What's really interesting if you post that question and you ask folks to one idea, one project per Post-It, you will find that you don't have consensus in that room, but if you collect those Post-Its in a democratized way, everyone has their equal vote and then you can look at the criteria.

In terms of making a decision, we need to be able to use criteria to select from all these projects you propose, the top three project priorities. What will be the filters for how we make that decision and then you rate each of those projects from a 1 through 5, which is not only will it create the highest impact but it has ease of implementation, for example. One of the ways our team got to what we call a master project list to guide our work through the year was to be very clear on that criteria and it wasn't me saying, "Okay, I think these are the three top ideas. It was the best thinking from a talented team. When I think about this process and democratized content, it really is the foundation of how Wikipedia gets better because everyone has a voice in refining and improving and pages on Wikipedia. It was an easy transition to say this also applies to how we manage our work day to day.

Amy Climer: Absolutely. In those situations do you tend to develop the criteria before you do the silent brain writing and the divergent thinking or do you do it afterwards?

Rosemary Rein: I actually use the same process for the team to develop the criteria and provide what would the criteria be and there be a voting sense. In some cases, I've had where there are organizational strategic priorities that need to be considered that are a given. By the way, I've also used this very successfully in searches for executive directors. Rather than trying to replace the person that had that job in the past, because you tend to think, "Oh well we need another Mary or we need another Jane," let's think about what the organization needs first to define that criteria before we look at any candidate. Sometimes, you begin with the criteria first. In other cases that criteria might evolve either side by side or during the process.



Amy Climer: Great. You talked a little bit about that process you use as really Creative Problem Solving. Even though you didn't say these words, you're clarifying, ideating, developing, and then implementing. Are there some other strategies that you use either woven in with that or completely separate that you can share?

Rosemary Rein: I think Creative Problem Solving is a process but it is not only in one form. For example, I use marriage with Design Thinking in creating products in the past. You're getting ready to look at what would be a program for a particular organization. Begin first with the voice of the client, the voice of the customer, the voice of the community member. In some cases, in planning a meeting, I've given pre-work or homework to everyone attending that session. In the case of an education program, I want you to interview a parent, a teacher, and a child so that you get those three voices in the room and actually take a picture of them with your iPhone. We make sure that when we're designing a program, we are not locked in a room removed from the people that really hold the solution and hold the answers. Use of pre-work and interviews which is a component of Design Thinking is used.

Another tool I've used is what we call a Fail Fest, which is often times innovation is the result of many failures. This is actually a process we use at conferences because you think about it as children, the data indicates we are far more creative and by about the age of 5, our creativity really plummets when we start getting those test scores which indicate you got it wrong. We get less comfortable in sharing failure. So the fail fest is designed to say, "Don't bring your success, but bring a failure and what we're going to do is we're going to tell a story. We plan this thing. This is what happens. This is how we knew it didn't work and this is what we would do differently." Then you bring in the Creative Problem Solving process for other folks in the room to say, "If we were to do this again, in what ways might we make it a stronger program or get to the end result?" There's a variety of tools.

We also at the Wikimedia Foundation use Hackathons, which really developed in Silicon Valley as a way of creating new software. So we do focused Hackathons around problems that we're having and literally for 2-3 days, we have volunteers from all around the world creating innovative solutions and creating programs and Hackathons can be used not only for building software but for process innovations for example. That's really just kind of an ambiance, a culture, a forum in which you can apply Creative Problem Solving in a very focused energetic way.



Amy Climer: Hackathons are basically like a two-day intensive where you're applying Creating Problem Solving throughout those two days.

Rosemary Rein: Yeah and it's usually accompanied by lots of junk food and you feed them well. For example, one thing I'm really thrilled with is we've created Hackathons in communities. We wanted to make sure that more women were engaged so in the Hackathon Center, we have child care provided for example. We get female as well as male engineers who are able to take this time and say, "Hey, you've got talent. We've got a challenge. Let's work together. Let's collaborate together in real time." It's a very energized focused problem solving which at the end, if you can imagine a science fair where when you've come up with the solutions, you're pitching your project and say, "Look what we did in two days." It's really fascinating to see Creative Problem Solving work where particularly you need to bring in different perspectives that might not live in one team.

The other tool I would say that we could talk about is I absolutely love the Pixar Process that Disney uses to create their films. We've used that tool as another way to really get our heads around how do we make sure that we begin with any project as not holding it sacred, but to really say as Disney does, "Every film begins as an ugly baby." Let's all assume that all our best idea is an ugly baby and together, let's make it better.

Amy Climer: Yeah. I love that, just that image because I'm thinking of a really ugly little puppy that it's so ugly it's adorable. You're like, "I love this thing," but then you start working with it and it grows and develops into something amazing.

Rosemary Rein: Well, if you've read *Creativity, Inc.* which I would highly recommend to your listeners the Friday Note Session is something that we've used. For example, in our team this year, we had each person who had a great idea of what they wanted to implement to come in and pitch their project and do a project pitch just as Disney would create a pitch for a film, and then everyone basically would write down, tear it apart, this doesn't really work, but it was done in a safe space and so I think if we come into saying, "We don't have the right answers" particularly as a team leader, I think my team currently gets it that I'm not going to provide the solution, but I will provide a process where their best thinking and their best talents can be brought to light.

Amy Climer: One thing that a thread that's coming up through what you're talking about is actually culture that you're creating within a team. You talked about Fail Fest and we're going to throw all our failures or even this idea of we're going to pick apart an idea for a Friday Note



Session. What are some things that you do to help create that culture that makes it comfortable, that makes it easy for people to be just like, “Oh this might be crap, but I’m going to throw it out anyway?”

Rosemary Rein: Yeah, that’s a stumbling block and I think one of the things that I use for example is I admit my own failures. I come to the team with a challenge. I kind of flip the tables in terms of I don’t have all the right answers, but I have this really cool process that if I can get you all in a room for an hour, I think by the end of an hour, we’re going to be able to maybe not have the perfect answer but we’re going to be able to go through this process of defining what the challenge is. Are we tackling the right challenge? What are our assumptions moving then to what other data do we need? So we’re refining the data. What don’t we have the answers to? And then going to what are all the potential solutions and then eventually converging, using criteria in terms of “Okay, we know we have to work with these criteria.” For example, there are financial limitations of the challenge and actually when I’m doing this in a room, I post flip charts around the room so that by the time we get to the solution finding and implementation, we are at the door. I try to use this in each team meeting.

We also, for example, are very open to sharing not only when we do, we call them learning patterns. Not only identify what went right, but we’re very transparent about what we learned and so we make sure that at the end of each project, we tend to put a lot of emphasis on preplanning. We also call out an after action review what didn’t work as well. I also try to bring in crazy fun. I’ve used a variety of tools. Your [Climer Cards](#) for example, Amy, I’ve used as a way for the team to get out of the normal way of thinking. For example, in Wikimedia, you could often go into a conference or room and not see any eyeballs because everyone is documenting. That’s what Wikipedians do. They document. So to be able to say we’re going to close the computers and we’re just going to work and we’re going to have you do a forced connection with the visual as we envision what the challenge is, is really incredible.

By the way, using visuals when you’re dealing with a global community where language English is not the first language, it’s so powerful, I have to tell you that. It has been really a fabulous tool so people can communicate their ideas even though they might not be comfortable speaking in English. They are comfortable with saying, “When you think about your challenge and you select an image, what comes to mind?” They are able to hold up that card and even though their English might not be perfect, they are able to articulate what they see in the card. We try to bring in various tools to really create a little bit of unease. I have to tell you that if you’ve not used this process before, at first when you bring in a new way of thinking or tackling



a challenge in a less than linear way, you're going to be. "Ahh, I'm not sure if this is going to work," but you just have to trust the process.

Amy Climer: Absolutely, trust the process. Well, I appreciate you talking about [Climer Cards](#) especially how they are so useful for people who are speaking in their second or third language. I've had that feedback before and it's kind of cool. They have been used in, I don't know, a dozen different countries around the world and I'm so glad to hear you're doing the same thing. That's awesome. Are there other kind of specific resources like that that you would recommend to folks besides Climer Cards?

Rosemary Rein: I like free and cheap as well and so I always recommend to folks on a limited budget, check out [Fiverr.com](#). People will do anything for \$5. I've had to bring in creativity and training with zero budget but I've been able to produce video films with a gentleman in Australia who did this jungle scenario to introduce a new concept. I find that if you're able to sometimes use video, it can be a highly engaging tool. I have used that to celebrate and recognize employees for creativity. For \$5, you can get a character sketch made from somebody's Facebook page and you can put creativity on their chest for having a creative idea. In addition to your cards, which I've used in sessions, I also use Google Images. When I'm thinking about a challenge, I have everyone pull up Google Images or I'm going to put a plug in here for free sources which is Creative Commons which is photos that are uploaded and free for everyone to use. What I do is a forced connection by thinking about that particular challenge. Do a word association and just pull up all of the images and write down what are some thoughts that come to mind and connection points. I try to use that as well.

Amy Climer: That's great. I will put these links all on the show notes for everyone so they can easily access them.

Rosemary Rein: Great.

Amy Climer: [Fiverr.com](#) is great. I haven't actually used it. I've been there several times and kind of coming at it more from like a business perspective. I love this idea as a cool reward or cool thank you for someone. A caricature sketch is so much more meaningful than a \$5 Starbucks gift card or something.

Rosemary Rein: Exactly right and it's very personalized. We all know that when you personalize a recognition, it can really go a whole lot further and it costs a whole lot less than that \$30 sweatshirt.



Amy Climer: Absolutely. I love that. Well, we've talked about so much already. We've talked about a bunch of different tools, physical tools as well as processes that you use with your groups you work with. One of the things that I do at the end of every episode is that I offer listeners a challenge related to the topic, something that they can do this week to get started with some of the ideas that you've talked about. I'm wondering if you have a challenge that you can give listeners this week, something related to building innovation and teams and what you've talked about.

Rosemary Rein: There are a lot of things I can do. The first thing I'm going to do is learn more about Creative Problem Solving and guess how you can do that. You can look up the Creative Problem Solving page on Wikipedia and it needs a little love, care, and attention by having additional citations and it's so easy to edit Wikipedia. Just imagine, when you do a little bit of research about something that you want to learn more about and you post a reference, guess what, it's immediately shared with the world. That's kind of an extra bonus. One challenge I will give the group is to really think of what is one top challenge that if you could fix would make your life so much easier and to put that in the frame of in "what ways might I..." or "might we be [blank]?" Frame and begin that practice of applied creativity at your next team meeting, sharing that, posting it on the board and basically one idea per Post-It, ask members of your team as fast as they can to come up with 20-25 possible solutions. I will tell you that by giving a target, you're going to increase the creative potential of your participants rather than just say, "Write as many as you can." Give them a time limit and then basically do nothing more than take those Post-Its that have been created from the democratized talent in the room and just get up and clean them in terms of what are those top ideas that have come up, not even the top ideas, what are major themes that you see.

If you just begin practicing that element in your approach to the challenge, you can then move on through some of the, how do we take and prioritize these ideas in terms of how would we rate them not only for ideas and themes but which of those ideas has the highest rating for highest impact, 1 through 5, and the second rating being ease of implementation, which is you want to make sure that whatever you come up with, you can implement. One of the things you might think of in your filter is the more people that are involved typically the more difficult it is. The more resources required, the more difficult it is. So be thinking about those two forms of the basic criteria and ease of implementation. When you've applied those two filters, what is the top idea that comes out that you might further develop? Basically you've done a form of expressed Creative Problem Solving.



Amy Climer: Absolutely. I love that challenge. That's a great one. I think that question – “In what ways might we...” or “In what ways might I...?” – is so powerful. It can just be a really powerful question. That's great. Rosemary, if listeners want to learn more about you and your work, where can they go?

Rosemary Rein: Yes, you could go to the WikimediaFoundation.org or you can go to your local Wikipedia wherever you are in the world and learn how you too can contribute to the sum of all human knowledge by sharing what you learn and going to museums and when you're traveling and snapping a photo, and being able to share that with the world through our various projects. What I love is now we are truly a global community and do what you can to share what you learn, share what you see and join us in democratized learning.

Amy Climer: Awesome. Thank you Rosemary and thank you so much for being in the show. I really appreciate it. I know listeners are really going to enjoy it.

Rosemary Rein: I've had so much fun and you keep doing what you're doing and helping teams and organizations really learn this process because it could be a little tricky at first. It's nice to have a coaching guide from the side.

Amy Climer: Awesome. Thank you so much.

Rosemary Rein: Thank you Amy.

Amy Climer: All right, great stuff with Rosemary. I felt like we could have kept going for another half hour. During our conversation, Rosemary mentioned a ton of resources and I have included all of them in the show notes for you. You can find those show notes over at ClimerConsulting.com/016. Also on that page, you can review the weekly challenge and you can share comments about how you're doing with the weekly challenge. If you work with your team and you put together in what ways might we or in what ways might I – if you put together a challenge like that, share it with everybody on the show notes. Let us know how it went. Let us know what your challenge was and you could also ask questions for Rosemary on the show notes page. If you post them there, I will have her answer them and we can start a good conversation, a good dialogue there. Again that's ClimerConsulting.com/016.

The other thing I want to tell you about is September 30, 2015 is a very special day. No, it's not my birthday. It's International Podcast Day. You probably didn't know that, did you? To celebrate podcasts a group of people have put together the International Podcast Day Gratitude



Award. The purpose is to focus on how podcasts have positively impacted people, which I think is a pretty cool purpose. I've signed up to participate and I need your help. This is a competition to see which podcast is positively having the biggest impact on its listeners. If you would like to support the Deliberate Creative Podcast, all you have to do is write a review on iTunes. You can head on over to iTunes either on your desktop, on your iPhone and write a review. If it makes it easier, go to ClimerConsulting.com/iTunes or just click on that purple podcast app on your iPhone. You can write a review right in there and the review should contain an expression of gratitude for how the Deliberate Creative Podcast has impacted you. In order to be considered for this competition, the review has to be in by September 26th, so just a couple more weeks. I know there are hundreds of you listening to this episode and I would love it if you went in and wrote a review. Who knows, maybe I'll win. Let's see what happens.

I just want to say thank you so much for listening to the Deliberate Creative Podcast. The focus here is always about how to lead innovation and teams and I hope that you learned a lot from Rosemary today. I certainly did and I look forward to seeing you all next week. Bye!