



## The Deliberate Creative Podcast with Amy Climer

### Transcript for Episode #017: Seven Norms of Collaboration

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**Amy Climer:** Hey everyone. Welcome to the Deliberate Creative Podcast [episode #017](#). On today's episode, we're going to talk about the Seven Norms of Collaboration and how you can use these to build your creativity.

To start with, let's talk about what is a norm? What do I mean by the Seven Norms of Collaboration? Essentially, a norm is something that your team naturally or normally does. For instance, you probably have different groups of people that you spend time with. You probably spend time with your family, maybe there are people at work you spend time with. Maybe you have a group of friends, maybe you have different groups of friends that you spend time with and chances are that within those different groups of people, there's different behavior that's considered normal or acceptable amongst those groups. There may be certain things where when you're hanging out with your family, it's completely appropriate to do, but then when you're at work, maybe not so much. You have different norms in those different groups.

I think one example that comes to mind is sarcasm. There are some groups of people both family, friends, work or whatever where sarcasm is very normal, where they tend to tease each other a lot and they have fun with those sarcastic comments. And, there are other groups where that's not welcome, that's not appropriate, that's just not the culture within that team, within that group. The thing with norms that can be so powerful and so valuable is that they can be intentionally developed. Today, we're going to look at the Seven Norms of Collaboration and these are based on the research of Bob Garmston and Bruce Wellman who were both involved in Adaptive Schools, which is an organization that helps schools and school districts become more collaborative and adaptive to change. They've actually since changed the name of the organization to Thinking Collaborative because they don't work just with schools anymore. Now, they are working with all sorts of organizations, really around the world actually, and their work is very powerful. This is all researched based and what they found is that these seven norms are the normal behavior that highly collaborative and successful teams have. Collaborating is often about conversation. The seven norms are to some extent the way your group has conversations together and the way they interact together. Teams that are highly



creative are also highly collaborative, and so that's why these norms are very important for a team that wants to be a creative and innovative together.

Lets' dive into the seven norms. The first three really go together almost in a sequence. Those are pausing, paraphrasing, and posing questions. Let's look at each one at a time.

### #1 Pausing

First is pausing. Pausing just means somebody is talking, they are sharing something and before I respond, I just pause for a second, maybe 2 seconds. It's one of those things that is so simple, but it's not necessarily easy, but that pause can be very helpful, very powerful because it allows time for thinking and it can really enhance dialogue and it can enhance decision making amongst the group because if we're not pausing, that means we're probably formulating our response while the other person is talking and so then in essence, we're not really listening that well. Pausing is really a listening skill more than anything. Just that short 1-2 second pause can really help you formulate your thoughts before you respond.

### #2 Paraphrasing

Then, you're going to norm #2 which is paraphrasing and the purpose is to really check for understanding and also to move the conversation forward to a deeper level. Now when I say paraphrasing, I think there's also some interesting reactions and one of those is kind of this, "No, I hate paraphrasing." I think historically, we sometimes confuse paraphrasing with what I call parroting, parrot like the bird. Parrots, they learn to say things exactly as you said them. They repeat them verbatim. I actually happen to live next door to a parrot. They can be quite annoying at times. They can be beautiful, but we don't want to necessarily do parroting. You probably had this situation before where you're telling somebody something and then they repeat it verbatim to you. You're thinking, "Yeah, that's what I said. Okay. Let's move on." It can be a bit frustrating. That's not what we're talking about. That's not the type of paraphrasing I mean.

I'm going to explain three types of paraphrasing that can be very helpful for collaboration. The first is Acknowledge and Clarify. This is essentially where you're holding up a mirror to the other person and you're reflecting back what they said, but not verbatim. For instance, let's say someone was telling you about a meeting that they were in and they were just going on about how it seemed like such a waste of time. You might say something like, "Oh it sounds like you're really frustrated in the meeting." They are going to respond in probably one or two ways. They are going to say, "Yes I was really frustrated" or they are going to say "Well no, it's not that I was



frustrated. It was that..." and then they are going to respond. In some ways, it doesn't matter if your paraphrase was right or not. In this case, I'm paraphrasing the feeling. If you didn't quite get it right, that's okay because you're giving them an opportunity to tell you more and to go into more depth and to clarify. Acknowledge and Clarify is just you're providing a statement, but your statement is in this question form. It's in this open form. Again, somebody is talking about how it seemed like a waste of time and you might say, "Oh, it sounds like you're really frustrated in the meeting." You say it as a question like I want to check with you. Again, that's Acknowledge and Clarify.

The second type of paraphrase is called Summarize and Organize. This is where I'm taking that information that they are sharing and then putting it into containers. This is particularly helpful if you have multiple people speaking or if you have someone that's perhaps a bit longwinded or they are talking about something more extensive. You might summarize and organize that after they are done by saying something like "Oh, so there seems to be two issues here, a lack of organization and that people showed up unprepared." That might be a paraphrase to that same conversation about the meeting that was a waste of time. I'm taking everything they are saying and I'm just putting it into like, "Okay, so we have this issue and this issue." Again, they may or may not agree with you. They may say "Yes, exactly but there's a third piece." and then they add their third piece that perhaps I missed or maybe they haven't gotten to yet. Or they might say, "Well, the first thing is correct. It is about lack of organization, but it's not that people showed unprepared. It's that we didn't have an agenda in the first place." Okay, so now we know there's this two things going on – lack of organization and lack of an agenda. That Summarizing and Organizing can help the group then move to figure out, "Okay, now what do we do with this?"

There's the third one and that's shifting to a higher or lower level of abstraction. With this, imagine an escalator. I'm either moving up the escalator or I'm moving down the escalator. Let's say again that same example, someone is telling you about a meeting that they were in. It was such a waste of time. If I want to move to a higher level of abstraction, I might summarize or paraphrase their values, concepts, goals, or assumptions that I hear in their speaking. For instance, I might say, "So perhaps a major goal for this team is to have more organized meetings in order to use the time well." They might say, "Yeah, that's exactly it." Or if they are talking a bit more abstract and I want to go to a lower level and I want to get more specific, I might offer an example or detail. I might say something like, "So specifically you're concerned with the lack of agenda and not starting on time." In that case, it's a little bit like the Summarize and



Organize, but the person was just speaking in a more abstract level and I'm bringing it to be a more specific level, a lower level of abstraction.

That can be very helpful and actually using these three types of paraphrase in order can sometimes work really well. It doesn't have to be that way. You can also use them just depending on the situation and what you need, but the paraphrasing can be really quite powerful. Remember, the paraphrasing is all about checking for understanding and moving the conversation forward to a deeper level. One warning about paraphrasing. You may have noticed that when I was paraphrasing, I didn't use the word "I" because it's not about me. I'm not putting myself in there, but instead I'm focusing on the person that's talking. You didn't hear me say, "Now, what I hear you saying is..." I don't know about you but sometimes I cringe when I hear that statement. There's something about it that I usually know that a person is, of course well intentioned and well meaning, but there's something about it that is not very inviting. I think what it is that in order for me to disagree with them, I'm now disagreeing with their own interpretation and there's something about having that "I" statement in there. So if you use that, try experimenting without using that and see what happens. Sometimes I feel like when somebody is paraphrasing really well, I don't even notice they are paraphrasing and we just end up having this great dialogue. It can be quite rich and quite real. Play with that paraphrasing, see what happens. That's norm #2.

### #3 Posing Questions

Norm #3 is posing questions. Sometimes after I paraphrase, I might follow up with a question. That question is really to explore the issue deeper and sometimes to specify thinking. Let's continue with this concept of someone having this meeting that was just a waste of time and I've paraphrased them and I might follow up with a question where I ask, "What ideas do you have to help make the team have more productive meetings? Now we're getting into some idea generation or perhaps we're not quite ready to go in that direction, I might say something as simple as "Can you say more about that?" I'm just asking them to go into more depth. You're following up with a question to explore something a little bit more.

### #4 Putting Ideas on the Table

Norm #4 is putting ideas on the table. Obviously, this is an integral part of creativity and I probably mentioned this in [episode #005](#) when I talked about the ideation stage of the Creative Problem Solving Process. I definitely recommend going back and listening to that episode. Anyway, the idea with putting ideas on the table, the concept here is if I have an idea, I'm putting it out on the table for the whole group to use and for the whole group to own as their



idea. If I put an idea out to the group and then as we're talking, the group continually refers to the idea as my idea, if they keep saying, "It's Amy's idea" or "Let's go back to Amy's idea," what ends up happening is that they don't own the idea and so they also don't feel the freedom to mold it, shape it, change it to make it fit. It's very rare that idea comes out of somebody's mouth perfectly well formed and gets used exactly as spoken. It's usually changed, sculpted, and molded through the process and so it's important that the ideas are owned by the group. That's what the norm means by saying putting ideas on the table. It is letting go of the ownership. Let the group have the idea.

#### #5 Providing Data

Norm #5 is provide data. Data in this case can mean a lot of different things. It can be both qualitative and quantitative data and we're talking about data in a variety of forms. Essentially, it is anything that supports the group members in creating that shared understanding from their work. Data could be that more traditional sense of data of maybe we're getting some census data from the community that we're a part of. Maybe we're getting data from surveys that we did of our customers or an internal staff survey. So kind of that more statistical data, but then data can also just be, "Oh I had this conversation with someone. Here's what that person said." Data doesn't necessarily have to be data in that traditional sense. It can just be much more informal and the qualitative and quantitative components of data together can be really helpful.

Another thing to keep in mind is the data only has the meaning that we give to it. By itself, it is completely meaningless and it's just there, but it's that shared meaning that really develops from exploring and analyzing and interpreting it together that can really be rich and increase that collaboration and increase that creativity. This is a big part of that clarifying stage of the Creative Problem Solving Process.

#### #6 Paying attention to Self and Others

#6 is paying attention to self and others. What this means is paying attention to our own behaviors and the behaviors of other people within our team. You're paying attention to what you're saying, you're paying attention to how you're saying it, and also to how others are responding. You're looking at body language, tone of voice, word choice, but now I don't mean this in a sense of that I'm so paranoid and focusing on my behavior that I can't be myself. No, not that at all, but what I mean is we're reflective. Perhaps after a meeting we're thinking about what could I do differently? What could I do better next time? It also includes if you're planning a meeting or if you're the facilitator that you're paying attention to learning style or Social Styles



of the people in the group and that you're designing a meeting to fit their styles, not necessarily yours.

It also means that when you're just having a conversation with someone one on one that you're thinking about their style and how can you get this information to them in a way that best works for them, not necessarily that works for you. Paying attention to self and others, a great tool for this is the FourSight Thinking Profile. We talked about that in [episode #008](#) with Blair Miller. This can be a really helpful tool to help you understand how to approach someone. There are other tools besides FourSight. Myers-Briggs, DISC, or a number of those that can be very helpful, but even beyond that, it's just that emotional intelligence to some degree of just being aware of yourself and others and of the emotions in the room.

### #7 Presume Positive Intentions

Finally the 7<sup>th</sup> norm of collaboration is presume positive intentions. I love this one. They are all important, but this is one that is just always there. It should always be a part of everything that you're doing. The idea is that I'm assuming other's intentions are positive. When you do this, it really can promote and facilitate meaningful dialogue. It eliminates a lot of unintentional rude comments or put-downs. I really believe that nearly everyone on our planet has positive intentions in everything they are doing. They may be different intentions than ours, they may be coming from something from a completely different angle, but I think that most of us really mean well. Unfortunately, media would like you to believe otherwise as they are showcasing people doing horrible things all the time, but I really think those are the few and far between.

One way to presume positive intention is to actually use these other norms that I have been talking about. If someone makes a comment or does something that you're thinking, "Oh my gosh, I can't believe they did that." Before jumping to that assumption or that conclusion, ask a question. Pose a question to them or perhaps paraphrase and then follow up with a question. "Can you say more about what you meant by that?" Nine times out of 10, they are going to go into some depth and share something that will be quite enlightening to you and will help you realize, "Okay, I did not see it from that perspective and now I understand where they are coming from." That can really be helpful.

### Review

Let's review these Seven Norms of Collaboration. 1) pausing, 2) paraphrasing, 3) posing questions, 4) putting ideas on the table, 5) providing data, 6) paying attention to self and others, 7) presuming positive intentions. These Seven Norms of Collaboration when they are used or





when they are followed as part of a team can really help the team become more creative because they are going to become more collaborative. Now you may be thinking, “Okay yeah this is great but how the heck am I going to get my team to start doing all these things?” Like anything, easier said than done, but not impossible and I have known a number of teams who have worked quite hard and diligently to get to the point where they are actively doing these things.

Certainly the first thing is to teach our team about the Seven Norms of Collaboration and then to look at what are you already doing well. Figure out where are the areas you really need to focus on improvement? Then it’s a matter of practicing and I highly recommend printing out a sheet of the Seven Norms of Collaboration and I have one for free for you all. You can download it on the show notes, which is [ClimerConsulting.com/017](http://ClimerConsulting.com/017). If you go there, there will be a link and you can download the Seven Norms of Collaboration. You can also visit the Thinking Collaborative website. I’ll put a link to the show notes in that. You can get some more information. I have seen teams when they have intentionally decided they are going to focus on this, they are going to practice it, they are going to remind each other about it, sometimes they will even put up a poster in the meeting room of the Seven Norms of Collaboration or they will have a handout in front of everybody or they will print the seven norms at the top of the agenda so that people can be reminded when they first come together.

There’s a number of different ways to do this, but like I said at the very beginning, norms can be developed within a team. They could be intentionally developed and manifested, but it does take some work. It does take time and it can be completely rewarding and totally worth it. I highly recommend putting some effort into it and you can download that free list at the show notes. When you do download it, you will also be added to my mailing list. I send out a newsletter about once a month. I write an article about leadership, creativity, or team development. If you don’t like it, you can unsubscribe. No big deal. Go there, [ClimerConsulting.com/017](http://ClimerConsulting.com/017) to download that little cheat sheet.

### Weekly Challenge

Every week I give a weekly challenge at the end of each episode. Your challenge this week is first of all go download that sheet or write down the Seven Norms of Collaboration. Put them somewhere visual where you can see them and pick one norm that you personally want to work on this week. Do you want to focus on putting idea on the table, do you want to focus on paraphrasing, is it presuming positive intentions? Focus on one this week and see how well you can do. If it’s something like paraphrasing, can you get three paraphrases throughout the day?



Maybe the first day you do one, the next day you do two, the next day you get three. See if you can get up to seven a day by the end of the week. By the way, this works great with partners, spouses, and family members. Trust me, I've tried it and it's awesome. It doesn't necessarily have to be in a work context to use these Seven Norms of Collaboration.

Download the one-page summary, the cheat sheet at [ClimerConsulting.com/017](http://ClimerConsulting.com/017). The other thing I haven't said this in a few episodes, but if you have topic request or questions about creativity that you want answered on the show, just send me an email. My email address is [Amy@ClimerConsulting.com](mailto:Amy@ClimerConsulting.com) and I'll try to incorporate your question to a future show. I have quite a list, which is where many of the topics come from. Feel free to email me and I'll see what I can do.

All right you all, have a wonderful week. I'll see you next time. Bye!