Amy Climer: Welcome to The Deliberate Creative Podcast Episode 45. Today's episode is about how to turn off that inner critic, and this topic comes from a question from a listener. I will talk about that in a moment, but first I want to address a little housekeeping. It has come to my attention that the contact form on my website has not been working, and I am so sorry. If you have emailed me lately and I have not responded to you, it is because I have not gotten your email. So if you could please so kindly email me again, that would be great. You can email me directly and skip the whole contact form. That email address is amy@climerconsulting.com. However, I believe the contact form is corrected now, ,so if you do want to try that, feel free.

If you email me, I typically respond within a couple of days. If I have not responded within a week, send me another email. Now, do not send me an email like every three days because something may be going on, but for the most part I am pretty prompt. So if you have a question you want me to talk about on the show or just something you are curious about, or if you are interested in bringing me into your organization and teaching your team how to be more creative together, that is what I do and I would love to talk to you about that, so send me an email. My phone number is also on the website and if you prefer to call me, you can do that as well. I apologize if you have emailed me and I have not responded. If it was from the website, that is most likely what happened.

Let's dive in to this topic. This is from an email I got from Shawn Sundsvold. Shawn, I hope I am saying your last name right. I am going to actually read the email to you all. "Amy, I love your show. I have binge-listened to certain episodes until my ears rang. I'm attempting to soak up all I can. I am one of those who would be the first to admit that I tell myself I'm not creative. Most of my life, I have always been surrounded by the typical creatives like songwriters, musicians and writers. I'm not one of them. I do write, but never really worked to

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publish anything. You talk in Episode 31 of creativity training and briefly discuss the divergent versus convergent thinking. I am the person with the ever present idea editor that can make up five reasons why something won't work, instead of appreciating the idea in the moment without editing or negative thinking. I really do believe it affects the creativity of the mind when for so long you have edited yourself down to no good ideas or the comparison of your idea versus someone else's idea, and immediately ruling out your idea because the internal editor immediately says it is not good enough. My question: how do you turn off the self editor and simply appreciate an idea for the idea? Do you have any tricks to develop that divergent thinking? Thanks."

Shawn, thank you so much for this question. I think a lot of people have the same question, obviously, that is why I am doing a whole episode on it. So let's dive in. There are three pieces of advice that I have. The first thing I want to say, however, is that if you are dealing with this, maybe it will be comforting to know that so are a lot of other people. I think that everybody on the planet probably has an internal editor, an internal critic of some sort. The difference is that some people are just better at dealing with it and better at saying, "No thanks, I do not need that opinion right now," and ignoring the editor, or at least selectively ignoring it. Sometimes that internal editor, that internal critic, can be really helpful because it can help us not do things that we really should not do. Sometimes it might help us be more ethical or make good decisions about our relationships or about life, but as Shawn has pointed out, sometimes that is not the case, and we do have good ideas that actually are worth pursuing, but our editor convinces us otherwise.

I have thought a lot about Shawn's question and there are three things I want to talk about. The first is our egos, the second is our environment, and the third is saying "yes". So I will talk about each of those. I am actually going to start with the environment. When I talk about environment, what I really mean is, the people we are around, not so much our physical environment. I actually believe that you can be creative in just about any physical environment. For some people physical environment is more important than for other people. Some people really need the beauty or the inspiration that might come from a beautiful place, and other people can actually be quite creative in a cubicle. The physical environment is not as universally important, and so for you figure out what you need in your physical environment. For me it is not actually a huge deal. I am not somebody that has to have a

certain type of space in order to be creative. If you can develop more flexibility in that area, I think that is a good thing.

But anyway, I am getting off topic. What I am really talking about are the people that we spend time with. I think that the inner critic develops in part from how we were raised, from our past, from our childhood, from the types of experiences that we had as kids, in school, even in middle school, high school, and college. All of these experiences really shape how open we are to ideas. Even if you have had a history of being in an environment that was more oppressive of ideas and really believed that there is one right answer for things, I think even if you come from that type of environment you can still move past that and you can still become more open and creative. I think sometimes it might help just to recognize what kind of messages you got as a kid about ideas. Were you taught to stay within a certain lane or this certain box, or were you taught that there are a lot of options and to explore them? So I think recognizing the kind of messages you got growing up can help you identify where the source of the critic might be coming from.

It is just good information. I am not a psychologist, I do not really know a lot of detail about what you are going to do with that other than just being able to recognize it and being able to know, oh yeah, I got that message when I was in middle school, in high school. Okay, that helps me understand where this critic is coming from. However, I do not live in that type of life, I do not have that environment right now, I am not in that same situation so the critic does not need to be the same. I hope this is making sense.

Anyway, just recognizing that past environment and then thinking about what is your present environment like. Who are the people you spend time with? From the age of 19 to 26, I lived in seven different states and that was very intentional on my part. I never moved as a kid, I lived in the same house from age 3 to 18. I did not remember this until actually pretty recent, but when I was a kid I always wanted to move. I thought that was really neat. I do not know why, because I liked the house. As an adult, when you are 19 to 26, at least for me, everything I owned fit in my car. I did not have a lot of possessions. I did not have a lot of responsibilities, necessarily. I mean, I did go to college but I did not have kids yet or that kind of thing, so for me it was an opportunity to explore new places.

I also did not have the financial ability to just go on vacation. That was expensive. So what I would do is I would get a job somewhere and then I would move there. I would get a job in a

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place that I wanted to be. So my first job out of college was in Washington State. I worked for the U.S. Forest Service as a stream surveyor. I went to college in North Carolina, so I moved from North Carolina to Washington State. I really just got in my car and drove there. Then that job ended. I moved to Portland. I moved to Colorado and New Hampshire. I have lived in all these different places.

I guess the one thing I learned from moving so much is that as I was making new friends, I got to be very intentional and choose who I spent time with. And I started realizing that I could spend time with people that were really negative and pull me down, or I could spend time with people that were more positive and helped me be a better person. Initially, I think I was actually intimidated by people who were more successful than me or who just like had their act together better than I did and so I would avoid them initially. But then as I got more comfortable and kind of recognized, oh, those are the kinds of people I want to spend time with and I need to seek them out.

So I got pretty picky about the kind of friends that I had and the people that I hung out with. And I am definitely picky today and I would say that for the most part the people that I hang out with and the friends that I have, they are really positive and they are supportive. Even if they do not get what I am doing, they are open. So pay attention to who you spend time with and be selective. Now, I am not saying to go divorce or breakup with all your friends, that is not what I mean. Because certainly, all of us have friends that maybe are a little bit more negative than others, but sometimes it is just okay and you can hang out with them and it is all good. But also trying to find friends who are more positive and that do support you.

Three Types of Friends who Impact your Ideas [11:08]

Supportive Friends
The other thing I have realized is that when it comes to ideas, there are three types of friends that I have. The first type is the friend that is super supportive. For me, that is my friend Sarah, probably my best friend. We are really close. She is the person that if I have an idea, she is going to say, "Yeah Amy, that is awesome. I love it, cool." She is going to ask me questions about it and we are going to have a great conversation. So if I have an idea that is not really well developed or I just sort of want to bounce around an idea with someone, I might talk to Sarah about it.
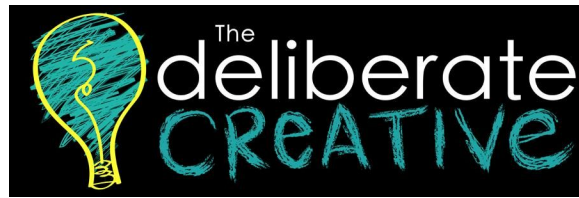
Neutral Friends [11:45]

Then I have other friends who bouncing around ideas is just not their thing. If I had an idea and I shared it with them, they would not necessarily shoot it down, but they might just say, "Oh, okay, cool." Maybe they would ask questions and poke holes in it, but they are pretty neutral or offer no feedback or support. Not that they are unsupportive, it is just they say, "Yeah, whatever, okay I do not really care." And again, not that they are being rude or anything, it is just that we have other connections besides that.

Problem Solving Friends [12:16]

The third type of friend is the one that I will go to when I have an idea and I need help further developing it. I want to problem solve with them. So for me, that is my mastermind group. If you are not familiar, I think I have talked about this before on the podcast, but a mastermind group is a group of people who are all working together. You are working individually and you are all working towards similar goals. I have two different mastermind groups, I started both of them, and the groups are all other entrepreneurs. There are five in one group and there are four in another. It is intentionally very small so that we can meet for two hours and each person has time to share and talk about what is going on in their business and their life.

That is the group that I will go to and say, "Okay, you all, I have this idea but it is not that well developed yet and I need to get some feedback on it." So we would spend maybe 15 or 20 minutes brainstorming and they would ask me questions or provide ideas or advice of ways I could further develop the idea. It is super helpful. Then every once in awhile they might say, "No, that is not going to work, Amy." But if I am getting that reaction from them all the time, something is wrong. Either I always have horrible ideas, which is not the case, or the relationship is off, and it's not a good fit. Fortunately, that does not happen so that does not apply in my case. But if it is that situation for you, really pay attention like what is going on here.

So those are three different types of friends I have: the one who is super supportive, the one who is either offering no support or is neutral, and then problem solving friends. I do not have a lot of friends, to be honest, who are unsupportive or who are challenging me or pushing me to not do things that I want to do. Those people are not in my life. There are people like that on the planet, absolutely. And there are people that I have been friends with like that before, but not anymore. There is finite time in the day, so I want to spend that with

people I want to be with and spend it in a way I want to, and it is not with unsupportive, negative people.

I am talking about your social environment because it makes a big difference in our inner critic. If you are around those unsupportive, negative people, your inner critic is most likely going to be stronger and you might hear those people speaking more in your head. Then, on the other hand, if you have supportive people in your life, you might hear their voices in your head, which is really helpful especially when you are nervous about a new idea. So that is one thing, pay attention to people who you spend time with and perhaps shift a little bit and spend more time with those positive people in your life.

How your Ego might be Hindering your Creativity [15:20]

Let's talk about point number two, which is the ego. First let me say, our inner critic is our ego; I do not know what Freud or the psychologists say, but that is what I think. I believe that a lot of times it is our ego that it is the inner critic and is concerned about rejection. In some ways, that inner critic is there to protect you. Let's say that you are a writer, and Shawn, you mentioned writing so I am using this example. But if you are a writer, let's say you write short stories and you want to send some of your short stories to a magazine or a journal or a literary magazine or something, and your inner critic is telling you, "No, don't do that, you are just going to get rejected. You are not good. You can't actually get published."

That is the inner critic trying to protect you, really. That is your ego because your ego does not want to get bruised. I am sure there are some real reasons, real need for our ego, but for the most part, I think it just gets in the way. Some of the people that I admire most in my life are really humble. My wife is one of those people. She is amazingly humble. Sometimes it drives me a little nuts because she is amazing and I say, "You should realize you are amazing," which maybe in the way back of her head she does. I hope she does not mind I am talking about her. Anyway, I think when we are so worried about rejection, it is our ego.

If you are a writer, I highly recommend reading the book by Stephen King called *On Writing*. Even if you do not like horror, he is a brilliant writer and very prolific, very successful. He wrote this great book about his life as a writer and what he has learned. I actually listened to it on audio and he narrates it, which is kind of cool. I felt like I was having a conversation with him, even though I have never met him and he has no idea I exist, but that was cool. He

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shared this great story of when he was trying to initially get his stuff published, and he was actually a high schooler. Every time he got a rejection letter, he nailed it on his wall. He had this one nail that he hung all the rejection letters on.

Eventually he had this big pile and when the nail started sagging and would no longer hold the weight of the paper, he had to get rid of the nail and then got a stake. So he hammered the stake into his wall where he hung all the rejection notices. I love that visual. He said he actually kind of got a little proud that he had all these rejection notices. Some of them had handwritten notes on them which read keep going, keep trying, or send this back to us in a couple of years, something like that. e said he treasured those the most, which I thought was pretty cool. Like, hey, somebody actually read it!

Some of this, as far as combating the ego, is maybe about reframing things. So instead of thinking I am trying to get my story published, thinking of it as I am trying to get as many rejection letters as I can because it is going to make a great story, and then see what happens. I mean, submit a real article, do not intentionally submit something that is not going to fit, but submit a real article and then see how many rejection letters you get. Changing the goal, I mean, wow, what is the inner critic going to do with that? Are they going to say, "You are not going to get any rejection letters, you are amazing?" Probably not. They might actually think the whole concept is stupid, but hey, whatever. See how many rejection letters you can get. It would be kind of fun.

So the first thing about the ego is that it is trying to protect us and for whatever reason; it thinks rejection is bad. Think of it as rejecting your story. Rejecting a short story you wrote is not rejecting you. Whoever is reading that does not even know you, does not know anything about you. It is not you, it is the story. And use that as a tool to say, "Okay, all right, it was not quite right. What can I do differently?" And do not be so egotistical to think that it is perfect the way it is and you cannot change it." That is where I think the ego really gets in the way of creativity.

The other thing that happens is sometimes we get ideas and we think they are bad ideas because they are not as amazing as say Einstein or Edison. Oh yeah, your idea is not the brand new light bulb. Nope, it is just something much smaller. There are two different types of creativity. There is evolutionary creativity and there is revolutionary creativity. Revolutionary creativity is something that just completely changes a field or life. I guess you could say the

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light bulb was a revolutionary idea. But evolutionary is something that is just a small step. Evolutionary is much more common, and I think sometimes we expect ourselves to be revolutionary when actually we are evolutionary.

Here is an example. I have a product called Climer Cards. I have talked about this before on the podcast and I know many listeners are owners of a deck of Climer Cards. For those who are not familiar, they are just a small deck of cards; they look like a deck of playing cards. On one side there are hand-painted images, watercolor paintings that I did. They are bold, iconic images. There are hundreds of ways to use the cards but the most common are to deepen conversations amongst your group, for example, during a training or to use them to generate new ideas.

The story of how these cards come to be was a very evolutionary process, an evolutionary idea, and actually I had a different set of cards that I had created just for myself. I had no thought or intent to ever sell them or market them. I was using them one day out on a ropes course. I was leading a team building session, and my friend Sarah, who I mentioned a minute ago, was the client. I used them with her group and as we were walking to the next activity, we had a couple of moments to chat.She said, "Amy, these cards are really cool. Have you thought about doing something with them?" I was like, "Oh no, I had not. I had never thought of that."

But that question really got my wheels turning in my brain. My first thought was, "Well, there are already other cards out there like that." There is a deck of cards called Chiji Cards which is the same concept but they are made with clipart images, so they look very different. I said, "Well, there are already Chiji Cards, people can just buy those. Why would they buy my cards?" I could probably give you ten different reasons of why I should not have made Climer Cards, but instead I thought, "Huh, I wonder if I could do this. Why don't I go through this process and then I will test it on Kickstarter?"

Kickstarter, I think, is a really cool way to test a new product idea because if no one wants to buy it, your campaign is not going to be successful. It is kind of low risk. I mean, yeah, it is a little bit of money, but not that much compared to what you would spend if you just move forward with the idea. So anyway, sure enough I tested it on Kickstarter and it was successful. Since then, that was 2012, I have sold around 1,300 to 1,400 decks of cards. It is not so much

that it is changing the world, but I think that is pretty darn cool. So I think sometimes we get these ideas and we shoot them down because it is not the next light bulb.

I hear stories from people all the time about how they have used Climer Cards and it makes me so happy. It is so cool because this deck of cards is having a significant impact on their life. So it is not changing the world, I mean not even close, but it is having a small impact on some people and I think that is pretty cool. Had my ego gotten in the way, I would not be having this conversation right now. When you are trying to come up with ideas or when you have ideas and you are trying to decide to implement or not, check your ego at the door and just go for it and just see what happens. Do not be so critical and do not be so worried about rejection because, so what? It does not actually hurt anything.

The Power of Saying Yes [24:13]

So I have talked about environment and I have talked about ego. The third thing I want to talk about is this idea of saying "yes". There is a concept called "yes, and". This comes from the world of improv, like theatre improv or comedy improv, and it is kind of the opposite of "no, but". So, if you imagine that an idea comes up and somebody says, "No, but here is another idea." Or, "No, that will not work, but…" versus, "Yes, and…" There is significant different energy in those two pairs of words.

Here is an example. This last weekend, I was at an event, a LeaderShape Lead Retreat and I was talking to a friend of mine, Chris. Chris was telling me that this summer he is leaving his job for a month -- he has a professional job -- he is leaving for a month to study improv in Chicago with a well known improv school. They are called iO. He was telling me this and it was so fun to listen to him because he was getting so excited and animated. And I was thinking, wow! First of all, that is really cool to go and have that opportunity and to decide to spend a month studying improv. Second was the fact that he was able to convince his boss to give him a month off of work.

Let me back up a little bit and explain a little bit more of this "yes, and" concept from the world of improv. For those of you who do not know, improv -- and I am no expert in improv by any means -- is a type of theatre, a type of performance where the actors are on the stage and they do not have a script. There is not a specific plan of who is going to say what, when. In
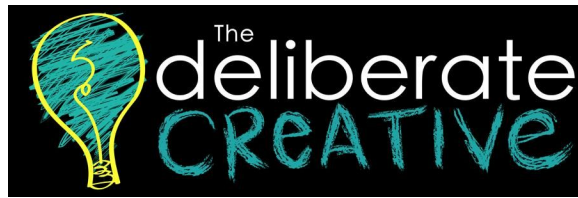
some ways, I think in Saturday Night Live there is definitely a large piece of improv, and Whose Line Is It Anyway is another example of some well known improv.

Imagine there are two people up on stage and they are doing a performance and one of them says, "Oh look, there is a rainbow!" And the other one says, "No, there is not. I don't see a rainbow. No, there is not a rainbow there. There is nothing there." That has certain energy to it. What if it went like this? One person says, "Oh look, there is a rainbow!" And the other one says, "Oh cool! I wonder what is under that rainbow. Oh my gosh, I think I see a unicorn! Do you see the unicorn?" And the first person says, "Oh my gosh, yes! Let's go." It completely changes the interaction. While there may be an occasion where disagreeing on the stage or saying, "Oh no, I don't see a rainbow," works, but for the most part what happens is that it kills the whole thing and the whole thing just halts to a stop. Versus if the responding actor says in their head, "Yes, and," they build on that initial concept and together collaboratively they are able to create something much more interesting and much more amazing.

So as Chris is telling me this story of leaving work for a month to study improv, I was thinking of how amazing it was that his supervisor essentially said, "Yes, and." And Chris was able to make a case of how studying improv was going to help him with his work and how he would bring some of the learning and some of the ideas back into his work, but how easy would it have been for his boss to have said no? But he did not. He paused and he said, "Hmm, all right, maybe." It also made me think about what you would do if you are in that situation as the boss and you had an employee come to you with kind of a crazy idea? What is your response? Do you say, "Yes, and," or do you say, "Oh, no?" So I think one way to start using the "yes, and" is that if you are on a team of any sort, when an idea is presented, say "yes". Do not say "no". I think when we are able to say "yes" to other people in our lives, it helps our critic start to say "yes" to ourselves.

I will give you another example also in the workplace. I have a client who is a technology firm, and a friend of mine, her boyfriend happens to work there. I actually just found this out. She was telling me this story that her boyfriend left the company and is actually hiking the Appalachian Trail. If you do not know, it is a 2,000 mile hike from Georgia to Maine in the United States. When he approached the company and said, "Hey, I am giving my notice because I am leaving and I am going to go hike the Appalachian Trail," there were so many reactions the company could have. They could have said, "Wow, well good riddance," or

whatever, but instead they said, "Wow! That is an amazing experience and we are really happy for you. And when you are done, if you want to come back, we would love to have you back. Oh, and by the way, while you are hiking the Appalachian Trail, are you going to need health insurance? Because we might be able to help you with that."

So she is telling me this story of what the company said to her boyfriend I say, "What? That is so cool! Especially the health insurance part." I think he ended up not needed the health insurance that they were offering, I do not know all the details of that, but the fact that they offered, wow! What a great example of saying "yes" to others. By the way, it is a really cool company to work for. And I think organizations that have a habit of saying "yes"have happy staff, and happy staff are more productive, do more for the company and result in an innovative company.

So Shawn, think about what can you say "yes" to. When the people you're surrounded by share their ideas, how do you respond to them? Also, how do you respond to yourself? How can you say "yes, and"? The other thing to keep in mind is that when you have an idea, it is never fully developed. No idea just emerges in somebody's head fully developed. It is a process. It is a seed. So this idea pops in your head and it has to be cared for and germinated and needs to be watered and fertilized and eventually it will grow into something that looks nothing like the original seed. It will look like some amazing plant.

I think sometimes we are really critical of the idea as it exactly emerges. If somebody told you that they needed a sunflower and you hand them a seed, they are probably going to be disappointed because they were expecting this big yellow flower. Same thing with an idea. If you expect the idea to be fully emerged, you are going to be disappointed. You have to start out with the seed and let it grow and nurture it and take care of it. I think there are a lot of negative things that happen if you do not. I think just in our own psyche and our own lives, it is not healthy. So nurture those ideas. They are not all going to be good and that is just normal. But see which ones you can nurture and develop and grow into cool sunflowers.

Shawn, I hope this was helpful. I hope I gave you some ideas on how you can help combat that inner critic. We talked about environment, the people you spend time with, your ego and how that can get in the way, and then finally saying "yes" to yourself and others, and trying to not

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say "no, but". Actually I will add even saying "yes, but" is kind of like a "no, but". So it is all about saying "yes".

The Weekly Challenge [32:25]

Your weekly challenge this week for everyone listening is to say "yes". If you are somebody where that feels like a big stretch, then your challenge is to say "yes" at least once this week to something that you might not have typically said "yes" to. If you are feeling like you are pretty good at that, then your challenge is to say "yes" three times or you can really push yourself and can do it every day for a full week. So that is your challenge. Say "yes" this week and of course, pay attention to your ego and your environment and see how you can apply those in your life as well.

All right you all, I hope this was helpful. Have a wonderful week. If you have questions you want me to answer on the podcast, send me an email and I will be happy to answer them either via email or the podcast, but I will definitely respond to you in some way. Have a wonderful, creative week. I will see you next time. Bye.