The Deliberate Creative Podcast with Amy Climer
Transcript for Episode #061:
How to Select the Best Ideas

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Amy Climer: Welcome to the Deliberate Creative podcast. Today's episode is about how to select the best ideas. I am going to teach you the exact process I use when I am trying to decide from a big list of ideas that I have and how to narrow down and select the best ones. This question actually comes from several listeners. I get this question rather frequently from people saying "Hey, I have all these ideas," or "Our team generates all these ideas, but then we never really know what to do with them. And how do we actually decide which ones are worth doing and which ones are not worth doing?" I am going to tell you how to do that.

I am going to give you an example. About a year ago, I was working with a consultant who I hired to help me sort through my ideas. I love coming up with ideas. I always have lots of ideas for my business and how I am going to present programs and how I am going to teach people how to be more creative and I've always had ideas. For me, the biggest challenge is that there is not enough time in the day, in the year even, for me to implement all my ideas. I really have to narrow in and figure out which ones are best. I have found that sometimes that is difficult for me to do by myself and it helps me if I can talk through that with someone else. If you are working in a team, you got that covered because you have other people to look at it from a variety of perspectives.

Develop Criteria for Your Specific Situation [02:05]

The first thing you want to do if you are trying to figure out which ideas are the best ones is you need to develop criteria for your specific situation. An example I am going to use, I was trying to think about what are the best ideas for me to implement for my business and to help grow

Climer Consulting and to help grow my consulting practice. My criteria that I ended up using were:

1. **Time:** How long would it take to implement this idea? Is this a really big project? Is this a small project? How much time investment is needed from me?

2. **Cost:** How expensive would it be for me to implement this idea. Not thinking of expense as in my time, but what are the external expenses? Would I need to hire someone to help me? Do I need to pay for something upfront? Is there an expense to a product that I am developing? What is the cost?

3. **Return on Investment:** One of those return criteria was how much money would I make. Like it or not, I do need to make money in order to survive so I had to think about how much money would this bring in. But then the second criterion I was using is what impact would that have on the people that I am sharing with. Those are two types of return on investment.

   As an example, as far as return goes, I do this podcast -- it used to be every week, now it is every other week -- and I do not get paid to do this. I actually do not make money on this podcast, but I do this because I think the return is high in that it can have an impact on a lot of people. That there are hundreds of people that listen to this podcast and I know that I am out there helping them be better leaders and stronger team leaders, helping teams develop into being more creative teams. That is really important to me. That is my main mission for my business. So even though monetarily I am not seeing a return so much, I know that this is part of the mission of my business so I am going to keep doing that.

The criteria that I used again were time, cost and the return on investment, so how much money would it bring in or how much impact would it have on people who are using the idea or the product, whatever it was.

How to Prototype and Test the Top Ideas [04:32]

I took all the ideas I had and I ranked them on these criteria. I just used a very simple low, medium, high. You can get a bit more complex if you wanted. You could use a scale of one to

five or a scale of one to ten, but I would say keep it simple. In fact, I would go, at most, one to five. For me, there were some things that the time was high and the expense would be low, but maybe my return was also going to be low. I decided well, my time is becoming more and more valuable and so I am not going to do that. I am not going to implement that idea, at least at this point. There were some ideas where I did not implement them yet, but they are still there. I have not thrown them away. I have no plans for them right away, but they are there and I know that in a couple of years the situation might change and I might decide that that is a better idea at that point.

And this is something your entire team could do together. You can set up an excel spreadsheet, we have the criteria on one side and all the ideas on the other side and team members can go in and insert their perspective for each of the ideas, like how much they think it would cost -- low, medium or high -- how much time they think it would take, et cetera, and then you could come together in a team meeting and compare those responses. Compare to see, "Wait a minute, one person thought this would take a lot of time and one person thought this would be really fast. Let's talk about that. Let's look at that."

It does not necessarily make sense to do this for hundreds of ideas. I think of this as like, say you do have hundreds of ideas, select 15, maybe even 20 depending on the situation, select some that automatically rise to the top. You know how it is. Sometimes in brainstorming or in ideation sessions, there are ideas that show up that are just really bad. Obviously, do not include those. It is okay to have some bad ideas, that is part of the process. Just get them out of the way. Take those top, say 15 ideas and then put them in this matrix and sort through what is going to be your best idea.

I have done this with teams before and I use the matrix -- the criteria on one axis and the ideas on the other axis -- I use that as a decision-making tool, but it is not the final decision. Let's say that you have an idea and the final score for this idea is 4.5 and then there is another idea that is 4.6 and we are saying higher is better, I am not going to automatically select the idea that is 4.6 over the one that is 4.5. Instead, what I do is, "Okay, here are these two ideas, let's now look at these. Let's put all the rest of them aside, now let's explore both these ideas." Depending on the situation, you may be able to only do one of them and so you need to just talk through it more. Or maybe that you can actually do a little bit of both of them, maybe you test them or prototype both of those ideas and then you come back and evaluate after playing around with each one

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for a week or a month. It depends on the situation and how much time you might need, but sometimes more than one idea can be implemented, especially initially. And then it may become more and more clear, like okay, this idea B is actually working better than idea A.

I will just give you another example of that. This morning, actually, I had coffee with someone who is a sales rep for an employment agency. I was getting to know her and learning more about the work she does. Her job is to work with businesses and help them hire the right people. Her clients are other business, so very similar to me in that regard. She has been in her job for about a year. I could tell she was really passionate about it and she really likes the company she works for, which I just think is always cool to talk with people who feel that way. So that was really fun.

But she was telling me that because she has only been in her job for about a year, she has a lot to learn. She is still figuring out what is the best way for her to approach businesses and to get to know the decision makers in the businesses, the people that could actually hire her and hire her company. She has this long list of ideas that she has been working on and what she decided is she was just going to try them all out and see what happens. One of the pieces of her criteria was that she got the opportunity to meet with the decision maker in the business and she is trying to figure out how do I do that?

She had all these different ideas and some of them were, actually, really creative, very interesting. One of them was she dressed up like Santa and would go to businesses and deliver gifts and she would come back to the same business 12 days in a row. She referred to it as the Twelve Days of Christmas. That was one thing she did. She selected some leadership books that she liked and management books and she would give those books as gifts and look at it, "Hey, let's get together in a month and let's have a conversation about this book and let's explore this book."

She had a bunch of other ideas and then she had this whole tracking system, essentially let me try the book idea for a month and see what happens. Let me try this Twelve Days of Christmas Santa Claus thing for 12 days and then she tracked how well they worked. What she found is that some ideas that she thought were going to work did not work so well and that others did work better, maybe ones that she did not expect. As she is explaining this to me I said, "What

you are doing is prototyping. You are prototyping ideas."

I share this with you because sometimes it is not obvious which idea is going to be the best one and so try it out, see what happens. Implement a few of those ideas on a low level or on a lower risk scale. For her to do this Twelve Days of Christmas thing, yeah, it took a little bit of time and I think she probably had a lot of fun with it, but it is relatively low risk. She is not hurting anything or it was not a huge expense for her. I think she did give little gifts to each place she went, but it was relatively low expense so it was low risk for her. And she seemed like someone that was pretty happy to dress up as Santa Claus so for some people that would feel like a greater risk. The point is, figure out which of those ideas you can prototype and which ones can you test before having this huge commitment to them.

I hope this has helped you think about how might you select the best ideas. The first thing you are going to do is develop criteria. In my example, you noticed I have three criteria, maybe four if you separate the return out for both money and impact. I had four pieces of criteria and I would say that is enough. Three is ideal, maybe go up to five, but I would not get any more than five. It just gets too complex.

You can select those criteria really at any point in the process. You could select it before you even come up with the ideas. I actually prefer to select the criteria afterwards. After I have generated a list of ideas, then I develop my criteria. If you are working in a team setting, I would develop that criteria as a team and have a conversation about it. I have done that with teams before and actually what I found is for the most part, teams can do that pretty quickly. There are certain criteria that always come up; time, cost, impact or return. Those are three really common ones. Feel free to just take those three criteria, if that works for you. Coming up with those criteria, you can do that after you have come up with the ideas. You can do it before, the only downside of that is that it might squelch some ideas, so something to keep in mind to think about.

The Weekly Challenge [13:16]

I hope that has helped you. Your challenge for the week is to try this out. Figure out what is a problem, what is a challenge that you are working on that you have a lot of ideas for and develop three pieces of criteria. Then set up some sort of matrix so that you can evaluate the

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ideas and figure out which ones might be the best ideas. That is your challenge for the week.

I would love to see your comments in the shownotes. You can access the shownotes at www.climerconsulting.com/061 because this is Episode 061. If you go there, you will be able to find the shownotes and share your comments. Let me know how it goes. If you have not already subscribed to the Deliberate Creative podcast, please go to iTunes or Google Play and subscribe. That way, every two weeks as a new episode comes up, it will show up in your phone, on your app, whatever it is you're using, so that you do not miss any of the episodes. You can also follow me on Twitter, Facebook and Pinterest and Instagram, I am on all those things. I am most active on Facebook and Twitter. Find me there and we can connect. I put all sorts of resources up there for you.

One of the ideas that did pass the criteria that I mentioned when I was evaluating all my ideas about a year ago was an online class. And if you are on my newsletter, you will get information about that. I am really excited about it. I think it is going to be really awesome. If you are interested in hearing more about that, sign up to my newsletter on my website at www.climerconsulting.com. Have a wonderful week everyone. See you next time. Bye!

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