



The Deliberate Creative Podcast with Amy Climer Transcript for Episode #078: Facilitating Creative Problem Solving with Roger Firestien October 5, 2017

Amy Climer: Welcome to The Deliberate Creative Podcast Episode 78. Today's episode is about Facilitating Creative Problem Solving. I have invited Dr. Roger Firestien and he is going to talk about facilitating. He has a ton of experience and has a lot of insight and wisdom to share. Before I introduce Roger Firestien, I wanted to share with you a new review that came in on [iTunes](#). This review is from Hays67 and it is five stars, titled: Highly Recommend for Everyone.

Hays67 says:

“Amy provides well-informed, well-educated and fully inspired discussions about creativity. She applies the language and principles of artist to business setting so that it's broadly relatable. Amy makes creativity feel doable for those who wouldn't consider themselves creative, and she validates those who do. More importantly, she gives a clear “why” behind what she discusses.”

Thank you so much, Hays67. I appreciate the feedback. If you are a listener and you have not yet left a review, please go over to [iTunes](#) or [Google Play](#). Love to get your feedback. Leave an honest review there. I read most of the reviews on the air. Thank you for sharing.

Today, we are going to talk with Dr. Roger Firestien. He is a rock star in the world of creativity. He has been a professor of creativity for decades, he has written numerous books, articles, and apparently, he has led more people through the Creative Problem Solving Process than anyone else on the planet. I would say he knows his stuff when it comes to facilitating Creative Problem Solving. I have been to conferences, sat in on his workshops and he is really good at what he does. I have learned a lot of from him so I wanted to invite him on the show. Today, he breaks down what you need to know to be a good facilitator of the Creative Problem Solving Process.

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If you are listening to this episode and you do not fully understand Creative Problem Solving, you may want to go back to episodes 3 through 8 on this podcast and listen to them. You can find them at www.climerconsulting.com/003. Also, Roger shares a number of resources and links in our conversation and I will put all of those on the shownotes at www.climerconsulting.com/078 because this is Episode 78.

All right, here is Roger.

Roger, welcome to The Deliberate Creative podcast. Thanks for being on the show.

Roger Firestien: It is a pleasure to be here, Amy. Thank you.

Amy Climer: Can you start off and tell us a bit about who you are and what you do?

Roger Firestien: My name is Roger Firestien and I am the Senior Faculty member at the International Center for Studies in Creativity at SUNY Buffalo State. I am also an innovation consultant and I have been involved in the field of creativity since 1977. I do not look that old, all right?

Amy Climer: That is right, you do not!

Roger Firestien: There you go. But I fell in love with this stuff when I was about 22 years old and have continued to just stay in the field and love it and keep doing lots of work with it and working with clients and write books and teach student how to facilitate this stuff. So yeah, that is a little bit about me.

Amy Climer: That is awesome. Today, we are going to really hone in on Facilitating Creative Problem Solving. To kick things off, can you start by explaining, what is Creative Problem Solving and what does it mean to facilitate it?

What is Creative Problem Solving? [04:06]

Roger Firestien: Creative Problem Solving is a simple repeatable way for groups and individuals to take on new challenges and come up with effective, even breakthrough, solutions that result in new productive change. I have been working with this process for, like I said, 40 years. The



beautiful thing about this process is that you do not have to wait or to worry about getting creative or innovative ideas because the process does exactly that.

Essentially, it follows a number of steps, and this is how we think about things. The first thing we do is we identify a goal or a wish or a challenge. What is it that you want to create? What is it that you want to make different? What is it that you want to improve? We use some language to describe that. We use words like “I wish” or “it would be great if”, and then we gather some data around that. What is the information around that?

Then what we do is we redefine what that initial goal or wish is. For example, it would be great if I could be more physically fit, or I wish I could lose weight, or it would be great if I could write my next book. Once we gather the data, we look at all the different little blocks or sub-problems or challenges that might be in the way for making that happen and we phrase those like a challenge statement, beginning with the words “how to” or “how might”. We come up with a bunch of these. We come up with 10, 15, 20 different ways to state the challenge. We pick the best definition of the challenge, then very quickly, we are able to generate lots of ideas for solving that challenge. We pick the best of those ideas, we refine those ideas and we put together a step-by-step plan for action.

It is a structured yet flexible process that moves you from something you would like to create to some very specific steps to make that happen. What I have seen is over the years it is extraordinary. I continue to teach the introductory graduate class in creative studies at SUNY Buffalo State in the International Center for Studies in Creativity because what I see happen in there is I see people changing their lives. I see people doing extraordinary things. I see light bulbs coming on in people’s heads and people making a difference, not only in their personal life, but in the life of their business and their communities by applying Creative Problem Solving.

Amy Climer: Absolutely. I have seen the same thing. It is sort of amazing, especially when you realize how simple the process is.

Roger Firestien: That is really true, Amy. Often times, people think that creativity has to take a lot of time or it has to be complex and it has been my goal over the years to make creativity simple, make it practical, help people to apply it in their world. There are extraordinary examples on how we have been able to do that.



Examples of How the Creative Problem Solving Process Works [06:46]

Amy Climer: You have mentioned that you have seen some incredible experiences and some incredible breakthroughs happen. Can you give us an example of maybe some different types of clients you have worked with or what you have seen with the Creative Problem Solving Process?

Roger Firestien: Absolutely. There is a whole bunch of examples. Let me give you just a couple of examples here. This is a favorite of mine. I actually did not facilitate this session, but my students did. This is a story about my friend Austin Saccia and Nathan Bliss. They worked at the General Motor's Saginaw division forge plant in Tonawanda, New York. They had taken one of my classes and they were getting Creative Problem Solving into this plant. What this plant does is that they make ring gears. What a ring gear does is it changes the direction of power in your car, so from one direction to another, so it is in your transaxle, it is in your differential.

The way you make a ring gear is you take a really hot piece of metal that looks like a donut and you put it in a stamp with about 45 tons of weight to it and this ring gear comes out on the other side. And it is a round gear and has got notches on it. The problem was the ring gears were sticking in the die. And so what the operators would do is they would put a slab of grease on the die, the die would hold still and the die would break. They were breaking around ten of these ring gears a week. Ring gears cost between \$4,000 to \$5,000 a piece, so this is a \$50,000 problem.

Amy Climer: Wow! \$50,000 a week!

Roger Firestien: \$50,000 a week, yeah. Just add that up how much is going out in a month. So they said let's try this Creative Problem Solving stuff. They put together a group of operators, they had some people in there that were in the administrative area, they had a couple of chemical engineers in there and just a whole bunch of people with a whole bunch of different perspectives. And they started working on the challenge of how might we prevent the ring gears from getting stuck in the die.

They used this little Forced Connections technique so it looked at ideas that might not relate with the problem all, and one of the fellows in the group said, "You know, my wife has this product called Pam and when you spray it on the pan, the vegetables don't stick to the pan.



What if we spray the dies with Pam and then maybe the ring gears wouldn't stick to them?" There was a chemical engineer in the group and he said, "Pam probably won't work, but some Penfield Oil number 5 and some number 10 soap might work."

They stopped the session, they jumped in their Chevrolets, they drove down the street to the nearest K-Mart, they got a spray bottle, they went back, they mixed this solution up, they sprayed it up on the die, they have not broken a die since. That little solution is a \$1.50 solution. Here is an example where \$1.50 solution saves up to \$50,000 a week. That is an example.

The thing is when we talk about how long did it take for them to come up with this idea, it was about 45 minutes. Because everybody in this group was trained in Creative Problem Solving. It does not have to take a lot of time. It can be very, very efficient, and the results can be extraordinary. Do you want some more examples?

Amy Climer: Yeah, maybe give us one more. That was a great story.

Roger Firestien: Here is another example. This example is how to get a billion dollars.

Amy Climer: Nice.

Roger Firestien: A number of years ago, I was contacted by the Western New York Economic Development Council. This council was tasked to work on a way to spur economic development in western New York. Working with graduates and alumni of the Master's of Science degree program in Creative Studies, we designed a series of facilitation meetings to meet with the Economic Development Council. That included, often times, the lieutenant governor, presidents of local universities, local business leaders. And we were able to put together the initial parts of a plan that eventually went to Albany and Governor Cuomo awarded \$1 billion for economic development in Buffalo. It is called the Buffalo Billion.

The core of that was facilitation in Creative Problem Solving. They were looking for unique different plans, comprehensive plans, and what we were able to do in using creativity and Creative Problem Solving in pieces of the process was to be able to craft a plan that got Buffalo one billion dollars for economic development. And we did that in about three and a half to four



months. That is how powerful this stuff can be. And I can go on and on and on because I live and die by the results that my clients and our clients have.

Amy Climer: Wow! That is amazing. Those are some huge numbers you just talked about.

Roger Firestien: Here is the thing too; numbers are great, but let me tell you another story. This is a story about one of the students in one of my classes. I teach a weekend class and it is three weekends during the semester. The first class was, let's say, in January and the student was there. She was delightful. She was really interesting. Second class, she comes back and she is really kind of getting involved in this stuff. The third class she comes back and she said, "I want to tell you what I have done between this class and the last class. I want to let you know that I published a book that I originally started writing when I was in fourth grade, I have started a publishing company, I am working actively on domestic violence, and I have an exhibit at a local art place that's going to be next week and it's in the news."

First forwards six months -- she is a victim of domestic violence -- she is Albany, New York talking to our senator about an act named Britney's Law which would be a registered list for violent offenders just like sexual predators. She used that and she has turned her life around. And she is raising a nine-year-old son and she is helping other people doing this kind of stuff. So not only is it the big numbers, but it is also people that are doing extraordinary things for their communities, for children, to make the world safe and a better place.

Amy Climer: Wow! All through Creative Problem Solving.

Roger Firestien: Yeah.

Amy Climer: That is actually amazing. Let's talk about facilitating that process. Actually, first question is; when you mentioned the story about the ring gears, you said that everybody already knew the Creative Problem Solving process and so it took about 45 minutes. What did that look like? Did they get training in this, say, at some prior point and then they were able to pull out these tools when they needed them or how did that work?

Roger Firestien: I think the way it worked was, as I recall, is that Austin and Nate had taken a course with me and we also did a little bit of training with the organization. They were trying to get the organization to get more creative so we did just a few little half-day creativity training

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programs. Essentially, we taught them how to redefine challenges and how to generate ideas using a variety of idea generating techniques and how to evaluate those ideas effectively. The training programs were maybe 3 or 4 hours in length and then the goal was to come back and then apply those on challenges that they had.

When we talked about the Buffalo Billion, this was really very highly facilitated. We had a trained facilitator in each one of those and our training for that was maybe 15 or 20 minutes for each session just to give them a tool, introduce the tool and then directly apply it on the challenge. I think the main thing that we are after here is that we do not have the time anymore -- we used to be able to do five-day training programs and have people come off and go to places and do off-sites. We do not have that time anymore. What I have been looking and my work over the last few years has been able to, looking at reducing the amount of time it takes to learn creativity tools, looking at the very essential tools that people can use 98 percent of the time that work consistently and then people can then apply that on the challenges that they have.

So there was some training, but not hours or days worth of training because the goal is, back to what I talked about earlier, making creativity simple, practical and helping people to apply it in their world. You can practice this stuff on a fun sort of a challenge like we always use the classic warm up activities, how to improve a bathtub for generating ideas. That's fine. And you play around with that, you learn how the technique works and then you work on the challenge at hand. But you always need to have that learning, that training first, even if it is just a short burst of 10, 15, 20 minutes. Because what that training does is it sanctions the time for innovative thinking. It sanctions the time for creativity. So when you come in, we do a little creativity warm up and then work on the challenge. People get the message that we are here to think differently, to think in new ways. That is a little bit about those two cases.

Amy Climer: I have sat in on one of your workshops before at the CPSI Conference and I remember you were a big fan of the warm up, of doing some challenge that has nothing to do with what they really need to do, like oh, let's redesign bathtubs, just as a way to get people thinking differently.

Roger Firestien: Yeah. I am not a really big fan, I am like dedicated. When I teach that with students, it is like in my entire career when I neglected to do a warm up activity, I did that twice.



Either because I thought the group was already warmed up or I did not have enough time to do it or I did not think I had enough time and that I had to go back and actually do a warm up activity.

What a warm up activity is essentially is just a little brief training activity. There are fun activities that you can do like how to get an elephant out of the refrigerator, how to get a rhinoceros out of a Jeep, what to do with ten tins of orange Jell-O. Fun quick things like that to get people to laugh, to get people to have a good time, to get people to practice creativity methods on something that they have no investment in at all so that they can learn the tools. Just like my whole analogy is I am a musician by training so first before you can play really good music, you have to learn the scales. You have to learn how stuff fits together.

All you are doing in those little warm up activities is just learning the scales and then you are reinforcing the behavior that you are after, the environment that you want to set up. Because it does a number of things; it gets people to trust each other, it gets people to have some fun and it gets people to try out the methods and the techniques and then work on the challenge at hand.

In all the challenges that we have worked on, including the Buffalo Billion, there was always a little warm up activity first instead of just jumping into it the way people have always approached a challenge. Because you are stopping the action, you are saying, “We are thinking differently now and here is how we are going to do that.” That is the purpose of the warm up.

Amy Climer: That is great. I love it.

Roger Firestien: Thanks.

Roger’s Process of Facilitation [17:38]

Amy Climer: I just want to walk through your process of facilitation. Let’s imagine I am a client. I come to you and I know that my organization needs to be more creative and say we have a particular problem, something like the ring gear. I come to you and I say, “Hey, can you help us?” What does that look like when someone comes to you? What kind of conversations do you



have with them ahead of time? What does that process look like when you are face-to-face with them? Walk us through that if you would.

Roger Firestien: Most of the people that I work with have been recommended to me by somebody else. Many cases, it is word of mouth. They will go then to the website and they will take a look at the kind of stuff that I have done and then they will contact me and they will say, “Look, here’s what we’re working on.” Let me give you a couple of examples. Right now, I am working with a city out in Colorado, a very progressive city. It is the City of Fort Collins. They have asked me to come out and to work with their sustainability issues, to work with helping them make their community even better. The person that is handling that knows me through other work that I have done and he said, “We really would like you to come out and engage the community.”

We have had a number of conversations around two things. First, this is going to be a morning session. The facilitation will include some training, it is some idea generating and it is not just going through the creative process lockstep often times. There are, often times, lots of different ways to approach this. The objective was we want to get people involved in the community, we want to get people to realize that we are innovative, we want to give people some tools for innovation, and we want some output as well.

We structured an event where they are going to have about 40 minutes of training on what is creativity, how does it work, how do you apply it. And then we are going to work specifically on challenges that the community has come up with to generate ideas, to select those ideas. And at the end of the morning, the government out there and the community leaders and the people as far as Fort Collins sustainability is concerned, are going to have a whole bunch of ideas that then they can take and use and implement to make the community better.

It has really been interesting because I have been doing a lot of work recently with community development, with economic development and getting people involved in their communities in economic development. This is like the second or third one I am doing around that area. Other folks will say, “Look, we have a specific problem.” For example, we were working with a magazine a number of years ago and they were trying to get more sell-through at the newsstand. I came in, I worked with a small group, we said it would be great if we get more



sell-through the newsstand, we gathered some data round it, redefined the problem, generated some ideas and then they left with a plan of action.

There is essentially two things. There is one where you have a small resource group of say seven folks or so and a client, the person who owns the challenge, and the purpose there is very specifically to go through to solve a problem. And they get a transcript of the proceedings, they get step-by-step actions and ideas and they go. It does not really matter if they learn the process or they learn the tools or not. The other approach is a bit of training so that they can replicate this and then working on specific challenges that are there.

Amy Climer: And then they could do that whenever they want.

Roger Firestien: Exactly, right. And they also leave with some output. They also leave with stuff that is important to them. The thing is, this stuff is not going to stick organizationally if you just go out and give them creativity tools. "Isn't this neat? Isn't this fun? We came up with a bunch of ideas, thank you very much." No, you got to give them some tools and you have to apply them to stuff that is important to them because that way, folks see the relevance of it and they create results immediately.

Amy Climer: I think having it be about a real issue that they have is critical.

Roger Firestien: Absolutely, Amy.

Amy Climer: The other thing that I think is so important that you touched on is just it is not random tools that you are doing like, "Oh, let's do some brainstorming technique." No, it is like this entire process that all fits together.

Roger Firestien: Yes. Most people do not do brainstorming very well. People think we are going to sit round in a room and we are going to talk about some ideas. That is not brainstorming. Brainstorming is following very specific guidelines, different judgments, strive for quantity, seek wild and unusual ideas, combine and build on those ideas. In a well-functioning brainstorming session, you are going to come up with 40, 50, 60 ideas in five minutes. And you follow some very structured guidelines, you have somebody to facilitate the process, that is when the stuff works.



As you mentioned, Amy, it is not just idea generation or brainstorming, it is really redefining the challenge and brainstorming different ways to state the challenge. Coming up with lots of different ways to view the challenge and then you pick the best one and then you can really fly. It does not make any sense to generate lots of ideas if you are solving the wrong problem.

Amy Climer: Yes! One of the things I say a lot is that the way you word the challenge impacts the type of ideas you get.

Roger Firestien: Absolutely right.

Amy Climer: And so making sure you are actually getting the ideas you want.

Roger Firestien: Solving the right problems.

Amy Climer: Exactly. Roger, when you are facilitating, what are some things that you want to keep in mind to make sure that the experience goes well?

What to Keep in Mind When Facilitating [22:44]

Roger Firestien: I think the most important thing to keep in mind when you are facilitating is how you show up as a facilitator. What I mean by that, you are modeling the behaviors that you want people to have happen in the session. And there is a number of those behaviors around that. One is energy. You never match the energy of the group, you are always up two or three notches above the energy of the group.

The other thing is that you show up not judging, you show up as open, you show up as caring and you show up as the folks out there that you are working with really need your help. It is your job to establish an environment that nurtures them, that allows them to be safe. And within that environment there are some guidelines as well, but reinforcing the guidelines that we are not going to share anything outside of this, this is confidential. We are interested in everybody's ideas. We are not going to judge ideas until we have got a bunch of ideas out there and then we are going to judge them in a very specific fashion that really helps people to move those ideas forward. We are going to talk about challenges in a different way. Instead of saying things like we do not have the money, we are going to say things like how might we raise the money or how might we reduce the cost? And we are going to move forward in a way that



produces a positive outcome rather than just hanging around and complaining. I think that is the most important thing that I have learned over all of these years.

And it is funny too because I like to play around and joke around and Amy, you have been in sessions where you have seen me, I just joke and have some fun, and I have to be careful that my joking does not edge on sarcasm. Because if I do that, then that just changes the whole environment just a little tiny bit and I do not want to mess with the environment like that. And so I have to be funny or have fun or having fun, but not being sarcastic in any way. That just does not work. And so it is really that whole environment of you are safe, here are some things that are going to help you, here are some tools to help you, and so that is how I show up as a facilitator.

And then the tools and the process is absolutely essential, but if you are going to flab up, make some mistakes on the delivery of the tools and not on how you show up as a person because that is what people are going to be watching. The other thing is I do not use a lot of creativity tools. I do not throw every creativity tool in the book in a session. There are three or four that I use consistently that work consistently. I do not think you have to be a flashy facilitator to be a really good facilitator or to be an excellent facilitator.

Amy Climer: I would agree. Actually, sometimes the best facilitator, I am sometimes just so impressed because it looks like they do not have any tools and, of course, they really do, but it's just so smooth.

Roger Firestien: Yeah.

The Tools Roger Uses More Than Any Others [25:37]

Amy Climer: You mentioned that you have three or four favorite tools that you just go to all the time. Could you share what those are?

Roger Firestien: This is to the regret of my colleagues, "Try this, do this."

Amy Climer: And you are like, "No, no."



Roger Firestien: “No, this works.” Here are the favorite tools and if folks want to find out more about this, you can go to the website. I have got a slide deck on there called Mastering the Inside Moves of Creative Problem Solving Facilitation, you can look that over. But let’s start with this.

A number of tools; one, phrasing problems like challenges. Phrasing problems with “how to” or “how might” or “in what ways might”. Generating lots of challenges that way. The idea generating tools are Stick 'em Up Brainstorming, Brainwriting, Forced Connections. That is about it. To evaluate, I use Pluses, Potentials, Concerns, starting that out with the idea phrase “what I see myself doing.” And then to generate actions, just a checklist of action questions and generating actions that way. That is basically about it. Because the interesting thing is when you show folks a Forced Connections technique, which is showing people a picture or an unrelated stimulus to get some ideas from there, it is amazing the way people are able to make connections and it is absolutely extraordinary.

I am doing a series of interviews on Application of Creative Problem Solving and I am interviewing a leading cardiologist in the area. This guy is brilliant. He saves thousands of people’s lives. He took my class and he said the thing that was extraordinary to him is the whole idea of forcing connections. Making connections between things that you never thought related before and that was one of the key things as far as developing his creativity is concerned.

I do not think you have to be fancy to be a really good facilitator. That also means that you are not absolutely proficient at every tool that is out there that you can use in your toolkit because sometimes you are going to need to use that. Sometimes you are going to need to do Evaluation Metrics or Card Sort or The Ladder of Abstraction or those sorts of tools. But that is not always necessary, but you need to have them there just in case.

Amy Climer: Great, that is awesome. Thanks for sharing that.

Roger Firestien: You are welcome.

Amy Climer: I will make sure to put a link to the slide deck in the shownotes. Just for those of you listening, some of these tools I have explained in the very early episodes of the podcast. I



think episodes 3, 4, 5, 6, and 7 kind of walk through stages of the Creative Problem Solving Process. Some of those tools are explained in there as well.

How to Design the Physical Space to Achieve Maximum Results [28:15]

Roger, how do you set up the environment, like the physical space? Is there anything in particular you like to do?

Roger Firestien: You bet. When you come into the space, the last thing you want to do is come into a dead space. What we will do is if we are going to do just a facilitation session, we will have the room set up and on the table there are going to be markers and post-its and there are going to be some pictures. So there are going to be [Climer Cards](#) on the table. And there is going to be music playing and there is going to be slide quotes up on the screen. I usually have creativity quotes about life, pictures and stuff up on the screen so when people come in, it is a welcoming environment. Like I said, you have music playing and there are slides on the screen, there are interesting things on the table, there is Play-Doh and Silly Putty and Legos if you want and Pipe Cleaners so you can manipulate those things as you are going through a session.

It is a stimulus-rich environment, but not a stimulus overdone environment. It is a warm environment, it is a nurturing environment. The last thing you want to do is to walk into a dead room where there is no music playing, where there is nothing going on. Because when you start a facilitation session, it starts the second that people walk in that door because they are going to make an impression around that session immediately. Often times, people walk in and they go, "Oh my gosh, this looks like fun." Already you are winning. Because if it is fun, if it looks interesting, it is like wow! Okay. Then you can build from there. It is great.

Amy Climer: I am assuming you are using like round tables, people are not sitting in rows.

Roger Firestien: No.

Amy Climer: I was recently asked to do a session and the space was at a summer camp. And I was talking to them about okay, well what is the physical space like? And she is like, "Well, we are going to do it in the chapel so there are pews." I am like, "Ah, no, that's not going to work." That was very funny.



Roger Firestien: That is really crucial. I will tell you a funny story. I was doing some work a number of years ago and I was in Manhattan and I was like on the 40th floor of one of these places and the room they had me in had this big conference table, that was a problem in itself, but there was no wall space. But on the wall were these oil paintings of like the benefactors and the past presidents and stuff. And you know how we have in movie theatres those velvet ropes that rope stuff off, these were in front of the paintings so I could not even use wall space and so we are sticking stuff to the walls and stuff like that. The environment can work for you and also it can really be difficult for you.

I tell my students, I say when you are doing stuff, you own the room. Also a number of years ago I was doing some work with the Department of Treasury and we were going to have a series of programs over the course of a year and they took me to the room where we were going to do the session and they said, "Here's your session room, we are going do all the sessions here." The room was set up so the tables were in a square. I said, "Well, we are going to have to put those into small groups, into subgroups, into pods." And they said, "No, you can't do that." I said, "Why?" They said, "The tables are bolted together." I said, "Get me a wrench." So I spent four hours laying under these tables unbolting these tables reconfiguring the room because that arrangement would not work. It is really crucial that we set up the environment that is going to work for you. And the chapel in the summer camp, sorry move it.

Amy Climer: I do not think I can unbolt all the pews.

Roger Firestien: Yeah. Nice idea.

Amy Climer: That is great. A lot of times when I am talking to a client and I tell them I want to get there about an hour ahead of time, is that okay, is someone going to be there, they are often quite surprised that I would need a full hour. I am like well -- sometimes I do not, but sometime you might have to be unbolting tables.

Roger Firestien: Right. When I am working with a client in another part of the country, for example this work that I will be doing in Colorado because I live in Buffalo, I will be out there the day before and we are going to look at the space and check it out. Often times, I will spend an hour or so the day before because you want to make sure that when folks walk in, particularly with the morning session, you are ready to go. And you are walking in there calm and you have



tested the AV. I do not like surprises before a session. And although the session looks incredibly spontaneous and stuff, that is absolutely correct, but you have to set the stage for spontaneity.

Amy Climer: Absolutely. I think if you can get there the day before, that is going to be ideal. I think that point about spontaneity is so true. I once was working with a client who was just a one-on-one coaching client where I was helping them be a better speaker. This person was incredibly shy and just very nervous about speaking but they needed to do it as part of their job. We were talking about people that give TED Talks or other I would not say overly polished, but they are practiced, they have some experience. And I talked about how they spend a lot of time planning and prepping and he was blown away. He was like, “What?” Because if you are a good speaker, it just looks like you are up there thinking off the top of your head and it is just so smooth, but the reality is you have put a lot of work behind the scenes into it.

Roger Firestien: Tremendous amount of work. And the shorter the talk, the more work you put into it.

Amy Climer: Oh yeah. I just did a 6 minute and 40 second talk last week, it was so much work.

Roger Firestien: I did one of those 5-minute disrupt HR events where you have 20 slides, 5 minutes and the slides advance automatically every 15 seconds.

Amy Climer: Yup, that is what I did last week.

Roger Firestien: Uuwiii!

Amy Climer: It was tough.

Roger Firestien: I rehearsed that thing for weeks.

Amy Climer: I probably should have done a little more rehearsing than I did, but yeah. This is great. Another question I have Roger is, and something we talked about before we started recording is this idea of evaluating yourself as a facilitator and how do you decide if you did well and if you can improve. I know sometimes when I finished a session, I think, “Okay, I think that went well,” but I am not in the participant’s heads. I cannot really tell what their reaction was. I



am just wondering what do you do? How do you evaluate yourself and how do you know where you want to improve and get better?

Roger Firestien: I think there are a couple of levels of that. First, there is a technical evaluation and then there is also sort of -- the word that comes to mind is spiritual, but I do not mean it that way or the essence of it. The technical evaluation is did you execute the techniques to the best of your ability? Did you ask the client questions? Did you check back appropriately? Did you phrase problem statements appropriately? Did you do, I like to call it, a technically perfect process? Which there is hardly any technically perfect processes, but did you do the techniques well? And that happens early on in somebody's career in this. So that is what you are looking at reviving in probably the first four or five years. Did you do the techniques well? Did you play the scales right? Did you play the notes right? To use the musical analogy, again, did you play the notes right?

And then from there what you are looking at is like did you craft the session well? If we are talking about music, did you crescendo when you were supposed to? Did you phrase properly? And so it is that level that you are looking at, is you are looking at how the session flowed. The bottom line is that whether you are doing a training session or whether you are doing a facilitation session with a smaller group, you always want to just check in, did folks get what they needed? And that is where I check in with the client, the person that hired me.

Also, you will know that when people come up to you in the end and saying, "This is the most incredible stuff I've ever heard in my life. Thank you." You will also know that when the energy level at the end is high. Oftentimes, it's been really interesting, we will end the session and people do not want to leave. It is like, "Okay, we are done," and they want to stay. That is one of the ways that you do it. You can always do evaluations like a two-question evaluation; what were the strengths of the session, what would you recommend we change or do differently? Those are always fine, but I think when you are at a point where you are at a level of master facilitator, you have a really good idea of what is happening, when it is happening, and afterwards. And if you are finding that it is going off the rails when you are doing the session, then that is when you correct. That is when you improvise. And to use the musical analogy again, you are not going to be able to improvise unless you know the scales really well.



I guess I would say first, get the technique down so well that you do not even have to think about it. That is your first level of evaluation. Your second level of evaluation is how did the session flow? How did the musical piece work? If you talk about conductors who conduct orchestras they talked about this. He said you are an artist when you are facilitating a session. Every facilitation is a work of art. Every facilitation is a piece of music. And when you are facilitating, you are the conductor and the conductor does not play the music, but the conductor makes sure that the orchestra has phrased everything properly. Has put it together and has interpreted it well.

And so that is the other level that I look at when we are evaluating a facilitation session. Did the spirit of it come through? Are people excited about this? Did folks get the ideas that they wanted? Are they leaving with something that they can apply immediately? That is essentially how I go about doing it.

Amy Climer: That is awesome. I love those three levels, kind of the technical piece, the essence and then the outcomes.

Roger Firestien: Thanks. I just thought of that.

Amy Climer: There is the spontaneity.

Roger Firestien: We are cranking.

Amy Climer: Exactly. I love it. Roger, you have shared a ton today. This has been so awesome.

Roger Firestien: Thank you.

Weekly Challenge [38:38]

Amy Climer: Could you wrap it up with what is one thing you would recommend listeners can do this week to help them be better creativity facilitators?

Roger Firestien: I think it goes back to something that I said earlier. It is take a look at how you show up. The other thing around that is also, if you have somebody in your group, whether it is training session or not and they are not being nice participants, it is probably not about you. Other things are probably going on. If you come in with your integrity and with your intention



focusing on I am here to do a really good job for you, I am here to do the absolute very best that I can and I am going to give you everything that I can for this, then you are going to be fine. And you work within an environment that you are supportive, for me, I have to be careful and not get a little sarcastic. I always checked that. But it is really on how you show up as a facilitator and where you are at and where your spirit is when you walk into that room. Because as I mentioned earlier, you can flub up a little bit on the technical stuff, but you can certainly make that up with your spirit and if you are moving in the direction that if your intention there is to just do great work for the client and for the group.

Amy Climer: I love that and I love your iteration of really being thoughtful and kind of remind yourself of what the purpose is and that you are there for them. You are there to serve.

Roger Firestien: Absolutely.

Amy Climer: Roger, if people want to learn more about you and your work, where can they find you?

Roger Firestien: At www.rogerfirestien.com.

Amy Climer: Great. Thank you so much for being on the podcast. I really appreciate. This is wonderful.

Roger Firestien: My pleasure, Amy. Thank you for doing this. This is really important work.

Amy Climer: Thank you, Roger. Wow! Love the stories and examples. Great content, great insights and wisdom and so helpful to get insight into the concrete things you can do to make Creative Problem Solving Sessions go even better. Again, I have listed all of the resources and examples that Roger has shared at www.climerconsulting.com/078.

You all, if you want one-on-one help with learning how to facilitate creativity within your teams, send me an email. I coach leaders and facilitators to help them use Creative Problem Solving in their work. We can set up a short phone call and talk about what you want to learn and then to see if we are a good fit together. If not, I will definitely recommend some other consultants and coaches who can help you. You also could reach out to Roger via his website. I also work with



teams and organizations and so if you want training at the team level, shoot me an email and let's set up a phone call and talk about what you are looking for.

If you have been listening and you have not yet left a review on [iTunes](#) or [Google Play](#), please head on over. You can leave a review. I would love to get your feedback. The other thing is if you have questions about creativity in teams that you want answered on this podcast, shoot me an email. A lot of the different topics that I explore are questions from listeners. I love getting your questions. Chances are if you have that question, somebody else does, too. I love being able to design episodes based on what listeners are looking for. Shoot me an email. Go over to www.climerconsulting.com and send me an email with your questions.

Y'all, have a wonderful creative week. I will talk to you next time. Bye.