



The Deliberate Creative Podcast with Amy Climer Transcript for Episode #091: The Skills You Need To Be a Design Thinker with Dr. Dani Chesson

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Amy Climer: Welcome to The Deliberate Creative Podcast Episode 91. This podcast is all about teaching you how to lead innovation in your teams. I am excited to share that The Deliberate Creative is part of the [C-Suite Radio Network](#). If you are not familiar yet with the [C-Suite Radio Network](#), check it out. It is a collection of podcasts and radio shows specifically for those of you who are working in the C-Suite. If you are at the executive level, if you are a CEO or COO or working at that level, then you might appreciate the other shows in there as well.

I think it says a lot about creativity in leadership for The Deliberate Creative to be a part of that network. To me, it says that if you want to be an effective leader at that level, you need to develop your skills in creativity and you need to become a creative innovative thinker and leader.

In today's episode, I am talking with Dr. Dani Chesson about the skills and capabilities needed to be creative and to think like a designer. Not to be a designer, but how to think like one and to apply that into the work that you are doing, whatever context that is in.

Dani and I met each other a few years ago. We were both students at Antioch University in the PhD in Leadership and Change. I graduated about a year before Dani did, but our research really complemented each other. Mine was more focused on the skills and capabilities teams needed collectively in order to be more creative, whereas hers focused more on the individual skills each team member needed to bring to the table.

We both created scales to measure these respect components in teams and individuals. I am excited to say that our scales will be released in 2018. Her scale will be available to the public, should be April 2018, and mine will be a little bit later on in the year. You will hear more about

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that here on the podcast once it is ready. But you can get a link to Dani's scale as well as other resources that she mentions in the episode on the show notes. You can find the show notes at www.climerconsulting.com/091. Head on over there if you want to get a link to Dani's research and to her scale.

I am very proud to introduce to you Dr. Dani Chesson.

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

Dani Chesson: Hey, Amy. I am so excited to be here.

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

Dani Chesson: Sure. I wear many hats. I am a consultant, I am a coach, I am a researcher and an aspiring writer.

Amy Climer: Nice.

Dani Chesson: Although, after writing a dissertation, I do not know that I could say aspiring anymore.

Amy Climer: Yeah, you got this.

Dani Chesson: Basically, my work focuses on helping individuals and teams discover and strengthen their capabilities for innovation.

Amy Climer: You specifically focus on Design Thinking, right?

Dani Chesson: Yes. Specifically, I focus on the capabilities that are needed to engage in Design Thinking.

Amy Climer: Nice. We are going to talk about that. Let's start off with can you just define what is Design Thinking and just kind of briefly explain how it works?

Dani Chesson: Sure. Design Thinking is an interesting term because it has not really been defined and different people define it in different ways. For me, what I have done with my work



with clients is I present it as an approach to problem solving. There are many ways to go about solving problems, Design Thinking is one of them.

What Design Thinking calls us to do is it calls us to engage in both creative thinking and analytical thinking and balancing those. It involves generating a lot of ideas and then also testing them out to see if they are practical and feasible. It is an iterative way of working so we have to come up with ideas, test them, learn from our testing and kind of do the whole thing over and over until we end up with a viable solution.

Amy Climer: You have done a lot of work around the capabilities and skills that a Design Thinker needs or someone that wants to engage in Design Thinking what they need. Can you talk a little bit about that?

Dani Chesson: What I found as I started going around looking at this concept of Design Thinking is we talk a lot about what Design Thinking is and we talk about how to engage in Design Thinking so we look at Design Thinking as a methodology or a process. What I found that was lacking is we do not talk about what are the skills. What skills do we have to develop in people so they can work in this way? That is what my research work focused on. What I discovered are six core capabilities that we need to develop in individuals so that they can work in this way.

Amy Climer: Yeah, I feel like our work is very aligned around you are kind of focusing a little bit more on the individual capabilities, but it connects with the team, would you say?

Dani Chesson: Yeah, that is something to point out. Even though my work focuses on individuals, Design Thinking is really a team process. In this work we always say like nothing good happens in isolation. All good ideas come from engaging with others and sharing your ideas with others, so there is a big collaborative aspect to Design Thinking, and really solving problems in general.

Amy Climer: I feel like teams are the number one source of innovation in organizations and so it is all about the team.

Dani Chesson: Yes, it is.



Amy Climer: Actually, one of the phrases that I really have grown to dislike is that phrase there is no I in team. I am like no, actually, teams are made of a bunch of individuals, a bunch of I's and it is really about fostering them to work together.

Dani Chesson: Exactly. That is part of why I started looking at innovation work and how creative work happens in a team, we each have to bring something to the team. We bring skills and capabilities, ideas, and mindsets to the team. I think it is important to focus on what are we instilling in individuals and then how do those individual capabilities work in a team context. It is kind of a twofold approach.

Amy Climer: Let's talk about what these six core capabilities are. Can you walk us through them?

The Six Core Capabilities of Design Thinkers

1. Optimistic About Solutions [00:07:40]

Dani Chesson: The first one is Design Thinkers are optimistic about finding solutions. They do not see obstacles as the problem. They kind of see obstacles as something they have to work with. They believe that all problems have at least one solution and their job is to kind of figure out how to get to that solution.

2. Visually Express Ideas [00:08:08]

Design Thinkers visually express ideas. Amy, you know this. There is a ton of research that talks about the power of sketching and how visuals stimulate our thinking. Design Thinkers kind of understand this so they do a lot of mind-mapping, sketching, process flowing, so using a lot of visuals in their thinking process and even in the process of engaging with others. Important to note here though is this has nothing to do with someone's drawing abilities. You do not have to be a gifted artist to be a Design Thinker.

Amy Climer: Right. Can you draw like a circle, square or a triangle? Then you are good to go.

Dani Chesson: Exactly. I always like to point that out because when people hear visual, they get really nervous and almost uncomfortable with their capabilities as an artist.

Amy Climer: I feel like sometimes the word draw is like a four letter word. Like you cannot say this.



Dani Chesson: Yeah, the bad four letter word.

Amy Climer: Exactly.

3. Empathetic and Human-Centered [00:09:18]

Dani Chesson: The other one is Design Thinkers are human-centered and they are really good at developing empathy towards others. This is specifically important when we think about work on problem solving or innovation or coming up with something. If we do not understand what the lives of the people that we are creating for a solution are like, what are their pain points, how is this thing I am making going to impact their lives on a day-to-day basis. The more we can understand that and understand it on a really deep and meaningful level, the better we become at coming up with solutions because we are really understanding the pain we are trying to solve for. That is a key capability.

4. Collaborative [00:10:05]

The other one is Design Thinkers are collaborative. They understand that good ideas do not come when you are working on your own. They understand the importance of sharing. While you might come up with an idea on your own, they understand that for that idea to become great, they need others. They are really good at sharing their ideas early often, and then taking feedback and kind of continuing to evolve their idea. But also just working with others. Letting others come into their process of working.

5. Good at Generating Ideas [00:10:44]

The other one is Design Thinkers are really good at generating ideas. The number one thing that I find that gets in the way of people generating ideas is they come up with something and then they try to qualify it or judge it. Design Thinkers kind of separate these two. They go into idea generation mode which is just here is everything that came to mind, I am putting them all up on posties and sticking them on the wall, and then later, they go back for evaluate them.

Amy Climer: Yeah, they are separating that out.

Dani Chesson: But a lot of us tend to work in this way where we come up with an idea and then we shoot it down. Even before the idea is out of our mouth we are like, "Oh, that is not going to work."



Amy Climer: Oh yeah. We do not even want to say it out loud. Just in our head, it is in our dialog and it is like shooting ourselves down like what is the matter with us?

Dani Chesson: That is something we have to really get better at. Like let the idea sit. Let it percolate. Accept it as an idea, do not qualify it as being a viable, feasible idea.

6. Embrace Risk and Failure [00:11:55]

The last one is embracing risk and failure. This is my favorite one and is the one that in my research we found that people are the most uncomfortable with. Here is the thing; if you are going to do something new or if you are going to change something, you have to go into spaces that have not been explored. You have to do new things. The old saying goes like doing the same thing over and over and expecting different results is the definition of insanity. And it is kind of true.

If we want to bring a product to the market that is just going to change the world, we have to go out there and do something different or do something new, which involves taking risk. The problem with taking risk, people are not really uncomfortable with the risk part. They are uncomfortable with the failure part. If they take a risk and they are guaranteed to succeed, they are okay with it. But it is the unknown, it is the what if this does not work.

Design Thinkers look at this a little differently. They get that they have to try new things. But they also get that failure is not a bad thing. Failure is really about learning and that is something they have gotten really comfortable with, so taking the risk and then learning from it.

Amy Climer: It is all about that learning and if you mess it up, but you learn from it then maybe it was still worth it. At least that is what a Design Thinker would think, right?

Dani Chesson: Yes.

Amy Climer: These are awesome! I just want to make sure I have all these six. First is optimistic about solutions, visual expression, empathy and human-centered focused, collaboration or collaborative, generating ideas, and embracing risk and failure.

Dani Chesson: Yes.



Amy Climer: Awesome. Those are the six capabilities that you discovered in your research that people who tend to be Design Thinkers they have these capabilities.

Dani Chesson: Yes.

Amy Climer: Can we hone in on maybe one or two of them and just go a little bit deeper and talk about them? Which would be the two that are best to focus on?

Dani Chesson: The two that I tend to focus on are the human-centered one and the risk and failure one. Because the data shows that this is where most people struggle the most or these are the least developed capabilities in the general population. Let's start with human-centered and empathetic.

Amy Climer: How do we know, for that specific one, if we are good at that or not?

Dani Chesson: One, there is the whole assessment I created, Chesson's Design Thinker Profile. It is actually going to be going live and available for sell online in about 60 days so super excited about that. And if people want to learn more about the instrument and how they can do that they can visit the Design Thinker Profile website, www.designthinkerprofile.com.

Amy Climer: That will probably be around April 2018 when it is available?

Dani Chesson: Yes.

Amy Climer: Before they go there to www.designthinkerprofile.com and check out this scale, are there some things that can help them understand just intuitively? Like when I think about being an empathetic human-centered thinker, what does that mean? What skills and capabilities do I need in order to be able to do that well? Does that make sense?

Dani Chesson: Yeah. The one question that you can ask yourself to understand if you are being empathetic is can I see this from the other person's perspective. Often times when we have conversations, we tend to have me-centric conversations. Or how many times are you having a conversation with somebody and in your mind you are already starting to form what you are going to respond? One thing we can all ask ourselves is how does this other person see this situation?



Amy Climer: And so if there is a specific problem we are trying to solve then we want to look at what is their perspective, how are they seeing this and then how might I help solve it that it is going to really alleviate that pain or whatever that they are experiencing.

Dani Chesson: The other thing is just practice listening to people and asking questions that kind of get at the why of things, like why do you feel a certain way or how does something make you feel? Because I think in our society, we tend to talk at the what level. What is going on? But we do not really dig into how does that happen? Or why does that happen? Because that requires a lot more in-depth conversation. I think an area that we can all improve on is how do we get to those deeper level conversations so that we can start relating to each other.

Amy Climer: If you are a Design Thinker, then maybe interviewing some people that might be affected by your problem and talking about like hey, can you tell me more about this and what is going on and do you know why this happens?

Dani Chesson: Exactly. Or even in my work as a consultant, sometimes I find clients that are trying to solve a problem that is not really even a problem. It is like they see it as a problem so they want to come up with a solution, but the people that are using their product or service, they do not see it as a problem. It is really important to kind of get that perspective. This could be with your employees, it could be with your life partner, it could be with your kids. It kind of has broader implications, but in the context of business and innovation, really understanding like who are your customers, what are their pain points and is that something that you are thinking about doing really make a difference in their life.

Amy Climer: Just thinking about companies who spend a lot of money, a lot of research and development on something where they have changed some feature and no one actually cares.

Dani Chesson: Exactly. It happens all the time. Just kind of taking that beat and saying – and one thing I recommend is kind of this two column journaling exercising of writing on the left column how you see a situation and then doing some interviewing or talking to people. And then on the right column kind of writing out how do other people see it so that you can kind of start seeing that there are multiple perspectives to everything.



Amy Climer: I love that, the two column approach. I am wondering, Dani, can you think of any examples of a situation where maybe one of your clients or something where they either did a great job or a really poor job of having this empathetic approach?

Dani Chesson: I find this a lot in associate engagement survey work.

Amy Climer: Can you explain what that means?

Dani Chesson: Sure. A lot of times, companies will send out a survey to their employees and they ask questions. It is basically are you happy working here, is your work challenging, what do you feel about your boss? It is kind of getting a pulse on how the employees of the company feel about the company. One thing I found is that a lot of times they get this feedback and then the company will move towards making changes, but they do not actually look at the feedback and go okay, these are some possible things we can do and then take that back to the employees and say will this make a difference for you?

How One Company Saved Millions by Using Design Thinking [00:20:05]

A very concrete example of this is that a company decided that based on the feedback, they were going to revamp their benefit program and they were going to invest like a couple of million dollars in it and revamp it. In my work with them I told them let's take a beat and let's actually see what they really want. And it turns out all these employees what they were talking about that they wish they had is they wanted more flexibility in their work schedule, which is a completely free thing to do. Not completely free, but compared to shelling out money to create bigger, better benefit programs that they were not even really going to care about, they just wanted more flexibility.

Amy Climer: Yeah. I want to come in at 9:00, not at 8:30 or whatever.

Dani Chesson: Exactly.

Amy Climer: That is interesting. That is a great example of just having a conversation with employees like, "Hey, here is the feedback we got on the survey. We just want to dig in a little bit to see what this actually means. What do you all think?" How simple, but sometimes we shy away from what we think is going to be that difficult conversation.



Dani Chesson: We kind of live in a society of sound bites. We are moving at such a fast pace and we get a little bit of information and we want to act on it and I think we kind of need to start taking a step back and getting to those deeper conversations.

Amy Climer: Yeah, that is perfect. It totally fits with the human-centered approach. Let's talk about the other one, embracing risk and failure. Can you start off and, again, how can we assess, like just a quick pulse check of how do I know if I am good at this or not. Like I think I am pretty good at it, but how do I know.

Dani Chesson: One way to gauge this is if somebody asks you to do something or when someone asks you to do something and you do not know how to do it, how do you respond?

Amy Climer: Nice. That is great. Are you asking me?

Dani Chesson: Yeah. I am putting you on the spot.

Amy Climer: All right. Turn the tables a little bit. I love it. Usually, I guess it depends what it is, of course, but a lot of times, I would be like, "All right, I do not know how to do that, what do I need to do?" I start asking questions, I dig in a little bit more. In some ways I feel like that is sort of the bulk of owning your own business. Oh my gosh! What I know now versus 2009 when I started, it is just unreal. All the things I figured out how to do that I had no idea. Of course, half the technology, even though it is not that long ago, did not even exist. This Zoom that we are talking on did not exist then. Podcasts were like barely going. I think I am definitely kind of like all right, I want to learn it. How do I do that?

Dani Chesson: That response suggests to me that your Design Thinker capabilities are pretty well developed. If you are the type of person if you are asked to do something and you do not know and you tend to say "no" or you tend to say "yes" and now you are freaking out, you are probably not good at this.

I want to make it clear; these skills are not absolute. In my work, I talk about them as being on a continuum or a spectrum. All of these capabilities, we all have the potential to do them. It is just that some of us have taken the time to develop these skills or life has granted us opportunities to develop these skills. If we all become mindful that these are the capabilities and how can I develop them and practice them every day, we can all do this. When I say that someone has the



capability or not, what I really mean is that their capability has not been tapped into yet. It is like untapped capability versus realized capability.

Amy Climer: Yes, we all have the potential to fully realize these capabilities.

Dani Chesson: Exactly. One mistake that I feel that people make with this whole idea of embracing risk and failure is that they tend to look at all risk and all failure as being one level, and they are really not. I can take a risk and go out to dinner tonight and order something I have never even heard of. I don't even know what it is. I am going to order it and I am just going to be brave and try it. That is a risk and it could end up being just a horrible meal, just did not enjoy myself. But that risk is not really going to change the world in any way, but I have tried something new, I discovered I did not like it and now I can move on. Whereas I can also take the type of risk that I could take all of my life's savings and invest it in crypto currencies and I may end up a billion or I may end up living...

Amy Climer: You might end up broke.

Dani Chesson: Exactly. That is a different level of risk where ordering one meal and taking a risk versus putting all my life savings in something, those are at very different levels. One thing that people could do is really assess what is the risk. Like in the grand scheme of things, how risky is this action really? If I try this new thing what could possibly go wrong worst case scenario?

Amy Climer: You are really evaluating like is this more of just like I am going to be a little uncomfortable or is this going to actually hurt me in my life?

Dani Chesson: Exactly. Because it can create some irreparable damage so it is important to kind of gauge that. The other thing is we have to stop looking at failure as a bad thing. I know this is easier said than done, and as I have been writing about this -- we are conditioned to avoid failure from a very tender age. I remember being in kindergarten or maybe it was the first or second grade where you had to go up to the board and solve math problems and I remember that fear of like you do not want to get that wrong because everybody is going to see it.

But we are conditioned -- like all of our lives we are told when you have the right answer you are rewarded, when you have the wrong answer you are punished and we have to kind of break up with that mental model of failure and start seeing failure as a way of learning. When we fail, we learn what does not work. When we fail, it is almost like your brain starts to kind of thinking

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about I know that does not work, but what does work? What could I have done differently? What could I do differently next time?

When we start seeing failure in that context, we kind of have this breakthrough of our limitations. Because we are not saying oh, I tried something, it did not go well now I am a complete failure, I need to go hide under a rock. We start seeing it as okay, what can I learn from this? How can I move forward?

Amy Climer: I feel like that is sort of what makes you successful. I do not mean successful in like we are all going to be rich billionaires, but just successful in whatever you are doing, like however you are defining success. That is what is going to actually get you there is if you try something and learn and apply that and try it again and keep going.

Dani Chesson: Exactly. This is kind of where I talked earlier about how this is an iterative process to solve problems. And that is what it is. It is like we try something that did not work, let's try something else. And then each time you are trying something else, you are kind of building on what you have learned based on past failures. You can Google any company, any successful person, any entrepreneur, nothing succeeded on the first try. Nothing worthwhile has succeeded on the first try.

Amy Climer: Yeah, that is pretty true.

Dani Chesson: And if somebody does have an example, I would love to hear about something that was successful right off the bat. Because that would make a really great case study.

Amy Climer: I think it is interesting because even sometimes it looks like that to the outside. When people talk about like oh, the overnight success and you are like actually no, this person has been working for ten years on this, but no one knew about it because he was not successful yet or they were not being publicized or whatever. I think it is kind of a disservice because we are looking at this person and we are thinking they are really lucky or they just had this talent that just got discovered when actually like no, they have been working and failing and working and failing and learning.

Dani Chesson: I think one thing, something we could all do if we want to change the mental model of how we see failure is we can start talking about our failures. I know that puts a lot of us in a vulnerable spot, but like for me I have had leaders that have shared where they failed in

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their careers. Even my parents were telling me stories about moments in their lives where things didn't work out and how they overcame it is very powerful and inspiring. And then I think it demonstrates that you can fail and still move on. Like you can fail and still go on to do great things. Failure does not have to define you.

Amy Climer: I think that is a really good point. I just was thinking about my mom when I was growing up my whole life she owned a business. She was telling me this story recently where when she wanted to expand her business, which was already going well, and she went to the bank – this was in the 80s – she went to seven banks. I think maybe the seventh one gave her a loan, but the first six said, “No, we are not going to loan you money because you are a female.” And I was like what? I had no idea my mom was dealing with that. Just like wow, perseverance.

Dani Chesson: You think of the 80s, that is not that long ago.

Amy Climer: It is not. I remember the 80s.

Dani Chesson: Maybe I say that because I was born in the 80s and I don't want to think of it like that, but it is really not.

Amy Climer: It is really not. I think there is some real value in that. As far as talking about failure, have you heard about I think it was Tina Seelig who is a creativity researcher at Stanford. She has this concept of a [failure résumé](#). Have you heard of this? Basically, it is the idea of like on our résumé we put all our successes and all these great things we have done and she is like what if you just make a failure résumé of all the things that you really failed at? I have been thinking more about that. I have not actually typed it up, but I have been thinking more of like what are the things that I failed at in my life and I learned from.

Dani Chesson: I actually think that would make a very powerful résumé. Because if you could say these are all the things I have failed at and people could see despite all of that you are here, it is quite the story of how you are a survivor.

Amy Climer: Yeah, and way more interesting than this polished...

Dani Chesson: I know. I might try that.



Amy Climer: Yeah, do. That interview you were telling me about, take that with you. That is awesome! This is great. Thinking about these six capabilities, any advice for someone who they are listening to this and they are like how can I be more of a Design Thinker? Any advice that you want to part with?

Dani Chesson: My advice would be pick one capability. Pick one that you think would impact your work the most, your life the most and focus on that. Because what I find is if you pick one thing and you are very diligent about it and you make it a very specific thing; maybe your specific thing is you are going to have deeper conversations with people. You are going to try to get to know your employees or your relatives or even a stranger, you are going to have a deep meaningful conversation with a stranger, be very specific about what you want to develop and then create an action item for it and then practice that every single day. And then when you get to the point where you feel like I am good at that, then pick another one.

One thing people need to understand is that these capabilities, almost throughout our lives we have been conditioned to do the opposite of these capabilities. I am 36 years old and that means for 36 years I have been taught something completely different and now I want to break away from that. That is not going to happen overnight. I would like to say listen to this podcast and you will be a Design Thinker, but it is a daily practice and you have to start with baby steps that you keep doing over and over and over.

Amy Climer: I love that, and I really like that idea of focusing on one at a time. What about if you do one of them for two months then within a year you would have them all covered.

Dani Chesson: Exactly.

Amy Climer: My next question was going to be if you could provide a weekly challenge, something that people could do this week to get started. You may have just done that, I do not know if there is anything more you would want to add.

Weekly Challenge 00:34:09

Dani Chesson: Actually, I think I touched on this, but I will kind of say it more explicitly. I think a great weekly challenge would be for you to share with one person one failure event in your life.



Amy Climer: I love it. Yeah, I love that. I may have to do a little blog post about that.

Dani Chesson: My second piece to that is do that sharing and then journal about it. I am a big believer in journaling. So share it and then journal about what that experience is like.

Amy Climer: I love it. That is great. And really thinking about what have you learned from that and how have you applied that learning into all of the things you have done. I think sometimes reflecting back on those experiences we can even pull learning from something that happened ten years ago that we had not realized or there is still learning to be had, essentially.

Dani Chesson: Yes. Even our past failures. That is a great point. There are lessons that we may not have learned that revisiting some of that we can get some new insights into that.

Amy Climer: Cool. Dani, if people want to learn more about you and your work, where can they go?

Dani Chesson: They can go to the [Design Thinker Profile website](#). I have got a blog there that you will have once the assessment is out that will go on there. And then they could find out about my upcoming book. When that is already up there. That is kind of where all of this information will be housed.

Amy Climer: Awesome, cool. Thank you so much for being on the podcast. This was really fun.

Dani Chesson: Thank you, Amy, for having me. This was great.

Amy Climer: Thank you, Dani, for being on The Deliberate Creative podcast. So awesome to have you here. Such good stuff she was sharing. I particularly appreciated the part about talking about failure and how we do not do that enough. I love the weekly challenge that Dani shared to focus on sharing a failure in your life with one other person. So I decided, inspired by her idea, to write a blog post about a failure that I have and I am sharing it with the whole world.

If you are curious and you want to read about the failure that I have experienced, one of them, obviously, there are many, you can head over to the show notes where you will find a link to that blog post. The show notes are at www.climerconsulting.com/091. Head on over there to find the link to my blog post about failure as well as to the resources that Dani mentioned,



specifically her website and The Designer Thinker Profile Scale. You can head on over there to get those.

You all, I want to say thank you so much for listening to the show. I never take your time for granted. It means a lot to me. I hope you will be able to apply some of what you are learning here today to be more creative in the work that you are doing. If you need any help with that, please reach out to me and we can talk about coaching and training and speaking. Those are things that I do frequently.

Also, if you are listening and you have not yet left a review on iTunes, please go over there and leave a review. You can find the podcast on iTunes by go to www.climerconsulting.com/itunes. If you head over to that link, it will take you directly to The Deliberate Creative podcast where you can leave a review. I would love to get that feedback from you all. It just makes me happy. Thank you so much for listening. You all, have a wonderful creative week. I would love to hear about your failures. If you would like to, you can leave those comments in the show notes or feel free to shoot me an email. You can email me at amy@climerconsulting.com.

See you next week. Bye.