

**COLLABORATION
FOR CREATIVE
ENTREPRENEURS**

**RETHINKING PRODUCTIVITY:
TOOLS AND SYSTEMS FOR
YOUR MISSION**

**MANAGING A
CREATIVE BUSINESS**

*A conversation series
in notes*

May 14th, 2020



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your idea + my idea = better idea

COLLABORATION FOR CREATIVE ENTREPRENEURS

Moderator

Alicia Roberts, Event Producer, Somewhereelse

Panelists

Alica Hall, Executive Director, Nia Centre for the Arts and Founder, At The Moment
Alicia Bee, Artist Manager + Co-Founder, It's OK*, Founder, Pollen; Art Director, Virtue
Towa Beer, Founder + Director of Operations, MyMentorSaid.ca

RETHINKING PRODUCTIVITY: TOOLS AND SYSTEMS FOR YOUR MISSION

Something we all need.

Moderator

Bianca Li Channer, Designer, Brand Consultant + Entrepreneur

Panelists

Stephanie Small, Designer, Special Projects, Canada Goose
Saba Seyed, Digital Product Designer, SOCAN
Amara Nwogu, Brand Marketing + Social Impact Strategist

MANAGING A CREATIVE BUSINESS

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Moderator

Raji Aujla, President, Willendorf Cultural Planning

Panelists

Tahsin the Good, Artist
Mia Nielsen, Director, Art Toronto
Rajni Perera, Artist

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COLLABORATION FOR CREATIVE ENTREPRENEURS

Collaboration is a key element of any creative practice. What are learnings and best practices in fostering successful collaborations?

Consider the needs and concerns of your collaborators, and be proactive about addressing them.

"I think it's important to understand where people are coming from. For example, in collaborating with a corporate client, I know that they have to go and get approvals, so I want to give them as much information as possible about what we're doing, about the artists that we'll be working with, and assure them that if they have concerns about nudity or particular kinds of content, that I understand and that that's not what I'm bringing to their space. It's really important to prepare people, **give them that pitch and also give them the assurances that you understand what their business is and what their needs are.**" **Alica Hall**

- 1 **Show empathy to their needs. If you know what they need, things will move quicker.**
- 2 **Start cold calling and building connections. Remember, it's just a conversation.**
- 3 **Do the research before the meeting. They'll respect it.**

Meaningful collaboration can be found through digital platforms.

"**Don't be afraid to reach out.** Almost every job that I've gotten in the first half of my career was a very cold reach out: 'I liked your agency', 'I liked your project'. And then, following up, you can get someone to remember your name in their inbox or their DMs - it works. **If you're coming by it honestly and you're genuinely trying to engage to build a connection, a lot of people are very willing to have conversations with you.**" **Alicia Bee**

When approaching a potential collaboration, enter the conversation as informed as you can be.

"It's really important to be genuine and just also **have a little bit of a background on who you're approaching so you're actually speaking from a place of knowledge.** So when I've done research and I know what they've been up to, and I can speak from that -- it just makes the conversation more fluid and it makes the connection a lot more natural." **Alicia Roberts**

Consistent communication with the full team keeps a collaborative project moving forward and keeps the relationships strong.

"Be as reachable as possible and always update your contact. I have a rule which is three points of contact: **You should reach out to your contacts at least three times in a week: once with your contact, once with the team leads and once with somebody who is involved in doing the work.** Often, the people doing the work never get any praise and they never know what's going on - they just get handed tasks. So I might reach out and be like, "How's it going?" "Do you need anything?" "Is my team giving you everything that you need?" You're not going behind someone's back, you're just reaching out and you're always copying the people that are involved." **Towa Beer**

- 4 **Talk to the whole team, even the people you wouldn't normally talk too and keep consistent with client communication.**

RETHINKING PRODUCTIVITY

Creative professional womxn's identities are often closely tied to their output. Often being of service, how can womxn create healthier dynamics with the notion of "who we are, is what we do," especially in climates where womxn can't always create or produce?

Process, structure and tools don't need to impede your creative output, when used well they can amplify it.

"I feel like as a creative person, when you hear the word structure, you sometimes think it's a negative thing. You're like 'No, I don't want structure. I want to be able to be free and be creative', but I think that if you use structure in the right way, it can propel your creativity....I think as a creative person, we want to be so fluid, but having that box creates that structure and then you can be fluid within that box, which I think is really important." **Stephanie Small**

- 1 There's creativity in structure so embrace it.
- 2 Set aside time for play, exploration and see what the world is doing. It's research for creatives.
- 3 Your team should be stronger than any individual. That only happens if you don't share the same skills. Find the team that you need and that needs you.
- 4 Be empathetic to the experience of others and check your privilege. Always be inclusive and equitable!

Research and play are just as important to productivity as demonstrating a tangible output or completing a task.

"I've learned that I need to give myself sufficient time to play. And I used to think that that was so wrong, but now I am like, 'no, this is my research time'. I think that this is really important for any designer, because unless you're able to see things, I can't imagine how you're envisioning other things outside your own bias. It allows me to break my mindset of what I enjoy and just look at what everyone else has created, and then I dissect what they've created and I take components of someone who's done something and try to think, how can I elevate? How can I think about it in my own way?" **Saba Seyedi**

There is only so much that can be accomplished independently. Become a part of a team that can amplify your own strengths.

"Good teams are built if everyone has different expertise, because if you are process driven or a linear thinker and I'm a systems thinker, then we're going to work perfectly together -- you're going to see things that I'm not seeing. I need to work in an environment where I am the expert in my field: I'm working with a comms person, a policy person, a strategist or a PR person, and we all collectively, comprehensively come together with a plan. It's also about finding the organisations where the culture works for you." **Amara Nwogu**

A conversation about productivity cannot leave out the much higher price that women of colour pay in the creative industries.

"This conversation is really showing the price women pay to succeed in the hyper productivity economy. I think as women, we are constantly having to find multiple ways to do what we want to do. Sometimes we're not always being believed to bring value. Sometimes we have to do twice as much. We have an invisible tax on us, especially women of colour, having to reaffirm why this is the way we should do things or why that's something to consider." **Bianca Li Channer**

MANAGING A CREATIVE BUSINESS

According to the Canada Council for the Arts, 52% of artists are self-employed, compared to just 12% of all Canadian workers. Maintaining a creative practice inherently requires knowledge and skills to run and manage a business. How do we sustain the balance between our creative practice and the business side?

Effectively communicating your ideas takes understanding who you are speaking with, where they are coming from and bringing them along the journey.

"It's important to try to match the people you're trying to sell this idea to: a funder, property owner, a gallery owner, whatever it is, to match them in their thinking. **You can't present an idea as fully formed. You have to take them through it and listen to those moments of resistance** or sometimes on their part, frankly, insecurity and bring them through it and try not to rush it. **That takes time, so give them that same opportunity to take it step by step.**" **Mia Nielsen**

- 1 **Always present the full story, not just the outcome.**
- 2 **Don't feel bad for taking a break. It'll help you come back stronger.**
- 3 **The more skills you have, the easier it'll be to execute an idea. So build skills, keep learning, and figure it out on the go.**
- 4 **Don't disregard your experiences. They're skills and respect them as such!**

Finding ways to stay grounded and understanding that thinking is a part of the work can help you break out of the guilt that can keep you tied to a desk.

"I love that you go to nature so you can have those meditative moments to ground yourself...and I think that's really smart that you take that time out to give yourself. **Sometimes it's almost like you can feel guilt or shame not being productive and sitting in front of something** and doing something that feels like you're contributing to work. But the kind of work of going into nature and having those **thoughts to yourself, equip you better to be productive when you're back at your desk.**" **Raji Aujla**

Tap into all your different skills to lower the barrier to entry to act quickly and start something.

"I think that being able to do a lot of different things is definitely helpful in **terms of springboarding your ideas out there.** It definitely lowers the barrier to entry to doing anything. So you're able to do web design, set up an online store, do your own graphic design and maybe do your own branding... being able to move quickly and act on an idea and having your skill set to turn around **and do it on your own, that's what** I mean by lowering the barrier to entry. I was able to just do it." **Tahsin the Good**

Abilities that may come naturally to you or have been developed along your journey are skills that have value.

"I was curating weird funny shows with little bands and whatever when I was still in school with my friends and whatever resources I had. **Pooling together your social capital, pulling together people in love with a united vision and executing a goal - that is a skill.** That's a skill that's not a dream or a fun story. That's a thing that you learned to make happen. That's something that even helps me now working with businesses. **I have a lot that I bring to the table** because of my experience of starting to do things before people thought I knew what I was doing." **Rajni Perera**



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