

Denise Jacobs

How to banish your inner critic

Speakers:

Nick Skillicorn – Innovation and Creativity Expert and Host of Innovation & Creativity Summit

Denise Jacobs

Expert Interview transcript:

Nick Skillicorn: Hello everyone and welcome to another interview at the innovation and creativity summit 2017, I am very happy to have Denise Jacob with me today, Denise is a creativity evangelist, keynote speaker, and author and her latest book coming out soon is banish your inner critic, silence the voice of self doubt, unleash your creativity and do your best work, welcome Denise.

Denise Jacob: Thank you Nick, Thank you for having me.

Nick Skillicorn: No problem I am really looking forward to today's discussion because I think a lot of people are going to really resonate with what we are going to talk about today which is all about the feelings of people's own creativity or lack their roots, why don't you tell us quickly about your background and how you got into this study of creativity.

Denise Jacob: My background is quite very broad, the short version of it is that I work in a tech industry since 1997 and through kind of a series of things ended up becoming a front end developer and a web designer. I taught web design and web development at a community college for five years and when I moved from Seattle to Miami, ended up doing a project management job that job was not awesome and when it ended I ended up kind of through another series of interesting things getting a book deal, now the book deal was to write a tech book and it was on web design and web development, called the CSS to tech guide, it was almost awesome when it came out but that's a different story. While I was writing this book I basically came up against my own inner critic pretty much every day and so for months I am sitting there thinking I don't know enough, I am not an expert enough, this should be somebody else's book, what people find out that I am fraud and a mistake and all of these stuff I gather people that are so much better at this than I am, etcetera and that was what was happening for basically eight months solid for me writing this book but then what happened at the end, once I got to the end I had written this 275 page book I had designed all inbuilt by hand, all of the example website in it that I used, not only did I build them, I had to break them, re build them and then write about the process of re building them and story format which is kind of what the little gimmick that I had for the book and when I was done with that I was just like hmmmm. I ended up having the you know they say the cobbler's children have no shoes, so I was one of the cobbler's children and I still managed to build the website for the book itself. I was going to go speak at south west, I wanted to make sure I had something, going to the bigger tech conference in the world you are not going to go and say I wrote a book but I don't have a website for it or had time to build it. So I was building a website and I experienced this very profound experience

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which was, it was the first time in eight months maybe my whole life where I finally had a moment when I stopped criticizing myself while I was creative I stopped judging myself, I stopped judging what I was making, I stopped doubting whether I am a good web designer, like all of that stuff turned off and experience was so incredibly enjoyable, not only enjoyable but I felt empowered, I literally felt energy moving energy moving through my body in a way that I never had thought before and I was bliss out and I was happy and the next day when I started thinking about the better side, I can help other people feel like this. This is what I want to do and that basically is a pave able moment of my life and I starting paving the part for everything else.

Nick Skillicorn: So let's help people feel like that today, lets actually get into this concept of the inner critic, what do you mean by the inner critic

Denise Jacobs: So the inner critic is basically a psychology constraint that we create early on in our lives that basically help protect us from criticism, from judgment, all these step. It is actually the way; it actually works in a lot of way, it modifies behavior, so if you go some place and somebody goes so oh wow what are you wearing then after that you are always going to be actually very hyper vigilant and continuous about what you are wearing so that you can avoid somebody say something like that to you again. So behavior modification, the problem is that it doesn't jabble a little too well and what its start doing is making you second guess yourself all the time, making you doubt yourself and not trust your gut or trust in your kind of ability to be creative or to produce anything, makes you very very overly sensitive to criticism, hyper aware of the prospect of being judged by people comparing yourself to others to try to make yourself kind of fit in, it causes a lot of problems and I think one of the thing is that it's really one of our barriers first of all to creativity and the creative flow and actually the neuroscience proves that the part of the brain that needs to be silent when you are creating is actually the part of the brain of self evaluation, self judgment, behavior modification etcetera. Not only is it a barrier to creativity, I actually believe, I am convinced that it is actually a barrier for us to achieve excellence and achieve the excellence that we are capable of. It's the barrier between us and self actualization becoming the best and biggest and kind of most actualized for lack of better words version of ourselves, and that's why I wrote the book because I want to help people get to that point where they feel completely themselves, where they feel completely in their power, they feel completely capable and ready to take on and solve bigger and better problems because that's what the world needs, the world needs people to come in to be creative thinkers, to be innovative, to think beyond what is already be done before so that we can create a world that is better than what we have right now.

Nick Skillicorn: Okay my first question then is related to who this actually applies to, I know a lot of people they have a major critic of their own creativity so much so they don't actually consider themselves creative or is this also a sort of thing that professional creative people suffer from as well

Denise Jacob: Yes, professional creative people I think work with this a lot, I think that they have in some ways because they come up against the inner critic so much that they are first of all most probably more familiar with it, more familiar with how it works, have more tricks in everything and kind of techniques to deal with it or they just ignore it and they are just like okay I see you there whatever, just have a drink in the corner and whatever, I m not going to listen to you. I think it's the people who don't see themselves as creative, who think they are in analytical or think that their jobs, like they don't see how they creatively problem solve in what they do and maybe it's not in

their jobs, maybe it's their personal life, maybe somebody is a really amazing event planner who throw great parties and maybe there is somebody who is like I love to throw dinner parties and I will make this an amazing dinner party and everybody is like Oh my God, you are a genius at that, no doubts, no big deal that's how you create it. I think in some ways for professional creative yes it's definitely applicable, I actually want to talk, I want the people who think that they are not creative, or who want to be creative and think that they are not or think that they are only sometimes like the moon has to be an alignment, the moon has to be in seven parts in Jupiter aligning with mars as it works for things to work out. Those are people I want to say actually no, you, you are a creative person the reason why you don't think you are creative is because of the inner critic and we can work on that

Nick Skillicorn: So how do we work on that, we were speaking at the earlier and there is actually several facet is to this inner critic, let's take them one by one, so what is the first one you want to talk about

Denise Jacobs: One of the things that I feel like it's really kind of a similar part of the inner critic, like one of the beginning part soft h inner critic is fear of being judged and fear of being criticized and one of the reasons why it so deep is because it part of evolution, we have something called negativity bias which we come out of the box with and that was an evolutionary strategy to keep us safe. For example if you are millions of years ago and you are like early out hanging out and then you see like a snake, a viper or something in the bushes, your negativity bias is going to be like this place is dangerous, either we are not coming back here or if we come back here we have to make sure we look and it goes to a different part of the brain and then beats itself and one of the thing is that it was is very fast, it is very immediate and you can survive. The problem is that now we don't have a lot of vipers in the bush and forest we know, but the danger comes from the people around us that we are so focused on something, little thing that we come out of the box with which is attachment and need for belonging this, belonging this is actually the third tier on as mass level higher needs, so like belonging this is super important and because we need to belong to the group, we are always on the lookout for a rejection, hey here comes my couch hey zillion I knew you were going to come through, I was like on of the cat is going to come through and be like hey what up, I am on an online summit, zillion in the house everybody. so this fear of rejection is huge and then it actually ends up driving so much and so this fear of being judged, being criticized, this isn't act like men you need to get over it, it's like we are all wired that way, we are totally wired that way but once you know that you are wired that way, then you can start to be like more continuous of it, more mindful and more in control of it. So that's fair judgment huge

Nick Skillicorn: So the first step is just being aware of that something deep rooted in you and then you can become aware of the fact that you can address it.

Denise Jacobs: Exactly, one of the things that I like to talk about in my presentation is the acronym for fear and fear is false evidence appearing real and there is an actually also another very great acronym for fear which is face everything and rise, so one of the things that I like to tell people is when you are feeling afraid and you are not entirely certain of the source or you are certain of the source but you are really getting wrapped up by feeling afraid and you are afraid that you are feeling anxiety about a big presentation coming up or you are afraid of speaking in public, a lot of people have this fear or you are afraid of asking for ways or something like that, you are not actually

responding to anything that is actually happening, you are responding to your belief of what could potentially happen that is bad right and so that is that false evidence appearing real, it seems real as heck what if my boss says no, what if your boss says no right, what if somebody laughs at you, one person laughs but then other fifty people are like that was amazing, you are going to let that one person totally keep you from doing something you may want to do, so one of the things I like to remember people is that fear is actually a choice, great quote from the movie after earth which I never did see but the previews were awesome but one of the great quote was that fear isn't real and it's a choice, danger is real but fear is a choice. I was like nice and I love it, that's one of the things that I recommend and also one of the things that I recommend in the book is also kind of recognize the nature of fear and understand that fear is a choice that you can choose to do something else you can choose something differently.

Nick Skillicorn: One of the other things we talked before hand was another thing people can do for themselves, it's something you called self compassion

Denise Jacobs: Absolutely o yes, thank you for bringing me back to that so a lot of people are kind of in the influence of the inner critic or succumb to the inner critic, it's just like getting to this mode of self abasement right just completely chastisizing ourselves. Completely beating ourselves up, like why didn't you do this, you should have thought of that, I can't believe and now they are going to say bla blab blab it endless, it just there, this kind of subconscious chatter that is happening all the time and that actually wears down on your psyche over time. If you are always like it's one thing for somebody to criticize you and they criticize you once and then they walk again and that moment happened and it's not happening any more, it's another thing for you to take that criticism, make a recording of it and play it over and over and over again in your head long after that person has done which is what we do. right so self compassion is basically kind of like the combination of self compassion and self kindness, so self compassion is basically recognizing that you are suffering, recognizing this English chatter of self chastisement is painful and it hurts and until I feel like wow, I can see you really hurting and am really sorry and the same kind of treatment that you will give another person who is really hurting or who is being mean to themselves, if you had a friend and your friend was like oh man I am such a loser, I can't get anything right and you be like dude dude seriously like just calm down , I am your friend, I love you and I think you are great, you are alright and maybe you made a mistake, you made a mistake and whatever you move on. You do this same thing that you would do to a friend to yourself, you have that same kind of approach and so that's where the self kindness comes in, to actually be kind to yourself and be compassionate to yourself the same way you would be to anybody else in the world, even a stranger right, a stranger if somebody as a matter of fact, I know a woman who is a performance artist she is based here in Miami, her name is Antonia Wright and her latest piece is called are you okay, and what she does is she stands on a corner in a city and she cries and she records and she got videos like clandestine hidden videos and she videos and sees who comes and ask her if she is okay and people do obviously, and it's the same kind of thing, if somebody else, a stranger was crying or was in distress or something like that,, you probably would go to them and be like can I help or something I can do but then when it comes to ourselves we sit there and we just like okay bring up the weeps, so put down the weeps, put down the hammer, stop beating yourself and be kind to yourself.

Nick Skillicorn: A lot of people I think they somehow feel like they deserve this criticism or they deserve the punishment, even if the punishment hasn't happen yet, sort of preparing themselves in the future though, worst case scenario.

Denise Jacobs: Right and actually creating a self fulfilling prophesy is actually an example of confirmation bias, see I knew that this was going to happen, no actually you created that because that's what you were expecting to see and what I was also going to say was not only do people do this because they feel like they deserve it, it's like it's such a habit that they are just in a habit right, they are just in a habit of doing that and they kind of feel like a lot of people use self criticism as a motivating force but interestingly enough there's been a lot of actually scientific research that shows that self criticism does not actually work well as a motivator at all, and that self compassion and kindness is much more effective as a motivating force than self criticism is.

Nick Skillicorn: I think let's move on to another thing that we talked about earlier which I had found really interesting, it's this concept of people looking at other people and comparing themselves to this great artists and saying well I can't do that.

Denise Jacobs: Right or even I mean it's even its more, great artist certainly and we have got this kind of society, this culture of instagram and facebook and celebrity adoration these stuff like Kim Kardashian

Nick Skillicorn: Don't get me started

Denise Jacobs: I won't, people are looking outwards all the time and looking at what other people are doing and there is all this content and all these information about what other people are doing and so instead of being self focused, and self referential, we become other focus and other referential and then we compare ourselves to what somebody has referred to as other people's highlight reels. So it's like you see beyonce and see is looking fabulous and you are like oh my God I can never look like that, i was like she has got a personal trainer, she is got a personal chef, she is got an exercise regimen that is unreal because she is a dancer, she has got a makeup artist, she has got a stylist, like she's got a whole team of people who makes her look like that, if you had all a whole team of people making you look like that, you will look like that too. Like you look like your own version of that, you can compare yourself to somebody else and also beyonce is a person right, she has got all of the drama and a whole lot of things going on in her life like everybody else does, step up her family, her dad, her husband, her sisters, she got drama right so there is the great quote, another great quote, I am in the quote, I think I should just come clean and admit that I am in the quote. There is a great quote that says you can't compare your insides to somebody else's outsides but that's what we do. so one of the things that I recommend in the book is for you to be self preferential and to really get in touch with knowing what your distinctiveness is and what your uniqueness is and I actually haven't exercised where I am like you are just going to take an inventory, you are going to take an inventory of everything you have done, every accomplishment and not just accomplishments but qualities about yourself, are you a kind person, are you a gentle person, are you a good listener, to really get people in touch with who you are and to not be focused at all on who other people are, it doesn't matter.

Nick Skillicorn: I'd like to go back to beyonce though because obviously it's one thing to look at a picture of a beautiful woman like her and say yes if I had make up and exercise and Photoshop and

all of that, then I can look like that too but people look at her and say she can sing, she can dance, she can write songs, she has got the creativity and if I look at myself, I don't have that and that makes me feel anxious and I can't really achieve that.

Denise Jacobs: You don't have that in that way but that's not necessarily like, we don't need a whole world of singers and dancers and some writers if that were the case, first of all it will be a really crowded market and then who would listen to all the work that we did, we need everybody to have their own unique thing and that's why I think the take inventory thing is so important because once you start saying, if you are going to like sit around and be like oh my God I don't sing, I don't dance, like yes you do other things that beyonce cannot do at all. Beyonce may not be able to draw or design or write a book or write a story or cook a meal or you know help somebody heal when they get hurt, she can't do everything and so that's why I feel it's so important to get in touch with how are you creative, you can't do everything. There are people who are renaissance people and they can do a lot of stuff but they still can't do everything right and so it's like what's your unique genius, what's your genius, what's your brilliance not what do you think is brilliant that other people do but what's your brilliance and I feel like as soon as you get in touch with that, you get so excited about expressing that brilliance and letting it out because you don't care about what other people are doing and when other people are doing other things you will be like oh shit you are brilliant at that and you keep moving right.

Nick Skillicorn: I think quite a lot of people struggle with though and I mean I can talk from my own experience as well, you look at what you produce and sometimes you think this is amazing but sometimes you just look at it and you think this isn't that good but when other people see it, they actually think this is a lot better than you are given yourself credit for

Denise Jacobs: Absolutely and that I definitely think that has to do with first of all certainly the inner critic, I think that's like self judgment and self criticism and also maybe feeling like the stuff that you do isn't good enough and feeling like you are somehow deficient in some way that you are lacking something and other people are like what are you kidding me. I had a friend that I do work with, we do trainings and things like that together and when we first met each other and everything we were like O my God you are awesome, you were awesome. She said when she came home, we met each other at a conference, when she came back she told her husband about me, she showed him an email I wrote and said Oh my God look at how amazing she writes, like just this email is so well written because she is not really a writer and I was just like you shown him an email and she said I was just so impressed by how well written your email was and I was like shut up, really but she does stuff that I am like I don't even know how she does it, I am like how will you talk to like eight people for an hour during the day, how do you do that, she gets like tons of work because she is amazing at maintaining relationships, amazing at it, phenomenally it's an art form with her. It's like its easy, it's just who she is and so it's like we can criticize ourselves it doesn't change the fact that what we are brilliant at, we can't see, most of the time it's so easy, it's so much like breathing, it so like when you look at your hand and you just think that's my hand but then somebody goes oh my God you have got really nice hands, you have got really beautiful fingers and you are just like this is my hand or even one of the ways I describe it is like, it's your eye color, you probably don't sit around and think God, I have got this like really amazing blue eyes, or my hazel eyes are awesome but when people see you, it may be one of the first things they see about you like wow, there is a woman at the farmer's market who has this awesome, big and food and her eyes are like stunning, like ridiculous,

like light hazel, light gold, grey, with this dark ridiculous and i was just standing there like oh my God look at how amazing her eyes are and my house mate was with me and I was like did you see how beautiful her eyes were and she was like I didn't notice and I was like that interesting. For me I was so struck by it and I am sure that woman doesn't sit around and go people are thinking about my eye color all the time because she can't see it and so I think that it's the same thing with what we are brilliant at, what we are good at, it's so easy for us, it's so second nature, it's so just like a part of who we are that its almost invisible to us and that's why I feel like it's really important to start taking inventory and start looking at things and say oh yea, I did that one thing and that was really fun, and that was really easy, people did go like how did you do that, you just did it.

Nick Skillicorn: What about people who want to try something out but they are afraid of starting, do you have any advice for people like that

Denise Jacobs: Yes, and that is actually the kind of, sometimes I like to, one of my recommendation for somebody is to give yourself permission to do it badly, as a matter of fact, you may even go into it trying to do it badly like I am going to totally mess this up, like I am going to be awful at it and it doesn't matter and you just give yourself permission like just to take away all of the expectations and everything and be like i am going to be so awful at this its going to be great just so that you take the pressure off because when you go in, this is a professional something for sure, when you go in and expecting yourself to do it perfectly, that first and I would say two people's defense when they are like that usually it's because they have been trained that way, they have grown up in the situation, I actually had this myself, where I grew up in a situation where people had super high expectation of you, they had super high standard and that if you didn't meet those standards you got criticized, so you are just like oh shit I am not going to do anything unless I do it perfectly. I am sure you read the book mindset by Carol Dweck and they showed that children who had that mindset, that perfectionist mindset, that fixed mindset aren't able to progress as well and achieve as much mastery like people who have a growth mindset who are just like we are going there and we will see what happens and learn, I will get to a point of something that is called deliberate practice where you practice until you get to the point of failure and then you kind of like back up and you practice again you get to the point of failure and you kind of keep pushing, pushing the barrier until you have actually acheived some form of mastery. I just want to say for a moment that my nose is so itchy and I don't know why. So I keep scratching my nose. So my recommendation like I said is take the pressure off, try to adopt a growth mindset but even easier than going through all that like what is growth mindset involved and just go in there and say I am going to do this horribly and its going to be fun, it's going to be great.

Nick Skillicorn: Perfect, Denise I am sure we can keep speaking for ages and ages but we are coming up to the end of the interview, but one thing I like to ask all of the expert is if you have got one tip, one actionable insight that people can try out either this afternoon or over the course of the next week to banish their inner critic, what would you recommend they do

Denise Jacobs: I have the perfect thing, in my book I write about the connections between our bodies and our minds and they have done like a lot of really interesting studies that show that gesture actually sometimes precede thoughts. It's very interesting and not only that sometimes gestures proceed thoughts or kind of goes along with thoughts but the gesture can actually affect thoughts as well. So one of the exercise that I have its one of my favorite ones, its quick and easy, it's

what I call swipe left so if you have a moment where you realize that you are in a place of self judgment, self criticism, self doubt, I don't know if I can do it, it's not going to be perfect etcetera etcetera, just do swipe left, take your fingers like you are doing it on your phone and whatever and just swipe left and just say delete, every time say delete, cancel, no, cancel, delete, no delete, no, no, don't want it, just do that every single that and that will actually change, it will actually start to re wire your brain and it will associate those thoughts with deletion and rejection.

Nick Skillicorn: I really like that one; I am going to try that one out myself. So I highly recommend everyone check out some of your materials, we are going to have a link down to your resources down below the video, can you just describe what people are going to find if they go there

Denise Jacobs: Absolutely, so what you would find is a link to the sign up to get on the mailing list for banish your inner critic and when you sign up, you will be able to get a little teaser version of the introduction and the first chapter so that you can kind of get a taste of the book and see what's coming with it and so I highly recommend that you go sign up on the list for the book, also if you want to have probably a second link for you to sign up on my mailing list for my news letter and with that, when you sign up for that, you will be able to download a chit chit that I made up which is five creativity hacks to make shift happen, so five quick tips to help you get out of the place of being stuck and move into a place of being into creativity

Nick Skillicorn: That's wonderful, Denise it's been wonderful chatting with you today and I look forward to speaking again with you soon

Denise Jacobs: Excellent, thank you so much Nick, I appreciate it.