

James Taylor

The five stages of the creative process

Speakers:

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

James Taylor

Expert Interview transcript:

Nick Skillicorn: Hello everyone and welcome to another expert interview series at the innovation and creativity summit 2017, very happy to have James Taylor on the line today, James is a creativity speaker and a creativity coach, we worked together previously and I know he has got a lot of great stuff to say about how creativity actually works and how we can we can improve it. James it's wonderful to have you here.

James Taylor: It's fantastic, I am seeing the guests that you have on this summit, I have seen Erik Wahl and others it's great that you put all these folks together to kind of share their knowledge.

Nick Skillicorn: So for people who don't know you can you give us a brief background as to how you got into creativity and the sort of work that you do.

James Taylor: Yes, originally I was a musician many many years ago, when I was at school, I was a professional musician, I thrived around the world, and so I was used to being on stage and then I got really passionate about helping the other musician, other artist create monetized in market what they were doing. So I kind of went from being on stage all the time to being back stage, so for the past fifteen years, I have been often the guy behind the scenes of things you have been seeing. Imagine bands like Deacon blue working around with Rolling stones, multiple Grammy award winners and my job was really to help them really we can get the most from their creative potentials, to unlock that creative potential and also to kind of put in place systems and processes and people and teams around them so they can really operate at the highest level that might include (Inaudible) being put heads together if there was a music artist or working with authors on how to build their brand especially online, a lot of the work I have been doing, I moved to California a few years ago and the work I did there was really working with subject matter experts and how to take that what was incredible knowledge and creative's in their brain and kind of create an online program, an online membership site, so that's really what I was doing for many many years and its only be relatively recently I have come back to go back on the stage again and people say can you come and speak on our event, can you come and work with our team and so that's what I have been doing more now and travel around the world speaking about creativity and having online programs through my online school which is called Cisco.

Nick Skillicorn: I know that you have also put a lot of stuff on YouTube which is where a lot of people know you from, one of your most popular videos is one of the ones which I am amazed you haven't

touched so much on the summit so far which is what sort of creativity actually isn't and how it works, it's about the creative process, could you let us know a bit about what that is

James Taylor: Yes, so I mean the reason I actually started doing the YouTube videos was just because I was learning like many people who are watching and listening now, you kind of learn a new subject, even though I have been very heavily involved in working with a lot of creative's so much like myself creative as well, I started reading about the science, neuro science and the research about it, I was kind of curious, this is fantastic, why do more people don't know much about this, so I just decided to do these videos really just as a way to help me learn so I would film this short videos about whatever I was learning about creativity and put them up, somehow they got very popular and so a lot of views. So the one about the creative process was, I was kind of amazed that no one has really created a video about it or talked about it this way which is the five step or stages to creative process which anyone does any kind of creativity work, you either know it explicitly or you just kind of internalized that kind work that you do, so the classic five stages are, the first stage is the preparation stage, so the other day I was talking to a group of lawyers and judges, they are classic in their preparation stages, it's like learning their brief, learning the case itself. If you are a musician or if you are an artist it's looking at the work of other musicians and artists. That's really where a lot of the work goes in, that preparation really learning and kind of getting really knowledgeable about your particular domain or your subject and then you go to the next stage which is the incubation stage, the stage where you have to watch you are taking all of the knowledge and information is important, I am sure your other guests who had come from the neuro science perspective talked about this as well. You kind of have to learn to put things to the back of your mind. Steven King the writer he talks about this when he is writing or working on a book, you have to learn how to use maybe during the first draft and put it into the draw for a while and then bring it back out. Because what has happened you have taken so much information, you need to let that stuff kind of go subconscious in the moment and sit a little there at the back and it's your brain essentially looking for patterns and new things. Then we have the third stage which is kind of the insights, the Aha moment as we hear people will talk about, that's the bit that gets made into the movies, that's the scene of the movie where somehow you have got it or the apple drops from the tree and things. In creativity really one of the shortest parts, the shortest stages, but it's such a seminar moment that people kind of talk about and make movies and write books about it. And you go to the fourth stage which is the evaluation where you have to evaluate all the different ideas that are coming to you to basically decide which of these ideas one worth the sharing is. So you do that and eventually all these different ways you can do that individually or as part of a team. The final stage is the elaboration, Edison said one percent inspiration and ninety nine percent perspiration, and this is 99 percent perspiration. So these are the five classic stages of the creative process but in reality they are not linear you are going back and forth between these different stages, that's a good kind of model to understand to think about your creativity so you could sometimes if things are not necessarily working you can think about how it relates to that creative process and you can think okay maybe I need to focus on maybe develop some skills around there or mastering or changing things up often changing the environments in which you are doing these things.

Nick Skillicorn: I think a lot of people it does sort of spark something in them when they learn that this is something that more or less everyone goes through and they have an idea because it seems to be pretty universal. A lot of the researches are suggesting that there is either this five stages or some

people say four stages, they leave often the elaboration at the end but it does seem to be something that happens in everyone and it's also a good example of how everyone has the ability to be creative even though unfortunately a lot of people nowadays don't consider themselves to be that creative. What's your view on people who say that about themselves?

James Taylor: When I go, in fact yesterday I was speaking to a group of business leaders in Edinburgh Scotland and I often start by asking a question, please put your hands up if you consider yourself as creative and a certain number of people put their hands up and there was a second question how many of you consider creativity important for the job that we are doing, the business that you are working and everyone kind of placed their hands up and then you ask the third question, how many of you are organizations or leader organization which are actively investing in creativity training or innovation training, like very few hands go up at that point. So there is this gap there and I think there will be the research saying that about thirty five percent of people consider themselves creative. That is shocking to me, that such a small number of people consider themselves creative and I think part that is due to our education system, Ken Robinson talks about this in his TED talks but there is also a kind of cultural thing going on there as well, so I speak a lot in far east and in Europe we are used to in Latin create es new, the idea that something has to be new, has to be created from nothing and that's because we come from today a Christian background where something, the world was created in seven days, that tradition so we have to think of something to be created, it has to be brand new, it never has to be existed before. But in the east because they come from Buddhist or cautious background they believe in created materials something, a new thing is often a combination of two or more existing ideas like the phone, it's a phone and a computer, so I think one of the reasons a lot of people get really hung up about this idea of creativity and might not consider themselves as creative is because they have a misunderstanding about what creativity actually is and they think that for something to be creative it has to be brand new, it never existed before, it kind of not really what it is for most of the time.

Nick Skillicorn: What about people who feel like that, they want to be creative, they want to express themselves but there are just things that are in their way, either that they feel like their boss don't let them or they are afraid of expressing themselves or they just don't have the confidence to do it.

James Taylor: Yes, I think one of the reasons that came about is I mean if you go right back to the ancient Greeks and the Romans, they felt like we are vessels of creativity, we were the tool bringing genius, the genius of the place, we were vessels for this ideas coming in from the gods or the energy around those, today we talk about the energy more than anything else. In the Renaissance time, George wrote a book called lines of the artist and that changed it, and that did talk about the individual, that was the genius, that the creative genius. And that put a lot of pressure on people because it then suddenly had to make about new genius which had to come from them, they can be so much of a collaborative experience, what Vermeer had to do was he had to carefully paint out all the apprentices or the patriots or the other people that make something happen, apart from just the individual who gets the credit for it. So one of the first things I often do when I have a conversation with those who don't consider themselves creative, so whatever is your fear is about creativity, I know certain things like update my ideas isn't good enough, I don't believe in someone has done my idea better. I believe that I am too young or believe that I am too old or I will only do it when it's absolutely one hundred percent perfect. What the writer Gilbert says in his book big magic, he said perfectionism is like a high class type of fear, fear in two shoes, it try to just glamorously terrified,

the thing as I tell them the many of the creative people that I work with, Grammy award winners, bestselling authors, they have exactly these same fears, but I think media with certain people decide to learn with creative genius as the way that creativity works. You have to be some other worldly, drop taking, risk taking. That's not really what creativity do majority of time, but I think what we need to develop is a bit more honest about the difficulties of the creative process as well. First I do say is get started, there is a classic book about Julia Cameron called the artist way, there is a very simple exercise in that, it's useful to get started in this thinking kind of reconnecting with your creativity is a good way to do it , every morning when you get up, sit down, have a note book and just write three pages of long hand, of just top of mind, just kind of get out of your head what is going on there, take like of 15 minutes, the point is that creativity is much like a muscles, it needs to be kind of worked out. When you roll up in the morning, you do yoga and in the morning and you then need to do that and morning pages are very effective way of doing that to just kind of stretch, no one else is ever going to see this pages that you have written, they are just for you but they just allow you to start connecting with that creative thing inside of you. And then from there it's a bit of a gate way and it's like a small incremental step that you are going to give yourself a particular creative project you want to work on. I speak a lot of, we organize a lot of creativity retreat at Cisco and I was doing, we had two at the weekend, one in California and one in London, the thing that always interest me is when I go run these things and speak at these events is that a lot of people there who have had big birthdays, a birthday with zero on the end or had a major life event or maybe death or an illness or divorce or something and they say to themselves I want to get that creative part of me that is what I want to get. As my friend said he said I want my crowns back, they want to get back that thing and I think that's a very powerful indicate and you should listen to that in yourself and just see where it goes in these different process and things that you train about as well. They are just a light to start reconnecting with something that is already there for long or been suppressed for long time.

Nick Skillicorn: What sort of other tips apart from the morning pages can you give people who want to sort of reconnect with their creativity, what sort of rituals or habits people can develop

James Taylor: Yes so there is a whole bunch of them, but one of the thing I find very powerful in creativity is the importance of place in your creative process. the ancient Greeks knew about this called I the genius low kind, places have their own genius and their own creativity. So when you are in those five different places of creative process, what you often find is the different stages will work better, different places will work better at different stages. So that preparation stage, that very first stage is often best to be doing in quiet environments or places where you can really focus and absorbing as much information as possible. A little bit of noise is good, just a little bit of background and that's where coffee shops can also be very useful for that. In fact there is an app one of my guest in my podcast told me about recently called coffee tivity which I never never heard about before, it's a basic app you have on your computer, you press the back ground noise as if you are in the coffee shop, like you are working as well. In that preparation stage, it's about being in an environment which is relatively quiet or with a little level of noise so that you can focus on what you are doing. But when you go into those other stages, the incubation stage and the insight stage, the incubation stage and the insight stage will most often happen when you are doing some kind of low level physical activity or when your mind is opened unstructured in different ways, one in which you get some of the best ideas in the shower because you work get up in the morning, your brain is not

quite there yet, you may be thinking about things from the night before and you are opened to unconventional ideas and you go into a low level physical thing. There are a lot of things shown as well, like just getting out in nature, it's very powerful. University of Berlin did a study showing in terms of what colors increase levels of creativity and the color green, that vibrant green that you get out and nature is very good for creativity which is why a lot of people also get some of the best ideas when they are out walking about as well. Then just little simple things like creativity hacks like caffeine, a neuro science professor at the university of Pennsylvania did a study on the effects of different substances on creativity, one that was used was coffee, coffee is very useful at the first stage, for the preparation stage and its very good at the last stage. When you are haven't elaborate, you haven't really kind of work on things micro testing. In the middle stage when you want an insight, he says the insight are much less slightly going to happen if you having high levels of caffeine. So at this stage if you want more insights like probably reduce the caffeine levels, drink juices, tea maybe because there is this link of really pushing high level of caffeine than the ability for your brain to kind of relax a little bit more and look for some of those connections and its less slightly to happen.

Nick Skillicorn: I know exactly the study you are talking about, it's one of the most controversial ones out there because a lot of people idolized the sort of scrappy, a bit hectic creative visionaries that these artist that you see portrayed in TV series and holly wood and a lot of them seem to be hopped up on caffeine and alcohol the whole time but the research doesn't show that its good for creativity at all, it's more a question of whether or not there is a personality traits which lead them to caffeine more or alcohol more, it doesn't help every one achieve those same things.

James Taylor: Yea, I think people get confused, they think it's a link issue and something, it's like mental illness for example, its often the one that get talked about with, folks are very creative in high case maybe In which is the one that is triggering the other sometimes as well. I think it depends what your inner flow, if you are either creative over a long period of time and to be holistic in that way and then to be prollickic and some of those things. So the people that I work with who are operating a very high level whether it's in the arts or in business working so they can validate. Frankly there is too much to be done and they want to achieve too much creativity and so they kind of tend to steer clear. They do however have ways of coping mechanisms in terms of stress which is a different thing. So yours is in mindfulness being used a lot more as well. Even the Greeks knew this in symposiums they were to have wine but they always walked to the damn two pubs wine, three pub and they will serve and share in cups. So they weren't stupid, they realized that maybe a little bit is fine but too much is detrimental. Where I was speaking last night was in Edinburg and in Edinburg they had the clubs during the enlightenment era and it did exactly the same thing there with clients while they were more tripped down because its good, it useful to be in a more relaxed state especially if you are in a certain stage of the creative process but there is a danger to it as well

Nick Skillicorn: I would like to pick your brains a bit about the sort of people that you work with, because as you said you work with authors, you work with musicians you mentioned rolling stones, a lot of people think I could never be like those people, they are sort of godly, they have got a talent that I don't have but from your experience do these people that other people or the average person would consider to be creative, do they also suffer from the sort of problems that normal people do, getting blocks, not thinking that they could come up with ideas that are as good as the ones they previously had or any other sort of creative issues.

James Taylor: Yes I mean that list I mentioned earlier about this kind of creative fears, they are pretty much there in all of them, and they have maybe developed coping mechanisms and ways of dealing with it. I had one the other day, was talking about creative blocks in a course he did, a master class he said creative blocks is a permanent position, it all reveals everyday there is a creative block there and someone else that I worked with who was in song writing, they say inspiration is to amateur really, you have to develop a craft around what you do and you ensure that you are constantly working towards something. Even though those fears would come in, you essentially train yourself to be able to deal with it and sort of get on with it because the fears are going to happen. I think Elizabeth mentioned something for writer, whenever she starts a book, she has this little voice at the side of her head that says you are not really a writer and you are not a very good writer, you just had a one on one head with that pretty love book, this next book is not going to be successful. She said she learnt to kind of just talk to the voice and she would say I realized here with my best interest at heart but really I think I am good, I think I am good just carry on anyways. You can play with that fear the same time.

Nick Skillicorn: Absolutely, we are coming up to the end of the interview unfortunately, I am sure we could keep going for hours and hours, what I like to ask a lot of the experts is if you have one tip or what I call one actionable insights that people who are interested in becoming more creative can try out either over the course of afternoon or a week, what would you recommend they try

James Taylor: I think what I am very keen on is creative pairs. I know there is a lot of research coming out about this as well, so every batman needs a Robin. I think sometimes when we think about creativity, we think it has to be a purely solid tree this shield, actually it can be very enjoyable working on a creativity project with someone else, maybe someone that is a flow for you as well. It feels very good, at certain stages of the creative process, certain part of creativity and maybe the person will come and do their bits, they love this part. So I think it is one thing that I will suggest to you. So maybe the project you are doing is just you on your own, maybe have a project where you bring in someone else and you work together and you partner on something. It's just good because it will bring in fresh ideas that will challenge you with some of, it kind of get you out of rot sometimes because sometimes creativity we get be where we get stuck in this same rot and having someone come in and say actually if we did it this way, if we did it that in a different way that could be very useful. So go out there, whatever the project is that you know maybe if you are a writer maybe finding an editor or a co writer to work with on something, I had engaged recently a big successful, self published writer and she often does co writing with people and some writers uses her all the time, entrepreneurs, they start in terms of silicon valleys, the sole founder, the two founders. There is no just comparism, no two founders always ends up having be more successful than a single founder. So I think creative pair is the one little tip I will give you today.

Nick Skillicorn: Perfect we are also going to get links down to your resources in the video description below, can you just give a brief insights to what people can find if they go and click on that link

James Taylor: Sure, the thing I put together is a three part training series called the creativity blue print, the first form of idea, talking more in depth about the five steps or stages of creative process, what's involved in each of those then the video two in that is about creating blocks so I took a number of strategy you can deal with if you have blocks in whatever you are doing in creativity and the third video actually cover the ten most common questions I get, coming to myself and my team

about creativity. These are just the real strong ones I hear all the time, people find time to do their creative work, some of the things that you mentioned, confidence, build a lot of confidence around your creativity daily rituals and so we cover that in that creative blue print so people get that for free

Nick Skillicorn: Absolutely, it's a wonderful resource; I will recommend everyone check it out. James it's been wonderful having you here, I am so glad you managed to make time to be part of the summit; I look forward to speaking to speaking again with you soon.

James Taylor: My pleasure, its great being here..