

# Janet Sernack

How to create a safe space for disruption

Speakers:

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

Janet Sernack

Expert Interview transcript:

**Nick Skillicorn:** Hello Everyone welcome to another interview session at the innovation and creativity summit, we have got a transatlantic, trans pacific, trans oceanic interview for you today with Janet Sernack from Australia with Imagination. Janet how are you doing?

**Janet Sernack:** I am doing fine; I am just back from my evening yoga class so I am well stretched and very relaxed.

**Nick Skillicorn:** Perfect some listeners may notice there is a bit of a time difference with the session and that's because the speed of light in between London and Australia will take a second or two in between the questions so we will make it work. So Janet why don't you tell us a little bit about your back ground in innovation and what Imagination is, and what do they do?

**Janet Sernack:** Great, thank you for asking, well Imagination is located in Australia and was actually born in Israel, the Startup nation, when my husband and I went to live there nearly eight years ago and I found out that I couldn't work in my field which was organizational learning and development in a whole area of transmission and leadership. So what does a girl do and she would start up entrepreneur so I think I was one of the entrepreneurs to ever cut Israel. What really compelled me and what really inspired me was the innovation culture and the whole entrepreneurship lifestyle. I have been a serial entrepreneur; I work for myself for thirty years while this was illogical and very creative and enormously challenging step. We relocated to Australia nearly two years ago and despite what everybody said: "you can't do it". Well I did it and we are doing it and now with global thought leaders in discovery innovation. There you go.

**Nick Skillicorn:** so what do you mean by the discovery end of innovation?

**Janet Sernack:** Well all of our research indicates that there are really three phases of innovation. There is the front end which is the discovery, which is about being able to see, respond to and generate new ideas. Then there is the design phase which is actually probably closer to inventing something that represents your creativity and your new idea. And then there is the delivery, what we call the commercialization phase of innovation and

then what we saw is the universities and the academics have got the delivery side down pat and the design thinkers have got the design side down pat but there are not many people playing with what we call the discovery or the generative skill set so that's where we play, we say play because play is part of what we do.

**Nick Skillicorn:** why is it that this is so important that companies need to think about this discovery phase in a new way? What are the sort of problems that companies usually are facing there?

**Janet Sernack:** well as Albert Einstein always say, you can't solve the problem with the same thinking that created it. So part of the problem with innovation is that organizations and the BCG indicate that 79 percent of organizations have not actually have difficulty making a breakthrough and Clayton Christensen say that since the discovery skill set is the most important skill set for innovator to have. Most organization just focus on execution so what they are doing is that they are executing an idea with the same way they started it. The discovery phase is really about how to be different, so when we talk about being different we talk about being courageous, compassionate, connected, and confident and things like that. When we talk about thinking differently so being able to really good and divergent, convergent and associative thinker and they are also important skills and there are the about how to be different, how to think differently, and to act differently in order to make the difference that you want to make in the world in a way that people value and cherish. So we teach people to be provocative, destructive and deviant so that they can create openings, they can see and create openings for new idea that they can create the ideas and they can transform it into innovative solutions.

**Nick Skillicorn:** Why would a company want people who are disruptive and destructive? Surely wouldn't that ruin things like team dynamics.

**Janet Sernack:** it's actually maximizing diversity and difference. It's a nice way of saying it so what you are trying to do is to create out of the box thinking and to challenge the status quo, and after spending the most of my career in top team alignment and transformational leadership, being nice is not going to deliver you the outcomes that you want, so we teach people how to be safely disruptive and one of the core is the six practices in our leadership model.

The first one is to be unplugged from everything that is going on around you and be present and the next phase is to actually create what we call the safe collective holding space. So we create the safety, what's called the psychological safety by its designs as trainers, as coaches, as facilitators we call safe space because its only when you provoke and disrupt the a status quo that you can create puncture marks on it. We call those cracks for something you emerge, the principle is you have to break down something old for something new to come. So we do that in a very safe and empathic and compassionate way.

**Nick Skillicorn:** You also mentioned something earlier about things like confidence and culture, how does a company actually increase the confidence of its people to try out new ideas?

**Janet Sernack:** Well, it's a great question because there are barriers to innovation, risk adversity is very strong here in Australia, so you have to make it safe for people to take risk and not punish them if they make a mistake and fail. The second thing is you have to make it safe for people to embrace, change to offer them a more positive state and also the last thing is complacency. So complacency is, as they say in the recent BCG report "not invented here syndrome". So you have to motivate people to move out of their comfort zones, so a lot of it is around safety and creating the space where people can experiment and I mean doing and failing. We talk about building people's confidence so when they see they are not going to get bashed up, that's a good Australian term or beaten up for doing things differently or wrong, so they're actually going to be more confident. The other thing is we want to build the capacity so that's their emotional agility to be resilient and bounce back from adversity and failure, something I had to experience myself and then there's the mindset and skills. It's all about developing a culture that is agile so that people know how to adapt to and respond to changes quickly and creatively.

**Nick Skillicorn:** Can you possibly take us through if someone were to bring in the imagination facilitator at what sort of things do they face at the beginning and what sort of hurdles do they find in teams and what sort of techniques are out there to actually overcome those hurdles?

**Janet Sernack:** That's a great one. It's usually when we go in with a client's it's not conventional, all of our work is customized, all of our work has programs. One of the things I noticed when I moved in to the innovation space is how conventional innovation consultants were and so that was a lot of fun to play with.

So the first thing that we do is we work with the CEO and the Executive team to actually be explicit about why innovation is important to their business and you need to be successful and there is a need for urgency around this burning platforms and possibility. So we call that push strategy for necessity and a pull strategy for possibility. So it's not just about survival, it's about flourishing.

So each organization is different, it's really important to know why you want to innovate and then actually facilitate a draft function of innovation that suits the client's needs, suit their businesses and the founders or the executive team and it's only like what we call a strong hypothesis to play with. It's really importantly we take on board a sponsor to be a role model for the program and that's what is really challenging because you come up against cognitive inertia.

Which is we are doing okay, we don't need to change. We come up against fear of a loss of status, the CEO says "I know what I am doing" but it's really not those little things that you

To find out how Nick Skillicorn can help you build your innovation and creativity capabilities, go to

[www.improvides.com](http://www.improvides.com)

come up against the founders especially saying you don't know anything with this we don't need you even though the people in the organization might be very disengaged and do need this.

So another of course is learning anxiety which is fear of looking stupid for not knowing, innovation involves change on steroids, so we actually tend to partner with our clients and co create the kind of structure that is going to work best for them and then most times because we work strategically and systematically we ensure that there is a vision for innovation and that its real and is strategic

**Nick Skillicorn:** As you mentioned right at the beginning, you guys are thought leaders when it comes to this first part of the innovation methodology, it seems like you really have a philosophy that everything is built upon , what's the background behind the processes that you use in the philosophy and of the way that approach innovation.

**Janet Sernack:** Everything we have learnt about innovation and Imagination is as a result of what we are doing, so by really exploring what works and what doesn't work. I have been known for a very long time as the how-to girl. I guess the main thing is be the change that you want to see in the world. I always wanted fast track consciousness and really I am revealing a secret side of myself and realized that the best way to do that is through innovation because you need to have the final say, you need to have some consciousness to be innovative.

So it's much about teaching people to be present, teaching people how to really connect with each other and with whoever they are working with, with the system and with the whole. So the philosophy is very emergent in and it's very much pulling people towards realizing their full potential and also their full possibilities. So we are in an era it catches its possibilities it's only a matter of how. So I am miss possibility, that's certainly underlying everything that we do at Imagination to really unleash that possibility opposed to saying "innovation or die", I believe that.

**Nick Skillicorn:** it's been fascinating hearing about what sort of things happen within teams and what sort of things hold people back and what sort of things they can do to improve their innovation performance but the last thing I want to talk about before we run out of time today is if you were to give individuals or teams or managers one actionable thing that they can go out and try this week, this afternoon, this year, what sort of things should they actually go out and take their first step on?

**Janet Sernack:** It's a really great question and again the answer is very simple and hard to do, that is to be really present with whoever you are with and really listen to the possibility that is in the conversation, listen to judge, don't listen to offer a conflicting point of view to be empathic, invasive and possibility of what could be whilst and also expecting what is and then just simply ask more questions about it and be willing to be provocative as long as you have created the safe space to be so

**Nick Skillicorn:** Janet thank you so much for being here, we are going to have a link on the screen for everyone who is joining us on the webinar to find out more. Janet where is that link going to take people,

**Janet Sernack:** it's going to take people to our site, where we run free monthly webinar, download our white paper, join our community to be on monthly community bulletin and we will love to welcome you to the website and I look very different when am not just back from the yoga classes

**Nick Skillicorn:** No problem, it's been lovely having you. Apologies for any audio issues any one may have had, Janet thank you so much for being here and I look forward to speaking with you again soon.

**Janet Sernack:** I wish you a great success in your business practices and may the future be so bright for all of us that we need to wear sun glasses.