

Patti Clark

Regaining your sense of self and your own ability to be creative

Speakers:

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

Patti Clark

Expert Interview transcript:

Nick Skillicorn: Hello and welcome to another expert interview session here at the innovation and creativity summit. I am very happy to have Patti Clark on the line today. Patti is the author of *This Way Up* and runs workshops for people on how to discover their own innate creativity and to get through creative blocks. Patti it's wonderful to have you here.

Patti Clark: It's great to be here, thanks for having me Nick

Nick Skillicorn: No problem, I understand it's all the way in New Zealand where you are now

Patti Clark: Yes it's a beautiful morning here and it's the middle of summer. The weather has been hot and beautiful. Luckily I live near the beach; I am able to swim while it's hot.

Nick Skillicorn: That's perfect. So for people who aren't aware of your work and what you do, can you give a brief background as to what you have written and your own history with creativity.

Patti Clark: Sure, my book is *This Way Up, Seven Tools For Unleashing Your Creative Self And Transforming Your Life*. The book itself took about ten years to write through various permutations shall we say. I have been running workshops for teenagers and then for women for the past twenty years. I started out running workshops for teenagers and then a lot of the mothers said we want what you are doing with our kids for us. And so I started running workshops with my business partner Deb about twelve years ago.

Nick Skillicorn: Perfect and what is the actual focus of *This Way Up*, the book and you talked about unleashing your creativity?

Patti Clark: Yes the book is actually an amalgamation of a lot of information that I have heard from women throughout the past decade. A lot about losing a sense of self, especially for women because we tend to give ourselves away a lot and sort of lose touch with who we are and what drives us and what we feel passionate about. When children leave home or with divorce or redundancy, a lot of times women especially kind of get set adrift. So my book is unique, it's being called a hybrid because the first half of the book is written as a narrative and a story of a woman whose kids have left home and she is feeling lost and bereft and through a certain process she gets back in touch with herself, and then the second half of the book is a day by day journaling exercise for 12 weeks about getting back in touch with creativity and back in touch with self. The whole story line although there

is different tools, it all revolves around creativity because in my opinion, the best way back to self is through creativity. That takes courage to connect with that creativity.

Nick Skillicorn: Exactly it certainly does. When you talk about creativity, what exactly are you talking about?

Patti Clark: It's so huge, that's one of the real difficulties when we talk about creativity is that people automatically, not everyone, but the majority of the people I have spoken to say, oh well I am not creative. Because they think that creativity means having a large blank canvas that they have to fill, not only have to fill but they have to fill it expertly and precisely and so that's terrifying. So most people say I am not creative, I can't do that. Whereas to me creativity is everything, it's all around us, it's about thinking outside the square, it's about writing, it's about gardening, music, listening to music and moving to musical work, creating music, whatever that sounds like for you. For me my modality is mostly writing because I have always been a writer, I have always been a journaler. It can be anything, gardening, sewing, creative living. It's really a broad area and I think a lot of people are talking now about that beautiful combination of synergistic energy that happens with curiosity and creativity. So I will like to say when I am talking to people about creativity that first be curious, what is it that drives you, what gets you excited, then pursue that and allow that energy to lead you to your creativity

Nick Skillicorn: I mean it's something I think a lot of people can relate to not just that but about the earlier thing you talked about like people feeling like they are not creative. So many people, the majority of people if you ask them, they will just associate the fact that they are not as good a singer like Mariah Carey or not as good a painter as Picasso meaning that they are not creative and they don't have the capacity to be. Why do you think this in your view seems to affect women more than men?

Patti Clark: Well I don't want to say it affects women more than men around creativity certainly not. I am just talking about because I work with women, that's my expertise and my experience so I don't want to say that women have this all fear thing covered. Although I would say that without being too gender specific, men do have a tendency to sort of push through things more easily than women as a general rule. Women by my experience, have more of a fear of doing it wrong and Joseph Chilton Pearce says that "in order to lead a creative life, we have to lose that fear of being wrong".

And Matisse says "creativity takes courage". We have to be able to lose that fear of what are other people going to think, what if I don't do it right, what if my painting doesn't look like Monet, what if I don't do lilies right?

We have been trained with this idea of what right looks like and then we create the box that we get stuck in with that fear of well we won't do right and therefore I am so terrified of not doing it right. I am just going to stand still because I can't do it accurately and so we get stuck and I think from my experience women tend to get stuck in that box more easily shall we say.

Nick Skillicorn: I mean a lot of people they have this fear of perfectionism, perfectionism drives their fear I mean, quite often that prevents wanting to even start. In so many cases there is nothing scarier than a blank piece of paper.

Patti Clark: Absolutely, that blank canvas or blank piece of paper or blank computer screen is the most terrifying piece. But the irony here, I am not sure if irony is the best word but in my experience the way to get into creativity is to get creative, the way to get into your flow is to start doing something that will create flow.

So when we are in workshops, my business partner Deb and I, we just say “start”. One of the best way to start is by getting and using broad strokes, get a piece of paper and if you can’t start writing, start drawing lines, scratch it out, get that moving so that you can get past it. It doesn’t matter what it looks like, draw x’s if you are wanting to write, write something like “I don’t know what to say, I don’t know how to start, I am feeling stuck”, just keep doing it as you are walking through it. Julie Cameron, of my favorite books in the entire world *The Artist’s Way* talks about morning pages, if you have nothing to say, fill up three pages with nothing and just keep writing until you start writing something. Because the hardest part of taking a walk is putting on your shoes, just start doing it and soon things start to flow but our own fear holds us captive.

Nick Skillicorn: Is there anything that people can do to overcome this fears, the reason I asked that is in your book you talked about these seven tools of creativity to actually help people express themselves and unlock their creativity, what are these tools?

Patti Clark: Well the seven tools themselves is very much about being internal. I kind of envisioned all of us having this clear tube that connects us to what Jung called the soup, the source. We can call it anything we want and that the tools help us keep that tube clear if you will and helps us stay connected to self and to where our creativity flows.

So the seven tools are about first of all getting in touch with ourselves through silence, through visualization, I am slow to use these words because this is another thing that people say, I am not spiritual, I don’t meditate. I know people that say meditation is the M word, I don’t do that. Silence terrifies people, people want to be hooked in, they want to have their phone, they are on the computer. Silence and stepping away from that is terrifying and yet the way to get back in touch with that deeper sense of self, we have to do it. So again it takes courage but that first tool is visualization and silence. Learning to tap into ourselves and see what it is that we want to move forward to.

The next part is about connecting to our passion and the way that I do it is through writing and through the simplest way of putting it is goal setting, heart centered goal setting in that we attach our passion and start moving towards it. Again it’s that Irony that one way of getting creative to move us towards our creativity.

The third tool is through positive psychology. Sort of again an irony: if you want to be happy, be happy. So be happy first and then happiness follows. All of these ironies, all of these seeming contradictions that seem confusing and yet is a way through, when you act as if energy starts flowing and that follows. It’s around a lot around neuro science and positive psychology.

The next tool is around heart, love and one of the best ways to get in touch with our creativity is to love ourselves first. So many of us and again I am going to focus on women. Women especially have a hard time saying that we can love our selves first, we feel like that’s selfish and we have been trained to put family first, husband first, children first and yet we can’t pour from an empty cup. So

it's the opposite of selfish when we keep ourselves filled, we can't give more. And again a lot through silence and through getting into the flow and through creativity to connect.

The next tool you will notice I am moving my body because the tools are sort of connected to the body. The next tool is around forgiveness, that is forgiveness of self and forgiveness of others because Julia Cameron expresses it beautifully in the artist's way that when we are holding grudges, when we are stuck in the inability to move forward because we feel like someone has done us wrong or that sort of thing of they do it better than me therefore I don't like them, I am not going to even attempt it. Also that whole idea of imposter syndrome falls into that.

The next tool is around gratitude, the best, neuro science has proven that the best way for us to actually move through any kind of block is by getting into a place of gratitude. I always recommend to people I am working with start by writing, if nothing else write three things that you are grateful for that starts that actual physicality of writing and it gives you something that you are feeling good about and it's just get juices flowing.

Then the final tool is about again nearly mirroring back to the first about getting silence and connecting to that source to get the inspiration to move forward and then as you move forward getting quiet again connecting the source and moving forward. So it's sort of like take a step reconnect, take a step reconnect.

Nick Skillicorn: What I find fascinating listening to you there is when I approach my work around creativity, I take more of an academic evidence based scientific insight into it, so the sorts of studies out there around what's happening in the brain and yet I seem to be coming to the same conclusion that you are. For example I have what I call the five activities that can help creativity and three of them specifically seem to relate directly to what you are talking about. First one is fifteen minutes of unfocused time everyday and this getting people away from their phones, away from their screens, TVs, also away from other people for a while. So they just have to listen to themselves and be with themselves. I find it interesting that we both come to the same conclusion from different backgrounds.

Patti Clark: One of my favorite people to listen to on TED talks and anytime I can read anything about him is Richie Davidson. Richie Davidson is a neuro scientist, he works at the University of Wisconsin-Madison and I have been privileged, I teach in Madison quite often and when I am teaching in the university, I go to his talks whenever I can and he is coming from very very scientific basis. He is in the neuro science center, his PhD is rigorous, he is an incredible professor and yet his closest person that he works with around us is Dalai Lama.

So that beautiful dove tailing of science and spirituality, well it's all coming together now and where the two used to be considered so not connected that one was very on the head and the other was more sort of esoteric and couldn't be proved, they are finding they are so intrincating now.

Nick Skillicorn: I know, the other one which is in my list of five training activities, which I would like to get your view on, it's something I call everyone should do on a personal creative project once a month. This is because a lot of the time people in business, they don't necessarily have the ability to journal every evening but I recommend everyone do something for themselves, creating something for themselves, whether or not it's writing or photography or writing music or coding or wood

working or anything, just to prove that every month you can produce something new. Is that in line with what you think as well?

Patti Clark: Absolutely. It goes back to what I said earlier on, creativity leads to creativity. You know and that we get into the flow when we are doing something creative, whatever that looks like, and therefore when we say I am not creative or I don't have time, that's the big one. When we peek out that little bit of time like start some kind of project, we get lost in the flow and think wow, I really enjoyed that. That opens the door for us doing more. So yes I say very similar things, I say to women, I don't care what it looks like, sew something for fun not because you have to make your kids clothes, sew something fun and outrageous. Go in the garden and plant something fun. Don't just go and weed unless you love weeding, that's fine. Find some music and move when no one is looking and just enjoy the movement.

So doing that just for self but take yourself away from what you have to do and see it as tedious work even though you are saying this is not what you should do but it leads to that sort of that opening, I guess it's the best way to put it. That opening of self is where that flow comes again and that's wonderful. The sad thing is what I find is that that's often one imposter syndrome steps in and we sort of do something to say wow that was fun, that was good but I don't want anyone to know gosh I am not doing it as well as her or him and well I am not really, and then we let our head get back into the game and all of those fears and doubts come in

Nick Skillicorn: But how do people overcome all of this imposter syndrome

Patti Clark: I think what that takes in my personal opinion, that's a great question and I don't know that's the simple answer. But in my experience the best way through it is getting to a point where you have to say "I don't care what other people think, I am doing this for me".

Again I believe that comes back to self love and getting to the point where I can say you know what this feels really good for me and I don't care what other people think. Write, write some more and don't show anybody, this is for you and this is about getting in touch for you. My God did I feel that when I finally got to the point where you know I was going to send my book in to a publisher and the publisher said to me yes and I jumped and hooted and hollered and that yes you know a publisher likes my work and oh shit so he's going to see my work.

Then in the space of a heart beat all of that went in, people are going to know, people are really going to know that I can't write, I have nothing to say, that I am an imposter. It took a lot of work and ironically it took a lot of people mirroring me from outside saying "well that was really helpful" and people writing to me and saying that it was helpful for me to get to a point where I could sort of say okay, yeah it's a crazy. So how do you do it, you love yourself first and you move forward and pretend, act as if, try not to let the rest of the world's opinion matter. Whatever people think of me is none of my business.

Nick Skillicorn: Right in the beginning you said you work with quite a lot of women because originally you work with their children and then the parents found out that this might also be useful for them, there is also a lot of research out there which says that childhood is unfortunately a time where a lot of people lose their self perception of creativity. Why do you think that happens and what have you found might be able to help that either on an individual or family level.

Patti Clark: First and foremost I recommend that everyone on your summit if they haven't done so already go to Ted talks and watch Sir Kenneth Robinson, How Schools Kill Creativity, are you familiar with that?

Nick Skillicorn: very much so.

Patti Clark: it's one of my absolute favorite Ted talks; I think it's a lot of people's. I think it's the number one ted talk actually. He is fabulous and I think he is spot on basically as a child, when children are very young, they are creativity. Their whole body is creativity, put color in front of them and they will splash color around, leave them alone and they will start creating songs and stories and everything. I think a lot of people are well meaning, I don't think anyone purposely squelches children's creativity, most of the time I think it is very well meaning but small things from teachers and from parents puts children in boxes. Well meaning things like trees aren't purple, look around and boom. Ok, I can't draw a tree little voice in there.

I remember a teacher saying to me laughingly when I was in a play and I had to sing, "Patti we are going to keep you in speaking roles, you memorize great, don't give up your day job to sing", sort of jokingly, like boom, school play and I can't sing. I carried that around for so many years. I can't sing, I am not willing to sing.

Again kids their brains are forming at a young age and as they are forming they are learning, they are looking around, they are learning, they are paying attention. And we learn, okay don't do that, this makes me feel worse and I am not go do it that way and so we create the blocks and that's what happens and they become a fear based instead of joy and love based.

Nick Skillicorn: What can parents do to help reverse that trend?

Patti Clark: I think one of the best ways is to just give your kid space. Almost ironically don't cover and say oh that's great, that's great, it's wonderful; it's perfect, you are doing everything wonderfully because there is no discerning in there. Certainly don't critique, good but a child doesn't need constant feedback on oh you are wonderful either.

Actually there's been some incredible studies done in neuro science that talks about kids actually learning some sort of an opposite sense of self worth when you keep saying oh you are great, you are so smart, you are so wonderful, you are so smart and then they feel like "well I guess I don't have to work hard".

Instead what they have found for the best way for parents to acknowledge their child is, wow you worked really hard on that, well done on your diligence, well done on your perseverance, well done on really caring enough to do a good job. So really commenting on that instead of yay you are fantastic, you are fabulous and a child draws one line, "oh my God you are incredible, that's awesome". It's not helpful to brain development and also a kid as we see looks more and more for that acknowledgement, they draw line, "look mommy", draw another line, "look". Sometimes that's fine, but that's not creating resilience and that's not creating just a creative flow. In my opinion one of the best things we can do is give them space, let them explore, let them play

Nick Skillicorn: Patti it's been wonderful speaking with you today, we are coming to the end of the session but what I like to do with all of the experts is to ask, do you have one tip or one piece of

insight that you want to share with the watchers that they can go out and try either this afternoon or this week?

Patti Clark: I think in terms of my own work and in terms of neuro science, I think one of the best things that any of us can do is to cultivate gratitude, and so it actually impacts our brain in huge ways, neuro science has shown this. The one suggestion I make is every day before you leave and get out of bed, think of three things you are grateful for every day and make it a habit. And if you want to take it a little bit further I am echoing Julie Cameron, start writing a little bit everyday and so many people that say I don't have time, I don't have time, get up five minutes earlier, all it takes is five minutes because that's when our juices are flowing, if you don't know what to write, just write "not sure what to write". Sometimes it's nothing, sometimes that's when we get our most beautiful strokes of insights. So as I would say that's a beautiful place to start, if you don't have time just think of three things that you are grateful for but if you can hack out five minutes write five things you are grateful for and then just write it more to get that creativity flowing.

Nick Skillicorn: That's perfect. We are going to have links on screen to all of your resources and your book, but if people want to find out more, where are these links going to take them

Patti Clark: The best place to find me and find out what I am doing is on my website which is thiswayupbook.com and then I have a blog site patticlark.org where I post writings quite often, Sir Ken anytime he does a new ted talk that's one of my absolute heroes, so you can find me in either one of those.

Nick Skillicorn: It's been wonderful having you and I look forward to speaking with you again soon.

Patti Clark: Me too, thank you so much for having me Nick, it's just been an absolute pleasure