

Series 3 Episode 2

[00:00:00] Hello, and thank you so much for joining me. This is the second episode of series three of *In Ten Years Time: How to live a creative life*. I'm so happy you are here. I'm Tricia Duffy. I'm a songwriter, a media consultant, a singer, a writer, and a podcaster. And I'm here with an aim to inspire you to live a creative life. To find a balance of creativity that works for you and to encourage you to make your creative dream a reality. With a combination of small daily steps and the heady power of ten to help us, we will all live a more satisfying life. And if you'd like to engage with this conversation, please follow me now @intenyearstimeofficial on Instagram or Facebook, I respond to all direct messages, and if there's a topic or question you would like me to research and discuss, I'd love to hear your suggestions.

I've spent the last few years trialling ways to live [00:01:00] a more creative life, and I'm distilling all I've learnt in thousands of hours of research into this podcast series so that you can embark on a similar journey.

In this series of the podcast, we're exploring a theme of amplifying. And today I want to talk about reframing rejection as a means to amplify our creative selves. Okay, deep breath everyone. This is a huge topic, one that I think I could probably do an entire series on. Of all the things I've tried in my quest to create this podcast and these resources, I think this may be the one thing that's had the greatest impact on my own creative journey.

That's not to say that I can just deal with rejection by reframing it and forget all the other creative tools and ideas. All these things work together. But there's something magic about what I'm about to share with you, about our adult relationship with rejection, and my body is physically bursting with joy that I get to tell you all about it.

We've all [00:02:00] experienced some form of rejection at some point in our lives. As children, we were told no all the time. 'Can I have sweets?' 'Can I stay out late?' 'Can I balance out of the window and see if I can fly?' When we were kids, hearing no was easier. It was more frequent and in most instances we forgot about these micro rejections quickly. In fact, as parents we are told that learning to say no to our children is an important part of helping them grow into functioning adults. As we get older, rejection

becomes less frequent because we learn that balancing out of the window is bad for our health and so we stop asking.

But infrequent rejection can be a lot more painful, whether in a form of being rejected personally by someone, or by society. We will all experience some micro rejections that present themselves as minor criticism. But we will also experience more significant rejections that may feel like abandonment.

The point is that everyone will be [00:03:00] rejected at some point in their adult lives. And when it comes to our creativity, sharing our art or our craft, the potential to be rejected many times over is even greater. Many people describe being rejected as physical pain. They say that the rejection was like a slap in the face. They feel heartbroken.

I'm sure all of us have felt that physical pain in our hearts when we've been rejected by someone we loved, especially if they didn't love us back, or if we've been excluded from society because of our beliefs or personal attributes. The social psychologist Naomi Eisenberger wanted to understand why rejection feels so physically painful. So she conducted an experiment to explore it. The experiment involved participants playing a virtual reality game. While the researchers measured their brain activity through fMRI scans.

As the game progressed, some participants were excluded to allow the researchers to see what impact experiencing the [00:04:00] social pain of being left out had on their brains. Naomi found that the feeling of rejection triggered the same neural circuits that translate physical injuries into what we experience as pain. The science says that rejection does actually hurt.

I'll put a link to the research in the show notes, but it is behind a paywall. So I'll also link an article from personal development coach, Dimitris Kalogirou, who talks in more detail about the experiment in an accessible way. So if we're interested in amplifying our creativity, sharing our creative acts and our craft, and our art with the world, it will undoubtedly mean we encounter rejection and the pain that goes with it.

Not everyone is going to like what we do. And we're not going to have success from day one. It's probably the one thing we can be most sure of, but that doesn't stop it hurting. When we are rejected, it feels personal. It

feels unfair. We feel [00:05:00] misunderstood, maybe even attacked. Our ego is bruised. We think we shouldn't have bothered in the first place and our perception of our status in society is damaged.

I'm talking here about the rejections we encounter in our creativity. Not the pain of significant personal rejection in our lives that we might experience in our relationships or our work. Or the rejection you may feel if you're marginalised in society. As the scientists tell us, these rejections really hurt.

Sometimes the sadness and pain feels so devastating and overwhelming that we wonder if we'll ever bounce back. A major rejection wrapped up in a significant life change, such as a divorce or redundancy will have an impact on your wellbeing. So just to reiterate, this is not the sort of rejection I'm addressing here. Although if you are experiencing something like this, creativity may offer you a way to heal or deal with your pain. And I would recommend listening to the two special interviews I did with Richard Cranefield [00:06:00] and Sarah Johnson at the end of series one and two.

Back to rejection in our creative life. I think we have two pretty clear choices here. We can actively avoid being rejected or we can find ways to embrace and deal with it to amplify our creative selves. Now I've been using myself as a highly unscientific experiment for this episode over the past few months, inspired by a theory presented in the aggressive world of photocopier sales! I tried to set myself a target to get rejected a hundred times for Christmas. Yes, really, and more on the photocopiers later.

The whole thing started in July 2024 when I was invited to pitch some holiday songs for a Hallmark Christmas movie. I should share that it's one of my biggest ambitions to have a song in a Hallmark Christmas movie. At the risk of digressing, I absolutely love these movies. I feel I need to defend myself and say that I know they are predictable. I know that they go against all my feminist principles [00:07:00] and I know the plot is almost always the same. A woman grows up in a small town and goes off to the city to have a successful career, which she is naturally brilliant at. Just before the holidays she returns to the small town where there has been a death in the family or some such other emergency. While she's there, she meets her old boyfriend and they do not see eye to eye at all. Then some massive snow-related weather event happens which prevents her from leaving the small

town to get back to the city for Christmas. And, of course, she ends up volunteering to save the day at some pageant or bake sale.

She falls back in love with the old boyfriend, sees the error of her career girl ways, and they all live happily ever after, which is just as well because her horrible city boss was about to fire her for not getting back to her desk on Christmas day. The end.

I hope you're not going to reject me for confessing this! In the UK, at the end of October, these movies come on every afternoon on Channel 5, and I often work with them on in the background. There's something settling and comforting about them [00:08:00] and maybe I also like them because the protagonist often chooses a more creative life over conventional commercial success.

Anyway, I pitched the songs last summer with great hope in my heart. My dreams were on the verge of being fulfilled, exciting, and my hopes were quickly shattered. It only took 3 hours for the response to come in rejecting all four of the songs I'd pitched. What's even worse is that I can tell from the platforms I use whether my songs have been heard or not and the person I'd pitched them to hadn't even listened to them.

A year ago, I would have allowed this to really upset me because it feels so damn unfair. I'd fulfilled my side of the bargain, written the songs, got them produced to professional standards, submitted the songs as requested, at the right time, in the right format, and they didn't even have the courtesy to give me any feedback.

And at the very least, listen to them. I mean, how on earth does anyone get a break in this stupid industry? For some reason, I can't really explain. This time, I didn't feel [00:09:00] that way. What I actually thought was 'Good. The most successful songwriters in Nashville say if they're not getting rejected twice a day, they're not working hard enough.'

I realised I hadn't pitched anything for well over a month and I'd never pitched any Christmas songs before. Songwriting is a numbers game. Now, there are some other factors at play, which I do get angry about. Less than 15 percent of hit songs in the last 10 years have been written by women. But even for those with a statistical advantage, they still must be creating a lot of material that never sees the light of day.

I realise I have to play the game properly if I wanted to succeed. I have a few songs with a sync library based in Northern Ireland. A sync library is one that licenses music for use in TV and film. I had a chat with the founder a few days after these rejections had come in and I told him I thought it was a good thing because it offered me a chance to reframe how I see rejection.

That I could increase my chances of success if I actively tried to get rejected a hundred times in the next year [00:10:00] and refused to take it personally. This conversation was very important because I started to say these words out loud and hear the idea, which seemed helpful. I felt supported by the idea of gamifying rejection.

Someone else I mentioned it to pointed out that one hundred a year did not seem very ambitious, given my claims about the music industry being a numbers game, highlighting that's less than two rejections a week. And so I further reframed it and the 'one hundred rejections for Christmas' idea was born.

And so I started finding places to pitch my songs, places to pitch this podcast, places to pitch myself as a public speaker, to talk about creativity. I did it with hope and generosity, but with a specific aim to get a rejection.

And the strangest thing happened.

I didn't get rejected at all. Now, I didn't necessarily get accepted either, but mostly I got ignored. The overwhelming trend was that people either responded positively with a yes, or they ignored me. In the [00:11:00] first month, I pitched songs 17 times and the podcast 12 times, and I only got one no, which ironically was for another Christmas pitch.

As I'm assured it's pretty normal, for journalists receiving cold PR pitches, the podcast press release mainly got ignored. But three of the twelve came back with a positive response. Now, after a time, I reframed those no responses as a rejection, so they all counted towards my ambitious goal of a hundred by Christmas.

But what it taught me was that I didn't have to steel myself for the physical pain of rejection daily. I could rely on the most likely outcome being

nothing at all. Which neither hurts or inspires me. It's actually quite neutral. Yes, it's frustrating, but I have to remind myself that it's not about me.

We're all guilty of not responding to emails. And when it comes to music, I'm in a highly competitive industry. And I know that many people simply don't have the time to respond to every single pitch. It's not about me or even about the quality of my [00:12:00] songs. The thing I did realise though, was that I was never going to get to my hundred rejections target if I didn't start upping my game, both in terms of volume and ambition. The few yeses I got came from unexpected places. I got a yes from someone at *The Guardian* offering to pass my press release onto some journalists that might be interested in the content. You don't ask, you don't get! Now, those journalists never covered the podcast in their reviews, but still, at least it got to their desks.

I got a yes from my local CPP. In the UK, some boroughs have CPPs which stand for Creative People and Places. These are council-run organisations that encourage residents to come together to participate in creative arts experiences, to make arts and culture more accessible. The CPP immediately shared my podcast with the local community and invited me to a networking event that was happening that very week.

This made me think that maybe I was being a little bit shy about the number of times and places I was pitching, so I decided to write to record [00:13:00] labels about my music. The very first label I pitched to responded asking for more information. Then I thought, I'll pitch the idea I have for a book on the In Ten Years Time philosophy to a literary agent. I only sent it to one agent, and she responded two days later, asking for the first few chapters of the Ten Years Time book. I thought: what's going on here?!

Now I'm still on the journey and I have a long way to go. I need to start pitching even more often and more ambitiously. I still have to work my day job, so the opportunity cost of my time is a factor I have to consider. One of the key learnings is that I find I get better results with carefully worded bespoke contact rather than broad brush mailouts. So, I'd like to share with you now the process I use with the hope that it inspires you to do the same. Let's all see what happens when we try to get rejected.

The first thing you need to do is decide how you're going to track your pitches. I've created an Excel template for you, which is available on my website, but you could use a Google sheet too. [00:14:00] If you want to create this yourself, you will need the following columns:

1. Number: because you need to track the number of pitches. If you're going to challenge yourself to get a hundred rejections.
2. Date. The date of the pitch.
3. The item. The thing you are pitching. A painting, a song, a book.
4. The where or the who: Who you're pitching the item to. Which organisation, person, gallery, press department, blogger, awarding body or competition.
5. Rejected. Yes, no or ignored.
6. Learning. This is important if we're going to learn from our rejections and recalibrate for the next pitch. For example, the interest I had from the literary agent fell apart after I sent her the first four chapters. And looking back on it, I could have predicted that because I rushed to finish them. That's on me. I need to hold off approaching agents about my book until I have something I am happy to share with them. There's no rush. But what this made me realise was that I should finish the next two series of the podcast as a priority. Because researching [00:15:00] episodes like this, gives me much better foundations for a book which I can write later.
7. And then notes for anything that comes up or that you need to record as a reminder, such as asking you to check back later.

Every time you pitch or share, add it onto this list. Aim to add something at least once a week, more if you can. Although if you're starting from a place where you really don't feel like you know how to pitch effectively, I would recommend take your time to begin with and make individual contact with people.

As I mentioned, a carefully worded email to one person will do a couple of things. First, it creates a much greater likelihood that you'll get a positive

response, but it also gives you a chance to practice your elevator pitch over and over again. Trying different words to become more comfortable with your own story about your art, creativity, or your craft.

I mentioned earlier on in this episode that I took some inspiration from the cut-throat world of photocopier sales. I'm referring to a book [00:16:00] called *Go for No* by Andrea Waltz and Richard Fenton. It's a very, very short book and it tells the fictional story of Eric, a photocopier salesperson who had a fall and hits his head only to wake up in his own house 10 years later. And yes, I did love that the story used a 10 year time frame. He meets his own self 10 years on and over the course of a few days together learns that this other self - the sliding doors version of himself - had developed a system of actively seeking a 'no' from the person he was selling a photocopier to.

The book explores how people respond to sales, and when no is really no, and also the psychology behind selling. Both for the salesperson and the potential customer. When the salesperson was working to a target of yeses or completed sales, they would work only hard enough to reach that target or just exceed it and then put their feet up on the desk.

Through Eric's story, Andrea and Richard [00:17:00] tell us that statistically most sales happen after a customer has said no a staggering four times! Now as creatives, we're not in a traditional sales mode usually when we're pitching our work or creating a platform where people might purchase our art, but we can still learn from this.

The thing that the book explores, which I was most interested in was our relationship with the word no. We hate to say no and we hate to hear it. In my consulting job, I once worked with a top broadcaster. They were inundated with requests from production companies, pitching ideas to them, the companies were getting disheartened because the team responsible for picking the content would either not reply, or they would send a note saying that maybe they might be interested.

These maybes would start a cycle of activity for the producer of that idea. They would get hopeful and spend their precious resources on working the idea further. The truth was that the broadcaster in question was unlikely to commission most of these ideas, but they [00:18:00] hated to tell the producers 'no.' They're human beings and letting people down feels awful.

The producers told me that a quick no would be far preferable than a long maybe. They said they would find it easier and they could get over their rejections and move on, rather than drag on the process for months or even years. I'll put a link to the book *Go For No* in the notes as always. It is fun and if you like audio books I found the story really entertaining to listen to while out running and walking. It's read by one of the authors which I always enjoy.

I also procured a copy of the *Go For No* workbook. This is a 21-day challenge for salespeople that accompanies the book. Now, disclaimer, this book does not work at all for those of us living a creative life. It's specifically designed for sales work. But, in the introduction, there's another great tip, which I think is really helpful that I'd like to share with you now.

That is, to get yourself a 'no buddy.' Have you [00:19:00] ever been on a diet, tried dry January or worked towards a fitness challenge of some kind, or shared your walks or runs on a fitness app? The reason that Couch to 5K and Weight Watchers work is because of the accountability. There'll be someone in your creative community you can have this conversation with, and they will support you as you get your 'no's. Hard as it is, and though the nose might knock your confidence temporarily, don't shy away from them. Celebrate them. The sooner you get your 100 'no's, the sooner you're going to start getting your yeses. As Waltz and Fenton say, 'yes is the destination. No is how you get there.' Collect them like pebbles on the beach. They are abundant and in amongst those rocks are treasures waiting to be uncovered.

I started sharing my rejections very publicly on my Instagram account and the strangest thing happened. The more I shared, the more engagement I got. The more people wrote to me via direct messages or in the comments saying that this had inspired them. [00:20:00] Getting a no is not a failure. It is a small failing on the way to success. See the difference? Okay, I am actually bursting right now because I can't explain how excited I am for you to start doing this.

On my website, you'll find a link to a Facebook community group. If you haven't got a no buddy, you can share your rejections there. Or send me a message on Instagram or Facebook anytime. I'm here for you and all your creative endeavours. And those 'no's are just tiny, tiny steps on the path.

They matter, not because they're rejecting you. They matter because they're one step closer to yes.

Right, I have to stop now. And as always, I will offer a challenge, a question, and a recommendation. The challenge is, what's your no goal? I want you to write down how many 'no's you are going to aim for by a certain date. I would suggest a three-month target is sensible and the number you go for will depend on your creativity and your craft. For me songwriting is a numbers game so a [00:21:00] hundred pitches is actually a little on the cautious side. For a photographer perhaps entering five competitions might be more reasonable and for a dancer perhaps there would just be one or two contests, performances or classes you can put yourself up for. You will know the right number for you, but be ambitious and celebrate wholeheartedly every time you get a no.

The question I want you to ask yourself, what counts as a no? One of those other record companies I mentioned earlier responded to me saying they would consider in the future, but not now. Now that's not a 'no', that's a 'not now'. It's a big difference. I'm now actively thinking about what I can do to get them to say 'no', this is my target. They said that they would consider discussing again if I had 10, 000 streams for one song. Now, they may move the goalposts again and I won't be able to control that, but getting those streams will be good for my songwriting career regardless of that outcome.

So there will be good that comes of it, even if that's indirectly. So this one sits on my tracker as inconclusive, [00:22:00] and I need to find a way to get my streams up so that when I go back to them, it gives them another opportunity to say 'no'. If Richard and Andrea are right, 'it takes four no's to get the sale', then I need him to say no at least once if I have any chance of being represented by this label.

The recommendation this week is to read Kathy Heller's book, *Don't Keep Your Day Job*. I recommended this in my newsletter last year, but it is so powerful that I wanted to mention it here too. This book is for anyone that wants to make a career out of your creativity. Her examples come from all sorts of industry, not just creatives. But there are insights and lessons in this book that are incredibly inspiring and really lean into the in 10 years' time philosophy: long term dreams and goals with small daily steps towards them.

Thank you, creative soul, for being here. If you're enjoying this series, please follow me wherever you get your podcasts. And please give me a rating too! That really helps an independent [00:23:00] creative like me. Keep on keeping on. Speaking of keeping on, I'm keen to ensure that this podcast stays ad free. I think it is better for you to listen to these episodes and get to your creativity without the pressure of listening to several minutes of ads.

So, if you can afford it, and you've had some value from this series so far, please will you consider making a small donation? You'll find a donation tab on my website where you can do that. And I thank you so much for considering this kind and generous gesture. Next time I'm going to reframe something else that can help us amplify our creative selves: sleep, rest, and naps, and something called hypnagogia as a creative act. I'll explain what all that means next time. It's certainly been a fascinating topic to research.

I can't wait to have that conversation with you! Until then, please engage with me on Instagram or Facebook @intyearstimeofficial. Sign up to my creativity newsletter on the website. And if you like the series, tell a [00:24:00] friend. Until then, take care. Keep creating peace and love.