

Episode 1 - Transcript

[00:00:00] Hello and welcome to series two, episode one of *In Ten Years' Time: How to Live a Creative Life*. Thank you so much for being here. I'm Tricia Duffy. I'm a songwriter, a media consultant, a singer 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 that creative dream a reality.

With a combination of small daily steps and the heady power of ten to help us, we will live a more satisfying life. If you'd like to engage with this conversation, please follow me @intenyearstimeofficial on Instagram or Facebook, or @intenyearstime on Twitter or TikTok. I respond to every direct message, and if there's a topic or question you would like me to research and discuss, I would love to hear about it.

[00:01:00] I've spent the last two years trialling ways to live a more creative life, and I'm distilling all I've learned in thousands of hours of research into this podcast series so that you can embark on a similar journey. In the second series of the podcast, we'll be focusing on overcoming creative challenges. I want to start today by talking about identity, about values, and that moment when you start to call yourself a creative or an artist. And how we might deal with the challenges and doubts that can come up as part of that process.

But before I get into that, I thought it might be useful just to spend a few minutes revisiting the *In 10 Years' Time* philosophy. I spent many years working with creative organisations as a strategy consultant, helping them to understand how they could achieve commercial success. And I found that the organisations with a long-term strategy and a vision were better able to react in the moment. The vision or goal acted as a [00:02:00] North Star and empowered everyone in these

organisations to make better decisions each day, to take daily small steps towards their goals.

In the first episode of series one, I talked about how the measures for success for individuals are likely to be more complex than for a business. So if you're in the process of working out what success means to you, I'd recommend you go back and dip into that conversation.

A few years ago, I made a decision to change my life. I wanted to achieve creative balance, and I wondered if I applied the same strategies that I'd used with the most successful commercial creative clients I worked with, would I get similar results?

Since then, I've been on a journey of discovery, of trial and error, and I'm convinced that there is incredible power in the combination of ten-year planning coupled with daily small steps. A ten-year plan is powerful because ten years is close enough to be imaginable. You can make some [00:03:00] predictions about some things in ten years. But it's also far enough away to provoke dreams and aspiration.

On my website, there's a free template and you can listen to Episode 3 from Series 1 for a step-by-step guide to creating your own ten-year plan. Once you've created your ten-year plan, use it as a guide for your daily decisions. How you spend your time will have a direct impact on your future. And once you know the direction of travel, it's easier to invest that precious time in activities that make you more content in the moment and align with future you.

I recommend you update your ten-year plan every year because, after all, this is not a legally binding contract that, once committed to paper, you never revisit. The process of creating your plan will enable you to start walking a variety of different paths. And these paths will, in turn, inform your direction of travel. I hope you're already on your creative path, and that you're [00:04:00] finding the moments each day to write,

paint, model, sculpt, dance, play, play music, perform, learn, and consider your artistic life and balance.

Whether you're doing this many hours a day or you're grabbing a precious 10 minutes in your lunch break, you are living a creative life. So when do you start to identify as a creative person and how does your creativity impact your identity? Oscar Wilde said, "Be yourself. Everybody else is taken." It's a quote I think about often. Who am I? What am I? In a time of deliberate or forced change, how do I think about my identity? And how do I explain myself to others in a way that will make me feel authentic and understood?

You'll notice at the start of each episode I describe myself as a media consultant, a singer, a songwriter and podcaster. [00:05:00] It took a huge intake of breath to do that at the start of creating these podcasts, but over time I've got used to it and I'm sure I made the right decision. I find it easier to describe myself as a media consultant because that's how I've made my living for the last 11 years.

I also feel comfortable describing myself as a singer because I've sung in some capacity for most of my life, either as a job or a hobby. So it doesn't feel like a huge leap and other people are used to that part of my identity. However, I spend most of my time mainly working as a songwriter and a podcaster.

So if we work on the principle that I am what I do, they warrant inclusion in my identity menu. Here's the rub. And we return once again to this idea of falling into the trap of social pressure. Neither my songwriting nor this podcast break even financially right now. That's to be expected. I decided to [00:06:00] run in 10 years' Time at a loss for the first year because I wanted it to be an act of generosity, which is fundamental to my own values.

And the songwriting industry has a lag. The time between writing a song and making any financial return is long. Even when an artist commits to recording a song I have written, it takes months, sometimes years, to see any commercial return. It's a high risk business.

Back in Series 1, I mentioned other elements of my identity. I'm a runner, a mum, a wife. Mentioning these elements of myself doesn't make me feel the least bit uncomfortable. So why does describing myself as a podcaster or a songwriter feel so difficult? Let's unpack the reasons and see what we can do about it. I'm going to share another chapter of my own story to bring this to life.

In 2012, I left full time employment at the BBC where I'd been working as the Head of Transformation for four years. [00:07:00] I left because the job had taken its toll on me, and I'd been responsible for saving a billion pounds across all of the BBC's television operations. And earlier that year, I'd experienced three consecutive bereavements in a matter of months.

Like the conversation we had with Richard Cranefield in the last series about how we pivot in times of pain, it made me rethink how I was living my life. I craved balance and at that stage I didn't see it as creative balance, simply that I wanted to gain control over how I spend my time.

So I decided to launch my consulting business, Lily Grey. I trained as a mediator, expecting that I would make a living doing workplace and civil mediations and some consulting on the side. I had a long term plan. I created my business as a limited company. So it was a bona fide organisation. I got a website set up, I started to work my network so that I could generate some clients. All sounds like the sort of normal stuff you do when you launch a business, right? But then I went [00:08:00] on LinkedIn and started to think about how I would describe myself in what felt like an in-between phase.

I'd left my full time job and I was now working pretty hard at all the things you need to do to launch a new business, but I wasn't yet taking a salary and I didn't have any clients. After much debate, mainly with myself, I decided to go for it and wrote a bio that said I was working for Lily Grey as a consultant.

In the day to day, that was entirely true. And if Lily Grey had been a pre-existing, established consulting firm who'd hired me and had to build a portfolio of clients from scratch, I'd have had no trouble saying that that was my employer at all. There's something about this being mine. A start up. A leap of faith that caused the doubt. There were of course no guarantees that my business was going to be successful or even viable, but the facts were all there. The business - which is separate from me individually - had hired me, albeit on a zero hours contract. And [00:09:00] fortunately it didn't take long before I had my first clients and I was up and running.

I was given this advice to describe myself boldly as a consultant working for my business from day one by others who had learned this lesson before me. And I've been paying the advice forward since I launched that business, encouraging others to do the same.

Running a consulting business when I had transferable skills that were recognisable and measurable was relatively easy when I look back on it now. But even with that experience and knowledge behind me, describing myself as a songwriter has been very difficult. Is a songwriter a songwriter when they've never had a hit? Is an artist an artist when they've never sold a painting or a sculpture? Is a baker a baker when the cakes are only tasted by friends? Was Van Gogh a painter?

As I'm sure you may be aware, Van Gogh lived on the poverty line and only sold one painting while he was alive, the Red Vineyard, [00:10:00] which went for 400 francs seven months before he died. A sign of financial rewards to come? Perhaps. And we can't know whether he

would have gone on to achieve fame and commercial success if his life hadn't prematurely ended. The one thing we can probably agree on though, is that Van Gogh was a painter. He was an artist. You are what you do. Now, not everyone is willing to live in poverty and dedicate ten years of their life to painting hundreds of original works.

Nor indeed, given the example of Van Gogh, is that necessarily recommended. We know that he was deeply troubled for much of his life. But I think we can learn from him in relation to identity. If we agree he was an artist, because that's what he did with his time, then the lack of commercial success seems to have very little to do with it.

But what if you don't have a lot of time? What if you only paint, bake, sculpt, create a [00:11:00] few minutes each day? Does that make you a painter, a baker, a sculptor?

I'm going to jump back into running to help us through this. An analogy I used in the first series. The analogy that keeps on giving. Do you run? Do you know anyone who runs? I run three or four times a week and I have zero problem describing myself as a runner. I run very slowly with extremely poor technique and just five or six kilometres at a time. Calling myself a runner feels utterly straightforward. Even when I am injured and can't run for any length of time, I'm still happy to identify as a runner.

When I run, I'm sometimes seen leaving the house by my neighbours, on the towpath by friends walking their dogs. I post my runs on Strava and track my poor performance. I schedule it into my week ruthlessly. I do the activity. I run. And I am witnessed running by others. I dress in clothes appropriate for running when I'm in my leggings and my running [00:12:00] vest and my headphones on and my trainers on. I look like a runner. It doesn't really matter how slow I go or how far. I am a runner.

Okay, this is not a podcast about running. So let's get back to creativity. What can we learn from this? There are a few things to point out. The first is taking the creativity seriously. I take my songwriting, my creativity, very seriously. A few years ago, when I was just starting out on this path, I remember being at a dinner party and someone who I didn't know asked me what I did. I said, "I've got two jobs. Would you like to hear the interesting one or the conventional one?" And they naturally asked for the interesting. So I proudly said, "songwriter." Then the person said, "oh, how much money do you make from that?" I nearly fell off my chair. I was completely unprepared for the question. Because the truth was, at that stage, a few hundred quid! I realise now I should have replied, "Oh, are we comparing earnings? What was your bonus last year?" But I didn't.

What I did was [00:13:00] immediately launch into a monologue about my financially stable consulting career. It almost felt like I was undermining myself. "Don't worry, there's nothing to see here. I know I say I'm a songwriter, but I have a proper job too." I really hope I wouldn't react in the same way if I was in that situation again.

I am a songwriter. It is how I spend significant amounts of my time. Just like my running, which I also don't make a living from, I take it seriously. I schedule it into my week. I dedicate time for my craft. I learn and I pass my learnings on to others. I contribute to the academic discourse around songwriting. If I'm not writing at any given moment, or even if I don't write for a week, I'm still a songwriter, just like I'm a runner if I'm injured or having a rest day.

My invitation to you is to take your craft, your creativity seriously. It might take some time, but practice answering the sometimes dreaded question, 'what do you do?' with your creative answer and [00:14:00] just see how that feels. I mentioned I have all the gear when I'm

running. Leggings, running top, a gilet for winter, the proper Brooks trainers that I wear thin over a year of 20 kilometres a week.

And I raise this because there's something very empowering about looking the part. We've all heard the old adage, 'dress like the job you want, not the job you have', which always makes me think of that meme with the guy dressed as Batman explaining to his boss, "you told me to dress for the job I want!"

There's something massively empowering about wearing clothes that fit your creative identity. And perhaps slipping some of them into your daily life. Even if you work in a completely different industry. I have a couple of looks. When I'm working in the media industry, I need to look like a media professional.

So with my jeans and jacket, typical of the industry, I might wear the pair of cowboy boot earrings my cousin gave me for Christmas. [00:15:00] With a relatively formal outfit - that's formal for television, which is a very casual industry - I can add something that just allows me to hold on to a little bit of my creative identity at work.

I love Americana and country music. Maybe it will be a conversation starter. Maybe it will allow me to find people who have a similar interest. It allows me to hold on to all of me, the best of me. My writer self dresses casually, a bit boho even. And this is when I feel most relaxed, most authentic. Most comfortable, most in tune with my creativity.

In my mind, I look like a songwriter. Last year, I became songwriter in residence on Johnson's Island for a special project I was doing. Johnson's Island is a tiny landmass in the Grand Union Canal that houses artists studios. Each of the artists there have a look.

There was Sam, the collage artist with his bright [00:16:00] coloured shirts and silk scarf. A painter with splats of paint just down one side of her trousers, apparently because she's right handed. Max, a hatter with,

you guessed it, a beautiful hat, always adorned. Each of these artists looked uniquely different, but they had, possibly inadvertently, found clothes or accessories that were completely authentic to their creativity. Practical. Reflective and beautiful. Even the paint splattered trousers, which were a stunning work of art in themselves. So we dress like the life we want to lead and we take our creativity seriously.

I want to return to another topic that we discussed last series, which is sharing our work. I mentioned when I run, I look the part: all the gear and no idea! I take it seriously by scheduling the time to ensure that I run three or four times a week and I bear witness to [00:17:00] that. When I am witnessed, either via a Strava post or out on the street, I'm seen as a runner and that reinforces this part of my identity.

When you share your work, you are seen. You are exposed. You are verified. If giving and receiving feedback is something that worries you, I strongly recommend you listen to episode 5 from series 1. And on my website, there's a free feedback cheat sheet that will help you to navigate this process. You are what you do, and if you share that part of yourself with others, you will get the benefit of a continuous feedback loop that reinforces that part of your identity.

Now, every episode I offer a challenge, a question, and a recommendation. The question first, what is your creative look? Do you have an apron or overalls you use for your passion to protect you? What can you take into other parts of your life that is authentic to your [00:18:00] creativity? That aligns with how you want to be seen and viewed by others? You could add this to your ten-year plan. What does that ten year future you wear every day?

The challenge, make an evidence list. There's a template for this on my website if you prefer to have a structure. Essentially, it's a practice of documenting all the parts of your creative life. The tiny micro achievements you have made. The class you attended, the time you're

carving out, the painting you made, the work you shared, the feedback you got. You get the idea.

Finally, for the recommendation this time, I mentioned earlier that generosity is a massively important value for me. It informs my identity as a creator, including of this podcast, and the founder of TED Talks, Chris Anderson, feels exactly the same way. So I'd like to guide you to his book, *Infectious Generosity*. You can buy his book if you prefer a [00:19:00] physical copy, but if you're happy to read off a screen or listen to an audio version, he offers it generously for free at ted.com/generosity. Of course, I will include a link in the show notes.

Speaking of generosity, I'm very keen to ensure that this podcast stays ad-free. I think it's much better for you to listen to these episodes and get to your creativity without the pressure to listen to several minutes of ads.

So if you can afford it and you've had some value from the series so far, please consider buying me a coffee so that I can keep the content as concise as possible. You'll find a donation tab on my website where you can do that. And thank you very much for considering this generous gesture.

Next time, we're going to dive into some specific tools that will encourage you to overcome challenges on your creative journey, including the practice of 'giving yourself an A'. I can't wait to have that conversation with [00:20:00] you all. Until then, please engage with the conversation on Instagram or Facebook.

Sign up to my newsletter on the website and if you like the series, tell a friend. Until next time, keep creating. Peace and love.