

EPISODE 5

Tricia: Welcome to episode five of *In 10 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 [00:00:30] creative dream a reality. With a combination of small daily steps and the heady power of 10 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 a question you would like me to research and discuss I would love to hear [00:01:00] about it. I have 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.

Today I want to talk about that moment when you bravely share your work. How to navigate that challenging process and how to manage the inevitable feedback. At any stage of our [00:01:30] creative journey it can sometimes feel difficult to embrace the idea of sharing and receiving any kind of feedback and when we do get feedback we can sometimes feel quite misunderstood.

I want to explain why that can happen and I want to encourage you to share your work and empower you with the tools that will enable you to receive feedback in the most constructive way. I also want to arm you with the tools you need to give good feedback to others. Because when you start to engage with your creative [00:02:00] community, it's a two way street. The more you embrace your creativity, the greater the interactions will be on the topic of your chosen craft. You already have great creative instincts and opinions. They are naturally occurring, part

of the human condition. The secret to navigating sharing and feedback is the way you deliver and receive the opinions of others.

Let's start talking a bit about why sharing your creative activities and [00:02:30] creations is worthwhile. It can feel like a scary step sharing your work with others and often you'll question why it's even worth it. But by sharing your work, sharing your art, even works in progress, you will enhance your learning journey by engaging with audiences and your family and friends and people whose opinions you value. You'll start to understand what resonates with them. Even if you don't agree and you are your own audience for the work, which I advocate for [00:03:00] entirely by the way, you will both be clearer on your own taste as well as allowing yourself to consider challenges to your own creative mindset, which you can choose to use or ignore entirely at will.

If you have perfectionist tendencies, this may be even more important. I often use the term coined by American author and professor Brené Brown in *Daring Greatly* to describe myself as a recovering perfectionist. More on [00:03:30] that in a second. I find I flit between two states when it comes to sharing my work, either blind faith in what I'm sharing or a deep seated fear of failure. By routinely sharing my songwriting, and even early demos of this podcast, I've been able to gather the views of people I trust to improve my work, give me some direction and also give myself confidence when things are hitting the mark. But actually sharing your work can be a big fear for many [00:04:00] of us. So let me talk a little bit more about Brené and her encouragement to share our most vulnerable selves, which I believe are also our creative selves. In *Daring Greatly* and on her blog, Brené quotes the artist Nicholas Wilton who talks eloquently about art and perfection. He says, "art most closely resembles what it is to be human, to be alive." It is our nature to be imperfect, to have uncategorised feelings as [00:04:30] emotions, to make or do things that don't sometimes necessarily make sense. Art is all just perfectly imperfect."

Once the word 'art' enters the description of what you're up to, it's almost like getting a hall pass from perfection. It releases us from any

expectation of perfection. Empowering words indeed. If you have anything in your life that's a mess, just call it art and you're off the hook! No, I'm being silly. But I think the real learnings [00:05:00] from Brené and Nick are that all art, creativity, innovation comes from failure. From trying something new. From seeing what happens if. From experimentation.

Brené herself once described the TED Talk format as a 'failure conference' because she noted that almost every single person that gets on that stage tells the story of how many times they failed before they got success. We discussed [00:05:30] experimentation and process at length last time. Beyond process though, you can use your ability to share as a lever for greater creativity and celebrate your individuality and perfect imperfection as you do.

Another great benefit of sharing your work is that it can enable you to find your creative home. Whether you're sharing via social media, taking songs to an open mic or a songwriting session, sharing art with a community group or in a more [00:06:00] formal academic setting, going to a dance class, or starting to sell your jewellery at a pop up store. You will undoubtedly connect with others who are doing the same or similar things. You will create connections and friendships with people who understand your chosen field, whose opinions will become increasingly valuable to you over the next ten years.

I have a handful of go-to songwriter friends that I've gathered over the last few years. They are the people I use regularly to garner [00:06:30] feedback in specific circumstances when things are still a work in progress. I have one who I often go to for melodic feedback, a couple of all-rounders who are great to check in with when I think I'm really onto something - but I have a sense that something might be missing. And my producer for the Little Lore Project (which is the artist name I use to release my own music), patiently listens to my songs, even when they are still forming. The point is, that over the last couple of years, I've learned who I can go [00:07:00] to for different kinds of input. And you will too. By sharing your work you will attract exactly who you need in

your life. Now this is a two way street because inevitably people ask me for feedback too. I'll talk more about that in a minute.

By assembling this superstar team, you will then start to hone *how* you receive feedback. People very close to you, who are not experts in your craft, are likely to tell you they love it or hate it in quite biased terms. [00:07:30] A songwriter friend in Nashville once told me that he thinks of feedback he receives to any music he releases as potential guests coming into a hotel foyer. He is the feedback concierge and he gets to decide which feedback gets to enter the elevator and go up to the hotel bar for a beverage and which feedback stays in the foyer. I like this metaphor because it reminds us that we are in charge of how we receive feedback. It can be used to our advantage in all its forms, either to [00:08:00] reconfirm our convictions or allow us to pivot or tweak. Every book needs editing. Sometimes sections need to be completely scrapped and restarted. In the songwriting world, there's a phrase: 'good songs are written, great songs are rewritten'. Even when they are finished, and we can debate whether anything creative or artistic is ever really finished, there will be some people who like what you create and some will have different taste. That's [00:08:30] human nature.

My wonderful producer Rachel told me a story she heard that resonates with this, which is that if everyone likes what you put out into the world, that's not good. You want something that's a bit divisive, that people can talk about, that some people love and others hate. It shows you're hitting the big time.

The good news: the more you share, the easier it gets. As I mentioned, your tribe will no doubt start to ask you for feedback too. And one of the truly [00:09:00] greatest gifts I have been given during the last few years is how to hone my own ability to give good, helpful feedback. By working on those skills, it has a knock-on effect to how I receive feedback too. A continuous, positive feedback loop. I genuinely believe that people love to help when they can. It makes us all feel good to do someone a favour and it builds stronger connections between people.

I want to take a moment now to share some of my top tips for [00:09:30] giving and receiving feedback, but if you want to know more you can find a free feedback cheat sheet on my website. I've linked it in the show notes. So when you're receiving feedback, here's a few of my tips.

Number one, set out your intentions or your creative goals before you ask for feedback. For example, if I decide to share a verse and a chorus of a song with a songwriting colleague, but I don't explain to them that it's work in progress and unfinished, they might quite logically point out [00:10:00] that it feels too short. If I share with them a song written for a pop artist, but don't explain that, they might assume it's a Little Lore song and say it doesn't obviously fit with my artist's brand. Whereas if I clearly explain, 'this is as yet unfinished, written for a commercial brief or a particular artist' and ask them, 'is the relationship between the verse and the chorus clear?' They now know exactly what I'm looking for. And they may have other ideas as well, but they're better armed to respond. I'm helping them [00:10:30] to help me.

Number two, it's important to be specific about the type of feedback you would like. I was recently sent a song by a country artist, a song he was planning to release. He sent me a message saying, 'I would love to know what you think of this'. Nothing more. I checked back asking what kind of feedback he'd like and what stage of release the song was at. He replied: 'this is finished. I'm planning to release it.' I was really glad I checked because if he was still at demo [00:11:00] stage, I did have a few comments on how the lyrics could be a little bit tighter but only tiny things. But as he'd already invested in the production, all that feedback was going to do was undermine his confidence and the song is great. So I told him genuinely and honestly what I loved about it and left it at that.

Number three, say thank you. It takes time and effort for people to look at, listen to, read or participate in your creation. Even if you don't agree with the [00:11:30] response, always say thank you. As we've

mentioned, you won't agree with everyone's feedback, but it is always helpful.

Number four. Pause before you react to the feedback. When someone offers you any criticism of your work, however constructive, your inner chimp will be activated. A little distance can help you. Beware of defensiveness. I wrote a song recently for the commercial country market with a verse that started, [00:12:00] 'She had a rough start that just got tougher, two kids, two jobs, double single mother.' I sent it to my collaborator Andrew and he said to me, 'I love that double single mother line but I don't think it really makes sense'. I loved it too so I decided to ignore his feedback. A few months later I sent the song for an independent evaluation with a songwriting organisation I'm part of. The feedback came back very positive, but pointed out that [00:12:30] same line. While they could see it was clever, a nice country play on words, they didn't really understand it. It took me being told twice to make the change. Now the verse goes, 'She had a rough start, that just got tougher. Two kids, two jobs, working single mother.' It's less clever, perhaps, but it's clearer and therefore easier for any audience who might hear the song in the future to understand and relate to. [00:13:00] I can save the 'double single' for another song.

Number five. Ask questions about the feedback to understand better what they mean. If someone gives you constructive criticism and you don't understand it or recognise it, it may be worth asking some probing questions to get clarity on exactly what they mean. For example, if you share a painting and the feedback comes back they can't tell what it is, perhaps your intention was to create a work that has an opaque or unclear theme? You [00:13:30] might also want to explore whether they have a taste for more literal work, which would explain their view. Not everyone is the audience for even your best work.

And to that end, number six, be prepared to ignore feedback that is unhelpful or from someone who hasn't understood your intention. You can pick and choose what feedback you decide to listen to. You may

learn that sometimes you are not the best audience for someone else's work. It's a two way street.

[00:14:00] Number seven, focus on the enjoyment of the process rather than the outcome. Expanding on what we discussed last time, if you get feedback that is disappointing, remember the war against perfectionism can be really useful to remind yourself how you felt when you were creating. Dancing, painting, writing, singing, playing your instrument, metalworking, I'm 100% confident there will be joy in the creation.

I really understand how difficult it is to hear [00:14:30] feedback that might not have been what you were expecting. But equally, please remember, it's really brave to give that feedback too. So when someone shares their critique, bear that in mind. What can you learn from their input?

Number eight. If appropriate, follow up or share future work to understand if there's improvement. When you find the people you can trust, it's often worth going back with the same work and asking them to read it, listen to it, watch it, look at it again.

And [00:15:00] lastly, number nine, remember, everyone starts somewhere. Everyone. I implore you to share now. Don't hesitate. It's a leap that you can put off forever. Let's take Ed Sheeran. You'll find interviews where he says himself he could hardly play guitar, wasn't a great singer, and his writing needed a lot of improvement. In ten years, with a lot of practice, the right people around him, and no doubt tons of constructive feedback, he's raised his game to the highest [00:15:30] heights. Whether you love him or hate him. Taste is yours alone.

On my website the feedback cheat sheet has some thoughts on giving feedback to people as well. Logically, they sort of work counter to the advice I've given you here. Make sure you understand the intentions of someone's work, ask what kind of feedback the person would like, especially if the work is finished, published, released, or sold. Take being asked as a [00:16:00] huge compliment. If you have ideas, it can

be helpful to use phrases like, 'an idea to consider could be...include a pre chorus' rather than, 'you need to write a pre chorus.'

I would also suggest you depersonalise any critique, avoid I statements by using phrases like, 'some people might say it is very...poppy or very country'. Always acknowledge the effort and bravery in sharing. And if you love it, for goodness sake [00:16:30] tell them!

Okay, we're coming to the end of this episode and as always, I have a challenge, a question, and a recommendation for you. Let's do the challenge first. As we've discussed today, share your work. Share your creative idea. Share your dream. Be brave. And as Voltaire said, 'don't let perfect be the enemy of good'. In 10 years time, you will look back amazed at how much you've learned, and [00:17:00] you will know that sharing was part of what enabled you to fulfil your creative potential.

The question. This week, I want to ask you if you will give me some feedback. My intention was to create a podcast that helps inspire people to live their most creative life. And we're nearly at the end of the first series with one more episode to go. So now is the perfect time to influence where the second series goes so that I can improve this podcast with [00:17:30] your input.

Please do tell me what you've enjoyed. What could serve you better? Which creative people you would like me to talk to. What topics you'd like me to research and talk about in future episodes. I would love to know whether you found the free resources and templates helpful. And if there's anything else you'd like to tell me.

I thank you for taking the time to do this. You can get in touch with me via my website inteyearstime.com or Instagram @tenyearstimeofficial. And the recommendation. I've already mentioned Brené Brown and if you haven't ever seen it before, I recommend that you check out her first-ever TEDtalk on the power of vulnerability.

I know that some of you will already be familiar with Brené, so alongside that, let me point you towards a very small but powerful book by the musician Kae Tempest called *On Connection*. The work is almost an extended essay, and in it, Tempest [00:18:30] unpacks why creativity helps us with our own self awareness, but also helps us connect with others. I'll also leave a link to some of their spoken word in the show notes.

Next week for our final episode of the series, I'm going to interview photographer Richard Cranefield and have an important conversation about the relationship between creativity and grief, trauma and pain. I'm sure it's going to be a really special episode.

Thank you all for [00:19:00] being here. Check out the show notes to delve further into the things that we've talked about today. And until next time, peace and love.