

Transcript - Rod Judkins - What do we mean by creative thinking?

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Transcript

Ross G 00:07

Hello, you're listening to the Future Talent Learning podcast developed to help you build your leadership and management skills. I'm Ross Garner.

Ross D 00:13

And I'm Ross Dickey.

Ross G 00:14

This week, we're asking, what do we mean by creative thinking?

Ross G 00:18

Can anyone think creatively? And what techniques can help us generate new ideas? To answer these questions, we're speaking to best selling author and innovation consultant, Rod Judkins. Rod's books, Change Your Mind and The Art of Creative Thinking are available in over 15 languages.

Ross G 00:33

He has delivered workshops to clients that include Google, Apple, Samsung and Bombay Sapphire. And he lectures on art, design and the creative process at Central St. Martin's College of Art. Hello, Rod.

Ross G 00:44

How are you doing today?

Rod 00:45

Hi, good to see you. I'm fine.

Ross G 00:48

Good to see you as well. I am very interested in your background and how you ended up where you are just now. So I wonder if you could start off by just talking us through how you started thinking about creativity in a business context.

Rod 01:04

Well, I studied at the Royal College of Arts and became an artist and worked as an artist for many years. But then when I started teaching at Central St. Martin's, I thought that the things that we were teaching the students were really useful.

Rod 01:23

They were really good techniques and methods for being creative. And I felt that they would be useful to other people as well, because at St. Martin's there's an architecture department and product design department.

Rod 01:43

So it's not just kind of art, you know, paintings and sculptures. It's very much about creating the things which are around us. You know, the furniture and the cars and, you know, everything we're surrounded by has been produced as a result of creative thinking.

Rod 02:04

And another of my role at St. Martin's is to teach students methods and techniques for getting ideas. And so, you know, I don't just teach kind of art in the sort of traditional sense that people understand.

Rod 02:21

It's very much about how you have how to think creatively. So over the years of teaching at St. Martin's, I've developed all these techniques and methods which I can teach students to help them to be more creative.

Rod 02:39

And I started thinking that it would be really useful to other people in other fields. So I put it down. I put some of these techniques down in a book and I hope that, you know, it'd be useful to people.

Rod 02:53

And luckily it was. A lot of people from different fields like banking and medicine read the book and contacted me and asked me to go into hospitals or banks or whatever to help their staff be more creative.

Rod 03:10

Because I suppose working in, you know, in an art college, you're surrounded by creativity. It's for the people being creative, you know, create, like I said, creating all the things that we're surrounded by.

Rod 03:25

But then when you when I go out, when I leave, you know, leave the art college and go out into the street, you know, there's all kinds of everyone seems to be doing things in a very habitual, ritualistic, you know, a sort of repetitive way, you know, without really, you know, you know, without being being creative, you know, it's sort of creative thinking seems to go out the window.

Rod 03:50

So I thought, you know, that's really why I read the books, because I think it could help. I thought that creative thinking could help people in other fields.

Ross D 04:01

I'm curious what creative thinking looks like in a sort of business organisation context. So I previously worked in a digital marketing startup. There was just three of us and I was the designated creative type in the team.

Ross D 04:15

So anything that needed to be done that was sort of creative, be it copywriting, video editing, photography, graphic design, it was like, ah, Ross is creative. He'll take care of that. I don't think that's what you're talking about.

Ross D 04:29

We talk about creativity. You're saying it's not just related to the work you do to art, creating paintings or photographs or sculptures, whatever it might be, but sort of thinking more broadly about what creativity looks like.

Ross D 04:43

So, yeah, it might be helpful for our audience if you could either give an example or just sort of a description of what creativity means to you.

Rod 04:52

Well, when I read my first book, when it came out, I got an email from a surgeon who worked at the Royal Free Hospital in London. And he wanted me to teach his medical students creative thinking, you know, because he felt that a lot of the students were, you know, they were very good at, you know, they got very high grades in A levels and so on.

Rod 05:23

They were very good at memorising information and then kind of regurgitating it. But in a medical situation, you often get very unusual things happen and a doctor or surgeon has to kind of think on their feet and come up with something very creative.

Rod 05:43

And he felt that that was lacking in a lot of the medical students approach. So yeah, so this was like six or seven years ago I was first asked in and I teach them kind of thinking that we have at art school to think creatively about whatever they're doing.

Rod 06:09

Obviously, I'm not trying to, you know, I'm trying to make them do their medical work differently, but it's more about almost like reflecting on something that they might have done. So they might have done a surgical procedure and then I get them to analyze how it went and think about how they could improve it.

Rod 06:30

Think about, you know, the instruments they used. Could they be improved? Could they redesign them? Could they make them better? You know, what was the process that they went through in the surgical procedure?

Rod 06:43

Could it be done differently? Could it be done better? So a lot of, you know, that's like a kind of way of thinking that you don't just do something the way you've been taught about it. Afterwards, you think about how could you improve it in some way, even things that work well, you know, they could still be improved.

Rod 07:02

And I think they're in, you know, we all get into a kind of mindset where something works or leaving taught how to do something and then we just do it in that way. You know, we forget to really question what we're doing and think about whether we could improve it.

Rod 07:21

So that's kind of like a sort of mentality, really, to always look at, you know, reflect on something that you've done and think about could you improve it? But, you know, obviously I'm not trying to get medical students to be, you know, creative.

Ross G 07:41

They'll all drop out of their careers and become artists. That was the effect that we were after.

Rod 07:46

Well, a lot of people, you know, they come on my courses and they, you know, they say to me, I'm thinking of giving up my job and becoming, you know, an artist or something. That's not really what I'm about, really.

Rod 08:02

I'm about them trying to bring a more, you know, more creative approach to what they do to find, you know, if they're an accountant, to find a way of bringing a more creative approach to what they do, you know, so that their work is more fulfilling.

Rod 08:21

And I have been asked into accountancy firms to teach creative thinking to accountants. So I think it shows that in many fields, there is like this realisation that creativity or creative thinking can improve any business and make it more rewarding for the people who work in a bank or accountancy firm or whatever.

Ross G 08:53

Yeah, I was surprised. Um, so in, in my role, I'm a, I'm a manager. And I think implicit in that role is you spend a lot of time looking at spreadsheets and numbers and things like that. And I was actually quite surprised when I took on this job, but just how creative working in spreadsheets is by which I mean, well, the numbers are one word worker fiction.

Ross G 09:12

Well, the numbers are normally some sort of, they're based on something, but they're not quite as absolute as you might have expected, uh, on, you know, when you came in on day one. And then what you do with those numbers is normally, you're normally interpreting them in some way or telling some sort of story with the numbers, usually to, to get this thing that you, that you want, uh, from other people.

Ross G 09:31

So I think that really surprised me, but it, it, it strikes me, uh, Rod, that there's, there's kind of two different groups coming into your workshop. So there's the ones that come in and say, I want to quit my job and become an artist.

Ross G 09:43

So they're obviously thinking I'm a creative person, uh, this is what I meant to be doing. I just need to develop the skills. But then there's the, the people where your workshops are a thing being done to them.

Ross G 09:56

So the person running an accountancy firm who thinks we should have more creativity here and they're going to bring you in and the people react warmly to that, or do they think, I don't need creativity.

Ross G 10:07

I'm not a creative person. I'm an accountant. Why would I have to sit through this? You know, I guess, um, can anyone become creative and how do you overcome those hurdles?

Rod 10:19

Yeah, but that's very much a kind of problem that I encounter, for instance, where I was talking about the medical student, so they very much had an attitude of what use is this to me, you know, I just, yeah, I want to be a doctor, you know, and so I had to sell creativity.

Rod 10:39

I had to show them examples of people in that field who had done something creative and it's, I mean, when the surgeon got me in, he sort of explained that, you know, most of his students just want to be, you know, 80% of his students want to learn how to become a doctor and be a doctor and that's really useful and a wonderful occupation, but about 20% of them want to do some things a bit special.

Rod 11:07

They want to create, you know, a new procedure or be, you know, you know, make some mark in the medical world and he said, that's where you come and you can help those people who want to do something a little bit special in their field.

Rod 11:21

So yeah, I mean, it's not for everyone, I suppose, or not everyone is, I mean, it was a shock to me because, you know, when I teach at, in an art college, everyone is up for creativity, they're there for that and, you know, when I teach, you know, I go to do a workshop for accountants or medical students that they, I have to sell them, sell them creativity, I have to explain how it's useful to them and show them examples of how it could be used.

Rod 11:55

So that was a shock to me.

Ross D 12:00

Have you ever encountered a resistance from either from sort of higher levels of an organisation or from managers themselves? Cause it strikes me that what you're talking about, you know, sort of finding new ways of doing things, not just accepting things as they are, but thinking, okay, well we have this process, but maybe there's a better way of doing it that could be perceived as a risk to managers or to senior people in the organisation, you know, we know that this process produces this result.

Ross D 12:25

This is the way we've always done things is something you hear a lot. So how do you navigate that kind of resistance?

Ross G 12:34

It's a cynical question, Ross.

Ross D 12:37

No one needed to ask it.

Rod 12:40

Yeah, well, it does happen a lot, actually, and on one occasion I was flown over to Dubai to do a workshop for a TV station and they were going to create a new soap opera. And you know, they had a way of going about things and the script writers wrote the scripts and the cameraman did the camera work and, you know, the director, everybody had their role.

Rod 13:10

And I found it really, really difficult to get any kind of creativity happening because people were so entrenched in their role, you know, they were just doing what they'd always done. So it's very hard to get anything creative to happen.

Rod 13:29

And I kind of just said, right, you're all going to change roles now. The script writers are going to be the cameraman, the cameraman are going to be the director. And I just got everyone to change their role, which they really hated.

Rod 13:46

But when they did it, it really freed things up because, you know, the people writing the script, they weren't invested, you

know, they didn't have a reputation to worry about whether they could write scripts or not, you know, they could really freed things up.

Rod 14:01

So yeah, getting sorry, getting people to, you know, swapping roles or really a lot of creativity is about creating the right atmosphere or the right environment where people feel like they can try something new and fail and no one's going to laugh at them.

Rod 14:23

And, you know, something might go wrong, but then other people can build on it and make something from it. So yeah, that was an occasion where it really worked. You know, they came up, you know, in the TV station, they really came up with some great ideas because they were just doing something differently and thinking differently.

Rod 14:46

But it was kind of a moment of panic for me because they were like, you know, it was there was no atmosphere at first. It's all deadpan and they were a bit scared of, you know, doing things differently.

Rod 14:59

But eventually it kind of really worked. And they came up with some great ideas.

Ross G 15:07

Well, in a way, that's a weird example because that feels like a creative context, they're there to create entertainment and so you would almost expect them to be the more inclined towards it than others.

Ross G 15:18

So I guess why, why do you think people, even if they're in a creative industry would find that so scary?

Rod 15:25

Well, because people have have like a role, you know, like I said, the script writers. Yeah, they had a way of writing scripts and the kind of process and you know, they they've been to university and studied English literature and you know, they were very invested in their job.

Rod 15:47

So so that their attitude is this is how we do things. This is our this is our way of doing things. And to get, you know, at the beginning of a project, you want everybody to kind of free their minds up and be much more open to unusual ideas and but also I kind of I was trying to involve everyone.

Rod 16:11

So there there were people who were more kind of on the technical side of things. And they they didn't really expect to be involved in the crazy process. But I got them to think of characters. I got them to write what's the most unusual person or the most eccentric person that you even met in Dubai.

Rod 16:34

You know, I mean, they would write that character up. And, you know, we could use that in the script in some way. So I got it's a way of getting everybody involved. And, you know, just because somebody is a script writer doesn't necessarily mean that, you know, other people can't come up with come up with interesting ideas for script.

Ross G 16:59

Once they have the opportunity to do so

Rod 17:02

Yeah.

Ross D 17:03

I really like that example, because as Ross said, that sort of roles you're describing, script writing, cameraman, these are sort of tasks that most people would think of as creative, uh, rules, but I think in any job, it's sort of easy to fall into patterns of just things that, you know, work well that make you feel good.

Ross D 17:25

So they sort of massage your ego. Something's brought you success in the past. It's like, Oh, this was great. The last time I did it, I'll just do it this way. Again. And then people are amazing. So I was talking about how it's a creativity is a perceived risk, possibly to organisation and managers, but it's also what you're saying makes me think it's also risk to the individual.

Ross D 17:42

It's like, if I do something different, maybe I'm not,

Ross G 17:46

I don't feel the best anymore.

Rod 17:47

Yeah. But I think, I think in any organisational company, there's always like an element of fear. You know, people are always like worried about their job. And so that's kind of parts of my role really is to just say, right, this is a workshop here and we're going to be really free and free to make mistakes.

Rod 18:07

And often, often people feel like they have to come up with a brilliant idea. Do you know what I mean? Like, you see, they're like a brilliant idea of nothing. And I try and get people to feel free to put forward really bad ideas because a bad idea is something you can build on.

Rod 18:30

You know, a bad idea might be funny and, you know, if it's funny, you know, then you start being playful and messing around and then that's where, you know, another idea might come from it. So people often feel like they've got to be amazingly brilliant or just keep quiet.

Rod 18:48

That's a lot of, a lot of what I do is that, you know, let's get something down. Let's get something happening. And then we can, there's something to build on.

Ross D 18:59

But this is one of the things I wanted to ask you about because I think often in sort of work context, people are expected to be creative on cue. You know, it's sort of we're going to have this brainstorming session.

Ross D 19:13

We're going to come up with lots of amazing ideas. These are the two hours you're going to be creative and then you're going to go back to being not creative. But in my experience, creativity doesn't really work like that.

Ross D 19:23

People talk about the muse. I don't want to get like too sort of eerie theory with it. But you know, this idea that like you can be creative on demand, I think, is just not really how creativity works, at least in my experience.

Ross D 19:40

So how do you how do you create a sort of like, I don't know if it's possible to get like a bank of creativity or like so that, you know, this is maybe where these techniques that you're discussing come in where you can actually spark creative ideas, even if you're not feeling particularly creative in the moment.

Rod 19:57

Yeah, I think that what you're describing is like having to come up with an idea in a situation is kind of pressure and pressure always kind of like makes you kind of freeze. So one of the things that I never do is brainstorming sessions because they're more of a social thing.

Rod 20:18

It's more about, you know, it's always somebody who takes over and does all the talking or so. And what I do is get...

Ross G 20:27

For listeners there Ross was nodding emphatically there, as if he has someone in mind who might take over as such thing. I feel those are my criticism and how crippling you agreed with that.

Ross D 20:39

I think you and I are both guilty of that.

Rod 20:43

Yeah, but yeah, brainstorming sessions are like a social thing, rather than focusing on the projects or ideas, people tend to be thinking about what other people are doing and how they appear to other people.

Rod 20:58

So I always get people to go off individually and I usually give them a task like, you know, come up with a really bad idea or, you know, do a drawing of your idea. And then they come back as a group and then there's something to work on, you know, something to talk about.

Rod 21:17

And so a lot of the things I do are about avoiding the blank page, about avoiding staring at a blank page and having to come up with an idea. So like with the medical students, I often, I mean, one of their tasks was they were learning about the liver and learning about artificial livers.

Rod 21:40

So the way that they would normally be taught is they, you know, they would go to a lecture about the human liver and then they'd go to a lecture about an artificial liver and how an artificial liver worked.

Rod 21:54

But what I did was that they went to the lecture and learned about the human liver. And then I got them to make an artificial liver themselves, just with tin foil and sponges and, you know, some random material.

Rod 22:11

So they had to, you know, by making it themselves, they had to really think about how a liver worked and how an artificial liver worked, you know, and you learn more by kind of doing something than just sitting in a lecture and being taught about it.

Rod 22:31

And, you know, obviously then they went, they did then learn about, you know, artificial livers as they were used in a hospital. But they actually came up with some really good ideas, like artificial livers are like really huge things.

Rod 22:46

And the patients kind of just have to sit in a bed next to it. And they kept, one of them came up with the idea of like putting an artificial liver on like a kind of sort of scooter thing so that they could move around, you know, instead of being stuck next to this huge machine, they could move around.

Rod 23:13

So, yes, some really good ideas do come out of it.

Ross G 23:17

I was reading your book in prep for this podcast, The Art of Creative Thinking. And one of the things that I think it does really well is it breaks creative thinking down into very small chunks. So each chapter is like one or two pages normally.

Ross G 23:32

And the book's not linear either. So it's almost like a choose your own adventure style book. I remember from when I was much younger. So for example, you have a chapter called Stop Missing Opportunities.

Ross G 23:43

And at the end of the chapter, it says, can't see any opportunities worth taking. Create your own on page 22 or hold out for a recession on page 253. And I think what you're doing is you're making these creative tips seem really accessible.

Ross G 23:57

There's no secret recipe to this. It's not like you should follow these 20 steps in origin. At the end of it, you're going to have a brilliant idea. There's all sorts of things that you can do and many of them aren't difficult at all.

Ross G 24:08

They only take a page or two to explain.

Rod 24:12

Yeah, I think that's part of creativity, you have a problem and you try something out and see if it works. If it doesn't move to a different technique, try something else out and see what results you get.

Rod 24:25

And then you might have a lot of kind of things which half work and then you try and put those things which half work together to see if you can make something work really well. So yeah, a lot of creativity is just about throwing mud at the wall really, just trying trying out all sorts of different techniques and not kind of prejudging things, just trying something out with optimism really, just trying and seeing what will happen.

Ross G 24:56

I went on a scrum mastery course recently, which is the scrum project management methodology, and we had to, it was actually, it was really interesting the way that they did it. So it was, it was not lecture-based at all.

Ross G 25:08

It was like, get into a group, come up with a product, and then we're going to apply this methodology to it. And the way that we had to come up with a product, which everyone sort of, you know, panicked, it's that bolt up around like, oh, I don't have an idea, was we used the story dice app where you have sort of three or four dice on screen.

Ross G 25:24

I'm just on your phone, you shake your phone, and then you can see like the via combination of the Star Wars set and general and kids in mystery. So you might have like a ghost and then a net and I don't know, a shampoo bottle, something like that.

Ross G 25:36

And you'd look at that and like, oh, I don't know, the big, weird examples there. Ghostbusters shampoo, for example. I don't know, whatever it might be. And you could try a few times and see what ideas came up.

Ross G 25:50

I'm curious what they, you don't need to name the names. What's the most boring and uncreative bunch of people that you've ever worked with? How did you tackle it?

Rod 26:03

Uh that's really stumped me, because most of the people that I work with are... you know they might be from you know business or they might be from accountancy but the moment that they start doing something or start working with them I find that you know their background, you know and their hobby is writing poetry or doing sculpture or something.

Rod 26:36

People people might appear to be you know quite straight because they were wearing a suit and tie or something but they're usually not once you start delving a little bit into their character, and and most people are quite hungry for a change and to do something differently. So I can't really think of like a bunch of people who were actually dull. I've walked into to a room with a lot of business managers and thought oh oh god what is this? What's going to happen here?

Rod 27:08

And they've always turned out to be very creative and once they, like I say most people are kind of fearful of what I'm gonna get them to do, but you know once I've got them relax and you know and kind of buy into it then they usually kind of loosen up and come up some good ideas.

Ross G 27:43

All right, brilliant. Well, let's leave it there because I'm astounded you didn't leap to the accountancy example again, but we can talk about that in a minute. So, Ross, what will you be taking from this conversation applying in your life this week?

Ross D 27:56

So I think the main thing for me is that creativity or creative thinking isn't just for people who we often think of as creative within organisations. So I think we often put this kind of, we gatekeep ourselves and prevent ourselves from exploring these sorts of things, I think, partly out of fear.

Ross D 28:14

So I think it's just having the courage to explore creativity, try something new. I think one of the practical examples, the Rod said that I really liked was if you can't think of a really great idea, try and come up with the worst idea you can think of, actually try that and

Ross G 28:32

I thought you have been doing that for years

Ross D 28:38

I walked into that one.

Ross G 28:42

Yeah, for me, I was actually really reassured by Rod's answer to my last question. Cause I honestly thought you were going to say the accountants were the most boring people and they didn't have a creative bone in their body, but actually, um, it feels like as soon as you start talking with people, you find out they have all these like secret hobbies that they don't bring to work cause they never had a chance to, to bring it up or probably they do something.

Ross G 29:01

Um, so it really feels like any group of people are going to have some degree of creativity, just need that opportunity to express themselves.

Rod 29:10

Yeah, well, accountants are really clever people, you know, and you know, crazy...

Ross G 29:15

Throwing shade at them. That's not fair really. And Rod, what one idea would you like us to take from this conversation if they remember nothing else?

Rod 29:26

Being witty and playful is really part of being creative and that's what I got from you two. You're very witty and funny and

Ross D 29:40

And you can come back, Rod.

Ross G 29:50

Well, let's leave creativity there and we'll move on to a regular future. One thing I've learned this week, where we share something that we've picked up over the past seven days. Ross, do you want to go first?

Ross D 30:02

Yes. So I went to a concert this week. It's the first concert I've been to since COVID. So probably about three years since I've been in an indoor venue with lots of other people not wearing masks. And it felt slightly weird, but also just forgotten how much I enjoy those experiences.

Ross D 30:22

I actually found myself getting quite emotional, not at anything in the songs, but just thinking, wow, everybody is here listening to live music. I've not been able to do this for so long. And I had a similar experience the first time I went to the cinema after COVID.

Ross D 30:37

I think you sort of go so long without something. You forget that it's enjoyable and you think, well, actually I can just listen to music at home or I'll just stream this on my TV. But I think what I've relearned is just the value of these sort of big social gatherings and enjoying people expressing their creativity to share my reflection to our discussion.

Ross G 31:01

Yeah, I had the same experience. I remember going to the pub, because pubs became very quiet during COVID. We weren't allowed to play any music. I remember, I was at this outdoor food, sort of festival thing.

Ross G 31:11

They just had a guy playing guitar, but I had a similarly emotional response to the fact that there was music on, it just

completely changed the atmosphere of the thing. Well, I have a slightly drier, less emotive thing that I learned this week, which was, I was reading in TechCrunch, the magazine website.

Ross G 31:31

That Airbnb have adopted a work from anywhere policy. Now, this interests me because I've worked from home for six years and I am convinced that this will be the future. Apart from a very small number of employees, anyone at Airbnb can work anywhere in the country where they live without any effect on their wage, but they can also spend 90 days a year working in other countries around the world.

Ross G 31:54

That list is slightly constrained by the tax and legal implications of where people might be working, but the Airbnb's objective is to expand this list over time. Now, obviously, that aligns with Airbnb's approach to business.

Ross G 32:08

They want people to travel. I think this is a really interesting model. It'd be interesting to see how it evolves over the next few years. Can we truly become nomadic workers and live and work anywhere?

Ross G 32:22

I'm not sure. So I'll be watching that. Yeah. Yeah. And Rod, what have you learned this week?

Rod 32:30

One of my students are getting ready for their shows and something I've kind of noticed is that they've been showing their work to each other and really working in the kind of bubble of a university and now they're about to show their work publicly and they're kind of really fearful of what the audience reaction is going to be, so to speak.

Rod 32:54

So I think I kind of learned that, you know, it kind of reminds me that you've got to show your work to people outside your bubble quite frequently, you know, and otherwise it kind of becomes a big shock when you get feedback from the public.

Rod 33:13

Try and show your work publicly as much as possible, I think.

Ross G 33:19

So Rod, if anyone's listened to this and wants to find out more about you and your books, where should they be looking?

Rod 33:24

Uh, well, they could go to my website. It's just, rodjudkins, or follow me on Instagram or, or go to a bookshop and buy one of my books. Or Google me, or, you know, look me up on Amazon and buy a book.

Rod 33:40

And that'd be great.

Ross D 33:42

Visit a bookshop if you can.

Rod 33:44

Yeah. Well, I've offended so many people. Well, my students would be really angry with me.

Ross G 33:54

Go to your bookshop if you can find one.

Rod 33:57

Yeah, for God's sake.

Ross G 34:02

And that's it. You'll be listening to the Future Talent Learning Podcast with me, Ross Garner, and Ross Dickey. Our guest this week is Rod Dickens. Until next time, bye for now.