

Make Creativity Pay Podcast

Pamela Slim - author, speaker, consultant, entrepreneur and coach

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0:03 Leanne: Hi everybody! This is Leanne Regalla with Make Creativity Pay and today I'm really happy to be speaking with [Pam Slim](#). She is an author, speaker, consultant, entrepreneur and coach and she has written a couple of really great books that you might like to check out - [Escape from Cubicle Nation](#) and, most recently, which we'll be talking quite a bit about today, [Body of Work: Finding the Thread that Ties Your Story Together](#). So want to thank you for joining us, Pam...

Pamela Slim: Thanks so much for having me...

0:39 Leanne: So, a little bit about our listeners...we have a pretty wide variety of creative people: writers, musicians, painters, photographers, designers, crafters, and everybody kind of has a lot of the same questions and the people that I work with, the people that I coach, a lot of them have, or they have over their lifetime, they've had many different interests. And I think we kind of have a tendency to think less of ourselves because we feel kind of scattered. So what do you think about anybody listening who has several interests and several skills. Do you think it's important to tie all those various interests together and why?

1:46 Pamela Slim: Absolutely! I mean it's really just a big conspiracy by "the man" to keep us down, to have the thought that because we've done many things, that there's something wrong with us. That is just simply not true, so the reframe -- I must say that word at least five times in a conversation otherwise they revoke my coaching card -- but the reframe on that thought is that everything is about context and there I think are a couple of very important reasons why it is that we want to understand and contextualize the work that we do. One of them, one reason, is so that we feel good about it and we understand what it is and we can understand it knowing that you have creative, artistic people that are listening, we all understand the concept of 'body of work.' That someone that's really familiar it comes from the trades and it comes from the arts. Where you might go through, you know, a decade of having a certain influence in your painting and then you might do something else. Many people in the way that most of us used to work were doing a whole variety of different things: sometimes working in the trades while doing art...all kinds of different things. So having a context and an understanding about what your work means -- first to yourself and then how it is that you can describe it to others -- is something I think that can make us feel clarity and can give us pride. It is something that we can use to understand the meaning of our life and what it is that we've created.

3:19 It's very common as you're going through that process of reflection that you might say, "Oh, man, I sure wish I would have taken the time to do this!" or "Did I really need to spend so many years in that particular role as an accountant? Man, I wish I would have gotten out earlier!" So it's totally fine, like that's just being human, right? We all have experiences that maybe we would have wished that we would have changed a little bit. But what's powerful when then you think about the second part of telling the story, -- which is what it is that you tell to the general market out there who you're hoping to fund your art or to hire you for your creative skills and all of that -- is you want to really paint a coherent picture for **them** that's based on **their** interests and their desires.

4:03 One thing I've found working with a lot of clients over the years is so much because of the way we're used to looking at resumes or things like that, we think that we need to include everything. The metaphor that I use in **Body of Work** was 'all of our ingredients' being, representing, our skills, our strengths, our experiences, so we can feel like we need to tell EVERYBODY **everything** that we've ever done. And that feels overwhelming to us and to them, as opposed to telling a real clear story about parts of our experience, significant themes or trends that went through maybe many different types of work that we did.

4:41 So that to me is the most important reason why we want to create context and understand the connects in our work, is so first we can feel good about it ourselves; we can identify areas where we want to continue to grow and develop, which gives us good direction about what to do next.

4:58 But then, because we're always looking to create in relationship with other people, we also want to present a really clear picture to them in such a way that they can really understand it and that they can feel like it solves their problems or gets them totally excited or whatever it's gonna mean for them to be supportive of your work.

5:18 **Leanne:** Right, right. I think that's really, a really great point and I almost think that from my experience working with **my** clients, you almost...I think you **have** to have that clarity for yourself before you can even be confident about expressing it to other people.

I have one client that just is jumping out at me right now, is a physician and she's also a musician. And she came to me and she's like, "Leanne, how am I gonna tie these two very different things together?" And we ended up coming up with some very cool stuff because she had some passions that she's had all her life that actually do tie everything together. But I think all of us, many of us anyway, go through periods of life where we don't really talk about the other things that we do and I wonder if that's just because we're not clear ourselves about common themes.

6:26 **Pamela Slim:** Yeah, I think it's a combination of things. I think there are different stages of our life where things are more clear and less clear. There's so many different things that can impact our lives and there can be all kinds of personal changes that are going on. There can be times where you're right

in the middle of doing something, and it's always easier to see the threads once you've been through it. But when you're in the middle of it, it's often very challenging to see it. And so to me it makes sense, it's helpful to understand the context of how it is that creative work happens in general, but also how it is that our life happens in general. That it's never just a straight line or an upward trajectory, right, on a graph: Increased contribution...income...impact.

7:15 If your life is anything like mine, there's some wonderful dips and ebbs and flows, just like the hero's journey that's just, that really captures the human experience, there's all kinds of things that go into it.

What I argue a lot, or highly recommend or encourage people to do is to be clear that it's very helpful, even at stages where you might not feel completely clear about what it is that's next for you, that at least you have a way of describing it that is coherent and that makes you feel good. Because one thing that can make all of us feel super awkward in social situations and networking situations is where somebody says, "Hey, what are you working on?" and you're like, "Well, I don't really know. It's kind of this weird time and I hate my job, but I'm not really sure what to do next..." This is a great thing that you can talk to your mom about, to your best friend, to your inner circle of people to be sharing that..

It's the kind of thing that may not make people feel totally comfortable and confident in wanting to work with you in the future. And maybe you're right in this dip right now about to just break into an amazing stage of your body of work, right, where you're creating all kinds of things and you want to go back to that person. I'm not trying to say completely make things up and like lock yourself up and pretend everything is perfect if it's not. But even when you're in a period of exploration, you can say, "Right now, I'm wrapping up some work that I've been doing and I'm really conscious about exploring like five different research areas. I'm fascinated by art and academia, I'm looking at non-profit projects, I'm looking at different social enterprises, and I'm really excited to discover the particular area that I'm going to be going into next time; in the next stage of my body of work." Something like that.

8:59 That's truthful, right, it's truthful, but it's coming from a position of power and it's coming from a position of clarity. And then it also means that that person can say, "Oh, well that's so cool! I actually know somebody! My brother in law does a lot cool social enterprise stuff; you should talk to him." versus "I'm totally confused; I have no idea what's going on." It doesn't make me feel as comfortable and the way you can tell if it works for you or not is how do YOU feel after leaving that interaction? If you're just out there and that works for you and you feel fine after and you end up having a great deep conversation, then that's totally cool. But usually, for many people, if they haven't thought about how to respond to that question in advance, they just end up feeling kind of crappy, like "Oh, man, what did I say? I just kind of bumbled around and I wasn't really clear."

9:52 Leanne: Right, right. That's excellent, great stuff. I think it's gonna be really helpful for people listening. In your book, you talked about...you already mentioned your ingredients and you also talk

about roots and those are the first kind of steps that you introduce to help people to tie all their unrelated -- seemingly unrelated -- interests and experiences together. So you want to touch on that a little bit?

10:24 Pamela Slim: Yeah, I laid out the book really based on a way of looking at, there's different parts of your body of work, there're different pieces that you want to look at that make up really decisions that you're going to make about what it is that you want to create within the next twelve to 24 months. And I think we do our best work when we're doing work that is deeply, personally significant, that is related to working in a way that's in harmony with our values and our beliefs, that is solving problems that we're really passionate about solving, that's creating art that we feel brings tremendous beauty and transformation to the world. Whenever we're doing that kind of work, that's really connected to what I call your roots and it makes us feel amazing. And then as we were talking about, when you can take assessment of all of your ingredients, all of your experience, to me it's not so much that we have to tell a story that includes every single piece of that.

Like, we need to know what are all the ingredients in our cupboard, like, "What am I working with here? Twelve people are coming over for dinner, here's what I have in the cabinet. What can I make with it?" Now, hopefully, you won't throw all of the ingredients in the pot because it won't taste good - - cinnamon and cumin -- well, actually those kind of go well together -- but you get what I'm saying. It could go bad very quickly: Lavender salt and just starts to get all weird.

11:45 But the key is that you're aware of all the different capabilities that you have, of all the different options you have for things that you can choose to utilize in your work recipe in order to create this next stage of your body of work. But you really want to be examining different parts of that in order to make good choices. So you want to think about, in the case of a career path, what's the kind of work mode that you want to work in? Some people are really passionate about leaving a job to start a business; other people are passionate about creating programs in companies or in a non-profit organization or doing work in academia.

12:28 So to me one of the things I got a little bit tired of at the end of the work that I was doing in **Escape from Cubicle Nation** of doing so much wonderful start-up work for so long it's just the best work in the world and I loved it, and I loved my clients; what I didn't love was a lot of the rhetoric in the market about entrepreneurship that would tout it as the only way for you to be truly free, the only way for you to be truly creative. And I don't know about you, but I've known many, many free, creative people who have worked in all kinds of organizations throughout the course of my life.

People do amazing stuff every day that are working for somebody else. Not to mention, as soon as you start a company and begin to grow it, the people who work in your company, you're saying that about

them, which is a little problematic. Are you the only one as the owner that can be free? And that never feels good to me as well for the people I have working for me in my company.

So that's part of what I want to encourage people to think about if they've been impacted by that rhetoric and feel like they're selling out if they work for somebody else or that they should be starting their own thing. If you want to do it, fantastic! If you have an idea that's gonna fly in the marketplace, and you have a high tolerance for risk and you enjoy that as much as I do after 19 years, then that is fantastic. But that is not the only option that you have available to you. So you really want to be thinking about that.

13:53 And then you want to be looking at pieces like what you're definition of success? How will you know when you're successful? Is it just about revenue for you? Is it about artistic merit and mastery? Is it about impact working with people? Is it about the pleasure and joy that you get in the process of creating? Are you a minimalist where you just want the most simple life possible? Are you a maximist where you want to be flying on jets and drinking champagne? Whatever your individual definition of success is, is something you really need to be baking into the picture.

And then you'll want to be looking at pieces like looking at collaborators. Who do you need and want around you in order to be realizing this next stage of your work? What do you need to learn, what kind of skills do you need to balance gaps that you have in yours?

14:40 And then finally, how can you tell a compelling story about it? Every single thing we want to do is all gonna come to us through a great story. Fund a Kickstarter campaign, sell a book proposal, get somebody to buy your program or your eBook from a sales letter on the internet, land a job in a job interview -- all of that is happening through a super well-crafted, true, authentic story that presents you in exactly the kind of light that you want to presented, that gets people excited to hire you or give money to you or whatever it is that you're looking for.

15:15 Leanne: Yeah, right...that's really, really powerful stuff. And I love your point and I think you made it in this book, but I ran across it several, many years ago, I guess, I worked a full-time job and had a part-time business for about 10 years before I went out on my own and I just remember that rhetoric that you talked about -- only truly having freedom if you're self-employed and the reality is that we're all self-employed. We choose...if we choose to sell our services to a corporation or whatever, an organization, non-profit, it's still our choice and I found that to be really empowering and it helped me to get through, sometimes that rhetoric can be a little bit negative and can make you feel bad about yourself.

16:21 Pamela Slim: Yeah, and I just think that it's just not helpful. It's not kind to yourself, right? It's just...and it creates...having been a career coach for so many years I know exactly how it makes people feel because I've had those so many conversations where people feel shame or embarrassment. And I'm just thinking, "Man, this is **your** life; **you** get to choose the work mode that provides the kind of structure and support that you need at this particular time. And what it is that you need around you.

16:51 And often for creative folks there's huge joy that you can get from being in a collaborative situation, working with other people, with being surrounded by other people; it can be a huge joy to get a regular paycheck direct deposited once every two weeks. There's nothing wrong with that.

17:10 And in the bigger context where you know why you're making the decision and you feel good about it and you're still creating work that's important to you. Because again, looking at the crazy, wonderful hero's journey that is our life, there're plenty of times where you may be doing something that is **not** totally aligned with the work that you're doing, but it fits as part of the plan for what it is that you want to be building moving forward.

17:35 I use my Dad's story a lot in the book. My Dad's a photographer, lifelong photographer, and really has a huge influence on me. And he's always been so passionate about photography and just loves it. He's 80 years old. He's actually at my house right now. He's visiting with my bonus mom, which is great. And he's still freelancing at 80 years old, still doing his art.

But after my parents divorced, my dad moved away, and you know, needed to make ends meet and so he worked in an oil refinery for about 8 years. That was not at all his favorite work, but he loved the people that he worked with. He grew up on a farm so he has great respect for people, just working folks, and he's not afraid to do hard work. But it was definitely not feeding his creative muse. He was doing photography on the side on a freelance basis, selling stories and stuff to magazines because he's also a journalist. That was something he needed to do to take care of us and pay child support and get through that period.

And thankfully after that time he got rehired for the company he had worked with before. And then he had many decades of really doing his creative work and enjoying it. So it's just, you know, it's the...we can trip ourselves out so much by, "We **must** be passionate at every moment." "We **must** only work for ourselves." And just think about it; you have many different options and to me what's important is that you are aware why you are making different decisions at different times.

19:05 And if you're in a position where you **do** need money for your needs and the needs of your family, then that's totally fine. But you can be clear about how long are you doing that, what's the reason you're doing it. I used the term in Escape called 'becoming your own venture capitalist,' where it can feel a little bit different if you know that work that may not be ideal is clearly funding the project, the side hustle that you have that you're really passionate about.

And that's something that's gonna give you energy and purpose and joy every time you're scooting away some money from your monthly paycheck, to put it in an account to fund your dreams. And I think that kind of context makes a really big difference and it can make you appreciate the work that you're doing, even if it's not totally aligned with your ideal work.

19:51 Leanne: Yes, I agree and I know that from personal experience, that it really, really helps; it helps to energize you and keep you moving forward and all of that. So this is something that...I was just curious, you didn't really mention this in the book, but this is something that I experienced part of my life, some of my clients experienced where they're in a position where they have a job that's kind of paying the bills and they're working on their art early in the morning or at night or something, and there's kind of...they feel like they have a double life, that their activities are kind of siloed and the two things don't really cross. Do you have any opinions about structuring your life that way?

20:48 Pamela Slim: I think this is an example where if you are feeling like there is no connection with them -- with one activity with the other -- I really invite you to re-examine it. Because they're both coming out of your own head. There's the starting point. This is being done inside your body, in your brain that you have output on one hand for one kind of work and on the other hand for another kind of work.

21:15 So this was an example like I said there could be things that you could see related to whatever may be as a primary source of income, skills that you're developing or things that you're learning, ways that you can be leveraging this experience for other things you're doing.

If we're looking at the example of the musician/doctor -- I actually know one as well, which is, hey, I bet there's more than we think of -- people who have that combination. But as an example, if you're a doctor and you know that your end goal is to really be pursuing more passion for music, you could be experimenting in your practice with starting a program for stress reduction for patients to have beautiful music piped in. You can be thinking of ways in which you could study the impact of music...I was just watching a National Geographic show with my nine-year-old son last night about where they do experiments with people where they listen to Mozart. They played, they had a group playing Mozart outside in a park and they listened to that music and then they were temporarily after that much smarter, they were able to recall and focus on things a lot easier. It turns out it wasn't just classical music, it was any kind of music. Because of what it is that it does to your brain. But I thought that was kind of cool, but that's an example of where a medical doctor could choose to create some context around her practice where she was conscious about wanting to use music in a different way.

22:47 And so that's up to **you**. That's **your** job to be making that correlation. And where you find you're doing something you don't enjoy, you don't see where it goes; it's completely dragging you down. It's, in fact making you feel really uncomfortable and very unhappy, then that's where you might want to

say, "What might be a next interim step where I could be doing something that doesn't make me feel so totally disconnected?"

Because sometimes people want to go from where they are to immediately the new reality. And sometimes it just takes a few steps. If your business idea is not fully formed, if you don't really have a market yet, if you might have some ongoing financial concerns, your kids are in college, you're taking care of aging parents, you're the only working partner in your house, things like that. It could be that you can take some interim steps.

23:39 But what I always...when I want to get on my soapbox, which is daily, I always tell people, "This is your story to tell and you gotta believe your own story first." I can't go and help you figure -- certainly if I'm working with you as a coach it's my job to help you figure it out -- but for general people of the world out there, they're not going to tell you where the pieces fit. They're not going to create that meaning. That's for you to figure out and it's amazing what happens when you start to ask yourself, "How can this experience be helping me move in a new direction?" How could I think differently about what I'm doing in a way that's gonna be supportive?" "Are there people in my current work environment that I could actually talk to that are really smart that can be helping me with this next stage of my other side hustle kind of thing?" And I've seen it over and over and over again what often happens is even if you know that you're on the way out from your old engagement, you're happier, you're more productive, you're better, things go smoother, you just feel better in general to make that kind of connection.

24:48 Leanne: Yeah, absolutely. So you have this really cool quote in your book from [LL Cool J](#). He said: "In order to keep America great, we have to keep America creating." And that just really hit home with me that especially for anyone listening who might be wondering why their work matters why it matters if they're doing what they're doing. So can you go into that a little bit for us?

25:16 Pamela Slim: Yes, this is a late night watching CNN moment where I just had this intense spiritual revelation brought on by LL Cool J. It is not unusual; it's not unusual for me.

And it was the interviewer who was asking him, "What do you think we need to do to keep America great?" And it was during the elections and there was all kinds of contentiousness around about what was going on with our economy and so forth. And LL said, "You know, first of all, we're a great nation. We do great things, but really what keeps us great is creating. Kids who are living in a rough situation in a neighborhood, if they want to improve their lives they have to create. Kids that are way too wealthy that live in the Hamptons, and have time on their hands and are getting in trouble; they need to create."

And I just realized it was just such a moment for me when I realized just in my own body of work, that's why I take such tremendous joy in what I do, because every single day of my life, I'm either creating

stuff for me -- for my own books or programs or whatever -- but I'm also helping other people to create things. And that's where **everything** happens. That is where **everything** changes. We can be in a community and we can look at the fact that certain industries are going away and jobs are going away, and when we begin to work together and create things together, that's where everything starts to change.

That's where we make more connections with each other, that's where we get creative, that's where things happen. And not in the state for many individuals, which is just sitting back wondering and pondering and doing yet more research and signing up for yet one more program. Hopefully those things help. I'm somebody who creates programs to be able to create a structure to help people work through something, but I will be really clear to somebody if they've just been taking five different programs throughout the years and are still not ever creating and shipping anything, then I'll say, "Hey, here's your experiment: why don't you...maybe you can sign up later...right now, why don't you get out there and actually create something. Take that idea for your book and let's get it out there in the marketplace. Show your draft to one other person. Pitch an idea to do a community art project and see if you can write a small grant to get funding."

27:35 That's where everything happens, that's where we realize our potential. It's just so transformational. I just thought it was very profound. That's where it's at. If we're sitting back arguing with each other, there's so much contentiousness and just people yelling at each other about different views. And I just think, "Hey, what can we actually create together? Where can we find some common ground where we can do something that's going to be for the benefit of somebody?" And that's just where things start to soften, people start to soften. And excitement and economic development and all kinds of good things; brotherhood, sisterhood, all begin to develop when we do those things together.

28:16 Leanne: Right, right. It hit me as well being really, really powerful because we never figure anything out really in our heads. It's only by actually going out, doing things and trying things that we can get any feedback and figure out if it's gonna work. Good. Do you have time for one more question?

Pamela Slim: A quick one, absolutely.

28:47 Leanne: Alright. I wondered...my last question was what do you...how important do you think the story is for people who want to actually start making money with their creative work? So somebody who's maybe had a hobby and thinking about transitioning. How important is the story to that process?

29:14 Pamela Slim: I think it's critically important because that's the way that you can clarify what your beliefs are. That's the way that you can be influencing and persuading people in the best possible way to pay attention to what it is that you're doing, to get excited about it.

And I know as a writer...I used to run a nonprofit martial arts organization for ten years in San Francisco so I did grant writing. It's just like everything about making an idea come to be is transmitted through a powerful story. That's the way when I'm trying to conceptualize a book for myself to know what it is I want to share and when I'm trying to pitch it to my publisher to get them to buy it. It's about how it is that I really craft that story in a way that really creates usefulness that is gonna move people, that's gonna be a positive thing and that's what great grant writing is.

And what's interesting is that through that process of clarifying exactly what the idea is, it gives you a tremendous amount of fuel for the creative thing itself. It reminds you, "Oh, my god, I do need to write this book! This is really cool. This is necessary! Here's what I'm writing this for! They need me! Who am I to be selfish and sit back and have writer's block? It's time for me to move forward."

So there's many, many benefits to creating a cohesive story. But that's the part I find can just really hold people back, is if they haven't thought of a way to translate all the great ideas they have in their head for what they're doing in a way that somebody else can stand behind it to begin to support it. And that just creates partnership and community and momentum. And income flowing. That's really the lifeblood of what allows us to create, is having that income. And there's nothing wrong with that.

31:00 Leanne: Right, right. Great. So is there anything else you'd like to add for the people listening or where should people go to find out more?

31:11 Pamela Slim: Yeah, so you can find me at pamelaslim.com and that's where I have all my social profiles. We can connect Twitter, Facebook, whatever and I also encourage folks to sign up for my mailing list. I have a cool PDF that's based on all the exercises I have in Body of Work, so if you're trying to scribble and pursue some of the questions that I was talking about in the interview, the PDF has all of those questions laid out for you kind of in a worksheet format. So I'd love to stay connected.

31:44 Leanne: OK great! Well thank you so much, Pam! I think this has been really awesome. Appreciate you taking the time for us today.

Pamela Slim: Thank you so much! Take care...

Leanne: OK, Bye, bye.