

October 2020

How to get your groove back

By Nancy Miller

One of my favourite words in the English language is *flow*. Rivers flow. Conversations flow. Hair—on a good day—flows. If you've read Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, you'll know that *flow* not only describes rivers, conversations and hair—but psychological states of deep attention. When you're focused on an activity and can think of nothing else; when you feel challenged but at ease; when time slows down or speeds up—you know you're in the flow.

Artists enter a flow state when they lose themselves in creative work. Basketball players, business people and bartenders likewise experience flow—shooting hoops, analyzing markets and serving drinks. It's all about finding your groove, whoever you are and whatever you do.

Needless to say, when you're overthinking and overwhelmed, you'll find it trickier to enter states of flow. But there's a handful of methods to kick-start your creative process, hijack your worry and get your brain back on track.

1. Ignore your inner critic

My inner critic has a name: Norman. Norman hangs over my shoulder, pointing out my mistakes. When your Norman comes knocking: Ignore him. Book a whole weekend away from that voice in your head.



2. Embrace the mess

Life is messy. Unpredictable. Full of chaos and contradiction.

The creative process is no different.

When you're innovating, expect things to feel out of whack—especially in the early stages.

Call on your inner Alice-in-Wonderland.

Be confident that you can turn chaos into cool and find faith when it's all gone tipsy-turvy.

Till that mess. It's fertile ground for your imagination.



3. Don't be afraid to daydream.

Somehow, somewhere along the line, mind wandering got a bad rap. Maybe it started with the first third-grade teacher to scold a nine-year-old for staring out the window. Or maybe it was because working culture began prioritizing productivity over play.

No doubt, there's a time for action and execution. But to avoid burnout, every brain needs time to daydream. To solve problems more creatively, you need to collect the dots and muse on the ways they might relate to one another—before you try to connect them.

Wherever you are in your process, have courage! Ditch the critic. Relax around the mess. And invite a daydream!



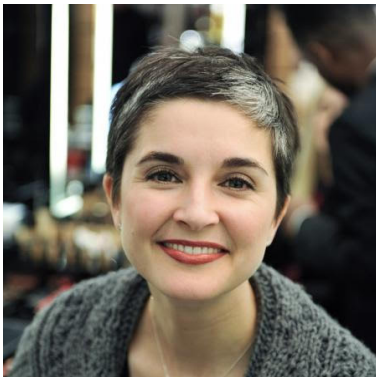
Nancy is the director of [InsightEd](#), which bridges technology and innovation ventures to the education sector and helps people lead their businesses and lives more mindfully and creatively.

Focus on skills that best meet the moment

By Sue Horner

At PIC's recent webinar, Alison Garwood-Jones said what we've all thought: "Let's be honest; this is a really stressful time." Experts advise diversifying at the best of times. In these worst of times, it's even more important.

Alison had a "multi-hyphenated" career as a writer-speaker-illustrator-instructor-coach. But she still spent March and April on her couch—with no focus and zero discipline. Her in-class teaching at the University of Toronto was cancelled; so were conferences. To top it off, her printing partner shut down, sidelining her e-commerce business.



By May, she started taking notes on the situation. She noticed that the products taking off (backyard furniture, weights, flour, wall art for Zoom meetings) pointed to a trend. The home had turned into the centre of the universe. She pondered how the world was changing and how she could fit in. Her experiences led Alison to share this advice:

1. Take stock

Read the news, and look for areas of growth. Think about where you can fit into the new economy. Understand where the current opportunities are and what your current limitations are as a storyteller. For example, video consumption is way up. Blogging is still important in the long term, but—thanks

to suspended commutes and closed gyms—podcast consumption is down. **Learn video storytelling to attract wider, more engaged audiences.**

“Read the news, and look for areas of growth. Think about where you can fit into the new economy. Understand where the opportunities are...”

2. Focus on the skills that best meet the moment

Use your LinkedIn profile to highlight what you want to be known for right now (it might change in six months), and include an “action photo” of you on the job. (Alison chose a shot of her drawing at a conference.)

During the pandemic, she created and syndicated across her social channels a new 60-second art lesson series called [The Ink Spot](#) and promptly added “Art Instructor” to her LinkedIn profile. That generated several leads and a few new clients. (“I’d rather lead with writing, but the internet is telling me ‘Give us art, Alison.’”) She also illustrates custom social media avatars, sketches people as superheroes triumphing over adversity and draws house portraits for quarantining clients.

What can you teach or offer your followers that you haven’t tried before?

Hint: Think of the storytelling skills you have or can resurrect and “Don’t be afraid of being a beginner,” Alison said. She didn’t draw for the first 20 years of her career, she added.

3. Serve, don’t sell

Content marketing is not about selling but about putting the wants, needs and questions of your customers first. **Offer “free content that teaches, touches and delights.”** You’ll plant seeds that will encourage people to think of you for

their future needs. Embrace storytelling formats beyond writing, especially video. Did you know that Cisco predicted video would account for 82% of web traffic in 2020?

4. Market your values

In this moment, content marketing must embrace activism. The public expects businesses to lead the way for social change. **Celebrate diversity and practice inclusion in your everyday work by helping others**, whether it’s writing a LinkedIn testimonial or promoting colleagues in social media posts and video interviews.

5. Build trust

How can it be business as usual during an apocalypse? **Share your vulnerability and the person behind the work. Show your process.** What’s mundane to you may be intriguing—or make you relatable—to others.

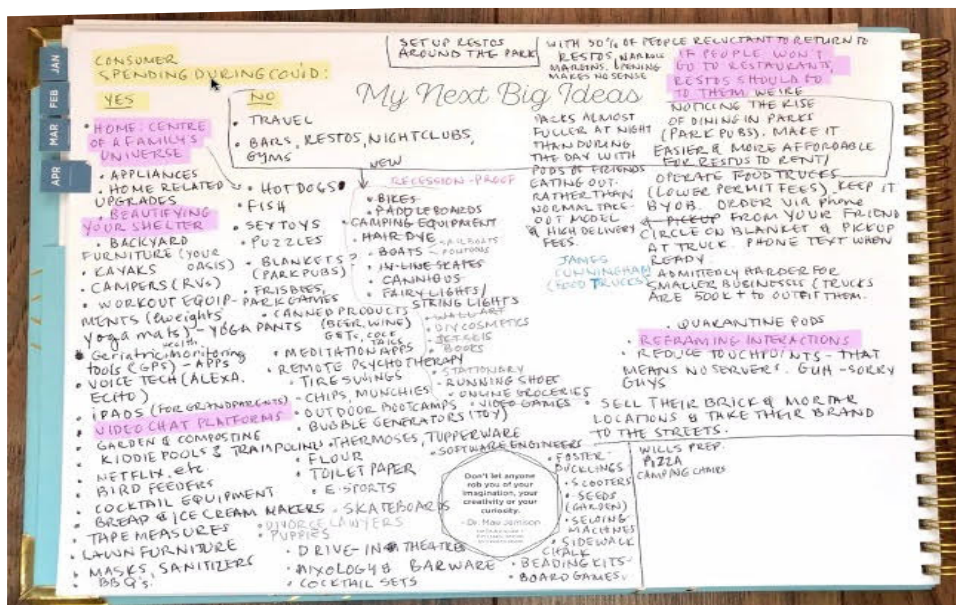
“Celebrate diversity and practice inclusion in your everyday work by helping others...”

Follow Alison on Twitter at [@AlisonGJ](#) and check her out at [Society Pages](#), a blog that looks at how technology challenges and shapes human nature and creativity. She also recommends reading Dorie Clark’s [Entrepreneurial You: Monetize Your Expertise, Create Multiple Income Streams and Thrive](#).



Sue is a writer, principal of [Get It Write](#) and Director of Social Media for PIC. She wonders why her grandfather’s artistic talents didn’t flow through to her own fingers.

Food for thought from Alison's talk



“Alison’s advice felt like a call to action,” said Nathalie Noël. “I’ve already been inspired to add more creativity into my work, and to do it with an attitude of DIY and play.”

“Her stories of failure and triumph definitely inspired me to keep up with my content marketing journey,” said Vanessa Holding.

“Not only do I have new ideas, I also feel more optimistic,” said Judy Irwin.

“I found her approach upbeat and inspiring and will definitely follow it,” said Ellen Gardner.

A page from Alison's notebook demonstrating her process. Do you keep a notebook? What are your Next Big Ideas? Share your process on our [LinkedIn](#) or [Facebook](#) group. Or post it on [Twitter](#) and tag us @pictoronto!

See you on social media

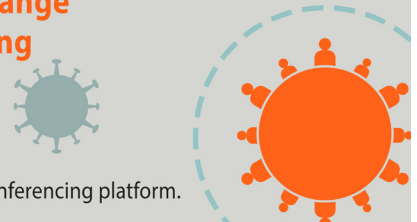
Build and strengthen your connections with other PIC members, advance your communications business, discuss business issues and network with PIC on social media: on Twitter at [@pictoronto](#); LinkedIn, [IABC Toronto Professional Independent Communicators](#); and Facebook, [Professional Independent Communicators \(PIC\), part of IABC/Toronto](#). Recent posts include tips to get flaky clients to pay, benefits to working with other indies and tips for marketing.

Professional Independent Communicators Roundtable Discussion:

How are Shifting Markets, Social Change and the COVID-19 Pandemic Affecting Independent Communicators?

When: November 18th, from 6:30 p.m. to 7:30 p.m.
Where: The session will be hosted on the Zoom videoconferencing platform.

REGISTER NOW



PIC PERSONALITY:

Meet Elena Fordham

By Kathy Lim



Elena Fordham is the founder and principal of Beveridge Marketing, a boutique marketing communications firm that provides customer-centric creative solutions for profitable consumer and business-to-business growth. Her consultancy creates strategic programs that build customer awareness, strengthen brand loyalty and drive revenue. Beveridge Marketing's clients span AI startups, professional services, non-profit, construction, destination, banking, hospitality, fashion and lifestyle sectors. [Learn more about Elena on her website](#) and on [LinkedIn](#). She can also be reached via [email](#).

When did you launch your independent business and how did it come about?

I launched Beveridge Marketing in April 2015. One of my first roles was with Four Seasons Resort Whistler during the 2010 Olympics where I was responsible for PR and marketing. Following that, I worked in a few industries doing a combination of marketing

communications and business development. But I started to feel like a square peg trying to fit into a round hole. When I interviewed with PR agencies, they wanted me to take on a traditional media strategy role. My mind simply doesn't operate that way anymore, nor does the market.

I wanted variety and the freedom to pick and choose which clients I worked with. I loved working with entrepreneurs. But I no longer wanted to work for them. I always wanted to run my own business, and being at a crossroads, with no spouse or dependents to speak of at the time, it simply felt right to take the leap!

"I started to feel like a square peg trying to fit into a round hole."

What do you enjoy most about being an indie?

I like the flexibility of working for myself and on my own schedule, especially now that I have a family. I work with clients I enjoy, and there's mutual respect. I get to be an extension of their team, a marketing director on demand. I provide an outside perspective and draw upon a range of business experience, which they find valuable.

What don't you like about being an indie?

During COVID-19, there have been exponentially more Zoom meetings, and it's exhausting sometimes to

always be on camera. I miss being with people, and at times, I miss the water cooler talk that comes with working in an office. I used to go to my clients' offices regularly and work side by side with them. So, I miss that. There's nothing that can replace in-person face time.

"Be honest about your capabilities, but also be willing to take on new types of projects and problem solve as you go. Communicators are natural problem solvers!"

What advice would you give someone new to independent life?

Have a professional email and create a website with your portfolio. Stack your portfolio with case studies, even if the first are pro bono, and always keep it up to date. Be honest about your capabilities, but also be willing to take on new types of projects and problem solve as you go. Communicators are natural problem solvers!

Ask to have coffee dates with other freelancers, so you can collaborate and have other people championing your business on your behalf. Offer to do webinars with your local chambers of commerce to show thought leadership and attract new clients. If you sell by yourself

all the time, you won't get enough leads.

Also, pay attention to the market. I came from hospitality, and the pandemic decimated the market. Fortunately, I branched out to tech startups and professional services when I did, but the key is, I was also *willing* to go beyond my comfort zone. I think it's about being realistic and understanding that we all have to pivot and widen our net to stay competitive. It's good to be a generalist right now.

How long have you been an IABC and PIC member? What value do you get from your membership in IABC?

I've been a member of both IABC and PIC for about four years. I'd like to meet other qualified professional independent communicators who I can collaborate with or outsource various projects to. It's also good to network and bounce ideas off of one another and share tips and tricks. Everyone has something to bring to the table.



PIC Personality randomly profiles our members, who offer a range of talent from coaching and media relations to video production and writing. Kathy is an editor with experience in trade publishing and financial editing. She is the Director of Membership for PIC.

THE INDEPENDENT VIEW

Necessity is the mother of reinvention

By Nkiru Asika

A couple of days after this edition of *The Buzz* hits your inbox, I will hit a milestone birthday. The Big 50.

Of course, I am not celebrating the way I had planned. In January, I declared 2020 to be my Year of Travel. Between August and October, I was scheduled to visit friends and family across three continents.

All roads were leading to a P. Diddy-style mega birthday blow-out in Lagos.

Is that the sound of God laughing?

Anyway, these days I'm feeling more reflective than raucous. So, I'm checking into a luxury hotel for a brief staycation right here in Toronto, to relax and meditate on life—past, present and future.

The recurring theme for me has been reinvention. I might not have always recognized it as such in the moment or have planned for it. But for a variety of reasons—relocation, education, love, the end of love, children, work, business, boredom—I've worn a variety of hats and have experienced a wide range of circumstances, both professional and personal.

The ability to embrace change, to reset or “pivot”—to borrow the most overused word of year—has become a critical life skill. Intransigence has never been useful, but in the current climate, it could be costly.

We've all been forced to re-examine our priorities, re-imagine our work and home lives and deal with a staggering level of uncertainty. For anyone who had relatively unflexed change muscles, 2020 will have proved a brutal workout.

I'm sure at one point or another, we've all thought, “Just wake me up when it's over.” But what if we choose to embrace this period as a time for reinvention instead? The beauty of reinvention is that there are no rules. Reinvention is really about lifelong learning. The determined desire to keep our minds curious and open to new ideas and the possibility of new beginnings.

What can you learn? What can you dream? What no longer fits your life or the way you want to work? Who will you become? What new ideas will you incorporate? What new services will you offer? What new boundaries will you set? What new streams of income

can you add? What new connections will you make? Above all, how can you incorporate more joy, meaning and adventure into your life and business?

Reinvention can be as simple as signing up for an online class or as scary as burning your business to the ground and starting all over again. It is whatever you make it. And whatever you make it is okay. My message is simply that now is the time to grow and not to shrink. So, stretch your change muscles and see where they take you. As for me, I'm tempted to go the way of [Jenny Joseph in her wonderful poem “Warning.”](#) Watch out, world.

Finally, if you have any ideas for professional development topics, possible speakers (including yourself) or any questions, concerns or ideas about PIC, please don't hesitate to reach me at toronto-sig@iabc.to.

Onwards and upwards,

Nkiru Asika

Chair, PIC;
VP, Special Interest Groups,
[IABC/Toronto](#)



[Professional Independent Communicators](#) (PIC) is a special interest group of [IABC/Toronto](#). PIC's mission is to support independent IABC/Toronto communicators through professional development, networking and marketing. [IABC](#) connects communicators from around the world with the insights, resources and people they need to drive their careers and the profession forward.

The Buzz informs members about upcoming events, shares professional development tips from past meetings and keeps us connected. Editor this issue: [Nancy Miller](#) | Design: [Ilan Sivapathasundaram](#)

THE BUZZ

Want to recap a meeting or contribute to *The Buzz*? Contact [Nancy Miller](#).

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