

TEI 076: Effectively pitching your ideas and influencing others

Host: Chad McAllister, PhD

Guest: Nancy Duarte

[0:00]

Chad: Hi, this is Chad, host of The Everyday Innovator and founder of Product Innovation Educators, where product managers become product masters. I want to take you back to the 2016 Annual Product Management and Marketing Survey. We covered that on our previous episode, and one of the interesting things was that survey identified four skills that are responsible for a significant increase in personal income. Product managers that excel in these four areas earn 25% more than product managers who don't. One of these skills is called Pitch Artists, and they define it as: the ability to stand up to peers, managers, and executives and sell them your ideas and conclusions. When it comes to being a Pitch Artist that's effectively communicating ideas, there is no better expert than Nancy Duarte, of the Duarte Design Firm in Silicon Valley. Nancy is a communication expert who has been featured in several publications, including Fortune, Forbes, and Fast Company. Her firm, Duarte Inc., has created thousands of presentations for the world's top institutions, including Apple, Cisco, Facebook, GE, Google, TED, and the World Bank. She's also the author of Resonate, Slide:ology, the HBR Guide to Persuasive Presentations, and co-author of Illuminate: Ignite Change Through Speeches, Stories, Ceremonies, and Symbols, which we will be talking more about in this interview. This interview is a little different than past ones; we're going to do it in two parts. I'm hosting the first part, and that first part is focused on how can product managers and innovators more effectively communicate their ideas and get others to join in supporting their ideas. Then, I have a co-host who is doing the second part. My co-host is John Latham. You might remember him from a previous episode that we explored transforming organizations, and John's going to introduce the second part.

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John: Hi, this is John. In part two, we explore with Nancy what it was like to lead the transformation of Duarte Inc. and how to grow a company and still maintain creativity and innovations as you add systems and structures.

Chad: You'll find the summary of the discussion and the transcript, along with the valuable resources that Nancy provides, at www.theeverydayinnovator.com/076. Now, to the interview!

Chad: Nancy, thank you so much for being part of The Everyday Innovator podcast.

Nancy: Thanks for having me.

Chad: I'm really excited to have you here. I know you have such a background in how we present information and share ideas. You've written a number of award-winning books on this topic of presenting ideas, and really moving an audience through the use of story, and I know your first one was Slide:ology, and then moved on to Resonate, a great book. Recently you co-authored Illuminate, with communication expert Patty Sanchez. I'm curious, how has your thinking about really effectively communicating ideas evolved through those works?

Nancy: You know, it's funny, because so far I feel like I'm writing my books and completely backwards order, because to start with the slides, like you aren't really supposed to start with the slides. You're supposed to start with thinking and content, so I wrote Slide:ology thinking the biggest problem was people, really you go and get your MBA, you get a great doctorate degree and you're never taught how

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to be a visual communicator. So we took kind of graphic design language and made a business case for it and broke it down, and then I realized...what! The slides look better but the talks are still terrible. So then I went on a journey through story-telling, and came up with a methodology and discovered this underlying structure the greatest communicators use. Then *Illuminate* backs it up, like if your zooming out, you know, *Illuminate* is like...wait a minute, my presentation that I'm doing next Thursday or whatever, is in service of a larger movement that I'm trying to do, a bigger transformation, so it's like, you know, we just kind of keep zooming out and realizing the problem is bigger and bigger and bigger. So we're trying to put our arms around the bigger and bigger communication problem. So with *Illuminate* it gets into how do you use communication to drive transformations or change. Then we do have a couple more books about...well, wait a minute, how do you even know what needs to transform? How do you define that and how do you declare that? So we just keep kind of zooming out and realizing that the problem is bigger than just the slides. Like way, way bigger. It's been fun. I've had so much fun. I just have no complaints about life whatsoever.

[4:45]

Chad: I'm glad it's been a fun journey. It's a journey that relates so well to *The Everyday Innovators* listening. All of us in product management and innovation, I think we start kind of in the same place. We recognize...how do we more effectively share our ideas with people. That's kind of the center theme when we first encounter a new idea that we have. Then we realize along the way that that's not the entire puzzle. We might share the ideas, but we're still not getting people on board with what those ideas are. I love the journey that you've been on to discover the same thing. In *Illuminate*, there's a great quote I wanted to share with everyone. You said, "Leaders aren't just the people at the top of the org chart. A leader is anyone who can see a better future and rally people to reach it, whether you're an executive, entrepreneur, or individual contributor, you have the potential to motivate people through your words and actions." I love that quote, because anyone that's really involved in product management and innovation is certainly part of that list, whether we're in an official leadership role or not. We are truly trying to motivate people through our words and actions. In *Illuminate*, you talk about you're writing directly for innovators, and how they can influence others to join on their plans, and you call innovators torch-bearers. Tell us about the background on this term torch-bearers--why you chose that.

Nancy: We spent a lot of time on this, because I think when it's called leaders or followers, that just doesn't really capture what we were trying to convey. So we landed on torch-bearers and travelers, and we were actually kind of inspired by Frodo in the sense that he was the bearer of a ring and it came with a burden. You have to be called, almost, to be a leader, but then you have to accept it, almost like a mantle. And so many people just pass it by. It's so funny when we're like, oh yeah, we've written communication books and this excellence in leadership book, and people be like, whoa, I guess that's not for me. It just always startles me how even if you're a product manager, or a parent, even if you're a father or a mother, you're a leader and you are going to need to influence the lives and hearts of many. We really liked the concept of bearing a torch, because in situations where you need a torch, usually it's dark and damp and scary and not well-lit and unknown. You don't know where you're going and you need a torch. We didn't say search-light, where you can see for miles. A torch basically illuminates enough right in front of you to make the next few steps bearable and understandable. That's what

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communication does. It casts just enough light for people to be like, oh! I could go there, that's not that scary. That's why we really like this concept of torch-bearer and travelers, because it's a journey and the leader should be on the journey with the team and understanding how they're feeling, understanding when they're too tired to keep going, understand when they need their wounds healed. They really need a front row seat at what it's like to go through transformation, and it just felt, I don't know, it just felt right. The first pass that we had, we actually called the travelers, we called them troops. We didn't want to say your team, we didn't want to say your partners, your customers, because it was bigger than just your direct reports. When you're leading a transformation there's lots of constituents, and troops just sounded too militaristic, it sounded too control and command. But we knew we wanted language that was for a journey. We spent a lot of time with Lewis and Clark, a lot of time with the Lewis and Clark story, how they prepared for the trip, how they understood their enemies, how they understood how hard the trip would be and how they planned for it. So those all kind of came together into this concept of travelers and torch-bearers and it's actually kind of lovely. We've had a good time with it.

[8:45]

Chad: That's wonderful. One of my favorite aspects of the Lewis and Clark story is Seamen, their dog that was their trusty companion along the way. In a sense, he was kind of a torch-bearer for them because he was the early warning at times for them. I love how you've gotten away from the leadership focus and including really a much wider cast of players, but this torch-bearer term. Product managers may not always think of themselves as leaders. They certainly become leaders over time, but as you say, this is applicable to parents or anyone that we need to illuminate the next step and get there and then figure out where to go from there to continue on. Great term. Speaking about that next step, you do define a full path and you call it the venture scape, that we must navigate, and you include some tools. The tools you talk about are delivering presentations effectively and how you tell stories to capture people's attention, and holding ceremonies and the rituals that are involved. I really want to encourage listeners to get your book, *Illuminate*, so they can really unpack all those valuable tools in there. Let's walk through what you do call that path, a venture scape, so we can understand the journey. That starts with this first step you call the dream. Can you tell us about that?

Nancy: Yeah. There's a 5-stage structure that you go through when people are being transformed. Oddly enough, it's also the same structure a protagonist goes through, when they're being transformed during a story. So the five stages are dream, leap, fight, climb, and arrive. The first thing you need to do is have a dream. Have a dream of an alternate future. As the communicator, that moment needs to be one of inspiration. In the dream phase you need to create a moment of inspiration and to do that, you would use speeches, stories, ceremonies and symbols to inspire people. If you think about it, it's hard to point to a movement that didn't start with some sort of an impassioned plea. As experts in the spoken word, it's been a real honor to think about when you have a dream, how do you cast it in a way that more people jump in than choose to resist it. That's how you frame it, it's how you declare it, it's how you stage it, all of those things. By stage it, there's a lot of times you declare a dream and you need to be out on a muddy field like William Wallace was in *Braveheart*. It just depends, and you need to really understand the hearts of the people when and how you declare this dream will determine how many people jump in or not. So that's why the second phase is leap. And dream/leap are the first act of this venture scape. If you say it in such a way, people will want to commit. If there's any resistance, they

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will...you need to create a moment of decision, a moment where they have to decide, I'm in or I'm out. It really is important to have as many people on board as possible. And then, if there are people that are resistant, you need to listen and hear why, so you can address their fear, you can address them letting go of the past, there's so many things why people won't choose to jump in. So, that dream and leap are the first of the five stages, but it is the first act of the three-act story.

[12:15]

Chad: And just to underscore that dream part, you know, as innovators and product managers, this is what we're doing all the time. Any time that we are creating something new, there's going to be the corporate antibodies that come in and reverse that automatically.

Nancy: Yep.

Chad: We need to recognize that that happens when we're creating something new and we need to quickly get others on-board with the idea, and cast that impassioned plea of what this could be like, to have this new capability, this new service, whatever the product or service we're looking at.

Nancy: Yeah, it's funny when....I think leaders, in a sense, are prophetic in the sense that they understand and can see something in the future, and what happens when the voice of a prophet, say, rises up, the heretic lashes out against it. So we have all these archetypes for each phase, too, that you really need to understand—who readily embraces the future and who really loves stasis and status quo.

Chad: Very good. So that takes us through dream and leap. What is next in the venture scape?

Nancy: So the next two stages make the messy middle, and that's fight and climb. So just like in storytelling, in a really exciting adventure movie, there's the high-speed chase, the shooting of the aliens getting all clawed up along the way, usually some sort of mortal or seemingly mortal wound, like Frodo got the arrow in his shoulder, and then you still have to climb this vast mountain. It's like the most exciting and you know you're on the edge of your seat, but it is not fun to be the one going through it. I think that one of the reasons this is a visual model is because we really wanted leaders, anyone who's leading a product or leading change or innovating, to understand, like, oh my gosh, I see how hard this is and I can see how difficult what I'm asking them to do is. I know as leaders, we're just like, come on, everyone! Just get there, just do what I'm saying! It's not that hard! And yet, we need to really understand the hearts and minds of the people we're asking to do this work, and so this fight phase is very important, and this is when you need to create a moment of bravery. You need them to be willing to...we looked at like, how indigenous people, what did they do before the day of a great big battle. They would dance around the fire, or do things, you know, beat their own chests or whatever they would do to make themselves feel boldened about the future. You need to create that kind of a rally cry in the fight phase. In the climb phase, they need a moment of endurance. So in myths and movies, what happens is usually at this phase where they need to really climb out is they make...they have to recommit to what they committed to originally.

[15:12]

Nancy: Usually they're completely in despair, they're discouraged, not only did they lose the girl but the alien just won this big fight, and whatever is going on they feel like they've got to recount the cost again.

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Is it worth it to continue, or do I want to throw in the towel? This is usually when they get up and they reload all their ammo, they run and they go get the enemy again. But there is the moment in Joseph Campbell's Hero Journey, it's called the Inmost Cave, they go in the deepest part of their soul and they decide, do I really want to keep going or am I going to bail right now? You've got to realize that in the climb phase, that's where your people are at. That's where your travelers are. They may not want to continue with you, so you need to give them a moment of endurance. This is where leaders do these cheesy metaphors, like passing the baton, or auto-racing. You got to get a little more meaningful than that in this phase. It's not really about that. It's about reconnecting them to the dream of why we're doing this in the first place. That's hard. Now I put it in sequential, like fight, climb. But it really, like if you can picture the face of a very steep mountain, now there's some people that can climb the face of a mountain, but there's not very many. Usually what happens is you go on switchbacks, right? So really it's kind of fight, climb, then you have to go back and fight, climb, and then it's fight, fight, fight, climb, climb, climb, fight, climb, climb, fight, climb, right? It's really kind of switchbacks for a while, until ultimately the third chapter starts, and that's when you arrive.

Chad: And we get there.

Nancy: The third act. You got to get there. Funny thing is, for arrive, we didn't call it moment of victory. We called it moment of reflection, because in reality you don't always win. It's western cultures that always have a positive resolution to the story, and life's not that way. We don't wake up every day having won, and victory...got the girl, killed the alien. Life's not like that. We lose a lot. We need to be able to let them know, hey, we tried and we lost. We need to reflect on what just happened. If it's a victory, you reflect on the victory. But even in a victory, there were lessons learned, there were hard things and lessons learned, and so you need to reflect back, cull out the stories, the warning stories, the motivating stories. Capture those and then move on, because even though that's the resolution, you don't get to just lay in a green meadow and sleep your life away at that point. In reality, you just get a little respite before you have to jump into the next venture scape, because that's how life is. We don't get a break. Organizations that are thriving are constantly innovating, which means no sooner do you arrive that you have to move on to the next product.

[17:55]

Chad: I love that you recognize in arrive that it doesn't always mean success, but we should take that moment of reflection and learn what did we learn through this whole experience? As you talk about the fight and the climb and how we're kind of iterating through that so much through this process, the appeal of what we've done before always looks good to people. That's comfortable, and even if it wasn't working, for some reason that's still comfortable. Getting to a state where things are working better is really important in organizations, and when it comes to doing a new product, we're trying to create something that is offering great value to our customers. It's a challenge.

Nancy: Yeah.

Chad: So, when it comes to arriving, do you have any structured tools for looking back and reflecting on what you did learn?

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Nancy: Yeah, in this section we kind of allude to the fact that organizations, whether it's the leader or someone else, they need a folk-lorist. It is kind of an anthropological job, where somebody needs to be watching the stories and what's told and what are the ceremonies that are done because they have so much power. People will latch onto something and create enormous meaning around it. So let's say a new leader comes in, or a new product is getting launched. You have to be very good at understanding, hey, what stories should we keep pulling forward, and what stories actually need to be dismantled. Now you have to realize in a culture, stories are almost sacred. You can't just stomp all over them, but there are times where it's like, hey, we need to all acknowledge that this isn't true anymore, and we need to create an ending for that, and a new beginning so we can make room for wonder and room for exploration, but sometimes we cling to our past, just cling to it, and claw at it and want it to still be our truth, and we can't let go. So that's why this arrival phase is important, because you can reflect on what do we want to bring forward into our next reinvention and what do we need to leave behind? And consciously doing it, that's kind of the power of ceremony in the book, is that's what ceremony is—rights of passage means hey, 10 minutes ago, but I just went through a ceremony and I'm married. Nothing really happened different other than that ceremony. It's about leaving the past and entering into a new future. Same with a graduation, same with a bar mitzvah, a quinceanera, all of those rights of passage kinds of things. Organizations need those too. Hey, what we were 10 minutes ago is not what who we are right now anymore. Those are important moments that you need to acknowledge and a lot of the reflection happens in the arrival phase. It needs to happen all along the way, but...

Chad: Absolutely. In those moments, we tell stories to reinforce the culture that we have, or like you said, the culture we want, recognizing what we need to dismantle. The example that came to my mind as you're talking about that was, early days in a startup. One of the stories that would get told is the person, and one time it was me, but not proudly so, now, working all night to get something done, right? Those things were lifted up as stories. The person that pulls the all-nighter to accomplish what needs to get done. But as the organization grows, you tend to burn people out if that's what you honor, and you need to, like you said, dismantle some of those aspects of your culture, and put in ones that are more sustainable, ones that are actually better for your company, which does lead us to the second part of this interview, as I teed up in the introduction to this. I'm going to have my co-host, John Latham, talk through with you and get your insights about how do we scale companies and not lose that innovative edge. So, I'll turn the mic over to him.

[21:42]

John: So Nancy, you've not only written about this in *Illuminate*, but you're living it and you continue to live it as you go forward with...

Nancy: Thankfully so...

John: I think that personal experience is what we'd like to turn to now and talk about, because whether you're a product manager who is trying to create an innovative environment and move your team forward, or your whole organization forward, or you're any kind of leader in an organization trying to create a more innovative, creative organization, one of the issues we run into is the whole issue of systems. Management systems...we've designed systems to run organizations better, but it's a double-edged sword oftentimes. So what it makes it more efficient and effective sometimes can reduce

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creativity, innovation, and risk-taking. Duarte is a creative firm and so, you wrote in your book how the lack of management systems made you wobble a little bit as a company. I'd like to hear from you how you thought about the issues that you faced, trying to design in systems and get the efficiency and effectiveness of systems and the ability to manage and at the same time keep the creativity. And maybe even improve the creativity.

Nancy: It's interesting. I knew it would be hard; I didn't know it would be that hard. I think that's what women think before they go into childbirth, too. It's kind of like that—I knew it'd be hard, but I didn't know it would be that hard. It's interesting, because when you are a creative firm, the biggest thing you need your staff to do is take risks. As we were looking at trying to go global, I knew that I couldn't copy Duarte and paste it anywhere, because it was kind of boutique-y, it was different, it was not even like normal, how other agencies were ran, which was actually to our benefit for a season. We even had a goofy structure, where it was almost like I had 9 mini-me studios inside a larger agency. I had account teams that actually almost acted like business owners, and then the artists answered into my account team. That's unheard of. They couldn't be...my designers couldn't be developed, they weren't led by a creative person, and so I unbundled all of that. I had the designers answer-in to designers, I had the account people answer-in to a powerful executive.

[24:11]

Nancy: Those kinds of things, so unbundling that was one thing, but then when we piled onto that this MIS system that was designed for kind of global access, it was actually primarily an accounting tool with a bolted-on project management tool. So here we are, this creative firm, and everyone feels like we all work for accounting. Even I did. I was so pissed sometimes. I'm like, I'm in service of accounting suddenly? Suddenly I have 12 steps to do just so accounting can do their books instead of me doing my best creative work? It was unflipping believable. It was 3 years of deconstructing a system, because what it did, was it put so many gates in there, that it was like we couldn't even be nimble. It was like you had to create a project where it's like...step 1, step 1 complete. Step 2, step 2 complete. It made it to where every job, almost, had to be managed exactly...and life's not like that, especially if you're really good at innovation. You should be able to not have to click a 10-point system. You should be able to go point 1, point 5, back to point 2, point 8, you know? It was unbelievable and unbearable on everybody. At the same time, we're hitting up against this Dunbar number, which is, Robin Dunbar came up with this research that between about 100 and 120 people in a culture, the culture tends to want to subdivide. It wants to break down into silos and so we also have this strain of then people starting to feel alienated, and we had this really great grapevine, we had you know....it was just the most tenuous, unbelievable. The good news is I had given permission to the organization to not grow. If I was also piling growth on top of that, I had to stall growth. We went flat for 3 years, while this is all going on, which may be idle hands, or the devil's work or something, because there was a lot of bitching and moaning, too, at the same time. It just was this unbelievable opportunity for a hot mess. It was...now we're dismantling a lot of these...we've been doing it now for about the last year, just dismantling almost everything that was put in, to honor the creative process that we really need. I just did a talk on Monday about the starlings. I'm sure you guys are familiar. It's mesmerizing to watch these starlings hop up in the air and move and make these collectively beautiful shapes, seemingly on their own. That's the kind of organization I want, this emergent organization. Not one that's hierarchical, but one that can

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form and reform and form and reform around the client needs. And we're getting there. We are so close. So I've clustered people into these little tiny teams of 7, that have permission to just adapt and move and swirl other people into their little systems. It's been actually very beautiful, so we captured our case study only up to the climb phase when everyone was exhausted and needing to get to a point of recommitment. We'd been getting people who were so interested in our own transformation that we are going to release a couple little eBooks, because we're in kind of a new phase now, and then I want everyone to be with me rejoicing when we hit the arrival phase. That's where we're at. That was a long answer, sorry about that.

[27:50]

John: It was a great answer, and I can feel the emotion as you've struggle with this, and you talk about the emotional toll in Illuminate that the workforce and differing views and the struggle that they went through. Specifically, you talk about the needs some felt they should go fast and some felt that you should go slow. I'm curious if we can dig into that a little bit, about what did you choose to do, and if that changed during different phases, and why. In other words, what did you consider and how did you make those decisions on whether to go fast or slow?

Nancy: It's so funny. We were talking earlier about how everyone needs something different in a season of transformation, so half the shop was like...take the Band-Aid off fast! And the others were like...slow down, slow down. So you just can't ever make anyone happy at the same time. Some were excited, some were terrified. I was actually off writing a book during this season of change. I've had two presidents, one for six years and one for four. So I was kind of hearing the rumbling and the dissatisfaction, there's public forums where you can say what you feel about your employer, and we'd never had people not excited about working here. There was a small contingency of people that were the ones that were, I would say, they were actually victims of the organization in this season. We were getting a lot of feedback; like why can't the executive team just make some decisions? I didn't know decisions weren't necessarily being made. I wasn't even really on the executive team. I gave someone else power to kind of run my organization, so when I kind of re-entered the shop from finishing Illuminate, I almost burnt up on re-entry. I was like, what the heck is going on here? This is not the culture or the place that I designed it to be. I reengaged and I realized the team was a lot more parched than I thought, and a lot more kinks had been inserted in through this MIS system. I was hearing rumors that there was going to be an exodus if I didn't do something, so we needed swift decisions. I stepped back into the role of president. I became an operational leader again, realized pretty quickly that the executive team wasn't really being honest with each other. Like, you know, why can't we sit in a room and say, your delay on that decision is really screwing stuff up, you know? We needed to have that kind of candor and honesty and be one team, like be really united. So I kind of tightened up that whole team, stepped in, made some swift decision that needed to be made, but this was not...I didn't do any of that until I had done a listening tour. I called a ton of customers, I sat in meetings with a ton of employees, and I listened, and listened and listened. And it was really bazaar-o, because I would listen to one and they had one perspective, a 180-degree perspective. I actually created this big matrix around the polarity of perspectives on different...I should actually publish it because it's hysterical. On the same issue, the polarity of gaps and the perception around it. And so we made some really swift decisions, and nobody would accuse me of not having listened deeply. I had a cross-functional team do what I

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called an empathy walk. We sat, we took five different project types and talked through not our process, but what does our process look like to our customers? We realized, we have too many steps in our process still, so we started hacking away at steps in the process. It was really kind of remarkable. I got to the root of the problem as quick as I could. I stepped in in September. In January I re-claimed, I re-declared Duarte's vision and values. I got to say, it was one of our finest moments. People were crying in the vision meeting. I got a standing ovation and people were like completely reengaged and excited to be rejuvenated again. It's coming true. The plans were there, we had da da da da.... And it's happening and people are like, oh my god, things are finally happening. It's been quite a journey and we've done some very clever and interesting things to push the momentum along. So that's why we kind of want to publish what's happened next.

[32:26]

John: I can't wait to read it. One of the things that comes out is just the iterative nature of the whole journey.

Nancy: Oh yeah.

John: I think all successful transformations go through that, as ironic or odd as that may seem. The linear path, we describe it that way in documents because it's easy to do and it makes sense and people can grasp it, but it really isn't linear and it goes back and forth and is often unpredictable. That's actually one of the things I like about Illuminate is that it's presented in this sequential fashion, but then it provides the pieces that you can go back and forth and pick and choose and learn and apply as the journey unfolds, and you can use it to address different areas. I think from that perspective it does both. It educates the whole journey, but then gives you a resource to dive into as you need it. During this, there were these emotions, you moved forward, you moved back, you decided to undo things...

Nancy: Did you hear that? Auditory whiplash, there.

John: And you're in great company, because that's how it all happens, and that's how people figure things out. A little too much structure, not enough, and I think often we find that there's this inverted U or curvilinear relationship between structure and innovation and creativity. A little bit of structure, or the right amount of structure and the right structure actually facilitates innovation and creativity, but then you go past this point, or you implement the wrong structure and all of a sudden you're detracting or decreasing.

Nancy: Things fall apart really quickly, especially in a tender, creative organization, I think. Not that they need a lot of coddling, but I think your role as a leader of a creative team is to create an incubator, this safe, warm, happy place where great things grow. If you're throwing all of these external forces at them that makes them concerned or worried, they're not able to do their best work. I like to protect these little incubated chicks, and they just do such beautiful things. There are all these scary things that they were struggling to process that was getting in the way of their best work.

John: I read somewhere that you don't make a flower go by pulling on it. Flowers grow because they have sunshine, water, soil, and so speaking of that environment, and people had to move around in your organization. You talked about how some of them had to take on new roles and responsibilities that

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they didn't have the experience for or the knowledge, skills, and abilities for. Talk a little bit about how you prepared people to be successful in their roles and to be tolerant as they were growing and learning.

[35:12]

Nancy: Yeah, I had to get up a couple times and ask permission to give these people space that I was asking them...I remember I used this metaphor of the huge shoes they're going to step in. If you've ever seen a clown with really large shoes, it's just awkward at first. The clown metaphor might not have been the best, but that's how it is. It's like, give them some patience, it will be a little awkward, but then they'll grow into the shoes and they'll be normal-sized shoes. The first thing I did, I have my own little bank of literature. I handed each of them...I mean, they had to go from not manager to manager, and we just kind of turned the switch because we didn't have a choice. But I gave them One-Minute Manager, which is such a classic, and the book Gung Ho. I do ask them to read a couple of books a year. This year, the whole company is going through Crucial Conversations, and I think that's the hardest part of being a manager, is having the guts and the passion to actually follow through on conversations and hold people accountable, and so Crucial Conversations, everyone in the shop is going through it. We've already had the whole pilot group and second batch go through. I just facilitated...we're doing these practice conversations, so I picked a couple topics that are chronic in a billable, creative environment, and that's why is your billability so low, and why are your job tickets not in? Those are conversations they have to have almost every day. It's just time tracking. So we rehearse. Rehearse critical conversations and make them feel comfortable. I was really startled after the first rehearsal, how many of those conversations happened immediately. It's just fear. Fear of being rejected, fear that you won't be liked, and all those things, because you went from being these people's peer to being the one who has to hold them accountable. So that's been working really well. Creative people are perfectionists, right? They rarely will just wing it and jump into something that they can't be perfect at, so letting them fail, letting them take risks, telling them it's okay, and we haven't had...you know, the account people felt like, you know I was a better manager, but what's happening is we're seeing stronger creative. That's what the goal was. I wanted to see stronger, creative output. Yeah, maybe the account person was totally comfortable having a conversation about billability because that, you know, drives their profit, but those weren't the critical conversations. The designers, now, are making their direct reports into master craftsman and an account person couldn't do that. So it's been really lovely to see this kind of rise of the creative voice. So what I just did, part of what I did when I stepped in, was I created what I was calling guilds. I looked into Florence, and Florence was the most thriving city in the middle ages and that's because they had guilds. A guild was the marriage between a creative person and a merchant. It had never been done before, and that's what we have here at this creative shop. It's a combination of the creative and the merchant. So I came up with this little guild structure, and the guilds belong to a neighborhood, which, if you go to Florence, they're big on what neighborhood you're in. It's all part of the ancient guild structure. It's reinfusing, because not only was Florence the most flourishing financial city, but it was the most artistic city, too. The guilds took such pride in the work. There was a symbol they would emblaze on all the work, and if you saw a symbol from Florence you knew it was high, high quality work from Florence. So I'm trying to reinfuse these small, tiny, nimble teams that are master craftsman like the artist in Florence. It's just been kind of fun. I haven't been an operational leader for a

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decade and I think I needed to step back in and kind of press my heart and intent back on the people, while I look for another operational leader.

[39:16]

John: I love the metaphor about Florence. In some of the work I've done, I've called for a renaissance of management thinking, and I think really we're going to have to rethink how we manage.

Nancy: I do too.

John: There's just heck of a lot of people out there doing that, including yourself and your organization. I think that's healthy and good and I think the Florence metaphor is really appropriate. Speaking of creativity and growth and learning and the fact that this is an iterative process, which if it is done right is a learning process, most of the CEOs I've dealt with over the years or senior leaders I've dealt with that have led successful transformations, they found themselves personally changed by the process. Some of them didn't even realize it was going on at the time until much later, and they realized how much they had changed, and some of them were on a journey of very systematic change themselves, of self-reflection and learning. What do you think, how has this transformation of Duarte and writing the book, changed you as a leader along the way?

Nancy: Big time. Big...

John: In five minutes...

Nancy: Yeah. You know what is fascinating, is it was really meta to be working on a book about transformations while my own shop was going through the largest transformation ever. I'm an impatient leader and I'm also referred to as a hummingbird. It's like, I'm just all over the place. That's why I have to have a different operational leader. So I'm totally trying to drive, I'm not even driving the transformation. I'm kind of observing the suffering of my team. I'm co-writing with my chief strategist and we would rent a meeting space over at the hotel, just spread all our stuff out all over the walls, and we'd hunker down and do these weeks of writing. There were a couple of those weeks that were so poignant and the nerves of the team were so frayed, I would come in and just be like, I don't get it, you know, typical frustrated leader. I don't understand it, this is stupid...and my coauthor is an empath. If you look that it up, it's like someone with supernatural abilities to be empathetic. She would be like, well, Nancy, let's consider what life is like for them right now. And I would just be so blown back by an alternate perspective to mine, that I realized how flawed I was. That I'm only looking through my eyes and my eyes are the only ones that matter. She would just kindly and just matter-of-factly just say, let's consider an alternate reality. A couple times, so poignant and so rich in that moment and said with such kindness and lovely...my coauthor is just unflipping-believable, that I changed. I changed. I am...longer story, but I've struggled with empathy all my life, in fact, I got a C- in speech communication in college. I got an A+ for my visuals. They didn't have PowerPoint then, so you had to do posters and props and all this stuff. So I got an A+ in that, but I got an F in content that connects to the audience. I wasn't bringing anything of interest that the students would be interested in. I think sometimes it's failures like that, oh, connecting to an audience, that we're exposed. Now you have a choice when a failure like that's exposed. You can run and hide and be a victim, or you can spend your lifetime overcoming that flaw. I demonstrated very young that I lacked empathy. If you look at all my work, you know, Illuminate, that

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whole model, where you can see your travelers and how they feel as a model of empathy, Resonate has the persuasive story form. It's also a model of empathy. So you can see my body of work is actually me as a leader clawing away at my own flaw of this empathy void, and I would say Illuminate changed me, in fact, it's hysterical, because I've had to open the book twice for talks I've had to do, to be like, okay, let me orient myself to where the person is that I'm about to talk to. And I whip out the communication toolkit, and I'm like, okay, okay, good, okay, and then I craft my talk. So, yeah, I'm reading my own material and applying it to my own life. It definitely changes you to write a body of work like this. It was fun.

[43:49]

John: It certainly does. Nancy, this has been very illuminating. That was not intended, but your book is fantastic, and anybody leading a journey is just going to love it, because the communication part...we talk about communication all the time, and every time I've ever talked with organizations that are having trouble with change, communication is always brought up as a key component. But we've always talked about change and then we've talked about communication and you and your coauthor in Illuminate have brought this together so nicely that it makes it easy for any leader to pick this up and use as a guide to help them along the way as their facing all these issues. Thanks for sharing, and it's been a great time.

Nancy: Thank you.

Chad: Nancy, as my listeners know, we always like to wrap up with an innovation quote. I asked you to bring us one. Can you share that, and why you chose it?

Nancy: Yeah. I think innovation is a lot about creating a future people long to be with you on this journey, and so I picked a quote, and I never know how to say the name, but it's Antoine de Saint-Exupéry and it's, "If you want to build a ship, don't drum up people together to collect wood and don't assign them tasks and work, but rather teach them to long for the endless immensity of the sea."

Chad: Wow. That takes us back to the dream-casting, right?

Nancy: Exactly.

Chad: Painting that powerful vision. Thank you for sharing that. We can get caught up into the project management tasks and it just becomes drudgery if we lose track of why we're doing it.

Nancy: Exactly.

Chad: Most importantly, how can listeners find out more about the wonderful resources you make available for communicating ideas, and certainly your Illuminate book.

Nancy: Yeah. We have a lot of content that I think is super-interesting at www.duarte.com. You can get a visual executive summary of Illuminate at www.duarte.com/illuminate, I'm on Twitter @nancyduarte. Patti is on Twitter @pattisan, we have @duarte as a Twitter handle, and Patti and I do connect to anyone who connects to us on LinkedIn. That's all the ways to get ahold of us.

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Chad: Wonderful. And I will put all that information in the show notes for listeners, too, to make it easy. That resource that you shared, the visual of Illuminate, the journey, is just wonderful, and I encourage everyone to go and download that. Nancy, thank you for your time today.

Nancy: Okay. Thanks a ton.

Chad: I so much appreciate this Everyday Innovator community. Thank you for listening and thank you for telling others about this podcast. I hope you enjoyed the information from Nancy, and if you want to find the resources that she discussed, you can get them at www.theeverydayinnovator.com/076. Also, I'll provide a summary of the discussion, the transcript and links that are helpful. Thanks, everyone. Keep innovating!