

Ep #28: Where to Go from “I Don’t Know”



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Leah Badertscher

[The Art School Podcast](#) with Leah Badertscher

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To create anything new requires devotion to a vision. On days when artists are inspired, it may feel easy to remain in flow, to move downstream toward that vision. But what about when we don’t have a clear vision of what we want to create? How then do we begin?

You might start by asking yourself, what do I really, really want to create? What is my soul craving? Can you see it? Some of my clients do have a very clear vision for their art and their lives. But others are just beginning to trust themselves, and that’s okay because visioning also is a beautiful creative practice.

Every creative person has to face the unknown. The writer faces the blank page. The artist faces the blank canvass. The entrepreneur faces the barest template of a business plan and what can seem like a terrifying amount of uncertainty.

A lot of my clients can feel paralyzed when faced with having to make that first mark, whether in their art or in business. It’s tempting to say, “I don’t know what to write, what to paint. I don’t know which idea will work.” And so it can be tempting to give up before we even start.

But I don’t want that for you and I don’t want you also to stop in the middle of your journey. There is a line in the Bible from Isaiah that says, “Without a vision, the people perish.” And while that sounds melodramatic, what it means for your creative life, for your business, for your life in general is that I have seen too many times where lack of a vision causes unnecessary loss of time, money, morale, energy, and opportunity.

So whether you are just starting out or you are a seasoned veteran decades down the road, listen into today’s podcast for inspiration and insight into either how to begin or how to continue creating momentum and experience new epiphanies and breakthroughs.

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You are listening to *The Art School Podcast*, a show for artists and creatives who want to become the next greatest version of themselves. Learn how to cultivate an extraordinary way of being and take the mystery out of making money, and the struggle out of making art. Here is your host, master certified life coach, artist, and former lawyer, Leah Badertscher.

Hello, all you beautiful creative people and welcome back. I hope you are doing amazing. I’m having an awesome day. This week, we had our first ever *Art School* Summer Workshop series. So we kicked off the first of four workshops, which are taking place this summer. And the topic was visioning. So I’m pulling some of the gems from that class to share with you today.

And then, next month, we’re going to have the second workshop in June, dates to be announced. But it was wonderful. We had a mix of alum, of people who are enrolled already in the fall session, and also people who just wanted to try out a class, a workshop al-la-cart. And I’ve gotten a lot of lovely feedback on that class already, so thank you to those of you who attended and have written to me.

I wanted to share with you one message I received that really exemplified the spirit of a lot of the wonderful messages I received. And this *Art School* client writes, “Thank you for this workshop. I can’t believe how much value and love you deliver. The teaching and content were extraordinary and riveting to witness, but your coaching and presence are truly transformative. I can’t wait for the next workshop.”

So, I can’t wait for the workshop and I would love to have you join us. You can go and get on my email list on my website and you’ll hear more about that upcoming news, and I’ll talk a little bit more at the end of the podcast as well.

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So that was great this week, and then today, just like an hour ago, was my youngest, my daughter Blaise’s kindergarten graduation, which I am still emotional about, which is why I think my voice sounds a little bit off. But oh my gosh, her kindergarten, it was the same teachers that my sons had and it is such a beautiful place. And I was just really, once again, blown away with the talent and the true calling and gift and love that these teachers shared and really inspired by people who are living their calling full out and the impact they make on so many people’s lives. So it inspires me to want to be even better and even more loving and generous about what I’m doing, which is teaching also, but just in a little bit different format.

So, today we are talking about visioning. We are also talking about the artist as a visionary and craftsperson. Because I told you about how May, I have declared, as the month of May-yay, a month of celebrating and really wanting to give you the best ideas I have right now on focusing in on what’s going to help you elevate your energy and elevating it every opportunity you have. Because it’s something I’ll talk about in a future episode, but without the full force of your energy available to you, you really don’t know what you’re capable of.

And I see that as sort of the base camp of things I look at when someone comes to me for coaching is too many of have just been sustaining ourselves and our creativity and everything we do, from relationships to our career to generating income to creating our art, to doing business. We’ve been sustaining that on what I’d say is like a quarter of a tank to fumes.

And if you’ve been doing that, you don’t even know you’ve been doing that. So once you learn really how to nourish yourself and take extraordinary care of yourself, once you really start to get a taste of what a full tank is, then you will blow yourself away with the transformation you see in yourself and with the impact you’re able to create. You’ll be doing the same things but the results will be so amplified because your energy is so amplified.

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So, more on that in a future episode. And again, today, the topic I want to talk about is something that is such a crucial part of cultivating that extraordinary way of being in mind, body, and spirit that is going to inevitably lead to the extraordinary results you want in your life, the extraordinary results you want to experience and create.

So, last week, I started the episode by asking you to take a moment and call to mind your greatest vision and your dream for your life. And then I asked you to go inside that, embody it, and look around and to notice what’s missing. And then that podcast was about complaining and overwhelming negativity because so often, if we’re going to really embody the vision of our life, that would be what we are not available for at that new frequency, at that greater expression of ourselves.

So, something else that I am going to venture a guess is going to be present in that greatest vision for yourself and your life is a sense of confidence, of creative confidence, of knowing that no matter what happens, it’s figureoutable, you’ve got it and you’ve got your own back, and that you are equal to your dreams and to any challenges that you encounter and that in that vision as well, your talents are equal to creating that vision and the challenges and the stretches that you might have along the way, it’s a satisfying engagement, even when it’s difficult, it’s enjoyable.

So today, I want to share with you a rule, a step, a principle that is necessary for getting to that place of clarity, of confidence, of being a true creative powerhouse. And that is what I like to tell my clients is the number one rule in my coaching and the number one rule in *Art School*. And that is, we never say, “I don’t know.” Because saying I don’t know blocks your intuition, it blocks your creativity, or a greater creativity that’s trying to come through you. It blocks the muse. It blocks the universe or source energy, however you want to think of it.

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It blocks your inner artist because you have a channel that is in you that is ever-flowing and unceasing and is so full of deep wisdom. But when we say, “I don’t know,” we block that door. We close that door to ourselves. We act like it’s not even there, that there isn’t a door at all. And therefore, then we cut off that channel.

So, what I love to invite my clients to try on instead is that when they feel themselves saying I don’t know or giving into one of its near cousins, you know, confusion, overwhelm is a near cousin to I don’t know, that instead, you say I’m willing to know, I’m open to knowing. You can ask yourself as well – this is one of my favorites – if I did know, what would I know? And if I had to guess, what do I think I know?

And you will always get an answer, even if the answer is, wait for it, because there’s a nuance here I want to point out. There is, again, a paradox in this creative process where the number one rule is we don’t allow ourselves to say or believe I don’t know, the number two rule is we are so willing to swim in uncertainty because uncertainty is where all that rich creative potential is, because uncertainty means it hasn’t been done before. And in uncertainty, you can start to feel like a self-organization within that chaos that can feel like uncertainty. You can sense it before you can start to wrap recognizable images, before you can start to wrap words around it or explain it, you feel that first subtle sense, whether you call it inspiration or a nudge, you can sense that before you can really explain it.

And so it’s important that you can be comfortable hanging out in uncertainty, but I really like to distinguish the fact that hanging out with uncertainty and being like, huh, something is wanting to be known here, what is it? What’s the closest I can take starting to call that vision to mind? Is it ready to be put into words yet or am I still feeling it out? Because in this space, you don’t have to be in a rush.

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And it’s very different though from saying I don’t know, because I don’t know, to me, means you haven’t even allowed yourself to really move into the uncertainty that is also that field of limitless potential, because life is always trying to have a conversation with us. And in that uncertain space where maybe you’re starting to feel an idea that has never quite been said that way before or has not quite been translated through the way that you would translate it, through whatever your medium is.

So, one answer you might get back when you ask, if I did know, what would I know, if I had to guess, what do I think I know? You can also ask, what’s wanting to be known here? What do I think is wanting to be known here? What’s my feeling, my intuition, my sense? What am I sensing wants to be known here?

And one answer you might get back is, wait, and that’s okay. And you can meditate and contemplate that. But again, that is very different than blocking that with I don’t know. If you can rid yourself of the habit of I don’t know, you can really begin to unleash your creativity. And again, back to this nuance of the difference between I don’t know and that place of not knowing uncertainty, which I’m going to call is an openness to what wants to happen which you don’t yet have a name for but you’re sensing your way into.

If you say, I don’t know, you’re not allowing yourself to be open to that sensing place, to that field of potential, that field of what wants to happen. So if you allow that discomfort of that place of uncertainty and of not having the answers yet but sensing something that wants to come into being and you don’t twist that into doubt or shame, it may lead to a much greater and very rich vision.

My poetry mentor Fran Quinn says, “Our ignorance is where most of our creativity lies. Learn to be excited by your ignorance.” And it might again sound like a contradiction, but saying I don’t know in the way of when I say

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what’s your vision for your life, what story do you want to tell, and people tell with the flat affect of, I don’t know, I don’t know what to do next – that’s not being excited by your ignorance and that’s not being open and that’s not opening your imagination and your spirit and going into that luminal space, really, between what has been done and known and what has yet to be created.

Because when you remain open, you are also staying curious. I also want to emphasize, don’t limit yourself by the how and don’t be limited by the idea that you can only get there one way. So for those of you that know thought work and are familiar with the model of self-coaching that Brooke Castillo teaches and that I taught to you in the episode about your creative mindset, this is a place where you don’t get hung up in the action line.

Do you take action? Yes, but the fact that you cannot yet see how you’re going to get there should not be a reason for not believing. Those are two separate things. So that’s kind of tricky to get around and this is where you really have to dive into the work and maybe relisten to this line again and again.

But don’t limit yourself by the how just because, let’s say, for instance, I’ve never made \$2 million before and what if I said, well then I’m not going to be able to because I don’t know how to? I can’t let that stop me. I believe I am making \$2 million and the how is going to be unknown to me. Do I have plenty of plans in place? Do I have my massive action plan? Do I have my epic fails plan? Of course, and it’s probably also going to unfold in ways that I never could have anticipated.

But I’m open and I’m curious and I’m always revisioning, calling that vision back, and then adjusting my actions accordingly. The other thing I want to make sure that you know to be aware of is that your rational and your logical mind is always referencing the past. It’s always referencing what other people who you think are like you or are in proximity to you are doing

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and it’s referencing its vision for what’s possible for you, your rational and logical mind’s vision for what’s possible for you is based on what you’ve done before.

So I really want to underscore this. If you are continually referencing what’s realistic – and a lot of people will tell me, that’s just the truth, it’s not that simple – if you’re referencing what’s realistic and calling it the truth, if you’re referencing what you’ve done before, you are going to get realistic, it’s been done before, that’s what I’ve always done status quo kinds of results.

But think about it. the people who do impossible amazing things are people who, at one time, had visions and dreams that seemed very impossible and unrealistic to others and maybe even to themselves at that time. So do not back down and shy away from being unrealistic. Don’t take that as a slam or an insult.

Unrealistic only describes the now. Unrealistic is only a problem if you don’t trust yourself to have your own back and you don’t believe that you can commit to this extraordinary way of being, this extraordinary creative process of believing and then taking action from that belief and then creating from that belief.

So again, you don’t have to get the new vision right the first time because one way we clarify our vision is that we take action and we take action again and again and we’re always getting feedback from that action. There is always new data. And then we’re always, again, that’s another way of saying we’re in conversation with life.

We make a mark and we begin. So follow what feels fun. Trust yourself to move towards what is attracting your soul, what seems interesting, what your soul is craving, what you really love, like that Rumi line, “Let yourself be drawn by the deeper pull of what you really love and abstain from confusion.”

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So on one hand, you’re reaching for more of what you love, and then on the other hand, letting go of those things that cloud your vision and keep you stuck. So what clouds your vision and keeps you stuck? Saying I don’t know. So you want to abstain from I don’t know, which again is different from being comfortable with hanging out in uncertainty, abstain from I don’t know, abstain from confusion, abstain from overwhelm, and act as if you were guided.

That one line has been one of my most powerful trusty guides for almost two decades now and it’s one I’m often sharing with my clients as a belief that they can borrow and try on and make their own. Act as if guided on everything because you are and you always have been. And I think if you look over your shoulder and look back, if you’ve lived long enough, you start to get a sense that you really have been guided.

And so go step by step and listen in and ask questions, be open, be curious, be in conversation. Breathe, go for a walk, go for long walks and have a lot of graciousness and love for yourself. Be very forgiving of things that currently seem like missteps or awkward notes and know there are no wrong marks, this is simply a conversation and you’re always revising, again, recalling, calling that vision back and adjusting, clarifying accordingly.

And another important note is to keep moving because action will always be the antidote to confusion and overwhelm. I heard once this story of a fighter pilot saying that in their training, they are told that if something malfunctions and something really starts to go wrong, the worst thing they can do is nothing. So even if they’re not sure what they’re doing that they should bang on the console, they should push buttons, they should bang on the window, but to keep moving. Because without moving, that fear can paralyze you, but if you keep moving, that keeps that energy going and that keeps your connection to your creativity and what could happen and what is possible, it keeps you connected to that.

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So for me in my creative life, when I don’t have a clear vision when I start to paint, and oftentimes I don’t, I simply begin by making marks or I begin by laying certain colors down and then I see what those marks and those colors seem to be doing together, if they seem to be in conversation together. And then I have a conversation with that conversation that’s going on with lines and colors on the canvass.

Is there something there that I didn’t see before? Can I flip the canvass around many times and does something else happen? And I’m always asking myself, what seems like it wants to happen? What colors are speaking to me? What’s flowing? What feels good to me as I’m making marks? Is there a rhythm within me that feels really good? Is there an image in what I’ve done that maybe I didn’t intend but now is coming through?

Other times, I’ll go outside and I’ll notice what I notice. What does my eye go to and why does my eye go to that tree every single time? And what does that bird always seem to go to that feeder and why do I notice? So I’m noticing what I notice and I then honor that, acknowledge it and honor that as significant. I honor my own experience as significant. That’s one way of being open and allowing yourself to be in conversation with life and allowing life to help form your vision.

And those things that I’m noticing might find, usually find, their way back into my work, whether unconsciously or consciously. So again, I want to reemphasize the role that action plays in clarifying your vision, because too many times, I hear people saying that they are waiting until they know exactly what they are doing, and it sounds so responsible, right?

They’re waiting until all the uncertainty has resolved, that they have the answers and they are waiting until the path and the how to the results they want is absolutely seen and known and all sorts of risks have been mitigated and completely understood before they act.

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When I was in law school, they taught us the principle of CYA, so cover your ass. And this approach of waiting for absolute certainty and clarity before you begin will keep you stuck for years and even decades. So know that action plays an important role in clarifying your vision and also in the process of revision.

So action is the part of the conversation, that ongoing conversation that you and life and creativity get to have. It’s part of the dance, so always go out into the world and take some action, because instead of knowing, you can begin to see. And each action will clarify for you that next action to take.

So this past week, on the topic of seeing, one of Monet’s paintings from his Haystack series sold at auction for \$110.7 million, the most ever paid at auction for a painting by Monet. Monet painted this series after noticing how the changing light hit the stacks of wheat on his neighbor’s farm. He eventually painted 25 of these haystack paintings.

If Monet had had the idea to paint a haystack in a field and set out to find one, it might not sound like that captivating of a subject. But what drew Monet in was that he saw how interesting the changing light was as it hit the stacks of harvest wheat. And that’s what he painted.

He painted what he saw. He painted that vision. And so, he gave us his vision of that light. And what started out as one painting become two, and then a series, and eventually he considered light and days and seasons and weather.

Another medium that comes to mind, because I love dance and I love to dance, although I am not a trained dancer, and I love reading about dance and choreography and learning about it, and something that fascinates me, among many things in that discipline, is the importance of your gaze and of your focus. Because, for instance, when someone is doing one of those

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series of like wild pirouettes where they are just spinning and spinning like a swirling dervish, what’s so important for them to keep steady is sighting.

Because without sighting, they can’t spin like that. They have to find a focal point in order to be able to move like that. And if you watch dancers too, watch their eyes. Their eyes are so disciplined. And I see this again and again in people that I work with and in my own career. And that is the importance of having a focus point; an outer focus and an inner focus.

Because it is that sighting, it is that focused vision, that keeps you from spinning off the stage or falling down. It’s that focus that keeps you in a space where you are danced, where a greater energy can move through you and you can accomplish all of these and execute this amazing performance that looks effortless, but then you also remember there’s that intensity and that discipline of a clear inner and outer focus.

So if you don’t have a strong vision yet, don’t worry. This is also such an exciting part of the process. Go out and cultivate one. Go within and listen and receive one, because the world is offering itself to you from the outside in and from the inside all the time. There is never a shortage of information, of vision coming to you in one form or the other. So don’t cut it off just because you’re expecting it to come through so clearly.

Oftentimes, it comes as a nudge, as a whisper, as a breadcrumb, as a feeling that you can’t quite get rid of, as a dream that just won’t leave you alone. And if you’re feeling unclear, take an action because I don’t know, which is doubt, and action can’t coexist. Abstain from confusion, overwhelm, and I don’t know because every artist is both a visionary and a craftsperson. So if the vision isn’t clear yet, focus on your craft, and the craftsperson nails one nail at a time.

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So this brings me to the part of the podcast where I want you to do more than just listen. I want you to really lean in and work with me, coach with me, take this information and make it transformational in your life.

So, I have an exciting assignment for you this week. You have probably heard me speak before on the topic of the importance of forming your opinion of yourself on purpose, because here’s the thing, it’s like that dancer without a focal point. If you don’t have an opinion of yourself on which you are focusing both your inner and outer vision, you’re going to spin and move all over the stage and fall off.

You’re going to move this way and that. You’re going to be so easily distracted and you’re going to be so susceptible to the opinions of the outside world and what happens willy-nilly. So, form your opinion of yourself on purpose and never trade your opinion of yourself for someone else’s opinion of you unless it’s somehow an upgrade, unless somebody somehow offers you an opinion of yourself that you’re like, whoa, that’s even better than the one I had of myself, yes, I will take that.

So I’ve talked about that before, the importance of having your opinion of yourself and coming from this extraordinarily loving and dignified place. So today, there’s a little bit of a twist on that. I want you to think of some work of yours that’s really important. Maybe you’re a painter so it’s your art. Maybe you are a singer songwriter so it’s your music. Maybe you are a writer and it’s your novel. Maybe you are a coach or a consultant and so it’s your services.

So I want you to come up with a crystal-clear vision of what that work is at its highest, which is the same as saying what is your opinion of your work on purpose? What do you want your opinion of your work on purpose to be? Take the time. So don’t just listen to this and think, oh yeah, I can do that on the fly. Really carve out the time to do this. This is one of those things.

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I will reference this quote 100 million times because it's so good, the Abraham Lincoln quote about how if he had seven hours to chop down the cherry tree, he'd spend six sharpening the axe. And I'll tell you what, clarifying your opinion of yourself, clarifying your vision of yourself, clarifying your vision and your opinion of your work is that work of spending six hours sharpening that axe so you put such a razor's edge on it that it makes short work of things down the road and you save yourself so much suffering because you coming up with your opinion of your work is going to make your energy as you bring this work out into the world so much more magnetic and powerful.

And you're going to feel resilient from the inside out because you will have spent the time not convincing yourself of the value of your work, but really knowing it and feeling it and embodying it. And that is going to carry through with every single interaction you have with the outside world about the value of your work.

So if you want the world to know your value and the value of your work, first you have to do this six hours of axe sharpening, whatever that looks like for you, in order to really know it and embody it yourself. And again, that's not work you have to do alone, so seek out wise counsel. Seek out wise community and support. Get a coach, journal. Take this extraordinary care of what is wanting to happen in your life, whether it's your creative work or whether it's you just feeling more powerfully and authentically expressed and successful in the world.

Thank you so much for joining me for another episode of *The Art School Podcast*. If you love this material and you want to take the work deeper and learn how to apply it to your own life to really make this information transformational, then come on over to my website, www.leahcb.com and sign up to be on my *Art School* Insider mailing list.

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You’ll be the first to know about latest offerings from *The Art School* as well as special bonuses and free trainings. You’ll also hear more about our summer workshop series. Also, if you’re interested in working with me one on one, my private practice is currently full and I do have now one more opening in mid-June and one more in early-July.

And so, if you’re interested in working with me one on one, you can email me at leah@leahcb.com with discovery consult in the subject line, and I will be in touch with you about how to arrange a free discovery consult and we can talk about private coaching and if it’s the right fit for you.

So, to close this podcast, as I mentioned in last week’s podcast, my mantra for May is that I love you and there’s nothing you can do about it. And I’m going to keep repeating this the whole month of May because repetition is king and I want you to get a chance to hear it again and again so that you’re reminded of it and have that little nudge to use it again and again in your own life, towards yourself, towards strangers on the street, towards people you’re having difficulty with, towards the people that you really love the most.

So, I love you and there’s nothing you can do about it and I also hope you all have a beautiful week. Thanks so much for being here and I’ll talk to you next time.