

On play as a creative resource

Athletic coach, curator, and founder India Bailey discusses the body as a creative instrument, following desire, and removing the outcome entirely.

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As told to Rachel Leong, 1722 words.

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How have years spent in sport and the wellness industry shaped how you understand creativity, and the role of the body in creativity?

I was in downhill ski racing from a young age. Competitive sport really taught me discipline and the power of community. But it also taught me something just as important, which is that talent alone isn't enough if desire isn't there. We might feel like we want to go down this route because that's what we should do, but if your heart isn't in it, it won't reap the same rewards. I remember very clearly a teammate of mine: she woke up before all of us for our morning run, and she was doing hill runs with bricks in her backpacks before we even woke up. She was so dead set on the Olympics; that is the definition of grit.

I endured an injury that re-pivoted me slightly. The universe has its very witty ways in doing this. I wish I didn't have to experience a fracture for that to happen, but the universe has ways to redirect you. I knew that movement was my medicine, and I loved the camaraderie that came with team sport. When I moved from sport into the wellness and fitness industry, I learned about optimization outcomes and functional strength, which of course have their place and are very important. But what was missing for me was expression. It wasn't until I really started teaching spin in particular that music, movement, and collective energy really came together. It's this journey you're in for 45 minutes and it can be incredibly impactful. It's like therapy for many people. I realized the body isn't just something to train or fix, but it's actually a creative instrument. And creativity happens through the body for me, not despite it.

What's something that you're unlearning about creativity through movement, and vice versa?

Oftentimes—and I'm sure people can empathize with this—it's like, "I'm out here writing poetry when I'm under duress—in stress or suffering." It's like you have to burn yourself to prove that you're serious. But I don't believe that anymore. I think creativity thrives when it's resourced and not extracted. It can come from a place of rest, play, and actually taking the time to acknowledge what's coming up in between us trying to control the narrative.

I want to learn how creativity changes across different seasons of our lives. How does creativity respond with age, nervous system state, or a collective environment? I'm really interested in creativity that's sustainable, that makes an impact, and isn't just impressive. I really want to feel authenticity through the creativity that flows through me.

What was the moment that you decided "play" was the way to approach creativity and art?

I think they come hand in hand, to be honest. My creativity has flowed massively through the choice of my career, taking a risk on building a company around it. It's forced me to keep testing and reflecting and thinking about

how I would like to express myself. I think it stretches beyond just the collective. It's also been a great way for me to learn about myself.

But to be honest I decided to do PLAY when I experienced some of the dark underbelly of the wellness industry. I found myself preaching wellness when I was actually so burnt out and exhausted. I wanted to create something where people could walk in and be honest with who they were that day... It all mirrors my journey.

I think, for lack of a better word, it's quite ballsy: to lead a business with an ethos that is still yet to be explored. There's not a lot out there to draw from.

I wouldn't say that it was a singular moment so much as a pattern that I couldn't ignore anymore. I realized the part of my work I loved the most was creating shared experiences that had rippling effects on me and my mental health. I think spin really did show me that I had the power to be authentic and share what was happening for me through music, movement, and the atmosphere I was creating. It wasn't just the movement I loved, but also creating worlds and colliding them.

Walk me through how you started PLAY, and what it was like building a business centered on an ethos that is antithetical to optimization and productivity, mindsets we're told are essential.

PLAY came from years of moving across different worlds: wellness, sport, culture. Curating events at Soho House and beyond, and always feeling constrained by having to choose one lane. As a Capricorn with ADHD—which I wouldn't wish on anyone, honestly—I'm wired to keep getting curious. The ambition runs deep, but so does the impulse to turn over every rock before getting distracted by the next one. Which is probably why I've ended up bringing all these worlds together in what I can only describe as a childlike experiment.

It was also built on confidence. Years of creating experiences for other brands, until I realized I wanted to build something that reflected the full spectrum of who I am. And that wasn't easy. Because there are parts of ourselves we still don't fully know. If you look closely, most of us still have a relationship with ourselves that needs a little TLC. Stepping into that unapologetically became its own act of self-discovery. And building a business around play isn't anti-optimization; it feels more anti-reduction. We still work with structure and intention but we're not interested in flattening the experience into something scalable at the cost of depth. Success for me is about resonance and return, not just reach. In the landscape we're living in now, that's counterculture. But I want to build something that lasts.

How does that coexist: building a business guided by play and intuition, while also maintaining strategy, commercial relationships, revenue?

Intuition sets the direction. I'm working to refine that more and more. I think over time we get shown what intuition is, and we still choose to ignore it. It's still hard to cut through the noise. But right now, I'm really focused on that connection, sharpening it, oiling it. Intuition tells me what matters. Strategy is the container that protects it and gives it reach. One without the other doesn't work, not in this landscape. But I never want strategy to lead. That's where things go flat.

What compromises have you refused to make while growing PLAY?

I've refused to reduce PLAY to a single modality or to strip the reflective and integrative elements just to make it more commercially palatable. I've resisted jumping on trends, and I've resisted chasing scale for scale's sake. Presence matters too much; it's what we preach. So as a founder, it's important to keep returning to the reason you started. And to trust that if it's right, people will come. That means being selective about brand collaborations, about who we work with, making sure there's a genuine alignment with our ethos, not just an opportunity.

Do you find it hard to give yourself permission to explore? Have you noticed that creatives generally struggle with that?

I don't want to generalize, because I believe that anyone putting creative work into the world—whether it's public or entirely private—is creative. I believe we all have it within us. But as a founder, giving myself permission is a daily practice.

I've been doing work recently with an acupuncturist, in a modality called theta, where you allow the body to express what you're actually feeling, bypassing the mind. You stand up straight, answer questions, and your body moves forward or back in response. Through that work, I've learned that I hold a lot of my identity in what I do. Which makes sense—before PLAY, everything was under my own name... But I've been working to untangle that, to start relating to PLAY as its own entity. Because the whole point is that this is a sum of multitudes. Not one person, not one ideology, not the India Bailey brand. When we bring in different art forms, different movers, different backgrounds and perspectives, that's what makes PLAY more than any one of us. The power is in the collective moving toward the same intention, each in their own way. And I think that should be celebrated.

Do you feel like the industry is moving in a direction where playfulness is being taken more seriously?

Honestly, there's always been an internal fear of PLAY being seen as soft, or indulgent, or immature, because of what people associate the word with. I did have to ask myself early on, is this actually something people want, or is it just me? Externally, there's always pressure to niche down, to make things more legible or marketable. But I've worked through that by accepting that integrity matters more than immediate clarity. I'd rather build something that reflects how humans actually move through the world than force it into a neat category. That means making mistakes, finding our footing, doing it anyway. That's just the human experience.

What's one small shift someone could make this week to bring more play into their creative process?

Remove the outcome entirely. If you're genuinely prioritizing play, the outcome has no place in the room. And follow curiosity for ten minutes without documenting it. That's a good place to start.

What's keeping you curious right now?

The idea that rest isn't a reward. It connects back to what I've been uncovering about identity—separating myself from the work I do, the things I produce, the metrics of my life. I want to know that I'm whole without any of it. That I'm enough in silence, in stillness, in my own presence. Like any relationship, it needs tending. And I keep coming back to this: sustainability is a creative skill. You don't need to suffer to make meaningful work.

India Bailey recommends:

[Healing East acupuncture mat](#)

[My V&A membership card](#)

[Vuori Kit](#)

[Friendly Pressure Sound System](#) (wish list)

[Verden](#). Bath salts for my wellness ritual, magnesium balm for a good sleep!

[Name](#)

India Bailey

[Vocation](#)

founder, curator, wellness editor, former athlete

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