

On feeding and releasing the ego



YouTube creator and marketing consultant Rachel Nguyen on the difference between doing your own work and collaborating with clients, letting your true self exist on the internet, and navigating success and failure.

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As told to Carolyn Bernucca, 2602 words.

Tags: [Fashion](#), [Collaboration](#), [Process](#), [Failure](#), [Identity](#).

As a mostly freelancer, how do you remove ego when you're forced to brand yourself and make people aware of who you are and what you do?

That's the nice thing about creating a brand that revolves around my lifestyle—ego actually helps. "Ego," I think, has such a bad connotation, but I see it as having a sense of confidence. In the workplace, ego can obstruct my vision, because I'm working on a different brand. I have to put my ego aside when I work on projects at work, and collaborate to create one cohesive vision. That's somewhere I have to put my ego down, and I can't take criticism personally. That's why it's so nice that I have my own platform, which is my YouTube channel and blog, to let my ego shine a little.

Other than removal or implementation of ego, how does your collaborative work style differ from your independent work style?

Well, when I collaborate with people on my YouTube channel, I like to work with like-minded people. There are a lot of things I don't know how to do, or can't do well; that's why I really like to collaborate with people on my own content, to have someone to bounce these ideas off of and who can help me execute a vision. It feels like an extension and expression of multiple visions.

As far as the work environment, that's a whole other beast I'm still trying to get a hold of. At AG, we were working on probably eight different projects simultaneously. For me, because I'm so used to making anything and everything that I want, coming into this space where suddenly I have to work with others, I sometimes have to just swallow my vision and be collaborative. So in the workplace, collaboration's been more about compromise.

Do you prefer the collaborative work that you get to do on your own over collaboration in the workplace?

Being able to express myself exactly how I want to be on my own platform is wonderful. But I don't think one is better than the other; one feeds the ego and the other releases the ego. I think having that balance is very important.

[Collaboration] is a skill I think I need help with, and I constantly check myself, so that I'm not just a spoiled creative brat who wants to do what I want to do every single time. I think it's amazing what I do on my own platform, but to really grow it, I need to have skillsets outside of this small package I've made.

How do you communicate dissatisfaction or conflict with creative partners or collaborators?

It's really unfair to expect other people to read your mind. Having open lines of communication and talking about your frustrations, before they bottle up to a point where you want to leave or quit, is really important.

If you have a problem with something, sit down, process it, and understand why you're having a problem with it. What is a solution? You don't want to present a problem without a solution. "This is why I'm feeling frustrated, but this is what would help me not feel frustrated. These are the resources I need." Having that game plan thought out is important, so that someone can take you seriously, and help you get out of that cycle. I think that's the best way—over-communicating your problem and making sure that there's a solution.

What are your weaknesses, and how do you combat them?

I get really defensive about my own things. Working for yourself is the best, but that's the dream scenario; I don't know the longevity of it, or how practical it is in a real-life situation. Working for myself, I've developed a very spoiled mindset, where I want what I want.

Now, I'm throwing myself into a work environment where that mentality and that way of creating doesn't work. There are different ideas, different tastes, different execution styles. And, because I've just thrown myself into that, after being so independent for so long, I've gotten really defensive. Like, "No, I know better"—but do I know better? It challenges me.

As far as combating this, it's about not taking myself so seriously and opening myself up to compromise. I create so intuitively and emotionally, and for years I've had the luxury of acting upon it without a process of approval. You can't always lead with emotion in a workplace; people think differently and need tactile facts and reasoning to be on board. So now when I have an idea, I make sure I think about all the "holes" someone could poke in it, and have a rebuttal via facts, not gut feelings. Sometimes I put it into a presentation, too, because a good Keynote is hard to say no to.

How do you decide what kind of videos to make? There is a level of cohesiveness to your YouTube channel, but it doesn't seem like there's always rhyme or reason.

I love the community aspect of YouTube, because it helps me to be able to continue creating. I have this guideline through the audience, of what they want to see. I can read a comment and go, "Okay, well if they want to see my closet, how can I do this?" The videos that come out are made out of the sheer love of sharing.

I'm working on a video right now where I have this lost footage from my GoPro, and I'm like, "Okay, let me just put this all together into one video and see how it looks." But it's a trial and error process. There are times where I look at footage after filming a whole thing and just go, "Oh, I don't even like this footage. I'm not gonna use it." Or, I'll edit a whole video and I'll go, "Hmm, actually I don't know if I really like it that much." There are so many projects I start and I end up not finishing, because I don't like the direction they're going in.

What are you inspired by?

I think I'm inspired by unfiltered creation. We overthink things so much, and we care too much about what other people think, so we start creating based off of the acceptance of the community. I do that sometimes, too, make videos for the sake of, "Oh, someone might like this," or whatever. But I think what I'm inspired by is those pieces that are made just for your own sake of creating.

That applies to music, podcasts, intention-setting, art—even YouTube and Instagram. You can tell when someone's just doing [something] because they love to do it. I get inspired by people who know themselves, who are creating just because they have this burst of creative energy that's dying to get out. Seeing it all happen and unfold, that's magic to me, and I'm inspired by that.

How do you decide what to share, when it comes to your personal life?

It feels therapeutic to me to be able to talk about how I'm feeling. I know that my story might be really small, but it could help someone else in a similar situation. We live in a world that's so closed off. I like the good, bad, and the ugly that comes with life... well, I don't like it, but I think that it's important to share that story.

How much I share really depends on the privacy of other people. I will never speak on someone else's behalf. I don't think that's fair. There are two sides to every story—I have a platform to talk about things, but it's not fair to anyone else in the vicinity of me to be sucked into that, you know?

How do you approach digital spaces? What is your relationship like with social media, email, and other online distractions?

It's so skewed, because I work so heavily in it. Sometimes I wish that wasn't the case. But my general platform of expression and how people consume me is through the internet. I've been lucky enough to be at the sweet spot where I remember a life without the internet, but was in the midst of the internet boom. It's as if the growth of the internet paralleled with me coming of age, and I shared parts of my growth while adapting to the ever-changing internet.

The internet will always be a place to keep growing and learning. It will never stop. As long as you have a strong relationship with yourself, the internet can be a fruitful place. I feel for the generation that grew up exclusively with the immediacy of social platforms. I feel tremendous weight and fear about it, and hope we can foster safe consuming habits for our kids.

When you're in a creative mindset, what is your favorite kind of art to make?

I really love the process of planning. I think maybe it could be my Virgo rising coming out, as I get older. I like to create mood boards. I like to compile a bunch of things I've seen that can fit into one cohesive vision, a mish-mash of different things. To put these different ideas together and then watch it come to life. The execution part is not as fun for me, but I love the creative process of planning out my content, and seeing how it can work.

What is it about the execution part that is less fun to you?

Execution doesn't always live up to the concept. Planning an idea, photoshoot, campaign, video, anything, is still in the mindset of dreaming. It's the next step after an idea, so I can still imagine all the ways my vision can come together, and also enjoy some of the problem-solving aspects. Execution is the reality, where you get hit with road bumps; it starts to make you question your dream state. Problem solving becomes a little harder because you're so "in it"—initial perspectives are so much easier to get along with.

What sort of self-care precautions do you take when you're doing something like Vlogmas, where you vlog every day?

I have to mentally prepare myself for it, so definitely knowing that I'm gonna do it, months in advance, just helps me get everything I need to out of the way. Creating space in my mind, body, physical space, and having boundaries, is so important. There is a very magical formula—I don't know what it is—but there is a very possible balance between having boundaries and being open at the same time. Having that system figured out within yourself is super important. I know I'm quite fiery, but I do have my boundaries, and I push them. When I do that, I'm not in a good place. It's about knowing what you're capable of.

How has your dedication to your spirituality affected your creative work?

I think it's helped me really understand myself more and allowed me to create for myself, not for the approval of others. Just having that really strong sense of who I am, what I want, what I need, how I need it, when I need it, setting my own boundaries. I instill authentic creativity in myself [through spirituality] by being really honed

in on myself. Centering back to, "Okay, this is what I like. This is not affected by anyone else. This is truly what I respond to. How can I express that?"

Meditation, stretching; [these practices] give me space mentally, and in my body, to create more, because I'm letting go of things that I don't need. Even small things like, "Okay, this project turned out differently. Okay, I'm letting go of that." When I am able to let go of things that bother me, that helps me create space to have the mindset to make more.

How do you work up the courage to learn a new skill?

I never thought of it as courage. If I really want to learn how to do something, I just go in and do it. I learned how to skateboard solely because I was trying to impress my boyfriend when we first started dating. I was like, "Oh yeah, I'm gonna learn how to do this." I would hang out in my friend's garage, and there was just a no-judgment zone, where I was skating around his garage, trying to learn how to push off. You can sit there and talk about it all day, or you can just not waste your life. I'm gonna hit 30 this year—your 20s, they go by so fast.

I made so much content before I actually started a YouTube channel, because I just needed to learn how to make videos. I learned how to film myself, started editing, and then would be like, "Oh, well that was trial and error. Next time I film, I should make sure I talk like this and this." That trial-and-error process makes it so that learning a new skill doesn't become as daunting, because you're taking your time, step by step. And you don't have to publicize your failures.

Would you say that you are able to handle "failure" well?

I think it's always come naturally to me, because it's completely normal. The heavy stigma on it, that's what makes it scary. It's not the actual act of failing, but the social stigma attached to it. I think I'm pretty good at being able to detach myself from what other people think, because it's such a waste of energy. And, failures, like I said, don't need to be publicized. Knowing that, and creating your own safe, non-judgmental space, takes away from that stigma. "Okay, I tried something new and it didn't work out and that's fine." I've been surfing for three years and I can barely get on the wave, you know? But that's the fun of it, to not take yourself so seriously, because everyone's learning.

Think of what skate culture really came from; a bunch of kids who didn't care what other people did, and didn't care about "failure"—they just did something because they loved it and they weren't good at it, so they practiced all together in groups. They watched each other and learned from each other and coached each other, and there was none of that social stigma of being afraid to fail, because failure was so accepted.

On the contrary, what do you consider "success," both in your day-to-day and in the broader scope of life?

There's such esteem toward the word "success." Success versus failure, failure versus success. To me, if you can see through an idea or goal of yours, you're successful in that. To be generally successful in life is too broad—no one is perfect in all aspects of their career, relationships, and well-being. Being successful, to me, is accomplishing whatever goal you have set. The thing is, it always keeps changing, because we keep growing. One can't be forever successful; there's always something new to try. It's just a state of mind.

Rachel Nguyen recommends:

Esther Perel's podcast, *Where Should We Begin?*

Yoga—it's therapy in itself to have to sit with yourself and find calm in strenuous poses

A film camera, to document life without referring back to a screen

Frank Ocean on forever repeat

A Vitamix, to make your own milk, smoothies, soups and dips

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