

# Series 5 Episode 2

Hello, this is episode two of the fifth series of In Ten Years Time: How to Live a Creative Life. I'm Tricia Duffy. I am a songwriter, a media consultant, a singer, a writer, a public speaker, and a podcaster. And I'm here with an aim, an aim to inspire you to live a creative life, to find a balance of creativity that works for you and encourage you to make your creative dreams a reality.

I believe there is a power in the combination of a ten-year plan coupled with small daily steps. The long-term vision lets us know where we are heading and taking one tiny action towards that vision every day, perhaps just for five minutes will make us instantly more content.

If you'd like to engage with this conversation, you can find me @intenyearstimeofficial on Instagram or Facebook, and I [00:01:00] love hearing from you. If there's a topic you would like me to research, I would be delighted to investigate. I spent the last few years trialling ways to live a more creative life, and I'm distilling all I've learned in thousands of hours of research into this podcast series so that you can embark on a similar journey.

In this series, we are thinking about maintaining our creativity, about how we keep on keeping on when the going gets tough, when life gets in the way, or when boredom sets in. About how building good habits can support us and about how we might manage the financial implications of living a creative life in today's economic system. About how we can always find something in our backstory to reinvigorate our creativity or our art, and how pushing through the darkness can sometimes reveal the most staggering work of all.

Today I want to talk about inertia, and I want to address this in two specific ways: about how sometimes we can [00:02:00] tolerate things in our lives that aren't quite right for a long time before we act; and how we can avoid inertia creeping into our daily craft or practice.

As we navigate this conversation, I want to invite you to think deeply about the things in your life that don't serve you or your creativity, and empower you to make a change. The scale of change will be different for everyone. It might be a tiny bit of dedicated practice or introducing

a new element to your craft, or it might be something more fundamental.

However it looks for you, I am here to support you. I've been there and I have no doubt that I will be there again. Before we go any further, we should probably agree what we mean by the word 'inertia'.

In one context, inertia is a term used by physicists to describe the tendency of an object to resist changes in its state, at rest or in motion. If an object is at rest, it will stay at rest, and if it's in [00:03:00] motion, it will stay in motion unless some external force acts upon it. Newton's first law noticed that the greater the mass of an object, the greater its inertia.

In other words, it's harder to move a bigger object than a smaller one. And that's similar to what I want to talk about here. I'm interested in our mindset and how mental inertia can affect us, sometimes without us even noticing. That tendency to do nothing or to stay unchanged or immovable, it can show up in several different ways as procrastination or as a form of tolerating dissatisfaction. Dissatisfaction that could be low level, barely perceptible, or that is a more constant voice whispering in our ear, demanding to be heard.

I think of inertia as the ability to tolerate suboptimal things every day. Almost without [00:04:00] realising it. Human beings are naturally resistant to change. I go to the same pilates class every Monday evening, and each week we all end up choosing the same place in the class. We are creatures of habit. That's just one small example, but there are plenty of other ways that resistance to change shows up in everyday life.

Now, I should be clear. I don't think that all our routines are bad things at all. But when it comes to our ability to repeat patterns that are not serving us, as they become entrenched, this is where we could be getting in the way of achieving our creative dreams and leading a fulfilling life.

If you've been with me for a while, you will know that the *In Ten Years Time* philosophy was created when I started experimenting with strategic tools I'd used in my work on myself. I want to wander back to

the workplace today to see what else we can steal. I've been very fortunate in my career to work for several large [00:05:00] media companies. Inside these companies I met some people who disliked their jobs. They were dissatisfied with the work and the opportunities. They found the office politics tedious or even upsetting. These companies were large lumbering beasts, and they were hard to change. Their corporate inertia meant that the employees couldn't make meaningful change by themselves, and so they got up every day and went through the motions, perhaps finding lightness in some tasks and some friendships. But in the main, they were tolerating their work environment at best, and I was one of them.

This is where the stories we tell ourselves come in. I told myself I had no choice that things would get better if I worked hard, get to the end of the week, get through this project, whatever. I told myself I had a wonderful life with wonderful friends and family, and a good salary, and a car, and a home, and, and, and, and, and, and...

And the way I spent my time at work, feeling [00:06:00] less than optimal didn't matter because these hours were just part of a whole life package. But these unhappy moments became hours, and the hours became days. And days became weeks and months and years until one day I woke up and felt thoroughly miserable.

I wish I'd been able to spot this feeling of tolerating earlier, to take a small step to change the balance before I ended up burnt out and in a crumpled heap on the floor. A dramatic burnout - that in my case, coincided with three bereavements - is one way to change your perspective, and in some ways I believe that these things come to us when they're meant to, but today I want to look at this from a different angle to see if there are other less dramatic ways for us to spot this inertia or tolerance for the suboptimal to help us claim and maintain our creativity and all the benefits that brings. [00:07:00]

We talked in the last episode about toxic positivity and the social pressure to be happy. At this time in my life, I was hardly ever happy. As a deep depression started to absorb me, I began to feel as though I was operating within a sort of membrane that even when I was out with friends, supposedly having a good time or hanging out with my kids, there was a clear plastic film between me and the rest of the world

protecting me or keeping me separate. I painted on my smile, literally forced myself to act happy. While inside I felt numb. It was a very dark time, and looking back on it now, I can't understand why I didn't see it coming a mile off, and it's hard for me to share, it's a vulnerable thing to do. And Sebastian, my inner critic, is yelling, "what on earth do you think you're doing? You cannot possibly think that sharing your depression is going to convince people to live a creative life. [00:08:00] Tricia, your delulu knows no end!"

The tools that I offer help us spot these tolerances, the inertia, the places where we are quietly dissatisfied. So that - I hope - we can all feel encouraged to act before we hit rock bottom or become numbed to any joy in life. This is what I wish for you and for myself to be armed with tools and ways to prevent burnout. if you're already there, if you're feeling down or downright depressed, please seek help. It will get better, I promise.

I often think of a passage from a book by author and activist, Glennon Doyle that came out in 2020. She was thrust into the limelight when she published *Untamed*. Doyle described the way she took hold of the table that was her life, and completely upended it, spilling the contents on the floor.

Her story of coming [00:09:00] out, breaking free and making peace with who she really was inspired me at the time to take a little bit of myself back. If you're going to read it, a health warning from me. This is a book that divides opinion. From those who found her utterly inspiring to others who felt she was privileged, inauthentic, and self-righteous. You can make up your own mind, but here is a little passage from the book that illustrates what I'm talking about.

*If there's any secret you are missing, it's that doing it right is just really hard. Feeling all your feelings is hard. But that's what they're for. Feelings are for feeling. All of them, even the hard ones.*

*The secret is that you're doing it right and that doing it right hurts sometimes. I did not know that I was supposed to feel everything. I thought I was supposed to feel happy. I thought that happy was for feeling and pain was for fixing and numbing and [00:10:00]*

*deflecting and hiding and ignoring. I thought that when life got hard, it was because I had gone wrong somewhere.*

*I thought that pain was weakness and I was supposed to suck it up, but the thing was: the more I sucked it up, the more food and booze I had to suck down.*

I mentioned that there are two points I want to get into in this episode. I've covered this a little already, but one is the balance of your life and the things that you are doing that are not serving you. The second is your creativity itself and how repeating the same systems or ways of working, may be stifling your artistic potential.

I'll deal with the balance question first but let me just share a little story with you: more stealing from corporate thinking. When I was researching this episode, I found an interesting article by a customer experience and marketing consultant called Colin Shaw. He told a story of meeting a regular client who proudly shared his repeat business statistics with a [00:11:00] statement about how loyal his customers were.

In this thought piece, Shaw asks us to examine whether what we perceive as loyalty is really inertia and gives us some clues to spot the difference. Loyal customers he says, feel some emotional connection with the organisation, product or service they're getting. Inertia is habitual or automatic.

In this instance, a customer might not be able to explain why they purchase from the organisation at all. He goes on to explain that we can better understand our customers when we focus on why they're loyal to us, and if we look for ways to build on that loyalty with our followers. The article is in the show notes.

If I take an example from my own life, I recently cancelled my RAC membership, an annual roadside assistance service that I've paid for 20 years. Over two decades and a few flat tyres I'd initially built up loyalty with this provider, but inertia had crept [00:12:00] in about four years ago.

I sold my car to help fund my creative life changes, but I kept the roadside assistance going, telling myself that it was a small price to pay, and the day you need it, you really need it. But the truth is I hardly ever drive, but I still didn't act on it and cancel the policy. I could have done that at any point in the last four years, or even before that. Inertia had crept in. I tolerated the annual premium and told myself a story.

So what made me change and finally cancel the damn thing? Well, I updated my ten-year plan a few weeks ago, and I spent some time thinking about my relationship with money and security, which led me to do a review of my spending.

We're going to talk about money a bit more later on in the series. This payment had been niggling me, so I decided to contact the RAC to cancel my policy, but they made it so difficult with short amounts of time available, I couldn't find a way to cancel easily, which quite frankly made me a little mad. [00:13:00]

Now let's look at my trajectory here. I'd gone from loyal, to inertia and now to really unsatisfied, and I've now cancelled my direct debit with the bank. There's always a way! And I look forward to being a few quid better off next month when the next payment is due. Sorry, RAC, inertia served you well, but eventually it boils up and boom!

I'm so passionate about spotting these areas of unease at the earliest possible point. Money is important, but time is my most useful commodity right now. So how can I use this example to work out where my inertia is not serving me so that I can feel empowered to make better choices for myself: today and for future me, for *In Ten Years Time* me? Even if it feels like breaking some habits or overcoming huge hurdles.

[00:14:00] As part of this mission to identify points of inertia, I want to introduce you to a tool that I've been testing as part of this research. An emotion tracker: template on the website, of course. But a page in your notebook will work just as well. Taking time to track your emotions for a week every few months is a really helpful way to spot the areas of inertia creeping in. Simply write down the date at the top of the page and down the side, write the time in one-hour long chunks. For example, you might write 7-8am, 8-9am, 9-10am, and so on.

You need two columns for this. [00:15:00] One headed 'activity' and the other 'emotion' or 'feeling'. All you need to do is each hour take a minute to just jot down what you were doing, the main activities of the hour, and any emotional response. If you're busy, you can do it at the end of the day or after a few hours. Either way has worked really well for me.

Here's a snippet of how mine looks for yesterday. Let's join me at 12 noon.

12 noon - 1pm: *Activity*: writing thank you notes in a cafe. Joined by a colleague for work lunch. *Feeling*: energised and rejuvenated.

1pm - 2pm: *Activity*: Finishing lunch, waiting for the bus. *Feeling*: content and calm.

2pm - 3pm: *Activity*: bus journey, tedious with traffic delays. Arriving home and lying down. *Feeling*: frustrated and tired. In brackets here I've written here (judging myself for lying down when I could have been writing)!

3pm - 4pm: *Activity*: writing, finishing, newsletter achieved flow state. *Feeling*: satisfied and energised by being alone. [00:16:00]

4pm - 5pm: *Activity*: writing, finishing newsletter. *Feeling*: satisfied, joy.

5pm - 6pm: *Activity*: scrolling on phone. Kids come home, answering messages. *Feeling*: distracted, irritated and bored.

6pm - 7pm: *Activity*: Made dinner, ate dinner, watched TV. *Feeling*: neutral.

Now, that was a fairly unusual day for me because I was out and about in London in the morning, but what I can learn from this is that I need time alone and that - shock horror! - tedious bus journeys don't always feel great. I wouldn't class this as inertia, though there are some necessary evils and taking the bus is just one of them.

The traffic was outside everyone's control. But looking at the rest of what I've written down there, there was nothing that really got me

feeling down other than the scrolling hour at 5pm-6pm, and that's where I can [00:17:00] start spotting some patterns over a week.

I noticed that 5pm-6pm is kind of witching hour for me most days. This week in that slot, I've scrolled or reached for salty snacks or a glass of wine. I often feel bored or frustrated or irritated during that time. Then I journalled on this in my morning pages, and I realised it's a familiar feeling from my childhood. From a young age, I would have to help make dinner for my family.

I'd peel potatoes and prepare veg at 5:00pm and get them boiling for 5:30pm so that when my parents came up from the shop we lived above at 6pm dinner would be ready. I find this interesting and I'm sure that if you took a few minutes to track your feelings and emotions for a few days, you'll start to see patterns too. This information is telling me something that can empower me to make some small changes, and it might do something similar for you too.

So, I've covered a bit about how we might have slipped into a state of quiet dissatisfaction [00:18:00] and how we can examine the balance of our life to identify the areas to explore, to make a change. But I also want to talk about how we can stop inertia entering our creativity to. When we think about our craft, I believe that we are well served by trying to surprise ourselves. In my creativity as a songwriter, I found writing a song from the heart when I first started an incredible experience.

Sitting down with guitar and pencil and pad and just flowing a song out was enough for me. Now I do a lot more songwriting and that form of writing does still happen and occur from time to time, but it's a pretty unreliable way to come up with ideas and concepts regularly. I can't just wander around waiting for inspiration to strike. This would likely lead to inertia, as waiting around for something to happen is risky. I need to do things and take action to create the environment where that's more likely to happen.

So, I learn, I mix with others. I challenge [00:19:00] myself to write in new ways or new genres. More often than not, these surprise and delight me and my interest and dedication to songwriting continues to grow.



Here are just some of the ways that I fight off creative inertia that might work for you too:

- Try writing or creating in a different place.
- Take your laptop to the local cafe, the library, or simply try a different room in your home, or take your craft outside.
- Try something completely different that you've never done before to embrace the learner's mindset: The songwriter tries calligraphy. The artist tries writing a poem and the photographer attempts to paint. See where it takes you and what you can apply to your own craft.
- Turn it upside down or back to front. Just experiment. have you heard about those painters who try creating using only their non-dominant hand or holding a pen in their foot to see what comes, or songwriters that are usually lyrics first like me, start writing from beats first?
- Collaborate with someone who [00:20:00] does something completely different from you. The partnership may be enlightening. Keep a record of what you create. The very act of jotting down your progress can be really motivating. I keep a record of my music practice and it's great to look back on the pages to see how my accuracy and timing improve.

Keep surprising yourself with new things that keep on satisfying your urge to create and all the benefits that come with living a creative life.

Now, this episode has covered a lot, so let's sum up! Inertia is a sneaky little devil and often very difficult to spot at the early stages. Maybe that's because we have internalised the need to 'suck it up', much like Glennon Doyle says, and not make a fuss. And so we decide to tolerate whatever we're going through and just hope that it gets better. But as I've experienced firsthand: left unchecked, these constant tiny acts of tolerance can become damaging or even [00:21:00] volcanic.

The trouble is that identifying these feelings can be extremely difficult because our clever minds are constantly protecting us with thoughts

that help us to navigate our daily lives. We bargain with ourselves: 'Yes, it was a crappy day at work, but I'm home now and at least I got paid. It'll be all right. When I get promoted, such and such leaves, my boss goes on a holiday, I move to a new desk.' All these lovely stories we tell ourselves are a survival mechanism. But they prevent us from taking the time and space to really think about what's going on here.

You only have one life. Your time is your most precious commodity. If you're spending a lot of time on activities that don't serve you, or worse, give you negative feelings, I encourage you to identify them however hard that may be, and explore what changes you can make. That said, I know sometimes you will feel genuinely trapped in a circumstance that doesn't make you feel [00:22:00] good. I know there have been times when I've been unable to make a change but reframing it in the context of my ten-year plan has helped.

We must come to the end now and I will offer you the challenge, the question and the recommendation.

The challenge is to track your emotions. I suggested a way of doing that earlier in this episode. Can you commit to breaking down your days into hour-long chunks and analysing your emotions? Does the process of exploring your feelings reveal anything interesting? This is just information. I really want to encourage you to treat your findings as a data point. Then later, once you have that data, you can decide. You can choose if or when you might like to do something about it. Only you can make these decisions, and the level of change is entirely up to you.

The question today is this: how can you continue to surprise and delight your creative [00:23:00] self to jolt yourself out of a feeling of inertia, perhaps with a visit to a gallery, or tickets to a play, or perhaps by mixing your mediums in your art. Can you change your environment to create and see what comes of that?

The recommendation this week is twofold. I came across a really nice article from a substacker called Bertrand Wong on the topic of inertia and what he calls 'inflection points', which are indicators of when our tolerance has run out. He says it's easy to succumb to inertia and suggests a lot of things that align with the *In Ten Years Time*

philosophy, including changing environments, building a community, and scheduling time to - in his case - write. I'd recommend you read it as a companion to this episode because although it isn't about creativity as such, he does use his own writing as an example, which I found relevant to this discussion. The link is in the show notes.

Then I would also like to remind you about something I've recommended before, but not for a [00:24:00] while. Julia Cameron's *The Artist's Way*, is an incredibly useful resource for spotting inertia and challenging you out of your safety zone. I'm just starting her programme again for the second time, and I would encourage you to do the same if you've done it before. It was fun to explore the process again from the perspective of the person I am now versus who I was the first time I did it. We are different every day, and so our approach to these resources changes too. Well worth a revisit or do it for the first time if you haven't tried it before.

Next time we're going to talk about compound interest in creativity. I'm not talking about money, but how our creativity builds over time with every tiny little investment we make each day. I found the research really motivating, and it's a brilliant way to think about our practice when we're struggling to maintain our momentum.

Until then, please engage with the conversation on Instagram or Facebook. [00:25:00] Sign up to my creativity newsletter on the website and if you know someone who might benefit from everything we've been thinking about today, please open your phone right now and text them a link to this episode. I suspect they will appreciate it as much as I will. Until next time, keep creating, peace and love.