

**Episode #: 04**

**Episode Title:** Human creativity in the era of AI with Josh Robinson

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## Intro

**Louise Everett (00:13)**

Welcome to ClarityMatters.

AI is fast becoming part of everyday creative work, shaping how organisations write, design and communicate. As these tools grow more capable, they're raising new questions about what creativity really means at work. When content is easier than ever to generate, the focus shifts from producing more to deciding what's worth creating, how ideas are shaped and what makes them truly distinctive. Many teams are still working out how human judgment and machine capability work best together.

In this episode, we explore the hot topic of how organisations are approaching creativity today, how the role of human creativity may be evolving, and where leaders might want to be especially deliberate about keeping people at the heart of the creative process.

I'm thrilled to be joined by Josh Robinson, Founder and Executive Creative Director at 17days. Josh, welcome to ClarityMatters. It's great to have you

**Josh (01:24)**

Hi, Louise.

Thanks for having me. It's a good subject. I'm looking forward to getting into it.

## Main conversation

**Louise Everett (01:30)**

Josh, we first met back in 2008.

You were working for a brand experience agency, and we were launching a new premium car brand across Europe. So creativity has always been at the heart of your work, and a lot has changed since then. From what you're seeing now, how would you describe the biggest shift in how organisations approach creativity today?

**Josh (01:58)**

It's a good question and obviously a very kind of topical one. The thing I'm seeing is a much more sort of agile approach to creativity, and maybe that's a bit of an overused word, but I think brands and clients are being quite flexible in how they're resourcing around creativity. So not just in terms of how they might be bringing in AI, but how they are using people and how they're bringing together teams of specialists around particular projects.

And I often call them kind of hot teams. You bring together teams of people, specialist agencies, consultants, freelancers. And in the old days, you know, I think there was a kind of quite protective culture around creativity. And I think agencies would want to keep everything super tight and owned and sort of not give away that somebody might be a freelancer, you know, that they're part of the team kind of thing. But now I think we're seeing clients being much more open to bringing together specialists who are right for a project and being open to sort of resourcing those teams, and obviously then sort of start to get more efficiency, more direct efficiency around cost and quality by bringing those sort of perfect teams together around a particular project.

And then kind of aligned to that, if we bring the AI thing in, which is obviously really exciting and everyone is getting their heads around it and experimenting in different ways and trying to work out where to bring it into that process, what it means for their people, all that kind of stuff.

So I'm seeing, you know, I work with lots of different people, and that's coming up again and again, and again. The idea that projects are becoming quite kind of widespread and different teams are brought in around different parts of them, rather than the whole thing going in one direction, as may have been the case before.

So the sort of summary there is: agility, a more open kind of resourcing around scopes of work, projects, and AI and human kind of specialists playing a big role in how those sort of teams are brought together.

## **Louise Everett (04:30)**

That's fascinating.

So according to a recent Workday Global survey, 83% of employees believe that AI will make uniquely human skills more critical, not less, highlighting that human creativity is still central to future work. From your perspective, how is the role of human creativity changing as AI becomes more embedded in how organisations create and communicate?

## **Josh (05:05)**

I think the killer thing for me is you need the AI to be in the hands of people that understand that area. So if you were to hand AI to a non-strategist, non-specialist strategist or a non-specialist creative and ask them to deliver that strategic or creative work through AI, without that kind of technical experience or kind of craft, I think that's dangerous territory because it's easy to be seduced by what AI gives you back.

You know, it comes back at you quickly. It comes back at you in volume. It immediately feels impressive because of those reasons. And you do see interesting stuff in it.

And it comes back with this quite authoritative kind of tone. And that is really seductive. And it can make you think, this must be good. You know, I will use it. I think people who have spent years kind of honing their craft and have a passion for what they do,

they can see where the gaps are in what is coming back. They can see where there might be a kind of clumsy insight or duplication of thought, or even sort of lazy links between the thoughts and ideas.

And I think AI really needs that kind of specialist eye. It needs to be in the hands of people that understand it.

### **Louise Everett (06:44)**

That point around it being seductive and impressive.

I love the way you phrase it in that way. You phrase AI in that way. Because what I'm hearing you saying is that AI doesn't replace creative thinking. It amplifies the people who know how to question, refine, and direct it.

You know, but without that, we might find ourselves in a bit of a spot. So you've still got to be able to have that judgment and that thinking, in order to get the best out of it.

### **Josh (07:20)**

You know, before you might have gotten in a room with five other people and brainstormed around where you might take an idea and you can get a long way. I mean, perhaps you could argue that you can get far enough, to lead you to great work, but with AI, you can explode that thought very quickly. You can open yourself up to a far wider kind of universe of possible directions to go in.

And then, as I say, with your own kind of head on your shoulders, you can look at that and quickly see and decide what you want to take in and what you want to sort of work forward with.

### **Louise Everett (08:02)**

And it's interesting there, because for those of us that are a little long in the tooth, you know, we have that, we're able to have that objective view. It might be harder for us to introduce these new tools into habits and daily routines, which may be easier for younger generations to do. But conversely, we've got the experience and the hindsight and the judgment to be able to question what we're getting out of it.

But then perhaps younger generations less so, they haven't got that measure. So there's quite an interesting dynamic there with how perhaps different generations are engaging with the AI tools as well.

### **Josh (08:49)**

Yeah. It's kind of interesting, isn't it, that the younger generation who are earlier on in their careers, and it might be a little patronising to say perhaps they don't have the kind of the confidence or breadth of experience yet to feel completely confident in their worlds, yet. My advice to them would be, and it's the same advice that I'm sort of acting on, is to just roll with it and explore it, and kind of see it as your friend.

But that it can make you better. So get into it, start playing with it and see where it can take you, and it will actually help you improve as a thinker, as a creative, if it will help you hone your own craft, your own eye, your own kind of taste.

**Louise Everett (09:47)**

That piece about thinking as well is so interesting.

I heard a reference a few days ago, that strategy is your best friend in the creative journey. You know that thinking part is so important to creativity, that we shouldn't forget about. It's so important along that route.

**Josh (10:05)**

Yeah. I mean, my opinion has always been that really good creatives are quite commercial, strategic thinkers. You know, certainly in the world of marketing and brand, we are people who are working in business, and strategy and commerciality is a vital part of being a good creative.

**Louise Everett (10:30)**

So Josh, as technology accelerates creation, where should leaders be most deliberate about involving human creativity and why?

**Josh (10:41)**

I think human creativity needs to be in charge.

Hosting, hosting the journey, hosting the process, guiding the work, channelling what is asked of AI and what comes back. That human eye, that human brain on it is really important. And I think certainly at this stage and certainly as agencies and brands and organisations are working out where and how to use AI in ways that is right for them, that work should be in the hands of people that understand the role of AI and the potential benefits and threats of it at every stage of that creative process.

So right from when a brief comes in, and you may interrogate that brief and elaborate and enrich that brief through the strategic phase, through the creative ideation phase, through the production phase, even the sort of channel planning kind of phase all the way along the line, AI can of course help, but I think it needs to be in the hands of people that can really intelligently reflect on what they're seeing, and how to use that in their actual output and strategy.

**Louise Everett (12:04)**

Just going back to your point that you made earlier about AI being seductive and impressive. With the increased use of AI in the workplace, is there an impact on quality output and therefore outcome?

**Josh (12:19)**

I think there can be and it does come back to the being in the right hands point again a bit. A lot of people describe AI as an averaging machine. It does take huge volumes of data and

finds those sort of heavy patterns. And of course we as the users can push that and can drive the detail and the quality into it if we've got that expertise and we know how to do so. But I think it can affect quality.

There's a couple of interesting things which we talk a lot about. You know, when you see something that has come through AI, can you spot that? And very often these days you can. Now that might be because the people that are doing that work with AI are not yet good enough at driving that quality through it. But I think a lot of the time, more average output does come through.

And when you can see that or even sort of subconsciously feel it, even if you're kind of questioning it, that takes something away from the influence that that work can have on me. If you're working in a business where just scale of messaging and volume of messaging and just getting something out there at scale, big funnel, get that message in front of people maybe that quality of creative matters less, and that's fine, right?

That's a commercial decision. And there's a time and a place for it. But I think if you're talking about kind of pure craft and creativity, you have to be careful that AI doesn't seduce you into doing lower quality work. And the other thing is, I think it's quite interesting in AI, when you start talking about using AI at different phases of the creative process, different steps from the briefing through to the kind of production phase.

I think you've got to be careful you don't kind of pass average down the line. You don't pass an average brief, thanks to AI, to an average strategic response, thanks to AI, to an average ideation phase. You know, you've got to be careful that AI doesn't drive average through every step of the way. Which brings us back to the importance of it being in the right hands and it being used in the best way.

### **Louise Everett (14:52)**

Such a critical point that you make, in order to use AI almost responsibly and in the right way. So very useful throughout the process, but a huge caveat to avoid this sense of things being average.

So, Josh, we focused a lot on the present and future. Can we take a step back for a moment? And a couple of questions that I love to ask of all my guests. This year marks 20 years of Claritas. Over that time, communications has evolved rapidly in scale, speed and scrutiny. But some lessons endure.

If you could go back to your 20-year-old self, what's the one piece of career advice you would give?

### **Josh (15:42)**

I think I inadvertently kind of did the right thing. Perhaps just by chance, I knew I wanted to get involved in something creative. There were moments when I thought about taking kind of other paths. But I had a feeling, even though I didn't do a hugely kind of creative degree, I could just feel that that was the direction that I wanted to go. And I think that has served me well.

I think if you do something that you care about and that you're naturally interested in, your path forward can be richer and maybe even easier, you can move between different kinds of roles. You could explore different kind of pathways in your career if you keep something that you're genuinely naturally interested in and motivated by, at the heart of it.

You know, I remember when I was 20 and I would go and pick up the kind of a printed visual on board from an illustrator down the road. And I would be so excited about getting that board and seeing what it looked like and then taking it to a pitch or whatever. And now, 25 years later, it may not be on a board. It may be the PDF that comes through that I get actually the same feeling when I open that and look at it and think about it and imagine how it's going to be sort of received and presented to the client.

So that kind of core passion is there, and I'd encourage anyone, it's obvious advice, but to go with something that you feel naturally interested in and energised by.

### **Louise Everett (17:33)**

This is lovely.

And so sort of authentic. And we do some work together now. And I see that, every time in every project that we work on together, I see that. And it is a lucky position to be in, isn't it, to be doing something that you've still got that passion that oozes through, that you love and enjoy deeply every day. So, yeah. Very precious.

Taking a step forward. Let's look forward again. So if you could put one idea or piece of advice into a 20-year time capsule, what would it be and why does it matter?

### **Josh (18:10)**

I think it would be to always keep your eyes open to what is going on around you. Don't sort of commit in a rigid way to one path and feel like you can only improve, or make progress by staying on that one path. Keep your eyes open to what is happening either side of you.

It may be that breaking away from a big organisation and going your own way and doing your own thing is a good thing to do. Or it may be that something new pops up that you really want to get your head around and be at the front of and explore yourself what it could mean to you and what it might mean to your way of working and your way of earning money, but keeping your eyes open.

And then being brave to make those moves in different directions. And I think that is something that's quite important for creatively-minded people.

You know, we often value variety. We like improving what we do by experiencing different things in different ways. Even if creativity is always kind of in the middle of it.

So back yourself. Be brave. If you've got a gut instinct to go somewhere, go somewhere, explore it, you can always come back again if it doesn't work out. But that is the way to lead, I think, to have a kind of a fulfilling life and a work life where you are always improving and learning and ultimately able to help people more and more and more because of that depth of experience that you build up.

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So, yeah. Open eyes, be brave. Back yourself.

**Louise Everett (19:58)**

Wonderful, and embrace that change which can lead to richer, deeper experiences. That's lovely.

Josh, thank you for sharing your thoughts today. This has been hugely insightful.

**Outro**

**Louise (20:12)**

As AI makes creation easier, human creativity moves up the value chain from producing more to deciding what truly matters. AI may generate at speed, but it's human judgment that questions, refines and gives direction. And in a world where many people use the same tools, meaning becomes a real differentiator and currently meaning is still a human skill.

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