

Defining Creativity S1E11: Todd May Transcript

Debbi: Hi, everyone. Thank you for joining me for this episode of Defining Creativity, a podcast that explores where and how creativity is found. I'm your host, Debbi Ponella, a creativity researcher, cultivator, and devotee. On today's episode, we're joined by...

Todd: So, I am Todd May. I work for the Indiana Department of Transportation, and my role is, I am the Director of Innovation and Process Improvement. I'm also the Senior Director for what we call Broadband Corridors, which is any time high-speed internet or the broadband touches our rights of way, it has to go to our department. So, I spend probably 75% or 80% of my time, though, on the innovation and process improvement parts.

Debbi: Well, Todd, thank you so much for being here today and talking to me. Just your title, Director, you said the Department of Innovation, correct?

Todd: Yeah, yeah.

Debbi: So, it seems an obvious innovation and creativity. There we are. So, I can only imagine that you do a million creative things every day. So go ahead and just start by saying how you see creativity working in your life.

Todd: So just to give you a little background, we had never had innovation as part of, say, our mission statement or our core values or anything like that. And about three and a half years ago, we got feedback from our employees that said, hey, we're doing things out here that... We're trying to build a better mousetrap, so to speak. And so every day, really, what I do is I listen to folks who are truly creatively trying to solve a problem. And some of those problems can be really, really major, right?

We have a situation where a bridge gets hit or we have flood aid, to simplistic of filling potholes. And it's really brought to the forefront to me that regardless of whatever that task is, people are trying to be creative to reduce their heartburn in some respects, but they're also trying to get to a better solution and they're trying to get to a better place. And so, we've seen some really cool stuff. I mean, we've seen some stuff that has changed what we do on a daily basis.

And my goal really is, when folks are starting to talk about different things that we're doing on roadways or pavement or whatever the case may be and we're met with a problem, is asking them, how might we get to a solution? And I found that that simple question of how might we, starts get people thinking outside of the box, which is kind of a catch all phrase. But when you start thinking, people are becoming creative and it creates a lot of dialogue. It can create some conflict. It can create some situations where we've seen some solutions that, like I said earlier, have truly changed the way we quote unquote do business.

Debbi: So you're talking about a lot of people working with each other or are these isolated projects?

Todd: [3:17] Good question. So, it can be both. But, you know, a lot of times the creativity part comes in the large projects, right? Because we can go into, you know, planning a major piece of interstate between two cities that happens to be going on close to where we're living, right? So, we're seeing tons of tons and tons of workers. And every day there's obstacles that come up. You know, we can plan, we can engineer, but every day you just plan as best you can.

And so that creates an environment where a lot of folks have to make decisions quickly, but also they have to be creative in making those decisions and how they get to that point. So, I mean, obviously there's standards, there's things that for safety and traveling and all that stuff that we have to meet. But where we see some of the best things that happen, are in those individual work zones or work projects or whatever, because people are trying, truly, I firmly believe that people are trying to do what is right and what is good. And if we walk into it, assuming good intent, we see success.

And, I guess the most rewarding piece of what I do, and seeing these innovative approaches, is seeing when people are recognized and the recognition piece and its value. And so having family members who have been involved in the arts from ballet dancer to dance teams and those kinds of things, you know, the recognition of somebody's creativity of doing things well and doing things differently and doing things in the way that they interpret what is being brought to them, that to me is really the secret sauce. It's what keeps people being

creative and it can be kind of a, you know, when we were talking about doing this, the leap for me of, okay, we fix bridges, we fix potholes, we make roads. How do we tie that back to the arts?

And so I've given it a lot of thought and people see things differently and they see problems differently, much like when there's a piece of music and somebody is going to dance to it and it's different and there's commonalities, there's certain things that are exactly the same because that's the technique or that's the standard that we have to meet to build a road. But how do we get there is the creative part. And that's the cool piece. And in my mind, as I thought about it, I thought, man, that's a stretch to try to get those two together.

But then after I got your invite, I sort of started looking for that and it really starts hitting at the core of that creative piece of how people interpret what's in front of them. And whether that's a problem or whether that's a piece of music or whether that's pick whatever, it's how you as a person are interpreting in your response. And the other piece for me is that not everybody loves what's being created, right? So that whole beauty in the eye of the beholder is also very much in play for us.

We have, again, there are times where we're asked to design something that's aesthetically pleasing to some people and some people you would be stunned. It's like, my God, why did you make that bridge look like that? That's the ugliest thing I've ever seen in my life. Blah, blah, blah, blah, blah. And the same can be true for listening to a piece of music or watching somebody dance or a piece of art or whatever. It doesn't have to appeal to everybody. And that's just the way it is. And people are struck by different things.

Debbi: Absolutely. And thinking back to you're talking about... Well, actually there was just a ton right there to unpack because you just...

Todd: Yeah. I just threw up on you. Sorry.

Debbi: No, no. Not at all. I love it. But taking a step back and you were talking about when people are acknowledged for what they're doing and everything, part of that and part of creativity is finding the value in what you're doing, understanding your value, your unique person, and that you are creatively adding to the world. So yeah, that was one of my things thinking forward to this discussion with you is how does somebody who is dealing with bridges and those types of things, do they find themselves being creative? So, you mentioned some really cool things. Are there specific examples, either something that somebody's been acknowledged for or an innovation or something specific?

Todd: [7:53] Yeah. So we've been doing this for three and a half years. And when I was asked to do it, it was kind of like, we want to stand up an innovation department. We don't know what that looks like. We don't even know where we're going, right? So I reached out to a lot of peers and recognition was one of the top things that our sister states who have a history of an innovation department brought up. So that's really been the point of the spear for us and for my department. But I will say that I'll give you two examples.

One was a gentleman who submitted an idea to us to investigate as a way to change how we do some paving, basically. Super great idea, went through all of our vetting process, and ended up to be classified as one of our quote unquote winners. And folks who are chosen as a winning idea, they do get, they get a small monetary award. When we told him that his idea had won and that he was going to get this monetary award, he without hesitation said, I didn't do it for the money. I just wanted us to be better. Is there any way I can take that monetary award and award it to my teammates? We need to buy a new piece of equipment.

Debbi: Wow.

Todd: Well, I'm going to tell you, it shook me because not only was he so appreciative of this idea of winning, but he struck at the core of what we're trying to do. He saw a problem, he figured it out, the solution he came up with, I presented it to multiple states and they're like, this is brilliant, we've never seen anything like this. And so, his creative eye and being able to weld pieces of metal together to this problem, but then the recognition aspect of him saying, I want our team to be better. I did this for our team, spurred us to then have team recognition as well. So, his idea not only was a winner, it was almost like a double winner.

Debbi: Amazing.

Todd: And so that's really been super rewarding for us as an executive team, but also as leaders and seeing what folks do. The other example I will share with you is, we had a gentleman who has been with us for 36 years. So, an incredibly tenured person, he's an engineer and he presented a piece, truly it has changed the way we do business. It has changed the way we build bridges. It is a piece of equipment that makes us better at what we do.

When we told him or when I met with him and said, congratulations, you're a winner, he gets big tears in his eyes and he says, this has made my career. And I'm like, holy smokes, here's a person standing in front of me who has been a part of dozens of projects, dozens of different kinds of builds, different kinds of designs. And this is what's making his career is just that recognition.

And so what that does is then that spurs them to be more creative, that spurs them to look for more solutions for how do we get better and how do we do things differently. And they're not just run-of-the-mill solutions. They're truly... It's almost like the catalyst to their creative thought process of getting out of their own head or out of their own way or out of that prescriptive box of looking for better solutions.

And so I, again, harken back to watching people act or watching people dance and the fulfillment that you see in those folks when they get a standing ovation or when they're recognized for an amazing performance or whatever. It's almost like it's the gas that turns the car and engine and you see it, just that momentum and they become more successful and they become more creative and they become more dynamic.

And there's that real commonality there from something that is, no pun intended, as concrete as a bridge is to as non-concrete as watching somebody dance or watching somebody sing or watching somebody act. But it's really, really common in seeing that recognition pay off for people to be successful.

Debbi: And I think that whether it's on a stage or, you know, working in the projects that you're talking about, a lot of that has to do with the environment that's created, that's nurtured and fostered for them to feel free to do that, to be able to know they're going to be listened to, to know that they're able to put those things out there, to put either themselves out there or their art out there or their ideas. So how do you help to do that? How do you, as a leader, because it's so important in leadership, how do you help create that environment?

Todd: [13:16] Yeah. So that's, I wish I had like a really simple answer because, you know, I can be really trite and say, you know, you just trust or you trust and verify. But at the end of the day, as a leader, it's really important to allow yourself to be a sort of... Vulnerable is probably not the right word, but to some degree vulnerable and to some degree, allow yourself to get out of your own way and out of your own box.

To say, no, you know what, that's a great idea, but da, da, da, da, da, da, da, da, because we've always done it this way or I've always seen it this way or whatever. And it's interesting because I watch stuff about different leaders and I watched the thing, a snippet last night on Howard Hawks, movie producer of old, then worked with Bogart and McCall and all that stuff. And they talked about his leadership style was very, very quiet, but he also trusted his actors and doing what they thought was right.

And that really kind of struck to me similarly, going back to what I said, I really truly believe that folks are out there trying to do their absolute best. Somebody is not going out to really mess stuff up. They're trying to get it right and they're trying their best to do right. And that seemed to be very similar to just, if you trust the process and you trust what people are doing and you instill that, and you walk that walk of trusting them and you show them that you trust them, then it, again, just creates that environment that allows people to bounce around. I say in my, when I'm meeting with folks, that to use the roadway analogy, we have guardrails that we have to bounce in between, just like a car, unfortunately, they bounce in between to keep you safe.

For innovation and for process improvement, we've got certain guardrails that we bounce between. We know that we can't do something that goes against safety guidelines, but we can certainly bounce between, in those guardrails, to make what we're doing better and more efficient. And to trust folks to know where those boundaries are and to allow them to make mistakes in an environment that you're not gonna be the hammer that comes down on them.

One aspect I'm really proud to say is, in the three and a half years that we've been doing this, we've not had any situations where we've had to involve like a human resources thing. We haven't had anybody, to my knowledge, injured. We haven't had anybody laid off. We haven't had anybody fired. And so that's pretty cool, to allow people to bounce in that space in a safe environment where they know, hey, I can make mistakes and it's not going to be a career ender, so to speak.

Debbi: You mentioned that sometimes people don't like the result of what some of your department is doing. And I can imagine that having to do with construction and road work and those types of things, people also get frustrated. So, tell me a little bit about how you deal with some of those situations.

Todd: [16:41] I mean, yeah, you can't make everybody happy all the time, right? So that's a really hard question because we're dealing with internal forces. We're dealing with external forces, right? We're dealing with why has this lane been closed and I don't see any workers. Well, that's one thing. There are safety aspects there. But when you're talking about something that's going to programmatically change what we do, somebody has invested in... time into getting to the point where we're trying to change from. So they were on the first chain.

And so, I think the easiest way, which is not easy, is to involve people at the earliest stage when there's some sort of, I guess, conflict or disagreement or I don't like what we're doing is to give them the why behind it. The why isn't because this was bad or this was not a good idea or, I mean, the human animal does not like change. That's why we drive to work every day the same direction. Homeostasis is good. And so, you throw a detour up in front of somebody and oh my gosh. We like our comfort. And typically, when people disagree with something, you're moving them out of that comfort.

It's interesting to watch if you tell them the why behind it, then all of a sudden, they start looking for things that, oh, I understand the why behind it. Well, maybe I'll like that portion or this portion or this portion. That's been successful. I'm not saying it's successful 100% of the time, because there are times where you get really dug in on something and boy, that's tough. But information is a good thing and getting people included.

And a lot of times, the one thing that I have learned is that one thing that helps people understand and accept change is involvement. And to some degree, this is common across what we do, but also with arts, right? I've heard people say, oh, I just don't like opera. Oh my gosh, I just don't like opera. Well, how many operas have you seen? I've never been. Okay, well, really? Or I don't like X, Y, Z. And so, find a way to get the why behind it and get them exposed so that it's not so foreign to them or such a new experience to them.

Debbi: I think that those discussions and that experience and seeing other points of view like that go beyond what we're talking about, either in the arts or in your business, into life and how we interact as a community.

Todd: [19:28] Agreed. You know, I happened to be part of a conversation to look for a new music director at our church. And it's interesting, the conversation that we had at one of our meetings was one particular person said, you know, a Taizé service is just, it's just tough. It's tough for me to get through. I don't enjoy it. This is a person who is steeped in music tradition. It just doesn't, it doesn't do anything for me. Literally the person sitting next to them said, it's the most beautiful thing I've ever heard.

So they are coming from a very common spot and being part of, or have having been part of the Jacobs School. And I mean, wonderful musicians in and of themselves, but just this different perspective. And that's, that goes back to, everybody doesn't have to like the same things. And that is really, really important to remember as we are starting to move things towards change. But in life too, I mean, you gotta just sometimes allow yourself to be a little uncomfortable because sometimes the best things come from being uncomfortable and it can be a different way to work. It can be a different piece of music. It's really, sometimes it's hard to remember and it's hard to be on the other end when you want somebody to really, really like something and they're just continuing to push back to try to have that empathy to try to see their point of view.

Sometimes that's hard and that's hard in our world too. I've ridden on a paving machine. I've been on a paving job, but I don't know how to pave. So, when somebody comes to me and says, this is the best idea ever to pave a road, I'm like, okay. And so, it's allowing yourself that vulnerability.

Debbi: [21:21] So, I totally want to go in a new direction, somewhat. You were talking about when you were creating this environment at work where people can bounce around and try things and fail and learn from that and that that's healthy. And I'm thinking back to when we had younger kids and you were a coach, a baseball coach. So, talk about a place where that's a lesson, learning to fail and being okay with it and getting past that, that then, you know, no matter where they go in life, those are some of the lessons that pay off. So, tell me about that.

Todd: So as a coach and as a parent, you view failure very much differently than your player and/or your son, whom you're coaching. And so, you know, you have, again, it goes back to perspective, right? So, I can remember multiple times where we had been successful or, you know, won a game, gotten crushed, you know? I'm living every inning of it of, you know, why did we do this? Why would we do that? And seeing our players, we had kids who were like, man, it was a really pretty day. It was great. To, you know, we had some kids who

were just living, oh my gosh, I can't believe I struck out in the third inning on the, to, Hey, where are we going to go? Are we going to Applebee's? You know, just that whole spectrum of perspective, I guess.

But, you know, the cool part about that is that you see how kids, especially at the younger ages, they think that they want to do, Hey, I want to be a catcher. Okay, great. You know, and they put the gear on and they last four pitches and they're like, man, this stinks. I'm out 100%. Or they just, they enjoy just being on the team. They don't necessarily even give a rip about what is happening on the field.

So really the life lesson for me was, you know, not everything again, appeals to everybody, but, and how you deal with, I guess, successes and failures and seeing that through their eyes was a real lesson learned. And maybe that's helped me in this role too, in that. We've had folks who have had ideas that they've submitted and not worked, and they just said, well, you know what, this is not going to work. Similarly to, well, I tried pitching and I'm not good. And so I'm just not going to do it.

And so I wonder, I never really thought about it until you brought that up. I wonder if there's some sort of deep seeded, like, Hey, I'm dealing with this that way, because I learned that. But, um, watching kids have successes and failures, watching kids who literally ate, drank, breathed baseball to now, I don't want to have anything to do with baseball. I'm done. You know, it's, it's just a... You know, what you want right now may not be what you want down the road.

And that was, that became very evident pretty early on with some kids that, that I coached too. And kids, you know, again, I think that the human animal loves to be recognized and they love to be appreciated and there's nothing better than when there's the third out in the inning and the kid... And one of the kids who caught the fly ball, he comes in and you give him a high five, or you give him a pat on the back, give him a hug or whatever, that's pretty cool, and those are the memories that I think last certainly for me.

And some of the kids that I coach, I still see because they're friends with my son and they'll still talk about, Hey, do you remember when we da, da, da, da, da, da, da? Or, and some of those memories are really, really funny. And some of them are, you know, I can't believe we did that. I can't believe we lost here or whatever. Um, I think I grew as much doing that, if not more than any of the kids that I coached. Truthfully.

Debbi: I do think too, that there are other lessons of creativity in those experiences, even if it's just, um, collaboration. How we collaborate and how we work together, that's part of it. Then I'm thinking how creativity exists in the world of sports a little bit, um... You know, you have rules, just like we were talking about in dance or in, you know, building bridges, there are rules, but that within there, how do you express or how do you use creativity?

Todd: [26:24] Yeah. So, you know, as somebody who plays golf, I thought you might ask me this and, I think there's a lot of creativity that has to go into golf. And the reason why I say that is... I recently took a lesson from a guy who started off, he said, what's your goal? And I said, my goal is to hit the ball straight. He said, nobody hits the ball straight. He said, think about where you want it to start. Think about where you want it to stop. Okay. That's fair.

But I have said, and I have heard it said that I can play the same golf course every day for the rest of my life, and I won't have the same shot twice. And you have to be creative with what is given you. So, it could be the wind. It could be the grass is lying one way. You're on one side of the green. It's going to slope from left to right, right to left. You have to really look at what it's in front of you and be creative to solve that problem.

So that is really, to me, other than some of the things that are really in my opinion, tied to the arts, like figure skating or gymnastics or something like that, kind of a stick and ball, if you will, kind of a sport, where you really have to be creative and you really have to think, okay, this is the problem that's presented in front of me. And this is how I'm going to solve it. This is how I'm going to get the ball to the hole. I have to put it three feet to the left because I know it's going to break significantly to the right.

I think we see that in baseball to some degree, which they're getting ready to outlaw, which I'm all in favor of the shift in major leagues, where they shift infielders from one side of the infield to the other or whatever. I mean, that was pretty creative outside the box thinking for somebody who the first time, can you imagine just saying, okay, third base, you're going to go over into right field and you're going to play over there.

There's some of that out of the box thinking also that happens and, you know football to some degree as well. But I, I'm not nearly as familiar with that as I am with the sport of golf because truly that, where do you want it to start? Where do you want it to stop? is really different depending on what is in front of you. Do you have a

hole that, you know, you're standing on the tee box and that's a hard dog leg from left to right. You can't play the same shot that you're going to play on the next tee that is a hard right to left. You can't, it's just no good. So it is interesting because I do think there are parallels in sport that start leaking, you know, into the business world, but also vice versa, right? Did I answer your question?

Debbi: Absolutely.

Todd: Okay.

Debbi: And this brings me back... So I was talking to this fifth grader who plays tennis and just ask him about creativity. And he told me that he absolutely has to be creative in order to know how to hit the ball and win the point, and he had this whole breakdown of how he could anticipate what was gonna happen and I just thought that's brilliant. That's amazing, that... I think it's instinctive, you know, as we're learning the arts and sports and everything, but for him to understand that

Todd: Yeah, at a young age. You know, the epitome of golf is, you know, Jack Nicklaus, Tiger Woods— you pick the big names, but the thing that they have in common... And I think sometimes, if you don't love watching golf on TV, this can become very boring because there is so much preparation that goes into every single shot. They're looking at the wind, they're looking at the grass, they're looking at this.

Well, they're not doing a math problem in their head, they're trying to figure out. This is what's in front of me. Making a creative plan to have the best outcome, much like your point with winning a point in tennis, there's a lot of things that go into. If you're going to be successful. You have to consider and you have to have that create those creative juices start flowing of. This makes sense. I see it and there are times where on the golf course where I'll have a particularly hard shot or I've never really thought about it as far as being creative, I've heard it had people say that was pretty cool, that was pretty creative if you pull it off or whatever, but you start seeing it in your mind's eye before it actually happens. You start seeing the result of if the ball lands here, I know that it's going to hit twice, check up and move to the right or to the left.

And I think, again my experience watching ballet and being steeped in ballet through my daughter for so many years, she would see it in her mind's eye before she ever tied her ribbons. And I have seen her do this and you've, I'm sure, seen this in performers. I mean she would kind of close her eyes and almost visualize in her mind's eye what this is going to look like and then translate that from the abstract to the real. That happens in sport, and I think that happens in my world of concrete and asphalt and... People have to see it in their mind's eye, kind of start with the end in mind and then work to that and figure it out. And it's pretty cool when it works out. That doesn't mean there's not mistakes in between. That doesn't mean that a dancer doesn't fall, or an actor screws up a line, or you know, a batter in baseball strikes out. There's failures that happen. That just happens. It's just life.

Debbi: [31:55] And we're kind of talking about here, process as well. Right, very much that it's the process, not always the product, which is a whole, you know, other thing about creativity. So let me then just go ahead and ask you. When you're doing something, what is your creative process?

Todd: I laughed because I'm... I had to fill out, I had to fill out a kind of 'get to know you' questionnaire for a meeting that I'm getting ready to attend, and one of the questions was, what is a trait of yours that may drive your co-workers or friends crazy?

Debbi: Did you take a poll?

Todd: I should have called you. I asked a few people and there was one— is that, I'm kind of a big picture person. I think of—this is what I want to happen. I am not a great, fill in, fine line paint by numbers, itty bitty minute details... Let's just get to the end and that can be... It's a blessing and a bane, but for my creative process I know where I want to get and so I start working sort of backwards. Specifically talking about golf, I typically play the whole backwards.

So when I'm standing on the tee I figure out how do I want to get there, what do I want to, et cetera. And so it's a little bit unique. I think I've been told that's a little bit unique to go about things. Um, I give you an example in we have a situation with one particular innovation, that that was submitted and it's a fantastic idea, but getting to the finished product is... it's a reach, because there's just a lot of... It's just a lot, and I won't worry you with all the details, but my direction, if you will, to the folks, is build a final product and let's go from there and work backwards, almost like a trial and error piece.

But what that's taught us is those fine details, and taught me is that some of the stuff that we worry about, we don't need to worry about right now. And so, I don't know that that's necessarily my creative process, but it really does play a role of just, kind of that big picture and then start funneling it down. And the other piece, when people say the quirky trade is... man, I live for little small victories along the way as we kick to that final piece. Um, and you know, I think about. I think about from the sports aspect.

You know, my son didn't get up on the on the pitcher's mound and start throwing strikes immediately. So let's celebrate those victories of getting the ball just close. Let's start getting it close and start honing it in and celebrate those victories. So, I love those little victories. I love when you know something as simple as the coupler that's going to go on the hydraulic hose actually fits this time. That's awesome. Let's go, you know. Let's check it off. That's good. So, it's really kind of counterintuitive to think of the big picture and then celebrate those small pieces, but that's, that's how we... That's how I get there. That's my creative piece. Um, and you know, trial and error, a lot of times, is where I live. It's the world that I live in and I don't know. I was that way when I was an athlete. I hated practice. I was a play, I was a, I was a gamer. I hated, I hated practice, I hated it, hated it. But I was a gamer.

Debbi: Did you like the practice, Todd?

Todd: I hated it. It created, it created angst with coaches that I had, I will promise you. But it's just um, I don't know. It's just weird to think about, like I've never really thought about if I had to describe my creative process, that's, that's the best that I could come up with. Not a great process, probably. I probably make some folks crazy, but it sort of has worked for me, I guess.

Debbi: That's great. That's great.

Debbi: [36:01] So, Todd May, creative being, leader, father, baseball coach, ballet fan, dance team dad... What, what inspires you?

Todd: Ooh, um, you know... What inspires me is, I love to see people succeed. I guess. If I could put it in a nutshell, I'm trying to think of, trying to think of the... I mean, that really is that's kind of the secret sauce for me.

Debbi: Just to play devil's advocate, does that include the Yankees?

Todd: Um, you know what? I don't hate the Yankees. Um, I don't hate the Yankees. I don't love the Yankees, but I... You can share with a guy you may know who is a rabid Yankees fan that I have a side bet with somebody that Joey Gallo, being traded to the Los Angeles Dodgers, will be the world series MVP when the Dodgers beat the Yankees in the world series.

Debbi: Oh boy.

Todd: 'Cause crap like that happens in the world series and in baseball.

Debbi: Oh my. Honestly, though, that's a thing. We got to go up to Chicago with you and your family and my family and to a Wrigley Field, which was a new stadium for us. And, um, that's one thing about sports and about ballet or arts is that we can have these shared experiences. We don't have to be fans of the same club. We don't even have to know anybody on either team, honestly. But we can sit in a stadium and cheer, and sit in a concert and cheer and you know, just enjoy the experience and not knowing you know, the political beliefs of the person the next row over, or... We do have those commonalities. I think you had said 'commonalities' before in a different context, but it's so important.

Todd: Yeah, it is. And those commonalities, not to be too like super philosophical about the world we live in right now. I think we have forgotten how to live in those commonalities. We're living in the differences versus the commonalities. And that hurts my heart because commonalities is what moves us forward. And it's what, you know, allows us to be vulnerable, allows us to know what else is out there. To live in the differences is just, it limits your scope so much. You know, you think of, I think of when I was a kid, my parents had one rule about food, you had to try one bite. You didn't have to eat it all, you had to try one bite. And you might like it, you might hate it, but at least you've tried it. And I think in life, we forget that if you don't try something, you're never going to like it. And you're never going to expand your world, and you're not going to find those commonalities and grow your world. And we have a hell of a lot more in common with our folks, with our

fellow person that's sitting in that row next to us or in front of us, than we do differences. And it hurts my heart a lot.

Debbi: Yeah.

Debbi: All right. Well, this is the *Defining Creativity Podcast*, so my final question to you after this inspirational discussion is, what is your definition of creativity?

Todd: Okay, of all of the questions that you've asked me, this is the hardest one. You know what I do?

Debbi: You're welcome.

Todd: I have it highlighted on my little sheet that you sent me. You know, my definition of creativity is, regardless of the scope or the size of it, doing something that is new to you. And that, to me, can be as simple as taking a different route to work, to going back to going to an opera for the first time or going to a stage play the first time or going to a ballet or going to picket. That, to me, is as, I guess, a base definition as I can come up with for what I see as creativity is—no matter how big or small, doing something a little bit different is being creative, and that's how you grow. And that's how you grow your world and grow your people. So, and I don't mean just like people you work with.

Debbi: And those people, your people, all the people are lucky to have you because, man, I tell you, you're an inspiration. And I really appreciate this discussion.

Todd: All good, man. I'm honored to be asked. I really am. This has been cool. I've done podcasts, but not on creativity. But, just allowing me to kind of share and try to make a stretch between, like I say, concrete and asphalt to ballet that could be a real stretch for some folks that listen.

Debbi: The connections, that's the important thing. Between people, thoughts, ideas, things we do. That's what's important. That's why I'm doing this. I'm digging for it. Man, you laid up a lot of them for me today.

Todd: Oh, you're awesome.

Debbi: Appreciate those.

Todd: You're the best.

Debbi: All right. Well, thank you, Todd.

Todd: You're welcome. Anytime, anything I can do.

Debbi: That's a wrap for Episode 11, my discussion with Director of Innovation and Process Improvement for the Indiana Department of Transportation, Todd May. I'm so grateful for Todd and for you, the audience, for tuning in. Additional thanks to August Fackler for composing and recording the music. Join me next time as I talk creativity with the Chief Sales Officer of a niche company that provides services to insurance companies and supermom from Jacksonville, Florida, Brooke Ivey. Meanwhile, be open to possibilities, make connections, and embrace your creativity however it manifests itself in you.