

**EPISODE 77**

[INTRODUCTION]

**[00:00:04.1] ANNOUNCER:** Welcome to the Creative Empire Podcast. Each week, Reina Pomeroy, the life and biz success coach, and Christina Scalera, the attorney for creatives, are taking you up close and personal with successful influencers in the creative community and tackling your biggest business hurdles. Their mission is to help you, creative entrepreneurs, think beyond your daily biz so you can make the brave decisions that build your Creative Empire.

[INTERVIEW]

**[00:00:35.4] RP:** Welcome back for another episode of the Creative Empire Podcast. We are hoping that you are enjoying these episodes, and that you're learning from all of our incredible guests. Christina and I have been enjoying bringing you these episodes and talking to these awesome industry experts. Today though, Christina and I are talking to none other than Shay Cochrane.

Shay was a wedding and portrait photographer for eight years before she felt her passion and her creativity beginning to wane, and after a lightbulb moment in Home Goods — love Home Goods — she made an almost overnight decision to jump head first into the unknown world of styling and product photography. Super bravely, right? You've seen her work, and I almost feel silly telling you this introduction, because her work — I feel like — speaks for itself.

She deleted eight years of wedding photography off of her website, landed her first commercial client, and has never looked back. In her words, she's really found that organic creative authenticity that has always seemed to be missing from her work as a photographer, and she's found the work that her heart truly loves, which is such a great thing.

I got the chance to meet Shay at Creative at Heart Conference in July in Denver, and she is the most encouraging and gracious woman. It was such an honor to meet you then, Shay, and it's such an honor to introduce you to our Creative Empire Podcast audience. So welcome!

**[00:01:50.1] SC:** Oh my goodness, that was such a kind introduction! I am so excited to be here with you guys.

**[00:01:55.5] RP:** So I know our audience just adores your work, and we want to ask you all about how your business has grown into the thing that it is now. Can you give us a little bit of the behind the scenes of what's happening right now in your business?

**[00:02:09.9] SC:** Yeah, what's happening right now is that my business is made up of two parts, and they both contribute about 50% to the overall revenue that's generated. Half of that work would be commercial work that is done directly for clients, commercial client work; and then the other half of what I do in my little 14 hours a week that I have to work on businesses is the Stockshop I created to be a small off-shoot of what I was doing for my commercial clients.

When I started, I think it was in 2013, towards the end of 2013 when I shot my very first commercial product. I did my first styling and commercial product shoot for Emily Ley. I had the idea, along with a client of mine currently who was like, "You know, it would be really awesome if you could somehow provide the masses with professionally styled, beautiful imagery without them having to make the big-girl investment that you make maybe a few years into your business of having custom commercial photography done".

So that was just the inspiration that I needed to get me started with the Stockshop, which was again, just supposed to be sort of a small off-shoot of what I was already doing for clients, but available to the masses and scalable. Like I could then take what I was creating and make it available to larger quantities of people at a much smaller investment. So still, now we're a few years into it, and when I'm talking to my husband about maybe how the Stockshop has become overwhelming or something like that. He's still like, "Isn't that like a small part of your business?" and I have to remind him like, "No baby, it's actually a whole 50% of my business now." It's taking over.

So I say all of that to say that I didn't set out to necessarily do this. I didn't even have the idea of the Stockshop on my radar when I first started, but it has evolved to meet what I saw were the needs of both my existing clients, and those I wanted to serve but didn't know how to, because the price tag wasn't a good fit for them in the first or second or third year of business.

So I find myself where I am today, not as a result of a great plan, or a very strategic goal-setting, but sort of a lot of listening and trying to match up what I felt I was able to do in this season of life with what I saw to be a need in the industry.

**[00:04:17.0] RP:** I love that you said both of those things, your season of life, and the need in the industry. The conversation I think we're about to unfold is about how you've become, or your business has become this industry leader, and you are such a powerhouse in this, but it didn't start there, right? We always forget where it actually started when we see people like you. So how did it start in terms of standing out, keeping the noise out from all the people around you, and the things that other people around you were doing?

**[00:04:49.6] SC:** Well, I have to say, I think I had it a little bit easy in the sense that when I was making that transition out of wedding and portrait photography and into product photography, there weren't a whole lot of people around me who were doing it. So that is easier than trying, let's say, being a wedding photographer and trying to set yourself apart. I had some help there when I transitioned from wedding and portrait into product photography.

I at least didn't know a lot of other people that were doing it. So that helped. I didn't have a lot of people to compare myself to. I didn't really know of other people that were doing it. I knew of a lot of wedding and portrait photographers that would maybe help a friend out and shoot their product sometimes, but nobody that was doing just that, and partnered with the fact that that worked really well for me in that season of life.

I just had my second daughter, so I had two little girls. I was done with the high amount of energy, and concentration, and creativity that was required, and physical time required to be a wedding photographer. That wasn't a good fit anymore for that season of life. So in transitioning to product photography, all I really had to go off of was what I liked, what I enjoyed, what was aesthetically pleasing to me, and the fact that products were inanimate and very easy to work with.

Early on, I think some of the things that maybe were differentiators without me even realizing it was trying very quickly to get a sense of what my personal style was going to be in the work that

I was creating, and just trying to pay very close attention to what I liked. What my actual aesthetic preferences were. That happened most simply on Pinterest. When I first decided that I wanted to start dabbling in portrait photography, I got on Pinterest, and I started looking around at styled images, and I just started pinning everything that looked pretty to me.

Then what I ended up doing was going back through that board and looking for the similarities. What were the things I was most consistently drawn to and why? Were there color pallets? Was it a particular type of styling? That helped me really identify — almost immediately — that I really loved overhead shots, which is like a signature of what I do now as flat lays. I think now they are called flat lays, I don't know, but overhead shots, images that are created from like a bird's eye view.

Just from the simple work of creating a Pinterest page of images in general that I was noticing, okay, a lot of these are shot from overhead, a lot these are very minimalist, a lot of these are bright. They're on white backgrounds. They're not dark, and moody or dramatic. They're more just fun, and happy, and bright, and airy. In solidifying that style early on, I think I was able to get a little bit of leg up. Like you said so sweetly, my work became very recognizable very quickly.

So I think not trying to dabble in too many different things — and I did dabble a little bit. I experimented with darker images, and I experimented with children's themed things, and even with — from a commercial perspective, the different type of products that I would shoot, but I would say that the faster I identified what really was my own personal preference and aesthetic and really just stuck to that, the more fun I had. The better work I produced, and the more easy it was to recognize and identify in other people.

So I ended up getting the attention of the clients that were automatically going to be the best fit, who knew and loved my work, and then I could just do what I was already really enjoying and doing the best at. So I think to summarize that long-winded answer, a big part of it was just identifying a very clean style, and not trying to be everything to everyone. Identify where I thrived creatively, and was inspired creatively, and really just going 100% in that direction.

**[00:08:15.8] CS:** I just realized I am staring at the background of my computer and it's one of your images that I bought.

**[00:08:22.0] RP:** Yes.

**[00:08:22.6] CS:** Yeah, it's funny because I've actually talked a lot about you with different people, and mostly your work obviously, and so anyway, all that to say is one of the things that we've always talked about is that no matter what other people might pop up in the industry, I can always tell when it's your photo. I don't know what it is about your photos, but I can always tell that that's an SC Stockshop photo, even before I see that it's attached to your name.

I don't know how you do it, and I don't want you to tell us, but you're right. The whole bright white theme is gorgeous, but it's also very — I'm a trademark attorney, like without calling it a trademark, it really is one of your signature styles. It's interesting, because you've built this aesthetic that no one seems capable of replicating, both in styling and in the way that you shoot, and I think it's really unique.

One of the things that I encounter, as someone who deals with copyright and trademark infringement all day, is people that are really upset that other people are taking their work, and often times, it's just too expensive to go after the infringers. It's too expensive to sue or something like that, but at the same time, you reminded me a lot of — and I know I have used her as an example on the show before — but Anna Rifle Bond, who really pioneered a genre of creativity if you will.

And so it's really interesting, because even though copycats or whatever you want to call them might pop up, your style is at the forefront of the industry because you're the innovator, and you're continuing to innovate, and continuing to build, and I guess I didn't know until five, I don't know, 15 minutes ago that you only worked two days a week, which is incredible. So what are some of the things that you're able to do, maybe outside of work, that bolster this creativity that you're talking about?

Because that is something that a lot of us struggle with is calling ourselves creatives, and embracing that side of our business, because I mean I'm sure you remember the days when it was working until 10:00, and where does this creativity, where does this white space, where

does this fun stuff come in? I'm working all the time on my business, not in it, so what does that look like for you, Shay?

**[00:10:29.4] SC:** Well, to be very honest with you, this is an area that is really a struggle for me is making the time to refill creatively. So really, I can tell you what are the right answers. I can tell you the answers about how they get creative inspiration and how they make room for that, because it really is so essential, but again, to be very honest with you, even as a portrait photographer and wedding photographer of eight years before I started doing this, I would not have called myself a creative.

And I still struggle with that. That's something I've grown into in the last few years, but I always looked at myself as entrepreneur, and just sort of a lover of owning a business more than I even loved the art of photography, which was the thing that gave me away to myself overtime as I started to realize that my heart is really not in this. On a certain level, I have always accepted that — at least as it related to portrait and wedding photography — I loved having a business, but I never looked at myself as an artist or creative. Part of that maybe was because that really wasn't the space for me.

I did okay in it, but I don't know that I generated anything like really organic, and authentic, and contributed it to the world. I just was able to technically replicate what I saw around me, which is how a lot of people — that is a space that is easy to be stuck in, in your early years, and you do have to just work through that. We all probably go through that. So I say all that to say that the creative process is one that I am still trying to refine.

I only work 14 hours a week right now, so two days a week, Tuesdays and Thursdays, because my kids are still little and I have to pay for day care. I think if I have to work anymore than two days a week, I won't creatively thrive in it, and if I do too much of it, I will probably start to hate it. So even within that, I also limit the number of clients that I take each month. I really only take two commercial clients each month max, and if I take any more than that, I will not love that work anymore.

So for me, it has been a fine line with both wedding work, and then now with commercial work and styled stock, to find that line where I'm doing just enough of it to stay sharp, and to stay

interested in it, and to be producing new work, but not so much that I start to just feel creatively tired in it. Even within the clients, I have some reoccurring clients that I'm shooting for them, and I will say as it relates specifically to product photography, and to specifically to styling and creativity there, I draw a lot of creativity from what I am actually working with.

So the actual products that I am working with, their color pallets are inspiring to me, the textures that they're using, the direction that the client likes to go in, all of those little scraps of information are what I need to creatively thrive. Remember what show is it, Design Star, where they had like the white room challenge? I would have like, died in that. I could never do the white room challenge, where you just go into nothing and create something.

I really have to have the product, and the colors, and the textures, and the backstory, and the direction that they want to go in, in order to produce something truly creative. So very practically, my creative process does still involve Pinterest. I wish it involved doing walkabouts in nature, or whatever other people seemed to have time to do, but it doesn't. My work space and my work time is in an office that is not pretty or inspiring. So that's not a very helpful answer for you.

**[00:13:43.6] RP:** I think it's a really realistic answer, and I think that for — I am thinking back to my wedding planning days, when I used to sit in my cubicle at work and do planning, because my wedding planning was on the fly, and so whenever I had a break I would do that, and this is like just as Pinterest was starting. So I would do that stuff. I think that your honesty and transparency is actually really helpful, so thank you for that.

**[00:14:09.9] SC:** And I think there is an element of it that when you're forced to just get in there and do it, in an ideal situation resort to what is maybe most authentically you. So for example, I could pull a bunch of images, and create this beautiful nude board, and then I could set out to create an image, and there's a good chance that maybe that image is going to end up looking a lot like one of those images that I am looking at presently on my nude board.

Versus, in all honestly, most shoot days, all I have time for is to just set up my stuff as fast as possible, and start shooting as fast as possible, and I have a client's shoot brief and however extensive that is, and I can work off of that, and sometimes I have nothing and I just have to go. Because I have a short period of time to create a lot of things in.

What that forces me to do is just dig deep, and do the best I can with the ideas that I have in my head, with the things I have in front me, and what comes out continues to at least be consistent, and continue to at least be creative from a place of authenticity. I don't have this beautiful, amazing, and incredible creative process. I am just reaching down deep and doing the best I can with whatever ideas are in my brain, and sometimes it works out great and sometimes it doesn't.

**[00:15:20.2] RP:** I see a lot of your work, and I feel like it's always beautiful. So — I don't know, I appreciate your honesty though, because I think that not every creative process can be beautiful or out in the woods and doing your retreat. That's not real life, but I think that even from this place, you create beautiful things. You are an innovator, because — Christina said this already, you created this industry essentially, and how do you keep that noise out?

I know that there are so many more copycats that Christina deals with all the time where industry innovators are being copied, and their work is being violated, I guess, in some way. How do you not let that get you down, or how do you maybe not, I don't know, how do you keep it out of your way?

**[00:16:04.8] SC:** You know, that is something that I never saw coming in a million years. I just didn't see that coming when I first started this, and I remember the very first time somebody emailed me and was like, "Hey, somebody else is producing work, and it really looks exactly like yours. Maybe you should do something about it." I remember my heart just sinking. I felt bad, and scared, and oh my gosh, what's going to happen to my business and what do I do?

Do I write her an email, what do I do? Do I drag, do I come up with some fake lawyer paper and send her a really official looking letter? So these moments are panic moments, and unfortunately — and I tried, I actually did with the very first girl that really started copying what I was doing, I reached out to her and I did my very best, and she was just like, "I'm going to do what I'm going to do". So I had to make a decision right then, like am I going to chase down every person that does this?



I tried, I did try with the first one, and then it was the second one, and the third one, and the fourth one, and the fifth one, and they kept coming and coming. Now if you go into Etsy, there's 150 styled stock shots or something, probably and counting, and so I had to decide early on that I was just not going to pay attention to it. I had to be really firm with myself. So what that very practically looked like was that, and this is just how I pursue business in general.

I really only have enough time to keep my head down and do the work that's in front of me, so I don't follow a lot of people. I'm really not clued in on a lot of the awesome things going on in the industry. I am not connected to a bunch of really awesome people, and that is good and bad, and sometimes I regret that I am not more connected, and I don't have more time in my work week to make and foster these relationships, and connections, and keep my eyes out, and be more on top of what's happening in the industry as a whole.

Sometimes I wish I had more time for that, but most weeks, I'm glad that I'm limited in my time. It really means that I have to focus in really tightly. Practically, that means I am not going where anybody else that sells styled stock is going. I'm not on Etsy looking at what other people are doing. I see it, I obviously I see it, especially as the industry grows, I see more and more styled stock work being produced.

Some of it is really beautiful, and I always really appreciate when people do work that is completely different from mine, not just because it's completely different from mine, but because I have only really serviced a small niche within the industry. So I am producing only really one type of work for a client. There's a hundred off-shoots of styled stock that anyone could come in and really excel at, and so I love it when I see someone doing something that's really different, like producing more dark dramatic styled stock, or something that has a more organic feel, or something that is more masculine, or anything like that. That's where I think some of these, if they want to do styled stock, really has a chance to excel.

So to answer your question, I think what it meant for me, and what it continues to mean every day, is keeping my head down in general about business, and just looking at the work in front of me. I'm not really on Facebook. I'm not in these groups. I'm not in forums, I don't know, are people still in forums?

Maybe that is an outdated concept. I just have to really keep my head down, and I really have to completely ignore the other work that I see, the work that I see other people are doing, because I will instantly be discouraged by it. I would still feel like theirs is better, or I am just like every other creative who sees somebody else's work, and it's just different enough that you feel like I should just close up shop, this person is doing such a better job.

We are used to seeing the world a certain way, so when we do something within that creative space, it looks very normal to us. The stuff that I'm producing looks very normal to me. It doesn't look amazing, so you could pretty much show me any other styled stock that someone else does and I'm like, "Oh they're so good. I don't know what am I doing." I fall party to the same thing. But like you said, I keep my head down. I don't pay attention to it.

I did have to decide early on am I going to go after all these people that are trying to do the same thing as I am, or even reproducing the exact same images, with the exact same props, and the exact same placements, because I have dealt with all of that stuff. Either I can spend a chunk of my very precious 14 hours a week sending out cease and desist letters — that's probably not even the right terminology — but sending out letters and consulting with my lawyer about this, or I can just try to produce the very best work that I can.

I cannot produce it as fast as some of these people. I cannot produce this as much variety as some of these shops can produce, but I can just try to do me to the very best of my ability, and try to keep good as I can, and try to keep listening to my clients and our Stockshop customers as closely as possible to try to meet the specific needs that they're asking for. I do a much better headspace if I do that than if I try to really pay attention to other people and stay ahead of what other people are doing.

[BREAK]

**[00:20:52.4] CS:** Do you a business that serves other businesses? We would love to feature you as a sponsor on our podcast. Each week, our episodes reach thousands of listeners, and they are hungry and eager for the solutions that you would provide. If you would be interested in advertising with the Creative Empire Podcast, we would love to have you. All you have to do is jump on over to [creativeempire.co](http://creativeempire.co), that's [creativeempire.co](http://creativeempire.co), and learn more about becoming a

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[INTERVIEW CONTINUED]

**[00:21:29.3] CS:** I'm sure, and if I can be so bold, I think it's like Coke. Anybody can make Coca-Cola tasting soda. They have the secret recipe locked up or whatever, but it's been done over and over where people have reversed engineered, and this recipe taste exactly like Coke. But if they were to go out there and try to sell products, it would never work for them. Coke has one of the most recognizable brands and trademarks in the entire world. I think it's number one or two on the most recognizable, and so I want to be so bold as to say that is you in this industry with the flat-lays.

**[00:22:04.3] SC:** That's really sweet.

**[00:22:06.2] CS:** No, I'm serious. I feel like if somebody tried to reverse engineer it, it's not possible because of the brand and the following that you've built surrounding it. I can think of other people that do what you do. I can't think of their names. I mean, I can vaguely picture maybe what their logo looks like, but if someone asked me, "Where do you get your styled stock from?" I say, "SC Stockshop."

I know what that is, I hear from you on a weekly basis. I follow you, I see what you are doing on Instagram, and I think it's because you have created this entire brand around your product that you have continued to enjoy success. To be honest, earlier this year, I was interested in what would happen, because I hadn't seen any competitors before and now, it's like you recognize all of these people popped up. I have been really impressed with everything that you have done, and that you have maintained the integrity of the quality and the pricing of your work.

Because it's definitely higher quality from what I have seen, and the prices do reflect that, and again, you've done a really good job of making it accessible for people with some sales every once in a while as well. It's not like if you're just starting out, it's totally inaccessible. And your free images. I forgot about that on your newsletter list.

**[00:23:18.4] RP:** I was going to say too, Shay, our listeners are maybe newer, and they're probably where Shay was eight years ago, or whenever you started.

**[00:23:28.2] SC:** Three years ago.

**[00:23:29.3] RP:** Three years ago, right. When you were still in that wedding and portrait photographer eight year space, I think that was what I was trying to refer to, and trying to find their differentiator, trying to find their "it thing", whatever their Etsy Stockshop is for themselves, and they're frustrated, and they're wanting to be seen or be recognized for the work that they're producing. Do you have any words of encouragement, or any practical advice on maybe how to find that, or find their secret sauce, whatever that might look like?

**[00:23:29.3] SC:** Yeah, it makes me think of — I think that there are some questions that I handed out, Reina, at Creative at Heart that might be helpful. Maybe I can give you guys those to give out as a little worksheet or something attached to this, and that might help people work through some of these questions. I think in a nutshell, it has to do with a few things. It has to do with — and let me preface this, you don't find out probably the thing that you are meant to do six months into owning a business, or even two years into owning a business.

**[00:24:35.3] CS:** You don't?

**[00:24:36.5] SC:** Or make in a year — owning a business. I think you're right. I think Christina's got a point, everybody is looking for their thing, like their breakthrough thing. I just want to encourage them that my breakthrough thing, if we're going to call it that, came eight years into being a business owner, and a creative, and a photographer, and I had no clue that I even wanted to do this. So even if I had sat down with the right set of questions and asked myself the right prompt 10 years ago, if I had ever asked myself these questions, I wouldn't have ended up at styled stock photography and commercial product photographer.

So I say all of that to say that there's just a certain element of it that comes with time, and you just have to give it time. You have to try a lot of different things, and you have to decide what you enjoy, and what you don't enjoy, and what you're good at, and what you're not good at, and that's going to change based on your season of life and your personal interest.

So there's no easy answer to that question for developing or uncovering your secret sauce. It just takes time. The secret sauce or the trick to that, the key to that would be sticking with it. Sticking with yourself long enough to happen upon it through doing the hard work, being in the right place, trying new things. If you're not trying, and if you're scared, and if you're like, "I don't want to do anything unless I know that it's going to succeed", then you're not going to stumble upon your secret sauce, your thing, your breaks, your new thing. It's through doing the work and just showing up, and trying and trying the new things that you actually have the chance to even stumble upon what really is a great fit for you.

So that's just a word of encouragement, that doesn't come easily or quickly, and there isn't a certain set of questions you can ask yourselves to help that uncover that necessarily, but I will say that it will probably have to do with a little bit about your strengths, potentially. Who you are, where you come from, the things that are sort of your soap box topics, the things that are just of general interest to you that maybe have nothing to do with your work. One link between who I am and what I do now is that I grew up in a home with parents that loved to garden.

They just loved the vegetable garden. My mom had us out there vegetable gardening and floral gardening at a very early age. Now, I would have felt that was completely irrelevant piece of information as I am trying to build a business, but one of my clients was astute enough to point out that, "Oh, it makes perfect sense that you love styling and product photography, because you love working with your hands. I've heard you talk about loving gardening, and that you love working with your hands." So that was a connection that I would have never made.

But in retrospect, it's there. I do love working with my hands. Specifically, I love gardening, so I will say that I think it probably will have something to do with your story. What you're best at, and that is a really only going to come from trying a lot of things that you're not best at. So it's going to take just doing a lot of work, and a lot of different types of work, to stumble on something that your client really loves, and maybe you really, really love doing it, and you're like, "Dude, I should do a pretty awesome job at this", and then you push into that a little bit farther.

So that will come with time. That will come with trying new things, and that will change with your season of life, so there's no simple answer to that. But it is worth just showing up and doing the

creative work until you find that breakthrough moment where you've produced something that you felt like was authentic. That you really loved to do, that was unique to you or the way you see the world, and that your clients or the industry really found to be valuable, because obviously, in order for something to be very successful and be an overnight success, it has to be actually be meeting a need in the industry.

So it has to be something that people want to buy, or it has to be meeting an actual need for them, and there's going to be a lot of things that you try as a creative and a small business owner that might be great. It might be really awesome, and it might have to do with your story, and that might have to do with what you're best at, but it doesn't meeting a need that is valuable enough that clients will pay for it. Again, that will just take time and a lot of listening to realize, "Oh this would be really helpful. This solves a real problem", and I think when you marry those two things, that strong industry need and that problem solving with that thing that you're really good at, and the thing that you really loved, that's when you really see exponential success.

**[00:28:39.9] RP:** Amen to that. First of all, I want to say, you kept saying trying things. Trying things that — trying things means that you're willing to not succeed, right? And it sucks as a creative to not succeed, but if you are opening yourself up to that opportunity, I feel like that means that you are willing to also fail. So I want to hear a little bit about that, and then also, just the fact that you have to — as a creative, or any kind of business owner, that you have to fill a need. What is your view on failure?

**[00:29:12.1] SC:** It's essential. Obviously, we never set out to fail, and we don't set out to pursue projects that we know we're not going to do a good job at, and I think that is an important thing to note, because even to this day, I don't take projects that I don't think I'm going to be able to do a good job at. I don't think we just haphazardly try everything, and I don't think that's fair to potential clients that we take on projects that maybe we really genuinely might not be a good fit for. So I think there's something about having the discernment to say, "No, I really don't think I'm the best person for you".

I have to say that a lot. I really don't think I'm the best fit for this project, and I don't want to waste their money, and I don't have time to waste doing a project that would be really experimental for me all the time. So I think to a certain extent, we want to be discerning about

the projects that we take on, and we don't want to put our clients in a position where they're going to be wasting their time or money while we play around and experiment, but with that said, failure is essential.

If our identity is not caught up in who we are as a business owner, or as a creative, we're going to have a much easier time bouncing back after "failure" than if our whole identity is really based on getting this business thing right, and it's really based on what other people think of us, and whether or not other people perceived us as really knowing what we're doing and where we're going. Part of the ability to withstand failure comes from having a strong sense of self and a strong sense of identity that doesn't have anything to do with the works that you are maybe trying to do, or the business that you are trying to build. That's going to provide a very firm foundation.

If you say, "You know what? These are things that I am trying, and this is not who I am." Etsy Stockshop is not who I am, commercial photographer is not who I am. So let's say I fail at it, fine. That's a tiny little piece of who I am, so I'm free to move on. I am free to try something new. If I am not enjoying the work anymore, I'm free to move on and do something else, because it's not who I am. It's just a part of who I am, or really, it's just something that I am producing. It's a part of what I am creating and participating in. I think when you have that perspective it makes it feel easier.

I think that it's helpful the more honest you can be about each project, and about the potential failure of a project, the faster you will move through those stages of just hitting a wall, and that was okay but I didn't do great, and I think the more that we could stop and take the time to say, "Did I do a really good job at this, and if I did, what was good? And if I didn't, what really didn't go well? Was it the type of client? Was it the type of work? Was it the time of day? Was it how many other projects I had taken?" All of those play a part in what ends up being potentially failure.

The sooner we can acknowledge these things, and take a breath and say, "That didn't go well, and I'm just going to go ahead and say no to the next opportunity that comes along that's like that", I think the better off we'll be. Failure is a normal part of the business though. I can make a list for you, and really, what would be even more interesting is if you saw the logos that I have

designed for all the random little off-shoots of business that I've tried to start. It's laughable, but it's just a part of it, and if it doesn't define you, it's not going to be that big of a deal. It's just trying something until you find a good fit for you.

**[00:32:32.6] CS:** Definitely. I don't think I could say it any better myself, so I'm not going to try, but Shay, as we move forward this year, what does your creative empire start to look like? This year, or maybe in three years, what would you hope for in your business?

**[00:32:48.7] SC:** It's not a very impressive answer. I hope that I really still like what I'm doing. I hope that it's still fun, and I hope that it is still contained. So what that looks like for me is that I will always be looking very carefully at the projects that I take, making sure that they're still a good use of my time in terms of profitability, that they're still fun for me creatively, that I continue to enjoy the work, and that's really all I know. I know that those are the things that I am pursuing. That it's fun, that it's contained. I really don't want to work more than two days a week.

That, again, is my creative threshold, and it's just the way it fits into life right now. I really don't want to take more than two days a week. So I want to have these other days for family, and for personal time, and friendships, and things like that. I want to keep it contained, so I am always trying to sort of like — It feels like I am containing a beast. Last year, I described my whole year as I'm trying to lay track in front of a runaway train. It felt like a runaway train, and I did not know what to do or where I was going. I was literally just trying to lay track in front of it fast enough.

That described last year, and this year, it hasn't felt exactly like that. It took a little bit of a refining to make sure that it stays fun for me. I don't know, that's not like a very impressive answer, but that is my answer. So within that, and I don't know what I'll be doing three years from now. I don't know that I'll have a Stockshop three years from now. If it's still fun, then yes, I hope I will, but if it's not fun anymore, if it gets too big or just too stressful, I don't know what I'm going to do with it.

**[00:34:26.3] RP:** I love that. It's a reminder for us to have fun.

**[00:34:29.5] CS:** Yeah.



**[00:34:30.3] SC:** Yeah, I guess if I don't love the work then we're all screwed, and so I need to maintain a sweet spot where I love the work and have fun doing it. Otherwise, my family will suffer, I will suffer, my clients will suffer, the work will suffer. It will just all suffer. So my goal is fun. Keep it fun. Beyond that, I don't know. I don't know how big it will be. I don't know what types of work I'll be doing. I really try to hold it all with a very open hand, and that's it. It's not very strategic.

**[00:35:00.2] CS:** Yeah, it might not be strategic sounding to you, but it actually sounds like more of a plan than I've heard most people have, and I know I am personally looking forward to whatever that future empire of yours looks like. I know that — just knowing who you are, and how dedicated you are to your family and to your own wellbeing — I know that it's going to be something really beautiful for you, and for them, and maybe for us too, but that's to be determined. If it's not, that's okay. We'll be sad, but we'll get over it.

**[00:35:31.0] SC:** Well, I think one of the keys — just to encourage everybody — I think that if you're looking around and you're saying, "What should be the next step for me?" Or maybe you feel like you're in the cusp of something, but you're just not sure how to go about it, or how to pursue it, or how to expand it, I think the more that you can develop a routine for listening to your clients, they're going to give you a lot of instruction for maybe what the future will look like.

Now obviously, we don't let our clients and potential clients determine what our business would look like. There's a lot of suggestions that I get every day for the Stockshop, "would you create this kind of work or that kind of work?" and the answer is always going to be the same. A very sweet, "No, I am not a great fit for that." I fortunately don't have to say no to everybody, but we get a lot of requests, and we constantly have to filter through.

They say that listening to your audience, and asking a lot of questions, and just continuing to try to get to what is at the heart of their needs and their pain points. Asking then what their pain points are. It's easier to talk about this in tangible examples. Let's say you want to write a book, and you maybe have a little bit of concept, but you're not exactly sure if people will buy it, or maybe what the angle is going to be.

You want to do a lot of market research. Facebook questions, and talking to your friend,s and family, and dialoging, and listening to the words that they use, and listening to them describe what are their biggest frustrations related to whatever it is you're hoping to talk about, looking at what other holes that you see in the industry, what isn't already been talked about, that is going to be the best map and field guide for maybe where your business should go.

So as we look at the Stockshop for 2017, I don't have any plans except for getting over the Stockshop survey. Hundreds of responses that we've gotten, and asking more questions, and just trying to listen and listen and listen, and then pair up those requests that I am getting with things I feel like I am good at.

So for those listeners who are in the first few years and are just trying to do this, I don't know, should I sell prints next year? Should I offer this service or not offer this service? Should I expand in this area? You'll see more success if you're able to listen, and ask a lot of questions, and allow that to determine what you end up doing versus saying, "I want to do XYZ next year", I want to write a book about this, or I want to launch this product, or I want to launch this service.

You're going to see more success sooner the better listener you're able to be as you make plans for the future.

**[00:37:47.7] CS:** Yeah, for sure, and as you're looking to your future — and we're looking at it as well — we see a lot of speaking engagements for you on the horizon. I just saw you announced you're going to be speaking at Pursuit, and I know you've done a lot of speaking in the past. If people want to find you offline, if people want to find you online, where can they find you?

**[00:38:05.7] SC:** The best place to find me is on Instagram. I'm on Instagram. I mean come on, that's pretty much where we all are most days. I'm on Instagram as Shay Cochrane, and the Stockshop is on Instagram as SC Stockshop. So that's a fun place to keep a — and then my commercial site is just shaycochrane.com, and the Stockshop is scstockshop.com. Those are the normative places to find me.

I will be doing a few speaking engagements next year, but not many. Pursuit is the only one that's solid on the books, and then there's a few others, but as that stuff comes up, you'll hear about that on Instagram. So I would say let's be Insta-friends.

**[00:38:45.8] CS:** Yeah, for sure. Thank you so much for coming on today, Shay. I know that everyone is going to get so much value out of all of the wise words you had to talk to us today, and I want you all listening to go out there and build your own creative empires. Tag us on Facebook @mycreativeempire. Let us know what you were building in your life today, we would love to see it. Thank you all, thank you Shay.

**[00:39:08.3] SC:** You're welcome. Thank you guys.

[END OF INTERVIEW]

**[00:39:12.0] ANNOUNCER:** Are you ready to build your own empire? For more information, show notes, downloads, and tips on how to do it, head to [www.creativeempire.co](http://www.creativeempire.co), where you can find out more about this week's episode and the two lovely ladies behind it all, encouraging you to build your own creative empire.

If you enjoyed this week's show, it would mean so much to Reina and Christina if you could take two minutes to go to iTunes and leave a review. It's a little thing that makes a big difference for the show.

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