

Taryn Southern - Creator Series - 11-11-2020 - audio_only_

Taryn Southern

There we go. Excellent. So good. It's great to see you. And thanks for being so flexible Eric on the timing.

Eric Koester

Absolutely. We're so glad to have you and I love the bullhead right above you here.

Taryn Southern

I might be in Texas.

Eric Koester

Turns out. You just might, huh?

Taryn Southern

If for any reason there's any internet problems, I will join via my cell phone with a cellular data. I haven't used video here at this.

Eric Koester

You look perfect. You look wonderful. Well, thank you so much again for hanging out. And I'm glad to see you. And it's been a while since we caught up and this is a good opportunity to connect here and everything. How are you? It's been a crazy 2020. How are you? So many things going on here that we could probably talk for like six hours here. But generally, how are you managing 2020 with all the things going on personally and globally?

Taryn Southern

Yeah. It's been an interesting year for sure. I mean, I think everyone's had their own bizarre experience with COVID in some form or another. As you

know, Eric mine is probably a little unique, and I was forced to quarantine for about nine months prior to the actual quarantine that happened. So, this week is my one-year remission mark for breast cancer.

Eric Koester

Congratulations. Bob, for those of you, the inside joke here is the Taryn named the lump 'Bob'. The lump in your breast was named Bob. And so, we all were like 'Anti bob' for a long time.

Taryn Southern

Yeah, yeah. My friends actually made a book that, pardon my friends, but it was 'The fuck Bob book'. And it was all about destroying Bob. And we destroyed Bob, we did it. So, Bob is no more. And I feel great. In many ways, as frustrating as COVID was, because it basically happened right on the tail end of me finishing radiation, and I was ready to re-enter the world. The world had other plans. But it's actually been a really nice year for me to collect myself and really focus on my health and my energy and what kinds of creative projects I want to focus on for the next bit of time. So, it's been really nice, actually.

Eric Koester

And I said this to you before, I've been such a fan of you as living your truest self in public. What's so interesting about you, is, you just are you. And I remember we were chatting at one point about the decision for you to freeze your eggs, and the decision to do it and document it for other people, and just the outpouring of people saying, "Thank you". Talk a little bit about your experiences with again, health is one of these things and these concepts that are scary. Here you are documenting your experience, freezing your eggs and documenting experience going through cancer. Why? And how have you done that so authentically?

Taryn Southern

So, I don't know how much context you gave your students leading into the call. But having spent the bulk of my 20s, living my life fairly publicly online as a YouTuber, you get very comfortable with just sharing a lot of personal

information. That being said, when I was pursuing YouTube as a full-time career, I was also an actress, a comedy actress. And so I was very selective about what I chose to share. And there was a performative nature to it. And what I mean by that is, a lot of what I shared, it was a version of Taryn. It was sort of a heightened personality. But I wasn't sharing everything about my life.

Eric Koester

The curated version of this persona that you were playing.

Taryn Southern

Correct, very curated. But nonetheless, I became more and more comfortable. When I first started YouTube, I looked at it as I'm showing up and playing a character that's based on myself. And as I became more entrenched, in part, people started watching vlogs a lot more than sketch comedy videos. And that just became the norm. And so I had to become a little bit more comfortable sharing parts of myself. And by the time, I was pretty much completely comfortable sharing anything and everything. And so when I decided to freeze my eggs. I was like, why not? Why not share this? It's one of those things. This was like four or five years ago, four years ago. It felt a little bit provocative to be talking about it. Now, I don't know if people would blink an eye but at the time, it felt like sort of a big deal.

Eric Koester

When you came out and started talking about his experience, it was the first time I'd ever heard anyone talk about it as publicly and also as very authentically as you. It's a crazy conversation to think through. And you talked about your decisions to it. So, as much as it's normative for you, I do think that there's a lot of people that still find that to be one of those things that it takes a little bit of bravery. Over this last two or three years now that you've been talking more about yourself, have you seen the way people engage with you differently, the more vulnerable and open you've been?

Taryn Southern

100%. Yeah, every time you're afraid to share something, it's the thing that you're most afraid to share that will strike the greatest chord in the largest

number of people. I know that sharing that information was incredibly helpful for a lot of women, because I had many, many of them reach out. And what was super interesting was that the video that went up on Facebook around my egg freezing, I think it ended up getting like 9 million views, something like that. I know when it was really bizarre, but it had a very low ratio of likes and comments. But what we were able to see in the data was the massive volume of that video being shared privately through Facebook message. So what was happening, women didn't necessarily want to like or comment on it publicly, because they didn't want that showing up in their feeds, letting people know that they're contemplating this, but they were sharing it with their other female friends who they were having these private conversations with. And that's when you know you're sharing something that maybe people need to hear. And ironically, that also ended up being the best decision of my entire life, to freeze my eggs. Because I once I was diagnosed with cancer, I don't think I would have been able to freeze them because I had the type of cancer where you don't want to be injecting yourself with hormones and pouring gasoline on the fire. So, it was sort of a weird thing that I lived that publicly and then it turns out that that's probably the only way that I'll be able to have kids. It's through those eggs. Yeah.

Eric Koester

That's amazing. That's a great story. So, I wanted to take back a little bit. And it's interesting. As I was trying to even like prepare, telling your bio is like you're this reinvention machine. If I were to describe your last two decades, it's just this constant sense of like reinventing yourself. And you've done it over these multiple times here. Take us through a little bit of that journey here where you get this start here, you're a performer, and you suddenly realize there's this trend happening of, like you said, you talked about people using YouTube differently. You were early. Now kids want to be like YouTubers, you were like in YouTube before it was cool to be a YouTuber. How did that journey happened where you found yourself living your life in this new area, this new career, I guess for people?

Taryn Southern

Thank you. And by the way, is this gardening noise irritating?

Eric Koester

We can't even hear it. So, you're good.

Taryn Southern

Zoom. I love Zoom. I mean, they've done a great job with their audio. So yeah, I started YouTube before you can even make money on youtube. There was no such thing as an AdSense program. So, it was a creative outlet for me to make videos when I wasn't getting booked on television shows. And I just loved the freedom and the fun and the creative expression and the opportunity to reach a lot of people was so exciting at that time. It was also a little bit of a Fo Paw in the world of entertainment, to be uploading on YouTube. Because it was sort of seen like as lesser than, which I found inherently exciting because I just like it against the rules. So, I uploaded my first video in 2007. Yeah. Way back.

Eric Koester

We didn't know what this thing 'uploading' was by that point. Like even Dropbox wasn't really a thing by then.

Taryn Southern

Crazy. It was very early. And it was actually a comedy song that was like a love song for Hillary Clinton when she was up for the primaries at that time against Obama. And it was sort of a satire of this Obama girl song. And the video went viral. And it landed me on all of these political talk shows like Hardball, MSNBC, CNN, etc. And I know nothing or at least then I knew nothing about politics. I just made the video for fun or to be funny. And all of a sudden, I was getting offered correspondence jobs. I actually was offered a job with Fox News, which is terrible. Yeah, as a political part. Even if some of the traditional gatekeepers in Hollywood look down on this kind of engine, the ability to reach all these people, it's an audition tape in front of the world, and it could present a lot more opportunities if I just keep doing more of what I love. So, that's what clicked for me. I started making videos, but it was all sort of comedy stuff. And then within five, six years as YouTube became a certifiable career, and I was working a lot in television, but really unhappy with the lack of ownership that I had over my career and my life, and I just wanted the creative freedom and expression. So I basically quit everything I was doing and television and film, went for YouTube full time, did that for four years, built a production company that did a lot of influencer marketing and production. And

then I was coming up upon 30. And had been, at that point doing this for quite a while and felt like it was time to switch course. I enjoyed the ride. It was really fun. But it was no longer intellectually stimulating for me. And I really wanted to sink my teeth into something that felt more aligned with some of my deeper passions and interests. And that's where I really started focusing on emerging technologies. And how can I merge what I've learned in the digital space with these deeper passions to help people tell better stories reach millennials? And that's what I've been doing for the past five years. So there's been a few major pivots.

Eric Koester

I think what's so interesting about you and it was funny, because as I'm preparing for this one, I was trying to come up with a narrative to hear the stories. However, I was trying to figure it out. But it's interesting you discover something, and then you learn a lot about it. And suddenly, you're a head of all these things. I mean, you were in the entertainment world intelligently. And then you say, this is a thing here, a trend that I'm seeing. I'm going to take advantage of it. We've seen some of the waning here of some of the YouTube's feelings and that, to your point about it, may have reached peak influencer on that platform. And you say, hey, there's new stories. You use the music and technology. As someone who is on that bleeding edge of things, how do you find yourself learning about things? Because you learned about YouTube before YouTube was cool. You learned about VR before VR was cool. What's your style of learning differently?

Taryn Southern

Thank you. I think I've always been innately curious. What it used to be, I would just go down these crazy Google search holes about technology. Now I just spend way too much time on Quora. But I just love learning. I've always been a learner. And I was an anthropology major in college. So I love studying any kind of area of human culture, human psychology. And that's just lent itself, I think, well to some of these things. And because emerging tech and new ideas, because they are new, there's an aspect to them that's particularly appealing for me. Like how do I how can I learn about a space that doesn't yet exist? And what opportunities could arise from those spaces? It's like, the most exciting thing I can imagine doing is just trying to figure out that puzzle. It adds a lot of uncertainty into my life, trying to work in these spaces. But yeah, it's really, really exciting. And so the past five years, it really has been the most

intellectually fulfilling that I've ever felt in my career. Because I've been able to dabble in AI and VR and biotech and a little bit of everything. And I just love learning about all these places. But I don't really have a process. I just kind of keep my eyes peeled for certain things, and just happens to be that frontier technology of the area I find really fascinating.

Eric Koester

I think you do a process. I think your process is you let yourself go down the rabbit hole as long as it takes to satisfy yourself. And I think that really is like a learning process that people give themselves permission to explore without knowing where it's going to go a little bit.

Taryn Southern

And usually what happens is there's after exploring something for a bit of time, for AI, for instance, an idea pops in my head. And I cannot think about anything else except for pursuing that idea. So in the case of AI, I did a bunch of research on all of these AI art engines. I was playing around with generative art. I was actually originally contemplating maybe making it like an AI museum in LA. And then all of a sudden, it came to me to make an album using AI as the generative tool for all the music and I was like, I have to do that. My soul need to do this experiment. And then I just go do it.

Eric Koester

I was gonna actually just ask you that question here. You make this bet. And people, when they probably read about it the first time, they're like, what is this thing that she's talking about? What is this idea that she's saying about? AI and music? Tell us how this happened where you produce, I think was the first album that was sort of cogenerated, cocreated with AI?

Taryn Southern

Yeah. Again, it just came out of this curiosity thing. I was playing around with a bunch of AI tools. I was working on a project with Google. There's a grant program they have for artists. And they had provided me some money to experiment with some of their VR technologies. And so, the whole concept behind this VR thing I was doing was like this futuristic world. And I thought,

well, how can I incorporate other technologies into this world? And so I was looking at AI from the art space about how I get into that. And stumbled upon these AI music generators, started playing around with them. And I was so excited by the kinds of opportunities that they presented for filmmakers. Like that was really what excited me. Because as a YouTuber, finding affordable music to license for my videos was always a challenge. And you're pumping out content very, very quickly. And you also want something that sounds good and has a cool vibe. So, that was where my mind first went. Like, oh, this is a really cool tool for content creators, and filmmakers who want to create music on a budget. And then, with some further tinkering, I realized that the customization was good enough to where I could actually make something. I am making zero claims about this album being a worthy pop album. But I knew that I could make something that would be good enough to create a conversation around what this means for the future of music and human creativity. And that conversation was what excited me. Like, we need to have such conversations.

Eric Koester

And you don't have to brag on it. Others have bragged and said it was. It was surprising how good, compelling it was. The music was good. And for those of you I will share the link to it. It is really compelling to do and for those people that don't know, you documented a lot about your experience of what it's like to make music. That process. And I think most people have maybe never thought about how an album may talk us through. You describe it as kind of the AI augments. You as a songwriter and as a creator talk through how that helps and then how you see this in the future.

Taryn Southern

Yeah. It's like a lot of different tools. It's going to benefit some people immensely. Others will find zero uses for it. And it all comes down to the kinds of skill sets that you have. I think for people who do not have traditional music backgrounds, but want to try their hand at being creative, perhaps they write lyrics, or perhaps they write vocal melodies. But they have no way to actually produce the instrumentation behind the song. This kind of tool will enable them to actually finish something of value where in before they would have had to have found a music producer and had the resources to pay that person. Whereas a traditional music producer, probably would find very little use for it at this point. But I see a world, very soon within the next year or two

years, where a lot of these tools are getting good enough to where they could provide a lot of supplementary assistance to skilled music producers. One really obvious way is just by running a music producer's rough draft demo song through the system and saying, "You're copying another artists." Yeah, we're comparing this against our database of billions of music tracks, and this is a copy. Or you might contemplate a slightly different melodic structure to make the song feel more interesting. So I think it could end up becoming like a really helpful, collaborative tool even for people who are skilled musicians. It's kind of like YouTube in a lot of ways. When I started YouTube, it was actually pretty hard to make videos. Editing software was not the way it is now. We didn't have these really cheap, high end video cameras. Sound was a nightmare. You had to sync your sound with your video. I mean, it's a totally different world. But as things became cheaper, and these new tools came out, we started seeing all these new people learning the process of making videos and editing these videos. And there's an argument that it could take away work from professional directors of photography. But it hasn't really. It has just opened up more opportunities for creativity to exist and created new formats and all kinds of things. So, I think the same thing will happen with these AI tools.

Eric Koester

That's cool. With this group here, there's a lot of folks writing books in the same sort of things. Which is critiques about new tools and new frameworks and stuff like that, the purist argument behind it. How do you push past those? Because there are people who say, "Oh, well, that's not how it's typically done", or "That's not how it's done in the industry." How do you teach yourself to tune out that noise and keep pushing forward? Because you're typically early in these things. It's not a known path it's going workout.

Taryn Southern

Yeah. I mean, to be totally candid, I usually don't trust people who say, "Well, that's not the way you do things." Because I'm like, well, it's not the way you do things until now. Or until it changes. I mean, everything goes through this evolutionary process. And I think anyone who is overly committed to a certain process. Well, that's beautiful. And there's is value to that. It's just not a value I subscribe to. And I find so much more interestingness in the unknown and the experimentation. And the open playing field of saying, well, why not? Why can't things be different?

Eric Koester

Yeah. And I want to be respectful as you got a plane to catch here.

Taryn Southern

No problem. I'm totally good.

Eric Koester

Okay, cool. I want to ask a quick question leading into that one, you produce a documentary that came out that was so well reviewed and pushed on the envelope here, that really in some ways, encapsulates all the work you've been doing here about the future of human augmentation, human intelligence, these places about it. Tell us about this documentary. Because it was a fascinating experience to get to see this come out in the conversation it sparked.

Taryn Southern

Thank you, Eric. Yeah, so I was actually working on the documentary while working on the album. And the album ended up taking a backseat as my role with the documentary became larger. But the documentary is called 'I Am Human'. And it follows three patients with implantable brain interfaces. And through their journeys, we explore the larger implications of neuro technology in the broader world, and what it will mean to be human over the next 10-15 years, as we start to augment and change our brains. So it was a really big undertaking. It required a lot of trust on behalf of the institutions and the patients that we were working with. And I am not a neuroscientist, obviously. So to come in and direct the project, direct and produce was a really big challenge. But super exciting. And the big thing that we were focused on doing from the very beginning was how do we tell a story that is not dystopic? And it's not because there aren't dystopic elements to it that are not deserving of attention. And we do go into some of those issues in the film. But actually, making a dark sci fi film about the future. That's not the easy thing to do. And there are so many amazing possibilities that present themselves out of this technology. But those aren't the ones that are front and center in news headlines. So, it was challenging. We had to create several rough cuts of the film to get to a place where we felt really confident that we were telling

authentic stories that were really the result of these patients' experience. And also not ignoring the larger, scarier issues. So, it was a really interesting undertaking. And I tried to take that approach with everything that I'm working on. And is there a story of optimism here. In part just because we need more optimistic stories. Not to say that you shouldn't have really sharp commentary and critique. But there's not enough storytelling out there that gives people a map, a direction that that we can aspire to and feel good about. And that was really important.

Eric Koester

And so as someone who does so much, I mean, you've been doing storytelling and every aspect along the way here, we've got a bunch of authors here who are writing books and telling stories. How do you encourage them to think about it and how do you go through that process of balancing telling information but making sure there's a story in it that gives us hope in humanity? What are the things that you teach sharing and applying to your own work?

Taryn Southern

Ooh, that is such a good question. That's a big question.

Eric Koester

I know it's a big one. But it's the question. That's the biggie.

Taryn Southern

Well, it's interesting. I guess, I have a little bit of an anecdote that might represent that question. When the quarantine hit or when COVID hit and we were in quarantine, and I realized that my speaking career for this year was over. That was really what I was going to be focused on. I decided to sit down and actually finally write a book proposal around a book that I had been been thinking about doing for a while and I think we actually might have spoken. I don't remember if it was this exact book that we spoke about. But finished the proposal, ended up pitching it to all the major publishers and did not sell it. My agent that I had represented me has never not had a client sell books. So I will just say right now, I was the first client that did not get a book offer and

auction, which was disappointing. But I learned a whole lot from the process. And something that ended up happening was one of the publishers circled back around and said, "You know what? We would be interested in a version of the book that'd basically remove the transformational positivity from it." So, the book was basically peeling back the curtain on the world of digital influence from the stories of early influencers who were there, including my own story. But my whole angle was using those stories to help people better navigate their own digital presence in a way that's empowering and that it's not extracted from their lives. And this publisher, which is a pretty big publisher, and an exciting one to potentially work with was like, "We just want the tell-all exposé. We don't care about the positive part." And I sat on it for a while. And I even started reworking the proposal just to see could I do a version of this book that feels good? It's just really sharp social commentary. And ultimately for me, I was like this isn't for me. I really want to be able to tell a story that provides positive takeaways for people. Because otherwise, I don't know. We already have the... what was that documentary that just came out? The social...

Eric Koester

'The Social Dilemma'.

Taryn Southern

Yeah. Right. And it's just like darkness, darkness, darkness. What do we do about it? We get it. So, I don't know if that answers your question.

Eric Koester

I think it's great.

Taryn Southern

I didn't really talk about how I structure my writing around that. But I think it's a part of my value system to want to improve people's lives. And so as part of that, I need to be able to have this positive element. And it's for my own good, too. I need these things for myself. And part of the reason I tell these stories is so that I can find positive values from my own lessons. Yeah.

Eric Koester

I love it. So, we always do something fun here at the end. So first off, thank you so much. This is super interesting and helpful. We could probably spend six or eight hours talking about all these things. But we'll do something fun where we do a group photo, and we let you tell us like what you want us to do here. So last week, we had a hostage negotiator and he had us do the phone call in it. So, you tell us what you want us to do for our group photo to celebrate our time with you.

Taryn Southern

This is so awesome. But I wanted to find out what do you mean by hostage negotiator?

Eric Koester

So, he is a guy who had spent his career working as a hostage negotiator when people would take hostages. And he would go in and literally have a team. I'll tell you interesting thing. You'll love this one, Taryn. And he said, he worked for a team of 20 or so people. His three best hostage negotiators on their team, all of them were women. So, he said that women are better hostage negotiators than men. So, I think that was the big takeaway. And it was like, "Tell us why." And he was like, "Being married now, I think I know why. I'm certainly sure why." So, he had us do the telephone call. That was his one.

Taryn Southern

Oh, so you just did a photo with the phone call?

Eric Koester

A photo with all of us holding this one. So, you get to decide what you would like to do as your thing. I'll just take a group photo for us.

Taryn Southern

Okay, amazing. You'll send it to me, right?

Eric Koester

Of course. I'll send it right after this. Yeah, for sure.

Taryn Southern

Okay. Let's see, I want everyone to.... I want to give something creative here.

Eric Koester

I know I put you in the spot here.

Taryn Southern

Hmm... I want everyone to do a... Oh, no. I need a good one.

Eric Koester

You've got music and you've got film. And you've got YouTube. So, you got a bunch of these performative things here.

Taryn Southern

And maybe the face, your icon for your YouTube channel.

Eric Koester

Oh, got it. Got it. So, what would be that face that you would do here? Like the thinker or....

Taryn Southern

Yeah. I have to be performative. I know what mine was.

Eric Koester

Alright, there we go. So, I'm gonna get some photos here for everyone. Your iconic YouTube face here it would be. Take your photos here. Again, get some good ones. I like it. Martin's there in the middle. Very good. I'll share these photos with the crew for everyone. So Taryn, any kind of last words of wisdom here for this crew of creators? And we're gonna do something fun here. Some of them will be sending you copies of their books as they come out, too. So, you can add some stuff to your bookshelves as they're published. Any words of wisdom for the crew who's out there creating and battling their own imposter syndrome, putting good in the world here. What are your last words of wisdom here?

Taryn Southern

I mean, it's probably similar to what a lot of people will say on here. But you got to just keep going and failures are actually the best thing that could ever happen to you. Because they're all just lessons and in cultivating resilience and what you want. And you just have to stay really persistent with your vision. I cannot tell you how many times I've been turned down, rejected, lost jobs that were dream jobs. I mean, working in entertainment, you get really good at just being perpetually unemployed and rejected. And it's a fabulous skill to learn. So the better you can get at it, the better your life will be. And just don't let anyone stop you from going after the thing that you're really passionate about.

Eric Koester

And don't be afraid to go down the rabbit hole. I think that's the other lesson that will take away from you. Go down the rabbit hole.

Taryn Southern

And I love this class, because people are writing books. You're not letting anyone stop you from this process. And I think that's really, really exciting. And now I need to actually do that with my book just because I had a bunch of publishers say 'no'.

Eric Koester

We'll talk. We'll make this thing happen. We're going to call next week and make this thing happen. Don't you worry.

Taryn Southern

Thanks, Eric. Amazing.

Eric Koester

Taryn, thank you so much for hanging out. We really appreciate your time. Safe travels here. And thanks for being your authentic self-sharing with other people. We're excited to get to spend time with you. And I have to say I want to learn how to make music with AI someday. So, I can't wait till this happens. This is gonna be an interesting one to learn from for sure.

Taryn Southern

I'll give you a few pointers on our call.

Eric Koester

I appreciate it. All right.

Taryn Southern

Have a good one everybody. Nice to meet you all.

Eric Koester

Thanks again Taryn. Travel safe. Thanks for hanging out today.

Taryn Southern

Take care. Bye.

Eric Koester

Bye.

