

Wynne Leon (00:04)

Welcome to How to Share, a podcast about teaching, learning, giving, and growth.

I'm Wynne Leon and in this episode, I'm with professor, counselor and author, Vicki Atkinson. And we are talking about how to share feedback. Vicki tells us about her project in the works, a novel that builds on her fascinating and intriguing family history. Vicki has done the hard work to not only write, but also to seek out and incorporate feedback. She tells us what she learned from her doctoral dissertation.

about separating the ego from the work and how that's an essential part of being able to really take in someone else's input. We talk about asking the right questions when someone solicits our feedback and also being specific when we want input. And Vicki shows us what having a growth mindset looks like when it comes to incorporating comments.

Vicki walks us through the discernment necessary to pick out what is helpful when it comes to feedback and gives us permission to disregard what doesn't fit. This is a great conversation about a tricky subject and Dr. Vicki Atkinson's wisdom shines brightly through. I know you'll love it.

you

Hi Vicki!

Vicki Atkinson (01:46)

Hey, Wynne how are you?

Wynne Leon (01:48)

Good. I'm so glad to have you on to talk about how to share feedback because you've seen this from all sides, like as a student, as a professor, and now as a writer. And that's just like, that's a 360 view. But so I want to talk about that, but I also want to start with a sneak peek into the project that you have scheduled to publish early next year. What can you tell us about that?

Vicki Atkinson (02:01)

us.

Well, I haven't given away the title yet. I'm kind of holding that back a little bit, but there is some early work going on with cover design and you know what I've shared with people. Thank you for asking is it's a novel, but the inspiration really comes for anyone who's read *Surviving Sue*. The inspiration really comes from a lot of you know that beautiful what if thinking and the questions that I got from readers of *Surviving Sue*.

about whether or not I had done a drill down about my mom's family and my mom's really intense capacity for intuition. And I write in *Surviving Sue* that there were times that I could pick up on my mom and her sister's unspokens. just, they had sometimes full on often very naughty conversations. And you could just, whether it's body language,

just intuitiveness, I could piece together exactly what was going on. And I think the clarity about writing for wellness that came as a result of really looking at that was understanding that my mom often perceived me as a threat because of that, that I could kind of tune in. And so I've written a novel. You've been very gracious to be one of my beautiful beta readers about a family that

~ has kept a lot of secrets, the parents from the mothers, especially from their children and kind of the explosiveness and what happens. along the way, while I dug in, I found some ancestry stuff that answered actually some real questions that I had about my mom that I was not expecting at all.

Wynne Leon (04:04)

Amazing. mean, it's just so amazing. You've set that up so well. Just that family ability to do unspokens and then how you tease that into a story. would love that. And the basis in history reminds me of our recent podcast that we did with Alison Richman who took the Harry Elkins Widener story. I mean, you've done so much of that same thing, which has had the basis in. Yeah.

a grounded story and then come up with a great narrative around it. But in the course of that, you signed up for a writer's group where you've been sharing your novel by reading out loud that's so courageous. And I think that's where you received the feedback. I love sharing my thoughts with you because you see the separation from your work and yourself, something many writers never figure out.

Words on the page might be extensions of ourselves, but they don't define us. And that's an incredible piece of feedback to receive. Feedback about feedback.

Vicki Atkinson (05:11)

Yeah.

Yeah, you know, it is. And I had written a blog post about that back in July when I was still, you know, just a newer member a few months in. you know, I've written a textbook, I wrote a dissertation, you know, I wrote a memoir, I'm finalizing a novel. But I think ~ when you put yourself out there and you give people copies of your work and

we've learned, from other authors that there is a lot of power in the process of actually reading your work aloud, you know, whether it's just to yourself or, you know, reading it for a small audience or family members. But ~ when you get feedback from other people that

you have an openness to receiving, you know, that's a lovely thing because I've, I've learned and watched over the years in a lot of different contexts that

Finding a way to separate yourself from the creation is really an important self-care technique because if you see too much intertwining, you know, those two things, then your ego gets engaged, you you feel bruised, wounded, and it halts or complicates the process of creating. So yeah, but I think, you it was interesting to receive that feedback, but another ~

member of that group said, it's because you did a dissertation, you had your butt chewed up one side and down the other. I was like, were you there?

Wynne Leon (06:50)

Well, and I love that you brought that back to that learning mindset because I was looking through ~ some work by Carol Dweck, the professor that talks about the growth mindset. And she talks about those two different mindsets. And she describes the fixed mindset as believing that qualities are carved in stone. ~ The fixed mindset.

It creates an urgency to prove yourself over and over. And then in contrast, she says the growth mindset is based on the belief that your basic qualities are things you can cultivate through your efforts, your strategies and help from others. Although people may differ in every which way, like their talents and their aptitudes, interests or temperaments, everyone can change and grow through application and experience.

And so it's just even that basic underlying belief, right, that you can change. even cultivating that, I bet, in your students and in yourself as you, whether it's the dissertation process or now.

Vicki Atkinson (07:58)

I think it's, I mean, just in general, whether it's about, you know, something you've written or created, I think it's always good if you ever find yourself in a position where someone's asking for a critique or they're asking for feedback. I learned the hard way that the most important thing to do is to answer the question with a question, which is, tell me how I can be helpful to you, because that's such a broad, you know, kind of open door to walk through. And if someone is

is really looking for, know, I want feedback about the concept. That's one thing. You know, if I'm looking for errors of omission, you you want me to do a deep dive line edits, you know, about things. But I think, you know, taking that pause for a minute to just ask what people are looking for is really important because I have seen that mismatch, you know, where people just didn't say it.

the two parties are not aligned and then all of a sudden there are hurt feelings. Yeah. Yeah.

Wynne Leon (08:59)

And I think also when I've been asked to provide feedback, trying to take myself out of the, my ego out of the thing too, and just be that curious reader, that curious observer of, my gosh, this is where I'm confused. Maybe I can just point that out as opposed to...

This is what irks me, which is personal and I try to go a little bit more global when I give feedback, if that makes any sense.

Vicki Atkinson (09:28)

It does. I think, you know, it's also important for people to consider. So if we think about it just in the writing context, it makes sense to kind of stay in your lane a little bit. You know, and you wrote a beautiful memoir and you were generous about reading *Surviving Sue*. It's important to connect with people who have an interest in the same type of work that you do. And I saw something, I won't say where, know, play out recently.

~ between two writers where, you know, their genres could not have been more different. know, one is very like a literary fiction and expansive and rich and, you know, descriptive. Yeah. And the other person, you know, really wants to be like a thriller writer. And when those two people were giving each other feedback, I, you know, ~

I'm trying to think of an alternative word to hostile. Can't come up with what? Yeah. Right?

Wynne Leon (10:27)

Yeah.

That's such a good point because, you know, taking into account who it is that's giving you feedback. One of my favorite quotes is from Morgan Freeman and he said, some of the best advice I've been given is don't take criticism from people who you wouldn't go to for advice. Yeah. know, that's a

Vicki Atkinson (10:54)

Yeah. And I think sometimes people that are so hungry for feedback, especially early on in the creative process that they're on the right track. I've seen, you know, students, fellow writers, know, creative types ask for feedback too soon. So I think that's another thing that I think is, you know, just really important. Sometimes you need to make sure. Yeah. You know, have confidence, right? That, you know, let it, let some things come together.

Wynne Leon (11:16)

Let it bake a little more.

Vicki Atkinson (11:24)

before you offer it up to someone else, you know, for insight and input. Unless you say specifically, I'm at a crossroads, I've taken this this far and I'm stuck. That's a different

thing. But I think sometimes people ask for feedback too soon when what they're really looking for is, I want encouragement, right? And so again, it's important to really think about what the ask is, you know, and I think

When I, one of the comments that I got from one of the members of the writing group was,

about sharing thoughts with me because they saw that I could see the separation between the work and myself. And this person actually wrote on, you know, the, the portion of my novel that I read that day. Some, something my, many writers never figure out words on the page might be extensions of ourselves, but they don't define us that piece. I, you know, I think it's really hard because there's a fragility about creating.

So I see people get a lot of unnecessary wounds sometimes, and then they stop the process. And so we hear that a lot from people that pick up the novel, put it away, start it, and stop it. It's hard.

Wynne Leon (12:37)

It is

hard. It is so hard. love that advice not to do it too early in your ideation process to have a so that you can have a little more ~ belief structure foundation.

Vicki Atkinson (12:56)

wrong.

Right. Even if it's wrong. in that same blog post, maybe you were going to mention this too, but there's a writer with the Chicago Writers Association, you know, that I really enjoy. And he's very cheeky, B.A. Durham. And one of the things that I loved in a piece that he had written back in the summer, if you do that, and you you know, you get feedback and you're like, ~ you know, really kind of like wound up about it. He's just so

like blunt, said, if there's an issue, it's just a matter of fixing it. It doesn't mean there's something wrong with you. Just treat it like a missing loose screw on a bookshelf, fix the problem. And you might just create something great. But if you're, you're like all over the place and you know, the reader doesn't know it is a bookshelf. Right. Right. Can't conceive of it. Yeah. Yeah. But it's hard.

Wynne Leon (13:45)

It is. He also went on to say, which I love, remember that you're in charge after getting feedback, read it and go take a walk. I feel that physical distance from my computer gives me the emotional distance as well. I do this even when I get good feedback because not all positive feedback is correct even when it feels good. Yeah.

Vicki Atkinson (14:09)

my gosh. you know, so you have to take that into account too. There is sometimes a power dynamic in giving and receiving feedback. And you know, some people like to, it's not, it's a little sexist sounding, but you'll understand what I mean to blow like happy breezes up one skirt, right? I'm going to like, you know, tell you things just because I want you to feel good. but that it doesn't really help when that happens.

And there's, I think that's very true. And I think ~ the other thing that I think is important about that is

Yeah, Trying to choose my words carefully here. I think you can get stuck then feeling like if you don't get positive feedback that all hope is lost. So I think there's an appetite for it when you're feeling insecure about what you're creating. And when you get that and it's a one time only thing, I love Durham's advice. You need to just be practical about it and get her done and just fix it.

Or the other, I think important point is that you can hear it, you can receive it, you don't have to integrate it, you can push it back. And you don't have to tell the person that, you can just go, thank you very kindly.

Wynne Leon (15:35)

Let it go. it might conflict with other things you've heard. I mean, think that's where you have to be using your intuition to filter that as well, right?

Vicki Atkinson (15:46)

Ooh, look what you did right there.

Wynne Leon (15:48)

~ Do you have a time of day when giving or receiving feedback works best for you?

Vicki Atkinson (15:57)

Hmm. Giving or receiving. like, I, you and I are the same. think about this very often. Given a choice. like doing the hard things in the morning, you know, if I can, you know, to have that quiet time to get a little centered, you know, whatever my practice is that day. Right. Because especially if I'm giving feedback, you know, and in the roles that I've had, I give people feedback about all kinds of things, you know, their life.

digitally or on a piece of paper in the form of a resume or a vita giving people feedback about things they've written in a consulting role, cover letters, the job market is very difficult right now. And so I think people that have been otherwise confident in their careers about how to express and promote themselves are sometimes a little stymied. So if it's

If the stakes are high and I know it really matters, I want to do those things for other people right away in the morning when I'm the freshest. Yeah.

Wynne Leon (16:59)

Mm-hmm.

Mm-hmm. But the other part of it... in parenting, I, you know, the thing, I try not to talk in the evenings because at my... I'm clouded. Yeah. I'm tired. And so it just, whatever I'm gonna say, even if it is what I mean to say, it just comes out a little murkier. Yeah. It's better in the morning.

Vicki Atkinson (17:22)

And I think it's because some of us are gatherers during the day. And I think, you know, I, because I know you, I know that you are this way too. And there's a lot in our lives that we can't resolve as we move through the day, every day, right? Where we have no agency, no opportunity to have influence. And yet we're confronted by things that we wish we could fix or solve or, you know, be more impactful about. some, there.

They're large, they're small, they're in between. But I think sometimes later in the day, I may not always be aware of it, but I'm still carrying these things with me. And I can be less open, a little edgier, definitely fatigued. And sometimes I simply run out of words. There are none left. There are just none left.

Wynne Leon (18:15)

I hear you. Thank goodness from you that doesn't happen very often.

Vicki Atkinson (18:20)

~ yeah. it's, I mean, you want, when you're giving feedback, you want to use the right words. You know, if it's if it's oral feedback, and it's a zoom meeting like this, I am very and you've seen me, you we've talked about this. I am, I'm always very concerned about body language, eye contact, you know, positives, you know, ~ as much as possible conveying with you, you know, I'm with you, even if I have to give feedback that may not

may not be embraced initially or is corrective in some way. Right. But it's it is very difficult, you know, to do that. If you're just doing track changes in a document and you don't get a chance to talk about it with someone. It's it's very challenging.

You and I also share something in common about getting up really early. this week, because there are a couple of folks I'm helping with some job search things, I've been getting up like 3.30 or 4. So that's just kind of how extreme it can be at certain times so that I know I can do what I need to do and get at it right away.

you know, before the clouds start to gather in my head. can't do that for like day upon day upon day, but when it's necessary, yeah.

Wynne Leon (19:41)

Yeah, I'm with you on that. So I'm wondering two things. ~ Can you tell us when we're going to see your book in print? any last things to say about feedback and giving or receiving?

Vicki Atkinson (20:01)

I think, well, I'm turning in hopefully the final draft before the holidays and like March, April is the target date. I'm having some fun kind of putting the finishing touches on so soon. And I'm grateful to people who've been so supportive along the way as I've talked about often blogging about the process, because I've never written a novel and I feel like my brain has expanded so much.

It is all the things. Yeah. Gosh, it's a hard, it is truly professionally and creatively the hardest thing I have ever done. And yet I would do it all over again, even going back, you know, to two and a half years when it was just a spark of an idea.

Wynne Leon (20:49)

So has the feedback made it easier or harder?

Vicki Atkinson (20:55)

I the feedback early on was enthralling because I had a beta reader, my dear friend Kathleen and my dear friend Linda and you, reading a chapter at a time, but especially my friend Kathleen who was like, go, go, go, go, I want more. And even now she's finished reading the whole thing and.

She's like, okay, are you done with that yet? Because I want to know what happens to the characters next, which is such a beautiful thing. So that's very enthralling. But I think then there is the sticky stuff, where you learn about some of your writing crutches. I now feel like I know what they are. And I'm learning from a dear friend who's a screenwriter.

who has completely changed my vision about how to write a scene. And I would love to go back and overhaul some of what I've done with that perspective, but it'll need to be the next thing. But yeah, it has been wonderful. It has been challenging. I'm so grateful to you because, you've read it like two and a half times. my gosh.

two and a half times, right? Yeah, but it's, is, you give birth to something. And I think because of the family connection, you know, that idea of, writing for family, writing for posterity, it is something that even though it's a novel, it tells a story, I think about my mom's family. And I know for sure, this ancestral finding, I would never have dug, you know, to get that information. So

What a gift. Yeah, but along the way, have great empathy and regard for people on both sides, the getting, the receiving feedback. I think, I guess just to kind of wrap this up, I think people need to be very thoughtful about what they're asking for when they request

feedback, not just beta readers, but just in life generally. And I think if you're asked to be in a role like that, it's really good to define the parameters.

you know, just to make sure that you're hitting the target as best you can.

Wynne Leon (23:17)

I agree. And to make sure that you're

Cloudiness doesn't impact ~ your words that you're.

Vicki Atkinson (23:31)

Yeah, and some things you can just say, yes, and some things you can just say, thank you very much, but I, you know, your input has had no impact on me whatsoever. know, so think you have to, from a values point of view, you need to look at some of what may come your way and just go, no, no, and have confidence about it because it's yours. ~

Wynne Leon (23:55)

Right, right. Yeah. Well, thank you so much. I appreciate so much your time talking about this and giving us the sneak peek into your next project.

Vicki Atkinson (24:07)

Thank you, Wynne Bye.

Wynne Leon (24:12)

you

Thank for listening. Our music was written for us by the incredible duo of Jack Canfora and Rob Koenig For show notes and more great inspiration see avitiva.com ~