



ANYA HANKIN

Transcript: “Catalytic Leadership, Reciprocity, and Rooting Into Our Why”

Sarah Greenman:

Hello, and welcome to Collaborative Alchemy. My name is Sarah Greenman and I'm a creative alchemist, artist, storyteller, writer, and facilitator. I believe that your creativity is a gift meant to be wielded with great love and joy. It is a bone-deep tool for justice, healing, and regulatory collective liberation. Collaborative Alchemy is a series of conversations with artists, thought leaders, activists, farmers, educators, creatives, and other polymaths, where we tell our stories, expand our histories, and hold space for new ways of being my.

My Guest today is Anya Hankin, a facilitator, leadership mentor, and creative catalyst. She's also the founder of Anya Hankin Collaborative, where her mission is to help others actualize their big, purpose-driven life work. Anya's commitment to justice and to living and working with purpose is evident in everything that she does.

She's been leading and guiding groups for the last 20-plus years. And has designed and delivered original workshops, retreats, and courses for non-profit organizations, colleges, and universities, high school students across the country, creative entrepreneurs, and diverse communities of change-makers. With a background in educational pedagogy and conflict resolution, Anya is a gifted facilitator and mediator. And I'm so excited to have her here today.

Anya Hankin:

Thank you so much for having me here.

Sarah Greenman:

This is so exciting. It's so exciting for me because you are an integral part of my creation of the Creative Alchemy Cycle. I sort of built it on your watch and working within the framework that you provide as a facilitator with your Catalyst Cohort work. I have lots of ideas about what I think you do, but I would love to hear from you. What do you think you do?

Anya Hankin:

It really depends on the day, I would say. It depends on who's asking. How I like to talk about my work is that I am a facilitator, and a leadership mentor, and a creative catalyst. And so a big part of what that means is helping creative people usher their ideas into being. So finding from the universe from the heart space, from the soul space, really that deeper cravings, that purpose work and bringing it from the kind of esoteric overwhelming into tangible action that you can share and really live into. That looks a number of different ways, but that's a little nugget of it.

Sarah Greenman:

So juicy. So good. Well, talk to me then about your inception story as a creative and a facilitator. Because I think what you do is so unique to you, and it sounds like you'd have to kind of build your own genre of working in terms of what you provide other creatives. So I would love to hear about how you got here. I recall you sharing a really lovely story once about your first forays into the theater as being sort of like a gateway drug to creativity, but I would love your inception story.

Anya Hankin:

Well, I'm happy to talk about the theater piece, which really was in so many ways. And I feel like there are so many different kind of threads that wove together to lead into what I am doing now.

Sarah Greenman:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Anya Hankin:

The key inception pieces, really, are around education, around my learning experiences, and around theater. So when I was a young person, I was both very, very performative, and playful and would like write rhyming plays that we would produce in our kid-way. And I was kind of a ham, but only with my family and my community. And then when I would be in public spaces, in school, with bigger groups of people that I didn't know, I was really desperately shy. And theater and ended up being this space where I felt like I was able to really bring my performative space, my performative self, and the tools that I kind of cultivated in my shyness; deep listening, observation, really being curious about other people. And I could translate that in my theater work.

And in high school, I was invited to be part of this theater company that used our personal experiences and translated them onto the stage. And that was extremely pivotal for me. I was in that group from 16 to 18 and we were writing and telling stories about the messy transition time of being a teenager, relationships, body, family, all of the things, and take something that felt so vulnerable and so personal and speak it, perform it on a stage in front of hundreds was truly catalytic for me. And it was like the deepest kind of witnessing. And it was really empowering and emboldening for me. And impacted the rest of my life. Really, I feel like I used elements of that experience throughout all that I do.

Sarah Greenman:

I love that you bring up this idea of being witnessed or witnessing as part of the catalytic medicine or juice that really spoke to you. I know that you do that in your work now. Can you speak a little bit more

about that aspect of your human experience of witnessing? What does that mean to you, to witness or to be witnessed?

Anya Hankin:

I love that question? Thank you.

Sarah Greenman:

Yeah.

Anya Hankin:

I so often talk about really my work being rooted in the sense that we all deserve to be seen, to be heard, to be celebrated. And for me, that is being witnessed. And I think so much of it is knowing that we get to be our flawed, real, human selves and be seen in that, and to have that resonance of my story touches something in your story, my experience touches something in your experience. And I think that is really the heart of that witnessing. And there is something so healing in recognizing that we're not alone in it.

Sarah Greenman:

That's so huge. It's such a big part of my work, as well, as a creative, as a storyteller. That kind of compassionate witnessing has the capacity to solve some really big societal problems that we're facing right now as a community, as a society. I love that idea. Thank you for framing that so beautifully. I just want to drink that in.

Anya Hankin:

Well, and what you're saying, I feel like so much of our stuck spots or hurt spots are in that feeling of not being heard, not being understood, not being appreciated. And the witnessing has the capacity to really offer a remedy to that. I think there are ways we can witness ourselves, and I think that's important. And it's so valuable to have an external witnessing. The reciprocity of that exchange feels really important to me.

Sarah Greenman:

Hmm. You've just brought up something I wanted to talk about, which is reciprocity. You center that in your work as a facilitator, you have that all over your website, it's in your guiding principles. And I would love to hear more about reciprocity and where that lands in your work.

Anya Hankin:

Mm-hmm (affirmative). Can I tell you a little inception about reciprocity for me?

Sarah Greenman:

I would love to hear it.

Anya Hankin:

So when I was in graduate school, I worked with a department that was all about creating learning experiences for students that were out in the community, community and university partnerships. And I was invited to be part of this research project that looked at reciprocity in these relationships. And that was kind of a new concept to me, a new term. And it was really looking at the mutuality of the exchange. We say that this thing is good, we say it's to your benefit, but is it? So are we really valuing equally, collectively what the priorities are here? So is the university just kind of going out into the community and saying, we're doing this because you wanted and it's to your benefit? Or are we really asking, is this going to help? Is this what you want? How can we be of service?

Sarah Greenman:

That's the key question, is this what you want?

Anya Hankin:

Yes. Yes.

Sarah Greenman:

We forget to ask that sometimes.

Anya Hankin:

Absolutely... We do. We say, this is what you need. This is what you need. And that's what was happening. And so I got to be involved in these conversations with so many community organizations, with so many educators who were attempting to work in relationship and it was exploring how those relationships could be more mutually beneficial. And I think about reciprocity in my work as really being about a collective experience, a co-created experience. That it is not just me coming in as a leader, as a facilitator saying, "This is what you need. This is how to do it." But it's really asking, "Is this what you need? What do you need? How can we do it together?"

It also, to me, speaks to this element of a counter to burnout I think is inherent in the reciprocity. Am I just giving, giving, giving, giving, or is there a way that I am also refilling? So many of the people that I work with are people that are committed to being of service in a variety of ways, teachers, healers, facilitators, guides, who want to give and end up often feeling really overextended, burnt out, drained, because there isn't that reciprocity, there isn't that process of who's filling.

Sarah Greenman:

And right now, entering the second year of our pandemic, when I think about people who are helpers, who are the givers, who are here in service, there are so many ways in which we are depleting that cultural resource without giving back to the people who are showing up for us. I'm really interested in all of the ways in which we can show up and right relationship together, and I love that reciprocity is at the center of what you do. I feel that, as somebody who has worked with you, really deeply. I feel really nourished. Giving and receiving being in relationship with you in that way.

Anya Hankin:

Thank you, Sarah.

Sarah Greenman:

Oh my gosh. It's just so palpable. So palpable. Why are you called to do this work of guiding? I mean, it's a huge... Maybe this is why I'm having a hard time pulling this question together, because the way I experience you is that you do meet the need, the actual need. Because you have asked the question, "What do you need?" Then you do what you do best, which is kind of magic to me, which has shaped-shift a little bit to meet the need of your client. I wonder why you're called to do this work of guiding thought leaders and creatives and facilitators towards actualizing their big ideas. I'm sure you have a bunch of your own big ideas, but you seem really committed to launching other people's big ideas. Can you talk a little bit about that?

Anya Hankin:

Yeah. I think that's core to my big idea, right? My big idea is rooted in supporting other people to grow and share their work, their purpose-driven work. The why, it's so clear and it's so complex, right?

Sarah Greenman:

Yes. Always.

Anya Hankin:

I think it definitely goes back to what we touched on this sense that we all deserve to be seen, to be heard, to be recognized. And I think one of the best ways for us to really feel that truly is when we feel in right relationship aligned, alive, connected to how we are moving through our days. And for so many of us, that is in our big work, our big offerings and the way that we are of service to the world. And that we talk so much in the Catalyst Leadership Immersion about what is calling us up, and how can we really meet that need? What is the unique remedy that we have to attend to the needs?

And for me, that is my why, that is my remedy, is that I have a desire and an ability to really connect with people and to wade through the overwhelm and the stuck spots. And to find that gem that is like often so clear, but gets buried underneath the layers. And when we find, it so often it's like, "Oh yeah. Of course."

Sarah Greenman:

It's right here.

Anya Hankin:

It's right here, and it's been here, and this is core to how I move through the world, but I never saw it because it's so inherent. And to me, there is just such joy, and pleasure, and deep satisfaction in getting to be part of that process with people alongside people. And I think for so long in my work, in my teen years and early adulthood, I felt like to have an impact, I needed to reach a broad population.

Sarah Greenman:

Get big, yeah.

Anya Hankin:

Yeah, get big. And when I really checked in with myself and recognize my own kind of sense of burnout in the non-profit grind that I was in for many years, I realized that that's not how I thrive, that's not where my sweet spot and getting to connect really deeply, really fully with small groups of people, one-on-one. And then knowing that you all will go out into your communities and do your work, and then those people will go out into their communities and do their work, I feel like that ripple gave me so much freedom and space in my work to recognize that it doesn't always have to be vast, it can be deep. That's big for me.

Sarah Greenman:

I love the ripple metaphor, the ripple analogy. For the Vernal Equinox, our theme is we are water. And I love the idea that what we do ripples out from us in all directions, and touches people we know not.

Anya Hankin:

Yes.

Sarah Greenman:

So for creatives who want to share their work with an audience, I hear you saying don't worry about the big and focus on your why, but where is the single most important place to start for somebody who has a big idea that they want to share with an audience?

Anya Hankin:

I think it really is so much about the why and getting clear about the why for themselves. And I think we usually focus on the what and the how rather than the why. So a lot of those pieces can already be in place, but really rooting into the why and using that as our compass is transformative.

Sarah Greenman:

I felt that as soon as I started working with you and you helped me articulate my why in a more focused and pointed way. I noticed so many other things start happening for me in other parts of my work. And it informed everything I was doing, even my parenting and even my private relationships.

Anya Hankin:

Yes.

Sarah Greenman:

It is transformative.

Anya Hankin:

Those are the ripples.

Sarah Greenman:

Yeah. Those are totally the ripples within your own life. That's *me* effecting *me*.

Anya Hankin:

Yes. The other piece that strikes me about really rooting into the why, and having clarity around that, and checking in with that as a practice is that then it also leaves room to pay attention to the what, and to not necessarily need to control or prescribe it. And I think for creatives, especially starting out, getting to kind of be open to how things emerge and unfold can be so, so powerful. Like what is really feeling aligned for you? And what is really resonating with your community? And it allows you to be surprised.

Sarah Greenman:

It also allows you to slow the process down. I think we get into such murky water with our what and our how in terms of how things like sexism, patriarchy, white supremacy start making their way into our patterns, and behaviors, and systems, and structures. And if we're super clear about our why, and we're slowing down how we create our what and our how, we have a much better chance of creating something that has lasting benefit for a community, as opposed to something that perpetuates an old habit, energy, or behavior. I find that process to be really aligned with social justice work.

Anya Hankin:

Absolutely. Yes.

Sarah Greenman:

Talk to me about the justice lens work you do. That was one of the first things I read in the packet about your Catalyst Immersion Program, the Leadership Immersion Program, and you spoke about creating a justice lens.

Anya Hankin:

Yeah. My work is really rooted in these core frameworks, justice, reciprocity, engagement, and creativity. And for me, that informs how I do my work. It informs what the work is. It speaks to the why of the work. And for me, justice is absolutely key. It's absolutely foundational. Especially for something that is taking up so much of our time, right? These big offerings or our businesses, our work in the world. To have that grounded and rooted and awareness of justice, to me, feels vital. And I think so often it can kind of go unnoticed or un-tended to. And the work that we do in the catalyst cohort around the justice lens is really creating space that is explicit, embedded, embodied, and evolving.

Anya Hankin:

So justice that is not just theoretical, that is really palpable in practice, that is woven into the systems and the structures that we're creating for our work in the world. And as leaders, the way that we are

showing up in leadership, the way that we are engaging in community, the way that we are using our money, using our resources, citing sources, centering people, it's like everything is just imbued with this justice lens. And I feel like if we don't take the time to really build that intentionally, thoughtfully, we're then having impacts in ways that we might not want to be.

Sarah Greenman:

Right. That we don't even realize. Yeah.

Anya Hankin:

That we don't even realize we are.

Sarah Greenman:

You spoke earlier about burnout for a minute. I want to come back to that because I find that so many creatives, especially ones who are working in solo entrepreneurial ways, burnout real fast. And I want to know about the ways in which you nourish yourself to be ready for this work. What fills your tank?

Anya Hankin:

Mm-hmm (affirmative). Big question. Big practice. I think I can speak to that from many angles. For me, getting to do work that really is my soul work, is my... Right relationship aligned or helps to counter a sense of burnout. It really does. It doesn't mean that every day is perfect and easy, definitely not. But to really be rooted in that sense of deep gratitude and appreciation and happiness in the work, that is so helpful.

For me, I feel really lucky in that my work has a pretty immediate feedback loop in that I get to work directly with people and to see the impact of the frameworks and tools that I teach and offer. I see the catalyzing happen in real-time. And so that is so juicy, and good, and feeds me very much. I will say this year, in pandemic times, has been really hard. It's been beautiful and joyful and also really hard. And in the last winter months, I've definitely noticed a sense of pandemic fatigue, personal grief, and really just recognized that I was at a point where my tank was running low. My well was running dry. I had to be really honest with myself and pause.

So that sort of was a big act of trust and self listening. And then on a daily practice of countering burnout, all of my practices of creative resilience are really helpful in that regard. So meditating when I am able, moving my body outside, taking a walk every day, even when it's raining. I don't do that every day, but I came to. Writing, journaling, making, making art, making snail-mail love notes and sending them around the country.

Getting to also be really honest in my work and giving myself space to show up imperfectly. That maybe is the biggest act to counter burnout, is getting to say like, "Hey, I'm struggling." Or, "Today I feel sad." Or, "I'm holding this spectrum of emotions." Or, "I'm celebrating and delighted." But getting to just show up in the fullness of who I am and, again, be witnessed in that. But really allowing myself to be seen.

Sarah Greenman:

You're speaking to creativity as a form of self care, which I love. Creativity, so often, is hooked up to my work and how I make money.

Anya Hankin:

Yes. And I think it can be complex when we also make money doing the things that we love, that feed us, right?

Sarah Greenman:

Yeah.

Anya Hankin:

And so having some space to at least acknowledge that or, this is just for me and this is just a refilling, this is just my creativity.

Sarah Greenman:

Yep. That's why I love a journal practice and a sketchbook practice because it's super private. Nobody ever sees it. It's just for you.

Anya Hankin:

Yeah.

Sarah Greenman:

What do you consider your most important creative relationship? I always want to know about this: who are the people you're co-creating with, or elements that are your most important creative relationships?

Anya Hankin:

Yeah. I would definitely say nature is a co-creator with me in my creativity. Being out in nature, walking in nature, experiencing the change, and seasons, and cycles, and allowing myself to really tune into that and respond creatively to that. So having abundant and follow periods in my creative output. Thinking about humans and that relationship, I would absolutely say my clients, my catalysts, the people that I get to work with in a really deep, intimate way. Getting to kind of doula their creative work into the world feels like it also is really is my... It fuels my creativity.

I get to be really creative in that space. And I feel like when I am in mentorship conversations, one-on-one, or in a facilitated environment, there is something that happens for me where I feel like I am a conduit. It is like a channel that opens up. And it's me, but it's also the muse. It is the intuition, deeper wisdom, and really like the alchemy of the exchange. So I am in creative relationship with that. But for me, facilitation is a creative act, and leadership is a creative act. And I think also being business owners is a creative act.

Sarah Greenman:

That's something that I'm just learning from you and from the people that I'm working with elsewhere. I'd never thought of my business as part of the creative process. And now it is... How could I have not seen it? It's so clearly connected. I've never ever been able to marry those things together until now.

I think there's this part of us as humans, especially in a capitalistic American society as it exists right now that really separates business and creativity, and thinking outside the box. They're like, "No. Conform, conform, conform." I'm like, "Oh, that's business." Even the word feels very conforming. But now I really feel like it's married together. Which is why I think I'm thriving in the way that I am now. So it's-

Anya Hankin:

Yes. Yes, you're finding your way. I feel like it is that blend. We need the structure pieces and we need the creativity piece.

Sarah Greenman:

Yeah.

Anya Hankin:

There's no prescribed formula, right? There's no A to Z. It is about being in relationship and paying attention and creating something together. So I think it's inherently a creative act.

Sarah Greenman:

What have we all thought about our own personal relationships as a creative endeavor?

Anya Hankin:

Yes.

Sarah Greenman:

How would that change our relationships to each other, to our kids, to our partners, our community? I think it would make it way more fun than we think it is. And B, I think it would just create a holy new way of being in the world together.

Anya Hankin:

I absolutely agree. I absolutely agree. I think it gives us so much more freedom, also, to explore and evolve and feel supported in it too.

Sarah Greenman:

Well, talk about being able to step outside of prescribed roles and prescribed spaces. If you can get really creative about who you are and what service you're providing and how you show up for other people, you could really truly can be anything.

Anya Hankin:

Yeah.

Sarah Greenman:

I think about that a lot as I homeschool our child, Walker. I'm constantly thinking about what messages I'm giving them about how they can and should show up as opposed to allowing their inherent creativity to sort of build the world a new as they greet new information, make new choices.

Anya Hankin:

It's interesting because of that's one of my other primary inception experiences and stories, is around education. And as a high school student, recognizing that there were other ways of being, "educated" and learning, and what education is valued, what kind of learning is valued, who are the teachers that we're looking to. And so I got so excited about unschooling, and homeschooling, and student-led learning. It was mind-blowing for me. Like, "Oh, I'm 15, but I am also a teacher." And my creative longings and whims of what I want to learn about, even if it's not on the syllabus, that doesn't mean that it's not worthy, it was radical for me.

Sarah Greenman:

I love the idea that you just brought up of following your creative longing. I mean, this idea of longing for something. I know John O'Donohue talks about it as an urgent calling. What do you long for? Truly, like in our world and in your life, what do you want long for?

Anya Hankin:

I long for a space for us to recognize and name the grief that we feel and not feel like we have to push it down and numb out, especially around just the immense COVID loss of life, but also all the other things that we've lost this year. I long for community. I long for my hands in the dirt and planting things and watching them grow. I long for sweet connection with beloveds. I really long for shared meals and just a bunch of people around a table reaching in for food and laughing, and elbows touching, and glasses clanking. I long for that. Who's that fierceness? As somebody who's work and life is so rooted in gathering, in person gathering, I long for that.

Sarah Greenman:

Oh, that breaking of bread together-

Anya Hankin:

Someday-

Sarah Greenman:

Makes you want to just weep.

Anya Hankin:

Yeah, me too. Me too.

Sarah Greenman:

The work you do is so deeply connected, for me, in belonging. What does belonging mean to you? Where does that land in your life?

Anya Hankin:

It's interesting I grew up in very active community. I grew up on a piece of land with many other families, many other kids who I grew up alongside. And when we moved away from that space, that physical space, those relationships still were very strong and very significant in my growing up and into my every day. I have had such a beautiful, I think sometimes rare in this culture, experience of community. And that is where I feel a lived sense of belonging.

Anya Hankin:

And for me, that comes back to witnessing and to being witnessed and to knowing that there is a element of unconditional regard. That doesn't mean we always like each other. It doesn't mean there's not conflict, that we're challenged, there is absolutely, but to feel so known, to feel so known and for me to have such experience of that over my lifetime.

Sarah Greenman:

Amazing.

Anya Hankin:

That is amazing. And I do sort of take it for granted because it's so inherent in my experience of my life, but I also really recognize the potency of that. And I see that I am often in my work now wanting to return to cultivate that kind of space for and with other people. So how do we in our work create that sense of belonging where we all know that we are seen, and appreciated, and valued, and supported, and encouraged. And then we can go out and create that in our communities, in our relationships, and in our work?

Sarah Greenman:

What are you looking forward to for the spring? Do you have a garden? Do you garden?

Anya Hankin:

I don't have a garden where I live. Yeah. Which is part of belonging. I just want some dirt I can dig in. I'm so excited for the simple, profound fact of spring, that spring is coming, that I can feel it coming. Today, the sky is brilliantly blue and the buds are just bursting. And I walked down the street and I smell the Daphne and I am filled with hope. Spring, to me, is the sense of possibility. And I feel it in my body. It's like all of these ideas that have been percolating and really like releasing of what I've carried through the winter. Like, "Oh, shed it. Shake it off. Have a dance party."

Anya Hankin:

And I feel that too, just in where we're at societally. I know there is still a long way to go, but many of the people that I know are getting vaccinated and I feel hopeful with our new president. And there's just this.... There is a sense of possibility that is emerging. And I associate that with spring.

Sarah Greenman:

I can feel it just burgeoning underneath my feet out here. I know we're still snow-covered here in Eastern Oregon, but all of the creeks are beginning to bloom and get a little bit bigger, and there's a tiny bit of snowmelt happening, and there's water in my basement. So I know. I know it's happening.

Anya Hankin:

Oh, it's happening.

Sarah Greenman:

I think there's something interesting, too, about being in a space where things are fine, because that's sort of happening to me, too. It's nice to have it reflected in a sort of natural aspect. It makes them feel normal. It normalizes, as you say, the ebb and flow, the creative ebb and flow. How do you ritualize the hope of spring?

Anya Hankin:

Well, I quite literally bring it in to my house, gathering flowers and leaves and rocks and natural elements and bringing them in and often, really in a ritual practice, arranging them.

Sarah Greenman:

Yeah.

Anya Hankin:

So creating beauty with beauty and breathing that in. I think the kind of rhythm of my days really shift with the spring to just feeling the expanding light and using my energy in different ways. And I find that it really infuses the facilitation work that I do as well, the prompts that I am offering, the practices that I'm sharing that feels really informed by nature and the season.

Sarah Greenman:

I find that the ritual elements you bring to your facilitation, they make everything feel special. I think that's important. I think it's important for us to make our lives feel special, because they are.

Anya Hankin:

They are. And I feel like ritual is such a creative act and can be so simple, but taking that time to cultivate intentionality and bringing in beauty, bring in reflection, whatever it is for you, is so necessary. And can be so helpful and so transformative. It's really about marking these moments. I love that. I love that.

Sarah Greenman:

Anya, thank you so much for being with me today. Your words fill me up. Your work fills me up. Who you are and how you do what you do fills me up. Thank you so much.

Anya Hankin:

Thank you, Sarah, so much.

Sarah Greenman:

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