



# Reviving Creativity: Imperfection, Vulnerability, and the Power of “Doing the Thing”

Insights from Dr. David Gauntlett, at CreativeMornings Toronto

*Written by Lee Eldridge*

On a bright Friday morning, Dr. David Gauntlett, Canada Research Chair in Creative Innovation and Professor at Toronto Metropolitan University, took the stage at CreativeMornings Toronto to explore what it means to *Revive Creativity*.

With a blend of humour, heartfelt vulnerability, and hard-won wisdom, Gauntlett unpacked some of what holds people back creatively – and how they can move forward, especially when doubt, fear, and perfectionism loom large.

**July 2025**

**CREATIVEMORNINGS** TORONTO™

## The Talk as Creative Practice

Rather than delivering a conventional talk, Gauntlett embodied the very creativity he discussed. He began by sharing an original piece of music – his new single, [‘I’m Glad You Stayed Around’](#), written, produced, and performed by himself – accompanied by a slideshow of curated clouds. Sincere and personal, it was a deliberately vulnerable moment: Testing his own emotional resilience in a room full of strangers.

This vulnerability wasn’t accidental – it was thematic. “Doing the thing,” Gauntlett emphasized, is *key* to creativity. And “doing the thing” – even when you’re scared, unsure, or lacking confidence – is quite possibly the only way to keep growing.

## Creativity is *not* a Finite Resource

At the core of Gauntlett’s message was a direct challenge to how many people conceptualize creativity. He critiqued the idea that creativity is an innate “amount of juice” – a sort of limited resource, that some people *have* and others *lack*.

“Creativity is something you *do*”, not something you have at some sort of pre-determined level or capacity.

Gauntlett argued that creativity behaves much like any other skill: It improves with time, with effort, and with repetition. Just as no one expects a beginner to master tennis after a single game, or an instrument after a single lesson, we shouldn’t expect ourselves – or anyone else, for that matter – to be brilliant from the very outset.

The act of *doing* is what leads to *becoming* more creative.

## Perfectionism: The False Proxy for Professionalism

Gauntlett also explored the damaging link between perfectionism and professionalism. When beginning any creative endeavour – whether it’s music, visual art, writing, or design – creators often feel pressure to make it perfect, to prove that they’re “professional.”

That kind of pressure stifles experimentation. Gauntlett noted that many people start with bold, unconventional ideas, only to slowly polish all of the originality out of them in an attempt to fit in with the expectations of others. You start thinking, ‘I want people to take this seriously,’ and then suddenly you’re trying to meet all these invisible standards that pull you further away from what excited you about it in the first place.

This tension is particularly present in the digital era, where many platforms reward consistency and conformity. “To get [your music] on playlists, you have to be doing a recognizable thing”. If you’re not, it’s often overlooked – even if it’s good.

He emphasized the need to avoid having perfectionism erode your creative instinct. Embrace the quirks, the risks, the weirdness – that’s often where the magic lives.

Similarly, you shouldn’t wait on *confidence* as a precedent to *creativity*. Waiting to feel ready or good enough before sharing your work can be a trap. You gain confidence through doing the work, not by sitting on it until some magical moment of self-assurance arrives. As Gauntlett puts it: “Later doesn’t come unless you’re *doing things*.”

Instead, he encouraged attendees to move forward in spite of their potential discomfort. “It’s by making yourself *do the thing* that you’ll feel more confident about it, and everything gets better” – the act of “doing the thing” *builds* confidence around it, piece by piece.

## Collaborate, but don't Skip the Solo Work

Gauntlett addressed the current love affair with collaboration, especially in academic and creative circles, warning against the assumption that collaboration is somehow inherently better than solo creativity. "If a group of people are collaborating... if none of them has actually got anything interesting to contribute, it's just a bunch of people desperately hoping that someone else has got the magic rabbit". If no one has done the internal work, then collaboration becomes simply a collection of empty contributions.

Personal creativity, cultivated independently, is what makes collaborative creativity powerful. "Individual creativity is actually a thing that we really, really, need to nurture."

## AI doesn't Threaten this Kind of Creativity

Gauntlett addressed the omnipresent looming of artificial intelligence in creative industries. But his take was refreshingly grounded: "... Creativity is about the personal flourishing and growth and connections, and developing your sensitivity, developing your vulnerability."

Gauntlett acknowledged that there may be AI tools that can generate music, images, and text, faster or even sometimes better than humans may. But if the purpose of creativity is to understand yourself, to connect with others, or process the world, then AI becomes another tool – not a replacement. It might change workflows or raise interesting questions, he admitted, but the core of human creativity remains untouched – especially "if the important thing is about personal growth and connection and community – the heart of what CreativeMornings is all about".

## It may not Lead Somewhere, and that's okay

Perhaps the most encouraging insight came at the end. Gauntlett acknowledged a common fear:

***What if this doesn't go anywhere?***

***What if no one listens?***

***What if it fails?***

He shared that, in his experience, "something *always* leads to *something*". Even when it's not what you expected – even when it seems like a dead end – it opens a door, teaches a lesson, leads to a connection.

Creativity always moves you forward.

This sentiment beautifully aligned with the morning's theme of Revival. Revival isn't about restoring the old – it's about reigniting you. The creative impulse. The willingness to try. The courage to be seen.

Gauntlett's message is a timely reminder in an age of curated perfection and algorithmic visibility: Real creativity is messy, it is personal, and it can often be uncomfortable.

But it is also deeply rewarding.

You don't need to be confident. You don't need to be perfect. You don't need to fit in.

But you do need to *do the thing*.

And as Dr. Gauntlett showed – through clouds, chords, and candor – that's more than enough. Sometimes, the only way out, is *through* – "So keep going!"

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Written by Lee Eldridge

Based on a talk by Dr. David Gauntlett  
at CreativeMornings Toronto, May 2025.

## About Dr. David Gauntlett

Dr. David Gauntlett is Canada Research Chair in Creativity at The Creative School, Toronto Metropolitan University, Toronto, where he leads the Creativity Everything lab. He is the author of several books, including Creative Explorations (2007), Making Media Studies (2015), Making is Connecting (2018), and Creativity (2022). He has made a number of popular online resources, videos and playthings, and has pioneered creative research and workshop methods. He has worked with a number of the world's leading creative organisations, including the BBC, the British Library, Tate and LEGO. He releases music as Sculpture Projects and runs the label, Unfolding Records. His website at [DavidGauntlett.com](http://DavidGauntlett.com) includes extensive resources, blog and videos.



## About Lee Eldridge

Lee is a researcher and educator in Graphic and Creative communications. A seasoned expert with almost two decades of industry experience as Director of Advanced Technologies at CJ Graphics, the world's most award-winning print-communications company, Lee also served as Associate Editor of DesignEdge, Canada's premier trade-magazine for graphic designers for seven years. He currently focuses his efforts on mapping industry trends and integrating AI-powered tools into creative professions. A frequent speaker at international conferences, including appearances in Beijing, Tel Aviv, and Reykjavik, he shares insights on current and future trends in graphic technologies. Lee serves on the Board of Directors of the Ontario Print and Imaging Association and is a co-host of CreativeMornings Toronto, helping to shaping the next generation of creative professionals. You can find more of his research and writing at [www.GraphicEd.org](http://www.GraphicEd.org)



## About CreativeMornings Toronto

CreativeMornings is a free, global monthly breakfast lecture series designed for creative communities. The concept is simple: breakfast and a short talk one Friday morning a month. Every event is free of charge, and open to anyone – everyone is creative! Lecturers often include professional creators, designers, photographers and illustrators. CreativeMornings hosts monthly events in over 240 cities worldwide, and across 75 countries. The Toronto chapter is co-hosted by Lee Eldridge and Ivan Wanis-Ruiz.



This edition of CreativeMornings Toronto (May 2025) was presented in Partnership with The Creative School at Toronto Metropolitan University (Formerly Ryerson University).

For more information and upcoming event details, please visit: [www.CreativeMornings.com/TO](http://www.CreativeMornings.com/TO)