

Victoria Lozano Transcript

[00:00:00] Victoria: There's no way to predict what the jobs are going to be in the future or how things evolve, but there's no question that things are evolving at an incredibly fast pace and that technology, in one way, shape, or form, is playing an increasingly important role in our lives. And that is actually precisely why the importance of understanding what creativity is and how to nurture it. So whether it's in kids and really enabling them to keep that creativity—the innate thing, the innate quality that kids are naturally just born with or have—or whether it's in adults and really keeping it as a lifelong mindset, the importance of having creativity as a life skill is precisely because it actually helps prepare us individually and us collectively as a broader society and as a culture for whatever comes ahead.

[00:00:54] Matt: To thrive in a rapidly evolving landscape, brands must move at an ever-increasing pace. I'm Matt Britton, founder and CEO of Suzy. Join me and key industry leaders as we dive deep into the shifting consumer trends within their industry, why it matters now, and how you can keep up. Welcome to *The Speed of Culture* podcast. We are thrilled to welcome Victoria Lozano, the Chief Marketing Officer at Crayola. Victoria's played a pivotal role in Crayola's evolution, leading groundbreaking initiatives like the "Campaign for Creativity" and redefining how creativity and color can impact emotional and cognitive development. Victoria, I've been really looking forward to this. It's great to see you today. Thanks for joining.

[00:01:35] Victoria: Great to see you. Thanks for having me, Matt.

[00:01:37] Matt: Absolutely. So we're going through such an interesting time right now in the evolution of the consumer, especially with AI. I mean, I speak everywhere about AI, and the first question I get asked is, "What should I tell my kids to focus on? Like, what jobs are still going to exist?" And I answer in a lot of different ways, depending upon the audience, but the word creativity is always mentioned in that answer because I think that is one of the traits and skill sets that in so many ways is uniquely human and AI-proof. I'm just curious what your thoughts are on this changing evolution—where creativity fits in.

[00:02:13] Victoria: Well, I think some of the things you're asking are actually multiple \$64,000 questions—or actually quite more valuable. I think, look, there's no way to predict what the jobs are going to be in the future or how things evolve, but there's no question that things are evolving at an incredibly fast pace and that technology, in one way, shape, or form, is playing an increasingly important role in our lives. And that is actually precisely why the importance of understanding what creativity is and how to nurture it. So whether it's in kids and really enabling them to keep that creativity—that innate thing, that innate quality that kids are naturally just born with or have—or whether it's in adults and really keeping it as a lifelong mindset, the importance of having creativity as a life skill is precisely because it actually helps prepare us individually and us collectively as a broader society and as a culture for whatever comes ahead or whatever lies ahead. It doesn't matter what your job is, what industry you're in,

and what you specifically do within that industry, nor does it necessarily matter what the future jobs will look like. Because when you have creativity as a mindset—a way of thinking, a way of problem-solving, a way of collaborating and coming up with innovative new ideas with other people—if you have that, you will, in fact, be best prepared for whatever lies ahead.

[00:03:45] Matt: Absolutely. I mean, it's really interesting because I think when you think of Crayola, you think of coloring first and foremost. And when we were kids, at least when I was growing up—I'm a Gen Xer—you were taught to color inside the lines. And I think now more than ever, in the future, the world's going to reward those who color outside the lines because AI can color inside the lines, and it's basically about really being deterministic in an output where I think what makes things incredible coming out of a human is people who color outside the lines, who think differently. And I'm just curious in terms of the overall approach to creativity, do you see that the same way? Do you see the boundaries of creativity blurring when it comes to coloring inside the lines?

[00:04:30] Victoria: Sure. Well, I think what you're talking about is poking exactly at that—what is creativity—that exact question. When you think about creativity, just as coloring, that does tend to be how some of the myths or some of the lingering perceptions come about. But what you're poking at, or "coloring outside the lines," is exactly what we're talking about. It is about a way of thinking. It's a way of problem-solving. It's ways that you can use those small creative moments as a way of building this lifelong mindset so that when you're faced with challenges, uncertainties, or life's challenges, you're able to actually navigate them and navigate those uncertainties in a much better way. So, absolutely, it is not about coloring. It is about expressing your creativity. It's about developing creativity as a soft skill. It's about developing a mindset that helps you do those kinds of things. And I think that's important as a child. It's important as an adult. And in fact, it is what makes us better as a society. And I will tell you, just as an example of how strongly we at Crayola and me, myself, as an individual, believe in this: Crayola was founded 122 years ago—a little history story. And at that time, the founders who actually founded the business or founded the brand, this is at the back end of the Industrial Revolution, and they very much believed that America as a country was not going to be successful based on what was made, but it was going to be successful based on having the best inventors, problem-solvers, and innovators. And they believed that creativity and hands-on creative experiences are what helped develop that as a life skill.

So, guess what? Fast forward, we're now 122 years later. That belief still holds, and that is exactly, I think, when you use an expression like "coloring outside the lines," that's exactly what you're talking about. And I think that that will continue to remain true, and those are the kinds of people that ultimately—the thinkers, the doers—that will ultimately help lead and change the world for the better.

[00:06:30] Matt: Yeah, I mean, right now, some could make the case that innovation and creativity is really all we have as a global competitive advantage because it used to be manufacturing, but other countries around the world have proven to manufacture far more

efficiently. People work longer hours in other places, and all of their nations have one on productivity. But where the U.S. has continued to be exceptional is around innovation. Where would we be without Google, and Microsoft, and Apple, and these great companies? And those companies thrive not just on their ability to execute their supply chains well but to continually come up with new ideas. And I agree that you can't come up with those new ideas later in life if you're not trained the right way at early ages in life.

[00:07:13] Victoria: Absolutely. That is just incredibly important. And as the world advances and as AI and other technologies continue to take shape, that naturally human ability of "How do you use those tools but use them to even further advance how we innovate, how we think?" I think is where the magic comes through for us to continue, in the U.S. and anywhere else in the world, to continue to sort of thrive and advance as a human race.

[00:07:41] Matt: I agree. And, Victoria, you've kind of alluded to it several times already in our conversation that Crayola is more than a crayon company. What are some of the bold innovations the company has brought to market over the last three to five years that really show the company's commitment to broaden its aperture in terms of its product portfolio to appeal to new audiences and also take advantage of where the world is headed in the world of creativity?

[00:08:06] Victoria: Sure. Well, the way that we like to think about the Crayola brand and the business is really in the context of a framework of **products, experiences, and content**. And each one of the three pillars has its own things that we actually have in the market and that we innovate around, but they also work together because at the end of the day, an average consumer will have an experience with all of those as multiple touch points across the brand. And in the product world, we are, of course, most well-known for some of our iconic products, but a tremendous amount of resources and passion and innovation and breakthrough technologies that we bring to continuing to innovate on the kinds of products that we deliver to the market. So whether they are about hands-on creative expression on paper, whether they are around more of a playful and toy kind of creative toy products, whether they're around competitive products like our Color Worlds product, innovation continues to be an incredible priority because there are just so many different ways that you can express and experience creativity in a hands-on way.

In the world of experiences, some of the things that we really focus on are things such as our interactive business. Like, "Why should the canvas be always physical? Why can't it be digital?" And "Why can't it be intertwined with storytelling or gameplay?" Because all of that is actually sort of innate sometimes to how adults or kids express their creativity. Or location-based entertainment and the way that we create gated attraction experiences that really curate and create these immersive experiences that last hours on average in a single time, and really enable us to immerse and engage people in everything creative, so that people go home and they say, "Incredible experience. I made so many good family memories. I want to do this again." Whether it comes because they come back or whether they actually do it at home,

that's okay. Or in the world of content, we focus very much on what we do in social and in our overall communication around the "Crayola Campaign for Creativity." We also do a lot around education and how you use creativity in the classroom to teach core subjects, things such as literacy or social-emotional learning, and STEM subjects, sciences. So, I think what happens in the through content or "Crayola Studios" and how we think about entertainment content and how we showcase and celebrate creativity and the way that creativity could be part of engaging storytelling... I think what's really incredible and really powerful is the ability to not only have a clear point of view and a way to go to market in each one of those areas, but again, bringing them together so that folks and parents, teachers, and educators really experience them across the board. And what we have seen by being able to connect those dots is that not only does it create a more meaningful experience, but it's actually broadening how people think about the brand.

I know it's not going to surprise you, around all the things that we do targeted at kids or things that we do with educators in the classroom, because that's what you sort of know and love about Crayola. Right? Well, hopefully, love, but certainly know. But I think what might surprise you is that last year, over 50% of our purchases happened in households with no kids present.

[00:11:20] Matt: Wow. I knew you were targeting adults, but the fact that over 50% of the purchases... that is shocking.

[00:11:27] Victoria: And while there are certainly aunts, uncles, and grandparents in that mix, that is only a portion of that audience. A very large portion of that audience are buying it for themselves. And the question is why? Well, why is because this is a brand that, A, offers an incredibly broad number of ways to engage with the brand. It's a brand that offers experiences, products, and content that are relevant, that are engaging, and are really tapping into this fundamental human truth around the fact that creativity is an innate skill. We tend to be born with it. And as kids, we're sort of not worried about some of the judgment and the limitation. We just do it. We do it for the sake of doing.

[00:12:09] Matt: Over time, we lose it, though, because we're focused on everyday... we're forced to follow the rules, and I guess the mysticism of creativity kind of gets pushed down on the priority list.

[00:12:19] Victoria: I actually think it's a couple of things. A is the expectations of being really productive, right? And what you do with your time and all the things that you as an adult need to accomplish, and kind of finding room for some of these things without feeling guilty about it. And which, by the way, there's absolutely nothing to feel guilty about because it's actually an incredibly important part of our individual sort of emotional ecosystem, and we just need to give ourselves permission to just do it.

[00:12:45] Matt: You can look at, like, meditation or exercise. Right? It's just something you're doing for yourself.

[00:12:49] Victoria: Absolutely. It's recentering. It's inspirational. And, also, frankly, we know that there's a lot of links to wellness involved in terms of doing it, but we also just, as adults, need to let go of some of the judgment that as kids age, they begin to learn. This is a learned behavior around judgment and around how what I create needs to be evaluated and the quality standard and what the expectations are. And I think as adults, that tends to be so embedded in our brains that we don't as much focus on the process of creation and what actually it does to help refuel, reenergize, and recenter you, but we focus a lot on the output. And is what I created worthy of the time, or being able to say that I just spent all this time doing it? And I just think that is a very learned behavior. And if we are going to have the best innovators and problem-solvers and thinkers—us kids who are just growing up or as adults—we need to just let ourselves do it and have the permission without the fear of judgment and have the permission that sometimes it's the process of doing that is the energizing and empowering and freeing elements to help really sort of rediscover who you are and what you enjoy and reground you just as a human being.

[00:14:09] Matt: It's so interesting you say that. I have a four-year-old daughter, and before she goes to bed every night, we spend half an hour just doing a creative activity. It could be building Legos or it could be using one of your products, coloring, painting, whatever it may be. And it is centering for me, and it's something I would never do if it weren't for her, just honestly. But I probably should otherwise. And as a parent, you kind of force, sometimes, for lack of a better term, into that framework. And once you're in it, you're like, "Wow. This is really great for me." My question for you is, is the growth in this area, which almost seems counterculture, just reflective of people's need to escape from the chaos of modern-day society and 24-hour scrolling and everything that makes our minds so jumbled? Do you find because of that, there's more demand for what you're talking about—the area of creativity?

[00:15:02] Victoria: I think a lot of the demand for creativity comes from the fact that people, especially some older generations, have been ingrained with that expectation of productivity, the expectation of quality output. And I think what they're beginning to realize is that that has value beyond the output. And I think they're beginning to realize the value of doing it and the value of the experience. I think some people use it because it does help them to recenter and reground, and it's really part of their well-being and mental health, and wellness. For some people, it is about those bonding opportunities, like you with your daughter. Right? And it's creating these memories and this special moment that, guess what? Ten years from now, she might say to you, "Dad, remember when we did that?" and it's actually becoming part of your shared experience. I think there could be a lot of different reasons you get involved in it, but I think what's really important is the incredible power of those simple creative moments and the incredible, not only traditions that they might create for you as an individual, for you as a dad, but this is an incredible value that they carry. And I like to think about it in the context of these little c's—little creative moments, simple 15 minutes that you might spend every day—but the incredible power in how they adapt to this really big C as creativity, as something that becomes part of the way you think, part of the way you act, and sort of part of you just as a human

being, the way that you express your thoughts and ideas. And I just think that is so incredibly powerful.

[00:16:36] Matt: We'll be right back with *The Speed of Culture* after a few words from our sponsors.

So, obviously, despite the fact you're seeing growth with adults, younger consumers still remain a core target for Crayola. And the core young consumer target right now is Gen Alpha, who's age zero to 15 years old, and their attention span is shorter than ever before. They're the TikTok generation. They're toggling between Roblox and Minecraft and all these activities that are super intense. Does that change the way that you look at your product road map at all in terms of the ways that you can engage and market to that audience?

[00:17:14] Victoria: I would say it already has because there's no question that there are some generational differences, and some examples that you've given are good ones. I think that is precisely why it's so important for Crayola and why we think about our business around products, experiences, and content, because it is around that ecosystem and the various touch points. Some may come into the world of Crayola through products. Some might come in through digital experiences. Some might come in through entertainment and animated movies or shows, or live-action work that we do as part of Crayola Studios' slate. However, no matter what your "way in" is, it is still around celebrating, nurturing, and showcasing the incredible value and impact of creativity. So as new generations sort of come in, the mix of how we go to market and how the brand shows up is changing, and it needs to change. But that is precisely why we've made that shift to think about it across product experiences and content and to recognize that in order for the brand to be as relevant and as loved as it has been over the last 122 years, we have to find these unique and engaging ways of relating and engaging our audiences and doing it in a way that adjusts to how they might actually engage with brands and how they consume media and how they spend their time.

[00:18:35] Matt: Right. And I know as a CMO, it's your job to package all this together in the form of a story. That really reinforces the brand, as you mentioned, well over 100 years old, so you want to make sure the brand remains relevant. I think in that regard, continuing to evolve the messaging is important. I know a big campaign that you're involved in is called the "Campaign for Creativity," and it's really focused on brand purpose. And a lot of the things we've been discussing, we'd love to hear about that campaign and maybe some of the results you've seen thus far and why you're excited about it.

[00:19:05] Victoria: Absolutely. I think "Campaign for Creativity" is something that really encapsulates everything that we have talked about, and it's really around a focus on a broader societal and cultural conversation around what creativity is, why it matters, how we think about it as truly a life skill, and something that takes shape through simple creative moments but really adds up to a lifetime of difference and lifelong creative mindsets. This campaign launched last year. We've had a tremendous response to the campaign, and this year we're

launching what we call the second chapter, that is really focusing on the right now, call to action of helping colorful acts of creativity inspired by one child's drawing. We found this incredible child. Her name is Cadence. She's nine years old, and she's sort of the representation of this boundless creativity and aspiration that lives in all of us. She created this amazing piece of art that we've posted on social media, and we're inviting creators and any person out there who wants to participate to please join and help us show Cadence what the colors that she used and how her creativity can inspire so many other moments of creativity around the world.

And I think that's really the importance of this campaign. There is a bigger message. There is a bigger purpose around the brand and the brand's role in society, but it also comes down to us as every individual and each one of us, how we show our creativity and how we really create this as a social movement. This is not just a marketing campaign. This is truly an effort to change and impact culture, and we hope to be able to really inspire folks to join the movement and to start talking about it because it is just so important.

[00:20:54] Matt: Fantastic. So, shifting gears a little bit as we wrap up here, Victoria, I know that you've been at Crayola for 16 years, and, obviously, through everything we've been talking about and just looking at the state of the world, things have changed quite a lot in 16 years. I think what I'd love to know more specifically is, "How has Crayola changed since when you first walked into the doors of the company?" And with that, "How has the role of a marketer changed today versus at a point in 2009 when people were just starting to adopt the iPhone?"

[00:21:25] Victoria: Sure. Well, the world has changed tremendously, whether it's around the brand and what it looks like, and the size and the global footprint. And like I mentioned, the breadth of everything that we offer—products, experiences, and content—the way we go to market is absolutely different. It's so much more fragmented and is so much more faster-moving than it's ever been before, and I think it's just going to continue to get even more so.

So I think my kind of perception is Crayola has always had an incredibly clear point of view as to what it's for, why it exists, and it's not about, "Just we make this." Yes, we do make this. Yes, we do create this, but a larger purpose in the world. And finding ways and giving a voice to that message, to how that shows up, I think, is really what's shifted quite a bit. And I think when you look at 16 in the rear window, but if you actually look forward and look towards the future, what the brand means across all age groups is truly absolutely an exciting opportunity and ways that the way that we go to market actually and being more social, being more fragmented actually gives us the opportunity to reach different consumers differently and to personalize the conversation and the messages, frankly, in a way that wasn't possible 10 to 15 years ago. The way that you look at the global footprint and the tremendous opportunity Crayola has globally is actually really exciting. And, again, the way that the world has evolved in that respect has also been quite enabling. So I think for me, it's a lot of change, a lot of progress, but also a lot more of those kinds of opportunities that have opened up that sort of open up our aperture for the brand as a business and create tremendous opportunities for us to continue to grow and to

make a difference in the world of kids, adults, educators, everywhere around the world to the same degree that we have already in the U.S. as a country where, obviously, the brand had originally started out.

[00:23:28] Matt: And in order for you to seize those opportunities and make that global impact, obviously, you're not going to be able to do it all by yourself, and I know you guys have a great team at Crayola, and you continue to look for great talent to come to the organization. For some of our younger listeners here on the podcast, what are some of the traits and skill sets do you think entry-level marketers should focus on so they could maybe one day end up in the CMO seat like you're in today?

[00:23:56] Victoria: Well, I think having incredible team members and what we call "Crayolians," having incredible partners and agencies is all an important part of our ecosystem. I think for newly coming in marketers, I think ways that you can stretch the thinking and going in different directions... I think there is a sort of in you and any career, you're obviously looking to learn a lot, and you're looking to sort of get up to speed. But I think the people that really stand out are the people that are using that information to really challenge and push ideas, to come up with new ways of looking at things, to be able to learn quickly. Not everything is going to go right. Sometimes we all make mistakes, or sometimes we consider things that ultimately don't end up working out for whatever reason, but what have you learned from it? How quickly can you convert it to new ideas? What are different ideas that you consider? How do you problem-solve? Because things will come up, and there will be challenges throughout the process no matter what you're working on. I think it's a lot of times those softer skill sets that actually make a difference between someone who is technically good and someone who could take that knowledge and really take it to the next level and come up with those incredible ideas or bring them to life and market in a way that is just better, stronger, and more compelling. So I think for any new marketer, that's what I would focus on is, yes, learn what you need to learn, but use that creative mindset. Use that new way of thinking to really push ideas, learning, and taking that to new places and spaces in a way of helping redefine what the brand that you're working on actually means, stands for, and the way it goes to market. Yeah.

[00:25:38] Matt: And, of course, softer skills are harder to learn later in life. So I think to your point, start to foster those skills if you're a parent with your children early in life. And it's obviously never too late, but once you start to, I think, congeal your mind around a different way of thinking, it becomes easier to continue to grow as a creative professional than trying to bolt it on as a soft skill set later in your career, which I think, unfortunately, a lot of people are going to have to figure out as you continue to see companies just reevaluate their workforce in this new age of AI.

[00:26:11] Victoria: Absolutely. But I think sometimes people just need to give themselves a little credit and just to be able to pause for a second and say, "Hey. What am I not thinking of? What are my blind spots? How can I potentially approach this differently?" Pick the most creative person you know personally in your circle, and when you encounter an issue, what

would that person tell you to do? How could that person think about you differently? And it's always, always, always—no matter what—and I know this sounds so obvious, but I can't overemphasize it: Think about it from a perspective of your audience, not yourself. I think sometimes, as marketers, we tend to get so focused on what we need to accomplish. And, "How do I convey what it is that I'm trying to say about my brand or my business or this particular initiative?"

[00:26:55] Matt: Right. Unique selling proposition.

[00:26:57] Victoria: Exactly. You're so focused on the marketing speak, and sometimes it's just the basic human... "If you were the consumer and you heard this, do you know what that means? Does that mean anything to you? Is it compelling enough? Would you change your behavior? Not just you know, listen to, 'Oh, it's not great,' and then move on with your day. Is it going to compel you to change your behavior or do something differently?" It's when you put on that other hat that allows you to sort of pressure test what you're doing that sometimes you sort of realize that, "Hey. We actually got it." Or sometimes, "No. You know what? We don't got it yet, and we're not quite where we need to be because if you actually think about it from what I need to hear, here are the things that are not clicking yet." And that's kind of like the critical thinking that sometimes really helps you get what you're doing to the next level and accomplish the results that you're looking for.

[00:27:48] Matt: I think what you're articulating is really the shift from advertising to content. I mean, advertising was all about "350 horsepower," "20% more absorbent," those USPs that you'd force into advertising that consumers would have to watch on 30-second spots because they couldn't skip it. And now we are in a world where we have to be consumer-centric, and we have to think about the consumer first. Otherwise, we're not going to be able to engage them where they're spending most of their time, which is on platforms like social media, where content rules the day.

[00:28:16] Victoria: It does, and it does it in a lot more personalized way because it's not just even on social media—well, depending on the platform, you're stating the obvious—but how that content is delivered, the kind of messaging, the kinds of things that resonate with people is going to be different. So in this world of more kind of marketing fragmentation, it does get more complicated, but it also gives you a lot more opportunity to relate to that specific audience in a way that makes sense for them, and it really addresses their mindset and what they're looking for when they are, as an example, on that social media platform. So I think just having that understanding and keeping that in mind allows you to produce the most compelling campaigns and go-to-market plans in a way that ultimately makes your brand stand out because it is not just a "Let me tell you what I need to tell you," and it's a 30-second commercial. And everybody's going to see the same commercial, and that's the bulk of the marketing plans. I mean, those days are long, long gone.

[00:29:12] Matt: Yeah. I mean, I think to the contrary, with AI, you're going to be able to talk to a million different people a million different ways based upon signals that you know about them. And that's going to be where marketing is going to change dramatically is that hyper-personalization, which I think AI is finally starting to unlock.

[00:29:28] Victoria: Yeah. For sure.

[00:29:29] Matt: Well, it's been such a great discussion. I'm so appreciative of you taking time out of your busy schedule to share your story and all the great work you're doing at Crayola with our audience today. Just finally, we always ask our guests to wrap up if there's a quote or a mantra that guides their professional journey. I was wondering what might come to mind for you.

[00:29:46] Victoria: This is a quote that actually someone had at one point told me when I was struggling with something in my personal life, but it's just something that I've always remembered. And this friend said to me, "Human capacity grows." And when you feel that something you're tackling is uncertain or perhaps overwhelming, I think just knowing that your individual capacity and your ability to tackle whatever you are faced with is flexible. And this ability that there's not a lot of these things, as I would say, as elastic as the human mind or the human spirit. And I think whenever there is a particularly challenging project or a particularly challenging initiative or anything like that, I always sort of take that pause and say, "It's just one of those. We will figure it out. Let's just figure out what are the things that we think we need to solve for, and also, I always look at it from a perspective of what are the things that are the blind spots, the things that I'm taking for granted that I think we got? Because a lot of times, the things that surprise you are those things you actually didn't worry about. So what should I be worried about that I'm not worried about that could end up being really fundamental?" So I think it's those... a little bit longer answer than perhaps the question, but I think that's for me what sort of always grounds me and helps me sort of tackle whatever the next horizon is.

[00:31:07] Matt: Yeah. I mean, a lot of what you're identifying is the notion of focusing on what's important and not necessarily just what's urgent, and that's where a lot of the opportunities are, as well as your blind spots.

[00:31:16] Victoria: Yeah. And just letting yourself feel that everything is possible as long as you approach it with that mindset.

[00:31:23] Matt: Well, you're certainly proving it with your work at Crayola. It's incredibly inspiring to see. And, again, thanks so much for taking the time today. It's been a great episode, and I can't wait for our audience to hear it.

[00:31:32] Victoria: Thank you so much. I loved being here with you.

[00:31:34] Matt: Absolutely. On behalf of Suzy, thanks again to Victoria Lozano, the Chief Marketing Officer of Crayola, for joining us today. Be sure to subscribe, rate, and review *The*

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