

Heidi: One of my favorite quotes is, "The only thing that gets smaller as you run toward it, is fear."

Rickerby: Welcome to The Creator State, where we share stories of social innovation and entrepreneurship for movers, shakers, creators, and change makers. Each episode will celebrate success and failure, ingenuity, and the endless pursuit of knowledge.

Rickerby: In this episode, we're talking with Heidi Marie Garrett Villa about how she is using her experiences as a competitive athlete, hair and makeup artist, and health coach to create new definitions of beauty. Tune in to hear Heidi explain how she is turning her competitors into a supportive community, and why her biggest goal is to be able to give her services away for free. We'll also explore how social media is altering the creative process for artists.

Rickerby: We're recording in the Goldware Library at the University of California Riverside Alumni and Visitor Center. I'm your host Rickerby Hinds. Welcome to The Creator state.

Rickerby: I want to begin by asking you to talk just a little bit about what is your definition of beauty.

Heidi: All right. We're starting off strong right here.

Rickerby: Or should we back up? No, let's go there.

Heidi: No, we're good. First off, thank you for having me. I'm so excited to be here.

Heidi: My definition of beauty is that I don't have one because I don't think that you can really put beauty in ... or, you can't define beauty by putting it in a box because to me, beauty can be anything from a space between your two front teeth, stretch marks after giving birth. Those things are what make you who you are, give you character based on some of your life experiences, and all that, so ... But to some people, that isn't beauty, and I think that beauty is constantly changing, and the definition from person to person is obviously different too.

Heidi: But, I guess, for me, deep down, what beauty is to me, it goes beyond just kind of what a person looks like. Obviously, as a hair and makeup artist, I am working on the outside of a person, with their hair, with their face, and even sometimes with their body because you can contour, you can do all kinds of crazy things with ... and, you know, you're from a theater background. You know that you can do some really cool things to make a person become a character.

Rickerby: Yes.

Heidi: But deep down, beauty represents who you are at the core based on how you love, how you treat other people, and how honest you are, and just your integrity. So, you could change anything about how you look, but it's shouldn't change who you are at the core.

Rickerby: Very cool. You were an athlete when you were here at UCR. You played soccer.

Rickerby: Talk to me about going from being an athlete to someone who, now, is working with beauty and makeup, and then we'll get to weddings in a minute.

Heidi: Sure. So, I would say that most people ... maybe not so now, because I've been out of college for a while, been out of sports for a while, but initially, I think a lot of people were surprised that I went down the career path I chose because I think most athletes tend to graduate college and kind of ... they become a coach, or a physical trainer, you know, they do ... or a sportscaster. You know, they kind of stick to what they know.

Heidi: But I've always known hair and makeup. Ever since I was a little girl, on all my soccer teams, I was doing everyone's braids, and ponytails, and up-dos in between games at a tournament.

Rickerby: Wow. So, our team look better than the others.

Heidi: Yes. You could say so.

Rickerby: Sorry, I ... Anyway. Yes.

Heidi: And even with hair coloring. I don't color hair and now, but with having 30 teammates, I had 30 willing volunteers who would let me kind of mess with their hair. So, it might seem surprising that, "Wow. This Division-1 athlete is now in a beauty industry."

Heidi: But that's, in my opinion, who I've always been. It's always intrigued me just as much, if not more, than being an athlete because I learned how to braid when I was five. I always joke and say, "I make hair contact before eye contact with people." And so, when you have something like that that's just a part of who you are, it, I would hope, becomes a natural future for you too.

Rickerby: Yes. Hair contact. That's ... I'm going to make a note of hair contact.

Rickerby: So, let's talk about the transition, or finishing up at UCR, and then transitioning into the business that you are in now, and there are multiple facets to the business. But can you talk a little about that transition, and what was it that made you say, "Okay. This is the direction that I'm going in."

Heidi: Well, I knew once I graduated from UCR, I wanted to go to cosmetology school. So, as soon as I graduated here, about six months later, I started the cosmetology program at RCC, Riverside Community College. So, that was kind of the natural next step.

Heidi: And I remember being in one of my business classes with one of my favorite professors here on campus, and he took a poll in the middle of class, and said, "Who's planning on going to grad school?" And I did not raise my hand. And I was one of the few people who didn't raise their hand. And so, he looked at me, point-blank, because I was a person who sat near, or in the front of class because that's how I learned best, and he

said, "Why aren't you going to grad school?" And I said, "Because I'm going to go to cosmetology school." And I said it really proud because most people would think that that's maybe a step back versus a step forward, and because there's always been a stereotype attached to being a cosmetologist.

Heidi: But anyways, when I said that, he said, "Well, that is your grad school. And that's great." So, for me, it kind of validated my choice in going, not that I really needed that validation, but it just became the natural next step for me because I was continuing to pursue my dream. And I'm grateful to have been able to play soccer on a scholarship, and get my degree, and have that educational background in business because it has truly helped me in my career.

Heidi: A lot of times people go to cosmetology school, maybe right out of high school, and, you know, you think that you're going to go and learn how to do hair, and like, "Oh, this is so fun," but we are our own business owners. Whether you work in a salon as a commissioned stylist and you're working for someone, you're still your own boss in a sense. So, it's really important to know some, at least, Business-101 skills. So ...

Rickerby: Very cool.

Rickerby: So, I read that one of the primary focuses of what you do are weddings. Can you talk a little bit about what it is about being involved on this day with someone's life? And how does the role that you play become possibly more significant than just doing hair and makeup?

Heidi: So, those are some pretty loaded questions, so be prepared for an in-depth answer.

Heidi: So, I did my first wedding when I was 17, maybe 16. I was in high school, and one of my friends, her ... my friend's boyfriend's mom was getting re-married, and I, leading up to that, had been doing formal hair styling for prom and all the school dances, and back then, because this is now, you know, 14 years ago or so, not to age myself, but, you know, this was back in high school, like I said. And the wedding industry was very different back then. Most of the time, people, or brides, would go to their regular hair stylist in the salon for an appointment and get their hair done.

Heidi: Now, there is an entire segment of the industry, a niche, within the beauty industry specifically carved out for hair and makeup artists who can specialize in doing weddings and special events. So, I kind of would say I was in the right place at the right time, some divine timing on all of that. And by the time I was ready to really start my career, the doors had been just completely open, not just for myself, but for anyone who wanted to be in the wedding industry as a hair and makeup artist.

Heidi: So, now, brides are seeking out professionals who specialize in weddings because it really is such a different type of day than just going to the salon for a regular old hair appointment. Not to downplay that because hair is so important, it's our crown. But when you're working a wedding, it takes a certain caliber of customer service, of calmness no matter how stressed or freak out you are. You don't get to cancel.

Heidi: It's so important that you're finding someone who actually does weddings because they understand the significance of the role that they play for you on your wedding day. And specifically, a hair and makeup artist, if you think about it, we are spending the entire first half of the day with the bridal party before any other vendor comes into the hotel room, or the venue, or whatever, wherever we're getting ready. And so, if you are a person who likes to talk about yourself, is drama, who is high anxiety, those are the things you are going to be bringing to the room for six hours potentially.

Heidi: But if you're a person who's very professional, who wants your clients to feel calm, and relaxed, and excited for their big day, and really understands and listens to their needs, then all the other vendors are going to walk in and notice a difference, that, "Wow. This is the calmest bridal party I've ever met."

Rickerby: So, tell me about your creative process. You have canvases in a sense, you also have live movement happening, meaning you have an entire production going on when you are the one who is setting everything up for this day, for this wedding day. So, tell me about your creative process even before you get to the space.

Heidi: Well, I suppose it depends on the job that I'm working because if we're speaking to weddings specifically ... it's not to say that there isn't a creative process, but when you are doing a consultation with your client, it's important that you are listening to their concerns, listening to their needs, and looking at photos with them that they chose as inspiration, and then bringing your own ...

PART 1 OF 3 ENDS [00:11:04]

Heidi: ... they chose as inspiration and then, bringing your own twist to it or creativity to whatever they're requesting. Over the years, I would say that there has been ... How do I even say this? So, the creative aspect of doing weddings, over time, I feel like it's almost not there anymore because you're trying to please a client. Now, when you're working on a photoshoot and there's a team of artistic people coming together for, maybe there's a theme or there's a mood board or something that the person putting together the shoot created and you're following that, there's still a lot of wiggle room for your own creativity to come out.

Heidi: They're very different in the sense that when you're working on a model, they don't have a say on what their hair make up is going to look like. You can truly experiment and have full creative freedom over what look they're going to get. With a bride, very rarely does a bride say, "Do whatever you want. I trust you," and when she does say that, I always look at her and tell her, "You are the expert in yourself and I don't know you yet, so I want to get to know what your preferences are and then I'll do my thing." So, it's a collaboration with your client to ensure that they feel the most comfortable and like themselves or not like themselves, I guess, too.

Heidi: They want a look that is completely different than their norm. It's hard to explain the creative process involved without actually being the hair make up artist working on a consultation with a client.

Rickerby: When I asked about your creative process, I realized that there are parallels to preparing for any type of creativity and part of it is doing that research and knowing where you will be creating. Tell me a little bit about that for you when you are deciding or when you know that you're doing one particular job versus another.

Heidi: Well, I will say this first that social media has been a huge blessing as well as a curse for creatives because there's so much content available and now, I remember when I Was doing wedding even six years ago, when I was dabbling in it, starting out, trying to see if I could make it a career. I'd have clients who didn't bring me any photos because there wasn't photos except maybe really outdated photos on Google. They would truly be like, "Yeah, do whatever you think," and I'd asked them some questions, but I really felt like I got to create.

Heidi: They were excited to have a really neat updo or even a downdo because they haven't seen anything like that in the past because there wasn't these visuals of it in our face all the time on Instagram, Pinterest, or even Facebook and stuff. Now that the content is so readily available, not just to SS stylists, but to the client, the creative process is very different now for me than it was even five or six years ago. In a sense, you feel like because of trends, because of what's become popular, you almost feel like you're doing the same thing over and over again, but the thing I have to remind myself is that it's new to the client even if it's not new to me.

Rickerby: Well, it's the same idea behind doing a play which is this play is happening right now for the only time ever in this particular moment, so even if you've done the play 10, 15, 20, 100 times, it's getting yourself in that mind state to pay the same attention to every line. So, mistakes. How have mistakes or mishaps contributed to your success in your business?

Heidi: I think that's a great question. The word mistake is okay. Luckily, I would say the majority of the "mistakes" that I've experienced ... and I still experience mistakes because it's a constantly changing industry, you have to be very flexible and willing to change with it, but especially in the beginning, I would say I had a lot of women in my life who were also hair makeup artists, but we were all figuring it out at the same time, and defining what it looked like to be a wedding hair makeup artists because as I said before, there weren't a lot to really go off of and model your business after.

Heidi: In the beginning, I'm like, "Yeah, I'm going to do your hair on your wedding day," and I took it seriously, but I didn't have a contract, I didn't take a deposit, I didn't think I needed one because I trusted myself that I was going to show up until I had a client who said, "Okay, great. I'd love to book you. Send me over the contract and info for the deposit and I'll mail it over to you," and I went, "Sure. No problem."

Heidi: Then, I went on Google and I researched how to put together a contract, specifically for weddings, and sent it over to her. I never once said, "Well, I don't have a contract." I started doing a contract because I had client who requested it. I would say that they weren't actual mistakes per se, but they were moments that said, "All right. Time to

start implementing this," or maybe a better example to speak to the whole mistake idea was a client who wanted to book me for her wedding.

Heidi: Initially, I thought that there was going to be six bridesmaids or a bigger bridal party that I'd be working on, and then a couple of weeks before the wedding, I get in touch with my client and she informs me that it's just going to be her now and there's only one service. Well, my mistakes for not require a minimum booking amount, my mistake for not having a contract that stated that if you committed to these services, you have to maintain them, even if they aren't going to happen anymore, you still have to pay me for it.

Heidi: I would say that in general, the majority of the mistakes that I've learned from, the client never knew that the mistake had happened, but I did. I took those oppportunities to grow my business, to evolve my business, and to make it better and better.

Rickerby: I want to go back to something you mentioned about social media. I want to ask you, you started to talk about this, but how has social media affected your business and you talked about this a little bit, what do you gain by social media and what do you lose by social media, specifically in what it is that you do?

Heidi: I would say that social media has played a huge role in my business, but also in the oppportunities that have presented themselves over the years. For example, I'm going to be going to New York soon, and it's all because of social media, because of Instagram, because of the exposure that you can give yourself over the entire world. It's not just in your area where you're paying for a little slot on a website to advertise now.

Heidi: I've collaborated with a person who does beautiful hair accessories. She lives in the Netherlands. We found each other on social media. Never would have known who she is. Those types of oppportunities, they still blow my mind years later, but also with clients being able to find their vendors now. I have clients who have been following me on Instagram for years, so when it's their turn to get married, I've had people reach out to me saying, "I've been following your work for a couple of years and now it's finally my turn. I'm so excited."

Heidi: Those are the little things that happen that get me excited again about doing work because it's amazing to me what social media can do. Then, there's a lot of pressure that comes with it too, especially if you're a person who doesn't have a lot of followers. Sometimes, clients think that you're not good enough, even though you might be one of the best hair colorists or hair stylists or makeup artists, but you might only have 1000 followers, and they're going to potentially hire someone who has 500,000 followers because of that number.

Heidi: That would, I would say, be the negative to it, is that our society puts so much weight on a number now, and it's not always an accurate depiction of someone's true abilities.

Rickerby: Can you tell us specifically what's taking you to New York and how social media played a role?

Heidi: Sure, so the opportunity that's happening in New York is there's a magazine called Modern Salon Magazine. They're putting together an artist collective where they chose 16 people who 8 of them do hair in the salon, 8 of them are stylists like myself, who do formal styling and all that or really cool braids and stuff like that. So, they invited us to come and their pairing us up, so I got paired up with a colorist and we're going to do a makeover on a model.

Heidi: So, the colorist is going to do a color makeover and then I get to do the finished look that's going to be shot for the magazine and featured in there. Then, it's a two day deal, so the first day, we're actually doing peer to peer education where we're sharing some of our tips and tricks for what we're known for to each other. I'm going off on a little tangent here, but one of the things I was hesitant about in terms of getting into the hair industry was back in the day, there was so much competitiveness amongst stylists, especially within your own salon.

Heidi: You didn't share formulas, you didn't talk about any of that, and it was very hush-hush. Now, especially also going back to the social media idea, education and freelance education has become so common that people have realized it's okay to share your secrets because you are the expert in your tips and tricks and secrets that you have and by sharing with someone else, they get to try something new and spark their creativeness again. They get to share what they're good at, that you're maybe not good at, so social media has been really great for the educational aspect of the industry as well.

Rickerby: Wow. That sounds like a really cool event, this idea of going and being able to collaborate with a peer and create something new.

PART 2 OF 3 ENDS [00:22:04]

Rickerby: To collaborate with a peer and treat something new. The idea of the competitiveness being mitigated somewhat by social media is something I wouldn't have thought would be the case. Now, let's get into the creator's state of mind. In each episode, we ask our guest to share what's been on their minds. Something they can't stop thinking about, a new challenge they're facing, or what's inspired them into action recently. We call it The Creator State Of Mind.

Heidi: I just started filming really high quality hair tutorials with a friend of mine. Her name's Erica. She's the owner of 10.11. Makeup. She loves teaching as well and we decided to collaborate to bring ... Mine and her style's are very different, and so we're bringing two styles to the table to be able to teach people how to do hair.

Heidi: Because I've gotten to go all over the United States to teach. I've even gone to Canada to teach classes.

Rickerby: Wow.

Heidi: Because of social media.

Rickerby: Wow.

Heidi: But what I've learned is that although those classes are really great and they can inspire the stylists who are attending, it's really difficult to sit there for four hours or five hours, and really grasp all of the techniques and the information all at once. You're condensing in all this information, and it's just overwhelming.

Heidi: By creating videos and allowing people to view them beyond YouTube, it's more of an educational website that people can pay for, and have access to these more educational, longer videos. They can basically pace themselves and see what they want to learn, and pick and choose.

Heidi: That's a project that I'm working on right now that I'm so excited about, if you can't tell. And then also, I've been having these conversations over the last year with my same friend, who I'm doing these videos with, and we both got into the wedding industry for the same reason. We love seeing a woman look in the mirror and really actually believe that she's beautiful for the first time.

Heidi: Over the years, I feel like that has shifted into becoming a true business, and it's hard to blend the two when you're trying to make a living doing what you love. I've always preached that you need to protect your passion, and although my passion is to do hair and makeup, part of my passion is to help women realize their natural beauty.

Heidi: So, as that has shifted into it becoming more of a job, my goal is to, and what's been on my mind a lot lately, is to be able to come full circle and actually do weddings for free again. I used to do them for free when I was first starting out.

Rickerby: Wow.

Heidi: Like, I mean I'm talking years ago or I did 'em for like 20 bucks. Not to say that I want to be slaving away and doing 50 weddings a year for free, that's not at all what I'm trying to say, but to be able to bless someone whose love story I've fallen in love with-

Rickerby: Wow.

Heidi: ... really investing and why they're choosing to get married, because to me marriage is a big deal. I have fallen away from investing in that part of the day, and in order to be able to do ... I don't want to call it a charitable act, but to be able to do something for free, you have to be making money somewhere else.

Heidi: I'm hoping that through the educational portion, which we're actually planning on also taking a portion of those proceeds to put into a scholarship fund for someone to send them to cosmetology school, which that will probably happen years from now. It's not going to be an immediate thing, but we have a lot of things where we're wanting to give back to our industry and be able to help other people on the stylist side of it to send someone to school, but also on the client side of it to just really take it back to our roots, and why we started in the first place.



Rickerby: That is very cool.

Heidi: Something also that has been a newly found passion of mine is health coaching. It's through a company. We actually prefer not to brand ourselves which might sound weird, but part of it is because we believe in speaking to each person individually and finding out their needs and understanding their why before we give them the how.

Rickerby: Before you move forward, can you define what health culture means to you, from your point of view?

Heidi: Sure. The food plan that I'm helping people and coaching people through, I actually did myself. A friend of mine who is also a makeup artist, I saw her posting on Instagram, on her social media about her weight loss, about her healthy journey, about being able to lose weight pretty quickly, but more than that, it wasn't a diet. It was a lifestyle change for her. It was a health change for her, because she had gut issues and all kinds of things.

Heidi: By doing this food plan, it completely transformed her life and her perspective on food and the role it plays in your life. Then, I'm sitting there creeping, just watching, and that's what most people do. They just sit and watch and then they realize, "Oh, my gosh, I need that."

Heidi: Then I started seeing her post clients, and I'm like, "Okay, what? She's a health coach? No. She's a makeup artist. What?" I finally reached out to her and I'm like, "Listen, I, over the years, after not being active anymore 'cause I don't have a soccer coach to tell me when I need to go and work out and what I need to do, it's been really difficult for me to maintain a healthy lifestyle, because it got put on the back-burner as I've been nurturing my business."

Heidi: She shared with me the plan and how it works, how it's changed her life, and she was like, "You would really be an awesome health coach because what we do is beyond just, it's not a weight loss program. We help people change their lives." I'm like, "I'm in, that's great. I trust you, I've known you for years, and if you are all into this, I want to be there with you."

Heidi: That's actually, I'm hoping to be able to transition not completely out of doing weddings. I would like to take a mini sabbatical from them, to be able to do them for people, less people once in a while, but really to focus on the health coaching part. We're just people's guides.

Rickerby: Wow.

Heidi: We're introducing them to a new way of living in order for them to develop healthy habits.

Rickerby: Very cool. Very cool. It is always a valuable learning opportunity to take time to reflect. At the end of each interview, we like to ask our guests this. In hindsight, what is something you wish you would have known when you were starting out?

Heidi: There was something that I did learn early on, that every single time I look back to that moment, I wish other people would be able to truly not just believe it, but live it. I used to be a really fearful person. Not like high anxiety, like to the point where I would lock myself in my bedroom kind of thing, but before I almost didn't go to college 'cause I was scared.

Heidi: I almost didn't play soccer in college because I was very scared. I remember sitting, I used to cry before new school years in third grade, and even going into high school, it just always scared me because it was change. It was new. I had to learn new things, meet new people and all that stuff. I had no idea that starting the career path that I was going to be starting, I'd be meeting new people all the time.

Heidi: Like, literally I always joke and say that a trial run for a bride is like me going on a blind date with her.

Rickerby: Wow.

Heidi: Because I've never met her. We've only communicated through email and meet up. It's really allowed me to develop beyond the fears that I used to have, and one of my favorite quotes is, "The only thing that gets smaller as you run toward it is fear."

Rickerby: Wow.

Heidi: In the very beginning of my career, I realized that I had to go out on a limb. I had to put myself out there in order to have, to experience the fruit of my labor. Because if you're just doing hair in your bathroom at your house on your friends, you're never going to experience the great big world that is there.

Heidi: The thing that I learned early on, that I see people also when they're stuck, it's because they're afraid. There are times when I still am nervous, I'm scared. I don't want to do something 'cause it's going to stretch me, but because of all of the amazing things that have come after stepping into a situation that initially would have scared me, but I grew from it, I now know that if I'm afraid of it, I need to do it.

Heidi: I encourage everyone to also do the same, no matter if you're year one into your business or your career or your school, or year 10. Doesn't matter, 'cause we all have our fears and insecurities that we won't grow until we attack them.

Rickerby: Wow. Thank you so much for being our guest on this episode of The Creator State.

Heidi: Thank you for having me. It's been awesome.

Rickerby: Join us for our next episode when we sit down with tech entrepreneur Kevin Marcus to talk about taking risks and getting out of your comfort zone to achieve success. Thanks for listening. Find behind the scenes video and more information about our guests at CreatorState.com. Write us at creatorstate@ucr.edu, or find us on Twitter and Facebook, @TheCreatorState.

Rickerby: There's a team creating this podcast. Help us out by subscribing on iTunes, SoundCloud, or wherever you listen, and while you're there, leave us a review. Our producer for the show is Jennifer [Merrit 00:32:22], with video, audio, and editing by Christy Zwicke, Christina Rodriguez, David Silos, Chan Moon, and Rosemary Kwang. Digital strategy by Kelly McGrail, and design by Kristy Danforth, Denise Wolff, Brad Row, and creative director, Luis Sans.

Rickerby: The show is brought to you by the University of California Riverside. I'm your host, Rickerby Hinds. Thank you for joining us in The Creator State.

PART 3 OF 3 ENDS [00:32:56]