



# Northeastern Next Podcast

Season 1: Episode 27  
Air Date: October 27, 2020

**Vallabhi Singh, DMSB'17**  
Creatives Around the World



Meghan Brisson: Welcome to the Northeastern Next podcast, your channel for the latest alumni stories in Boston and beyond. In this show we'll catch up with Northeastern alumni who are out there achieving what's next.

Meghan Brisson: Curiosity is her compass. From her home in Delhi, India, Vallabhi Singh brings diverse perspectives and change makers to speak on her digital platform, Creatives Around The World...

Meghan Brisson: Hi Val. Welcome to the Northeastern Next podcast.

Val Singh: Hi Meghan, thank you so much for having me. It's really, really exciting to be here and to be given this opportunity to record a podcast with you.

Meghan Brisson: This show is about telling stories and sharing different voices with the alumni community. So I think our work has a few things in common. In the spring, you shared that you started a digital platform called, Creatives Around The World, focused on diverse perspectives and storytelling. So tell us about this program and why you started it.

Val Singh: Sure. So, I think there are a lot of similarities. And also, first of all, I want to share with you that I'm going to take notes on what you're doing, because the next thing on my list is to get a podcast started. But in essence, yeah, I mean, it's a loaded question, sometimes even I'm trying to figure out, what does Creatives Around The World really stand for? But in retrospect, I started this in 2020, and in essence, the way I see it is that, it's a combination of all the things that matter to me or have shaped me into the person that I am today.

Val Singh: And when I say that, what I really mean is that I've always been very interested, ever since I was, I think a junior or a senior at Northeastern, I was really interested in creative entrepreneurs and new ventures and



people and partnerships, how those things work. I think Northeastern and other universities also, they're very focused on their global community and how they're activating people in different parts of the world. So I was always interested in how people collaborate in different parts of the world, what are the new ventures they're starting, all of those things. So that's been something as an aspiring and wannabe entrepreneur, it's something I've always thought.

Val Singh:

So in essence, Creatives Around The World, is actually a global community of people. And I like to call this community a CATW tribe. So people from diverse industry, diverse approaches, diverse schools of thoughts, that include; fashion designers to sustainable architects, to even somewhat, some may say boring industries, such as finance and consulting, et cetera, and from seasoned executives to young professionals, just starting off. So it's a community of these people with great ideas. And through this platform, I'm trying to bring out their stories and what they're doing and sort of taking notes and cultivating it into some takeaways that I share across this platform on Instagram and other mostly digital platforms because that's where the world lives today. Yeah. And then over time we're growing it into something a little bit bigger than what it initially started off as, but yeah, I'll tell you a little bit more about the details as we go along.

Meghan Brisson:

Yeah, I love that. We'll get into this a little later about the word creative, because it's nice to hear that it encompasses so many people and you do learn a lot from just hearing people's stories, because you can see all these entrepreneurs and you see their product or their service, and you don't know the ins and outs of how they got there or how they approach their work and, I always, just running this podcast, learn so much from my guests. So, I'm curious, because you started in May, you launched right in the midst of this pandemic that we're all living through. Did you have to pivot your idea or change your vision or was that part of it to be always digital?

Val Singh:

Well, yes and no. Yes, because we launched during the COVID lockdown, we know we've done most of our stuff, we've been an entirely virtual initiative, we've done most of our stuff online through Zoom and Instagram. And we launched with these round tables that I've been doing, which is bringing people from, as I mentioned, broad, diverse schools of thoughts, diverse industries, and also different points in their



careers and having these conversations with them. And I've been calling them round tables.

Val Singh: And yes, this has been an idea that's been with me for easily about one or two years, but it definitely took a pandemic for me to actually get started. So from that point of view, yeah initially I had thought that I would be organizing something that would be in person. But I think with COVID, something that I have leveraged is that, all these very interesting people from all over the world and on a typical regular day, wouldn't have the time of day. Accessibility has been a huge thing for me I think. And with the pandemic, I've got the access to some amazing people.

Val Singh: Also, it's been a time where creativity and connectivity and also collaboration, how they're sort of transforming their business models to deal with the crisis that we've got at hand. It's just a very interesting time to talk about how various industries are pivoting their business models. So, it's a very interesting time for these conversations. So from that point of view, yeah COVID has impacted how I have kick-started this initiative and it's been mostly for the better. I would have wanted to do some more offline events as well and do offline initiatives but I can't complain.

Meghan Brisson: It's true. We've noticed that here in Northeastern Alumni Relations as well, we were so used to doing in-person events really around the world, people on the ground. And you're located in India, in what city are you in?

Val Singh: I'm based out of Delhi, which is the capital.

Meghan Brisson: Okay. And so I think what's so great is, we're finding a time to talk, over Zoom here. Well all these digital platforms existed pre pandemic, of course but I think we're so used to it now as our daily life, so I've talked to my friend down the street this way and someone across the world this way and so you're right, it's like the barrier of entry of really connecting people is lowered because it's becoming such a norm of how we interact. So I think that's-

Val Singh: Absolutely. Yeah.

Meghan Brisson: So in your business statement, you use the words, change makers and diverse and I just want to break that down and ask you what those words



mean to you and tell us a little bit more about the impact you're looking to make with your business.

Val Singh:

Yeah, I do use those words, change makers and diverse because for me personally, this all really started from being at Northeastern to be honest, because Northeastern is a school of, I think we've got one of the highest international populations compared to various universities in the States and I think that's really where I got exposed to so many interesting people from diverse cultures, diverse schools of thought and it really made me understand that diversity is an asset. And I think if you start to understand what an invaluable asset that is, it can play a huge role in how you go out and showcase your own ideas in the world and take your initiatives forward.

Val Singh:

So, I think one of the first round tables that I hosted back in May, with a professor from Parsons School of Design on the topic of game theory, he mentioned something very important, which is, that the innovation and the change that we're seeing our lives at this point in this year, is something that we haven't seen in the last decade or perhaps even two decades. Technologically we're advancing so quickly, people are... And the one common thing that's always going to be there is change and that's the constant.

Val Singh:

So when I say change makers, I simply mean anybody who's doing something and sort of leveraging the time and all of the advantages they've got with their current difficult circumstances and how they tackle those changes and how they tackle changes across the world. So something I'm really interested and focused on, is having all of our conversations, all of the content that we put out on our platform, be focused on a global school of thought, so we have some concrete takeaways. And I want to use the CATW platform, to be a catalyst for conversation, to effectively build empathy and bring together these perspectives and collectively have learnings from these perspectives that we hear.

Meghan Brisson:

Now, I'd also like you to break down the word creative. As I mentioned earlier, I personally identify as a creative, as I'm a designer, marketer, podcaster now and writer, but often I've come across colleagues in different offices who say, "Oh, I'm not creative" and they're so quick to say, "Oh, I'm not a creative, your creative team will do that." How would



you respond to that person? I have my own answer, but I'd love to hear yours.

Val Singh:

Sure. I mean honestly, this is a question that I get asked a lot, even by friends, family, anybody who hears about this, that the name of the initiative and the company, it's Creatives Around The World. So do you only work with creatives? Are you only working with artists and designers? The answer to that question is, definitely the way I see creativity is very different in the way most people see creativity. I think creativity is not a binary skill, it is state of mind. And to be creative is to be curious, to be passionate about anything that you're passionate about, about discovering new things, about discovering new initiatives, about learning new things. So I think if you can say that you view things differently, you see patterns where other people just think it's a coincidence, I think that's what makes you a creative.

Val Singh:

So I think the way things are moving forward, the way we're advancing, there's a lot of changes happening. And technologically we're having a one-up every year we move forward, apple comes up with these new products every year, so we're always moving and we're always innovating. But I think actually something I'd love to share on that note, having mentioned Apple is something that Steve jobs said, and that has stuck with me, because I watched one of his commencement speeches, time and again, and he mentioned in his speech, that "creativity is just connecting things." And because people are able to connect the experiences they've had and synthesize the knowledge that they've learned from these experiences, they're able to go out and do things differently. So I think the more we go out and expose ourselves to different ideas, to different people, I think the more creative we are, so it is not about the profession, but it's more about your thinking.

Meghan Brisson:

I love that. I think it's something you practice too. I also agree that I think of creative as someone who creates and when you create, you don't have to be an artist, you're doing something new, you're thinking about something differently, you're stepping outside the box and that's hard, it's hard to do, it's easy to just repeat what's in front of you and use templates or processes that exist but to be creative is to push it beyond that. So I really think everyone can be creative, if you put the work in. It's just the people that would say, "Oh, I'm not creative." Like, Oh, but have you tried?



Val Singh:

Honestly, on that note, I think sometimes you ask people, creative people or anyone really, how they did something. This is also something that was validated to me by Steve Jobs, which is that, you don't have to come up with something brand new, because in essence, I think we're just sort of transforming something that's already done and you're sort of taking a step forward and that step does not have to be a ginormous step, it might just be a little alteration that made user experience of a product better, or it made an entire product completely different, but you always have to sort of take something the way it is and improve it and that's creativity, at least that's how I see it.

Meghan Brisson:

So you mentioned you had a round table on game theory, but what are some of the other conversations in round tables that you've hosted recently?

Val Singh:

We've been focused on some core themes, which include the COVID impact industries and COVID kick-started changing many old school established industries and forced them to embrace technology and rethink their ways of working. We've hosted round tables that have been focused on the rebirth of food and beverage in our new reality or the rebirth of hospitality, travel and tourism as an entire industry, also the architecture of the pandemic and the future of design. And also I think, fashion is something that I've been personally very interested in because with the rise of this understanding of fast fashion and how new consumer mindsets are changing, and then something completely on a different note, we've been hosting round tables on this theme of the school of life and under that we've had conversations on, embracing our vulnerabilities and living more authentically.

Val Singh:

We had another round table with women in leadership, around the topic of creating solutions that work for everyone. And then with the black lives matter movement, that's taken the whole world by a storm, we also did a round table on unpacking internal programming and challenging implicit racial bias. So as you can see, there's just been a huge range of diverse topics that we're tackling. And I think that's something that I find really exciting because the topics are just out there. So anything that interests me in the moment and also people around me and all of the feedback that we get from our growing community, that we decide to go ahead and organize a conversation on that.



- Meghan Brisson: I think that's great, I think, especially in this time we're living in, we're all seeking out information and these conversations, because it's so hard to unpack, you used that word. So are your round tables, are they live that people can attend digitally? Or are they recorded? Where can people find these talks?
- Val Singh: So we've hosted most of our round tables on Zoom. Mostly because of starting off in times of lockdown and COVID, and also because of the accessibility. So most of the round tables have included speakers from very different parts of the world. I think literally at one time, we did a round table, the one on architecture and the future of design, which had six speakers and everyone was in six different parts of the world and from pretty much every continent. So that's something I find really exciting and Zoom and virtual digital ecosystem has been fantastic for that. Recently, very recently, as of about a month ago, we started to host conversations in collaboration with a couple of membership clubs, right here in Delhi. One of them is called, The Quorum and hopefully in the near future I'm in conversation, when doing this with a couple of other member organization groups. Hopefully-
- Meghan Brisson: And are they recorded to be able to watch later, or you have to attend it in the moment?
- Val Singh: They are recorded but they're not available to watch immediately. Which is that with the intention of encouraging people to tune in at the time, tune in live and ask questions because we really want these conversations to be as interactive as possible. But yeah, we do release recordings about two to three weeks later, so it's not immediately.
- Meghan Brisson: Great. So you are a member of the Young Global Leaders group, which is an alumni group that represents the international reach of our university. So you're located in Delhi, India, how long have you been in India? And my second question is why did you become a member of the YGL?
- Val Singh: The YGL program at Northeastern? I mean, it's absolutely fantastic. I've been a member of the YGL very recently honestly. I joined the community in May of this year. And why did I become a part of it? Honestly, they are doing such fantastic work and sort of taking off on what I said before, Northeastern is such a global community of students and alumni from very different parts of the world and YGL is truly embodying that spirit of being international and the access it provides you to all of these



wonderful entrepreneurial minds, it's fantastic. So I was very privileged to be accepted and invited into that community earlier this year.

Val Singh: And I moved back to India, about October 2018, so it's been exactly about two years. And luckily enough, this year I serendipitously found myself at the Young Global Leadership Summit, which was held in Mumbai right before the lockdown and that's where I met this incredible team and it was no brainer, I mean, they're doing incredible work so I'm really, really, really privileged and honored to be part of that community. But I'm also bringing on a lot of these YGL hustlers onto the round tables, having had about these at least three or four of them.

Meghan Brisson: That's great, we love that. All the Northeastern alumni working together to share these ideas. So you graduated from Northeastern D'Amore-McKim in 2017, with a degree in finance. So were you living in India right before Northeastern? Tell us a little bit about where you're from and how you got to Northeastern. And then where after studying finance, it seems like your work has moved away from that. So where did your career take you?

Val Singh: Yeah, that's a loaded question and it's pretty funny, honestly. Well, I did study finance and at the time I thought my interests were very aligned with it, wanting to take steps into this world of venture capital, et cetera. I had my co-ops in the roles of a financial analyst or a business analyst, working on John Hancock or AMC networks, but right upon graduating, very serendipitously again, I found myself at this company called, Beautiful Destinations, which is a travel media brand and creative agency. And that company played an immense role in shaping my career interests, couldn't be further from finance as you rightly pointed out.

Val Singh: So I took this job, pretty much a week after graduating. My life moved to New York and I started off as a business analyst at the company, but luckily I had a fantastic, very understanding boss who was also the co-founder of the company and he understood quickly that I am someone with interests that are sort of touching upon different business areas, so he allowed me and he gave me the flexibility to transition my business analyst role into more of a project manager, as well as business development and partnerships, because that's really where my skillset truly lies and also gives me the flexibility sort of be involved in multiple ad hoc projects. And I think that shaped my thoughts and my thinking into starting Creatives Around The World, because that company started off





on Instagram in 2012 and within five or six years developed the community of 25 million people across social media and also expanded 3X while I was there, so it's been a huge inspiration for me as a business.

Meghan Brisson: So what brought you back to India after you were in New York?

Val Singh: This is actually an interesting story, but due to very unforeseen circumstances which include not being able to get the visa, a work visa, I had to leave the Beautiful Destination shortly after having been there for about a year and a half. Within two weeks, I had to pack up and call it quits and leave. And that's the reason I moved back to India, which is where I'm originally from. And sorry, I didn't answer this earlier, but yeah, I grew up in India up until undergrad and then spent five years in Boston at Northeastern and then approximately two years in New York thereafter and now I'm here.

Meghan Brisson: Wow. So as a new founder, where do you see your business going? And this is a difficult question, so I'm just curious about who your target audience is? What's the next step? You mentioned earlier to me, that you were thinking about a podcast. What are those next steps of growing Creatives Around The World?

Val Singh: That is definitely a question that I've been thinking a lot about lately. But really where I see Creatives Around The World moving forward, is to continue leveraging this power of networks and we've been using #NetworksForGood as our tagline for us ever since we started. And the idea is to really become an innovation partner to young and upcoming brands. And I really genuinely believe that a brand and a product or a company ultimately is a reflection of who you are as a person. So I want to work with young founders and creatives and help design their visions and their ideas and to best reflect their personalities into their products and businesses.

Val Singh: So I have very recently started to take on couple of consulting and strategy projects for some young upcoming brands. And I think, sort of taking that forward and building our team over the next few months, is something that I'm very focused on and I'm really excited about. But I think you asked me, who is your target audience? And I think to answer that very directly, the target audience is anyone with a cool idea, with a cool vision and an interest to do something fun and unique. And I'd love to reach them with the CATW platform, as well as work with them.



- Meghan Brisson: That's amazing. I think that's all the time we have for today. And I just wanted to end with, do you have any round tables coming up that our listeners might be in?
- Val Singh: Yes, actually we have a round table this Saturday with Jen Welter, who is a trailblazing first-time female NFL coach. And I'm really excited to have her because I met her actually in New York about a couple of years ago and we reconnected recently. So she's going to be talking to us a lot about, the power of sport in transforming societies and creating sustainable platforms and inclusive programs to help, not just women but young individuals, become leaders and overcome challenges through physical and emotional and social wellbeing.
- Val Singh: And we have another interesting conversation that's coming up on October 15, which includes the Associate Vice Chancellor of Northeastern, Cigdem Talgar with another fellow Young Global Leader of Northeastern Andrea Regina and Curtis Ogden. So that conversation will be focused on, learning models of the future and how we can leverage experiential learning and take it a step further.
- Meghan Brisson: Great. Well, Thank you so much for your time and calling in all the way from across the world in India.
- Val Singh: No, thank you so much for having me. It's been great talking to you.
- Meghan Brisson: Thanks for listening. If you visit Creatives Around The World on Instagram and click the link in the bio, you can register for upcoming round tables or watch past recordings. For more stories, visit our website, [alumni.northeastern.edu/next](http://alumni.northeastern.edu/next) and please rate, review and subscribe on Apple podcasts. This is Megan Crook Brisson from the Office of Alumni Relations, I'll talk to you soon.