

## **Expert Interview I** with Kiana Pirouz, Creative Growth Strategist, Freelance **Including |** thoughts on being a futurist and unlocking possibilities with clients.

>> Kiana Pirouz guest curated Strands on March 16, 2023. [Read it here.](#)

### **Tell us a little bit about yourself and what keeps you busy. How did you end up doing what you're doing today?**

I'm at a really cool moment in my career. I spent several years in various marketing functions at agencies, media companies, and startups. My career saw the dawn of social media, branded content, and community building.

"Rest is productive" is one of those phrases that sounds good in theory, but finally made sense to me after taking sabbatical in 2021 from years of working (and truthfully, burnout). It was through that period that I started to get a sense of what brings me joy: diving into the future with optimism vs fear, staying forever curious and putting the human experience at the forefront of the future (personally, with collaborators, and with clients).

When I'm not working, I really enjoy contributing to community projects in web3. Somehow, I've gotten lucky enough to find like minded communities that don't perceive web3 as just an investment vehicle, but rather a playground to prototype futures in - without the guardrails of deadlines or the traditional structure of work as we know it. I also love the way these liberating collaborations inform my frameworks as a strategist.

And just to note, web3 resonates with me not because of the markets or its current state, but for the possibilities. I'm an observer at heart and the way I see the culture of communities organically built together reminds me of the way I approached building the We Are Rosie brand in 2019/2020 (my pre-web3 days). We had very little budget and large competitors. Instead of product marketing, we doubled down on fostering the community of freelancers through offering value, incentives, participation, and rewards. Looking back, that's what web3 is inherently about.

### **What excites you most about what you do?**



I absolutely love unlocking possibilities with clients. The times we live in can feel void of fun & play. There are a lot of unknowns. It's really fun to reframe the need to adapt with the opportunity to build.

The super fun part to me is that I'm a builder at heart. As much as I adore strategy, I also love seeing the thing through and fine tuning the build. That's the energy I live for - manifesting experiences in collaboration with brilliant minds.

### **What beliefs define your approach to work? How would you define your leadership style?**

I believe that liberation unlocks the best ideas. As Anais Nin states: "my best ideas usually come not at my desk writing but in the midst of living." Sabbatical, in essence, was a year of deep unlearning and starting over in discovering the rhythms of my creativity, tracking potential burnout before it happens, and forcing myself to believe that living life offline is essential to producing good work. Listening to my body and cultivating self trust guides me to the most harmonious outcomes & opportunities.

Leadership to me is about owning who you are with love, so you can see and bring out the best in others. In my experience, doing the inner work of self love, embracing the parts that feel shame, and prioritizing peace have informed my leadership style whether it's in how I express myself online, with clients, or collaborators. I believe that we should all be seen and treated as full human beings.

### **What has been the most rewarding project you've worked on and why?**

I recently helped an agency with internal and client education on Web3, their positioning on emerging tech, and operational strategies for growth. It was super fun as I was given freedom to foster a group of internal hand-raisers to create an internal agency-first rewards program centered on interoperability not just for function, but also as a way to learn & build products.

A couple of personal takeaways:

1. Realized I absolutely love business growth strategy (I am, in fact, a Capricorn).
2. It's possible to be a strategist within web3 who advises against knee jerk investing in an NFT / metaverse activation when it doesn't make sense (plus, having lovely clients who trust this advice).
3. Witnessing an org prioritize L&D to unlock ideas that serve the internal culture was deeply rewarding. At the end of the day, all L&D will impact client work regardless of what's trending.

**We are big believers in diversity -- Not only because we believe in equality, but because we also think it's better for business. The Black Lives Matter movement has shaped industry conversations around both global injustice, and also lack of representation in our industry. How do you frame these kinds of conversations, both internally and with clients? Is there an emphasis on action, or are the conversations really more about communication?**

One of the biggest complaints people have after graduating school and entering "the real world" is longing for an environment of enrichment, curiosity, and learning. I'm pretty sure if you put a C-suite in a room with social media managers and influencers, the latter would naturally be the teachers, and the former would be in the students seat.

That's just a thought experiment to showcase the wealth of knowledge that exists beyond the bounds of ego, status, and hierarchy. Where it gets tricky is when organizations view diversity as a metric, versus a core value embedded within every single decision made, in the pursuit of learning, growing, enlightening, and building an equitable future.

As a futurist I believe inclusion and diversity are not finite pursuits, but rather systemic pathways to build an expansive future that benefits society as a whole – a ripple effect. To truly value and embrace diversity is to acknowledge the end of systems (eg white supremacy, misogyny, ableism...) that harmed many while



benefiting few. The beauty lies in welcoming and rewarding inconvenient truths – versus responding with punishment, as well as in celebrating the "open source" learning that unlocks imaginative visions, ideas, and work. Ultimately, this is liberation work, not metrics.

When I was full time, I was kind of known as the loud mouth (good)trouble maker, for better or worse. Overall, I'm blessed to have mostly worked with CEOs that listened when I noted a need for representation, or when I reported behavior that felt psychologically unsafe for my team.

These days, the way I frame these discussions with clients is through core values. What are your core values, do you walk the walk? Do your team and clients know your core values? Do you have boundaries when actions violate the values? Do your values translate into an environment of open feedback loops? Do you surround yourself with yes-people or partners who feel safe to share what they see, that you might not? Is the discomfort of someone on your team worth a difficult conversation with a client? How are you elevating these voices, and are you inviting these voices to the decision-making table? A lot of this is about listening, and prioritizing pathways to give power to new perspectives.

**Switching gears a bit, how do you find time to balance personal interests with your career? Do you believe work/life balance is possible? Anything you've implemented that you recommend that others try?**

I used to think that to be successful, I needed a strong morning routine. But in reality, my nightly routine is what sets future me up for success the next day (eg: outfit laid out, meals prepped, gym shoes untied). So in the morning I sweat, and have a leisurely hour of getting ready where I'm not scrolling, but mindfully listening to music, an audiobook, or a podcast.

I also don't book meetings on Fridays as a personal boundary. Strategic thinking is deep work, and my brain \*needs\* a 3 day break.



That's all to say that the way I design my life is all based on mini experiments. Tinkering with my days to identify when my energy levels are high, when I'm on the precipice of burnout, and what my body needs.

My advice is always that the worst person to disappoint is yourself. It's always worth it to prioritize your needs with as little guilt as possible.

### **What's your media diet? Where do you find inspiration?**

- Newsletter faves (other than Genius Steals!): Zine by Matt Klein, Palm.Report by Poolsuite, After School by Casey Lewis, Not Boring by Packy McCormack
- Podcast faves: Building at the Edges, On the other Side, The Brave Marketer, Creative Control, Due Diligence, Boys Club
- Tiktok faves: @kylascan, @akilimoree, @feliciaforthewin.bts, @katiewelch, @thealgorythm @rachelissan

### **As you know, we believe there is so much value in having a wide range of teachers. What's the best piece of advice/knowledge you've stolen, and who/where'd you steal it from?**

Nature taught me my life motto: Slow Is Good 🍌🍌

I love technology, but do I need to live at its pace?

Do the trees live at that pace when the season changes? Nope. Do the birds during migration? They do not! They live at the pace of our natural world, and as do I. Nature is my forever muse for creativity, curiosity, and sustainable growth. Mother nature invented do not disturb!