

CREATIVE POWER:
RELEASING YOUR INNOVATIVE POTENTIAL

Written by: Greg Heeres

Edition: Summer 2014

INDEX

Introduction

Chapter 1: Understanding creativity

Chapter 2: The challenge of being creative

Chapter: How to cultivate creativity

Chapter 4: Don't give up on yourself or your ideas

Conclusion

References and Resources

Author information

INTRODUCTION

Be Ready And Set To Go

Popular author Stephen King was a part-time school teacher living in a small modular home when he published his first best seller, “Carrie.” It was an American epistolary novel released on April 5, 1974 with an approximate first print-run of 30,000 copies. King’s creative conditions weren’t opulent like a palace in the United Arab Emirates, structured like a corporate board room, traditional like a Land’s End clothing catalog, nor pressure-cooked like an egg grill. He wrote from a cozy, close quarters with familiar clutter that allowed for his creativity to abound. He wasn’t trying hard to be creative or successful back then, but set himself up to be the most innovative he could be, letting the rest take care of itself.

Be Brave

Being creative isn’t easy. In fact, being creative is pretty darn hard. Coming up with a great idea can be like trying to find a needle in a haystack, especially if you are facing a deadline or have a flat-lined business. Many individuals have iPods full of their favorite music genres. There are so many musicians, artists, actors, creative directors, idea incubation organizations, and plenty of other creative titles too difficult to list. I openly admit I am not a talented musician, but gained an understanding that the people who write or choreograph music make the real money. It’s not the person with two pounds of makeup and a whole bottle of hairspray, moving across the stage, singing

someone else's words. On a similar note, if your city has an art museum, you may discover something that just baffles and wows you. It captures your attention while you stare at it and wonder how the creator even began to come up with this, having the discipline to complete this unbelievable project. It seems being creative is not linear nor logical. It often is a feel, a sense, a flow, and an expression from deep inside a person's being.

Be Patient

Completing a creative effort can often take time. Lots of time. Around 1500 A.D., renowned sculptor Michelangelo was commissioned to paint the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel in Rome. The chapel ceiling was 20 meters off the ground, 14 meters wide and 40 meters long. It took approximately four years to complete. While standing and moving around on his own engineered scaffolding, he painted 343 characters in on wet plaster and stood for hours and hours, likely needing some form of ibuprofen and aspercreme. Being creative takes time, talent and tireless effort.

Be Amazed

Although my daughter, Alexa, did not study at the distinguished school of art institute in Chicago, she is a talented young lady. She is an accomplished pianist (see my blog dated June, 2013) and a very talented artist as well. Of the art mediums, she excels with paint. For a Christmas gift, she painted the symbols of my favorite super heroes on a canvas. Based on her talent and the time commitment, I anticipated a really cool art gift

from her and I was blown away at the end result. I couldn't help myself and blurted out: "How did you do that from scratch? That is amazing!"

Be Resilient

At Greenfield Village in Dearborn, Michigan, there is a wonderful exhibit of Thomas Edison and his invention laboratory. He is well known for inventing the incandescent light bulb. Did you know it took him over 2000 attempts to finalize the light bulb? Some of these attempts ended up as other patents or products we still use and enjoy today.

[Fun fact: in 2012 alone, over 2.35 million patents and trademarks were filed globally]

Be Daring

While consulting a sales organization recently, I challenged their team to spend some time away and develop difference-making ideas, services, and communications to serve clients more effectively and creatively, attracting new prospects. Some of the sales force were energized and excited at coming up with innovative ways to better serve their clients, while others were frozen with fear. So why is being creative so hard to come by, so intimidating, so mysterious? What blocks the ideas from coming out? How can we be more innovative at work? Creativity works in mysterious ways. Inspiration for an innovative idea often rises out of nowhere and then fails to arrive when you need it the most. Creativity requires complex cognition but is entirely unique from the thinking process. Read on and learn more on how to seed into your creative gene.

UNDERSTANDING CREATIVITY

Throughout this book, *creative* and *innovative* will be referred to interchangeably. As you can see below, the definitions are very similar. However, the application might stereotypically be used differently. Creativity often conjures up thoughts along the artistic lines. On the other side, innovation is often associated with business efficiencies.

- Creativity is a phenomenon or process whereby something new and valuable is produced (such as an idea, a joke, an artistic or literary work, a painting or musical composition, a solution or invention).
- Innovation is the process of translating an idea or invention into a product or service that creates value or for which a customer will pay for. A new way to do something, a method, idea or product.

“I’m not very creative.” “I am all out of good ideas.” “I am left brained.”

“Just tell me what your idea is, and I will make it happen.”

The above are just a few of the replies I have heard when asking someone to share their creative thoughts. A study of corporate executives (McKinsey, 2008) rated innovation as one of the most sought after ingredients to their company’s success as well as a top threat to the sustainability of their company. In a recent interview with a veteran educator, he shared that two of the most stressful classes in elementary school are art and music. Kids fear they won’t be successful; they can’t decide what to do or play. They worry about failure or being poked fun of. That same fear translates into the workplace for adults, too.

For example, a business is struggling and the owner is trying to come up with an innovative service to recapture the diminishing market share but can't because he fears it won't work. The pressure to be creative produces a freeze on the brain, resulting in a bunch of frustration, fear, and doubt.

THE CHALLENGE

A friend of mine is an accomplished writer and finishing his fourth book this year. He is an excellent communicator, yet has confessed to having writer's block from time to time. He was referring to this block where his creativity ceased, ideas were scarce, and innovation was out of the question. He shared he would have a deadline for a set of chapters or a first draft of a new book and his creative juices would dry up. The pressure. The deadline. The eerie silence between his ears.

Be A Creative Leader

The most creative organizations often have a leader who invites this innovation and is an instigator towards it. Dyer (Harvard Business Review, 2009) took a deep dive in research of top leadership and how innovative companies were and found the following:

- Only 15% of leaders surveyed noted they were actively involved in their companies' creative inertia. They delegated innovation to others.
- Most executives did not feel personally responsible for coming up with strategic innovations. They resorted to the role of facilitating the innovation process rather than getting involved. Their company innovative results and sustainability were markedly less.

Increase

Innovation is not produced, it is invited. Creativity occurs at the most unusual locations and unlikely times (Huffington Post, 2013). I have developed some of my best ideas in the weirdest places. Innovation in your business means doing something new, different, smarter, or better that will result in a positive difference in your organization and to your customers. An innovative company culture attracts and retains great employees. It can position you to be more competitive in the marketplace. Not only that, innovation covers every aspect of your business, building more profitable products, services, and efficient processes. Here are some myths about creative thinking I've found, and some great places I've hatched great ideas.

Creative Myths:

1. Just plop down any ol' place, and ideas will come to you.
2. A corporate office is the best environment to be creative.
3. Procrastination produces the best innovation because you're forced to think.
4. Late at night when the kids are in bed is the best time of day to create.

Creative Meccas:

1. Shower
2. Driving
3. Exercising or walking trail/park
4. Art gallery
5. Café or bookstore

Now that we've exposed the challenge of being creative and listed the best places to be creative, let's understand how to cultivate more creativity and innovation.

CULTIVATING CREATIVITY

Who doesn't want great ideas? Ideas seem to be magical, yet hard to produce. We expect them to just show up without cultivating them. It can be frustrating to us when we need an idea and it doesn't show up on time or at all. The good news is that cultivating ideas is a process, and one that we can practice to produce more (and hopefully better) ideas. Like we said previously, great ideas can often come to us while in the shower or in another relaxing environment. Let's briefly study how the brain works and how a creative process helps with out-of-the-box ideas, new paradigms, and innovations.

Brain Dissection

No one is single-mindedly right-brained or left-brained. Ideas are processed in our three part brain. These two halves are intricately connected with three areas of the brain that are engaged for creative thinking (Cooper, 2013). The first is the "Attentional Control Network" which helps us laser focus on a particular task. It's our concentration area. The second is the "Imagination Network" where we can picture future scenarios. Mental images are constructed in this area of our brain. Finally, there's the "Attentional Flexibility Network." It monitors our surroundings and allows for switches and transfers from the control area to the imagination area freely.

"The production of ideas is just as definite a process as the production of an automobile." James Webb Young.

Young studied brain activity and how we process multiple thoughts or handle multiple impulses at the same time. He concluded that there are two agreed upon principles that brain processing results in creativity.

1. *An idea is a new combination of old elements*
2. *The capacity to bring old elements into new combos*

On another note, here are eight excellent ways to cultivate more creativity (Desmarais, 2014):

1. **Ask the right question.** Listen for the real answer not one you anticipate. Write down ten variations of the same question. Question, don't assume (be willing to criticize an imperfect product or service).
2. **Become an expert.** Natural ability may not be enough. Be deliberate in practice. A world class performer requires 10,000 hours of practice, of repetition. It's not just doing the same thing over and over again, it involves mastering tasks beyond your normal performance and capabilities. They should become so innate that you could swish basketballs from the free throw line with your eyes closed.
3. **Pay attention.** Observation, not argument is the best way to learn. Top creative people are always on the lookout for possible solutions. You can do this by becoming more self-aware and practicing mindfulness, which involves intentionally noticing things. In addition, it is important not to judge people you meet based on your expectations or the categories you have established in your mind. Instead, strive to be curious and resist stereotyping people.

4. **Get lucky.** Create your own good fortune. Researchers have found that people who describe themselves as lucky tend to be more alert and aware than self-described unlucky people. They also act on unexpected opportunities and network well with others because they're curious. Don't let accidents annoy you. Plenty of inventions, such as Penicillin, the Slinky, and chewing gum, came into being because someone didn't brush past an accident, but studied it instead.
5. **Toy Story.** Play with your kid's toys. Playful children are adept at making new connections. Don't be afraid to pretend. When you play, your mind can wander and your subconscious has time to work. This is why time off from work is necessary for creativity to bloom.
6. **Idea storming.** Generate ideas. List unusual uses for common household objects. What are lots of different ways you could use a paperclip, brick, or knife? Give yourself five minutes to come up with a long list. Don't worry about whether your ideas are useful or silly.
7. **Use a calendar.** Set aside "idea time" as an appointment when you are most likely sharp, relaxed, and undistracted. Julia Cameron, author of popular self-help book "The Artist's Way", suggests taking 30 minutes each morning to free-write in a journal or doodle sketches and ideas in a notebook. As you do, you'll notice new ideas arise.
8. **Best of the best.** Prioritize your best ideas. Trust your intuition (that sense that an idea has potential and feels like it may have life to it). Compare your ideas. Select two of them and define how they're different, even in the most subtle ways. If you

have more than 50 ideas, write each one on a sticky note or index card. Arrange ideas together that seem closely-related. You'll arrive at idea clusters which will reveal interesting differences between ideas. Perhaps they all vary along the same dimension. Never stop editing. Ideas can always be improved upon. Ask people you trust to be honest with you to look critically at your idea. Even failed ideas can be repurposed. Remember that the Post-It note was the result of an adhesive that didn't work very well.

9. **A picture paints 1,000 words.** Draw a picture. Even if you think you can't draw, you can at least doodle. No one ever has to see what you put to paper. Abstract problems, such as your relationship with someone or a crushing workload, benefit most from turning them into sketches. Cartooning with exaggerated shapes or using simple symbols helps. Make a collage. Grab a stack of magazines and look for photos and ads. Clip any that relate to your problem in any way and glue them to a large piece of poster board. Keep this art near your desk where you can ponder it. You may get a new perspective on your problem.

DON'T GIVE UP

What do Abraham Lincoln, Thomas Edison, Colonel Sanders, Oprah Winfrey, and J.K. Rowling have in common? They faced adversity, were knocked down with setbacks, were told “no”, and experienced failure. But they never gave up.

Coming up with a cool idea or a more innovative way to do business doesn't require you to be born poor, experience health issues, lose a loved one, or file for bankruptcy. It does require one thing of you though: never give up. Set yourself up for a better creative environment, collect ideas, and try them out. Don't be afraid of innovative failure. My basketball coach would tell me, “Greg, you can't make a basket when you don't shoot.” He was right. The same applies for being creative. You won't know if an idea is good if you don't test it out. Remember Edison attempted over 2,000 times to invent the incandescent light bulb. Along the way, he found other inventions during his failed light bulb experiments. You can too.

CONCLUSION

Recently, I facilitated a strategic planning session with business leaders, and we started to exchange ideas. I felt the excitement barometer among us blast off. The posture of the leaders changed. We started to lean forward, gesturing with our hands and nodding our heads in agreement or to debate the idea further. Creativity doesn't come from one brilliant idea; it's a way of life. Here are a few creative ways to live to be more creative and newly innovative:

1. **Find the right question** - If you're stumped, take a step back to ask a different question.
2. **Prepare your mind** – Be a voracious learner and wide-eyed observer.
3. **Be aware** - Research shows that the most creative people are more curious, play a lot, and engage with a variety of people.
4. **Free your mind** – Imagine your problem in a very different scenario, like dentistry; school; or sports event. How would your problem look in that world?
5. **Generate, Combine and Improve Ideas** - Practice idea generation every day in simple tasks. Make lists. Write in a journal.
6. **Don't Give Up** - Get your ideas out and into the world, even if you aren't sure.

Certainly, being creative isn't easy. Coming up with a new idea is invigorating.

“Ideastorming” with others can be fruitful and fun. Set time aside to be creative because being too busy can be our worst creative enemy. You may need to keep a notepad by your

shower or nightstand, because now we know that ideas can come to you at the most odd times and circumstances.

REFERENCES

- Barsh, Joanna (2008). “Leadership and Innovation”. McKinsey Quarterly. January 2008.
- Cameron, Julia (2002). *The Artist’s Way*. Putnam Publishing.
- Cooper, Belle Beth (November 2013). Buffer.
- Desmarais, Christina (2014). 25 Ways to be more creative. INC. May 2014.
- Dyer, Harvard Business Review 2009
- Gregoire, Carolyn (2013). “Why your best ideas happen in the most unusual places.”
- The Huffington Post. September 08, 2013.
- Young, James Webb (????). A Technique for Producing Ideas.

RESOURCES

- Hugh MacLeod – *Ignore Everybody*
- Jack Foster – *How to get Ideas*
- Jim Randel – *The Skinny on Creativity*
- John Daido Looi – *The Zen of Creativity*
- Jonah Lehrer - *Imagine*
- Josh Linkner – *Disciplined Dreaming*
- Keith Sawyer – *Zig Zag*
- Michael Michalko – *Cracking Creativity*
- Scott Belsky – *Making Ideas Happen*
- Twyla Tharp – *The Creativity Habit*



With 20+ years of entrepreneurial and business leadership, Greg Heeres is known as an expert in engagement. He enjoys speaking, writing, and being creative. He is left-handed but is ambidextrous with a mobile device, a racquet, and even scissors. Through keynotes, trainings and consultations, Greg and his company, Maximize, play in vital spaces such as leadership development, sales growth, “Wowing” customer experiences, and engaging your organization’s mind and soul.

P 888-308-1600

E gregheeres@gmail.com

maximizeleadership.com

Twitter - [@gregheeres](https://twitter.com/gregheeres)