

HOW TO BE A CREATIVE GENIUS

WE CAN ALL LEARN TO THINK OUTSIDE THE BOX, IF WE FOLLOW THE RIGHT TECHNIQUES, SAYS MIKE CLAYTON

There is a pervasive and unhelpful myth: that some people are creative, and others are not. This is bunk and you should put it out of your mind. You are every bit as creative as the next person. The difference is often in four things that so-called 'creative people' do better than the rest. These are:

- 1. Investment.** Creative people invest in the resources of creativity, and these are low-cost activities that we can all pursue.
- 2. Environment.** Creativity occurs more easily in certain environments, which we can all create for ourselves when we need them.
- 3. Techniques.** There are simple techniques that bring out ideas and therefore 'turn on' creativity when we need it.
- 4. Mindsets.** A single frame of mind will limit your ability to find new solutions, but combining different ways of thinking can unleash your creativity.

By paying attention to all four of these, you, too, can turn on your creativity, whenever you need it. For example, I used many of these techniques in creating this article.

Investment

Like so much in life, to harvest something of value, you need to make an investment ahead of time. For creative thinking, you can set up the right conditions for future creativity by investing in five things.



ILLUSTRATION: IMAGE SOURCE

Curiosity

If there is one attitude that is vital for creativity, it is curiosity. Cultivate a curious mind that is always wondering, questioning and finding out stuff. Take nothing at face value; investigate everything. Never be satisfied with your state of knowledge. As a scientist, I learned early

on the value of enquiry and a constant quest to answer the question 'why?'.

Breadth

Allow your curiosity to roam across all branches of knowledge. Take an interest in everything. It's the connections that you can form that lead to creativity, so more

Mindsets

The dreamer

The dreamer ignores what is and asks what could be. Only when you have the right dream, do you invite the other mindsets to help you. It is a slow process of incubation and germination.

The intuitor

An alternative to the dreamer is the intuitor, who makes a sudden leap to a potentially winning idea. You need to have made the investments of curiosity and breadth to give your intuitor the raw material to work on.

The critic

Use the critic to assess the value of your dream: what do the facts say? What are the constraints of rules, regulations and requirements? What are the risks?

The carer

The carer cares how other people will be affected by your idea. Without this vital empathic social dimension to your thinking, you risk creating a brilliant idea that nobody will feel comfortable about committing to.

The builder

If your dream or intuition stands up to the scrutiny of your critic and carer, use your builder to figure out what resources are available and how to deploy them, to make your idea a reality.

The dreamer-intuitor-critic-carer-builder interplay is the source of innovation: creativity + responsibility + implementation.

"The more that you read, the more things you will know. The more things that you learn, the more places you'll go."

Dr Seuss: *I Can Read With My Eyes Shut!*

diverse knowledge means more connections. I read all sorts of stuff from a wide variety of topics.

Notebooks

Don't lose your ideas: note them down. And while you are noting them down, develop them. This will make them yours and help you to remember them. Whenever you need inspiration, go back through your notebooks. OneNote, Evernote and similar software are great, but nothing beats 19th-century technology: pen and paper.

Tickle file

Keep articles, clippings and pictures in a file of ideas that you can go to when you need them. I have two physical files (one neatly organised and one full of the stuff that I haven't organised for over seven years). It's the latter that offers greatest inspiration. I also use the online save-for-later service Pocket as a digital tickle file for stuff I find on the web.

Time off

Chill, relax, unwind and rest. If you don't, your brain will turn to mush. We know that we are not at our most creative when we are sharp and fresh, but there is a limit to how tired we can be and still remain in any way effective or creative. Turning off, whether sleeping or recreation time, allows your brain to work on a problem in background mode. My brain then lets

the ideas out in the quiet 'in-between times' like over breakfast, while walking or in the shower, when I am not focusing on anything.

Environment

When and where you 'try' to be creative can have a big impact, as can the people and circumstances around you. Let's look at five factors.

Comfort and pleasure

You are at your most creative when you feel comfortable, so go somewhere relaxing, with a variety of chairs and zones. The right environment, and the presence of interesting and random things that prompt you to play, can stimulate your sense of fun and help to get the creative connections flowing.

Diverse group

People who are the same think the same way. With a diverse group of people to bounce different ideas around and to interpret each one in a dozen ways, you will find the maximum number of connections.

Allowed to dream

There is a difference between a dreamer and a realist. A realist focuses on what is and is therefore not creative. Allowing yourself to 'zone out' and daydream, and asking yourself questions such as 'what if?' will release creative ideas. Walking is an ideal way to access this state of mind.

TECHNIQUES

Don't think for a moment that there is no technique to creativity. Here are five techniques that creative people use to squeeze out their ideas.

Changes

Systematically varying one or more aspects of an existing idea or solution is a process favoured by engineers and is guaranteed to give you new ideas. Here are eight changes you can make: Substitute one thing for another; Combine two or more components or ideas; Reduce something in size or number; Enlarge one part; Alter something; Multiply the number of some aspect; Eliminate something; or Reverse something to do the opposite. (SCREAMER)

Context

Lift the problem out of your current context into a new one and ask: how would we solve this, or what new ideas would we have if: we had no technology, had infinite wealth, had Dr Who to help us, were part of Apple... These different frames of reference reduce the mental pressure and open new, unconsidered possibilities.

Constraints

What if you had infinite wealth? This may lead you to a solution, but you clearly don't. Now ask how you could manage that solution, but with limited means. This changes one problem to a new one, and addresses your constraints.

Combinations

Combining two things to make a third is called bisociation. Sawdust plus glue equals particle board. Surfboard plus sail equals windsurfer. Combinations can be revolutionary.

Connections

Making random connections is a sure way to create new ideas and the 'Eureka Method' involves choosing four or five ideas at random – by choosing images from magazines, words from a dictionary or events from the newspaper, for example. Then brainstorm how each one is relevant to the problem that you are trying to solve. Wait for the random ideas to hit you. They will.

Under pressure

Don't relax too much. Necessity is the aunty of creativity. When you feel under pressure, you work harder and reach deeper into the recesses. But avoid so much pressure that you choke. Likewise, constraints help, too – they give you boundaries to press against

and burst out of. Even a blank sheet of paper has edges. This article had a deadline and a clear brief.

Timing

I plan what I am going to write first thing in the morning. I am fresh enough to have the mental energy, but near enough to my sleep state to be a little dreamy and creative. Early mornings and evenings are when we are at our most creative, near the boundary of wakefulness and sleep. ♥

"Whatever is interesting, we are interested in. Whatever is not interesting, we are even more interested in. Everything is interesting if looked at in the right way."

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