



Creativity, Part 2: Finding Creative Space

Think outside the square inside your personal space.

People often call on their creative powers only when they're faced with a problem. This is unfortunate because underutilizing this gift results in a reactive rather than a proactive approach to creativity. Individuals need to develop and use both their proactive and reactive creative powers to make maximum use of their creative potential.

Individuals or groups are motivated to become creative for different reasons. The most common are:

- A significant emotional or traumatic event (e.g., your car doesn't start in the morning, so you need to create a new way to get to work)
- Playfulness, brainstorming, or listing new ways to come up with something (e.g., a new way to serve a hot dog, such as on a stick)
- Systematic, purposeful creativity. The objective is to fill a void or come up with a better way to do something. It needn't be playful or problem-solving in nature.
- To satisfy a personal desire. Some individuals are driven to look at things in a different way, or they feel the need to be creative.

Creativity can occur at any time and any place. Sometimes we're very creative; at other times, it's just impossible to pluck out an original thought. We can do a lot to prepare ourselves to become more creative. Remember our discussion of the Oscar-vs.-Felix sides of the brain in last month's column? We can train the Oscar side of our brain to speak out more often and encourage the Felix side to listen more openly to Oscar's ideas. To do this, the following three conditions must be present:

- **Time.** Extra time is often required to develop and sell a creative solution that isn't in line with an individual's or organization's culture.

- **Environment.** It's difficult to be truly creative when you're continually interrupted by phone calls, questions, or children climbing onto your lap.

- **Success.** Nothing gets Felix's attention better than when we're recognized because we come up with creative new solutions.

Our emotions and actions are directed by our preconceived notions about the environment in which we find ourselves. We enter a library and begin to talk softly and move carefully. We go to a party and laugh and smile more. We go to work and become more conservative, reserved, and formal. This behavior is not only acceptable, it's expected. We've been trained to conform to the expectations related to a given environment or situation.

It's a good idea to set aside a specific location where you can exercise your creativity. It doesn't have to be a grand place: It could be a workbench in the garage or an old desk in the cellar behind the furnace. In my case, it's a desk in a small back bedroom. The important thing is that in your mind—as well as in your family's or business associates' minds—it's *your* space, and there are specific rules associated with it:

- **Rule 1:** No interruptions are tolerated unless it's an emergency.

- **Rule 2:** The clean-desk policy doesn't apply here. Don't take time to organize the work area, and make it clear that it's out of bounds to your spouse and or co-workers.

- **Rule 3:** Make your creative place visual. Use lots of Post-its to write down your good ideas, and stick them up around your area. Make sketches and flow diagrams and put them on the walls, too. Put up interesting pictures and change them often. Your creative place should stimulate ideas, not impress others.

- **Rule 4:** Create a relaxed atmosphere. Have a comfortable chair, one that you can lean back in while your mind goes blank

and opens to creative thoughts. Have furniture that you can put your feet on. Choose a spot that's not too hot or cold.

- **Rule 5:** Have the right equipment. Be prepared to be flooded with new ideas. When they come, you need to be able to capture them rapidly. Things that can be useful are:

- Good lighting
- A computer
- Lots of paper
- Colored markers
- A tape recorder
- A CD or tape player
- A filing system
- A corkboard
- A bookcase

- **Rule 6:** Have a focal point. This is something that relaxes you when you look at it. It could be a window that you look out of or a small aquarium. An ocean scene or an abstract painting works well.

Each person's creative place is unique because it must fit into his or her individual personality. Does this mean that it's the only place where you'll be creative? No. It's a lot like the treadmill you buy and put in your house to jog on. When you get on the treadmill, you don't start eating a sandwich; you start to jog. Just because you have a treadmill doesn't mean you can't jog around the block.

About the author

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