

A WHACK ON THE SIDE OF THE HEAD

How You Can Be More Creative

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Main Idea

Creativity is fun, profitable, necessary and achievable by everyone who is willing to break free of the mental locks imposed by society as a whole.

The fundamental principles of thinking creatively require you to go beyond what worked in the past, and come up with new and innovative solutions to the challenges of business today. You can never get your creative juices flowing if you are always being practical, following rules, afraid to make mistakes, not looking into outside areas or under the influence of any other mental lock.

Sometimes you need a metaphorical "whack" on the side of the head to get you to think creatively and generate ideas that may turn out to be profitable, original, innovative and enjoyable.

Nothing can replace the benefits of creative thinking.

Breaking The Mental Locks

There are ten mental locks that can stifle creative thinking. You need to be aware of them, and the possible ways to overcome their thought-stifling effects.

These mental locks are;

Mental Lock

1. There is only one right answer to every question.
2. That's not logical, therefore it is not useful.
3. You have to follow society's rules.
4. You have to be practical.
5. Play is frivolous and a time waster.
6. That's not my area.
7. Ambiguity should be avoided at all times.
8. Don't play the fool. Toe the line.
9. Making mistakes are bad.
10. I'm not creative.

Creative Solution

Get into the habit of routinely looking for a second and third correct answer to every question.

The best ideas come from a balanced mix of creative conceptual thinking and practical execution.

Never be afraid to see whether a useful creative idea is lurking beneath the surface of conventional ideas.

You can use impractical ideas as stepping stones to the development of new ideas which are practical.

Most of the great advances in science came from people who were developing an idea for entertainment.

There is a tremendous synergy when you take an idea from one area and apply it in another field.

If you tell people what you want and leave the details up to them, they have the chance to be creative.

If we assume nothing and are willing to look at any situation from a different perspective, we can be creative.

If you aren't making any mistakes along the way, you aren't trying anything creative.

If you believe you are creative, you will be. If you consider yourself to be uncreative, you will be that too.

Introduction

A Whack on the Side of the Head

Main Idea

Creative thinking is the ability to combine non-related ideas into new and effective combinations. It is the practical application of knowledge and experience in new ways. The biggest barriers to creative thinking are mental locks, and a conscious effort is usually required to break those locks and approach life creatively.

Supporting Ideas

In any commercial project, it is imperative to go beyond what worked in the past and to come up with new approaches. The world is constantly changing, and creative thinking skills need to be cultivated by everyone.

Ask yourself a simple question;

When was the last time you came up with a creative idea?

This question gets at the essence of creative thinking - namely, why challenge the rules and think creatively. There are two good reasons;

1. When circumstances have changed, it is no longer possible to solve today's challenges with yesterday's methods.
2. Creative thinking is incredibly good fun, mentally stimulating and refreshing.

Creative thinking is the practical application of a blend of knowledge and experience in a previously untried combination which opens the way to new applications. It is the practical process leading to new possibilities and to change. Creative thinking usually requires taking a known fact and considering it in a way that does not conform to previously accepted conventions.

Some people have a lot of trouble thinking creatively. This can be for any number of reasons, including;

1. In most daily activities, creativity is not required and efficiency is more highly sought after. In most of our daily lives, we function entirely on automatic pilot. Thinking creatively must be a conscious effort.
2. Education systems reward following established procedures rather than creative thinking. We are encouraged to learn other people's best ideas rather than generate our own.
3. Many people have personal belief systems that place a high value on approaching challenges using existing procedures.

These attitudes are mental locks that stymie creative thinking. In fact, there are 10 mental locks which are treated in the next 10 chapters. Sometimes, you need a mental "whack" on the side of the head to get you to break those mental locks and shake you out of routine patterns of thought to think creatively. These "whacks" may be self induced by a desire to think creatively, or they may be forced on you by external circumstances, but the important issue is they make you think on unconventional lines.

Some of the best (and most financially rewarding) ideas in the history of mankind have come from someone who has had a mental "whack" on the side of the head. It can help a person spot a problem before it arises, uncover an unexpected opportunity or generate an exciting new idea.

Make it a habit to constantly look for ways to open your mental locks long enough to do some creative thinking.

Breaking Mental Locks

1. The Right Answer

Main Idea

One way to become more creative is to always look for a second and third right answer to every question. Never be satisfied with just one correct answer.

Supporting Ideas

The mind has a built in filtering ability. This means that in the booming confusion of a noisy room, you can carry on a conversation with the person next to you. Your mind filters out everything else, and tunes in to the one thing you concentrate on. People invariably find the things they look for.

A formal education teaches you the concepts to use to understand any subject. You also learn how to search for information, and how to recognize when you have found the right answer. However, the education system is also geared towards training people to stop looking when they have found one correct answer to any question. This may be fine for maths where only one answer logically exists, but life is often a choice between conflicting values, and a number of "correct" answers exist. If you are trained to stop looking once you've found one answer, you may be missing other better answers that also exist.

In the real world, flexibility is required to survive. If you constantly follow the first answer to every question that arises, you can be missing huge opportunities. The more possibilities you have to choose from, the better any decision can be. In practice, it is usually the second or subsequent right answer that holds the creative key to solving any problem or challenge.

So how do you mentally encourage more than one right answer to every question? Try these ideas;

1. Try changing the wording on the question to lead your thoughts in different directions.
2. Look for multiple answers to every question you ask.
3. Fully expect to come up with a number of answers to every question, and don't stop thinking until you do.
4. Refuse to limit your thoughts to traditional ideas. Try the bizarre, novel, impractical or strange approaches.

Key Thoughts

"Discovery consists of looking at the same thing as everyone else and thinking something different."

— Albert Szent-Gyorgyi,
Nobel prize winning Physician

"Children enter school as question marks and leave as periods."

— Neil Postman, Educator

"Nothing is more dangerous than an idea when it's the only one you have."

— Emile Chartier, French Philosopher

"The best way to get a good idea is to get lots of ideas."

— Linus Pauling, Nobel prize winning chemist

"Inventing is a skill that some people have and some people don't. But you can learn how to invent. You have to have the will not to jump at the first solution because the really elegant solution might be right around the corner. An inventor is someone who says, "Yes, that's one way to do it, but it doesn't seem to be an optimum solution." Then he keeps on thinking."

— Thomas Dolby, Inventor

