

The Psychology of Creativity

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Innovation and creativity often appear elusive, especially early on in one's career. The path to innovation and creativity more often than not leads through being productive. Being more organized and productive frees up more time to indulge in creative thinking, experimenting and allowing time to fail. It's not that some people are naturally creative and others are not. Following the simple steps outlined in this article can help foster creativity.

TEN SIMPLE STRATEGIES TO BECOMING CREATIVE

1. Get Organized

Getting organized and setting yourself up for productivity is the first step toward creativity [1-4]. Once you have experimented and established a personalized simple and effective system for productivity, it creates a feeling of abundance and makes you realize the opportunities at your disposal. The energy, positivity, enthusiasm, and self-belief propagated allow increased acceptance of unique and innovative ideas while improving work-life balance.

2. Meet Expectations Early

For an academic clinical radiologist, there are numerous expectations for clinical work, research, and teaching. Before one proceeds to fulfill each of these expectations, it helps to understand the specifics of these expectations and timelines so as to pace oneself.

Meeting these expectations early helps open up more time for creative thinking, learning, and experimenting.

3. Use Your Spare Time to Improve Yourself

It is often striking how little time and money we invest in improving ourselves after our years spent in training. Media consumption is a huge time sink if many hours are spent on a daily basis consistently. Investing in learning outside of radiology, be it in finance, personality development, leadership, or public speaking, has huge benefits in furthering one's career and improving creativity. Some of the techniques I have used in my personal life have included listening to audiobooks on my daily commute and committing myself (and my wife, for the added motivation) to a vigorous fitness regimen. Adequate sleep is also paramount, as sleep deprivation is counterproductive to creativity.

4. Share What You Have With Others

All of us are talented enough to have something to share with others. Having an "abundance mindset," which is based on the premise that there is enough for everyone around you, allows people to connect with you and ultimately your innovative ideas. Your willingness to share will make your colleagues invested in your ideas, and they will be motivated to see your projects through to completion. Avoid the "scarcity mindset"; having

this mind-set makes it very difficult to build an effective team and leads to feelings of jealousy, competition, conflict, and sadness, which translate into unseen lost opportunities and decreased productivity and essentially kill creativity [5,6].

5. Create "Win-Win" Situations

Encourage your team members to use their unique talents and abilities to foster their own creativity. Encourage them to listen to one another and allow the flexibility to contribute to your projects on the basis of their skill sets and preferences [7]. Allow your team to take decisions and create a safe environment to critique your work at every stage. Schedule creative brainstorming sessions, encourage innovative new ideas, and establish a reward system to promote creativity. Make efforts to move from a hierarchy-based system to a collective wisdom—style method of working, formulate long-term connections with your team, and try to leave a legacy.

6. Have an Open Mind to Problem Solving

In a famous 1991 lecture, John Cleese [8] outlined "the 5 factors that you can arrange to make your lives more creative":

1. Space: "You can't become creative if you are under usual pressures."
2. Time: "It's not enough to create space; you have to create space for a specific period of time."

3. Time: “Give yourself as long as possible to come up with something original. Learn to tolerate the discomfort of pondering time and indecision.”
4. Confidence: “The fear of making a mistake prevents us from being more creative.”
5. Humor: “Humor gets us from the closed mode to the open mode quicker than anything else.”

Having an open mind, whereby one takes a broad, abstract view of a problem, allows the mind to consider innovative solutions and fosters creativity. Try to resist the temptation to revert to the closed mode, whereby you zoom in on implementing a specific solution with a narrow perspective.

7. Get Curious, Take Risks, but Act Now

Risk taking makes us move from a “competent zone” to an “incompetent zone.” It is often difficult to move away from the safety of our tried and tested approaches to the uncertainty of pursuing riskier ideas. Often the system encourages the status quo, and it takes courage to be creative. Trust your instincts. My personal favorite question, which I often ask luminaries in any field whom I meet, is, What made you famous? It is illuminating to note that many people usually talk of one thing they did, commonly a unique innovation they pursued that changed the courses of their careers. The key is to act immediately and avoid procrastinating.

8. Look for Positives in Every Loss

There are positives in every loss. For example, if you are ignored for a

promotion you feel you deserved, look for positives: introspect, ask for feedback, and work on your weaknesses. Negative thoughts and emotions often become self-fulfilling prophecies if you keep telling yourself that you are not good enough. Put your mind in control, and focus on what you can do instead of bemoaning what you cannot. Focus on the big picture and work toward achieving your life’s ambitions with renewed energy.

9. Stop Comparing and Set the Example

Foster positivity around you. Stop comparing yourself with other people, as each of us is unique in his or her own ways. Set an example with your personal achievements, work ethic, and professionalism. Set high expectations for your team, convey your vision clearly, and facilitate your team by encouraging them and providing them with the necessary skills and opportunities to achieve the common goal.

10. Have Appreciative Conversations and Express Gratitude

Make a habit of focusing on the things you have, talk about personal experiences and achievements, and ignore the things you don’t have. Appreciative conversations generate enthusiasm and energy. For a team to perform at its best, appreciative conversations help find the confidence and commitment to achieve those goals. With our busy lives, many of us increasingly indulge in shorter phone calls and e-mails. An

exception to this would be when expressing gratitude. Heartfelt and fully expressed gratitude is an effective way to positively influence behavior, fosters happiness, strengthens relationships, and benefits both the giver and the receiver.

CONCLUSIONS

Creativity may initially appear elusive. However, approaching one’s life with a positive mind-set can help foster creativity. Take the time to explore and experiment with some of these ideas. They have the potential to transform you into a creative powerhouse. *Give it a shot!*

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