

Unlocking Your Creativity

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I began studying creativity more than 20 years ago. I thought it was an ability that was possessed by a few, especially intelligent people, such as artists and writers and scientists. But as I delved further into the subject, I came to a remarkable conclusion: I am a genius! Not only that, but you, too, are a genius! In fact, probably 95 percent of the population has the capacity to function at exceptional levels. Creativity is as natural to human beings as is breathing in and out. Everyone is creative to a certain extent. People are highly creative because they decide to be highly creative. It's no miracle. Creativity is like any human faculty; it can be developed with practice and strengthened with constant use.

If you improve things in small ways, you are engaging in small acts of creativity. If you make major breakthroughs, and improve parts of your life in extraordinary ways, you are demonstrating high levels of creativity. And the amount of creativity you use in your life is largely up to you.

If creativity is improvement, in what areas do you want to use it? The answer is simple. You want to use your inborn creativity to improve the parts of your life that are most important to you. You can use your creativity to improve your relationships, to increase your income and improve your business, and to assure yourself higher levels of health and happiness. With that definition, you can see clearly that you have opportunities to be creative from the time you get up in the morning to the time you go to bed at night.

Creativity is like a muscle. If you do not deliberately and consciously flex your creativity on a regular basis, it becomes weak and soft. It loses its strength.

If people criticize you for your ideas, or if you have concluded that you are not particularly creative, you will tend to be more passive and submissive and look to others for

new and better ways of solving problems and achieving goals. However, if you start to practice creative thinking, along the lines that I'm going to share with you, you will be absolutely amazed at how smart you really are.

I used to think that you had to be highly intelligent to be creative. Then I found that intelligence is not just a matter of IQ. There are many people with high IQs who got excellent grades in school but who are doing very poorly at life. They are working at jobs they don't like and earning salaries that are far below their potentials. They probably haven't come up with a creative idea in years.

Intelligence is a way of acting. If you act intelligently, you are intelligent. If you act stupidly, you are stupid. That's all there is to it. You can decide to be highly intelligent and highly creative simply by doing the things that highly intelligent and highly creative people do. If you do these things over and over, you'll soon get the same results. People around you will be talking about how bright and full of ideas you have become.

There are three basic qualities of genius. Since you are a genius, you should know what they are and apply them regularly.

The first quality of genius is open-mindedness. People who are fluent, flexible and adaptive in their thinking are far brighter than those who are rigid, mechanical and straitlaced. The more open you are to new ideas and possibilities, to new approaches and solutions, the more creatively you will function.

Most people tend to fall into what are called "thinking traps." They assume that there is only one right answer to a problem; in reality, there could be several right answers. They jump to conclusions, assuming that because one thing happens, it is the reason for another thing's happening; there may be no relationship at all between the two

events. Sometimes people think that the problem has to be solved immediately; often, the problem can be deferred for some time, and often it will solve itself if left alone. People think that certain problems have to be solved without spending any money; often, if the solution is important enough, it is a good idea to spend money on it. Another thinking trap people fall into is thinking they have to solve the whole problem; sometimes, solving just one part of the problem is enough for the time. A final thinking trap is thinking that it is your problem and you are the one who must solve it; often, it is someone else's problem, and the very best thing for you to do is to turn it over to that person and refuse to get involved.

The second quality of genius is the ability to concentrate single-mindedly on one thing at a time, on one problem at a time. And to stay with it until it's solved. Highly creative people practice focusing on single questions and single problems, while uncreative people diffuse their mental energies by trying to do several things at once. They work on this and work on that. They pick something up and put it down. Then they go on to something else and come back. Often, they are scatterbrained, and if they do come up with ideas, their ideas are shallow and poorly thought-out.

The difference between diffusion and concentration in creativity is the difference between gentle sunlight and sunlight concentrated through a magnifying glass. It is the difference between light and a laser beam. It is the difference between a small flame and a welding torch. Your job, in increasing your creativity and enhancing your intelligence, is to concentrate your powers where they can do the most good.

The third quality of genius is the ability to approach problems systematically. People who throw themselves at their problems often become frantic and confused. They take a haphazard approach to thinking, and then they are amazed when they find themselves floundering and making no progress.

In his book *Innovation and Entrepreneurship*, Peter Drucker makes the point very clearly that innovation must be a systematic process. It must be planned and organized. It is too important to be random and haphazard.

Here is a 10-step method you can use to think systematically. With this method, you develop your creativity to genius levels.

1 Change your language from negative to positive. Instead of using the word problem, use the word situation, or call it a challenge or an opportunity. If a sale falls through, you can say something like, "This is an interesting challenge. It is an opportunity for me to improve my sales effectiveness so this doesn't happen again in the future."

The more positive your language is, the more confident and optimistic you will be when approaching any difficulty. The more creative and insightful you will be in identifying solutions and breakthrough ideas.

2 Define your situation or difficulty clearly. What exactly is the challenge you are facing? What is causing you the stress and anxiety? What is causing you to worry? Why are you unhappy? Write it out clearly in detail.

Sometimes what you are worrying about is what is called a "cluster problem." It is a series of small problems clustered together. You need to sort them out and define them separately.

3 Ask, "What else is the problem?" Don't be satisfied with a superficial answer. Look for the root cause of the problem rather than get sidetracked by the symptom. Approach the problem from several different directions.

For example, if your business is slow, you could ask, “What exactly is the challenge facing me?” Your first answer might be that sales are down. But what else is the problem? How else could you phrase your answer to make the problem more amenable to a solution?

Here are some different ways of answering that question. You could say that sales are down. You could say also that you are not selling enough. Or you could say that people are not buying enough. Or you could say that people are buying too much of your competition’s product. Or you could say that people are not buying your product the way it is currently produced or packaged. Or people are not buying your product the way you are selling it, or for the reasons you think they should, or in the quantity you need them to buy it for you to be financially successful.

In each case, by changing your definition of the problem, you change your possible approach to the solution. You expand your possibilities. You become more creative. You unlock more of your inner genius.

4 Ask, “What are my minimum boundary conditions?” What must the solution accomplish? What ingredients must the solution contain? What would your ideal solution to this problem look like? Define the parameters clearly.

5 Pick the best solution by comparing your various possible solutions against your problem, on the one hand, and your ideal solution, on the other. What is the best thing to do at this time under the circumstances?

6 Before you implement the decision, ask, “What’s the worst possible thing that can happen if this decision doesn’t work?” I remember once spending all the advertising money of the company I was working for on a single advertising campaign. I was convinced that, even at a low rate of return, sales would more

than justify the expenditure. I failed to ask that question about the worst possible outcome. I got blindsided by the “fallacy of large numbers,” which says that if you advertise to an enormous number of people, the odds are that you will get a certain number of sales. What happened was that I got no sales at all from the advertising. As a result, I almost ruined the business. I should have asked, “What effect would there be on the business if the advertising did not work at all?”

In fact, before you make any expenditure of money or effort in trying to achieve your goal, you should evaluate what would happen if your decision were a complete failure.

7 Set measures on your decision. How will you know that you are making progress? How will you measure success? How will you compare the success of this solution against the success of another solution?

If you decide to sell or market in a particular way, how will you know that you have made the right decision? How will you define a success? Make it measurable. Then monitor it on a regular basis.

8 Accept complete responsibility for implementing the decision. You might want to delegate responsibility for the implementation of the action steps to someone else. Many of the most creative ideas never materialize because no one is specifically assigned the responsibility of carrying out the decision.

9 Set a deadline. A decision without a deadline is a meaningless discussion. If it is a major decision and will take some time to implement, set a series of short-term deadlines and a schedule for reporting. If you have a one-year goal to increase your income, break down the goal into months, and then break down the months into weeks. Break down the weeks into days and the days

into hours. Then discipline yourself to do the things you need to do, every hour of every day, to assure that you achieve your weekly and monthly goals and your annual goal on schedule.

With the deadlines and subdeadlines, you will know immediately if you are on track or if you are falling behind. You can then use your creativity to alleviate further bottlenecks or choke points.

10 Take action. Get busy. Get going. Develop a sense of urgency. The faster you move in the direction of your clearly defined goals, the more creative you will be. The more energy you will have. The more you will learn. And the faster you will develop your capacity to achieve even more in the future.

The world is full of creative individuals who have wonderful ideas. But almost all of them fall down when it comes to implementation. And this is where you can excel. The future belongs to the creative minority who can not only think but also take action and put their ideas into effect.

You can solve any problem, overcome any obstacle or achieve any goal that you can set for yourself by using your wonderful creative mind and then taking action consistently and persistently until you attain your objective. Success is a mark of a creative thinker, and when you use your ability to think creatively, your success can be unlimited.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Brian Tracy is Chairman and CEO of Brian Tracy International, a company specializing in the training and development of individuals and organizations.

Brian's goal is to help you achieve your personal and business goals faster and easier than you ever imagined.

Brian Tracy has consulted for more than 1,000 companies and addressed more than 5,000,000 people in 5,000 talks and seminars throughout the US, Canada and 56 other countries worldwide. As a Keynote speaker and seminar leader, he addresses more than 250,000 people each year.

He has studied, researched, written and spoken for 30 years in the fields of economics, history, business, philosophy and psychology. He is the top selling author of over 50 books that have been translated into dozens of languages.

He has written and produced more than 500 audio and video learning programs, including the worldwide, best-selling Psychology of Achievement, which has been translated into more than 20 languages.

He speaks to corporate and public audiences on the subjects of Personal and Professional Development, including the executives and staff of many of America's largest corporations. His exciting talks and seminars on Leadership, Selling, Self-Esteem, Goals, Strategy, Creativity and Success Psychology bring about immediate changes and long-term results.

He has traveled and worked in over 90 countries on six continents, and speaks four languages. Brian is happily married and has four children. He is active in community

and national affairs, and is the President of three companies headquartered in Solana Beach, California.

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