



Be Creative!

10 Blends to Get Your Juices Flowing

The one question that I am asked more often in conferences is: How can a person be creative? I like to think of myself as a creative person. I remember when I came up with "The Seven Dwarfs of Change" speech about coping with Change and Transition, I noticed that there were seven reactions to change in the opening exercise and I wondered how I could teach this so it would stick and people would remember it. A friend of mine uses the characters in the Wizard of Oz to drive her points home, so I searched my memory for something that came in sevens that would help with the reactions to change. Bang! It hit me. The familiar story of Snow White and The Seven Dwarfs. The Seven Dwarfs were in a stable environment until this pretty young girl came to live with them. their world was turned upside down and they reacted according to their character names. That's what being creative is to me: Looking for ways to make other things work better together.

That works for me, but how can people be more creative? Have you ever noticed that creative people seem to have fun in life? Have you ever noticed how they seem to be indispensable to the executives? What steps can you take to get your creative juices flowing?

1. Network with creative people. I get my best ideas at conferences and seminars where great speakers and idea people tell me what they are doing and how they came up with it. I love going to our National Speaker's association conventions, conferences and meetings. Some of my best ideas come from hanging around these people who are the most creative people I know. We share ideas and challenge each other to go one step further. I belong to several organizations that involve entrepreneurs and creative people. Most are inexpensive and the ideas flow freely.

2. Look for/Do the obvious. Like the Dwarfs presentation and seminar, when I developed my speech on dealing with storms in life, I tried to find a medium I could deliver it in so people would be interested from the outset. Growing up I remembered that the most famous people involved in a storm in my childhood were the castaways on Gilligan's Island. Just about everyone knows who they were because the theme song told about each one of them. This became my introduction to a speech I present on how to survive terrible events in life (Trying

to Reason with Hurricane Season). There's the story of a chicken farmer who kept having to move his chickens to higher ground in the rainy season because of flooding. He got tired of doing this continually, but kept on in desperation. Finally his wife said, "Why don't you switch to raising ducks?"

3. Stay in search mode. Look for many options continually. Albert Einstein has been credited with saying, "Doing the same thing over and over, expecting different results is the definition of crazy." Emile Chartier, the Philosopher said "Nothing is more dangerous than an idea when it's the only one you have." Always keep your eyes open for new ideas and options to age old routines. Robert Kreigel and Louis Patler wrote a great book on this called, *If It Ain't Broke, Break It!* Remember that most good things come to an end. People who generate alternatives will have something to fall back on when the present solution is no longer effective. Stay involved in the creative process. That leads us to...

4. Look for many solutions--not the fault. We are constantly surrounded by fault finders and fruit inspectors. The creative person who not only can see what's wrong but provides a solution will get rewarded with more and better responsibilities. Henry Ford said, "Don't find fault...find a remedy." Charles Kettering when he was head of General Motors always told people to leave their slide rules (remember what a slide rule is, kids?) behind when attending meetings, because participants would take them out and use them to compute fault with new ideas. try this rule, no one can discuss a problem unless he/she can provide some workable solution.

5. Be un-reasonable. Go for the un-reasoned response to problems and difficulties. Think differently. Creative people don't waste time calculating. They think ahead, regardless of the consequences. Jim Stovall is a man who became blind by age 19. Rather than sitting around feeling sorry for himself, he invested everything he had in developing a network for blind people to hear not only the dialogue but a narrative track describing the action taking place in movies. No network official would give him an opportunity. Everyone told him it wouldn't work and was a useless idea. Today, he is the CEO of the Narrative Television Network. Life is full of people who will refine, or shoot down your ideas, let them do it. You just spend your time thinking outside of the box. And if that doesn't work for you, build your own box.

6. Always be thinking. Practice mental calisthenics. History records that Cyrus McCormick is not only known for inventing the reaper, but he came up with the installment plan to help farmers pay for the machine. Develop a system to file your ideas so when the BIG one comes you can make it mesh with several others. If you don't file well, this is a great way to get a system started. Remember my Gilligan's Island idea for the Storms of Life speech? Right after that Idea came to me I saw an episode of the popular CBS series *Survivor* on television. Did you know that *Gilligan's Island* premiered on CBS back in the '60's? This made it their very first *Survivor* series. Except back then you didn't

vote people off the island. In my talk on life's storms that's one of the first things we do. We vote on of the seven castaways off Gilligan's Island--just for the fun of it!

7. Get out of the Cookie Cutter mold. Find ways to do things differently. Dare to be different. Don't bother with the criticism you will receive. Albert Einstein said, "Great spirits have always encountered violent opposition from mediocre minds." The reason things haven't changed in your organization lately might be that no one wants to challenge the norm. Learn to see what others refuse to see. Rent (no BUY) the movie Patch Adams, starring Robin Williams. It's the true story of a med school student who challenges the norm and does medicine in creative ways. He is advised by a friend to see the world anew each day. You can, too!

8. See problems as opportunities. John Maxwell says, "When we see problems as problems, we want to be controlling. But when we see problems as opportunities we want to be creative." There is a famous story about a shoe company that sent a salesman to a South Seas island. He wrote the company back: "This place is a nightmare! Everyone is used to being barefooted and nobody wears shoes here. Send me home!" They recalled him and sent a second salesperson. This one wrote the company: "This place is paradise! Everyone here is a potential customer. Send more shoes!" Which side are you on?

9. Challenge rules and assumptions. This is very difficult for personality/behavior types that always have to play (abide - their word) by the rules. Thomas Edison hated playing by the rules. One of his famous quotes about his workshop in Menlo Park, NJ was: "There ain't no rules around here. We're trying to accomplish something." Often the very rules of an organization are the same ones that keep it from growing and being creative. One of the most frequent complaints I hear in talking to executives is that their people don't use creative ways to cross-sell, or extend themselves with customers. Then I find out that the workers are afraid to step out of the rules (or don't know them well enough to be empowered to act) in trying out ideas. What rules have you got in place that stifle your employees' creativity? What rewards or incentives can you put in place to turn them around? Give bonuses to people who extend themselves beyond the rules and make your company/organization a winner. Recognize them publicly so that everyone will get the idea that this behavior is what gets rewarded.

10. Have fun! It's okay to enjoy your work and your life. In a recent survey it was revealed that an adult of 40 is about 2% as creative as a child of 5 years of age. By age 40, 98% of the creativity has been squeezed out of us. Theodore Geisel (aka, Dr. Seuss) said, "Adults are obsolete children." A chart I saw one time said that ages 1-7 are filled with asking "Why?" Ages 7-17 are filled with asking the question, "Why not?" Ages 17-70 are filled with the statement, "Because!" Be a

kid again and ask, "Why not?"

Creativity can be the quality that makes you shine. It can turn your "bland" days into "blast-off" days. It all depends on your attitude towards circumstances and finding solutions. You can make the choice to be creative, swimming upstream, or just go with the flow. Which way are you going?

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