

“Kick Starting Creativity Without Screwing Up the Idea”

Creativity - the spark that ignites what you say and how you say it.

So what does creativity mean to you? It can mean different things to different people.

I would suggest to you that creativity is a state of mind. And when the mind is having fun, creativity is boundless. Creativity occurs when people perceive there are no limits. Creativity can also be defined as the ability to see, feel, touch, think and imagine what one has not seen, felt, touched, thought or imagined before.

My favorite definition: Creativity is “intelligence having fun.”
And if you’re not having FUN in this business, it’s time to hang up the spurs! OK, how many of you think you’re creative?

Here’s a News Flash – You all are! Each one of us represents a different perspective, a different creative slant. If in doubt, think of this:
If you have the ability to challenge your own imagination and stimulate

thoughts to lead you to a new level of solution, you’ll be realizing your own sense of creativity.

You’ve now heard **two tips** to help kick-start your creativity: **Have fun and believe you are creative.**

Along with creativity, the power of ideas can’t be underestimated. Even the simplest idea, creatively and smartly executed, can differentiate the forgettable from the memorable. It’s like a mix of logic and magic.

For best results, ideas should be media and discipline neutral. As such, you have no boundaries, and your wacky creative ideas may just be easier to sell. After all, companies only care about how to make the idea work and be relevant.

I asked you earlier how many consider yourselves creative. The legendary creative guru Lee Clow of TBWA Chiat/Day and the maestro behind Apple’s advertising had this to say about creatives:

“Creative people are 50% ego and 50% insecurity. They need to constantly be told they're good and they're loved.” So, for all of us

egotistical, insecure so and so’s, remember this (**Tip**): **Never fall in love with your idea. There’s always a better one around the corner.** And, it may not even come from you!

Tip: Don’t ever underestimate the power of your mind or your imagination. Don’t ever be afraid to ask, “Why, Why not or What if?”.

Tip: Provoking conversation is one way to kick-start some ideas. It’s like being like an investigative reporter. Ask probing questions beyond what is normally asked. Constantly refine the questions by using a few of the last words spoken in the previous answer. It’s like you’re drilling down to what may be a core message point – Example:
“Dr. Jones, what makes your eye clinic so special?” – “We have the Star Wars Laser Technique.” – “What’s different about the Star Wars Laser Technique?” – “It makes removal of cataracts painless.” – “Painless cataract removal? Tell me about that.” Get the idea? The more you get the client to converse, the better informational foundation you lay for idea generation.

OK, ready for some silliness?

Ye Olde Creativity Survival Kit to the rescue. Get any sort of container (old, cleaned out paint can is great) in which you place whatever makes you FEEL creative and THINK creatively.

If you’re thinking this is just silly, well you’re absolutely right. In this industry, silly is sometimes serious business.

Thinking at Warp Speed – Generating ideas at breakneck speed is a great way to capture ideas on Post-it Notes (one per note) in answering a specific question to solve a problem. You don’t have time to analyze and judge; you circumvent fear (of a bad idea). Basically, you’re generating 50 ideas in 5 minutes or, say, 100 ideas in 10 minutes.

Drill Down Technique – How do you know when you’ve hit THE idea? There’s more than one approach but here’s one that may not be widely used. Again, this is a timed exercise. Discuss among your group and then choose what you consider to be the best five ideas. **ELIMINATE THEM.** Choose five more. **ELIMINATE THEM.** When you’re down to

one, maybe this **last idea** is the best one; or maybe not, but it’s one to which you may not have paid much attention in the other approach.

Giant Post-it Notes – Make for an attractive “idea wall.” Use these big-ass yellow or white Post-It Notes that have adhesive on the back for easy sticking, and removing, from the wall. Great for idea posting, small group brainstorming and open-door policy “idea addition.” Pass the word as to what your’re working on and have other office mates drop by and contribute. A big white board attached to the wall also makes for good ideation involvement.

Tip: As ideas are developed, make sure their essence is refined. Make sure your ideas are clear and that you can explain their basic value in about 20 seconds. This makes it easier for the idea to gain acceptance. Practice on an 8-year old; if she gets it, you’re okay. Adults have too much mental baggage that gets in the way. They tend to over-analyze everything. A child, however, cuts right to the chase. *Octopus ad (located midway down my Home Page) – Illustration conveys that*

NalcoExxon gets intricately involved in their customers' business. Visual needed to carry the ad and get reader attention. Copy plays support role.

Special Tips to management: Don't manage creativity; manage FOR creativity. Provide an environment that is open and receptive to new ideas. And be prepared to take risks.

As Lee Clow once told AdAge: *“So it comes with being daring that you're going to screw up. But I'd rather apologize than to be so timid as to not try and do anything smart or brave.”*

Have the courage and guts to accept failure. Build it into your culture as part of the process; don't ridicule it, but honor and embrace it.

Consider how Pixar Studios deals with failure. They have what they call a “suckless mentality”. When presented with something that doesn't quite measure up, be lighthearted about it when you say something like “Gee, that really sucks. However, if your tried this or that, it might *suck less.*”

New ideas bring forth both good and bad ones. In recently addressing the bosses at Yahoo, Steve Jobs advised that killing bad ideas isn't that hard; it's killing good ideas that takes effort. Why? Because for any single good idea to succeed, it needs a lot of resources, time, and attention, so only a few good ideas can be developed fully.

According to a study by Stanford University, businesses depend on bosses to manage innovation as well as implementation. Good bosses teach and inspire their people to accept defeat gracefully (the killing of their pet idea) and move forward to implement the selected ideas. However, I'd suggest the boss clearly explain why the idea didn't fly this time around instead of just simply dismissing it.

And, I'd also suggest this:

Tip: Have an Idea Tub. This can be a physical place or thing and/or an electronic file. It's a compilation of all ideas ever submitted since you started keeping track, but organized in such a way as to be readily accessible. Bad ideas are forgotten; good ones need storage.

CMOs must have creativity in themselves, for the good of the business and their own teams, so says Mark-hans Richer, Sr. VP- CMO Harley-Davidson. -- “Creativity as a weapon of business is under-leveraged not for lack of ideas, but for lack of courage to use them or refusal to give up on them. The phrase, ‘We don’t have time for creativity,’ is not something you would ever hear in the most successful businesses.”

Tip: Don’t let the execution bury the idea. Obviously, ideas get generated all the time, but an idea is only as good as its execution. It doesn’t matter how many ideas you have if you never make them happen. And, plenty of good ideas have been trounced because the execution just sucked or some decision maker didn’t have the courage to stay true to it. Even when the marketing strategy is clear, your message can still be diluted if the creative is too cute, too complex or just plain dumb.

The computer and software are just tools to enhance the idea, not to compete with, replace, or screw it up. Be able to jot down your thoughts on paper or the infamous cocktail napkin.

Bonus Tip: Do **not** bring a DEAD CAT without a shovel! ☺ In other words, never present a problem to management without bringing the shovel – at least two possible solutions. In doing so, you save time if one of these is adopted, and you can share your creative thinking while learning more about what’s important to your boss or colleague; keep in mind, you may not know all there is to know about the situation.

Summing Up:

What this all comes down to is simple: We must still deliver what companies need most: *creative solutions to business problems*. We need to be creative business thinkers as well as storytellers in relating to our audiences. If you’re just an order taker, you’re selling both your company and yourself short. Just remember: Trying to satisfy everybody never got anybody anywhere. Take time to think.

There’s always more than one way to do something. That’s where creativity comes into play. Focus on what’s important, then do it.

Let me leave you with a **couple of oddball observations** that if nothing else sound really impressive . . .

#1 - Recognize that the key to doing great creative isn’t always thinking outside the box. It’s often finding something no one has done before inside the box. Don’t assume that everything has already been tried before. Even if it has, maybe it hasn’t been tried this way.

#2 - The key to accomplishing anything great is being too stupid to realize it can’t be done.

Will there be mistakes made? Sure. According to Scott Adams in The Dilbert Principle, “Creativity is allowing yourself to make mistakes. Art is knowing which ones to keep.” May you all be masterful artists!

Thank you very much!