



GERONIMO
PROMOTIONS & EVENTS, LLC

CREATIVITY IS NOT FOR SISSIES

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What did Galileo, Jesus and Elvis have in common? Give up? Each of them broke the rules.....and in doing so, each changed the world.

Some call it “out of the box” thinking, some call it “leading edge” thinking.... but I like to think of it as simply breaking the rules; because to be a truly original idea, you have approach a challenge from an angle that no one has thought of before.... put your mind in a place where no one has been before. This means that you have to break through the “usual” or “common sense” approach.... another way of saying that creativity is just breaking the rules.

However, defining it is much easier than doing it, as we all know. One of the perennial questions in creative businesses is: “Is there a process that will enhance creativity?” As you can imagine, many learned people have looked at this very question at length.

One of the earliest and most interesting perspectives was published in 1926 in the Art of Thought by Graham Wallas. He presented this explanation of the five stages of the creative process:

1. Preparation: preparatory work on a problem that focuses the individual’s mind on the problem and explores the problem’s dimensions,
2. Incubation: in which the problem is internalized into the unconscious mind and nothing appears externally to be happening,
3. Intimation: the creative person gets a “feeling” that a solution is on its way,
4. Illumination or insight: in which the creative idea bursts forth from its preconscious processing into conscious awareness
5. Verification: in which the idea is consciously verified, elaborated, and then applied.

Though often shortened to four stages, with “intimation” seen as a sub-stage, it presents a perspective that has been widely utilized as a starting point by other writers, and I shall be no different. So, here is my contemporary version of this creative process... the one that works for me.

1. Understanding the playground: to break the rules, you have to define the rules first. Know your problem. Understand your goal. Before you can let your inner creative child run free, you must truly understand the yard in which you are playing. Then, and only then, you can throw the rules out. As a famous Japanese proverb puts it quite succinctly: “I will master something, then the creativity will come.”

2. The long showers stage: The best ideas usually don't come from staring at a problem, but by looking around at things that interest you until some random thing clicks and you make an association with something that was not even on the horizon a few seconds before. As my wife tells me: "Just let the boys in the basement do their work." Meditate. Take long walks. Day dream. Sleep a lot..... it's amazing that some great ideas can come in dreams. Just trust yourself and relax.
3. The AHA moment: Sooner or later, something will usually drift into your conscious mind. Sometimes it seems really stupid at a glance. However, the best ideas often have their seeds in the stupidest ideas. Sometimes it will come to you fully formed. The trick is to recognize it for what it is and engage with it. This is the opposite of the long showers stage; this is a time for laser focus. Examine it. Get it down on paper. Understand the permutations, the consequences, the objections, the opportunities. Imagine the future possibilities.
4. Polishing the turd: One of the big problems with a creative concept is putting it into a form that other people can understand. This is often no small feat. Big ideas are often dismissed with words like "impossible," "too expensive," "impractical" or a host of other terms, often preceded by the dreaded words: "Yes, but....." So, to give your idea its best opportunity to make a difference: polish it up. Make sure you know how to present it. Anticipate the challenges and have your responses ready. Practice. Make sure you present it to the right people. Understand who has the most to gain, and start there. Believe in yourself. Have confidence in your idea and show it. Dress appropriately and don't act like a complete geek or eccentric when you talk about the idea. And don't look down on people when they don't get it. You have lived with this, but they are simply trying to fathom it. Be tenacious.

Even then, you may have to go it alone. Many visionaries find that they have been dismissed even though they know their idea is right. Or worse, they are vilified. This, of course, is the flip side of breaking the rules. Each of those I mentioned earlier was widely persecuted for his perceived transgressions against the status quo, no matter how important their ideas were to later generations. Galileo was threatened with excommunication and torture, Jesus was literally crucified and Elvis was widely reviled for leading the young generation straight to hell. As a man who wrote under the name Alan Ashley-Pitt put it: "Creativity is not without its attendant difficulties, for peculiarity breeds contempt. And the unfortunate thing about being ahead of your time is that when people finally realize you were right, they will say it was obvious all along."

Nonetheless, most, if not all, of our growth as a nation, as a society and as individuals depends on creativity. Our very ability to evolve as a species is dependent upon some individual somewhere who is willing to take the derision and approbation of the rest of society in order to do something truly unique. I am willing to bet that the first ape who stood and walked was laughed at by the rest of his clan, but I am also willing to bet that, in the end, that ape, like most truly creative people who have come since, didn't really have a

choice. Their desire to do this “thing” was so deeply written in their DNA that they simply had to take that leap of faith. Or as J. R. R. Tolkien opined: “I wasted my time though the hours seemed pleasant. But all things are short lived, and the joy in the making is their only true end.”

To that point, I would like add a fifth step to my process for creativity:

5. Smoking the cigarette: No this isn't an endorsement of tobacco. It is just that the image of the man and/or woman smoking a cigarette in bed after wonderful sex is one of the most evocative and indelible images in our social vocabulary. And creating something is very similar to sex at some levels. It is pleasurable, sweaty, passionate, complicated, all-consuming, draining and ends in a paroxysm of joy. So, once you are done... take a few moments to revel in what you created before moving on to the next project. This is often the hardest part for most true creative-types. But let me put it this way: you need to do it for your health.

Creativity is not for everyone.... it is certainly not for sissies. However, once again: all growth depends on the creativity of a few. “The man who follows the crowd, will usually get no further than the crowd. The man who walks alone is likely to find himself in places no one has ever been before.” as Ashley-Pitt put it.

So, if you see someone metaphorically “walking alone,” or if you work or live with a creative soul, I would give you the same advice that that John Gardner gave: “When Alexander the Great visited Diogenes and asked whether he could do anything for the famed teacher, Diogenes replied: ‘Only stand out of my light.’ Perhaps someday we shall know how to heighten creativity. Until then, one of the best things we can do for creative men and women is to stand out of their light.”