

**LEADERSHIP ACUMEN Feature Article**

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Revitalizing Your Creative Spirit

*Picasso, Miro, Dali. Da Vinci, Brunelleschi, Michelangelo.
Einstein, Curie, Galileo. Socrates, Pythagoras, Pheidias.*

Looking back over time, we have revered the great artists, architects and scientists for their creativity. Today, our computer designers, graphic artists, actors, and musicians are equally appreciated; and we nurture the creative spirit in our youth as a prized asset.

So too, creativity in business, government and not-for-profit leaders is something to celebrate. It is the necessary underpinning to innovation and value creation, and is a crucial element in marketing, sales or customer-service success. Indeed, while many artists can experiment in their studios and work-up towards performance moments; executives are on-stage performing creatively 9 hours a day, 5-6 days a week!

Think of where creativity enters the executive's daily routine:

- Writing letters/emails to clients or employees
- Building and giving presentations
- Problem-solving
- Coaching/leading your staff and peers
- Developing business cases and proposals
- Enhancing service delivery
- Developing new products, programs, services
- Motivating those around you
- Forming collaborations, alliances, partnerships
- Strategic thinking, planning and implementation
- Synthesizing, facilitating, leading change and continuous innovation initiatives
- Working with Boards
- Orchestrating complex project components, deadlines and changing priorities
- Connecting a Network of employees, contractors, affiliates, partners and more across geographies & timezones

We also know that the daily frustrations, long hours and travel can dampen this creativity.

I'm sure you have had at least one letter or email you would take-back because you reacted in a negative mood. You can probably remember one or more presentation that was 'flat' and not so inspired. And most of us can replay an employee interaction or customer conversation that didn't go the way we intended due to a creativity "brown-out".

So, let us look at some approaches that can help us revitalize or re-focus our creative energies.

Awakening the Right side of the Brain!

As you will remember, the two different sides of our brain control different aspects of our thinking:

<u>Left Brain Processing</u>	<u>Right Brain Processing</u>
Linear - Logical progression Part to whole	Holistic - Big picture, key elements Whole to part
Sequential - First to last, rank ordering Prioritizing	Synthesizing - Random jumps from one element to another, no priority
Symbolic - letters, words, mathematical symbols – names, addresses, descriptions	Visual - Things that can be touched or seen – faces, experiences, maps
Logical - Information processed piece by piece to solve problems	Intuitive - Processes information by whether or not it ‘feels’ right
Verbal - Thoughts are best expressed through words	Non-verbal - Ideas are thought-out using illustrations
Rules-based - Processes info. based upon what is right/wrong, rules/regulations	Creativity-based - Creates anew, with less focus on rules/regulations – looks for new patterns

In many ways, the Left side is the Management side, and the Right is the Leadership side.

Also, you will recall that the right side of the brain controls the motor functions of the left side of the body, and vice-versa.

Awakening our creative, right-brain can be as simple as using some left body motor aspects to get the desired brain cells firing! The yogic exercise of “alternate nostril breathing” – taking deep breaths through the different sides of your nose – was designed to wake-up the whole brain. To focus our creative energies, one can take some deep breaths through the left nostril! Alternatively, cock your head a bit sideways so your left eye is higher (more dominant) than the right one; tap your left foot to some music, or exercise your left hand with a stress ball. Try standing up and moving around when you write, or drawing a picture to represent your ideas. Better yet – use a flip chart or white board to get your ideas going, utilizing a mind-mapping technique instead of bullet-point words.

These can be fast-acting ways to stimulate your creative energy.

Learning from a Master – da Vinci’s Seven Principles for Creative Genius at Work

In his book, “*How to Think like Leonardo da Vinci*”; Michael Gelb outlined seven principles by which da Vinci lived his life and nourished his creative spirit. Applied by executives into their work and personal life, these Principles can maximize their potential creativity over an extended period of time.

Following are three of these Principles with specific examples of their application.

Curiosita - Taking an insatiable, curious approach to life, and an unrelenting commitment to life-long learning.

As an executive, you may be pleased with a recent effort or goal achievement, but try not to be “satisfied” – always look to improve. This would mean making regular efforts to be in touch with clients, crossing industries to seek out leading practices, and regularly attending training programs, conferences etc.

Perhaps you can start (re-start) a journal to build-in reflection and observation of people and processes around you. Perhaps you could introduce meditation or yoga to your daily routine!

Dimostrazione – A commitment to testing knowledge or insight through experimentation, experience and persistence – including a willingness to learn from mistakes.

For executives this might mean persevering in the face of obstacles, or facilitating a discussion with staff and suppliers involved in a faltering project to collect everyone’s experiences, insights, learning so far; then, developing a new approach forward.

Expose yourself to different beliefs or values – attend a church service from a different religion, read a very different newspaper/magazine for a week, listen to a different radio station.

Sensazione - The refinement of our senses: sight, smell, listening, to enliven our experience.

Think about your office environment – is it stimulating? What colours, music, artwork, sculpture or plants do you have? There are so many ways an executive can use this principle to stimulate creativity in self or others.

Perhaps wear a mock-neck shirt instead of collar and tie. Spend a day aware of the aromas in your life – “key in” to the air in your office, perfume, the leather of seats, the coffee bar, and more. Do some smells “switch-on” your brain more so than others?

Use music to focus your mind or body to your creativity challenges. Personally, I will play jazz (without lyrics) to stimulate creative writing or program design, I use classical like Vivaldi to help me think through problems or strategic issues, then use rock ‘n roll to “fire me up” prior to a presentation or speech.

Many companies paint the walls around common areas (reception or coffee stations) with bold colours. Others provide white boards in these areas to assist people in sharing their thinking with one another.

You Are What You Eat!

Creatively speaking, what you consume – read, watch, listen to, and experience – affects how creative you feel and perform. Plus, very few creative people operate in a vacuum. They need to interact with others, feel support for their ideas or experimentations, and have people they respect challenge and build-upon their ideas.

In essence, you need to create an enriching environment and culture for yourself and the others around you. Is there any wonder the Renaissance flourished in Italy in the 1400’s? Look at all the scientists, artisans, architects, entrepreneurs and philosophers that gathered around Florence at the time. The French impressionists of the late 1800’s, the Spanish Catalan artists in the early 1900’s, and the Silicon Valley researchers and computer experts of the late 1900’s all were at the center of a confluence of creative elements.

In practically every case, the most creative people in arts or business have a passion for “pushing the envelope”. These people are dissatisfied with the status quo, and getting stuck in routine. This does not mean they are without discipline, even though in some organizations they may be seen as “mavericks” or “rule-breakers”. All of this creative work takes energy and an enlivened spirit. And this requires a nourishing, enlivening environment in which to work. Think about what you could do to create such an environment!

What is your CQ – Creative Quotient?

(Answer “yes” or “no” to each of the following questions.)

1. When someone invites you to lunch at a “different” restaurant (Indian, Thai, Vegetarian, etc.) do you say “Yes” or “No”?
2. Do you change your route home or shop at a different grocery store from time-to-time just to experience something different?
3. Have you picked up and read a “different” magazine in the last 3 months – i.e. on a plane, in a hair salon, or passing by an expansive newsstand?
4. Do you have areas/ rooms of bold colours in your home or office? Do you have bright flowers in reception areas or your kitchen?
5. Do you allow self or others to play music at work? And, do you consciously use it to focus your energies?
6. Do you regularly attend concerts or theatre such as: symphony, opera, jazz clubs, improv. dinner-theatre, school plays, Broadway-type shows?
7. Do you facilitate the gathering of other professionals, suppliers, customers, etc. in order to exchange insights or explore topics of mutual interest? (Beyond budget, project planning or reporting meetings!!)
8. Do you take advantage of one or more days of the work week to dress in a relaxed manner?
9. Have you implemented regular journaling or meditation in order to increase reflection and perspective in your life?
10. Have you recently written an article, diagrammed-out a new idea, or developed a mind-map when listening to someone’s presentation?
11. If someone were to ask you: “What is your passion in your work?” Would you be able to lucidly answer that question?
12. Have you, in the past 3 months, broken a rule? [This could be your own rule, a non-serious corporate rule, or one of expected decorum.]
13. When you develop a speech or presentation, do you do so standing up (in the orientation you will be delivering it) and visualizing the room you will be in when you give it?
14. Have you recently had a young person or younger employee show you one of their favourite websites? Or, have you explored the web yourself looking for interesting sites?
15. Have you in the past 3 months, gone to a spa, had a day in the wilderness, explored a museum/art gallery, walked on a beach, or visited a foreign country?

Score 10 points for each question to which you answered “yes”. The more “yes” answers, the higher your Creativity Quotient! If you answered “no” to any question, then re-read it for some inspiration to enhance your own creative energies.

Surround Yourself With Inspiration

Sometimes, a change in practice is best started with small steps. However, when it comes to revitalizing your creativity, try to make these steps visible. In closing, here are some recommendations to improving your creative space – enjoy!

Artwork by: da Vinci
Michelangelo
Raphael
Donatello
Picasso
Miro
Dali
Monet
Degas
Renoir

Books/Magazines:

- Discover Magazine, January each year – Top 100 Science Stories of previous year
- Scientific American Mind – Annual Special Edition
- World Watch Magazine
- Wired Magazine
- “How to Think Like Leonardo da Vinci” – Michael J. Gelb
- “Creating Minds – An Anatomy of Creativity Through the Lives of Freud, Einstein, Picasso...” – Howard Gardner
- “The Future of Leadership” – Bennis et al
- “Six Questions of Socrates” – Christopher Phillips
- “Parables of Kierkegaard” – Thomas Oden (Ed.)
- “The Daily Drucker – 365 days of Insight & Motivation” – Peter F. Drucker

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