

An Introduction: Now for Something Completely Different

Do you remember how creative you were as a child?

The world was still new and we were experts at using our imaginations to fill in the blanks of our knowledge. We played make-believe, pretend, and we laughed at the most ridiculous things. Maybe, you had fun with dolls, toy soldiers, and rocks in the backyard, or played treasure hunt with your neighbors.

As children, we exercised our creative faculties to explore all sorts of fascinating ideas. Perhaps you conjured up bizarre stories, made interesting music that bothered the neighbors, or created deformed ashtrays out of clay. Or maybe, you were a clever entrepreneur selling street side lemonade. I still remember holding a raffle when I was just 10 years old—at my aunt's wedding! What crazy 10-year-old tries to profit from their aunt's wedding?

Actually, as children, we always had a tendency to do things differently than adults—some of it good, some of it not so good. Nevertheless, the world was enchanted and mysterious—always full of possibilities.

But then, at some point in our lives, we began to think that we actually knew the world. Maybe, we didn't say it out loud, but many of us began to behave as if we no longer needed our imaginations to fill in the blanks. We neglected our creative faculties in order to learn *the way things are* so that we could do things *the way they are supposed to be done*.

The world of possibilities became the world of the impossible. Rather than use our imagination to explore ideas, we began to use some form of rationality to avoid mistakes and failures by limiting our exploration. No more playing with mud because we might get dirty, people may look at us funny, or we might catch some funky mud disease that no one has ever heard of.

Consequently, for far too many of us, the world became less mysterious. It became un-enchanted and lifeless because we forgot how to make it come alive.

But reason and creativity are not mutually exclusive. The world requires that we use both our creativity and common sense to be better employees, entrepreneurs, policy makers, parents, citizens, friends, and neighbors. In order to learn, grow, improve, and solve problems, we need to be able to think differently. Doing things *the way they are supposed to be done* doesn't always cut it.

This was my realization. This was the creative insight that motivated me to start making music again, to write again, and to start a company with some wonderfully eccentric friends. Though creativity had been a large aspect of my life as a youth, I recognized one day—while I was staring at my mesmerizing computer screen in the warmth of my lovely cubicle—that I had forgotten it.

Once my creative juices were flowing again, I began making changes in my life. I decided to temporarily suspend my ten-year engineering career in order to study creativity. It seemed like an odd thing to do, but by definition, creativity isn't about being normal. It's about being different.

Creativity is “the ability to transcend traditional ideas, rules, patterns, relationships, or the like, and to create meaningful new ideas, forms, methods, interpretations, etc.”¹

Being creative doesn't mean you become a Picasso, Ella Fitzgerald, Bill Gates, or Mother Theresa. On the contrary, it means being unique, more original and authentic.

Creativity means breaking free of the herd in order to be less like someone else and more yourself.

The Power of Thinking Differently is a guidebook on how to do just that.

What This Book is About

As a professional in the corporate world, I have been a part of many “creative thinking” workshops. As an artist, I've performed and taught music, written fiction, non-fiction, sketch comedy, and

participated in comedy improvisation. However, I could never marry what I was being taught in a corporate seminar with what I was doing as a creative human being outside of the corporate world. That was unfortunate because, looking back on it now, a lot of the material was quite useful. It just needed to have been taught in a more personal, meaningful context.

By looking at the brain and how human beings think, I hope to put common sense and *thinking differently* in a context that can help us generate new ideas, perspectives, and solutions to problems. For instance, by taking a look at neuroscience, psychology, popular creativity texts, and real life examples of creativity, this book explores why it can be hard to deviate from conventional wisdom. Through this exploration, you'll discover how you can break free of groupthink and creative blocks in order to arrive at creative insights.

This book also surveys many popular notions of the creative process from various perspectives (art, business, spirituality, science, amongst many others) and then spends the majority of the time laying out a single detailed map based on all these perspectives. The result is a map applicable to anyone or any group wanting to participate in the adventure of manifesting something new.

Many of us want to make a positive change in our lives, and in the effort, we often spend day after day banging our heads against a brick wall. Maybe, you are head of state and are trying to solve the Middle East crisis, the economic crisis, or global warming but are frustrated and upset that you have difficulty finding a successful solution.

On a wee bit smaller scale, maybe, you crave to use creativity in any number of ventures including...

- Changing careers
- Reorganizing your finances
- Starting a new business
- ...a new painting
- Choreographing a dance routine
- Designing a new product or the next great invention
- Coming up with a new marketing plan
- Composing a new song
- Improving your relationships
- Concocting a new dish

- Solving a community problem (big)
- Stopping gang violence (huge)
- Discovering possible cures for diseases (huge)
- Authoring a book (enormous!)

...just to name a few, and you find yourself flooded with negative thoughts and energies because you have yet to find new ideas or are unable to successfully turn your great idea into a reality.

Or perhaps you desire a new path for your life, but are seemingly stuck in the mud, unable to play with it in order to see or realize alternatives.

Whatever your endeavor is, if you want to discover a new way to do whatever it is you're doing, this book presents a path to help you find your way. It is a book about how to get beyond the boundaries of common sensibilities in order to explore the world of creative possibilities.

How This Book is Organized

Part I

The first part of this book is the “what” section. It takes a look at our common thinking patterns and creative thinking from a bird’s-eye view so we can see “what it all looks like.”

Part II

The second part of this book is the “how” section. This is where we get down to the meat of the book. It addresses two important questions: How does the brain operate with respect to the different ways of thinking referenced in Part I, and how can we participate in the creative process? This section not only refers to the science of the way we think, but also describes the different stages of the creative process in an easily understandable way—through the language of a hero’s journey.*

Part II is the map for the *Creative Journey* and is broken up into six

* The idea of describing the creative process as a hero’s journey was inspired by Christopher Vogler’s text for screenwriters entitled *The Writer’s Journey*.

† Though I often refer to the stages of the creative process it may be more accurate to think of them as aspects, since the creative process is often non-linear. Writing the process in terms of stages simply makes for a more interesting narrative. Chapter 17 speaks more to this point.

different landmarks, or aspects, of the creative process. I also refer to these as being the different stages[†] of the Creative Journey—from the ordinary world of common sensibilities to the discovery of new ideas, all the way to manifesting ideas into some sort of tangible creation.

Part III

The third part of this book is the “why” section. It is concerned with why we should all learn how to think creatively and why I chose to describe the creative process as a heroic journey.

Bench Press for the Brain

As a whole, the book is meant to not just provide information about creativity, but also to be a piece of exercise equipment meant to give “both sides” of your brain a workout. Much of the book is written to appeal to your rational sensibilities. However, many of the ideas are also explained using metaphor, imagery, and humor meant to exercise your creative faculties.

1. For one, I do my best to restate each stage of the creative process in mythological language at the end of each major section in Part II. For each stage, I describe the common obstacles that must be overcome, the primary task that must be completed, and the archetypal characteristics that the creative hero must embody in order to complete each stage successfully.[‡]
2. Secondly, running throughout the book is a fanciful allegory of some quirky villagers, a peculiar beggar, and a very unusual island that they all inhabit. Both the mythological language and the allegory are meant to stimulate a different part of your brain than do the more technical aspects of this text.
3. Lastly, I do my best to integrate humor and a lighthearted attitude towards the material. The positive impact of a sense of humor on creativity is a central theme of this book.

As you’ll soon come to discover, exercising your creative muscles is more fun than you can imagine.

Or perhaps, it’s more accurate to say, “It’s as fun as *you can* imagine.”

[‡] These archetypal characteristics were inspired by the Carol Pearson book *The Hero Within*.

What You'll Learn

This book debunks the following ten common Creativity Myths:

1. That creativity in general is only for the artist or special “creative types.”
2. That you have to be either crazy or depressed to be creative.
3. That creative insights are only the results of hard work and thinking hard.
4. That being creative is all about being “right-brained.”
5. That time pressure or fear can force breakthroughs. (Anybody remember McGuyver?)
6. That creative groups require having a group of “creative people.”
7. That competition provides a better creative environment than collaboration.
8. That ingenious ideas only come from experts in their field.
9. That you have to be serious to be innovative or inventive.
10. And that creative inspiration can only occur if “the moment is right.”

Additionally, this book will provide practical information on creativity in order to help you, or your organization, experience immediate results.

It will examine the following:

- How your brain is naturally built for creativity.
- Why it can be hard to deviate from our habitual thinking patterns and perceptions.
- The secrets to out-of-the-box thinking and overcoming creative blocks. But shhh... don't tell anybody. It's our little secret.
- Why relaxation, humor, and a sense of play can help you become more “insight prone.”
- A survey of many popular notions of the creative process.
- An imaginative roadmap to the creative process that integrates these many notions.
- What the common obstacles and enemies are within the creative process and how we can have a better “relationship” with them.
- And keys to cultivating creativity in groups.

Oh, and you'll also learn how to become rich overnight and how to have great sex any time you want it.

Well, maybe not those last two things, but this book *will* teach you how to exercise your creative muscles so that you can think wacky thoughts and can access off-the-wall ideas. Maybe, you'll come up with a unique method to paint a picture, the next Chia Pet type product, or a dish that sounds more impossible than fried ice cream.

Most importantly, you'll learn how to access new and deeper ways of experiencing the world that will enhance your access to possibilities and meaning. Through this book, I hope you can re-enchant your world by allowing yourself to see it through the eyes of a child. It is only by thinking like a child that anyone can harness the power of thinking differently.

I know it sounds like buying a power tool at the local hardware store, but “thinking differently” not only slices and dices old ideas and then welds them into unique ones, it can also chop down assumptions that are at the roots of cultural conflict, emotional distress, and a monotonous existence.

The Time to Think Differently

I am writing this book at a time when the talk of *change* is center stage. The US economy is faced with turmoil as a result of a failed mortgage system. Old ways and systems have brought Americans into a topsy-turvy world where money no longer *seems* safe in banks, where the economy is unstable, where our resources are stretched to the limits, and where the health of the environment is in question. Many current regimes—rightly or wrongly—are often looked upon as being uncreative, making decisions based on archaic thought patterns and perspectives. On both sides of the political aisle, the predominant rallying cry revolves around messages of change.

However, some tend to oversimplify problems and, as a result, oversimplify the solutions. Hence, in many problem-solving scenarios, whether it be politicians promising to solve nation-wide issues, community leaders addressing community issues, or CEOs faced with declining profits, solutions are often presented as easily understood declarative statements.

We may speak of what actions need to be taken, and how *will* or

force can be applied to rectify our dilemmas. *Perhaps if dress codes or curfews are enforced we can end gang violence.* Sometimes, we are told that the solutions to our problems depend on *what* we think, where our issues can be resolved by attaining new information. *Perhaps we can cure high blood pressure by discovering new medications,* the idea being that more or new information can make long-lasting change.

These remedies can often help suppress our suffering. They can sometimes alleviate the symptoms of our problems, at least temporarily, or until we encounter the same scenario again. Enforcing a dress code may help curb gang violence until gangs decide to evolve their attire, but it does not address the sociological and psychological conditions that foster the violence. Pills may help those with high blood pressure, but do not address the life-style that brought about this condition in the first place.

Solutions like these can be good band-aids. But the root of many of our issues is not *what* we think, but *how* we think. Our lives are not affected just by what information we are given, but how we process this information. It is only by changing how we think that we will be able to make long-lasting improvements.

How we think is how we perceive, process information, gain knowledge, solve problems, make decisions, and understand our surroundings. It is how we generate new ideas, discover new vaccines, create new paintings, and make new music. How we think affects how we write new books and create new recipes. How we think dictates the paths we choose to follow and the lives we choose to live. How we think is also how we get ourselves into messes in the first place.

It can be difficult to change our habits of thought. It often feels easier to react to new circumstances in the exact same way we reacted to our old ones. Yet, with enough courage to try something new, we can access a vast sea of possibilities. And by becoming aware of the habits of thought that ruled our behaviors of the past, we can become empowered to be more creative now.

Life is too short and the world is too wondrous for us to live everyday just like the previous. Now is the time for exploring new possibilities.

Now is the time to think differently.