



Helping People to be Creative

Most people get it wrong about creativity. There is a current of thought out there – a surprisingly wide-running current of thought – which believes that creativity is something God-given. Indeed, this belief is actually part of our popular culture. People like to think that creativity is some wonderful inspired gift, some magical event which, as with winning the Lottery, is only granted to a few people.

The reason people like to think this is that being creative requires a definite mental effort and also a definite leap of courage. Most people are too lazy to want to do this and consequently prefer to believe that creativity is something which 'you either have or you haven't', with the implication that if you haven't got it, you don't need to blame yourself, but instead should lay the blame on fate or fortune.

In fact, this popular belief that creativity is some kind of magical inspiration is completely misleading and inaccurate. The truth of the matter is that creativity tends to stem from an individual or team of people having developed creativity as a skill they regularly and enthusiastically practise.

The composer Hans Zimmer, for example, who has written the scores for some of the most successful movies of the past 10 years, described his creative process in an interview recently as being simply a question of 'going to my office, sitting at the piano, and trying to think of a few tunes'. This wasn't false modesty; he was simply describing the habitual thought process and working mentality of a truly creative person.

How do we apply these principles to business? The answer is that we should train ourselves not to succumb to the feeble excuse that creativity is a gift. We should recognise that real creativity should be a professional discipline. It's like a muscle that we need to exercise if we are to make it strong and keep on exercising it.

Encourage yourself and your colleagues to see creativity in this way. Encourage them to regard creativity as a desired behaviour which they should consistently seek to practise. No one's saying they will have a great creative day every day, but let them keep that muscle well-exercised.

Introduce rewards and incentives for creativity. I don't mean the old fashioned 'suggestion box', I'm talking about encouraging a creative climate where everyone is motivated to maximise their creative input. Have regular staff meetings and discussions so that creative ideas can be aired; not forgetting to give their originators due credit. And build in to your

working framework a system of effective positive reinforcement for creativity. According to the tenets of positive reinforcement, the motivations and incentives should be personalised: that is, you give people the reinforcement that they value. This means really getting to know your colleagues, otherwise, how can you know what will most impact on their continued creativity? So not only will you wind up with a more creative workforce, you will also get to know your colleagues better as well. Isn't that itself a reasonably creative idea?

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