



Organization and Creativity Should Go Hand in Hand

By Lise Stahl Brown/ Excerpt
Sunday, April 1, 2007

Despite the common refrigerator magnet wisdom, creativity and organization are not mutually exclusive.

Creativity doesn't strike out of the blue. You show up to work, whether you think you've got the "spark" or not, and you prepare for inspiration through focused work, work that has a plan and some organization to it. Success as an artist, just as success in business, relies on a synergistic blend of planning, preparation, inspiration and effort.

Why are creative focus and organization important? We all have great creative potential. Our best work comes from thinking and acting creatively. So, we want to adopt practices that promote creative breakthroughs in all the aspects of our lives. Here are six organizing tools and practices to enhance your creativity, whether in business or the arts.

Get Started with Mind Mapping. This is an excellent tool for organizing the flood of ideas that often overwhelms creative minds. Mind mapping allows you to identify ideas, elaborate on your vision and create associations between ideas. Because it's visual and nonlinear, it works well to tap into your creativity. Try mind mapping with pencil and paper — engaging physically seems to enhance idea generation.

Adopt a Regular Creativity Routine. A creativity routine gets you into a regular practice of creative thinking and output, establishing the creative act as a habit. This routine doesn't produce an end result. It will, over time and practice, result in a new kind of profound knowledge and the ability to look at work with new insight and vision.

Schedule Uninterrupted Time. Time is our greatest limiting factor. It can feel hard to dedicate time to a job that isn't close to showing results or to remove expectations that the time spent will yield in a tangible end-product. In business, it's as difficult for the creator to take the time as it is for the manager to allow it. Remember, however, that your creativity is undermined by constant interruptions.

Whenever you have a project in your business that needs creative focus, set aside about 90 minutes to work without interruption. Shut off the e-mail and phone and hang out the "do not disturb" sign so you are able to get into the flow of ideas that your project needs.

Build in Time to Make Mistakes. Getting ready for inspiration can look and feel a lot like play. It's a time for experimenting and for trial and error. The mistakes are as valuable as the successes. When you're planning a creative project, be sure to allow time for play and making mistakes. Build trial-and-error time into your project schedule and you won't feel pressured to deliver before you're ready.

Try Composting. A fiber artist friend of mine has a practice she calls "composting." When designing a new woven piece, she assembles her yarns in a pile on the floor in her studio and then walks away. While she's outside her studio, her visions grow and breathe. And when she returns, almost magically, she has a new picture for the garment she will create. This technique allows the ideas and alternatives you gather to be assimilated and played with by your mind, both consciously and unconsciously.

Other ways of letting the mind work on the creative problem are to nap, meditate or engage in repetitive physical activity. Thomas Edison used to "nap with intention" and would awaken to his most creative ideas. You may have had a similar experience of awakening abruptly from sleep with the solution to a problem you've

been working on.

Organize Yourself for the Bolt of Lightning. When the "Aha!" moment comes, will you be ready? Beware of believing inspiration is all there is to creativity, a magical moment that happens or not according to fate. For most people, the "Aha!" moment occurs because of preparation and patience. If you've prepared and allowed your thoughts to incubate and/or compost, be ready. Inspiration is likely to follow.

If you have a place where inspiration happens, go there. Start noticing those places where your inspiration regularly happens and be sure to bring a pencil and paper to capture your "Aha!" moment.

Twyla Tharp said, "You don't get lucky without preparation, and there's no sense in being prepared if you're not open to the possibility of a glorious accident."

Prepare yourself for many glorious accidents.

Excerpted from "Exploring Productivity: Ideas From Industry Professionals on Getting More Done in the Workplace." Copyright © 2007 by the Network for Productivity Excellence. Exploring Productivity 978-0-9758680-1-0. Dawson Publishing, 3410 S. Tournament Drive, Memphis, TN38125.

Lise Stahl Brown is the president of Concord-based artful Productivity, which provides training and consulting to help New England companies build success and creativity on a foundation of solid personal productivity practices.