

## Andy Weisberg | Article

# On Creativity...

Today more than ever we are required to be creative. From solving managerial problems to coming up with new product ideas to inventing yet another process, the demand is real and increasing. Without tools and processes that can help break the restrictive patterns of selective thought we'll continue to work only with what exists now, and miss the joy of releasing our natural creative abilities.

### The Challenge

One of the major challenges is to clearly understand that creativity is a unique function of our minds. It does not judge or condemn, evaluate or measure, compare or assess. It cannot, because it is a totally different way of processing information. Creativity is holistic and intuitive, which is nearly impossible to describe. And yet it is as critical to our survival as breathing. The imagination, which is its primary tool, is capable of unbelievable feats. Some believe its power is at the center of all that we would call reality. The only thing that holds us back from the daily experience of the real power and magic of our own creativity is ourselves.

### The Reality

For a wide variety of reasons we have learned to distrust our innate creativity. We have been taught that it is erratic, chaotic, uncontrollable, unstructured, and undisciplined. It is. But that is its nature. The energy of discovering new forms and of seeing things in new ways is a threat to the energy that would like things to stay just the way they are. We are divided by the notion that our thoughts must be at odds with our dreams. And it has created a deep chasm and conflict between our work and our creative selves.

The truth is that our logic and our imagination are *equal* parts of who we are. It's suggested in the very structure of our brains. We know this, but very little of our professional and public lives reward us for pursuing our creative selves. Even privately, we endeavor to develop our creative side only if we have a burning desire that cannot be extinguished. At work, we don't score points for dreaming or reflecting. But that's exactly what we must do if we want to continue to improve, innovate, remain competitive, and grow.

### The Way to Play

There are some ways to bring creativity back into your work life -- and to encourage it with your employees. Here are a couple of things you can do:

- Examine the work environment itself. Check and see if there are any barriers, physical or political, to people exercising their creative muscles. Ask questions like: How are creative efforts received? Is there a venue for suggestions and ideas? Do we really understand and implement effective brainstorming methods? Do we appreciate the value of play and humor? Are these things just as valid as serious planning and organizing efforts?
- Provide resources and education. Make up-to-date information on the subject available to all employees, through a library or regular publication. Provide training that is varied and has depth, as there are many approaches to creativity and innovation. Allow employees to explore and study related subjects on company time. Topics like Stress Management, Systems Thinking, Chaos Theory, Comparative Philosophy, and Psychology are just a few that are relevant and directly useful in the workplace. There are many books, articles, audio and video recordings that are very well done and can spark a new enthusiasm for research and learning.

There are three main elements of the **presentations** and **training sessions** I have developed:

1. To free up and exercise our creative selves we have to first understand how creativity works and what our personal barriers are.
2. Then, it is necessary to create safe environments in which people can experiment and explore.
3. Finally, it must be understood that the principal method of exercising creativity is play. How exactly does play fit (or not fit) in to the workplace?

It's not about being goofy, or telling jokes, or having a lot of toys in your cube.

So, a thorough examination of our feelings about play, our reluctance to engage in it in most situations, and any other barriers to its manifestation must be undertaken. Only in looking long and hard at what holds us back can we start to move forward. And always with the perspective that we have all the "talent" and creativity we need to begin. As a matter of fact, we already have all the creative ability we're ever going to get. It's not about getting more of it, it's about cutting it loose and seeing how much there really is. That's when we get a glimpse of just how limitless we can be.