

## **Beyond the Boundaries: Discovering Your Creative Side**

You're sitting in a meeting and that one person who you love to hate is, yet again, being recognized for another *fantastic* contribution to the group; an idea that seems so obvious now that you've heard it and you're kicking yourself for not thinking of it first. You ask yourself "why can't I do that? I am just not creative." If you can relate to this, you are NOT alone! Many people believe creativity to be a gift a lucky few were lucky to be born with. You either have it, or you don't. While your observations may be true, that some people naturally seem to display more creativity in the situations in which you see them, there may be hope for the rest of us! Research has shown that creativity may not be as far beyond our reach as we thought. Consider the following questions and see for yourself:

### **1) Do you have a problem to solve?**

Many would dispute what creativity is and is not, but we can all agree that something creative must be original or novel. Nothing new, right? Most of us would stop there, but there are two key components to the long-standing definition of creative. The second part is that it must be useful or adaptive. The function of this factor is really to delineate creative from crazy, but it also opens a window for those of us who want to be creative. Every problem requires a solution – ideally one that is useful. If you task yourself to find a solution to your problem that is not simply a copy of someone else's, you will be executing an act of creativity!<sup>1</sup>

### **2) Do you have a particular skill or area of expertise, or even a special interest?**

While the jury is still out on where exactly the ability to be creative comes from, there are a number of things individuals bring to the table that set them up for success. The list includes talents, knowledge, and skills. Maybe you would love to be a painter and create the next great masterpiece, but if you lack the training and are not very good at painting, odds are you won't get too far creatively. That does not mean you are not creative! Research has shown that creativity may not be a one-dimensional, across the board kind of thing. Instead, it may be what is referred to as domain-specific, meaning that an individual can

show high levels of creativity in one area and not others. You can use your own interests and talents to guide you to a domain where you find ideas flow.<sup>2</sup>

*Not sure where your talents lie? Try this quiz based on esteemed professor and psychological researcher Howard's theory of multiple intelligences ->*

<http://www.literacyworks.org/mi/assessment/findingyourstrengths.html>

### **3) Are you Open to New Experiences?**

Being open to new experiences is one of the cognitive personality traits researchers have found correlates to creativity. Those lucky ones who have been deemed creative (at least in their area of expertise) display this openness. This trait could be what allows some people to "think outside of the box" as many would say, because they are not restrained by familiar limitations. Check out this quiz to see how open you are ->

<http://www.outofservice.com/bigfive/>

Not highly open to new experiences? Don't fret! If you know, you can grow.<sup>1</sup>

### **4) Are you independent? Confident? Assertive?**

This writer knows that she would like to say yes to all of these! These qualities are social personality traits that are often possessed by people who show high levels of creativity. The connection could be that these personality

traits help us to overcome the fear that blocks us from exercising our creativity. It feels risky to be different – what if different isn't the same as good? Independence allows us to think for ourselves, confidence can push us past those doubts, and assertiveness can help us share our ideas and convince those who doubt them the first time around. It is important to note that this is not the same as being an social butterfly extrovert. A quiet confidence can be just as powerful. <sup>1</sup>

Another category of personality traits – these are Motivational – Affective. One of the greatest gifts you can give yourself is to commit to whatever it is that interests you. Find that internal drive to figure out a problem or do what you want to, no matter how difficult or silly it may seem. The fact that persistence is included reminds us that success doesn't always come easily. It takes more than one try most times! <sup>1</sup>

### **5) Are you Driven? Ambitious? Persistent?**

Even if you answered NO some of these questions, creativity is still within your reach. It is not just a fabulous gift given to a lucky few. It is a skill that can be nurtured and developed if you take the time to get to know yourself better and make creativity a focus. Really, the question is not if you can be creative, but rather do you *want* to be creative?

#### **Take the Challenge:**

##### **1) Choose a problem to solve.**

Messy laundry room you can't make sense of? Budget issues staring you down? Kids not behaving? Pick just one of your most bothersome problems that needs a solution.

##### **2) Decide what talents you can use to solve the problem.**

Do you work best alone, or should you bring in an ally? Are you artistic? Like to write? Figure out how you work best and what type of product you feel most confident creating.

##### **3) Think, think, think....**

Take the time this problem deserves.

##### **4) Put it into action**

Whatever medium you chose, make it happen. You could write a song for teaching your kids a routine. You could make a miniature model of a room and rearrange it until you find something that works. Share it with everyone who is involved. Try it out – even if you're sure it won't work. You can always learn from your mistakes.

##### **5) Keep Trying**

Your first idea may not always be your best idea. Don't give up! Persist until you find what works for you.

At the end of this you will have a solution – something that is useful – that *you created!* By the end of this, you may realize that you are creative every day. You just have to give yourself credit.

#### **Want to know more? Check out these resources:**

- For more information on the research this article is based on

**The Cambridge Handbook of Creativity** – Chapters 6 and 17 by J.C. Kaufman, R.J. Sternberg PhD

<http://howardgardner.com/> - Information on Howard Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences and other works

- For further personal exploration

**The Widening Stream** by David Ulrich      **The Artist's Way** by Julia Cameron      **Creative Visualization** by Shakti Gawain

This article was written for the purpose of convincing an audience (specifically adult women) that it is possible for anyone to be creative. The goal is achieved through breaking the concept of creativity down into smaller pieces, which makes it feel more accessible. The concept of creativity as domain-specific is emphasized for this purpose. Even if a person is not creative in art (and they have experienced that lack of success), they could still be creative in another area. The personality traits described in Chapter 6 of the Cambridge Handbook of Creativity are also referenced in this article. The focus is on those traits that have been shown to be common in people who exhibit creativity.

1. Kaufman, James C., James C., Sternberg, Robert J., (2010). The Cambridge handbook of creativity (Ch 6). Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press

This chapter in the Cambridge Handbook of Creativity explores the question of how personality functions to influence creativity. The author's functional model of these personality traits include six latent variables: genetic and epigenetic influences, brain qualities, cognitive personality traits, social personality traits, motivational-affective personality traits,

and clinical personality traits. Much time is spent discussing the areas of the brain, particularly the frontal lobe and right hemisphere, but the general conclusion on neurology is that the brain of a highly creative is highly interconnected with more complex circuits than would be seen in a less creative brain. The chapter also discusses the remaining variables of personality, describing what specific traits a person who is highly creative would possess. These qualities and adjectives were useful in my own work as I used them as key terms readers could identify with. Some of these terms include: open to new experiences, persistent, driven, ambitious, confident, independent, and assertive.

2. Kaufman, James C., Sternberg, Robert J., (2010). The Cambridge handbook of creativity (Ch 17). Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press

This chapter in the Cambridge Handbook of Creativity addresses the question of whether creativity is domain specific or domain general. Domain generality suggests that creativity exists and is displayed by an individual in all areas. Evidence in support of this theory would be “high intercorrelations among different creative behaviors and a common set of psychological descriptors for those behaviors.” In contrast, “domain specificity would be supported by relatively low correlations among different behaviors, and a diverging set of psychological descriptors of those behaviors.” Often, people are referred to as simply “creative,” suggesting a wide acceptance of creativity as domain general. This may not be the case, however. The chapter explores research done in support of each theory, making note of the type of measures used and the validity and reliability of each as it measures creativity. While there is still much debate over this question, the author suggests leanings towards a fused model, which accepts “that the talents, knowledge, skills, motivations, traits, propensities, and so forth that underlie creative performance (a) vary depending on the kind of work one is undertaking, (b) are similar across related field or kinds of creative work, and (c) become progressively dissimilar as one moves to increasingly disparate fields of endeavor.” This would indicate that a person is not just creative or not, but rather can display creativity to various degrees dependent upon many conditions.