

Talking About Creativity

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Get to work!

You can't be creative by sitting around waiting for inspiration to strike you. The only way to create is to build your skills and knowledge, dig in and try out new ideas, even if you're pretty sure they won't lead you to the desired outcome. According to creativity expert Natalie Goldberg, "No matter what you do, the first step to tapping creativity is showing up. Tell yourself that you're going to write for 10 minutes, and then physically move your hand across the page for that amount of time. Maybe you'll produce only one good line, but that's a lot more than you would accomplish by just sitting there." (Jill Rosenfeld, "[Here's an Idea! Unit of One](#)," *Fast Company*, April, 2000.)

More about creativity in business

Don't try too hard to be new

Eva Zeisel, a world-renowned ceramics designer, insists that you don't have to focus on originality to create. Here's how she suggests you get started with an idea: "If you want to be creative, don't try to do something new. Doing something new means you're focusing on not doing what's been done before. Negative impulses are frustrating. They're the opposite of creativity, and they never yield good ideas—not even in business or technology. Creativity starts when you put a line on paper. Then you talk to that line. You make it a partner in conversation. You see that the line can go in different directions: you can make it go left or right, or you can add branches to it. You can think critically about it; you can decide that it is too fat or too thin. You can envision what you want the line to look like. But, whatever you do, don't think about where you can't go. If you sit down at a drafting table with the intention of making something new, you'll end up flustered. Creative people always run the risk of making something that already exists, but it's better to create something than nothing. You can throw it away or change it if you want to, but at least you've put down that first line, and started a conversation with yourself." (Jill Rosenfeld, "[Here's an Idea! Unit of One](#)," *Fast Company*, April, 2000.)

More techniques for creative thinking

You are creative

Here's a big don't. Don't say, "I'm not creative." Creative people have diverse skills and ways of thinking. A few people may be born with innate genius, but most of us learn creativity as a skill, through life experience, and by challenging our own conventional problem-solving patterns.

[Resources](#) for creativity and innovation

Your nice, normal, creative self

Rollo May separates the view of creativity as a recreational practice from Plato's view of "true artists," those who give birth to a new reality. May writes,

"We are not dealing with hobbies, do-it-yourself movements, Sunday painting, or other forms of filling up leisure time...The creative process must be explored as...representing the highest degree of emotional health, as the expression of normal people in the act of actualizing themselves.

"There are two keys to [innovation](#). The first is the ability to think beyond relatively conventional paradigms and to examine traditional constraints using nontraditional thinking. You have to be able to go outside your own frame of reference and find another way to look at a problem. The second key to innovation is the ability to discern the important issues and to keep your real goal in view. Companies get into real trouble when they see a means as an end—when they fail to change their business processes: that's when some interloper comes along and does it for them."

Frederick W. Smith, Founder, Chairman, President and CEO of Federal Express

"Innovation requires a fresh way of looking at things, an understanding of people, and an entrepreneurial willingness to take risks and to work hard. An idea doesn't become an innovation until it is widely adopted and incorporated into people's daily lives. Most people resist change, so a key part of innovating is convincing other people that your idea is a good one—by enlisting their help, and, in doing so, by helping them see the usefulness of the idea."

Art Fry, Corporate Scientist, 3M, and Inventor of Post-It Notes

"I like to take advantage of what already exists—to grab the intellectual momentum and then use it to advance an application into the mainstream: How do you invite your brain to encounter thoughts that you might not otherwise encounter? Creative people let their minds wander, and mix ideas freely. Innovation often comes from unexpected juxtapositions, connecting problems that aren't necessarily related. Another way is to treat a problem as though it were generic. If you're experiencing a particular problem, odds are that other people are experiencing it too."

Vinton Cerf, Senior Vice President for Internet Architecture and Technology, MCI WorldCom, Inc., and Co-Inventor of TCP/IP

"Creativity requires quite a lot of faith—not just in yourself, but also in the knowledge that you have the right to proceed, even when you may not know exactly what you're doing...Creativity comes from having an inquisitive mind, from being easily bored, from wanting to challenge the status quo. It comes from people who look for alternatives."

Twyla Tharp, Emmy Award-winning Dancer,

Creativity must be seen in the work of the scientist as well as in that of the artist, in the thinker as well as in the aesthete; and one must not rule out the extent to which it is present in captains of modern technology as well as in a mother's normal relationship with her child. Creativity, as Webster's rightly indicates, is basically the process of making, of bringing into being." (Rollo May, *The Courage to Create*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1975.)

Choreographer and Director, and MacArthur Fellow

From "[Here's an Idea!](#)
[Unit of One](#)," Jill Rosenfeld. *Fast Company*, April 2000.

If you go by May's definition, any time you express yourself by solving a problem in a new way, you're behaving creatively. If you find yourself long on the desire to solve problems and short on the ideas, you can strengthen your creative powers by giving them plenty of fresh air and exercise!

Thinking [outside the box](#)

Creativity takes active engagement

May maintains that every creative act begins with an encounter—a confrontation between the creator and the idea or problem to be solved. In some cases, a certain amount of willpower is involved. In every case, the creative act is achieved through the creator's active engagement in the idea. Creative solutions are often reached after many unsuccessful attempts. As Thomas Edison put it, "Results! Why, man, I have gotten a lot of results. I know several thousand things that won't work."

How [idea companies](#) get their ideas

Questions to [get the creative juices flowing](#)

Qualities of entrepreneurial achievers ([audio file](#)) ([pdf transcript](#))