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## Ain't No Mountain High Enough To Keep You From New Creative Heights

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*“With ideas it is like with dizzy heights you climb: At first they cause you discomfort and you are anxious to get down, distrustful of your own*

*powers; but soon (...) your step gets firm and sure and you begin to look  
—for dizzier heights.”*

—**Nikola Tesla**

A great idea doesn't mind who has it. The only question: Does it know you're coming and will it wait for you?

One of the very first ideas anyone needs to get to grips with about 'Creative Thinking' is the old 'sport of boxing' dictum: 'If you're not there, it can't hit you'. The insanely great idea, that is. The one that Steve or Bill or Jeff...or Nikola or Elon...or Walt or Jim for that matter...once had that became the basis of all the insanely great things they created ever after.

Some of the truly greats, of course, had more than one truly insanely great idea. Luck? I don't think so.

The insanely great Pablo Picasso was once asked if he believed in luck. "Of course, I believe in luck," he replied. "But when it arrives it must find you working." Legend has it that Kermit the Frog said much the same.

So let's get to work. Because the simple truth is everyone can learn to be more creative and have creative ideas - sometimes even insanely great ones. No, really. Creativity isn't just a special knack that some lucky few are born with - it's a process that can be acquired and developed.

John Cleese - he of *Monty Python* and *Fawlty Towers* fame - famously said:

*“Creativity isn't a talent—it's a way of operating. It's a skill that can be learned.”*

Steve Martin - another true comedic genius - has recently said much the same in his teaching course on comedy writing and creation.

Creativity is a process, not a supernatural event. But you do have to commit to it. And practice it. And work at it. Work through any mental barriers or blocks you might have already imposed on yourself.

. . .

The trick is first learning 'How to Think' about creativity - how to approach the very idea of it. Then to work at it until such time you finally convince yourself you really are creative. And not so much 'fake it until you make it' - because the only person you have to convince here is you - at least for starters. So the idea for now is just to start small and go - and grow - from there.

There are any number of schools of thought - systems, methodologies, and techniques - about how best to develop or prime the creative mind: How to encourage creativity; How to get unstuck when you're stuck; How to start again when things fail; How to deliver truly workable ideas. And the great thing is most, if not all, of the approaches to 'Creative Thinking' are available in book form or as in-person or on-line courses.

**The only caveat:** What will work best for you? Which approach will not only fulfil your immediate needs, but also help you to develop a set of skills you can draw on for all your future creative endeavours?

Not all thinking systems - schools of thought - set of concepts - are created equally. There's no one sure-fire method that will suit everyone - as everyone starts from a different point of view and enters at a different level.

At first sight, some creative thinking approaches appear far too complex. Some methodologies look to be too daunting. Or promise to be too time consuming. Some seem too simple even to be believable - or workable.

No one size fits all - or ever can - or should. So how best to know which is the best approach for you?

*“Creative is what works!”*

That’s always the key.

Find out what works for you. Then do a lot of it. Do it until it becomes second nature...just as happened when you learned to tie a shoelace or drive a car...or learned to juggle or play guitar...or learned to cook or code. Persistence is all. Perfection is in continuance.

*“This is the extraordinary thing about creativity: If just you keep your mind resting against the subject in a friendly but persistent way, sooner or later you will get a reward from your unconscious.”*

— John Cleese

### **‘And now for something completely different’**

Here’s one tried and true way to have great ideas hit you - *have your unconscious reward you* - sooner rather than later.

Chicago ‘Mad Man’ James Webb Young’s brilliantly useful ‘5-Step Process for Creating Ideas’ - a singular approach to creativity I was introduced to years ago when I worked at DDB and still use today.

First, though, a polite note of caution Mr. Young gave to all his graduate students at the University of Chicago Business School - then a quick retelling of his ‘5-Step Process’ to help spark your own creativity:

*“First, the formula is so simple that few who hear it really believe it. Second, while simple to state, it actually requires the hardest kind of intellectual*

*work to follow through, so not even all those who accept it go on and use it.”*

### **Step 1:**

Collect the dots - lots and lots of dots - all shapes and sizes. All the many different bits and pieces - however dotty or disconnected they may seem at first - that have anything at all to do with the problem to be solved. Get hold of as many of those dots as you can. Then go back for more.

Also - very important this - remember to open up all the boxes of random and miscellaneous dots you've had stashed away for a rainy day. Give them permission to come out and splash around in all the piles and puddles of things. (Don't mind the mixed metaphors. They're of enormous value, too.)

### **Step 2:**

Connect the dots in as many ways as you possibly can. Obvious ways. Not so obvious ways. Downright-odd ways. Silly ways. Implausible ways. Stupid-beyond-all-belief ways.

Then throw all the dots up in the air and start the process all over again. And again, and again, and again until you really do feel you've gone totally dotty.

### **NOW STOP!**

Put it all out of mind. Go for a walk. Read a book. See a film. Immerse yourself in a video game. Go shopping if you must. (Help keep the economy going.) Have dinner. Go to sleep. Let your unconscious mind work on connecting all the dots in new and un-thought of ways. That's Step 3.

And I know it sounds really dotty but - if you've dotted all the eyes, as it were, in Steps 1, 2, and 3 - **Step 4** is when you'll see new ideas arise as if from out of the blue. One or two of which - maybe even three or

four if your groundwork has truly taken seed - will tick all the boxes in the creative problem you were tasked to solve. Step back and look at what you've wrought - and one of the new ideas will invariably stand out from the rest.

### Step 5:

Take 'The New Idea' out into the big, wide world. Let others in on it. Get feedback. And like the initial 'dotty' creative process itself, you'll see that an 'Insanely Great Idea' just continues to grow and grow.

"Climb every mountain" anyone?

Think on.

DO.

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Tony Broadbent

## Creativity

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