

The Creative Challenge

The other day, someone outside the industry asked me if it was hard to be “creative all the time.” At first, I wasn’t sure how to answer this, because “being creative” isn’t something that one is conscious of or that you must conjure up at will; it’s simply a way of being. I’m sure there have been many studies conducted by academics that shed light on the idea of creative thinking – studies that address esoteric issues like left and right brain thinking processes, mind mapping, logic and imagination. I don’t know much about that, but I do know how to foster the surfacing of the creative thoughts within me. I know how to set the stage for the best ideas to emerge and how to motivate myself to think deeper, richer, more productively.

- 1) **Reading everything, desperately** – The best ideas bounce off other cues, ideas, visuals. A voracious Creative Reader/Thinker sucks in information like a member of the Donner Party seated at a feast. He reads without discrimination, everything from Nancy Drew to Nietzsche, from *Atlantic Monthly* to *Mad Magazine*. He gleans tidbits from every conceivable source – cereal boxes, signage, bank statements, and instruction manuals ... whatever’s within reach. He collects data, impressions and intriguing phrases, diving into dictionaries, thesauruses and arcane reference material with the relish of a 14 year-old boy discovering D. H. Lawrence. His idea of torture is sitting in a doctor’s office without magazines (any printed material!) to fill in the minutes before his name is called. And if he’s desperate enough, he will reach feebly for the ubiquitous *Children’s Picture Bible* collecting dust on the lamp table in the waiting room. In his glove compartment he stashes reading material like emergency rations, just in case he is ever caught in a traffic jam. In short, he is an insatiable fool for words, and there is never, ever enough time to savor them all.
- 2) **The right stage** – Coming out of a deep REM sleep stage is prime time for thinkers. Or in the shower. Or alone in an office when the phone isn’t ringing off the hook. Background music works for some and works against clear thinking for others. It depends. But the idea surfaces nonetheless without much effort if the stage is set to suit the Thinker.
- 3) **Synthesis** – The Creative Thinker takes information and synthesizes it into a raw idea that quickly takes other forms like graphics or poetry or ad campaigns. The first idea is a throw away, and perhaps the second, and even the third. But the true Creative Thinker knows when he’s on the right track and is usually tenacious in honing, molding, and perfecting the notion into just the right brilliant creative work.
- 4) **Developing the idea** -- The emerging Big Idea creates untold ecstasy and moves the Creative Thinker toward another frenzied level of development. He writes pages and pages of notes, then translates these into creative logic to insert into

client briefings and insightful marketing strategies. At this point, there's no stopping him. He's on a roll as the idea takes on a life of its own.

- 5) **The Presentation** – Nothing is as thrilling as sharing the Big Idea, and the Creative Thinker rubs his hands together greedily in anticipation of the big moment when he can articulate his idea and get others wholly and enthusiastically onboard. No time to be wasted on doubt or fear. He chooses his words for his presentation carefully -- words like “connote” and “motivate” and “infuse.” His delivery is usually right on target and impressive because he is totally caught up, intellectually and emotionally involved in the idea and its possibilities for the client.

- 6) **The Aftermath** – The Big Idea is totally embraced or totally rejected by the client– rarely is there a compromise. They either “get it” or they don't. The Creative Thinker knows this and is resilient enough to shake off any negativity, knowing deep down that the Big Idea, if implemented to his specifications, would realize the most amazing results ever recorded on ROI spreadsheets. What? Me worry? It's off to the next project, the next round of thought drafts. After all, there are endless ideas in the flotsam and jetsam of the mind's eye. Endless ideas waiting to be uncovered, massaged and implemented. The Creative Thinker exists to create and he couldn't stop the process even if he tried.