

HABITS THAT BLOCK CREATIVITY

Becoming more creative is not easy. Habits must be broken, perspectives changed, and thought patterns revised. Nevertheless, the results can be well worth the effort. Here are some reasons why it is difficult for most of us to be creative at all times.

It is a common myth that creativity declines with age beginning around the age of 11 or 12. It is also a myth that creativity also declines as education increases. These myths convey some idea that age and learning are obstacles to creative problem solving. This is not so it is just that as we gain experience and learning we develop more efficient tools for dealing with our daily activities.

The only difference between a person being obsolete at 35 and a pioneer at 70 lies in their ability to change their attitudes.
C. Kettering

The Known Vs. The New

The simplest definition of creativity is, the ability to come up with new or unique ideas. Ideas do not have to be new to the world, just new to us. Because two or more people happen to make the same discovery or develop the same invention does not change the fact that each of them had to be creative to discover or invent the system independently.

Unfortunately, routine everyday decision-making works against searching for or accepting new ideas. In attempting to exercise good judgement and not make mistakes, people usually base their decisions on the best, most complete, and most accurate information or experience available. These habits allow us to deal with most situations without difficulty or trauma. Unfortunately, such high-caliber information exists only about what is established, common, and known. The newer and more unique the solution required, the harder it is to get good and sufficient information. That is why the easiest solutions are not new and different. Creative solutions by their very nature must be new or different.

The Creator only creates by rearranging to give a significant, useful, or beautiful combination new to our experience.
Arthur Moss

Obstacles To Creativity

The process of creating a new idea involves combining existing elements into original combinations. An example is Watson Watt's invention of Radar. All the elements, radio waves, amplifiers and oscilloscopes existed and were known to him. Nevertheless, he combined these elements into a new system and turned them into hardware. Once Watt succeeded, radar became just another of the "givens" from which newer systems and applications would be developed.

To unleash the creative process, much of what is usually known and taken for granted, must be looked at in a different way, for a new purpose. Here are some of the most basic obstacles that must be overcome:

Habits Restrict Awareness:

Habits are good in that they are efficient and conserve our mental energies for other tasks. However, habitual behavior can lead to a kind of blindness. One of the chief roadblocks to creativity stems from the physical, perceptual, and mental habits that we build up over time. Such habits tend to tune out those things and ideas around us that could be the basis for new insights,

Habits take us where we were yesterday and our attitudes keep us there.
Confucius

Rigid Categories Prevent Insight:

We see the world selectively through a set of filters created by our experiences. These filters superimpose constraints on a problem that are not there. To find creative solutions we must discard our normal filtered perceptions and try a wholly new approach.

We begin life with essentially no experience or information. The solution to every problem is creative. We learn by interacting with our environment. This learning process fills our heads with raw data, which we organize into rules, mental pigeonholes. Each pigeonhole is the repository for a class of experience and/or information. Each pigeonhole is identified as good, if it leads to desirable results, or bad if it does not. Soon our first instinct when faced with a situation is to try to fit it into an existing pigeonhole.

Wanting to fit new things into existing categories increases as we gain experience. Note the response of someone exposed to something new. They will probably start out saying, that it is the same as something they already know. If they are told it is not, they may take several tries at establishing an identification based on similarity with something they know. If they are unable to do so, they may satisfy his need for mental equilibrium by saying: "Well, it is close enough." If they are open minded enough, they may accept it as totally new to them, and not fitting into a preexisting pigeonhole. They create a completely new category to reside beside the preexisting ones.

As we learn to cope with everyday living we learn to operate on automatic because we find it efficient and comfortable. We develop enough pigeonholes to get us through life, and we become reluctant to crowd in new ones. The net-effect is that even when exposed to something new, we try to treat it like something familiar, and immediately assume it belongs in an existing category.

There are several other creativity restraint mechanisms. For example, somewhere along the way we stop asking what we think are stupid questions. We somehow don't want to seem foolish and are afraid to show our ignorance. This tendency seems to increase as one's educational credentials increase. We are afraid to be laughed at or rebuffed.

Being different is difficult, to march to the beat of a different drummer. Our social instinct makes us want to belong to the group. Maintaining a view when those around you disagree with it is hard. Many psychological experiments have demonstrated that individuals may deny their own senses to make their judgements conform to what the overwhelming number of people in their group say or believe.

Most of these mechanisms are useful when it comes to getting us through life on a day-by-day basis. However, when the time comes to be creative, we must change the way we think and function. We must recognize these blocks to new ideas, for what they are and move beyond them.

Overcoming the Obstacles

The first step to becoming a more creative individual is to understand what conceptual blocks are and how they interfere with our ability to think about things in a new way. A conceptual block is a mind set that prevents a person from seeing a problem or a solution in an unconventional way. The most frequently occurring conceptual blocks are perceptual blocks, emotional blocks, cultural blocks, environmental blocks and communication blocks.

- **Perceptual Blocks.** These are obstacles that prevent us from clearly perceiving the problem or the information needed to solve it. A few perceptual blocks are:
 - *Stereotyping*:- This assumes that once an item or idea is identified it can have no other use or function.
 - *Imaginary boundaries*:- We project boundaries on the problem and solution that need not exist in

reality.

- *Information overload*:- Trying to satisfy an excess of information and detail restricts the alternative that can be considered.
- **Emotional Blocks.** These blocks decrease your freedom to explore and manipulate ideas in a realm that makes you uncomfortable. They interfere with your ability to conceptualize fluently and flexibly. Emotional blocks prevent you from communicating your ideas to others. Some types of emotional blocks include:
 - *Fear of taking a Risk*:- Risk taking is always difficult, we start from childhood to be careful, not to fail, not to look foolish. These prohibitions are deeply ingrained in us by the time we become adults.
 - *Dislike for uncertainty*:- To be a good problem solver you must be prepared to deal with problems that are sometimes confusing. Some possible solutions must be explored when their relevance to the problem is not obvious or certain. Some best solutions may even seem contradictory.
 - *Judgmental attitude*:- This block comes from a negative attitude. Finding reasons why things won't work is easier than accepting a strange idea. Yet wild ideas when explored further may lead to highly innovative solutions. A positive approach to strange ideas can overcome this block.
 - *Not invented here*:- This block comes about when a new idea threatens a preferred idea or concept.
 - *Lack of challenge*:- Some times problems or solutions seem too trivial or easy to waste our time on.
 - *Inability to incubate*:- Attempting to rush a solution without taking time to mull it over can lock out additional and possibly better solutions.
- **Cultural Blocks.** These are blocks that we impose on ourselves due to the society, culture or group to which we belong. Cultural blocks refuse to accept that other societies or groups may see and desire things to be different. Some of these blocks are:
 - *Our way is right*:- This refuses to accept that there are other ways of doing things.
 - *We don't say or think that way*:- This is a reflection of the taboos we carry with us. But, some time good solutions must be approached by first considering the unacceptable and thinking the unthinkable.
- **Environmental Blocks.** These blocks are due the distractions in our surroundings, real, imagined, or anticipated. Working in an atmosphere that is pleasing and supportive increases the generation of new ideas.
- **Intellectual Blocks.** These blocks occur because of insufficient knowledge of the kind needed to solve the problem being considered. Or because of a fixation on the specialty, with which we are comfortable, and denying the possibility that a better solution can be achieved using a different specialty.
- **Expressive Blocks.** This is the inability or willingness to express ideas clearly to others or oneself. Making models, sketches, drawings, or diagrams may clarify ideas and aid in communicating them.

Many of these perceptual Blocks reveal themselves by "killer phrases," phrases that stop consideration any other solutions or of the problem itself. When these phrases surface, it is valuable to stop and think about the conceptual block that must overcome. Some typical killer phrases are:

- **No!**
- **Guessing at the answer is wrong!**
- **Don't appear foolish!**
- **That's not my job (responsibility, concern)!**
- **I haven't been told what to do!**
- **I haven't been told how!**
- **I don't know how to start!**

- I haven't been told exactly what is wanted!
- I don't understand!
- I don't want to be different!
- It looks too hard!
- Its too easy!

Strategies for creative problem solving must include steps to overcome and avoid perceptual blocks. Some means of overcoming these blocks are:

- **Remove the fear of failure:-** Encourage wild ideas from all participants. Idea generation groups to be peer groups. Emphasize that all solutions belong to the group. Encourage humorous atmosphere. Have the ideas written down and passed around anonymously.
- **Adjust attitudes:-** Emphasize the positive aspects of the solution. Ensure that risks are worth taking. Encourage the acceptance of alternate solutions.
- **Change the rules:-** Temporarily suspend the rules and conditions for the problem and its solution. Especially where specific rules or conditions block progress.
- **Change the solution mode:-** If the problem is being explored verbally, try making a diagram or representing it mathematically. Use analogies. Assume a solution and see if it can be made to fit the problem.
- **Use provocative Questions:-** Instead of dealing with the problem directly consider a question that stars beyond the perceived block. Then work backwards. Once the perceptual block becomes familiar, it ceases to exist. Ask "What if" questions. Use a check lists.

