

Spark Your Creativity Via Your Intuitions

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Content:

Worried that you're not creative? You are, but you may be out of touch with it. Your intuition can lead you into a world of novel ideas, experimentation, and brainstorming that will perk up your work life and stimulate innovation and problem-solving. Intuition training is not just for New Agers. Many executives, business owners, and research and development professionals attribute their successes to following intuitive clues.

Intuition is your internal information and feeling source. It is an inner library of physical and emotional cues that can direct you onto the right avenue. It is the composite of "gut feelings" and perceptions unique to you. It is an inner way of knowing. Too often, we are trained to discount or repress that knowledge and therefore purposely neglect it, devalue it, or refuse to recognize its message. Intuition is a tool for insight and illumination. Can you recall a time when your intuition prompted you to follow a different course and connected you to a result you were looking for? Quentin recalls a time when his intuition prodded him to take an unfamiliar exit off the expressway on his way home. As he turned off, he felt foolish and almost turned around. But he followed this country road and passed an intriguing building with a "for sale" sign on it. He stopped in amazement--this building fit his image of the gourmet shop he wanted to open someday. Here was his dream in reality the rest was up to him. The creative process demands, like Quentin, that you're willing to step into the unknown and see what happens. Creativity is born of inspiration and your inspirations evolve from your passions. So follow your whims and see where they lead. These excursions will stimulate new thought patterns and generate new paradigms for you. To help you to massage your intuitive talents, you can try a series of exercises to evoke creative prospects for you.

Exercise #One: What Inspires You?

What do you feel excited by or passionate about? What kinds of books or magazines do you read? What kinds of people do you most like to talk with? What kinds of interests/projects are you drawn to in your leisure time? If you went back to school, what would you most like to learn about? What do you fantasize about? What are your aspirations? What kinds of activities stimulate your creative expression? Do you long to paint or write or build or organize or sing or play something? Write down everything and anything that comes to mind. No idea is wrong or silly. What is your internal voice urging you to explore/experience? Let this exercise be the beginning of a creative journal. You may be surprised at the wisdom and guidance stored for you in these seemingly random thoughts.

To facilitate the new, it helps to clear away the past. Think back to any regrets you have about lost opportunities. Kim wishes she had studied engineering in college instead of teaching. Paul had a chance to go into business with a friend and turned it down as he was too scared. His friend is now a millionaire who works part-time. It may not be too late for you.

Exercise #Two: What Creative Dreams Have You Abandoned and Why?

Make a list of all of the things you wanted to do, but didn't. Then think back to what your intuition told you about this option. Are you still interested in this path? What does your inner voice tell you about this choice now? Note any patterns that are still possible or an enduring vision that you want to manifest.

You need to make peace with these cast offs. What can you learn from these mistakes? Rudy learned that he hadn't been ready until now to write his play. His vision just became vivid enough for him to tell the story. So he was able to release his regrets. Melissa, on the other hand, always wanted to become a lawyer. Now at age fifty, she thought she was too old, but the dream still beckoned her. This was a choice point for her. She could either live the rest of her life with the sorrow of not having become a lawyer or she could go to law school. Or she could leverage her skills and become a lobbyist, a political activist, a paralegal, a city official, or fulfill her dream in numerous alternative ways. It was time for Melissa to move on. Grieve what you must and then turn the corner and make room for the next episode.

Learning to trust your intuition is the critical foundation for creativity. Think back to the times when you were clear that a particular choice was not a wise one. Your intuition warned you against it. Silvie, a billing consultant, recalls a phone call she received from a potential client. The woman owned an antique store and sounded stressed, disorganized, and demanding. Silvie had a negative visceral reaction to the woman's voice. Yet, Silvie needed more business and this was a big account, so Silvie hushed up her intuitive radar and accepted the woman as a client. A year later, the woman sued Silvie for malpractice. During the legal proceedings, Silvie learned that this woman had sued her last two billing agents and that lawsuits, not antiques, were her primary source of income. Silvie swore to heed her intuitive doubts in the future.

Exercise #Three: I Am Grateful to my Intuition for the Following...

When has your intuition steered you right? Make a list of the times when your intuition helped you to make the right decision or prompted you to try something. What have you learned about how it operates on your behalf? One of the greatest blocks to creativity is fear. Fear keeps you from exploring new ways. Fear of failure keeps you from enjoying an experimental mind set where failure is expected and welcomed as new information. Fear of being wrong or criticized also clips your creative wings. Almost everyone can remember trying something fresh and new and being chided. Therefore we learn to play it safe, cease taking risks, and stop the flow of creative solutions. While most people are educated in a school system that advocates one right answer, today's workplace requires you to invoke new answers. The beauty of the entrepreneurial mind set is that it allows you to innovate and make up your own solutions. Fear of getting the wrong answer halts your flow of unique ideas.

Exercise #Four: What Frightens You Most About Expressing Your Creativity?

What is your fear about? What creative traumas from the past still hold power over you? What do you fear from your internal critic and others? What person(s) from your past criticized your ideas and actions? Write this all down so you can see it. Fear is a component of risk and risking is essential to creativity. If you read about writers and artists and businesspeople, they all acknowledge fear. You will never be free of fear but you can minimize it and strategize around it. Just don't let fear keep you from your true self. Whenever you accomplish something, you become vulnerable to criticism. Leaders are often controversial and therefore targets for someone's arrow. Are you living your life for them or yourself? When I get scared to write, I pick up a book called "Walking on Alligators: A Book of Meditations for Writers" by Susan Shaughnessy (Harper, 1993). Writing often feels dangerous to me and reading about other writer's similar terrors helps me to forget my doubt and just start typing. You need to find antidotes for your fear. Mentors, support groups, classes, coaches, readings, etc. all offer support systems which can undo the demons from the past. Figure out what solutions will most help your fear to stay in the background and use them.

Another form of support for your creativity is a nurturing environment. Where do you do your best thinking? Where does your inner self feel most daring and alive?

Exercise #Five: Creative Stimuli

Describe the ideal environment for your creative process. Imagine it in all of its detail. What distracts and what stimulates you? Are you alone or with others? Is there music playing? Are you outdoors? What tools do you need? Are you at home or at a quaint inn? Knowing what sparks your creative fire allows you to make that space. Lots of creative people talk about having a studio or room of their own. Kay, a painter I know, can paint anywhere that's light enough if she has her female jazz singers serenading

her in the background. Music is her cue to let go and play with her colors. Trudie, a landscape architect, built an office for herself above the garage. As she lives in the city and doesn't have a view of trees, her office walls are plastered with pictures of plants and trees and gardens and she has silk flowers all over. Her rug of outdoor carpet spreads out like a lawn and her desk is a table inside a rickety old trellis with strings of vines and garden tools attached to it. She keeps bags of dirt and peat moss in the corner so she can smell them and pretend she's in the garden. You know what business she's in. Even if you only have a small space, make it your own and fill it with personal catalysts.

Sometimes when you have a business problem or feel stuck on a decision, nothing seems to help. Sit quietly and ask your intuitive guide for suggestions. You can also write yourself a note requesting an answer and put it in a drawer and let go for a while. Or you can change the format of your project or question and see what happens. I often find drawing a picture of what I'm trying to write about opens up new angles. Other innovators try techniques like turning a project upside down or sideways or miniaturizing it or making it into a story or photographing it or discussing it with a child. These configurations often cut through the haze. You've heard tales of inventions that were actually mistakes or the result of a hair brain scheme. Experiment with your dilemma and watch the solution appear.

Comparisons are also helpful. For example, Brian's intuition urged him to ponder how his decision about whether or not to cut staff was like a tree. So he bundled up in his parka and went out to look at the oak in his front yard. He finally realized that his employees were the roots of his company they held the tree up. Cutting an employee was like chopping off a necessary root, yet, he had to cut the payroll. So, he went back into the house and began to draft plans for reduced hours, part-time positions, and job sharing. Honor your intuitive messages and allow them to help you.

Exercise #Six: Your Creative Saboteurs

Write down all the things, people, places, activities, or thoughts that diminish your creative energy. What would you like to subtract from your life that interferes with the clarity of your intuitive channel?

Your intuition is a valuable asset you can't afford to have it compromised by clutter, other people's needs, or busyness. Even if you only find the time to write in your creative journal or sit quietly for fifteen minutes a day, you are connecting with your intuition. Preserve the messages and insights. From the above list, what can you subtract from your life to free up more creative space for yourself? What life choices support your ingenious energy? Honor your individual cravings and notions. Do you thrive in tranquility or excitement? Diligently restructure your lifestyle to cultivate your intuitive knowledge and its creative offshoots. Enjoy the new and exciting adventures that will result.

Gail McMeekin is a national career and creativity coach as well as a licensed psychotherapist and writer located in Boston. She has over 25 years of experience helping people vision and achieve their personal, professional, and creative goals. She is the author of *The 12 Secrets of Highly Creative Women: A Portable Mentor* (Conari Press, 2000) which sold out its first printing in 8 weeks and *The Power of Positive Choices* (Conari Press, 2001). She also wrote the 90-minute audiocassette workshop-on-tape *Positive Choices: From Stress to Serenity* which has been featured in *Human Resource Executive*, *Training*, *The Improper Bostonian* and *The Lifestyle Book of Tufts Associated Health Plan*. Her company, *Creative Success*, works with individuals and groups to maximize creative self-expression and positive living. Gail has a B.A. from Connecticut College, an

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