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Let's get creative

NED HAMSON

Are you attracted to living an open life but feel challenged when someone suggests that the key to it is creativity? You are not alone, many people are attracted by creativity and afraid of it at the same time. Why is that? What can you do to become more comfortable with creativity?



The urge to create, to innovate, to express our spirit in totally new ways is as old as humankind and as natural as waking up in the morning. In fact, innovation is perhaps the most defining behaviour of human beings.

So why do so many people feel like heading for the doors when someone says, "Let's get creative?" Because too many of us do not perceive of ourselves as innovative, creative, or, the most feared word of all, artistic. And that perception comes from the fact that we were taught (and accepted) a rather limited definition of what is "innovative," or "creative." More important, we were taught, and we accepted, the notion that creativity and innovation is most often associated with artists and/or people who are a bit strange. And everyone knows that strange or artistic people not only do not become bosses, they also do not fit in well with most social, work, or peer groups. It would be too easy to get into a rant on how this came to be the awful state of affairs, so I will not rant on but will try to convince you that life need not be so limiting and boring to get along or to get job promotions.

First, I have to admit an awful truth: The attitudes and policies that produce anti-spirit and anti-innovation behaviour in groups and organisations is just as natural and human as being innovative.

Let me explain before you run me through with a dull sword.

Human beings share with all other living entities two prime directives:

1. Survive and reproduce.
2. Do nothing to threaten the survival of your species.

Obeying and living out these two species directives supports our need for predictability, sameness, increasing survival skills through discipline and repetition.

The innovative readers are loving this part. Those who seem to only support predictability and sameness are no further advanced than the lowest forms of life.

On the other hand, there is another aspect of being human that sets us apart, quite distinctly (with a few limited exceptions). Humans are on top, so to speak, because they are also endowed with an irresistible urge to express themselves in new ways and to have new experiences.

My personal understanding of this aspect of being human is that we are:

1. All born with a desire to be loved and to give love unconditionally, and
2. We are all born with an innate urge to express and receive love in new and different ways. Of course, you can choose to ignore or play down this aspect of being human, but I believe you will have a hard time explaining our "good" behaviour without it.

The behaviours or characteristics associated with the drive or urge for new things and experiences are: Wanting new things or experiences. Seeking the unknown, the unplanned, taking risks. Such behaviour, characteristics, values are easily associated with creativity, being artistic, with innovation.

But if these are the only things you associate with innovation, artistry and creativity, you would be dead wrong. Innovation, artistry, creativity - human adaptability - is the result of both sides of being human.

The fact is that blessings of creativity, innovation and creativity are most often brought to us by people who are highly skilled and disciplined in their risk taking, their experimenting with new ways.

Their skill and discipline is based on practice, practice, practice - repetition of the basic and advanced skills of their field of endeavour.

It is in the constant pull back and forth between these two needs - predictability and novelty - that we find progress, innovation, learning, flow. So forget about trying to outlaw or encourage one over the other - hard

nosed predictability or unbridled innovation.

Here is a four-part strategy that you might follow if you wish to become a practical innovator, or a creative, disciplined person: First, reflect on which side you tend to find yourself, Second, don't fall into the balancing act trap. It's not some sort of exact balance you want but an ability to move from one to the other (creativity or predictability) as the situation or circumstances require.

Third, once you know to what side you normally lean, find someone, a friend or mentor who will push or pull you toward the other side when you become too one-sided. During the days of royalty, the court jester, or clown, served this type of service - he kept the leader from leaning too far towards one side of life: being too serious or too frivolous.

Fourth and lastly, resist your almost daily desire to call it quits with that person, since your success in life actually depends on their prodding and irritating you.

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