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HOW TO THINK CREATIVELY – PART 1

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Everyone thinks they are creative; very few people actually are. They could be but they are frightened that their creations will be spurned, mocked or laughed at, and they cannot face failure. We all want to succeed. Those who demand total success all the time often end up doing very little. The risk-averse remain solvent but poor.

If we can get over the fear of failure - see my earlier articles - we can think creatively. Not easy but possible for anyone, it demands disciplines that are difficult to measure. The four who discovered penicillin did not have financial accounts or KPIs. They observed the underground miners rubbing fungal growths from the mine shafts onto their wounds which then miraculously healed. Of the seven rules for being creative observation, as in this example, is the first.

Creativity is the ability to perceive relationships. All the words in that definition are important but the most important is 'perceive'. You cannot perceive unless you are alert, and our problem today is tigers. There aren't any, so we don't have to keep an eye open for them. Our society is orderly, and fairly crime-free. We don't need to keep looking over our shoulders, for which we are thankful. But it does mean that we don't see out of the corner of our eyes. We score an "A" for focus and a "Z" for peripheral vision. It requires a conscious effort to observe what is going on around us but we can do it if we want to. With practice it becomes a habit, occasionally life-saving.

When helping children learn creativity I ask them to invent stories about the people they see. This makes them observe every detail - they want to be the ones who invent the most interesting stories. Children have a natural creativity until it is trained out of them at about the age of puberty.

Sensitivity is the most difficult of the creative tools. Some people are just insensitive by nature or nurture and do not 'sense' threats or the feelings of others. As with most shortcomings, the solution is to think only about the other person and not about ourselves. Done consistently this will help us develop a sense of empathy and an ability to understand what someone else is feeling, a huge advantage when negotiating a deal.

Insensitive people cause most of the accidents in the world. They don't have their antennae tuned to danger. It can be fatal.

Reflection is the tool that is hardest to define. It is part analysis, part interpretation, part projection. Analysis by itself isn't enough; we have to draw conclusions from our analysis. We need to forget that they may be wrong and take risks when coming to conclusions. The only certainty is that if we never draw conclusions we can never be right.

Humour is, to me, the most important of all the tools, and the most neglected. Humour changes over time and the Charlie Chaplin slapstick of the 1930s is no longer amusing to the Simpsons generations or those who enjoy more modern comedians. If creativity is the ability to perceive relationships, humour is the ability to create them. You laugh when you see something in an unfamiliar context. There are other causes of humour, too, but we are most amused by inconsistencies. The pompous CEO with a funny paper hat on during the festive season is a cause of merriment - though not always to the CEO himself.

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There is much more to creativity than the four things I have mentioned here. In my next article I shall deal with the other vital ingredients.

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