



*TerrificMentors International*

### *The Seal of Good Mentoring*

*A Mentor is like a Ship's Pilot, there for stormy weather and tricky waters  
The Captain remains in charge; the Pilot helps him navigate  
"Master's Orders, Pilot's Advice" always remains the rule*

## **Think creatively**

**John Bittleston**

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 need to succeed. Those who demand unremitting total success end up doing very little. The risk-averse remain solvent but poor.

If we can get over the fear of failure we can think creatively. Not easy, but possible for anyone, it demands disciplines that are difficult to measure. The four Nobel Prize winners who discovered penicillin did not have financial accounts or Key Performance Indicators. They observed the underground miners rubbing fungal growths from the mine shafts onto their wounds which then amazingly 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 key word is '**perceive**'. You perceive only when 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. 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 by 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 about the other person and not about ourselves. Done consistently this will help us develop a sense of empathy and an understanding of what someone else is feeling, a big advantage when negotiating deals or relationships.

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 wearing a funny paper hat during the festive season is a cause of merriment - though not always to the CEO himself.

**Vision and foresight** are ways of describing imagination. Imagination is itself creativity, so not an ingredient. To achieve foresight we must forecast. Every decision in life is based on forecast. We forget that. Remembering it would make us predict better. Conscious forecasting is the first step to better forecasting. Herman Khan, a well-known forecaster guru, once told me "**forecasting is very difficult, especially about the future**". He had a solution for this.



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Foresight is extrapolating what we know. Vision is seeing what we cannot see. Together they form a vital element of creativity. Take the onset of global warming. Extrapolation tells us that it is going to happen - and many of the consequences. Vision may tell us how to deal with it. It hasn't begun to yet because we are squabbling about whether it is true and who is to blame. The similarity between a broken bottle in a primary school playground and the international arguments over global warming would be a cause for humour if not so frightening.

**Problem solving** means overcoming an unresolved obstacle in order to achieve a desired objective. Problems are a mixture of trouble (sometimes potentially disastrous), inconvenience, emotional upset, irritation and opportunity. Unfortunately, we often let the emotional aspects of a problem cloud the usually simple solution. If we approached each problem with the question 'what do I want to achieve?' and forgot all the side issues we should see the solution quickly. How problems are solved is often very creative. Revisit global warming, above.

**Memory** is usually underrated as a tool of creativity. With easy access to data why do we need memory? Truth is, our memory needs are changing all the time. Ease and speed of communication have made the need to remember lists, addresses, things to do, historical facts and other matters available on Google, irrelevant. If we have time to look it up we can always do so. How intelligent of Denmark to allow Google into examinations - provided, of course, they extend the exams to discern quick and analytical thinking.

And that is the point. The very **speed of today's communication** determines what we must be able to call up without delay - or miss an opportunity that may not present itself again. The rule for modern memory is relevance. Where in the past showing off knowledge was often a way to command respect we now need to demonstrate that the knowledge we are displaying is relevant to the subject and, even more important, to the moment. Today your memory can actually be too darned good. I remind myself and other seniors of that often. My rule is to try to remember the future, not the past. It's working satisfactorily at the moment.

Covering the seven vital ingredients of creativity in a short article allows little time for examples. Stories - and exercises - are the best way to learn creativity so I am writing a longer version of **The Vital Elements of Creativity**, giving illustrations and examples that I hope will help those of you keen to improve your creative thinking. They will be available online for a nominal amount in April 2010. You can ask me for an alert now so that when they are available you will know. Email me at [John.Bittleston@TerrificMentors.com](mailto:John.Bittleston@TerrificMentors.com).

What of the educational needs for creativity?

We admire teachers and those educating the young. They are hugely important. But they are stuck in knowledge-based formula teaching quite unsuitable for our present needs. Today we must have a new, broader-based form of education encompassing the 98% of the brain we are not using. Such education is not about fact and experience but about imagination and creativity.

***I am what I eat; I become what I think; I will be what I decide.***

[www.TerrificMentors.com](http://www.TerrificMentors.com)

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