

Thinking about creative thinking

By Randall Kenneth Jones

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Creative thinking keeps your head above water. PHOTO BY PETER BEREC

Whether the source is my presentations or editorials—it's pretty much guaranteed I'm going to get on my soapbox and stubbornly proclaim: we are all creative.

A few years ago, my agency won a series of national and international design awards for a point-of-sale brochure for a division of Sears—awards that would never have found their way to my trophy case without my self-described “creativity-bereft” bookkeeper feeling empowered to share her idea for the concept which got the ball rolling.

Don't believe me? I recently asked my seminar attendees for a show of hands as to “Who has a teenager living at home? (<25%) Who has raised a teenager? (>60%) Who has been a teenager? (Oddly enough, only about 90% confirmed their prior teen status leading me to believe that, for some, it's just safer to completely block out the teen years.)

My point? **You cannot raise a teenager or be a teenager without developing a keen ability to think creatively.**

Of course, not everyone can be as lucky as I was. My mother would actually “create” scenarios to justify some of my more dubious teenage activity regardless of what condition I was in when returning home late at night:

Mom: Randy, do you feel okay?

Randy: Well, now that you mention it, I am a bit—uh—lightheaded.

Mom: Hmmmm. What did you have to drink at your Burger King Employee party?

Randy: Uh...Hawaiian Punch?

Mom: Oh my—I bet someone put alcohol in your Hawaiian Punch when you weren't looking! We better get you to bed.

Even if my mother's “outside-the-house” career reached its pinnacle as a part-time bank teller at the University of Missouri Bookstore, and though I know she didn't really believe her ridiculous “Hawaiian-punched” scenario, my mother ultimately fostered a respect for the power of creative thinking. After all, if she chose to “creative think” her way out of the possibility she was raising a juvenile delinquent, who was I to argue? And without her seemingly blind love and inspired thought process, would I have grown up to become—well—a professional creative thinker?

Mommy, I love you.

For you managers; how many employees do you have, typically residing in those left-brained disciplines such as IT or Finance, who adamantly claim they are not creative? More important, what are you doing to create an environment enabling all of your employees to think creatively and speak openly? Can we really afford to miss out on any inspired thought or imaginative concept that just may revolutionize our businesses?

What about your own creative process? Okay, take a moment to grab a piece of paper and jot down the situations and locations where your mind is most likely to be open to creative thought and inspiration.

I'm serious. Get the paper. I'll wait here...

And we're back.

In my case, my most productive "mind time" occurs while driving (though that does not bode well for the other drivers sharing the same roadway as me); trying to go to sleep (yes, I keep a pad and pen close by just in case I think of grand solution to the World Peace thing); and—wait for it—going to the bathroom.

Do not lie—most of you thought about "going to the bathroom" even if you didn't have the guts to write it down.

Okay, look at your list. What inspires you to think? Going to the beach? Vacuuming? Reading? Watching *Judge Judy*? (Seriously, watching *Judge Judy* is on my list).

Now, let me ask: What was your last great idea? Did you share it or keep it to yourself—and why? What must take place for you to feel comfortable enough to stand up and be heard?

On the flip side: Are you open to hearing other people's ideas or does your ego require you to be the smartest person in the room? Do you embrace everyone's ideas regardless of the source?

So now that you've had a moment to consider the questions above, I ask you this in the least rhetorical way possible: what do you do now?

Think about it.

Humorist, Editorial Writer, Speaker, and Entrepreneur Randall Kenneth Jones is the creator of professional-courtesy initiative, RediscoverCourtesy.org, and the "confessional development" chronicle, AttackBunnies.com. His creative communications agency, Naples-based MindZoo, is dedicated to the development of highly targeted and innovative written and visual communications for use across today's wide spectrum of online and offline media.



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