



Vol. 2, No. 11, December 2005

Focus on Innovation

Focus on Innovation is a monthly electronic newsletter designed to provoke thoughts and ideas on how to bring innovation to life within the organizations in which we work.

For Those on the Run

As the year draws to a close many of us take time out to reflect on the year gone by. What went well and not so well? For some of us, we set New Year's resolutions - Lose weight, drink less, communicate better - the list varies for all of us. Yet, how many of us stop to reflect on how well we tapped into our creative side this year; the side of us that is often forgotten, the side that brings us joy, fulfillment, and fun. I encourage you this year to set a different sort of New Year's resolution. As you venture into 2006 set a goal that you will exercise your creative muscle this year. Here are some ideas to get you started.

New Year's Resolution: Exercise My Creative Muscle

They say it takes 21 days to change any behavior. So here are 21 things you can do over the next 21 days to exercise your creative muscle. What have you got to lose, you are guaranteed to learn something about yourself along the way and have some fun while you are at it.

Day 1: Creative Journal

Create a personal creativity journal to capture your creative journey. Make time to go to the store and pick one that really inspires you. While you are at it buy yourself a set of coloured pencils to use in your journal. Make it your own. This is the place where you will track how you have been exercising your creative muscle each day.

Day 2: Belief

To change any behavior it is critical that you believe that you can change the behavior. If you doubt your ability to be creative reflect back to your childhood. You were born creative. Create a list all your creative accomplishments and achievements over your lifetime. If you think that creativity is only bound in the arts you are limiting yourself. Creativity is defined as the ability to generate novel and useful solutions to everyday problems and situations. Everyone is creative!

Day 3: Affirmations

Create a list of affirmations to support your goal and negate any negative voices in your head that may derail you from building your creative muscle. Here are a few affirmations to get you started:

- I am creative.
- I am willing to create.
- I allow my creativity to flow through me.
- I welcome any creative ideas that come my way.
- As I trust my creativity, it will become stronger.

Day 4: Creative space

Having your special place for your creative outlet has many benefits. Mike Vance and Diane Deacon, in their book *Think Out of the Box* (Book-Mark Press, 1995) describes a concept called the Kitchen for the Mind which is a room filled with creativity-stimulating objects and decor - a resource rich environment. Mike Vance recommends that you take a space in your home or at work and make it a place that stimulates you to think and be creative. Make a conscious effort to surround yourself with the tools and resources you require.

Day 5: Creative Environment

Survey the environment in which you work/live. What seem to be the stimulants to creativity? What are the obstacles to creativity? Create a list of those things that you can do to foster the stimulants and minimize/eliminate the obstacles to creativity and work and in your life.

Day 6: Creative people

Conduct an interview with a creative person in your life; someone that you feel practices 'out of the box' thinking. What does this creative person say about himself or herself? Really probe to get them to share with you how they see themselves as being creative. What similarities and differences do you see between these people and yourself? What can you learn from them? Capture your learning in your journal.

Day 7: Creative characteristics

Pick one or two characteristic(s) associated with creativity that you would like to increase in your life. For example, you might want to become more open to experience or have more original ideas. For the next couple of weeks try to exercise that characteristic whenever you can. Write an affirmation, and read it everyday. Record your efforts in your journal and watch how you change.

Day 8: Creative experiences

Over the next couple of weeks use your journal to explore your experiences with creativity. Capture ideas that puzzle you, observations you have about yourself or others, dilemmas and solutions. Take time after this session to reflect and journal on the following questions:

- What do you consider to be the most creative thing you have ever done?
- What do you consider to be the most challenging problem or opportunity you are facing or have faced recently?
- What is the greatest barrier to your creativity now?
- What are you doing to avoid, remove or overcome your greatest creativity barrier?

Day 9: Habits

Reflect on what habits you may have that are weakening your creative muscles. Habits are our well-learned and habitual ways of thinking and responding. For example, when was the last time you tried a new restaurant? Was it exotic and creative? Socrates said, "When you always do, what you always done, you always get what you always got." Seek to develop creative habits. Instead of asking why not, ask what if? Or how to...?

Day 10: Generate Ideas

Many of us do not know the basics of brainstorming, never mind some techniques to generate lots of ideas. Visit the *Brainstorming Techniques Resource Center* at <http://www.innovationtools.com/resources/brainstorming.asp> for many brainstorming techniques.

Day 11: Check-in

You are at the halfway point in your journey to exercise your creative muscle. What have you learned about yourself so far? How are you doing in practicing the creative characteristic you choose? Take a few minutes to reflect on your progress and make any necessary adjustments. Record these in your journal.

Day 12: Practice being an artist

Write a poem about your job. Poetry helps give a voice to your wildest imagining, which may lead to new ideas. Or draw a picture of your most pressing work problems. Drawing a picture may help you understand the problems on a different level and can liberate your imagination in a new way. Pick up *The Artist's Way at Work* by Mark Bryan and Julia Cameron (Quill Publishers, 1998) and follow their program.

Day 13: Play with metaphors

Many creative ideas are born when people think in metaphors. What ideas do the following questions spark in your imagination about a problem you are experiencing?

- What animal is like your job/problem? Why?
- What are the similarities between a good pizza and training?
- How is an iceberg like an idea that might help you solve your problem?

Day 14: Challenge your assumptions

Reverse the assumptions you make about a particular problem you are trying to solve. List the assumptions and write the opposite. Henry Ford challenged the practice of having workers go to where building materials were kept, in order to build cars, by creating a system that brought the materials to the workers instead. With this reversal, the assembly line was born.

Day 15: Think outrageously

The more outlandish and divergent from conventional thinking an idea is, the greater the possibilities for new twists. A frozen-fish processor used this technique. A line of his frozen fish tasted bland and boring. He tried everything to improve the taste, including keeping the fish alive in holding tanks until the last moment. Nothing worked until he put a predator in the holding tank with the fish. The fish kept moving to escape the predator and they retained their vitality and flavour. Either think or do something outrageous today.

Day 16: Play a different role

Suppose you want to improve employee morale or your golf swing. Play the role of another person. Write, from the perspective of that role, what changes that person would make. Be creative in the role you choose. For instance, be Napoleon, Winston Churchill, a historian, a physician, Geraldo Rivera, a psychologist, a quarterback, Jay Leno, Ted Koppel, Rosanne Arnold, or Lou Holtz. Record any interesting thoughts or new ideas in your journal.

Day 17: Imagine you have a magic wand

You are well on the way to building your creative muscle. Today, consider what changes or actions you could use a magic wand to create, especially those that wouldn't normally be possible. After letting your imagination run, ask yourself what specific features of those wishes particularly appeal to you. Think of

some feasible changes or actions that embody some of those specific features.

Day 18: Randomly pick something and compare it with your problem

Open a dictionary and randomly, without looking, pick a word. Force yourself to make a comparison between the problem and the word. Suppose you are having a problem with a manager and you randomly pick the word "pencil." You might list the characteristics of the pencil and determine how those characteristics are like your problem. For example, for the eraser you might say, "My manager keeps mentioning past failures. I need to erase them." Considering the six sides of the pencil, you might ask: "What are six of the most important projects I should work on with my manager?"

Day 19: Read about creative people

Often we learn from others. Today visit your local library or bookstore and select a book or two on a creative person. Read about the lives of Einstein, Van Gogh, and Edison. We highly recommend Howard Gardner's book, *Creating Minds: An Anatomy of Creativity Seen Through the Lives of Einstein, Picasso, Stravinsky, Eliot, Graham, and Gandhi*, 1993, New York, NY: Basic Books. Capture any ideas in your journal.

Day 20: Humour

How many times have you laugh over the last few days? It is estimated that adults laugh approximately 15 times per day, while children laugh about 400 times a day! Humour has been identified as a common characteristic of creative people. It is often used as a technique to spur creativity and to solve problems. Plus, laughter, along with an active sense of humour, according to a recent New University of Maryland Medical Center Study, is good for your heart. Unfortunately, adults often leave their humour at the door when they need it most. Go play!

Day 21: Expand your creative awareness

With the age of the Internet, there are many good sites dedicated to the topic of creativity. Today check out at least one web site of the following websites:

- Enchanted Mind - www.enchantedmind.com
- Creativity & Innovation Portal - <http://www.creax.net/#19>
- Creativity at Work - www.creativityatwork.com
- Innovation Tools - www.innovationtools.com
- Innovation Network - www.thinksmart.com

Capture any ideas you gained from this site in your journal.

Day 22 and beyond: Keeping the journey alive

Take time to stop and reflect on your journey over the last 21 days. As you reflect on how the experience of building your creative muscle has been for you what do you want to stop, start, and continue doing? Building your creative muscle is something that you can never stop doing. Like exercise it benefits from daily and weekly exercise. Keep it up and watch how you expand and grow your creativity.

What's the Bottom line

Like anything else exercising your creative muscle will take practice and persistence. But to live a creative life is well worth the effort.

This article is adapted from an article written by Dr. Judy Laws on December 25, 2001.



Please feel free to pass this newsletter on to others.

If you would like more information about the ideas and topics listed in this issue, contact Judy Laws, Ph.D. at jlaws@foursightconsulting.com.

For more ideas on creativity, innovation, to join or be removed from the newsletter distribution list, visit www.foursightconsulting.com.