

the 24/7 creativity culture:

your handbook for the coming Creative Era.

by

greg stene, ph.d.
4015 e. soliere ave., #250
flagstaff, az 86004

928.225.6270
greg@mindthwack.com

sample chapters (2)

creativity. the rebellion. The first sample chapter (not the first chapter) is designed to talk about the way of living a creative life. It's different from the standard way of looking at the world. It's a lot more challenging, and it offers a lot more opportunity.

don't get boxed in. The second sample chapter is an example of how the reader is led into and through the creativity-building exercises in the book. This is a process far removed from the standard thought-puzzle method found in most other creativity books. It's a discussion.

Introduction to it all:

These are two chapters from the book on creativity,

the 24/7 creativity culture: your handbook for the coming Creative Era.

We are firmly in the postmodern world, where individuals and the smaller groups of people are now developing the capabilities to express themselves in ways that might well soon come to match those of corporations and political bodies.

Unique cultures have finally been brought together in the online world, and can encourage the production of highly innovative video and printed materials for their select group of members. Some of these works could eventually go mass-market. The Do It Yourself culture, in terms of creative expression, has taken hold. According to Time (June 22, 2009, p. 103): "... last year, for the first time in history, more books were self-published in the U.S. than were published in the regular way." It's not that the mainstream publishers are gone, but they hold less and less power to determine what we all will read and discuss.

Free Web opportunities such as YouTube for video and more, and Scribd for books and other printed expressions distribute the various products placing it within the reach of all of us.

But while the opportunities to express ourselves and have our work distributed internationally have exploded, no one's done much about teaching us how to think creatively. And that's why this book exists. It's about more than learning how to be creative, though. It's a look at the actual act of being creative. And at the problems, and at the good stuff about thinking creatively in a culture that's schizoid as hell about the idea of someone who doesn't think exactly like it does.

Most especially, however, this book is about how to become a creative thinker.

Creativity. The Rebellion.

Now, it's time to talk about rebellion.

If you're a creative person, or thinking about becoming creative, you need to put this whole thing about creativity into proper perspective. Hell, if you're just around creative people at work or at home, you need to understand some things about them.

First thing. Most important thing.

Creativity is rebellion.

Creativity rebels violently against everything that says that this is as good as it gets. Creativity drives you to find something important in life and make it better. Strangely, creativity may be more a response to the failure of everyone around us to do things well, than it is an internal need to express ourselves.

In this way alone, creativity is rebellion.

We have 300 million people in this country, and this is the best we can do? The best art? The best novel? The best local news? The best ads? How can we accept that?

We can't. We rebel. We look for the better way. We become creative.

As we rebel, we become diseased. This works on a number of levels, but the distress of illness is the best model. Some of us were taught that the word disease comes from the combination of "dis" and "ease." The "dis" part is the idea of taking something away. Like dis-assemble, dis-please, or dis-tend. Well, maybe distend doesn't work all that well. If you dis- something, you take that thing away.

So if you look at dis-ease as the idea of taking away the ease or the comfort of someone, you've pretty well described what happens to most of us when we get sick. We are put at dis-ease, and we hurt and we get cranky and we try to order people around ... bring me more beer, we scream in pain ... and they eventually get tired of listening to us and they don't bring beer anymore so our bodies figure that it's time to get well again because we've worn this game out and no one's paying us any attention. Get well. We can get our own beer again then. Okay.

So now you understand how creativity is a disease that comes from rebellion. Well, actually, we haven't gotten that far yet. Here's how it works in its most noble way:

Creativity is a disease because it puts you constantly at unease with how things are ...¹

From this point ... from this way of looking at the world, nothing is as good as it could be. Or should be. And you accept that as absolute truth. You look at everything around you from that perspective of nothing being good enough as it is, and if you have even a glimmer of courage, a dash of imagination, and some gumption to go along with it all, you go out and you change the world.

Yeah. This is how you must live your life. Being dis-eased.

You become Chris Columbus. Okay, he's been getting a bad rap for his attitude toward the Native Americans, but he did change the world. Or you become Van Gogh, and you so totally turn the world on its ear in terms of what you can do with paint and light and madness that no one after has ever even approached that level of expression ... afraid to go there, most likely. Or you become Henry Ford. Yeah, he's been getting a bad rap on college campuses for a number of things, including the idea of trapping workers into a forever cycle of Fordism ... you don't want to bother with this.

Or you become Philo Farnsworth. And you invent the TV and nobody remembers you while you're alive or after you die. But they remember Ford, and

¹ People who express themselves and their lives as their creative output rather than solve problems may find this disease model difficult to apply to themselves. In fact, it works well. The poet and lost love is at terrible personal dis-ease. The novelist who makes a good living at the quite innovative mystery novels she writes is dis-eased by the hierarchy of known and up-and-coming writers challenging her position as the preeminent mystery writer. The painter ... well, there isn't a truly creative painter on this planet who isn't feeling deep dis-ease with the world. The creative songwriter seeks the song as resolution to the dis-ease.

somewhere in the afterlife that really pisses you off. And they don't call the TV a Farnsworth, damn it.

That's the noble part of the disease ... the unwillingness to accept things as they are and the drive to do something better. Now, here's the bad part. There are several bad parts, actually.

Bad Endings for Creatives ...²

Van Gogh cuts off an ear and eats his pistol, an act which eventually kills him, after never selling a single painting (or maybe selling one – different sources say different things). Andy Warhol has a marvelous part to play, but it comes with a very bad ending. Bad fake hair and all, and after some incredible creative things he did that really do seem to become even more impressive as time rolls on, he gets himself gut-shot by a stalker. He survives, but dies later from complications. And if you can believe the movie, Jackson Pollock takes his car out while very drunk with a couple chicks in it and kills himself and one of the young women in a slow-motion crash.

Bad Party Times for Creatives ...

Look, if you're seriously into this creative thing, you already tend to think a bit differently from most other people around you. And you might discover that your chances to move up in the system depend on how well you can do *Small Talk at Parties*. This is often a severe problem, since small talk is often meaningless to your kind. (But here's a clue ... the Biggies in our business are experts in Small Talk. If you want to advance, get good at this part of what we do. Hell, you're creative ... you can do it. One of the best pieces of advice I've ever heard about generating small talk is to listen

² The word "creatives" is shorthand used in the advertising community to describe the writers and artists who create the work. We'll use it here for anyone working in a creative mode of life. More later.

carefully to the person you're talking to, and ask that person about him- or herself. They love to talk about themselves and they'll never realize you never spoke a word.)

But if you let your own creative self get strange on you, you might have problems.

"I notice you wear a wedding ring," you blurt, and then letting your creative imagination soar "What if our society were organized so that a ring on that finger indicated that you were looking for wanton sex, rather than acting, as it does, as an unspoken shield to keep me from approaching you sexually?"

"Huh?"

Suddenly you realize you're not engaging in Small Talk.

Run away. Quickly.

Bad People to Hang With if You're a Creative ...

Being around other creatives gets developed more, later, as a positive aspect, but we need to consider its downside here. You know all those kids in high school and college who get into all the art classes, or take all the English courses and they dress in black and wear black lipstick and stomp around in black-leather platform boots? Some have green hair, some have black hair, some have pink. Some a mix. And usually deep-purple fingernail polish on one nail on the left hand, the middle-finger, done in green. Not just Goths. Stranger than that. The Art-Guys.

You tend to hang with these people when you begin to be creative in college. Because you think they are that. Creative. Or they're in the same classes as you and it's kind of nice to spend time with them. Or because you're not really creative yourself and you're just as bad a *poseur* as they are.

That's the problem. The *poseurs*. Posers, in English. Pretty much of a poser attitude to use the French *poseur* to describe it. Anyway, the poseurs are just everywhere and you eventually begin to think how nice it would be for them to really be creative ... not because you would want to hang with them any more if they were. But, you muse, it would be nice if they were really creative because of the Bad Endings Creative People Tend to Get Into. Like Van Gogh. And Warhol.

So, what's the final bit here? ...

If you don't have a need driving you, you won't be driven to be creative. If you're not driven already, rebel against it all: get mad, get unhappy, get pissed at everyone else being incompetent. If you're young, you really ought to be getting seriously torqued at all the roadblocks the older generation's got in place keeping you from your destiny, and in general ... every one of us ought to seriously get to wondering:

Again ... we have about 300 million people in this country. Things are kind of okay, but seriously, is this really the best we can do with all that potential talent out there? No. We can do a world better.

Run the rebellion. Get pissed the better thing hasn't happened. Why do you have to put up with door locks on your new car that scratch and don't look good after a while? Why do you have to put up with driving to work at 20 MPH because the traffic flow sucks? Why are there really, as Bruce Springsteen put it once, 57 channels *and nothing on that damned TV?!* Why do you have to wait three days for an idea you have at work that could streamline things to be evaluated? Why, damn it.

If you're happy with things in your life and don't want to upset things and you really like a Politically Correct world, you won't be creative. Or if you've been beaten

senseless by life and you've had enough and you're not willing to get up and take on some more pain, you're not going to be creative.³

This sounds horrible. But it's not.

All it is, is looking at the extremes of the dis-ease you're about to take on. Remember this thing ... you've got to feel dis-comfort with the ease of the life around you. You've got to be able to look at something everybody else passes by and say that it's just not good enough. You've got to be able to look conventional thought right in the eye, and spit in it. And spit again. Even if you hit it dead-on the first time.

You know the person who invented the idea of the intermittent windshield wipers you have on your car? Of course not. Well, it was about 1967, and assuming that the resolution of the lawsuits over who invented the intermittent wiper on the Internet provides any sort of real answer to the question about who was the actual inventor, it was probably Robert Kearns.⁴

You can only imagine that he had to have been sitting there behind the wheel of his car for years just fuming at the idea of constantly turning his wipers on and off to clear a small bit of rain coming down. Everybody else on the road before him had been

³ Thanks, Tom Petty, for giving us the album title, "Let me up (I've had enough)"

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How Stuff Works. Patents. Robert Kearns and the intermittent windshield wiper.

http://fitness.howstuffworks.com/frame_d.htm?parent=wiper.htm&url=http://www.me.utexas.edu/~me179/topics/patents/case3.html, (visited 10/12/02).

content to turn those wipers on and off. On and off. On and off. Driving on. Grinning. Goofy. And totally at ease with things.

But Kearns had to have become dis-eased. No more comfort with the old way of doing things, even though the old way of noticing water on the windshield and occasionally reaching over and turning on the wipers and then turning off the wipers eventually got things done. Every time he turned on the wipers to clear a bit more rain from the windshield, and then reached over to turn them off after just a couple swipes of the blades must have just pissed him off to no end and got him spewing spittle of frustration on the inside of his windshield that never came off, no matter how many times he turned the damned wipers on and his blood pressure slammed into the terminal end of the game.

And it is also there ... inside that first Cro-Magnon man's head 60,000 years ago (yep, we do a few trips back into pre-history in this book ... it's quite instructive), as he smears the first paint on a boring rock surface in a French cave, and it's inside Van Gogh's head as he fries his brains out under a perfect sun-blazed madman's sky in France, and it's inside Robert Kearns's head as he rages against the machine that makes his wipers run constantly ... that is where you need to go to become creative.

Rebellion against how it all is. Even though everything's just fine for everyone else.

And then you need to **become** one of those magnificent creative people of our past absolutely brim-full with the anger of their disease. You need to find the way to become better. And demand it be done your way.

Two more creative tools are ...

1. The ability to imagine something impossible.

2. Giving it detail to the point it becomes real.

Right now, you're going to be asked to imagine a conversation with someone who's been dead for a number of years, and you're going to give this person so much detail in your mind's eye, you'll end up with your own spirit guide to work with as you do this creative thing.

A guide, or partner, so you don't have to go down this creativity road alone.

Odds are, not more than one out of a hundred people will have imagined having a conversation with a dead historical figure whom we'd call creative. Think of it – you, standing there in a tomato-and-flower garden with Einstein.

Einstein, the symbol for inventive and creative thinking in the 1900-to-2000 time period. It's early summer in the Northeast. He's got a sweater on, still guarding against possible chill. What color's the sweater? What's it made of? What kind of pants are those? What are the flowers he's growing? Their smell? Obsess. See it all ... all of it in your mind's eye.

This obsessing over the mind-creature you will talk to is part of creating your spirit guide.⁵

Your spirit-guide could be an explorer-in-principle, like Eric the Red, who took on the idea of exploring the vast unknown of the world and set out in his Viking ship, without any guide to where he was heading, with only the understanding that if he accomplished his goal of finding a new land, he'd live. If he didn't, he'd die out there in the vast ocean. With all his friends. Bad odds, and bad death if they failed. But they took off to look for that new land.

⁵ I think I first ran into the base idea of the spirit guide back around 1984 in a book, *Creative Visualization; Use the Power of Your Imagination to Create What You Want in Your Life*, by Shakti Gawain, re-issued 1997. A great piece of work, though it took me 10 years or so to be able to work with some of the ideas.

What an incredible symbol for exploring your own mind.

Or your spirit guide could be a technician in the safe rational process of Edison's discovery of the electric light bulb which required a huge number of tries and failures. Was Edison really all that creative ... or was he more a technician? Some people wonder these days. Don't go to the technician's mind in terms of creative thinking because it's not really there ... but do pick up on Edison's incredible persistence. If he didn't get something right the first time, he, or one of his technicians who he apparently did not treat all that well, would just keep plugging away at it until they finally got the damned invention figured out. According to some sources, Edison tried out thousands of substances for the carbon filament that would create the right glow for a longer period of time for the electric light bulb.

Edison's a good model for persistence. But for the creative life and thought processes, make it someone whose work you appreciate, a guide as you go through your own creative life. Hemingway, Janis Joplin, Robert Mapplethorpe, Wendy O. Williams,⁶ Picasso, James Coburn, Jimi Hendrix, Georgia O'Keefe, Leonardo da Vinci, Virginia Woolf, Warhol ... any dead creative person you appreciate.

Why dead? Because there's a freedom in the way you, personally, can talk to dead folk. If they're still alive, they may not have a lot of understanding and insight to offer you because they're still landlocked. But as spirits, they may know many things. Whether you think it's a spirit, or you believe it to be something in your own mind, this person can offer you some insight from the outside ... giving you a distance from your

⁶ Most people won't know about Wendy, lead singer/force of the punk/rock/everything-over-the-top 1980s band, The Plasmatics. Wendy was known to wield a nasty chainsaw, wore a Mohawk sometimes, did not wear a top or bottom sometimes, and ate a bullet in the woods in 1998. She was exceptional, and though my knowledge of her and her work is limited and I never saw her perform, she's a good candidate for a spirit guide for the wildly creative, I would think. BTW, far too many creatives eat a bullet ... Wendy, Hunter S. Thompson, Kurt Cobain, Hemingway, Van Gogh ... a few that come to mind quickly.

own creative furies of being caught up in the creative activities, so you can gain a better perspective on the work you're doing.

And that additional, outside critical perspective from a knowledgeable friend is a huge advantage in the creative act.

Once you have the Spirit Guide person in your head, fill in all those visual cues completely to make this person as real as possible. Where are you talking? Is it summer or winter? What's the person dressed in ... the material, its texture, the color, pressed or ruffled? How's the skin color (though they're really croaked people, imagine them alive so you're not dealing with unsightly ghouls).

Then, think about smells. How does the person smell? Remember, they're alive and not ghouls. What're the odors on the wind? Flowers? A cake cooking somewhere? What are their particular odors?

How's the temperature feel? Sunlight on your face, or rain falling?

Now, get into that conversation and ask them what they think creativity is all about. If you know the person's work, you may be surprised to find them actually talking to you in detail and with an incredible, insightful honesty.

Are these real spirits come to visit? Things you've conjured up by thinking deeply and intently? Some might say so. Or it is just yourself? Some might say that you've just created a channel in your mind to let your own understanding of the creative life of the artist come free and show itself to you.

1. Some people don't like this idea. It spooks them. Or it offends their beliefs.

They shouldn't do it.

2. Some people find this a great way to deepen their understanding of their lives and their own creative work. It's a way to hold a conversation about their work

with someone who really understands their intent, without having to defend it.

They grow from that conversation.

3. Some people just think it's all unnecessary. They've got a handle on things and doing it alone works for them. But they don't really do it alone. Their wife, or lover, or kids tend to hear about their work and they provide feedback, either by their silence, words, or glaring looks.

But if you're going to try it, get to know the work of the person you admire, go into full-imagination mode of being in their presence as guided above, and add to that sensation of presence as you will. The conversations should get clearer and fuller. You may find your work improving.

Let's look at Van Gogh for a few minutes. Imagine yourself in that psychiatric hospital in France where Van Gogh brought a revolver into his room. Who was the person who should have made sure he never got the weapon on the grounds in the first place? How did she/he sleep the night before the bullet and why? And the night after, knowing what they'd done through their negligence.

Imagine Van Gogh, stupidly reaching for the weapon. His hand over it. His mind believing there is no other recourse. He takes it up.

Imagine, what if he suddenly understands, and believes in his work as a matter of humanity. That he can contribute to the human story even in the face of the pain of his despair.

Imagine now, how his hand shakes over the pistol. Imagine how he backs away from the metal frame and cylinder which would carry his death. He leaves it behind.

Imagine instead, that he walks out to the field and creates a new painting.

Imagine another 40 years of this glory of Van Gogh in the fields, sun burning overhead, and painting after painting, vision after vision like no other before it or after, continuing to add to our human experience.

Imagine he never shot himself.

Imagine the conversation you can have with this man.

don't get boxed in.

There's something I call a mindburst. It's when you get a great idea and you can't go to sleep and you want to call everyone in the world and talk about it for hours. *Mindburst* ... like a cloudburst in intensity ... it's that short time period when you see those incredible creative visions in your head.

And there's a name I've coined for that other time that often follows, the mindbust. *Mindbust* ... the period when you look the idea over and decide it's really dreck and won't work at all. The mindbust is an incredibly bad time.

Maybe a bit of the disgusting touchie-feelie thing is actually good at this point. Dwelling on the negative is not a way to get creative,⁷ and one of the few worthwhile things about a touchie-feelie worldview is the idea of positive thinking. Not delusional positive thinking, like telling a kid in school that it's okay he didn't get the right answer, because, you know, he did try so hard.⁸ But rather, the valid positive-thinking thing ...

⁷ Feel negative all you want about the world around you ... songwriters have found incredible inspiration there. But they never doubted their ability to write about feeling the blues. Or if they did, they worked their way out of it by writing about it. Or they got drunk and died. And discovered in the process that puking to death or inhaling your own vomit wasn't all that romantic in the last minutes. But the point is, when you believe in yourself as a creative being ... that's the first part of finding the magic of being.

⁸ False reinforcement through self-esteem training in k-12 is hurting kids. And their going to school at the university level really doesn't allow room for false self-validation in a lot of classes, though it is enough in some. As a professor, I found it amazing to see how many students believed they should get a good grade on a project just because they put some time into it. The real world does not work that way. Nor did I, knowing these students would soon be stepping into a world that didn't give a rat's ass about their self-esteem on the job, or their claim that they tried very hard.

carrying yourself to that fine insanity of creating through the sheer strength of your own belief in yourself. That's the righteous thing.

But how do you get there? How do we create?

The answer is going to be the hardest part of the book for almost everyone.

You can't toss on the headphones and listen to a CD and study how to be creative (though it might give you some techniques to try). You can't put on mystical music and become creative (though good tunes may certainly help). You can't pay a guru \$5,000 for a crash-weekend encounter session to become creative (though the lessons might help). You can't meditate on your left big toe and count your breaths and become creative (though that may help guide you to the right place).

And just reading a book like this won't do it, either (though it will give you some guideposts).

Here's the awful reality about becoming creative ...

You have to do it.

You have to get dirty with the trying and the failing and the success and the anger and the excitement and the fear and the awful reality of the meaningless of your life and in contrast, the outrageous meaning of it and the pain of the dis-ease and the incredible ease after a time with which you suddenly find yourself creating and then the hopelessness and unbelievable despair that stomps on your head with size-14 Doc Martens' thick-heeled boots on that awful day you suddenly find yourself dry creatively. The Dry Spell. The Wall. The Writer's/Artist's/Weapons-Designer's Block.

And you've got to have the guts and courage to pull yourself out of that stupid-place you call The Block because by god and everything true, the only people who really do dry up creatively are the ones who just give up on life itself, and they should all

wither up and die anyway. No mercy here. What's needed instead of coddling mercy, is tough love and telling the person that the only way things make sense again is by doing the thing they've become so very much afraid of ... the creative act. That they must write. Act. Paint. Solve an industrial problem.

Breaking The Block is no mystery. It is, however, often very painful.

And, oh yeah. All that knowledge, all that experience that comes only from the trying. You need that, too. You need some creative experience. So ...

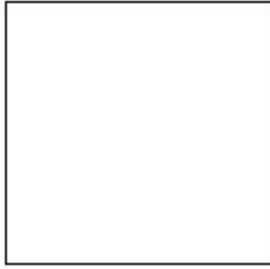
Another Creative Shot ...

Here's a challenge I've used to open the idea of creative thinking in my advertising copywriting courses. You've got to think creatively to do well in those courses I teach, and this was one of the first shots at deliberate creative thought some of the students had gotten into.⁹

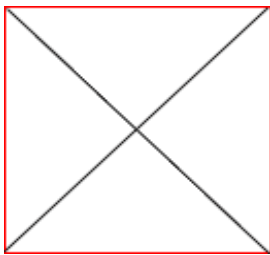
You should do this quickly. There's a large square just under these words. Break it into four equal sections.¹⁰ Go for it. You've got 60 seconds. 55 now. Now 50. Time's wasting.

⁹ The idea of a deliberate creative-thought act is almost the same as making things up in a lie. In fact, a lot of the skill that goes into telling a really good lie is the same as approaching a problem from a deliberate creative perspective: The problem is, we've forgotten the "imaginative skills applied to a problem" part of ourselves as kids that got us to be good liars.

¹⁰ A very different version of this exercise, with a different purpose, appeared in the excellent, *Lateral Thinking: Creativity Step by Step*, Edward de Bono, 1990 (1970), Harper & Row, p. 76. One of the variations in our use here is that the reader is later also challenged to identify him/herself self as creative, and noting how this self-identification assists in solving the problem creatively.



Okay. Now, consider what you've just done. If you're like 85-90 percent of the people in my copywriting classes, you divided the square something like this:



These tend to be the "natural" solutions to the problem. Under time and performance pressure and with a real-world solve-the-problem mindset, we move toward the most efficient solution. We look to our experience for a resolution, and the ease of developing the solution. Our experience in elementary through high school has probably shown us how to divide these things in a rational manner like this.

Creatively, under a time pressure like you were, there really is little time to think about untried solutions, especially if it's not your normal way to respond to a challenge. Creative thinking is a skill and most of us aren't used to it or very good at it. So we move to the most efficient use of time and seek the most convenient solution. We'll talk more later about how damaging this is in business, not to mention the way we tend to just rush through our lives depending on old solutions to things we encounter rather than live these lives of ours creatively and come up with new creative solutions to new problems.¹¹

¹¹ We do tend to seek the most efficient solution to our problems, and that usually means we apply old solutions to new problems. It happens to all of us. The trouble with that is that each problem really is

Mass production of minds ...

Notice the sly commentary above on schooling and how it drives us to the rational, easy solution? A number of people writing on creativity have also pulled up on this problem with school ... we mass-produce graduates from courses and classes.¹² And the most efficient way we can do that is by making everyone the same ... the same way we mass-produce shoes, underwear, and pistols.

Now, this is not all bad.

Shoes, underwear, and guns are all the same. Almost all size-11 shoes by one maker, New Balance, for example, will be the same and you can expect that. It makes it a reliable thing for you then, to try on a size at a retail store, and go home and order the same size online from New Balance because the actual color of shoe you want isn't in the retail store. Or you can find it cheaper online.

Dependability. Reliability. Exactly what you expect. These are indeed the very best qualities of mass production.

And frankly, those qualities are what most employers seem to want in their employees. For all their public-relations rant and human-resource-we-respect-you

unique, and we should give it due thought and come up with a solution developed specifically for that particular problem. Because if we continue to apply old generic solutions to all similar problems, a lot of those problems won't be resolved.

¹² We also do some other things. We tell young students to think like other kids in the class, because that makes class easier to run. We insist that they do things using the same process as everyone else because that makes the processes easier to teach. We insist on quiet because noise is disturbing. I did this to some degree as a college professor. I admit it. And I hated it when I'd look back over the day and see it.

But frankly, while we can indict school and home environments for a failure to nurture creativity, we have yet to deal with the fact that creativity is a pain in the ass for the teachers and parents. Creative kids can be messy, noisy, and disruptive. They can also be quiet and surly. Or bummed and scary. We need to provide adults with ways to work with the creative kid. I have not yet seen meaningful effective proposals for making that happen and giving tools to parents and teachers to work with these kids, so continual blame-placing on parents and teachers for killing off creativity seems at least partially unjustified.

jabber-positioning, most companies do not want creative thinking in their employees.¹³

Repeat ... they do *not* want creatively thinking employees.

Creative employees tend to raise questions about why things are done in a particular way that's already been tested by time and validated as true and proven, at least according to the powers that be. Creative people ask questions that take time away from standard performance levels. Creative thinkers fail to recognize that other people who came before them (who must be smarter than they are because they made the rules, after all) have set these systems in place for a reason and why are you asking all these questions and wasting all this time? Get back to work.

And drop your suggestions in the suggestion box.

Of course, not all companies work this way. Some employers see the creative input from their employees as part of gaining a competitive edge and producing more product, or a better service or whatever. And they value their employees' initiative and creative thinking.

But these companies are apparently rare.

So most companies depend on the schools providing workers who think along the lines that break a square into four equal parts by making them look like this, and would never seek to do it any differently:

¹³ *Watercooler*, by Justin Bachman (AP Business Writer), Kenai Peninsula Online, posted Nov. 1, 2002, "In mid-October, the Yahoo! Inc. subsidiary, New York-based HotJobs.com, surveyed bosses and employees in advance of National Boss Day. One question asked what qualities bosses value in workers. Of bosses who responded, 37 percent said 'being a team player' was most important, followed by dedication to quality work. On the other side of the equation, bosses weren't thrilled over 'the ability to be a self-starter,' with only 12 percent liking such initiative. **And only 7 percent said they want employees who 'think outside the box.'**" Emphasis added.

http://www.peninsulaclarion.com/stories/110102/bus_110102bus0030001.shtml (visited 12/3/02)

This indeed solves the problem of dividing a square into four sections. Like mass production, it's a good and valid solution to a problem. And we get a lot of work done in this country and we have the best damned standard of living anywhere.¹⁴ But some of us want to break out of that pattern and try another way of living. We need to look at things more creatively.

Back to the drawing board ...

Now, what I did with my students after we tallied up the solutions to the "breaking the square into four equal sections" is turn to them and say very simply, very quietly,

"Okay. Good stuff. Now, I want you to remember that this is a class on copywriting. That means thinking creatively. This is a space where creativity is what you need to seek out more than anything else. Understand that inside every one of you there is a creative aspect you may not have touched before, but this is the time and place to do it.

"Now, draw that square again. And come up with four equal sections ... in a creative way" They draw. And again, they have only sixty seconds to do it.

Now it's your turn. Draw the square, sectioned four equal ways. Give yourself only sixty seconds. When you're done, go get a beer if you're over 21 (India Pale Ale/IPAs are the best), and settle back and consider your thoughts as you approached this problem. But do the sectioning at 60 seconds first. Now. Don't read any more.

¹⁴ Really. This is no joke or some stupid postmodern ironic comment about people and society. Remember, mass production really does produce some amazing results. And a lot of people really want to have set parameters for the work they do. It gives clear and clean purpose to their work. And this is a good thing. No question about it. Most reasonable people cannot even begin to imagine the social horrorshow if everyone were "creative" in the way they did their work.

You're back now. Something happened here for most of you. And these are just a few of the things that became new and important as you worked through the problem:

- First of all, you discovered that everything in this book is going to demand you approach it from a creative point of view.
- Second, you realized that you, yourself, were not going to be satisfied with just a standard solution to the problem. Because you went back and did it again. You made that choice, that decision. You'd gotten the dis-ease.
- Third, and most importantly, you realized that you had to "shift into a creative frame of mind." And you did it. You found that creative solution.
- Fourth, and this is happening right now, you are understanding that your belief in yourself as a creative creature actually lets you act creatively ... that your belief in that creative nature of yourself created that place for you to "shift into your creative frame of mind."

Amazing. Your belief in yourself as a creative *made* you creative.¹⁵

Research suggests this is true. During the oil crisis in the early seventies, one oil company didn't want to find itself caught up helpless, at the mercy of the oil-producing countries like that again. It thought more creative thinking within its company might help develop alternative strategies for producing and distributing oil for times when it was held back by the oil-producing countries.

So it hired a researcher to come into the company and try to discover what made people creative. Time passed, heavy research dollars got spent, and the result was simply this (the best science is the one with the simplest results, it seems to me)

- When people believe they are creative, they are.

¹⁵ XXX, will show recent research from creativity journals validating this point (2004).

- When they don't believe they are creative, they aren't.¹⁶

Here are a couple other solutions to breaking a square into four equal sections:

The diagonal solution ...

This diagonal-line solution is the one that tended to show up most often in my classes as a "first step" into thinking about this problem creatively. It's a strong one.

There are a couple of new ways of thinking that have to happen to make this work:

- 1) First, to develop the diagonal approach, the person has to accept the idea of violating the conventional vertical/horizontal schema we ordinarily think of and literally see in our world views of vertical trees and flat horizons.
- 2) Second, to make equal areas, the person has to recognize that the distances from border-to-border for the two line sets are not equal. For example, the perpendicular distance from the bottom right corner to the first line up is a lot longer than from the second line to the center line. It needs to be this way for the triangle at bottom right to be able to contain as much space inside it as does the four-sided shape just above it.

The circular solution ...

This one is exquisite and shows up rarely.

- In addition to the same general considerations in the above diagonal one, the person needs to consider the idea that not all shapes need to be the same basic shape (this questions deeply held, unconscious assumptions), and ...

¹⁶ This story has become apocryphal. Who knows if it's true? I've seen several versions of it, but first ran into the oil version in *Creative Strategy in Advertising*, 3rd edition, 1989, by A. Jerome Jeweler, I believe. You can find a version dealing with a publishing house and trying to make the editorial staff more creative in Michael Michalko's *Thinkertoys*, Ten Speed Press, 1991, p. 7-8. No matter. The point is simple ... you can be creative if you believe in yourself as a creative person. You won't be if you don't. However, how good you are at it is something we need to develop in this book.

- The shapes do not need to be created by straight lines (which create the original square and almost always force one into thinking straight-line solutions) in order to contain the same amount of space.

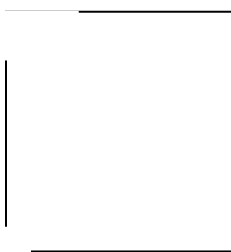
These points are huge considerations and are immensely creative in their order of throwing away all preconceptions (we'll talk about these limitations in terms of *assumptions* in another chapter).

Look at what else has happened here:

- The number of "containers" of the space that have been drawn inside the box is three, not four. The space of the large box itself containing the three circular forms acts as the "fourth equal space."
- The shapes of the "four containers" are not at all the same. One shape is the irregular "background area" of the *large square itself*, minus the other three areas of the circle, the oval (some of which falls off the large square), and another, small square.

The most incredible solution yet.

I wish it could claim this one. It is so ... creative. One of my students looked at this problem of breaking the square into four equal parts and mentally went to some head-space so incredible, I'm surprised he ever bothered to come back to the rest of us and spend time in our world. Here's how he broke the square into four equal parts:



completely recast the idea of breaking the square up, and rather than something which contained space, he saw it as the four lines of a closed space ... the job was to break up the square). So he

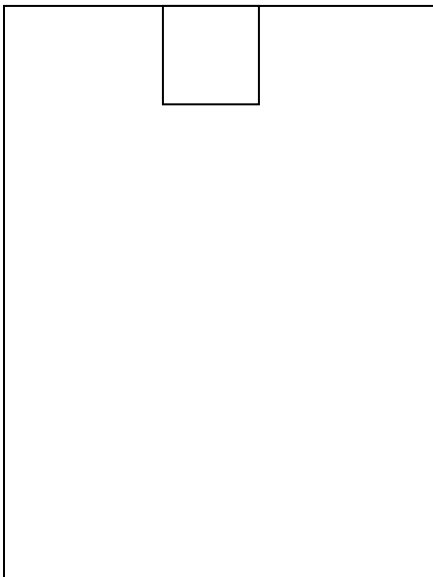
destroyed the square, and broke it into four equal lines. Unfortunately, I can't remember the name of the student. I'd credit him or her. This is elegant. My students later told me it was my idea, that I'd just misunderstood what another student had said, but I'm sure it was one of theirs.

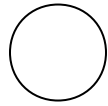
So here's how it plays out ...

- You've already shown yourself that you can be creative when challenged to be creative. Look at what you've just done with the squares. You've gone from a conventional solution to a creative one.
- You did this simply because you believed you should try something new, you got dis-eased ... and because you believed yourself able to do it. You believed in yourself as being creative. And you were.
- You have a start in this growth of yourself. Now, you need to nourish it with understanding, confidence, and practice. Incessant practice.

Here's one other opportunity to have a go at this kind of example.

Take another sheet of paper. At the top, as well as you can, draw a square one inch on each side that runs the top center of the paper. And at the bottom of the paper, draw a circle, one inch across as the diameter. Here's something like what you should be looking at:



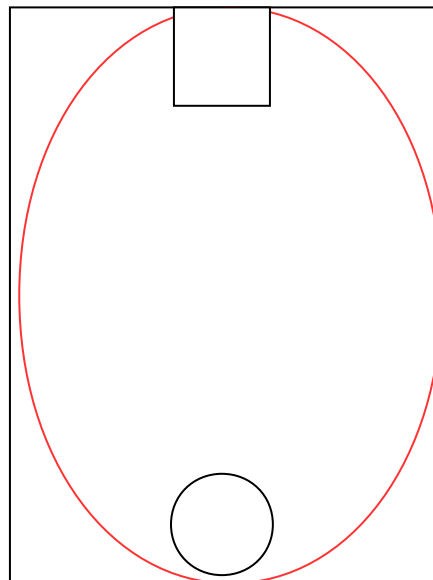
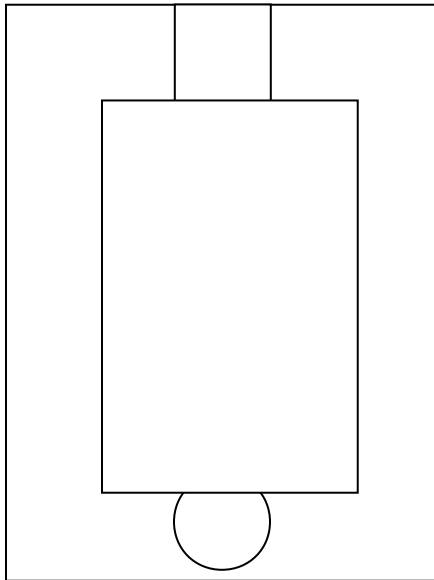


Now, connect the circle and the square. And then ...

... then consider what you've done. Did you move into the connecting part of the task, thinking there was more to come so you should move through this stage quickly. Get the job done. A lot of people do. Actually, the exercise is done now.

Even if you had considered this stage as a creative opportunity and considered how there is a tendency to react to it rather than think about it, you might have drawn something like a jagged line connecting the two shapes. Or a big circle that went around both.

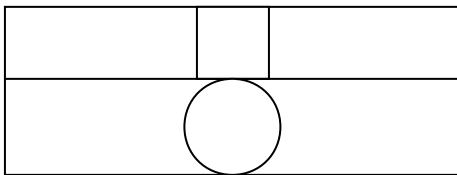
These are solutions we see quite often when people try this for the first time.



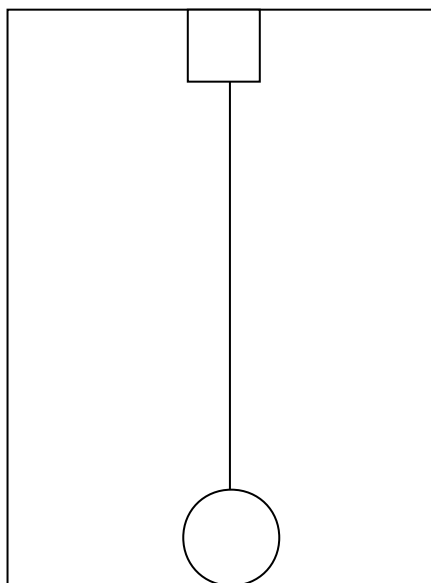
These are certainly nice solutions, but let's get really open to thinking about this for a minute. First, let's take a look at the way we get forced into thinking about things by the tools we literally have at hand. Without even knowing it.

Our tendency is to stay with the tools we're using. Here, it's paper and pencil/pen. So we draw on the paper with the pencil. We don't have to. Here are a couple other solutions that take you outside that drawing-as-solution orientation:

- Suppose you simply fold the paper so it gets shorter and the square and circle touch each other. It would look something like this (the center line represents the folds):



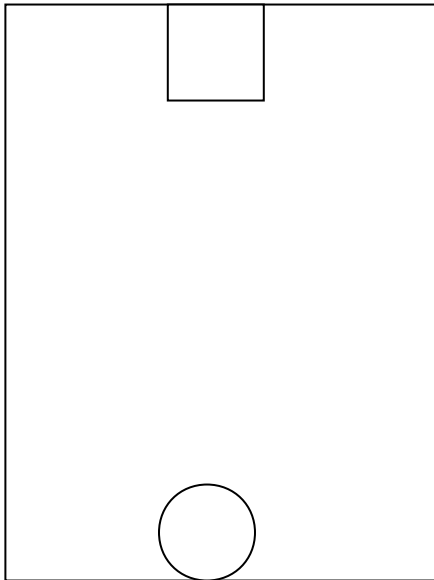
- Okay, good fun. Now, how else could you do it without drawing something to make the connection? You could, very simply, and sort of ironically, just place the pencil on the paper so it touches both the circle and the square, connecting them.



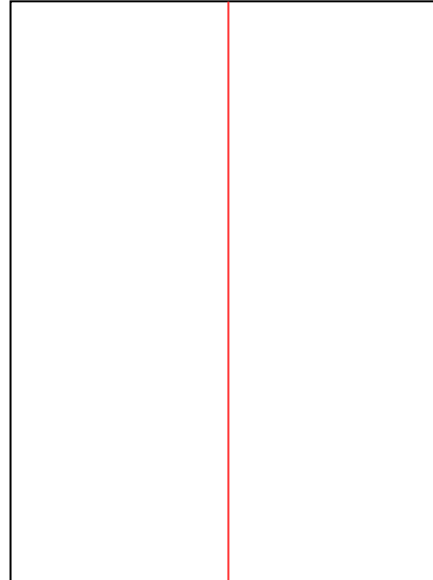
- But what if we *do* elect to use drawing to connect the square and the circle?

Here's how one way to do that solution might look.

(front side)



(reverse side)



What?

Yeah, what the hell is that? They're not connected. Well, since the edge of both the square and the circle are on the very edge of the paper, per the original instructions, that means that a line that begins on the edge of the paper is neither on this "front" side, nor on the "reverse." The line that starts on the edge could continue on either the front or the back of the paper. So, what the hell that's happened here is that there has been a line drawn from the top to the bottom edge on the opposite side of the paper, connecting the two shapes.

This solution's a lot like the one with the square in which the student completely recast the constraints of the problem itself and erased the corners of the square to break it into four equal parts.

Some creative-thinking teaching gurus suck.

A final comment about this creative being you're becoming. There are people who teach creativity and tell you to think of this creative-thing as being, "Your Creative Self." It's an easy trap. Hell, we even used that idea in this chapter. Your creative self ... or some other nonsensical thing they've decided to call this aspect of yourself because it really sounds kind of cool ... getting you a new spiritual-being part of your body and soul.

All that's crap.

There is no, "Your Creative Self." If you're looking for that, you'll be disappointed. If you need the schizophrenia of another creative self split off from the rest of you, then you're failing to take full responsibility and credit for yourself, your whole self as a creative being (note that this "other creative self" is not the same as your creative spirit guide).

If you think of your "everyday self" as one presentation of who you are, and your "creative self" as another presentation that you drag out only when you're faced with a challenge that's identified as a creative one, you fail to live everyday life creatively and you lose the finest part of all of this ... the brilliance of a life itself lived creatively. You cannot stick your "creative self" away and go deal with writing the checks to pay the bills at the end of the month. Who you are as a creative person should be involved in that check writing.

Here's just one reason why. If you live creatively, you're open to seeing the world filled with creative opportunities. And one of the things we researchers are finding is that one very large aspect of the really creative person is the ability to recognize creative problems and opportunities. You can't do that if you just shrug into your creative skin during the hours you've assigned yourself to write at night after the kids have been put to bed.

You should be thinking creatively when writing those dreaded monthly checks.

Maybe it makes you hate writing checks, the activity being so boring and repetitive. And so non-creative. And you get dis-eased. And maybe, as a result of the dis-ease, you figure out a way to get more people to pay their bills online through their banks and you end up with a computer program that makes it easy and cheap that banks pay you millions for.

Or maybe not. But if you only bring out your "creative self" when you sit down to the computer to write a story, or at the easel when you begin to paint, you've lost the sweet mystery of living life itself creatively.

Something magical happens when you bring that wealth of wonder that comes from constantly living creatively to a focus on your writing, or to your paint. Maybe it's by doing something as mundane as looking at a pair of running shoes and creatively wondering how it would be if they could change colors randomly throughout the day.

Maybe it's watching your child talking with other kids on the school playground as you're getting ready to pick her up at the end of her day. You're imagining what it would be like if what she were actually doing was channeling spirit beings and the other kids were goofing on the strange voices coming from her mouth. And who would she choose to channel?

All of that life that you live creatively every day ... after a while, it all comes to the party quite automatically when you settle down to write or paint. But it seems to flow from daily life into the world of self-expression seamlessly only if you live all of life itself as a creative being ... so there is no break from your everyday life and your creative self. So there is no everyday life and no creative life. There is only life lived creatively.

With the life lived creatively, the inspiration you get when you pick up the paint or sit at the computer will be at hand fully.

It likes to be expressed, and you'll be ready.

[A comment: No matter how creatively you live your life, you'll still lose sleep over the bills you've got to pay with too little money, or worry about your kid just making it through another day. And not to worry about going crazy. A lot of even a creative life is pretty uneventful and is solidly based in the reality of things like deciding on what's for dinner. You don't unhinge yourself from reality when you think like this. You look for opportunities to think differently, is all.

Being creative is no mystical thing that cures all of life's ills. But it can give you the room to eventually pull yourself out of that anxiety attack, and laugh softly to yourself as you shuffle on off to bed at 4:17 a.m. when the TV has become far too mindless with predictable news, shows and advertising ... as you, knowing you can do better than the best of the advertising and television world, lay your head to the pillow to rest confident in at least one part of your life. Your creativity.]

Believe it. If you work at it, you could become better than a lot of the alleged best the world has to offer. It might be enough small comfort to help you eventually

find sleep on those nights of dozing off in front of the TV with the ads worming their way into your groggy, defenseless mind.