

Creativity and you

*Excerpted from **Change Your Thinking, Change Your Life**
By Clive Simpkins – published CSSC publications 2003*

For listeners to Jeremy Maggs' 'After Eight Debate' on SAFM

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Website www.imbizo.com e-mail clive@imbizo.com

Part and parcel of self-management, is self-nurturing. Part of self-nurturing is to ensure that the creative aspects of us are given freedom of expression. *All* people are creative. It's just that creativity expresses itself differently in all of us. Make sure you allow the creative energies that flow through you, to cleanse and heal as they find *expression* in what you do.

If you bottle them up, they will create a 'head of steam' that will undoubtedly manifest in cranky, unpleasant or dysfunctional behaviour. The creative energy *needs* to flow to avoid stagnating and breeding 'bacteria.' If you've been given a gift and you stifle or ignore it, it will negatively impact on your life.

The gift of creativity plays a significant role in letting go of the old and taking on the new. This is something my Spiritual Preceptor, Swami Shivapadananda emphasised again and again. He didn't say imagination was a nice or good or great gift. He said it is the *greatest* gift. So let's look at how we can use creativity as our friend and ally.

Change your thinking

It's amazing just how many people believe they're 'uncreative.' Somehow or other, their concept of creativity is restricted to painting, sculpting, dancing, composing, singing or designing something. Wrong! Every single person has creative capacity and everyone's creativity will manifest differently and indeed, uniquely. You can use it to open up avenues in your existing career. You can apply it to strategic thinking, to find bottom-line enhancing solutions for your clients, even to deepening your spirituality. It's an impartial force, waiting to be directed. Your challenge lies not in 'acquiring' creativity, but learning to access and tap into your existing supply, which is ready, waiting, and indeed, raring to go.

The biggest trap, when attempting either strategic or literary creativity, is to start by writing down thoughts or ideas, in a *linear* fashion, in the hope of a creative solution. Linear means steps one, two and then only three. One point is sequentially dependent on the next. And you can't get to a point without going *through* its predecessors. The flaw lies in the fact that the moment you start thinking like this, you'll trigger the analytical department in your brain. So you'll be signing off on a contract to run along a linear, logical, sequential, link-connected-to-link, process. This is the absolute *antithesis* of creativity, which requires a random, unstructured, freewheeling, playful meander.

It's more fun to colour outside the lines.

Cynthia Copeland Lewis

Shake 'em loose with vibes!

A wonderful way to get ideas pouring out of your head is based on a simple musical principle. Picture it. The players in a symphony orchestra go for a break, leaving their instruments carefully placed on stands or on chairs on the stage. A cellist comes back a little earlier than the others. She begins to bow her cello in long, resonant strokes. If you walk around on stage, touching the other unattended instruments, you'll be fascinated to find that they're all resonating on the same frequency as the cello! This is fact, and it's a wonderful parallel for getting ideas out of our creative 'basement.'

Name and form

Name and form are inextricably interlinked. If I say ‘apple,’ it’s unlikely and indeed disturbing if an image of a hippopotamus pops up in your brain. When I say ‘apple,’ provided you know what an apple is – an apple concept will arise in your brain. So, *name* first, followed by *form*. If I say ‘Hexapophoulos’ or ‘Gloobleglatch,’ your brain will get caught in a ‘search’ loop. It won’t find the form because the names are meaningless. But if you’ve read Tolkien’s *Hobbit* or the *Lord of the Rings* trilogy, you’ll even understand and be able to attach meaning to strange words like Ent, Orc and the like.

Three men riding on a bicycle which has only one wheel. I guess that’s surrealist.

Don Kingman, viewing a painting

Get the ideas flowing

Here’s what I do. I take the thought or concept – just one or two words are fine – representing what it is that I want to talk or write about. I mentally push it down into my chest area – where I pretend my subconscious lives. There, the idea or concept, which has a particular vibratory frequency, will start a resonance among ‘like-minded,’ similar thoughts and concepts. Just like the musical instruments on stage. Because the thought-concept vibrates at a certain frequency, it will begin to ‘shake loose,’ as it were, synergistic or complementary thoughts, experiences, concepts and ideas, which, because they have relevance, will be vibrating on a similar frequency.

You’ll then find ideas, quotations, statistics, facts, anecdotes, examples and parallels surging into your conscious awareness. Often at such a speed that you’ll be compelled to do what I do – which is, have a hand-held digital recorder on standby. These creative thoughts have no regard for time, convenience, sequence or chronology. They’ll simply pop up in random order, as they’re shaken loose from your ‘thoughts basement.’ Try it. It’s a *phenomenally* successful way of swiftly generating ideas and themes for speaking, strategising or writing. I often find that I become almost ‘possessed’ by ideas and thoughts once the creative Muse sits on my shoulder.

The paperback is very interesting, but I find it will never replace a hardcover book – it makes a very poor doorstep.

Alfred Hitchcock

The Alpha state

Do you find your mind delivering reminders about unfinished tasks, providing interesting solutions to problems, or popping ideas into conscious brain awareness when you’re dozing off at night? Or when you allow your mind to ‘wander,’ or ‘day dream’? Chances are that you’ve stumbled into an alpha brain rhythm. That’s between 8 and 12 hertz, or cycles, per second. It’s a wave frequency measurable on electroencephalographic (EEG) equipment – it’s not anecdotal! In an alpha state, you’re intellectually resourceful, creative, relaxed, and you may feel that your concentration leaves you slightly ‘detached’ from the mainstream. Studies show that you’ll have hemispheric synchronisation in your brain. You’ll be in your own space. Meaning you’ll take a second or two to comprehend and respond to an interruption. You’re also in the *perfect* mentally receptive state for creative visualization, imaging and meditation or for using PNI (psycho-neuro-immunology) immune system enhancing techniques. My state is so focussed that it’s a standing instruction that friends or family walking into my home studio say ‘coming through’ well ahead of actually reaching it. This allows me to ‘unplug’ without getting a major shock.

Alpha on the beaches

You can equally easily enter an alpha state by listening to a favourite piece of music, lying on a beach, or watching clouds float across the sky. Listening to the sound of wind rustling through leaves in a forest, or having an aromatherapy massage will also do it. It’s *that* easily accessed. Any *light state of relaxed contemplation* is likely to trigger alpha. In the fuzziness of your awakening in the morning, you’ll typically drift in and out of alpha as well. There are people who make it sound complicated, or tell you there are ‘secret’ techniques for entering the state. That’s untrue.

Alpha in the air

I thoroughly enjoy drifting in and out of alpha in aircraft – as a passenger of course! It's one of my favourite brainstorming locations. Not only do I come up with all sorts of solutions and ideas but the state is deeply restful and therapeutic, and it shortens the trip. Likewise, when I'm driving my car. Whole chunks of this writing were delivered via a 'mull' process in my car. If I've had an exhausting series of consultations and my energies are low, or my focus is scattered, twenty minutes of alpha state gets me back on track. If I'm about to give a presentation, I like to remain slightly detached from my surroundings and keep my mind 'in the zone' as it were. I get quite irritable if people break into that state with trivia.

The artist in repair

Years ago, I watched artist, Nina Romm, running a creativity workshop. During one of the breaks, someone walked up to her and was about to ask a question. In the delightfully dramatic fashion that simply *is* Nina, she raised a hand, looked the other way and said, "Don't speak to me, I'm repairing!" I related instantly to what she did and said.

Here's an excerpt from the process guidelines for seminars I run: *Please ask all questions – unless they're deeply personal – in front of the rest of the group. This way we all learn from the issue. During breaks, I may need to gather my thoughts or recoup my energies. Please respect this, don't ask me questions, and understand if I appear to 'tune-out' a little.* People do indeed respect the request. It also allows me to deliver a better quality of program, because I can consolidate and focus my energy, instead of allowing it to be dissipated on trivia, or by one or two excessively demanding or self-involved people.

**There is a microscopically thin line between being brilliantly creative
and acting like the most gigantic idiot on earth.**

So what the hell, leap!

Cynthia Heimel, Lower Manhattan Survival Tactics, Village Voice, 1983

'Dali-time'

Surrealist Salvador Dali used to place a large ceramic dinner platter on the floor next to his favourite, comfortable easy chair. He would hold a coin between thumb and forefinger and dangle his arm over the side of the chair, his hand hanging relaxed over the platter. He'd then stretch out, close his eyes and allow himself to drift into a state of relaxed reverie. The moment he became aware of a wonderful idea or image, he'd get up and start sketching. The outcomes are world famous. If he relaxed *too* deeply and began to nod off, the coin would slip from his fingers, hit the platter and startle him awake. He'd found the perfect mechanism for tapping into his creativity.

Hypnogogic sleep

Today, we recognise Dali's method as *Hypnogogic Sleep*. I like to refer to it as my 'Dali-time,' in recognition of the Maestro's technique. When I'm writing a strategy, having to devise solutions to problems, or even writing something like this – I often shuttle between a couch and my computer. Those around me know what I'm doing, so nobody thinks I'm 'goofing off.' Crucial to the success of this process is that you don't allow yourself to take telephone calls, answer questions, or do other things that will yank you back into a linear mode and 'break the spell.' If you do, you may find it difficult to re-capture your alpha state again. All writers and artists understand this. To accommodate an interruption, you have to "unplug" from your alpha state, focus on what someone's saying, and then attempt to 'reconnect.' It doesn't always work. Sometimes you're sitting with the *perfect* turn of phrase or design element in mind, and the interruption sends it irretrievably into the ether.

In my home studio, I have a blank page waiting on my flipchart, with coloured felt tipped pens at the ready. Once I've incubated them, and ideas begin to pop into mind, I get up and jot them down with *total* disregard for relevance, order or sequence. Often using a mind-map (explanation coming up). I then go lie down again. It's proven (for me) to be a *most* productive creative process. I come up with topics for what I write in the same way. I wrote the entire script for a relaxation and visualization audio tape on a Johannesburg to Cape Town flight – also in an alpha-type state, but working directly onto my notebook computer keyboard. It's something I've become accustomed to, and good at. I don't any longer experience a dissonance between the 'linear' nature of the keyboard and my lateral creativity process. I can fling thoughts onto the computer screen as comfortably as I might onto a flipchart page.

I am always doing things I can't do. That's how I do them.

Pablo Picasso

Mind-mapping

Tony Buzan, Edward de Bono and other gurus on creativity have over the years recommended using mind-maps as a way of tapping into creativity. There are some excellent books on the subject, one of them being Buzan's '*Use your head,*' published by BBC books. Mind-maps are certainly a highly successful way of brainstorming with groups. There's also some simple and effective software (called *Mind Manager*) available for mind-mapping straight onto your computer. You'll find it by searching on the Internet. It's not important *what* creativity-accessing system you use, so long as you learn to tap into your creative faculty, on demand. I can. Those around me can. You too, can. You've just got to let go of the concept that you're 'not creative.'

Creative expression

Your particular form of creativity may manifest, like General Colin Powell's, in being able to tinker with and repair cars. His deeply relaxing and creative hobby was restoring old Volvos. Maybe you build wonderful model steam locomotives, ice cakes, design or sew clothing. You may indeed paint, sculpt, compose music or produce stained-glass lamps, but those are just a few of *millions* of creative outlets. Developing a wonderful 'wild' look with creatively chaotic flower planting in your garden, qualifies. Cooking is a very fulfilling (and filling, *and* fattening!) creative outlet. Riding a horse, in an elegant composed way, demands creativity. Don't be limited by someone else's concept of what creativity *isn't*. I cook well. I hope you find that I write well. I speak well. I'm a natural interior decorator. I have a great eye for photography and visual composition. I conceptualise great strategies. With God's Grace I'm *incredibly* creative. Partially because I've given myself *permission* to be!

**If you have a burning, restless urge to write or paint,
simply eat something sweet and the feeling will pass.**

Fran Lebowitz, Metropolitan Life, 1978