

Random Creativity

By Mark L. Fox

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It has been proven you have lost 95% of the creativity you once had. Want it back?

The fact is we are all born with enormous amounts of creativity, but over time the school systems and socialization beat it out of us. We are all pushed to “conform to the norm” and are often discouraged to try new things. The good news is there are proven and practical tools available to help you think creatively again. The best part is they are easy to learn.

What stops us from thinking creative naturally? Basically our minds are a “pattern recognition system”. Our minds are very efficient at pattern recognition processing and we couldn’t function effectively otherwise. Essentially we are creatures of habit and we don’t accept new ideas and concepts that don’t fit our pre-established thinking or “mind patterns.”

To come up with new ideas, we need to find a way to break these mind patterns. There are two ways in which they can be broken: accidental or deliberate. “Accidental” is when you just sit around and wait for ideas to pop in your head. We have all had success with this method, but it is unpredictable and slow. A much better method is to use a set of deliberate tools that are faster and much more effective.

One of the simplest tools is called “random entry.” The concept is simple and straightforward. You can do this by yourself or with a brainstorming team. The team concept is the more effective and works best with 8-12 people. Start off by writing down the issue or problem you are trying to resolve into a “problem statement.”

Next, introduce a “random input” to your thinking. The idea here is that the random input will force you to think of new ideas that you wouldn’t normally think of. Take the random input and use it to brainstorm as many new ideas as you possibly can. What new ideas does this random input make you think of? What does the new input and your problem have in common? What does this new

input suggest? What else could this lead to? What you are trying to do is generate new solutions to the problem using the random input as a stimulus or springboard to new ideas.

If you are like most people, your first reaction will be that the random input has nothing to do with your problem and therefore you will want to disregard it. Don't do it. Think for a while and force yourself to find as many associations as you can between the two. The reason you don't immediately see the similarities is that it doesn't fit your expected mind pattern. The biggest mistake made is to discard the random input and move on to another random input, another creative thinking tool, or worse just give up. Don't do it. Force yourself to come up with some new ideas. I promise you that you will never pick a random input where you can't find dozens of new ideas if you just use your imagination and take a little time to think.

There are several methods you can use to generate these random inputs. The 1st is to simply close your eyes and point to a random place on a page of a magazine or newspaper. Keep in mind that nouns work best so you may want to keep picking words until you hit a noun. Another method is to use a "random word generator." Several of these can be found by simply typing in "random word generator" into Google search. You can find some free software programs on the web and some even better ones for as little as a \$1 or so.

Another approach, which is my favorite, is to pick any word you can think of and type it into Google search. When the results are displayed in Google, the default is the "web" format. If you look at the top left hand part of the page you will see the tab labeled "web" highlighted. Just to the right of it is the "images" tab. Click on that and the search results will now show images only.

Pick anyone of the images and use the "picture" as the random input instead of a word or noun as described above. With an Internet connection and a projector you can display the picture for the whole room to see. You will often find that the ambiguity of a picture will generate even more creative ideas than just a random word input.

The "random entry" tool is one of many tools taught as part of the "Sly as Fox Creative Thinking Program."

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Mark L. Fox is a leading authority on teaching practical creative thinking techniques for business. He has a Chemical Engineering degree and an MBA and has held top management positions in Rocket Science, Aircraft Hydraulics, Engineering Services, Customer Service, Software and e-Business. You can learn more about creative thinking and his program at www.slyasafox.com or e-mail him at info@slyasafox.com

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