

Training and the Creative You

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The creative you

Modern theories of creativity permit the designer of the better mousetrap to be described as creative alongside creative greats such as Leonardo da Vinci. Libraries are a bit like mousetraps except they catch information. Undoubtedly, you have all been exercising your creative juices on how to trap and disseminate information in ways that are more efficient, more effective and more satisfying to your audience.

I suspect any limitations in creativity you might show in your workplace will derive more from restraints imposed upon you rather than your own inherent lack of creativity

The topic is not really creativity in general, but creativity in training. I'll talk first about how you might unleash your own creativity. Then I shall complete this paper with some tips and suggestions about creative training opportunities in the workplace, some of which I hope will be relevant to your workplace.

Whether you can implement any of these ideas would depend upon your work climate. And your climate will depend upon the mix and match of the purposes thought to be historically relevant that have attached to libraries. I entitle this rough historical survey a HERstory, in deference to the gender of most of the people attending the Law Librarians' Symposium.

The HERstory of libraries

Faced with the prospect of literally researching the HERstory of libraries, I decided to make my HERstory thematic and forward looking rather than factual and backward looking. I note with relief that the session is interactive and invite anyone in the audience to interpolate some facts where they seem relevant.

Knowledge for knowledge's sake

I guess the very early libraries were collections of papyrus scrolls organised in one place so that as many scholars as possible could have access to the information. Papyrus is a delicate material. The scroll form necessitates the manipulation of the reading surface to a much greater degree than books. Preservation was obviously a major focus in ancient times.

Not that even Athenian democracy would have required wide dissemination of information. The vast bulk of the Athenian population was female and/or slaves and/or children and/or plebeians. Any one of these features would have justified your exclusion from the reading public, leaving perhaps no more than two percent of the population!

We sometimes forget that until very recently even those who valued knowledge for knowledge's sake assumed that only a very tiny percentage of the population would ever need access to the vast library holdings of the state.

Collections of gorgeous objects

Shakespeare only used the word gorgeous a few times in its true meaning - multi-coloured. The word gorgeous immediately comes to mind when one recalls the fabulous illuminated manuscripts so lovingly illustrated and so inaccurately transcribed. Art historians now need access to illuminated manuscripts for the handsome illustrations. Text editors try to overcome the inaccurate transcriptions by a comparison of multiple manuscripts of a single work. Bibliophiles and libraries alike collect these as objects of beauty, valuable in their own right. Holdings in libraries are still designated collections as a present reference to the library role as a kind of walk-in book wardrobe. Access becomes an issue where the objects are inherently valuable and where handling endangers their preservation.

Knowledge is power

Nineteenth century Scotland had the highest level of literacy in the then western world as a result of the expectation that every Scot would keep the corrupt Papacy distant by a knowledge of the Good Book re-interpreted with proper Reformist zeal. As English speakers, we are not always aware that the Bible is only a work of literature and a continuing treasure trove for advertisers in English speaking countries and in Germany, following the Lutheran translation. In Roman Catholic countries the Bible is neither regarded as a source of literature nor as a source of common knowledge and experience. Who is empowered with knowledge in your organisation will be a vital issue.

HERstory of books

Gutenberg's movable type in 1426 revolutionised the world of books and therefore the world of libraries in ways which were good and bad. On the good side of the ledger, was the vast increase in volume as the prices of books lowered. Venice became a great centre for publishing. On the bad side of the ledger, the limitations of moveable type meant that pictures and the sometimes quirky presentation of information found in illuminated manuscripts departed. Gradually printed books conveyed the idea that serious works were in black and white, without pictures, and left-hand justified. Law books still look like this. As people became more mobile and as we understood more and more about human information processing, the size of the page shrank to A4 and indeed A4 became the industry standard in about 1979.

Enter the computer. The computer screen, for some bizarre reason, presents information in landscape, not in portrait formats. In addition, the MacIntosh has put the picture and colour back into the presentation of information. It is a challenge for the old familiar legislation to look as inviting as the Target brochure you receive free but never asked for.

The Internet has put interactivity back into information management. Libraries will no longer be places that are soundless for private study. We might have to have a humour corner where people can go to look at things that make them laugh and make a lot of noise.

As information becomes more and more computer based preservation of ephemeral will be an increasingly bedevilling issue. Likewise, there will be an expectation that information can be delivered at the desk. This will be realised by the development of intranets. Possibly, libraries will cease to be places and will increasingly become a bundle of policies to do with access, preservation and acquisition to be managed by librarians but implemented others.

Library HERstory - the future

The development of your own libraries will depend upon the balance your organisation strikes about:

1. the role of the library in preserving books as collections;
2. who is permitted to be empowered through knowledge;
3. how much knowledge is collected for its own sake within your organisation or is at least paid for;
4. how political the collection and dissemination of knowledge is seen to be by various stakeholders in your organisation who support the development of libraries.

The creative process

The bedevilling aspect of anything we call creative is that creativity comes unbidden and cannot be willed into existence. An understanding of the creative process, however, can help you and your organisation harness the creativity of your people. The library is essential to the creative process of your people because of the vital role information plays in both the five step creative process and in sources for inspiration for creative change.

Five step creative process

1. Preparation

The preparation process for big bang creativity, such as the development of the theory of relativity or the production of an opera, can be regarded as the whole early life of the creative person. Tony Buzan estimates that all our famous big bang creative people put in something like 30,000 hours in their childhood in order to become early geniuses. The preparation was indirect in the sense that Mozart, Einstein and Newton followed their noses, read widely and deeply and had strong likes and dislikes. The common factor is immersion. Whatever they were interested in, they lived day and night.

2. Incubation

We have all had the experience of failing to resolve a problem we think we have defined, so we go home. As soon as we stop thinking about the problem and move to doing something entirely different - often something physical like bathing the baby or going for a jog - the answer comes to us whole, unbidden and we greet it like an old friend.

If the preparation period is a period of intense immersion the incubation period is best a period of distance. It is not possible to say either in time or space how distant the distance needs to be. It does, however, argue for a variety of work locations within the workplace. It also argues for windows in libraries so that people can stare at the middle distance while they are incubating their ideas and seemingly doing nothing in particular.

3. Inspiration

Inspiration is the end result of incubation and is often described as the 'ah ha!' experience. The work of Edward de Bono suggests that randomness plays a great role in inspiration. Often the closer your mind is to the page the further your mind is away from the solution to the problem. De Bono suggests that one can call up inspiration by looking at pictures in random magazines, picking out words from a dictionary at random, going to a local shop, and using common household or business implements as sources of inspiration.

The purpose of all this randomness is to pique the mind's interest to enter the problem or the issue from a different direction in order to 'see' the solution or further possibilities. In organisations such as law firms, where sameness is valued more than difference, librarians can also be mentors for encouraging enthusiasts who have slightly specialist or non-mainstream interests. The little people are always very heartened to receive a copy of an article or a book or a flyer from the library about a topic of their passion.

Other sources of inspiration include the encouragement of mentors and self-motivation which the library perhaps is less likely to be involved in.

4. Verification

5. Application

These are self explanatory for people in analytical disciplines. Perhaps they even apply to the development of a library itself. Clearly, a library needs to have both quantitative and qualitative performance measures in order to be able to demonstrate that it has efficiently and perhaps even creatively responded to problems.

How the creative process applies to library development

The five step process:

- Preparation
- Incubation
- Inspiration
- Verification
- Application

mirrors the process of piloting new ways of doing things with a group of enthusiasts and then subjecting it to verification before it is applied throughout the organisation. Expect that the pilot process will be a process of immersion, distance and deviation. The pilot process never produces all the outcomes you anticipated and happily often produces some outcomes you didn't anticipate but might have wanted in your wildest dreams. A pilot can only be followed through if adjusted and institutionalised.

Creative people applying creative processes

The classic test of creativity is the paperclip test. That is, you list as many uses for a paperclip as you can devise in 30 seconds. The significance of the paperclip test is twofold. You are judged on the fluency of your ideas as well as the utility. Unlike analytical thinking processes, nobody cares how you dream up the ideas. Results are what counts. Also, a silly idea might lead to a very good one. The essence of the creative process is the opposite to the economic law of scarcity. Creativity accepts that you will create more ideas, more information and more possibilities than can ever be used in a lifetime. It accepts that you might need a hundred ideas to find the one that is really a goer. You are not judged by the fact that you have created 99 things which are useless but the fact that you created one thing which is good. It is the philosophy of abundance.

The other significance of the paper clip test is that it runs counter to all our own educational experience. That is, we are not asked to list non uses of paperclips. We are asked to list uses. Much of our education is about finding out what is wrong with something. Not about experimenting until we can make it right. The theory of abundance can be seen in the work of almost all creative geniuses. Leonardo da Vinci is possibly the greatest example. He rigorously followed his own maxims of observation, experimentation, verification and application yet created more ideas in his notes than could ever be tested in accordance with his own theories. Howard Florey, the Australian who won the Nobel prize for penicillin together with Ernst Chain and Sir Alexander Fleming, was called 'the great finisher'. Florey's creativity was not so much in dreaming up avenues for research but in completing research questions that others had not resolved. He was ingenious at experimental design and at co-opting others to design equipment and experiments on a shoestring. His own research was characterised by breadth of subject matter and by efficiency, economy and elegance in design.

Creative libraries

Modern creativity suggests that everybody is creative in some way. To return to Leonardo da Vinci the advice about unleashing your own creativity is as follows:

1. Study the art of science;
2. Study of the science of art;
3. Develop your senses and use them - intuition, hearing, taste, sight, touch and smell;
4. Realise that everything is connected to everything else.

The creativity process is both a paradox and a balance. The paradox of immersion and distance. The paradox of science and art. The balance of facts and people. The balance of you and others. These four rules applied to developing a library suggests that it is right that elements of your collection will always be uncatalogable and kind of messy. The science of librarianship will always be subordinate to the art of providing information to people.

The more sensual cues (short of sexual harassment) you can develop in the library for people to learn, the better the library will be for learning. Televisions, audio cassette tapes, interactive multi-media computer systems, and providing the same information in as many different ways will all be valid interpretations of this da Vincian advice.

The fourth observation that everything is in some way connected to everything else reminds us that when being creative no information is irrelevant. Optic fibre cables that have revolutionised communication were developed fortuitously from some fundamental research into volcanoes. Gutenberg's moveable type was devised in a moment of inspiration when Gutenberg married the idea of hot press to wine crushers. The Torrens title system of land registration was a happy marriage of the Hansiatic league concept of indefeasibility of title to the system of registration of ships in the United Kingdom.

Naturally your budget will focus your resources on that deemed by the organisation to be relevant. You will need to ensure that a small proportion of your budget is directed to the seemingly irrelevant. The best irrelevancies are always those about which your staff are passionate. You might need to fight for that off-the-wall subscription or that extensive collection of books by Edward de Bono that the senior partner favours.

Claiming your creative space

Tony Buzan suggests that there are five factors in helping you unleash your own creativity and that they are related to the process of learning.

Synergy

One plus one might equal two in abstract mathematics but one person plus another person equals infinity. You need other people to develop your own creativity because they will give you insights into yourself. Other people will encourage you where you are least confident but most skilled. Other people will give you both information and inspiration. In developing a library, you need other people to help you get budget and set policies. On a more subtle note, you need the library enthusiasts to continue to forge a role for the library as a leading provider of information. For example, in law firms there is actually no reason why marketing databases reside in marketing or industry information is on specialist shelves unclassified.

The physics of the universe

Tony Buzan suggests that the physics of the universe revolve around the acronym IEFCAL. We learn by TRIAL, ERROR, FEEDBACK, COMMUNICATION, APPLICATION and LEARNING. Your self talk is very important. Your self talk needs to be about what you have positively achieved and what you might rectify in order to achieve more.

Trial and success

You need to help yourself and help others to be self coaches. Human beings learn not from trial and error, says Tony Buzan, but trial and success. You need to develop positive self talk to yourself and to others which helps people build on successes and helps people deal with disappointment. Tony Kidman, an industrial psychologist and coincidentally the dad of Nicole Kidman, has written an excellent series of self help books called Self Talk which can help people develop more positive chat.

If you want to experience your own self talk, try juggling or buy one of those crazy little executive games that require good eye and hand co-ordination. Say your self talk out loud. Note when you are criticising yourself and when you are praising yourself. Move the focus from the failures to the successes. Only correct knowledge can found a success. If there is some element in the activity which you are not grasping, it might be, as in the case of juggling, you are focusing on not dropping the balls. The correct knowledge for juggling is the correct posture and knowing how to throw the ball, not how to catch it or, even worse, how not to drop it.

Likewise, if you are trying to increase your reading speed, you need more correct knowledge about reading than we were taught at school. You need to know whether to skim, peruse, or partially peruse. You need to know how to prepare your mind for reading very quickly by skimming a text with questions in mind so that your reading will supply answers. You need to know how to broaden the visual field for fast reading and to slow down and focus on the glue word for intense detailed reading.

Persistence

The Roman Catholic Church forbade the dismemberment of bodies but da Vinci persisted and produced the intensely beautiful anatomical drawings of foetuses which are still used in medical instruction. Einstein failed his first entry exam into a specialist high school. Madam Curie isolated radium under incredibly difficult personal and environmental conditions. Almost any famous person endured a period of time in the cold and many are more famous in retrospect than they were during their lifetime.

Mimic

Somehow we are given the impression that copying is okay for children to learn but as soon as we go to school copying is bad. You need to produce a list of mentors whose ideas, career paths, techniques, attitudes or philosophies provide role models for you to copy. Some from real life and some from history are quite a useful mixture. Be constantly on the lookout for techniques, attitudes, ideas that challenge you to adapt and adopt. This kind of symposium is a prime source. Perhaps the modern word network has aspects of permissible mimicry.

You - a summary

The creative you is the sum total of your relationships, your life expectancies, your professional expectations, your time management skills and a variety of other things that make you unique.

In the past you could confidently expect that one professional version of you would last your whole professional careers. Now, one's professional skills require radical renewal probably every five years. Before you have reached peak potential in your present expertise you will need to start to acquire other skills so that when the need for expertise in the current sexy area fades you will have something to replace it. This process is described as the Sigmoid curve. It means that we will all be working as hard to renew ourselves as Einstein, Mozart, da Vinci and Madame Curie.

A word to the wise. One way of looking at the question of creativity and renewal for both yourself and for your organisations is to ask the question 'What is making you feel uncomfortable now?' If the answer is 'nothing' it possibly means that you are not responding to change. Each of us need to invest a little of our day or week in doing things that are new and therefore make us uncomfortable. As soon as we reach a quiet resting place, we know our careers have finished.

That means that creative approaches to training in the library and elsewhere will involve, in summary:

- 1 Use of all the senses - not as either/or but as and/and so you will need overhead projectors, laptop computers with a LitePro, interactive multi-media including CD-ROM, flip charts with textas, a colour printer, audio cassette tapes and sound clip libraries as well as clip art and photo libraries. You will need to develop skills at adding pictures to the words and making the words rhyme.
2. Libraries as creative learning centres. The library is the obvious place for people to find delight and self renewal. It needs to be welcoming which possibly means following the bridal aphorism - something old, something new, something borrowed, something blue.

Something old

The library needs to have a predictable layout and way of doing things so that people who are operating only on automatic pilot can be thinking about their problem without thinking about how to find things.

Something new

You need a revolving display of new things coming into the library, demonstrations that are spontaneous, not predictable, anything that will make the library fun and attract people to come.

Something borrowed

The sweets jar at the Law Institute is a great attraction point and has been happily borrowed by a number of law firms. Surprising how a burst of sugar makes the world seem better.

Something blue

Not pornographic but rather warm and welcoming! The physical layout of the library and its architecture can be decisive in its success. Blue sky through windows help though

In short, the past might have been a history of libraries but the future will be the HERstory of libraries. The qualities and skills that identify and nurture creativity in ourselves and in others are the qualities we identify more with our mothers than our fathers. It is no coincidence that libraries that seek to empower, inform, nurture and encourage are run by women. The trick and possibly the subject of another talk at the next Law Librarians' Symposium (not by me!) is to have these qualities recognised and rewarded