

Spontaneous Idea Generation is the Key to Creativity and Innovation

No one really knows how an idea is generated. From out of a mass of white and gray matter called the brain, an idea all of the sudden appears "out of the blue."

Spontaneous idea generation is the mother of creativity. From the spontaneous idea arise concept, meaning, abstraction and innovation. That Eureka! moment is so powerful a behavioral reinforcer that once experienced few motivators can pull such weight.

Even though we don't exactly know what generates the spontaneous idea we do have some understanding of what works and what doesn't. For instance, we know that some cultures are less innovative and these cultures tend to be socially hierarchical and very rigid.

To be a part of these rigid cultures one must give up a good portion of one's self identity. In other words, if ma and pa tell you who you must or need to marry then your life will more or less conform to their expectations unless you rebel.

Rebellion is much less common than imagined. We humans are a species of sheep. Very few of us can remove ourselves from the culture that has been ingrained in us since birth.

One certainly has to give careful consideration to alienating one's family, friends, community and culture should one decide to be different.

And those that create are definitely different.

Even those that do manage to escape the rigors of a controlled society find idea generation difficult. That is because generating ideas requires practice and practice requires failure and often ridicule. It can also be downright frustrating.

To be human is to be creative and most of today's creativity is tied to economics. An idea's worth is what it can be sold for; there are so very few pure thinkers around today.

One can also make the case that the truly creative are that way because of their obsessive interest; someone like Thomas Edison just had to know. As neuroscience is beginning to show when one does something out of interest the whole brain dynamic changes and look what Edison accomplished.

So, there are the two big keys that most creative people have; a mind free of rigid social controls and the unwavering desire to follow one's own interests.

But the real key to creativity and spontaneous idea generation may in fact be the links and associations that our more than 5 trillion neural connections can make if we let them. That is the big point; if we let them.

There is credible evidence that one can plan or construct his own mind and it certainly might be possible to build in "mental best practices" with every mental game plan. Maybe even build mental structures that create and promote more neural links.

If this appears too much like smoke and mirrors that is because it is and it may take several hundred more years for we humans to understand these mental dynamics. What is important to remember is these dynamics aren't optional; it is how our brains are wired.

Blame all that bad wiring on our ancestral hominids.

While it may seem our brains are totally out of control and all is chaos that is not quite the case. Rather we must decide what we give ourselves permission to do; fortunately most of us decide not to be criminals!

In essence we must give ourselves "permission" to be creative and take advantage of our 5 trillion neural links. That's a lot of links. That's a lot of permutations and combinations.

Giving oneself permission to be creative is not as easy as it may sound. Many societies and social networks shun those that do not conform. To be laughed at and scorned is no easy decision. To be known as the one coming up with a stream of crazy ideas is not exactly fun either.

On a personal level one might begin to be concerned about their own mental stability when generating a steady stream of original ideas. That is why many creative people openly admit they are "nuts".

Creativity can't be manufactured but it can be managed.

So, cultural survival, self interest, self-permission and lots of strong neural links are requisites for creativity but are they the magic formula? Well, yes and no.

Yes because if these four conditions do not exist then the likelihood of creativity is diminished. Conversely, having all four conditions met unfortunately does not insure creativity. Too bad.

The final condition is practice. If the innovator ceases to create then the innovation ceases. After extended periods negative brain plasticity robs poor souls of what little creativity they may possess; once it's not used it shrivels up and melts away.

You know the type; never had an original idea in their life.

So if you have it, practice it so you hone your skills. You might think you are crazy and others may think you are crazy but then some thought Einstein was crazy.

Thomas Edison was called many things besides crazy. But both were creative because they practiced their art and continually generated ideas even though they were often "crazy ideas".

The Theory of Relativity and the electric light were clearly innovative works that involved a great deal of creativity. What is most interesting is considering how there might be a bit of Einstein and Edison in all of us if we just help it get out.

Think spontaneous ideas and write them down. Use Twitter or even the backs of napkins or envelopes. Just remember that it's up to you to get your Einstein and Edison to bloom!

You owe it to yourself and your society. The bad news is so few of us can actually generate an original idea that we are overly dependent on the few that do.

The good news is all of us have somewhere inside us that seed of creativity that is waiting to bloom. What's not to like about that?

About the Author

Jack Deal sometimes generates a spontaneous idea as the owner of Deal Business Consulting and JD Deal Online Marketing, Santa Cruz and Monterey, CA. [Related articles](#) may be found at <http://www.jddeal.com/blog/psychology> and <http://www.freeandinquiringmind.typepad.com/>

Source: <http://www.onlineearnings.net>