

## **Lesson Two: Creativity is a Choice**

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### A. Key Learning Points

1. If you keep on doing what you've always done; you'll keep on getting what you've always got – or less
2. Fortune favors the bold – create your future today.
3. Creativity can be learned
4. Creativity is not possible when we judge or categorize new experiences based on prior perceptions and understanding.
5. For pragmatic reasons, we are conditioned to focus and reinforce familiar information, concepts, and experiences.
6. For creative reasons, we must challenge ourselves to entertain new information, concepts, and experiences.
7. We will be more creative when we defer judgement and encourage new and diverse ideas and experiences.
8. You are not required to create or invent the future yourself; but you are responsible for recognizing and embracing emerging creative opportunities.

### B. Real World Examples and Considerations for Practitioners

1. If you keep on doing what you've always done; you'll keep on getting what you've always got – or less.

Success typically is imitated in the market place. Despite trademark and copyright protection, most original ideas, products, and services are copied with slight modification within 18 months.

In many instances, the imitation products are more successful than the originals. The imitation products also can be more profitable, because they do not tend to require as much investment in research and development and brand-related marketing as the original, creative product. Likewise, many price-conscious customers prefer commodity-priced knock-offs of successful products and services.

For example:

- Do you drink Coca Cola or another cola brand?
- Do you use leading brand food products or supermarket brand products?
- Do you use leading brand or generic medications?
- Do you rent from Hertz or from another budget car rental?
- Do you use a Netscape browser or Internet Explorer?
- Do you use WordPerfect or Microsoft Word?

Creative success gives the originator a head start on the market-place; but it does not guarantee long-term success. Creative organizations recognize the importance of sustaining their creativity to assure the long-term competitive advantage.

If you keep on creating, you will keep ahead. If you cease creating after your initial success, you will become the target for all of your competitors.

On a more personal note, if you expect different results, you must explore alternative methods. Today, will not be different, unless you make it so.

We all have our rituals, traditions, and habits – they are a source of comfort, security, and productivity. And we all have our hopes, wishes, and dreams – they offer us challenge and inspiration. But, we will not achieve our highest ideals without developing new knowledge, friends, colleagues, customers, and work methods.

2. Fortune favors the bold – create your future today.

We will never lack debate about the extent to which we are responsible for our own success. Such debates typically focus on questions like these:

- Does nature influence a child’s development more than nurture?
- Do circumstances create leaders or do leaders shape circumstances?

In business and in politics, many influential thinkers and consultants have argued for centuries that people, governments, and businesses increase their prospects for success when they take proactive responsibility for their future.

Niccolo Machiavelli, the famed 15<sup>th</sup> century Italian, advised his prince to act boldly and decisively to maximize his influence and opportunities.

Likewise, Peter Drucker, the famed 20<sup>th</sup> century management guru, advises us that “the best way to predict the future is to create it.”

Here are some examples that demonstrate the power of bold action, thinking, marketing, and/or investment:

- the American revolutionary declaration of independence
- Thomas Jefferson’s vision of an American nation that spanned the North American continent
- Abraham Lincoln’s conviction that a nation divided against itself can not stand
- John D. Rockefeller, Andrew Carnegie, and Henry Ford’s vision and industrial genius
- Alfred Sloan’s design and development of General Motors as a comprehensive, vertically integrated giant
- The Manhattan Project
- Rosa Park’s civil disobedience
- Apollo
- Apple’s Macintosh (v. IBM)
- Federal Express (v. USPS)
- Southwest Airlines (v. American Airlines et al)

On a personal level, while we might be thankful or complain about our past or present lives’ circumstances, we each have our own independent responsibility for choices and actions that will shape our future.

The investment students make in lifelong learning is a good example of bold, present-day actions that will contribute to future quality of professional and personal life.

3. Creativity can be learned

I’ve met many co-workers and students who’ve insisted that they were “not creative.” These people often say they are good at logical, rational, practical things and hopeless at creative, expressive, artistic things.

I've worked in and consulted to many organizations that insisted that creativity was not possible in this business, industry, or government agency. These organizations often argue that the laws, regulations, market-research, and/or shareholder expectations make creativity impossible, unlikely, and unprofitable.

Although many people believe that creativity is an innate, god-given blessing, contemporary research proves that we all can learn to increase our creative capacity. For example:

- A child's creativity increases when exposed to increased creative stimuli.
- An adult's peripheral vision will increase when (s)he focuses on lateral observations.

Although many people believe that creativity is impossible in government or in industry, municipalities like Madison Wisconsin and businesses like 3M are proving otherwise.

- Madison was among the first communities to apply Total Quality Management successfully in the public sector.
- 3M generates 30 percent of its sales revenues from new products introduced within the past three years.

Creativity is a choice. You will be more creative if you choose to be more creative. The inverse, of course, is equally true – you will not be creative if you choose not to be creative.

When your business hires new employees is it more interested in:

- a. Training that employee to conform to the organization's formal rules and informal culture
- b. Encouraging that employee to contribute his/her own unique interpretation or improvisation to the organization's formal rules and informal culture

At Nordstrom, one of the nation's superior clothing retail stores, there is only one rule:

Rule # 1

Use your good judgement in all situations.

There will be no additional rules.

Please feel free to ask your department manager, store manager, or division general manager any question at any time.

4. Creativity is not possible when we judge or categorize new experiences based on prior perceptions and understanding.

Imagine I am holding a fruit in my right hand.

It is orange.

It is sweet.

It is juicy.

Tell me what kind of fruit I am holding in my hand.

When I ask this question in a classroom or business meeting, almost all students or clients tell me that I am holding an orange. But I am, in fact, holding a tangerine. (A few students will argue with me that a tangerine, in fact, is an orange .....)

Why do respondents typically (and quite quickly) see an “orange” first, rather than a “tangerine”?

Oranges are more popular and more familiar to more people than tangerines – and, most people’s minds, not surprisingly, gravitate toward the dominant and more familiar fruit. Our prior experience and judgements have not prepared us well for the less familiar, more creative (tangerine) solution to this question.

When my mother first visited Albuquerque, her life’s experience spent almost exclusively in New England had not prepared her well to see or appreciate the uniqueness of our arid, wide open, high mountain desert. On our ride from the airport, she kept attempting comparisons between our landscape and the New England landscape. When I challenged these comparisons and encouraged my mother to see the differences and the respective uniqueness of our different landscapes, she began to relax and enjoy and appreciate her visit much more.

Big successful businesses are famous for their inability to recognize new, emerging creative factors. Their past and current successful experience, their sheer size and market dominance make it difficult to appreciate new and unique concepts, approaches, and opportunities. Here are two of the more famous leadership errors in creative judgment.

- The total estimated world-wide demand for automobiles does not exceed 1 million vehicles – Mercedes Benz c. 1901
- There is absolutely no reason why anyone would want a computer in their home – Ken Olson, Digital Equipment Co. c. 1972

For pragmatic reasons, we are conditioned to focus and reinforce familiar information, concepts, and experiences. But for creative reasons we must seek and experience new situations, information, concepts, and people that broaden our perspective and challenge our conventional pre-dispositions, biases, and judgement.

When Toyota began to design Lexus, the luxury vehicle that has now displaced Mercedes as the preferred luxury/status vehicle, it sent engineers to live with well-to-do, Mercedes-driving California families. This new, personal, first-hand experience helped Toyota engineers broaden and build on their prior expertise -- building reliable, relatively small, fuel efficient cars and trucks.

Likewise, when Ford designed the Taurus, the comfortable professional and family sedan that displaced the Honda Accord as the best-selling car in America in the late 1980’s, it specifically assigned a woman as lead designer. Although this was unusual in the macho, male-dominated US auto business, Ford wanted to build a better car that appealed to women who were responsible for more than half of all new car purchase decisions. And Ford’s exceptionally talented female designer, created a stylish, comfortable vehicle with features that were especially appreciated by women drivers – comfortable shoulder seat belts, lower clearance getting into the vehicle, and knobs and buttons that were easier to manipulate with longer finger nails (to name just a few features).

7. We will be more creative when we defer judgement and encourage new and diverse ideas and experiences.

Creative people and organizations develop and reward thinking that explores diverse interpretations of facts, problems, and opportunities. Such creativity requires deferring personal judgement and encouraging alternative and divergent opinions. To accomplish this, many creative organizations are adopting the 6 Thinking Hats approach advocated by Edward De Bono, one of the most celebrated and respected consultants in this field

De Bono's 6 Thinking Hats are an effective tool that challenges one-dimensional reasoning and broadens individual and organizational perspective. Each metaphorical hat represents one of six types of thinking that we use unconsciously each day.

White Hat – factual thinking  
Red Hat – emotions and intuition  
Yellow Hat – positive perspective  
Black Hat – caution and risk  
Green Hat – creativity and new ideas  
Blue Hat – control, overview and organization

De Bono recommends that we examine a situation, opportunity, or problem from each and all of the 6 thinking perspectives. While each of us has a dominant thinking mode or perspective, we also are well-advised to cultivate and strengthen our skills in the other modes.

For example, if you are most comfortable with White Hat/factual thinking, you might want to try Red Hat/emotional thinking (along with the other hats) prior to reaching a specific decision.

Likewise, before you rush to Green Hat/creativity decisions, you'd be wise to consider White Hat/facts, Black Hat/risk, and Blue Hat/organization implications.

Or, if you tend to be a conservative Black Hat/caution thinker, you might pause to explore Yellow Hat/positive opportunities.

8. You are not required to create or invent the future yourself; but you are responsible for recognizing and embracing emerging creative opportunities.

As Joel Barker explains in *Paradigms: The Business of Discovering the Future* (HarperBusiness), you don't have to explore or invent new opportunities yourself – as long as you recognize the emerging opportunities and are among the pioneers who are first to exploit them. The future belongs to the Explorers, the Inventors, and the Pioneers. The Settlers will be left increasingly rapidly behind.

In business, the Japanese are famous for pioneering production of inventions made by other nations. Although many of us own a Japanese-made FAX, VCR, watch, and/or automobile, none of these products was invented by the Japanese.

Microsoft was not the leader in word-processing, database/spreadsheet, or internet browser applications/software, but Microsoft was a pioneer in integrating these products in an Office "suite."

Dell Computers is not an explorer or inventor like Apple Computers, but Dell is a pioneer in just-in-time, built-to-order, factory-direct production and distribution of personal computers

You may not be the first students to study reengineering or to leverage distance learning channels of instruction, but you are among the early adopters, the pioneers who are strengthening your awareness and skills for creating a better personal, professional, and civic future. This awareness and these skills will serve you well as creative leaders.

- C. Recommended Reading Assignment & Highlights – All selections are from Barker, *Paradigms: The Business of Discovering the Future*. HarperBusiness (Chapters 4-6)

*And what do we do with the problems we don't solve? We put them aside, up on a shelf, so to speak. And we make a promise to ourselves. "We'll get back to them sooner or later." .... There are two good reasons why these problems are not solved right away.*

*Reason 1. We lack some technology or tool that would allow us to be able to solve the problem ....*

*Reason 2. We're not smart enough yet.*

*So who changes the paradigm? .... The short and unsettling answer is that it will probably be someone who is an outsider. Someone who really does not understand the prevailing paradigm in all its subtleties (sometimes they don't understand it at all!)*

*Keep in mind that when people respond harshly to outsiders, their responses, can be justified. People who have been practicing the prevailing paradigm have been successful. Nothing in their situation says they need to change. They still are ascending the problem-solving curve. All the signals, based on their own hard work, say they are right. So, of course, they have a difficult time listening to outsiders who ask them to change their ways.*

*Let's take a look at the four categories of paradigm shifters.*

*Category 1. A young person fresh out of training ....*

*Category 2. An older person shifting fields ....*

*Category 3. The maverick....*

*Category 4. Tinkerers ....*

*New paradigms put everyone practicing the old paradigm at great risk. The higher one's position, the greater the risk. The better you are at your paradigm, the more you have invested in it, the more you have to lose by changing paradigms.*

*You can not know who is going to bring you your future. You can not qualify them in advance by looking at degrees or experience, or gender or race. You can only listen.*

*It is paradigm pioneers who are first to follow the rough pathway that paradigm shifters have uncovered.*

*The essence of the pioneering decision is: Those who choose to change their paradigms early do it not as an act of the head but as an act of the heart.*

*You don't have to be a paradigm shifter to get all the advantages. Just being a paradigm pioneer is sufficient.*

*In the twenty-first century it will be the settlers who are at risk. Reverse engineering will only tell you what the pioneers did in the past. By the time you figure it out, they will be long gone. Every day the settler delays, the more it costs to enter into competition with the pioneers. And less of the market is left for them.*

#### D. Additional Resources and Links to Others Sources

Edward De Bono, *Serious Creativity: Using the Power of Lateral Thinking to Create New Ideas*. HarperBusiness.

Edward De Bono, *Six Thinking Hats*. Little Brown and Company.

#### E. Questions for Reflection and Discussion

1. What false or outdated assumptions do we operate under at work, in our community, in our schools, and in our families and personal lives?