

Overcoming the fear of creative thinking

Reading time 7 mins

Key Points

- Creativity isn't a genetic trait but rather a skill that can be nurtured and developed
- Most of us are born creative: we're curious, imaginative, and ask lots of questions
- Evolution, socialisation, and education have taught us to fear the unknown, critical judgement from our peers/society, and failing
- Creative thinking is essential for staying relevant in an increasingly competitive and volatile marketplace
- Overcoming the fear of creative thinking requires: cultivating curiosity, embracing failure, being patient, getting some exercise, and finding time to relax and play

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Did you know that only about 22% of our creative performance is related to the genetics ^[1] we're born with? And yet, because many of us think that people are born talented, a fear of failure or judgement prevents us from developing our creativity. Most of us are, in fact, born creative: as children, we have active imaginations, ask lots of questions, and are naturally curious. Formal education and socialisation teach us to stifle those behaviours, and those who aren't raised in environments that nurture creativity, end up forgetting about it. But that innate ability isn't lost, and overcoming the fear of creative thinking puts us on track to getting it back ^[2]:

1. Cultivate your curiosity
2. "Fail. Fail again. Fail better" - Samuel Beckett
3. Give it time
4. Be active, get a change of scenery
5. Relax, play, and put the devices away

As a business owner, entrepreneur, or developing your career, you might think that nurturing creativity isn't something you have the time for. However, it's an essential skill for staying relevant in an increasingly competitive and volatile marketplace. This boosts innovation, increases productivity, encourages adaptability and problem-solving, and promotes growth ^[3] - for both businesses and individuals.

Creative thinking restraint #1: Fear of the unknown

Evolution hardwired the fear of the unknown into us. Not wandering off the beaten path and into

uncertain territories kept us safe from harm. But where would we be without the explorers and experimenters who weren't afraid to ask questions and overcome their fear of finding out?

Cultivating our curiosity helps us to get out of our comfort zone and over the fear of the unknown. Start by exploring an attraction or cultural event local to you that you've never been to before. Ask lots of questions, and feel good about having tried something new. Go on holiday on your own, be open to new experiences without expectation or judgement and learn to see things from a different perspective.

In the workplace, take the time to engage with colleagues that you ordinarily wouldn't engage with. What does Mary in IT or Philippe in graphic design find the most challenging or rewarding about what they do? How does this change your bigger-picture view of the company and your role in it?

Creative thinking restraint #2: Fear of failure

One of the most common reasons people don't want to engage in creative thinking is that they are afraid to fail. This fear can be linked to the feeling of being judged by our peers or even ourselves. It's essential to remind yourself that failure is part of the process—it's okay to make mistakes as long as you learn from them and move on.

Start by putting yourself in spaces where you feel safe to 'fail': sign up for cooking, dance, or pottery classes. Expect to feel uncomfortable and 'do badly' the first time. Do better the second or third time. Change the narrative you're telling yourself, and call what you're doing 'experiments' and 'constructive feedback' rather than failures or a personal critique. Take this improved narrative with you into the workplace and view the projects or ideas you're testing and developing similarly.

Creative thinking restraint #3: Expecting immediate results

Another reason people may be hesitant to embrace creativity is that it takes time: time that may not fit into the already busy schedule of a business owner or deadline cruncher. But creativity isn't something that's developed overnight.

It's important to remember that any investment in creative exploration will pay off in the long run and help your business or career stand out from competitors. Be patient with yourself, and observe without self-judgement. If, after a few attempts, you do not see any noticeable change and you're still not a better salsa dancer, switch tracks and try pottery instead. Not only will this boost adaptability, but it will also help to overcome the fear of the unknown or failure.

Creative thinking restraint #4: Inertia

[An active body begets an active mind](#), and changes in scenery encourage mindsets to shift. Taking as little as a 20min walk every day and switching up where you work (e.g. go to a co-working space from time to time, re-position your desk, or change the layout of your office) can work wonders towards releasing mental blockages and getting creative juices flowing.

Creative thinking restraint #5: Forgetting our inner-child

Make time to play. Office games aren't just good for team-building: they encourage collaboration, strategic thinking, and healthy competition.

Relax. Practising accessible meditation techniques such as [mindfulness for creativity](#) reduces stress and improves cognitive flexibility, divergent thinking, and working memory.

Put the devices away. Smartphones, tablets, computers, and other tech comforts allow us to multitask and be more productive. However, they can also be a drain on our creativity. Periodically disconnect from your devices, approach problem-solving with only what's at your disposal and use your undivided attention to inspire novel thinking.

Is the fear of creative thinking easy to overcome?

It took years, if not decades, for these fears, habits, and expectations to develop – so they won't be banished overnight. For many of us, overcoming them will take consistent dedication and time – which isn't easy but definitely doable.

Take the time to ask yourself what your typical response to fear is. Do you fight (e.g. lash out at colleagues), freeze (e.g. get blocked), or take flight (e.g. procrastinate)?

Try using the techniques we listed above to find calm when you're stressed, get out and try something new, or collaborate with a colleague who can help you change your perspective.

Let us know how it works out for you, or share any fear-busting-creativity-enhancing techniques you have. We're always looking for new ways to get creative!

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