

Appendix E

HOW TO MANAGE CREATIVE PEOPLE

Because companies are faced with rapidly changing environments in today's highly competitive business world, innovation, which is the result of creative thinking, is an imperative for survival and growth. Over one-half of the *Fortune* 500 companies have adopted some type of program in creative thinking or problem solving in the last decade.

Few businesses have a more rapidly changing environment than the media, especially the online media, do. Thus, few industries need innovation and creative people more. This need brings up three questions: 1) How to tell the difference between people that are creative and those that merely think they are, 2) how to manage creative people, and 3) in what type of jobs will creative people be most effective.

How to Recognize Creative People

The first question is particularly important because the media and the Internet tend to attract scores of people who want to express themselves or to act “creative.” However, there is a big difference between wanting to be thought of as creative and actually being creative. Creativity can be measured and fulfills at least three conditions:

1. It involves a response or an idea that is novel or least statistically infrequent and must be adaptive to, or of, reality.
2. It must solve a problem, fit a situation, or accomplish some recognizable goal.
3. It must involve sustaining the original insight, an evaluation and elaboration of it, and a developing of it to the fullest.

Creativity from this point of view is a process extended in time and characterized by originality, adaptiveness, and realization. These conditions are the ones reported by Wolfe in *The Discovery of Talent*, a book that reports on a six-year study on creativity conducted at the University of California.

Applying the above definition to a media context, it suggests that simply being new or different is not enough; an idea must also have a practical, problem-solving application. Too often media practitioners want to try an idea just because it is different (creative, they think), but if an idea does not help accomplish the goals of an organization or solve a practical, reality-based problem, it is not only *not* creative, it is virtually useless. There is no virtue in being different; the only virtue an idea has is in being useful, in solving a problem.

In fact, many people equate being different with being creative. Often people enter the media because they have strong needs to be recognized, to be loved, to gain approval, and to be noticed. They often accomplish these goals by trying to be different to gain attention. But being different does not necessarily mean being creative. Creativity comes from deep within people. In *Creativity in Business*, authors Michael Ray and Michelle Myers, who taught a class in creativity in business at the Stanford Business School, write:

Each individual has a meant-to-be, a particular blending of talents and capacities that can guide him to achievement. Everyone you recognize as creative—not only our (class) speakers but also such luminaries as Einstein, Picasso, and Beethoven—has in common the amazing ability to express his own unique purpose here on earth. They have found that true creativity is being themselves. When Leonardo DaVinci was asked to name his greatest accomplishment, he answered, “Leonardo DaVinci.”ⁱ

In a book titled *Characteristics of the Creative Individual*, Eugene Raudsepp writes that truly creative people are intensely career oriented and devote enormous amounts of energy to their work. They pay particular attention to the intrinsic satisfactions in their work (they view their work as an end in itself). They look for interesting, stimulating, challenging, and creative projects. They need a variety of problems, professional and organizational recognition of their achievements, ascending degrees of responsibility and steady advancement, and self-actualization. They do not look for easy, comfortable situations, but want to utilize their talents, aptitudes, and interests to the fullest.

Truly creative people tend to have the following characteristics, according to Raudsepp:

1. They are self-confident, often to the point of arrogance (as opposed to many people who get in the media seeking love and approval to bolster a low self-image).
2. They are enthusiastic.
3. They are optimistic.
4. They can examine things impartially and objectively.
5. They are constructively discontented.
6. They are dynamic.
7. They have diverse interests.
8. They are honest with themselves.
9. They are not self-satisfied and complacent.
10. They are not afraid to ask questions that show ignorance.
11. They are not afraid of making a mistake and are risk takers.
12. They do not seek approval from others or society.
13. They will not compromise on those things they hold dear.
14. They engage in hobbies which require concentration and exercise of problem-solving abilities.
15. They strive for perfection.
16. They have an uncommon capacity for self-instruction.
17. They are flexible and can tolerate a high degree of ambiguity.
18. They are highly motivated.
19. They are uncommonly persistent.
20. They have an unusual ability to concentrate.
21. They constantly expand knowledge.
22. They dislike being bossed or policed.
23. They are intensely absorbed in their work.
24. They have above-average intelligence.ⁱⁱ

The list is long, which reinforces the notion that truly creative people are complex and behave in often contradictory ways.

Point number 24 is significant. Research has shown that in order to be creative a person has to have above-average intelligence, somewhere in the neighborhood of an IQ over 125, but after that threshold of intelligence has been reached, there is no correlation between higher creativity and higher intelligence. In other words, a person with above-average intelligence can be as creative as a genius can.

Denis Waitley, in *Empires of the Mind*, has a similar list, and suggests creative people are:

1. Optimistic about the future.
2. Highly curious and observant.
3. Adventurous with multiple interests.
4. Able to project their daydreams into the future.
5. Independent thinkers who use their whole brains (which translates innovative ideas into practical solutions).
6. Constructively discontented with the status quo.
7. Open to alternatives (not rigid, are coachable).
8. Able to recognize and break bad habits.
9. Unwilling to fall in love with a new invention or idea, since they accept that ideas are expandable and someone's bound to come up with an even better one.

Another hallmark of creative people is a passion for their work. As managerial psychologist and educator Harold J. Leavitt indicates, "We learn to love the things we do well."ⁱⁱⁱ So people who have a talent for writing, for dealing with people, or for graphic design will be passionate about doing what they are best at, and thus will typically do it extraordinarily well.

Furthermore, the creative process also involves the following elements, according to Raudsepp:

1. Gaining a great deal of fundamental knowledge.
2. A period of incubation in which this large store of knowledge ferments in the brain.
3. An uncommonly large amount of time spent in analysis.
4. An absorption in details.

Creative activity typically comes in spurts and streaks and is rarely, if ever, continuous, and dry spells do not mean the creative juices have dried up, they are just resting and incubating. Creativity is subject to personal, internal blocking mechanisms that can be overcome at times by discussion and verbalization. Creativity is also grounded in expertise. In the book by Ettema and Whitney, *Individuals in Mass Media Organizations: Creativity and Constraints*, well-known television producer Quinn Martin is quoted as saying that producing successful entertainment is "75% craft and 25% creativity...you need to know the rules before you can break them."^{iv}

How to Manage Creative People

In order to manage creative people, managers must first understand the basic contradictions in human nature, as identified in *Creativity: Flow and the Psychology of Discovery and Invention* by Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, who writes:

Each of us is born with two contradictory sets of instructions: a conservative tendency, made up of instincts for self-preservation, self-aggrandizement, and saving energy, and an expansive tendency made up of instincts for exploring, for enjoying novelty and risk—the curiosity that leads to creativity belongs to this set. We need both of these programs. But whereas the first tendency requires little encouragement or support from outside to motivate behavior, the second can wilt if it is not cultivated. If too few opportunities for curiosity are available, if too many obstacles are placed in the way of risk and exploration, the motivation to engage in creative behavior is easily extinguished.^v

Therefore, to encourage the curious, risk-taking behavior of creativity, the first rule of managing creative people is: *Don't' punish risk taking or mistakes; encourage reasonable risk taking.*

Creative people also are happiest when they have little or no supervision. They prefer to be independent and autonomous. Creative people intensely dislike doing routine, low-grade chores and paperwork. They work best in an atmosphere of freedom—freedom to experiment and to make mistakes. Thus, a favorable, encouraging environment and the proper style of supervision are absolutely critical to creative people's success. It is impossible to separate creative people from the environment in which they operate. Thus, the second rule of managing creative people: *Let creative people work independently and with a minimum of supervision.*

Furthermore, in order for managers to create an environment that is conducive to creativity, they must be extremely careful about criticizing. Criticism must be in the form of feedback that a creative person views as an attempt to help, to teach, and not in the form of anything approaching personal criticism. Feedback of a critical nature must be done in a constructive, encouraging, coaching manner.

Teresa Amabile in her ground-breaking work on creativity, *The Social Psychology of Creativity*, writes that “Criticism and imparting feelings of failure will destroy creativity—avoiding them are the keys to fostering creativity.” The author states that the “...work environments most conducive to the fulfillment of creative potential may include a high level of worker responsibility for initiating new activities, a low level of interference from administrative superiors, and a high stability in employment.”^{vi}

Amabile also defined six reliable methods for *killing creativity*:

1. *Evaluation* - Many creative people have described how fear of evaluation often kills their love for doing the creative activity, such as writing, acting, and painting, for example.
2. *Surveillance* - Having someone look over their shoulder or police them drives creative people crazy and demotivates them.
3. *Reward* - Extrinsic, tangible rewards (such as Nobel Prizes) tend to lower motivation. Give creative people rewards they value, such as more autonomy and opportunities to learn.
4. *Competition* - When creative people (and most people) are put in a win/lose competitive situation with fellow workers, it kills creativity and innovation. Most people in these situations think about how not to lose instead of how to win, which inhibits risk taking, according Amabile.

5. *Restricted choice* - Making choices for creative people or severely limiting their options for projects to work on or for learning opportunities lowers their creative output.
6. *Extrinsic orientation* - External rewards, prizes, money, win/lose competition all hurt creativity. Creative people love the intrinsic rewards of doing the work they are passionate about.

Considering the above, here are several more rules in dealing with creative employees:

- *Don't interfere, don't criticize (do give specific, constructive feedback).*
- *Don't compare them to others.*
- *Don't threaten them with the loss of their jobs.*

And, finally, the most important rule for managing creative people: *Either love and support them to the hilt or fire them, there is virtually no room in between.* In the case of creative people who have a great deal of administrative work to do, it is probably best to give them an assistant to keep them away from routinized, repetitive work. Avoiding the cost of an assistant is usually penny wise and pound foolish with creative employees.

Successful Managers of Creative People

Managers who successfully deal with creative employees tend to show the following characteristics, according to Raudsepp:

1. They respect individual differences.
2. They understand the creative process.
3. They have professional knowledge (expertise).
4. They know how to communicate sympathetically with creative people.
5. They give credit and recognition.
6. They take calculated risks.
7. They provide inspiration in the form of support and encouragement of ideas.
8. They bolster self-confidence.
9. They are flexible and have flexible organizations.
10. They welcome and encourage constructive nonconformity, individuality, and diversity.
11. They involve creative people in the planning and decision-making process at the earliest possible moment.
12. They allow creative people to try their pet projects and ideas without fear of criticism.^{vii}

Nurturing Creative People

Farnham in an article titled "How to Nurture Creative Sparks" in *Fortune* puts forth several rules for nurturing creative people:

1. *Accommodate* - Creative people tend to be high maintenance. Managers must keep their doors open and let creative people have access to them. Creative people usually need constant stroking. So stroke. Also, creative people cannot choose when they create, because ideas come to them at odd times. Accommodate to their

schedules. Never, never, never punish failure. Managers must learn to celebrate failures as learning experiences for creatives.

2. *Stimulate* - Management must find ways to stimulate creative thinking: trips or green and purple offices if creatives want them. Creatives must be encouraged to gaze out the window. They do not always have to be doing something.
3. *Recognize and reward—the right way* – “Since creative people tend to be self starters, giving them greater autonomy can be a powerful reward,” writes Farnham.^{viii} The worst type of incentive is for a manager to try to hog credit. Creatives want to be known for their work and ideas—that is where they get their powerful intrinsic rewards. Creatives care about what their peers think, so peer recognition is vitally important. Managers should enter the output of their creative people in awards, if the creative people value awards. Money, an extrinsic reward, is often not especially important to creatives (except for salespeople).¹
4. *Direct (lightly) and give feedback* - Creative people need deadlines, otherwise they will stay in an exploration mode too long. On the other hand, they hate specific directions. They need feedback on how they are progressing, but do not like to get feedback from managers. If they can see research, talk to audience members, or hear from their peers, they take feedback better than from managers, who they feel try to control them. Therefore, managers have to be extremely careful in giving feedback, which must be in the form of performance coaching, not evaluating (see Chapter 7, *Media Sales Management*, for more details on performance coaching).
5. *Protect them* - Managers have to protect creative people from dullards who do not understand the creative process. Managers also have to protect creatives from restrictive, corporate-mandated paperwork and overbearing rules.^{ix}

Placing Creative People in Jobs

Creative people are best suited for jobs where they can grow, learn, accomplish goals, avoid personal criticism and comparison, work independently and autonomously, and in which there is little or no repetitive, routinized work. In other words, if employees are required to follow rules in an exact manner or if they are allowed little or no leeway in making decisions, then do not hire people who are creative, their motivation will be destroyed. On the other hand, if managers need new ideas, a new approach, and innovation, hire creative people and give them plenty of leeway and support.

If there were one word that summarizes what creative employees need from a manager, it would be encouragement. When feedback is necessary, it must be put in a context of “here are some suggestions on how you can do it even better,” not in a context of “here's what you did wrong.” Two other concepts that are vitally important to remember in dealing with creative people are participation and autonomy. Let creative people participate in decisions and then give them autonomy on how to carry out their assignments. Finally, managers must remember that their approach should be to make these rare, invaluable creative people feel like winners in order to build their confidence.

¹ There is a widely held perception that selling attracts people who are looking for extrinsic rewards such as money. However, selling can be a creative endeavor and, thus, attract people whose talent and passion is dealing with people (high emotional intelligence).

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ⁱ Michael Ray and Michelle Myers. 1986. *Creativity in Business*. New York: Doubleday & Co. p. 114.

ⁱⁱ Eugene Raudsepp. 1978. *Characteristics of the Creative Individual*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton Creative Research.

ⁱⁱⁱ Michael Ray and Michelle Myers. 1986. *Creativity in Business*. New York: Doubleday & Co. p. 115.

^{iv} James Ettema and D. Charles Whitney, Editors. 1982. *Individuals In Mass Media Organizations: Creativity and Constraints*. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage Publications.

^v Milhaly Csikszentmihalyi. 1996. *Creativity: Flow and the Psychology of Discovery and Invention*. New York: Harper Collins Publishers. p. 11.

^{vi} Teresa Amabile. 1983. *The Social Psychology of Creativity*. New York: Springer-Verlag Publishers. p. 212.

^{vii} Eugene Raudsepp. 1978. *Characteristics of the Creative Individual*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton Creative Research.

^{viii} Farnham, A. 1994. "How to Nurture Creative Sparks." *Fortune*. June.

^{ix} Ibid.