

Creativity

You Do Not Need to Make Art to Be Creative



What is Creativity?

It's not easy to define creativity because it comes in as many forms as there are people, teams and organizations. The best way to describe it perhaps is as a state of imagination or flow where energy moves freely in such a way as to generate something new.

The Dictionary Definition of Creativity: the ability to transcend traditional ideas, rules, patterns, relationships, or the like, and to create meaningful new ideas, forms, methods, interpretations, etc.; originality, progressiveness, or imagination: the need for creativity in modern industry; creativity in the performing arts.

“Creativity is so innate and partial to who we are. It is our very essence. Whether we chose to tap into that power and really engage with it. There are so many forms of expression. We can bring that energy, that enthusiasm, that wonder that awe into [any] moment.”

– Seven Stones Community Call Participant

The Creative Flow

Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi writes and speaks extensively about the creative flow. He says there are nine qualities we can identify when we are in a state of flow or creativity.

1. *Clear goals at every step of the way.* Most of us find we might not necessarily have clear goals in an ordinary moment of our day, unlike a surgeon who has very clear goals and milestones moment by moment when she is operating on you. And these are not necessarily planned out in advance, but you know them when you meet them.
2. *Immediate feedback to one's action.* When we are in flow, we are in a heightened state of awareness and notice subtleties. The surgeon would get immediate feedback: the body would respond to a mistake by the pulse slowing down, or to success, if blood flowed smoothly through a vein being cleared out.
3. *A balance between being challenged and your skill set.* If something is way over our heads we may give up, or if it's too easy, we become bored or unfulfilled, either way, it becomes difficult hard for us to be creative.
4. *Action and awareness are merged.* We are so present to what we are doing we are not longer self-aware. We are completely focused in the moment.
5. *Distractions are excluded from consciousness.* We are so present we are un-distract-able! At Seven Stones we talk about what distracts us from our family, work, wisdom. The key distraction that many of us walk around with is the phone, or the television or the newspaper, or email. It's very challenging for us to find our creative voice when we are "plugged in."
6. *No worry of failure.* In the flow state—in this heightened moment of focus and presence—we transcend the polarity of success or failure. We know consciously that our worry will distract us and cause us to impair our creative flow. But in the actual moment, we are beyond even that consciousness. We are in the flow.
7. *Self-consciousness disappears.* When we stop monitoring how we appear and let down our guard we have access to our quietest voices and highest intelligence.



8. *Time flies.* "Oh my God, it's 4:00 where did the time go??" When action and awareness merge, distractions, worry and self-consciousness fall away, we are no longer subject to the limitations of time. Our world becomes timeless.
9. *The activity actually becomes self-fulfilling.* In the presence of creative flow, we are beyond success and failure, and the process is the reward. There is joy and contentment. We can be making something "creative" and either be in flow or not, depending on the quality of our minds.

Inquiry: So just pause in this moment and think about your work whether current employment or past, whether you're an entrepreneur, or retired or and maybe actually look at where in your life or where in your work have you experienced these qualities and allowed for creativity. Or where or what organization where you've had none of these steps and there was no creativity and you left.

Context Matters

Both our surroundings and the state of our mind, our external and internal contexts, determine our access to creative flow. We say "the structure is decisive" at Seven Stones. As we discover as managers, entrepreneurs, coaches and team leaders, a lot of the creativity, especially interpersonally, comes from how we allow creativity to flow out from others. How to structure a meeting or how to structure a conversation is just as important as the conversation itself. Intention, conscious structures provides an environment more or less conducive to creative flow, just like the cathedral of nature can do when we are out in the woods or by an ocean. That level of inspiration is available in the boardroom.

Inquiry: We begin by asking what affect does the environment have on me and my creativity? What do we need around us to thrive in our creativity? How can we set up our office, studio, bedroom, kitchen, outdoor space to support our getting into flow? What practices allow me to settle into myself to access my creativity? What stimuli am I aware of that impede my ability to create freely?

Creativity at Work

For some reason, creativity at work is called innovation. We imagine innovative people are locked in a room and emerge with a great new product. While creativity can be a solo experience—often in the fine arts, in business (like in dance, film and other art forms), creativity emerges through a collective experience.

Inquiry: How can creativity make a difference to organizations? How can those of us who run companies or work in companies and our experience of work, our products and services however we look at our businesses can lend to creativity? What makes your team creative?

IBM survey that revealed 1,500 CEOs from around the world, the number one leadership trait for the future is creativity, followed closely by integrity.



Example: Creatively Run Meetings

Using the philosophies behind Appreciative Inquiry, a simple meeting or performance review can become a creative process. We can ask questions that fully acknowledge and appreciate members of a team, such as:

- We went around what's going well?
- What's not going well?
- What do you need or want?
- And what do you appreciate?

"I feel in the workplace it's pretty black and white. All my journaling, all my lists, I use these great colored pens and I feel the colors seem to create something totally different on the paper opposed to if it was just in regular ink."

– Seven Stones Community Call Participant

Creativity as a Devotional Practice

As we can see from this discussion, creativity—and the flow it engenders is available in every domain in our life. One way creativity is less often considered is as a practice in and of itself. At Seven Stones, we have begun to think of creativity as a devotional practice, a set of actions and habits that support our accessing wisdom, open-heartedness, higher intelligence, and knowing sufficiency, for ourselves and others. We see that it is possible to make creativity our context for our entire life, for the unique presence and focus on creative flow to be our source for building a business and living our lives.

Inquiry: How well did I love myself this week? How well did I love the softness, the beauty, the hidden and the revealed?

Creativity Inventory

- What does creativity mean to you?
- How is it present in your life personally?
- Do you see yourself as a creative?
- What are your personal creative and devotional outlets?
- What would you label in your life as your juice or nourishment that feeds your creativity? Where does it come from? How do you find it? How do you know you have it?
- What is devotion to you? Where do you have devotion throughout your day or week?
- What makes your team creative?
- Where do you find creativity at work?
- Does your work inspire creativity?
- If structure shapes reality, how does your work space help or hinder your creative juices or your devotional practice?
- How does the structure of your day, your routines, help or hinder your creative and devotional practices?

"I am committed to bringing beauty around my home and creating it as a sacred place and I'm designing the garden. And it's a place where these leaders come to be sourced and are inspired and even write books."

– Seven Stones Community Call Participant



Ideas to Inspire

In a Seven Stones Community Call, the participants generated a list of ideas to support their personal and professional creative and devotional lives. What would you add to the list?

Personal practices to create context for creative living:

- Quiet/Listening
- Movement
- Media Fast & Electronic Vacation
- Establishing routines/habits
- Find a buddy—she may be sitting next to you
- Being Open to new things
- Hitting the reset button when you need it
- Completion rituals
- Visioning—creating for the future
- Create an alter and sit by it

Tactics to enhance a creative process:

- Collage
- Free, or direct, writing
- Mind mapping
- Post-it notes
- Inquiry & reflection
- Using colored pens
- Media fast
- Notes of completion

“Get a bunch of things out in random sequence and just play around with whatever is coming up from that. Sometimes you see two things side by side that you would have never thought of. You can kind of make it your own. Making it fun (with) all these little pieces of paper kind of float to each other”

– Seven Stones Community Call Participant

ABOUT SEVEN STONES

Seven Stones is a leadership journeys company founded by Gina LaRoche and Jennifer Cohen in 2009. Our learning programs, coaching practice, organizational consulting engagements and groundbreaking thought leadership work are all designed to help bring about a world that is loving, courageous and just. We pursue this vision primarily by shifting the paradigm from one of scarcity to one of Sustainable Abundance® in the individuals, organizations and communities with whom we work.

