

# upskill

21 KEYS TO PROFESSIONAL GROWTH



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Crown House Publishing Limited  
[www.crownhouse.co.uk](http://www.crownhouse.co.uk)

First published by

Crown House Publishing Ltd  
Crown Buildings, Bancyfelin, Carmarthen, Wales, SA33 5ND, UK  
[www.crownhouse.co.uk](http://www.crownhouse.co.uk)

and

Crown House Publishing Company LLC  
PO Box 2223, Williston, VT 05495, USA  
[www.crownhousepublishing.com](http://www.crownhousepublishing.com)

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First published 2018.

Keys image [iStock.com/smartboy10](https://www.iStock.com/smartboy10).

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British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data

A catalogue entry for this book is available from the British Library.

Print ISBN 978-178583352-6  
Mobi ISBN 978-178583372-4  
ePub ISBN 978-178583373-1  
ePDF ISBN 978-178583374-8  
LCCN 2018954980

Printed and bound in the UK by  
TJ International, Padstow, Cornwall

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# Creativity and Innovation

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People who adopt a creative mindset look beyond the first right answer by generating a range of alternative approaches and ideas. Typically, they can identify imaginative solutions and will question traditional assumptions. These individuals are able to uncover different avenues and opportunities when faced with unfamiliar situations. They make connections between ideas and are likely to recognise patterns and relationships. Curious by nature, they can suspend judgement and tolerate ambiguity in the workplace. More inclined to solve problems through collaborative enterprise, they are likely to be a catalyst for the introduction of new possibilities and directions. Capable of combining a number of established approaches to create innovative solutions, they will often focus on the practical application of novel ideas.



## Ideas for personal development

*You can't use up creativity. The more you use, the more you have.*

**Maya Angelou**

### Tools

- Capture all your ideas – write things down. As soon as we have over five or six items on our mind, things begin to drop off and be lost. Use popular apps such as Evernote to make sure you never forget an important idea.

- **Micro-manage.** Microfiction is a form of writing which involves developing ultra-short stories of only 100 to 300 words. The approach allows you to develop your creativity skills through the creation of simple narratives without having to set scenes or build character. There are lots of online microfiction groups you can join, such as [100wordstory.org](http://100wordstory.org), to receive feedback on your work and encourage your inner creative. If you struggle with the process of writing, try out one of the many writing productivity apps, such as Prolifiko, to set goals and track your progress.

## Techniques

- ▲ Be an observer of everyday problems. Define each problem as clearly as you can – be specific. Identify potential causes, then look for possible solutions.
- ▲ Read as much as you can (exercise the brain), read as little as you can (rest the brain). Back and forth. Back and forth. When exercising, pick up a copy of *A Technique for Producing Ideas* by James Webb Young to help you develop some original solutions.<sup>71</sup>
- ▲ Learn to be child-like (not childish). Play more and defer decision making for as long as possible. Embrace the principle that if at first the idea is not absurd, then there is no hope for it.
- ▲ Relax – use displacement activities. Stretch and relax like a concertina. Exercise can boost original thought patterns and help you to come up with a greater number of solutions to problems. Try new experiences and undertake new challenges to promote creativity. Change your environment and physiology to see things in a new way.
- ▲ Recognise that your rational, logical brain is slower to wake in the morning, so spend the first few minutes of every day in a state of relaxed attention and see if you can generate new ideas. Try using Julia Cameron's Morning Pages ritual to get your creative juices flowing by writing down longhand three uncensored pages of whatever comes into your mind shortly after you wake each morning.<sup>72</sup>

- ▲ Be sarcastic. This sounds too crazy to work, but it has been found that the dual meanings found in sarcasm can actually increase your ability to solve creative problems.<sup>73</sup>

## Inspiration

- + Watch Elizabeth Gilbert's TED Talk 'Your Elusive Creative Genius'.<sup>74</sup> When you know where your creative genius lives, discover how to foster more of it by watching the most popular TED Talk of all time, 'Do Schools Kill Creativity?' by Sir Ken Robinson.<sup>75</sup>
- + Listen to classical music. While the 'Mozart effect' may only be beneficial to children and developing brains, classical music fires many more synapses in the brain than popular music and may help you to relax.<sup>76</sup> Try out some baroque music such as Vivaldi's *The Four Seasons* or Pachelbel's 'Canon' to get your creative juices flowing.



## Ideas for delivering results

*The other day I was walking my dog around the building on the ledge. Some people are afraid of heights. Not me, I am afraid of widths.*

**Stephen Wright**

## Tools

- Go on a Six Hats Thinking course by the de Bono Group – or better still, train to become an accredited practitioner and teach others how to use a variety of different approaches to solve everyday business problems.<sup>77</sup>

- Use SCAMPER as a checklist for asking questions and testing assumptions.<sup>78</sup> This activity-based thinking process is an acronym to help people think of unusual ideas. It involves asking the following questions: how can I Substitute this product, problem or process? Combine it? Adjust it? Modify it? Put it to other uses? Eliminate it? Rearrange it?
- Never forget an idea. Verbalising your goals helps your brain to process information in a different way. Alternatively, send voice notes to your colleagues using an app like Braintoss in just two taps.

## Techniques

- ▲ Emphasise quantity over quality. Avoid adopting the first expedient solution to a problem. Look for the third, the ninth, the sixteenth. Fill your bucket with as many unlikely ideas as you can. Ask – the way you ask the question determines the answer you get. Keep asking why. Ask for more ideas, more images, more alternatives.
- ▲ Compartmentalise your thinking. Copy Walt Disney, who used three different rooms for three different processes: the dreamer room, the realist room and the spoiler/critic room. Three separate steps at separate times, with no overlap.
- ▲ Become a peripatetic. Follow Aristotle's lead and practise thinking while you walk. Search out behavioural scientist Marily Opezzo's five-minute TED Talk entitled 'Want to Be More Creative? Go for a Walk' to discover simple steps you can take to harness the power of walking to enhance your creativity.<sup>79</sup>
- ▲ Become a beginner – learn something new like hula hooping, wood carving or dancing, or why not try out a new language for free at [duolingo.com](https://www.duolingo.com). Practise your drawing skills. Sketching an idea is often more natural than writing. Envisage how your problem may look at a future desired state – draw what this would look like.



- ▲ Use the random entry method to stimulate new thinking. By applying unconnected input you can open up new lines of thinking. Gather unexpected stimuli using nouns from any book by opening random pages, then use each word selected blindly to create associations with your current challenge. Identify other random words and repeat.
- ▲ Apply the reversal technique. What factors would make your problem worse? Next, reverse these to identify ways to improve the situation.
- ▲ Practise not knowing. The first ideas we come up with are usually based on memories – ordinary ideas we are familiar with that can be tweaked. Creative ideas usually require additional input. Mix it up. Get someone else's opinion. Being around people who are unfamiliar and different to us makes us more innovative, diligent and harder-working.
- ▲ Use obstacles to improve performance. People recall more of what they have read when it is printed in smaller, less legible type.<sup>80</sup> Sometimes we need disruption to solve the problem.
- ▲ Try sticking to a strict schedule. Most creative minds religiously schedule their time. Ernest Hemingway rose at 6am every day and worked solidly until his midday break. Psychologist William James observed that an effective schedule allows us to 'free our minds to advance to really interesting fields of action'.
- ▲ Read more – acquire knowledge, ideas and strategies. In *The Miracle Morning*, Hal Elrod recommends reading just ten pages per day.<sup>81</sup> This only equates to about ten to fifteen minutes of reading in twenty-four hours, yet adds up to 3,650 pages or around eighteen books a year! Make your reading count by making a note of two things: lessons learned and any new commitments you will make.
- ▲ Compare the creativity levels of others by using the alternative uses test. How many uses can they think of for various inanimate objects in two minutes – a drawing pin, a razor blade, a toilet roll?
- ▲ Think *inside* the box. Imposing seemingly unreasonable constraints can often inspire greater creativity. Dr. Seuss found that setting limits to his work led to one of the most popular children's books in history. *Green Eggs and Ham* was the result of a bet that he wouldn't be able to write a book using only fifty

words. He replicated this approach for other books – *The Cat in the Hat* was written using only first grade vocabulary. Creating boundaries can sometimes stop you drowning in a sea of possibilities.

- ▲ Take it lying down. Evidence suggests that our ability to solve creative problems may actually increase when we are flat on our back.<sup>82</sup> Researchers at the Australian National University discovered that volunteers were faster at solving anagrams lying down as compared to when they were standing. Warning: long-term use of this unconventional strategy may prove to be counterproductive, especially if you are feeling sleepy!
- ▲ Leave something undone. At the end of the day, leave a problem slightly unfinished so your subconscious mind can work on it overnight.

## Inspiration

- + While silence is best for focus, ambient noise levels (not loud) have been found to improve creative thinking.<sup>83</sup> Brian Eno's *Music for Airports* is often cited as one of the best examples of ambient music.
- + Grab a copy of *Originals* by Adam Grant and discover how non-conformists move the world: 'Being original doesn't require being first. It just means being different and better.'<sup>84</sup>
- + Be a little boring. In her book *Bored and Brilliant*, Manoush Zomorodi suggests the more times we have to switch our attention, the higher our stress levels go.<sup>85</sup> Instead, switch off, get bored and discover your most brilliant ideas. Watch her TED Talk 'How Boredom Can Lead to Your Most Brilliant Ideas' to learn how this works.<sup>86</sup>



## Ideas for long-term gain

*Creativity is thinking up new things. Innovation is doing new things.*

**Theodore Levitt**

### Tools

- Fuse ideas – things that don't normally go together. Invest in a Creative Whack Pack by Roger Von Oech or a set of Oblique Strategies by rock producer Brian Eno. Both decks of cards encourage you to look at things from a different viewpoint.
- Tap into collective intelligence and gather multiple ideas. InnoCentive is one example of an open innovation and crowdsourcing website.

### Techniques

- ▲ Challenge the notion that creativity is a single thing – a moment of blinding inspiration. Eureka moments are very rare. Most great ideas are cobbled together and require preparation and persistence.
- ▲ Trial and error usually triumphs. Real-world research and rapid prototyping has consistently been found to be more successful than leaving creativity to the lone genius.
- ▲ Learn to suspend judgement and tolerate ambiguity. The ability to embrace paradoxes can increase creativity levels. Test yourself by checking out the Epimenides paradox,<sup>87</sup> and then help your colleagues to acknowledge that contradicting concepts can often complement each other.
- ▲ Widen the spectrum. PayPal founder Peter Thiel makes a point of deliberately hiring staff with autism and Asperger's to encourage the exploration of more innovative ideas – thus reducing the potential for what he calls 'herd-like thinking'.

- ▲ Netflix and chill. Traditional hierarchical cultures may disenfranchise people and stifle levels of innovation. Emulate the successes of organisations like Netflix and Spotify by making it easier for employees to develop and action new ideas by introducing flatter structures with fewer management levels.
- ▲ Parade creative ideas and reward others for innovative practices. Demonstrate an enthusiasm for innovation in the team.

## Inspiration

- + Buy or blag a copy of *Thinking, Fast and Slow* by the Nobel Prize winning Daniel Kahneman.<sup>88</sup>
- + Forget about brainstorming. New research suggests that the adoption of a 'no idea is a bad idea' approach may actually stifle creativity.<sup>89</sup> As an alternative, watch Linda Hill's TED Talk on 'How to Manage for Collective Creativity' to help you develop a 'marketplace of ideas' by focusing on constructive debates.<sup>90</sup>



## Related work skills

Commercial Thinking (2), Commitment to Change and Adaptation (3), Effective Planning and Organisation (7), Intuitive Thought (11), Motivation to Succeed (12), Positive Decisions (15), Results through Action (18), Specialist Knowledge and Ability (19), Teamwork and Collaboration (20).

# About the Author

Chris Watson is an award-winning specialist in the promotion of adaptive management skills who founded Endor Learn & Develop in 2002 following a successful career in publishing and higher education. He provides fresh, practical ideas to extend performance at work, delivering results through people for every type of organisation – from emerging small- to medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) through to multinational corporations. Drawing on his background in leadership, psychology, education and the human sciences, he has a proven track record in harnessing potential to help organisations flourish. Incurably curious about all aspects of organisational behaviour, his aim is to strengthen relationships in the workplace by sharing straightforward solutions which people can relate to on a personal level.

As an active member of the national learning and development community, Chris writes for the *Business Matters* publication and is a regular blogger at the Knowledge Bank. A chartered member of the Institute of Personnel and Development, he has an honours degree in psychology and a master's in human resource management. As a keynote speaker, facilitator and coach, Chris regularly presents at regional Chartered Management Institute events, business conferences and HR forums. More recently, he has collaborated with a number of institutions to support employability initiatives and has launched an innovative toolkit for young people on the language of work.

Chris lives in sleepy Lincolnshire in the UK with his wife and four children. In his spare time he enjoys watching stand-up comedy, eating spicy tacos and listening to Nick Cave albums (although rarely at the same time). He is always interested in exploring new ideas to extend the performance of people. If you have any great suggestions for developing any of the adaptive skills listed in this book, drop him a line at: [hello@endorlearning.com](mailto:hello@endorlearning.com).

# Endor Learn & Develop

Established in 2002, Endor have a proven track record in extending employee capability and commitment within every type of organisation – from emerging SMEs and not-for-profit organisations through to multinational companies. Our aim is to strengthen relationships in the workplace and beyond by delivering practical ideas which people can relate to on a personal level. As specialists in the development of adaptive skills, we focus on supporting the core set of behaviours and abilities most valued by today's employers and offer actionable approaches which can be applied across a wide range of different jobs and industries to build flexibility and extend employees' performance in role.

## What we do

- Training in adaptive work skills
- Management development
- Behaviour-based learning
- Collaborative team working
- Employee engagement
- Facilitation and feedback
- Personal development profiles
- Psychometric testing
- Innovative learning resources

## What our clients say

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**Operations Director, Innovate Logistics**

'In tune with the latest ideas and trends.'

**Human Resources Manager, Agrial Fresh Produce Ltd**

'They have made a real difference to our business.'

**Managing Director, Merrick and Day Ltd**

'The emphasis on applied techniques is both engaging and informative'

**Head of Service, York City Council**

'The leadership programme really helped us to understand ourselves'

**Head of Human Resources, Hodgson Sealants Ltd**

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