

# Creative Thinking — Fad or Function?

Tom Kuby

In many companies throughout the United States today, mere mention of the words, "Creative Thinking" causes frowns and raised eyebrows from serious-minded businessmen. They view the techniques as some sort of foolish fad—certainly not worthy of their attention, much less participation. This is unfortunate because creative thinking can offer most businessmen many concrete benefits.

Creative thinking is the catalyst of imagination—the mainspring of the mind that triggers ideas, wild and fanciful, free and unrestrained, without the squelching bites of negative thinking. Only after the cogs have cranked out a multitude of ideas and suggestions for solution to a problem; then judgment takes over and stamps out the impractical which can run as high as 85 percent. But generally it just takes one good, useful, creative idea to solve a problem. It stands

to reason that the more alternatives you have, the greater are your chances for coming up with a winner. And very often, the seemingly ridiculous or so-called poor suggestions can turn out to be highly practical after evaluating the tentative ideas.

In spite of the resistance by some leaders of industry to permit "such a radical deviation from present practice," this way of thinking is becoming increasingly popular today. Ideas that are fresh, bold, new and daring are sorely needed by industry today in order to stay in business or remain competitive. Ideas lead to innovation; innovation means progress.

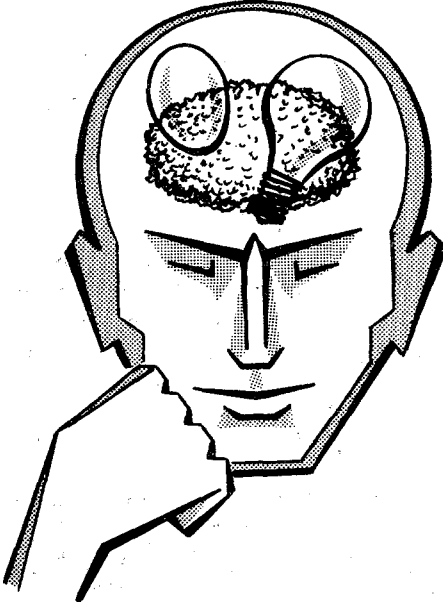
## Courses Available

As examples of the increasing popularity of creative thinking classes, courses and seminars, *Advertising Age* magazine sponsors a 3½ day workshop in July each year, primarily for

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copywriters. The University of Buffalo annually stages a week-long seminar for businessmen in June. The State University College at Oswego, New York, has launched a Quest for Creativity symposium for anyone interested in attending at a very nominal rate.



*Creative Thinking Process* is symbolized in this illustration. The sponge represents *saturation*, gathering all the facts and pertinent data; *incubation*, wherein the subconscious takes over, and *illumination*, that sudden flash of genius or insight into the problem.

Many progressive organizations such as TRW, General Electric, General Motors and Martin Marietta Corporation have continuing courses in creative thinking for their engineers, designers, middle management and salaried personnel. The Creative Education Foundation in Buffalo reports there are 4,176 references on the nature and nurture of creativity today; 71 percent of these publications have

appeared within the past 15 years.

A course in creative thinking enhances an individual's self-development and advancement opportunities. For one thing, it teaches him to look for alternatives. Applied to his job, he can certainly discover ways to perform it better and more economically. As Thomas Edison said, "There's a way to do it better, find it."

### Not A Panacea

According to creative thinking expert Charles Whiting, "Creative thinking programs have proved successful in hundreds of organizations. Any failures have been due either to a poor understanding of the true purpose of the program, or because of the grandiose, unrealistic promises claimed for them by some overzealous proponent."

"Creative thinking should not be regarded as a panacea," says Whiting. "It cannot perform miracles. Much of the present problem of gaining acceptance of intelligent management and academic circles stems directly from unrealistic claims made for training in creative thinking by a few enthusiasts."

On the other hand, Whiting and other experts tell of the widespread benefits of exposure to the technique. According to a series of scientific studies conducted at the University of Buffalo at which some 350 subjects participated, those who had taken courses in creative thinking averaged 94 percent improvement in idea production skill. Moreover, the studies revealed that in self-confidence, initiative, and related qualities of leadership, the students who took a course surpassed the controlled subjects.

### Critical vs. Creative Ability

The big problem today, psychologists have found, is that most people never exercise their creative ability.

They let this power wither through lack of use. Nearly everyone is highly creative in his childhood, but becomes less imaginative from adolescence on. This loss of creativity early in life is attributed to the disciplines of learning. Exhaustive research conducted at the University of Minnesota confirmed this theory. It showed that the pressures of living tend to sharpen our critical ability at the expense of our imaginative talent unless we deliberately do something to conserve and develop the imaginative talent with which we were born.

**Inhibiting Barriers**

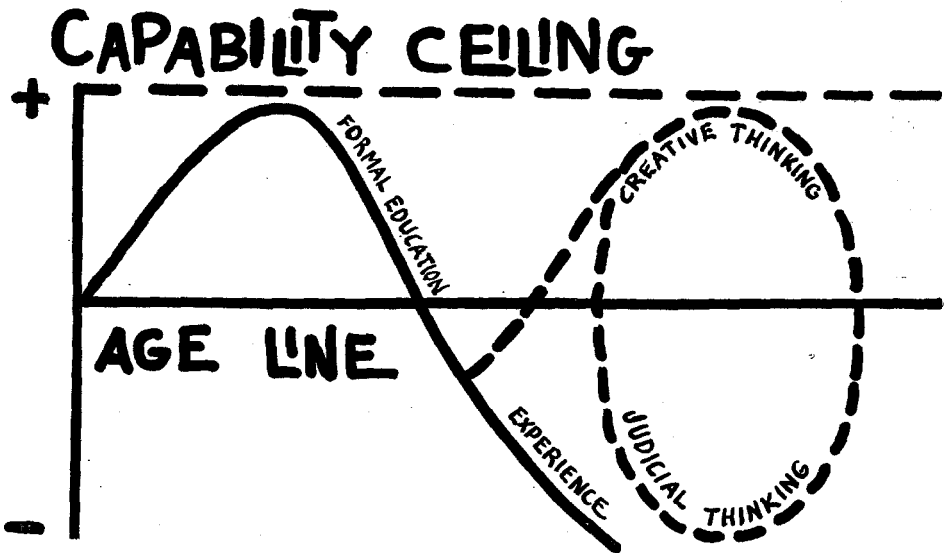
Among the ways we can tap our creative reservoir is to recognize the barriers that inhibit or destroy our ability to think creatively. They include a lack of self-confidence, fear of failing in a situation, and anxiety

over self-esteem. By recognizing these barriers in ourselves and learning how to overcome them or put them in their proper perspective, we can greatly reduce their damaging effect on our creative ability.

We can tap our creative potential by developing the characteristics and qualities of the creative individual. Among others, they include: problem sensitivity, fluency—the ability to generate alternatives, flexibility, and originality—the ability to conceive something new that will become acceptable.

**Problem-Solving Procedures**

The creative problem solving procedures include clearly defining the problem. Using ten words or less insures exact problem statement. Researching the problem thoroughly is the next step, gathering all the facts and pertinent data, then applying



From adolescence on, we tend to grow less and less creative unless we deliberately do something to conserve the imaginative talent with which we were born. This chart shows the decline of our creative ability as we grow older and how exercises in creative thinking can restore our imaginative talent.

imagination—letting the mind soar freely. Once the ideas are on paper, evaluation and judgment take over. Ideas are tested for feasibility from a time and cost standpoint. Finally, the best solution is adopted and executed. Action is vitally important. Ideas without action are useless.

Dr. Sidney Parnes, Director of Creative Education at the State University of New York at Buffalo, suggests keeping a record of ideas that come at any and all times, rather than only while working on a problem. He says, "Set a deadline and quota for production of ideas. Set aside certain times and places for deliberate idea-production.

"Learn the principle of deferred judgment (brainstorming)," he advises. "This calls for deliberate separation of idea-production from evaluation. In other words, during your effort to generate ideas, suspend the judicial process . . ."

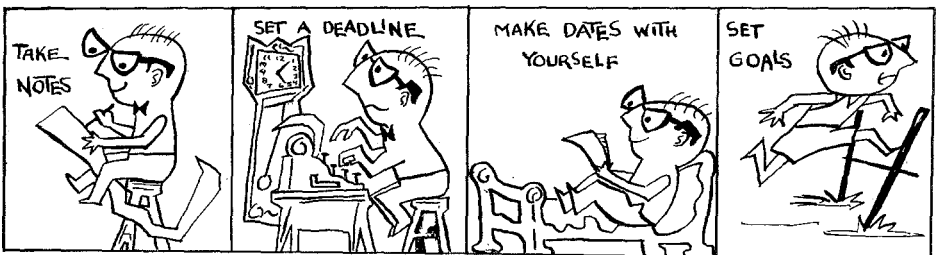
### Widely Applicable

Creative thinking, properly presented and studied, can be a valuable tool not only for management, but also for the secretary or housewife.

As Whiting points out, more and more routine tasks are turned over to machines as our life becomes increas-

ingly complex. On the other hand, creative ability is becoming more important. All of man's progress to date started with an idea. For although man has been able to devise electronic calculators or "brains" to perform amazing feats in terms of memory and repetitive routine calculations at tremendous speeds, there is no machine which can produce, correctly evaluate and implement a creative new idea. Creative ability is a unique ability of mankind.

Far from a fad, creative thinking is one of man's most ingenious functions. Dr. B. B. Goldner, Director of the School of Creative Thinking, LaSalle College, Philadelphia, says, "Of all our talents in the United States, one stands giant-like above the rest—our ability to be creative. Never have the people in any nation displayed more ingenuity and resourcefulness, more basic creativity, than those in the melting pot of the U. S. Perhaps it's because our entire concept from the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution was new, bold and creative. And we have woven the same pattern through everything we do. We are a nation of creative people. That is the secret of our greatness. It's our most potent weapon."



Four ways to add fuel to the imagination: *Taking notes* as they occur. This tends to empower association of ideas. *Set a deadline* to come up with ideas. This intensifies your emotional power. *Make dates with yourself*. You need time alone for creative thinking. *Set goals* to spur you toward creative progress.

