

Inspired Leap Consulting Inc.
Creativity: Asking the Right Questions
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Creativity: Asking the Right Questions (or Creativity the Inspired Leap™ Way)

There are many books, videos, and seminars on developing creativity, imagination, and the creative process in the workplace. My bias is toward books that develop the creative potential of the artist, without thought to whether or not that artist works in an office—for we are all creative and all have the potential to bring the soul of an artist to our jobs as well as our hobbies. The writer, producer, director, painter, or photographer has no more right to be called creative than those of us who create products, programs, communications, or relationships in an office building. Whether you *think* of yourself as creative or not does not matter—you are. That creativity may be buried or blocked, but it will find a way to get out.

At Inspired Leap, we believe it is critical to the superior productivity, morale, and health of all employees to have them develop their creativity to its highest potential. We believe the best way to do that is through intuition. That feeling in the gut, the shiver of recognition or "knowing," or the idea that pops into your head—that's intuition, or what we call intuitive intelligence. And it's the most powerful skill or "sense" you can ever develop. It is better than any education, training, or team of experts you might consult. The best part is that it's free and you own it already. That's the aspect of creativity I want to focus on now: that ***all of the creative power and intelligence you will ever need is within you right now***. You don't need one more class, seminar, book, degree, or year of experience. It is there now—all of the answers or solutions are there for you. You just need to get out of the way, or your brain needs to get out of the way.

Some of you may have heard this before or simply know this to be true. Most of you will likely be surprised and highly skeptical. But please leave your mind open a tiny bit to see if I can at least convince you that you might have all of the creative power you need within you. Now, I don't mean to say you'll want to eliminate your creative department, or that you'll never need to hire a specialist, but you will begin to feel confident in selecting the best advertising campaign, new product, or sales presentation. You'll also find it easier to develop your own creative solutions to challenges at work, and perhaps be inspired to start a new hobby.

Your intuition is your guide to this secret creative spot within you—the source of unlimited creative ideas, solutions, or images that can help lead you to the best next step for developing a product or solving a problem. Imagine that your intuition is like a PDA that when turned on taps into a network and goes to the source to retrieve the data or answers you need. You have to turn it on for it to work! You also have a few instructions—maybe even a new language—to learn before the device is truly valuable. And, like a shy child, your PDA,

or intuition, needs some concentrated and patient attention to reveal its full power and charm.

Unlike your PDA, though, your intuition may be quite rusty, if not in cold storage. That's because you're probably not encouraged to talk about or acknowledge that gut feeling, inner voice, or image that pops into your head. The reality is that most of you are making "gut" calls all the time because there is never enough time or information to make a decision without using some judgment. However, if you don't cultivate your intuition, it will disappear—like that shy child—when you want it around and likely need it most.

Most discussions centered on developing creativity in the workplace focus on sparking your imagination. While strengthening your ability to use your imagination is important work, it is *not* the same as developing your intuition. Imagination and intuition are two very different things. The best definition I've seen of the important differences between the two comes from Michele Cassou in her book *Point Zero: Creativity Without Limits*:

Imagination uses what is stored in the conscious warehouse of experience and rearranges or reorganizes it in inventive ways. It is a thinking process. Intuition, on the other hand, comes directly from the vast ocean of not knowing. It comes up with the unexpected and the nonverbal. It lives beyond the reaches of the mind and carries the voice of feelings and spirit. [p. 151]

Because imagination is a thinking process, it is what many businesspeople are most comfortable working on to inspire new product ideas or to solve problems. But look at the definitions again. *New ideas can only come from your intuition—not your imagination.*

How do you cultivate your intuitive powers? How do you know it's really your intuition and not indigestion or your monkey-mind (non-stop chatter in your head) performing tricks? The answer is simple—you ask the right questions and pay attention. Yes, that's it. Of course, it's a lot easier said than done because we have trained ourselves or have been taught that our brains are the seat of all intelligence and the way to a solution to a problem. Many in the corporate world certainly believe this. With the exception of those "weird" creatives (designers, copywriters, artists, and so on) who we carefully separate from the rest of the organization, business is about tapping into the mind. But, what if the *real* mind—the universal mind and the source of all inspiration—was only available through your soul, and not your brain?

Take a few moments now to remember times when you *felt* or just *knew* something. Did you follow up on the hunch or image, or did you ignore it? Really spend some time on this. The more examples you can pull from your memory, the more you'll realize a few things:

1. You are already intuitive, whether you think of yourself that way or not,
2. Regrets typically follow ignoring your intuition, and
3. Going with your "gut" invariably leads to success.

We've all seen the commercials with the image of a tiny devil on one shoulder shouting in someone's ear to "do it" (whatever bad thing "it" might be) and a guardian angel on the other

shoulder whispering "don't do it." Well, think of your intuition as the smartest, most loyal, invisible best friend you can imagine. It's so powerful that it doesn't just whisper in both ears—it shoots up your spine, whirls around in your stomach, raises the hair on your arms, and "pops" thoughts in your head—whatever it takes to enable you to hear its wisdom. Personally, I imagine your intuition is doing back flips all around you in excitement that maybe, just maybe, you're finally going to start paying plenty of attention to it. It will reward you at work and at home for the attention you give it and will very likely become your best friend (now you'll think twice before laughing at your five-year-old son's imaginary friend!).

Armed with this knowledge, let's look at creating the optimal environment for your intuition, so that when you ask it questions, it will respond quickly and clearly.

Creating the Right Environment for Intuition to Flourish

(All of these practices may be done individually, or as part of a team idea-generating process)

- **Pay Attention.** Practice paying close attention to your body, feelings, and thoughts. Initially, this is hard to do because we're all so outwardly focused. However, it is critical to look within to nurture your intuition (I know this sounds "touchy-feely," but be open to the possibility that by doing these things, you will actually become stronger and more powerful than you ever imagined. This is *not* an activity for wimps!). The better you understand how your body sends you signals, the feelings that correspond to those signals, and the thoughts or mental dialogue that flows through you, the easier it will be to know when your intuition is trying to speak to you.
- **Do Nothing.** Set aside five to 15 minutes a day—at work—to spend sitting quietly doing nothing. Close your eyes and concentrate on your breathing. If closing your eyes is too uncomfortable at the office, then focus your eyes on an image (that's what our Quiet Room is for at inspiredleap.com). Forget about trying to empty your mind. Just notice the thoughts running through your head. ***If you're noticing your thoughts, it means that you—the real you—can observe your mind and choose whether or not to listen to it.*** The whole idea is to notice with all of your senses what is going on at any time with your body, emotions, and thoughts. This is next to impossible to do without prior practice while you are alone. That's why the few minutes of silence alone each day are so critical. After a lot of **practice**, you'll be able to know when your intuition is working in the middle of an intense meeting. Until then, take time out to allow it to speak to you without any other distractions.
- **Ask Questions—Make Your Intuition Work for You.** After taking a few days to focus on the two activities above, add five more minutes to whatever time you've been setting aside to do nothing. Now ask your intuition a question. What problem are you struggling with that needs a fresh, new perspective? Are you heading into a meeting and need some guidance beforehand? Are you trying to decide what to do about a difficult employee? Whatever the question might be, just ask. Then, thank your intuition (in your head or in a whisper) for giving you the answer quickly and clearly. Sit quietly and see what pops into your head. If worries about all the things you have to do start coming in, just bring your focus back to your breathing or to the image you

normally look at. If nothing comes to you, still say thank you and that you expect the answer shortly. Take one last deep breath and go about your business for the rest of the day. No matter how foolish you feel initially, you will soon be amazed at how much calmer and more productive you are, simply by doing this. If you stay with this practice, the answers will start to come to you quickly.

- **Give Your Intuition Some Help.** Use questions to keep probing at whatever issue you or your team may have. You're looking for questions that unlock your intuition and "pop" answers or images into your head, so you can say "ah-ha—that's it!" This can be done in a team situation or on your own. If the questions get zany, stay with it. There's a reason your mind went off in that direction. Don't dismiss the goofy stuff. That might be where the ultimate solution comes from. For example:

If Susan has a new product team charged with coming up with a major product launch, she might want to initially name it *Wonder Product 2004* and have the team write the name across a pad of paper. Each team member silently starts to write down questions they'd ask about this product (What does it do? Why is it a wonder product?). Using whatever images pop into their heads, they should ask more questions, even if they get silly (Why is it purple? Why do we need to use metal instead of plastic?). Give people enough time to start to squirm and feel uncomfortable. Often, breakthroughs happen just when you can't stand to sit there another minute or can't possibly come up with another question. Remember, you are ultimately looking for images or ideas to enter your mind, and the questions are a way to inspire those images or thoughts to "jump in."

Before sharing images or thoughts, have everyone share their questions, leaving out only those that exactly duplicate questions mentioned by others. Put the most provocative questions on a whiteboard and give yourselves another 10 to 15 minutes to ask more questions. Use the images or ideas that came out of the question process as a launch into your brainstorming session.

- **Walk It Out.** Take a walk to get rid of negative energy and get your mind out of the way. There is something about walking—especially in nature—that gives your soul and intuitive intelligence a chance to be activated. In times of intense stress, force yourself to walk outside, no matter what the weather or how busy the streets. As you start your walk, silently ask a question, ask for help, or pray for support or guidance—whatever you feel a need to do at that moment—and just start walking. Give yourself 20 minutes to do this and you'll be amazed at how much calmer you feel and how much easier it is to "hear" what your intuition is trying to tell you.
 - If your mind is on hyper-drive and is still making you crazy, write down an affirmation, such as I am safe, Everything happens for my highest good, or I am an outstanding speaker (public speaking is among many people's greatest fears). Who cares if you feel silly doing this initially? The idea is to shut off, for

even a few moments, the worry/panic/fear tape that's spinning in your head. You need to be able to do this in order to sense or hear what your intuition is trying to tell you about next steps regarding the problem, presentation, or meeting.

- In her classic book on writing, *If You Want to Write*, author Brenda Ueland talks about the importance of walking in the present moment and not treating the experience as fast-paced exercise:

But if when I walk I look at the sky or the lake or the tiny, infinitesimally delicate, bare, young trees, or wherever I want to look, and my neck and jaw are loose and I feel happy and say to myself with my imagination, "I am free," and "There is nothing to hurry about," **I find then that thoughts begin to come to me in their quiet way. My explanation of it is that when I walk in a carefree way, without straining to get to my destination, then I am living in the present. And it is only then that the creative power flourishes.** [p. 43, emphasis added]

- In her latest book on creativity, *Walking in the World*, author Julia Cameron (*The Artist's Way* is her best-known book on the creative process), is so convinced of the power of walking that her title reflects it, and she has added a weekly 20-minute walk to the commitments you must make (along with writing three pages every morning and taking a weekly artist date) when you participate in her new 12-week program:

Most of us spend life on the run, too busy and too hurried to walk anywhere. Beset by problems and difficulties, we feel walking is a frivolous waste of time-our valuable time. "When will I do it?" becomes one more problem, one more question for our busy mind. **The truth is that walking holds our solutions.** [p. 10, emphasis added]

These are just a few ways to begin to develop your intuitive intelligence and have it play a much more significant role in creating new ideas, products, or solutions to problems. The benefits of incorporating these practices even once in an idea-generating session will be readily apparent. I recently coordinated and led most of a four-hour brainstorming session for a nonprofit organization. The energy in the room remained high the entire time and exciting "stretch" ideas and visions came out of the event. Immediately afterwards, numerous people came up to me and said it was "the best meeting I've ever attended." The secret of keeping these people engaged and energized for four hours was to use a combination of the ideas discussed above. It is easy to feel it's a "waste" to spend precious meeting time on meditation (or quiet time), visualization, and a walk for a break, but these practices get everyone's intuition activated and keep the energy in the room moving.

In addition, just prior to leaving Sierra On-Line, Inc., I led an off-site brainstorming session for the SierraHome marketing department. Variations on what I've discussed here were

incorporated, and the energy level and ideas generated were similarly high caliber. What made this even more remarkable is that the attendees were those remaining after a layoff of half of the division. Obviously, morale was low and pressure to develop new ideas was high. The vice president of marketing took the energy and ideas generated at the off-site to lead the group to exceed sales and profit goals for the year.

Sometimes relatively expensive off-sites are necessary because that's the only time employees seem to be able to give themselves permission to schedule: 1) official break times; 2) leisurely, relaxing meals; 3) creative activities to get imagination and intuition working; and 4) a location with easy access to the calming effects of nature. Imagine the consistently high quality of ideas generated and the money saved if these practices were incorporated as a regular part of doing business.

Finally, practicing these activities will have an important side benefit of bringing more joy and color into your life. The simple pleasures, such as remembering the gift before you leave for the party (as you get into the car, the thought "pops" into your head that the gift is on the kitchen counter), noticing the magnificent oak tree on your route to work for the very first time, or hearing the joyous melody of the birds as you walk your dog, start to make your day much brighter. These little things happen frequently when you start to pay attention to what's going on around you and to what you are thinking, feeling, and sensing.

If you get stuck and can't seem to hear or feel what your intuition is telling you, CREATE by doing the following:

Close your door and spend a few minutes sitting quietly,

Remember to pay attention to every thought, feeling, and sensation in your mind and body,

Envision your best friend whispering the solution in your ear and wait to hear it,

Ask questions until an image or thought "pops" into your head that will lead you to your answer,

Trust that you are the only one who can block your intuition, so you have the power to let it flow again, and

Expect the answers to come and they will!

When coworkers ask how you're able to calmly and quickly come up with so many new ideas or unique suggestions for how to resolve a problem, you can tell them what you've been doing or simply say, "I've been focusing a lot better on the task at hand and that seems to do the trick." The power of your intuition can be your secret or a skill to be shared with others. You're the only one who knows what is right to do in your office, but I hope you'll find a way to pass on the gifts that strong intuitive intelligence brings.

Sources for this report and recommended reading:

Julia Cameron, *The Artist's Way*, G.P. Putnam's Sons, New York, 1992.

Julia Cameron, *Walking in This World*, Jeremy P. Tarcher/Putnam, New York, 2002.

Michele Cassou, *Point Zero: Creativity Without Limits*, Jeremy P. Tarcher/Putnam, New York, 2001.

Brenda Ueland, *If You Want to Write*, G.P. Putnam's Sons, New York, 1938 and 1987 (Estate of Brenda Ueland).