

# CREATIVITY ISN'T LEARNED. IT'S CULTIVATED



# CREATIVITY IS A MINDSET, NOT A SKILL SET. THE DAY I REALIZED THAT IS THE DAY MY LIFE CHANGED FOREVER.

Creativity exists in many forms, and I never considered myself a fit for any of its definitions.

Growing up, I was always a linear person. If a, then b. Do this, get that. In order and in the way it was “supposed” to be done. I was the classic combo of rule following meets people pleasing. I played it safe. I studied hard, got good grades, and stuck with commitments long after the enjoyment factor expired. I worked in corporate America for nearly a decade and was slowly climbing the ladder, one promotion and 3% pay raise at a time. I never believed I “had what it took” to do it any differently. So I didn’t even try.

Until I took a vacation.

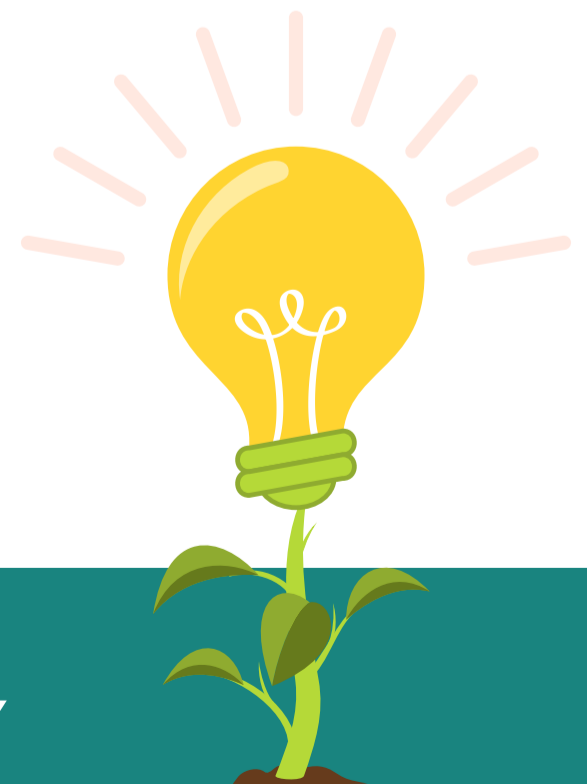
As the child of a workaholic, I did not appreciate the importance of rest until I experienced it firsthand. It’s amazing what your brain can do when afforded time and space. It was on this vacation (aka my honeymoon) that I realized I did have big ideas, grand visions, and a

creative brain. I was just too deep in the weeds of work and entrenched in my own narrative to realize it.

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hat I learned during that time is that creativity is all about one’s approach

to life. Creativity isn’t something you have or don’t have. It’s something you develop and nurture over time. Like anything in life, it’s a practice. It requires the ever illustrious and very delicate balance between devoting just enough without focusing so much that it stifles the creative process.



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So how do you do that? Over the years, I have honed a six-step self-care practice and adopted it to fuel my entrepreneurial creativity:

## 1. Food = Fuel

Your gut is your second brain, and how you nourish it matters. Several studies demonstrate that gut health is directly linked to cognitive processing.

According to a study by UCLA researcher Fernando Gomez-Pinilla, “Food is like a pharmaceutical compound that affects the brain,” and the consumption of natural foods, fruits and vegetables, and less sugar will increase blood flow to bolster creativity.

Adopting an anti-inflammatory diet has helped to keep my brain sharp, my energy high, and my creative wheels turning. Conversely, when I stray from my preferred way of eating, I experience lethargy, brain fog, mood shifts, and my creativity tanks.

## 2. Exercise = Energy

Exercise is like my personal time out. It’s a chance for me to step away from the chaos of kids and the computer screen and to carve out time for myself. Exercise is not only good for your body, it’s also good for your brain. Exercise releases several brain-boosting chemicals.

According to Wendy Suzuki at the NYU Center for Neural Science, “aerobic exercise stimulates something called Brain Derived Neurotrophic Factor (BDNF), which encourages the growth of new brain cells in the hippocampus, a region of the brain that plays a role in long-term memory and in imagining new situations, and thus, thinking creatively.”

Exercise also produces the “happy hormone,” endorphins, and personally I’m in

a better place to create and innovate in this state. Exercise also prevents loss of age-related brain volume and keeps the brain more resilient and adaptable.

So next time you’ve hit a roadblock in your work, take a break, hit the gym, and return to your life and work happier and more productive.

## 3. Sleep = Sanity

For many years, I thought lack of sleep was a badge of honor. A sign of a real mover and shaker. I was too “busy” to sleep. That’s until I realized that sleep deprivation is a form of torture that I had inflicted on myself over a period of years.

Lack of sleep does not inspire the creative process. Sleep is a necessary reset and is essential for physical and mental restoration and wellness. It’s a time to process everything happening in your day (aka “consolidation”). Moreover, REM sleep helps the brain connect unrelated ideas, which aids in creative problem solving. According to a UC San Diego study, 40% of participants scored better on a creativity test after REM sleep. So next time someone tells you to “sleep on it,” take their advice!

## 4. Connection = Creation

Human beings need human connection. I find real value in stepping away from the screen to spend time with real live people. I participate in entrepreneurs’ groups and love attending events where I can connect with others who are also thinking big and pursuing their dreams.

There is something contagious about hanging around with creative people. Whether that’s a casual conversation with someone I meet at a cocktail party or coffee shop, connecting with other creative people inspires and fuels the creative mindset.

## 5. Unplug

Yes, connect and unplug are both on my list. Connect with others. Disconnect from technology.

There is a time and a place for everything, and in general, the less time I spend in front of a screen the better. Vacations are restorative but unplugging doesn't have to mean a week on the beach sipping umbrella cocktails. Just unplugging from social media or the computer for a day or a weekend can be tremendously restorative. It reduces feelings of envy, loneliness, and FOMO, shifting those feelings to ones of gratitude.

Deepak Chopra says, "Gratitude opens the door to...the power, the wisdom, the creativity of the universe."

Moreover, the level of multitasking that tends to happen when you are "plugged in" has a direct negative effect on creativity. A study published in the journal PLOS One shows that spending four nature-filled days, away from electronic devices, was linked with 50% higher scores on a test for creativity. Take a break. Take a hike. It will pay dividends



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## 6. Write It Down

Creativity strikes at random times, and usually when you least expect it. Driving in the car, in the middle of a workout, or in those moments just as you are drifting off to sleep.

I always have Post-its, a notebook, or the Notes app on my phone ready to write down whatever comes my way. I have to get it out of the head and down on paper so I can free up more space for creative thinking. Otherwise my linear side takes over and I obsess about the fact that I may forget the idea, stifling future creativity.

Write it down, even if it seems silly or small. Those ideas are the building blocks for greatness.

Mindset is the path to creativity, and creativity is essential for entrepreneurship. Everyone has the potential for creativity. Acknowledging it is the first step to unlocking it.

Adapting one's lifestyle is the way to continually access it. As it turns out, I had the tools in the toolbelt all along. I just needed to shift from a fixed mindset to one that would let me grow in any direction I choose.



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