

Flowing Creatively

By Debbie Ellison

Reprinted from "The Faux Finisher" magazine, Winter 2002

"Creativity is the firing of my soul." This is how Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, one of the creative geniuses of all times, described creativity. It has been expressed in many ways by many people. But, creativity cannot truly be expressed in words. It is a passion that stirs the soul and flows effortlessly through the creator. Like a river, the creative person does not go with the flow; he or she *is* the flow.

What is creativity? It is the process of bringing something new into being. Plato, in his dialogue, the *Symposium*, described what he called the *true artists* - those who give birth to some new reality. Whether creativity is an inborn gift or one can "become" creative is a matter of controversy, but creativity certainly can be cultivated and stimulated.

Anyone can learn faux finishing. Those who excel in the industry, who stand out as true artists, are those who are the most creative, who stretch the limits of their imaginations, who dare to defy tradition to achieve the "impossible," whose passion exceeds even their talent.

Research at Stanford University shows that we use only two to five percent of our mental capacity. Brian Tracy, motivational speaker and author of many books on the development of the human potential, lists three qualities of genius which, if developed, can expand this small percentage of our mental potential. They are an open, child-like mind that is receptive to new ways to solve problems; the ability to concentrate single-mindedly without distraction on one thing at a time; and an orderly thought process.

There are certain steps involved in the creative process. Like a plant, it must be treated with tender loving care, nourished, and fertilized.

The first step is to plant the seeds by acknowledging your creative potential. Affirmations and visualizations are very important in this process and for personal growth. Every thought you think creates your future. An affirmation is a way of programming your mind to act in a particular way. To affirm is to make firm. An affirmation is a positive statement used to attain what you desire. It is always stated in the present tense, as if you already have it. It is more powerful if written and repeated every morning and every night, preferably at bedtime, or throughout the day. Some affirmations to get you started:

I deserve and now have a successful faux finishing business.

I am willing to experience my creative energy.

I treat each new problem I encounter as a new door to be opened, and an opportunity to be creative.

Creative visualization is another technique to help achieve your goals and dreams. It is a way of using the power of your imagination to create what you want in your life, sort of a mental rehearsal. The mind cannot distinguish between imagined or real events. If you imagine the way you want your life to be, your mind believes that is the way it is.

Begin by relaxing your mind and body. Sit or lie down comfortably. Close your eyes and take deep breaths, concentrating on the in-breath and then the out-breath. Next, use progressive relaxation to relax your body. Starting with your toes and moving to the top of your head, relax

each part of your body until you are fully relaxed. Now, state your goal or desire to yourself in as much detail as possible, always in the present tense, using only positive words. Picture yourself doing or having whatever it is that you want. As you visualize, see, hear, and feel your surroundings. Spend about ten or fifteen minutes “being there.” Then relax and focus again on your breathing, returning slowly to your physical surroundings. Practice this in the morning and evening.

A great resource to learn more about visualization techniques is [Creative Visualization](#) by Shakti Gawain.

The second step in the creative process is fertilizing the soil. Lay the groundwork by preparing yourself with the tools you need to be successful. Stay abreast of the trends and latest techniques in decorative painting and faux finishing. Keep a notebook with you at all times to record ideas, questions, things to do, and inspirations. Take classes and workshops, whatever is available to stay on top of things. Keep notebooks of articles, ideas, pictures cut out of magazines, newspapers, etc. Visit show houses, look through magazines for ideas, study other faux finishers’ work, and read books on faux finishing and related subjects.

The third step is to work diligently in the garden, absorbing yourself in your work. Work with concentration and focus, being always open to new ideas and ways of doing things. Brainstorm with yourself and try to think in your most child-like, imaginative way.

Germination is the fourth step. Come up for air. Stop working on the project at some point to give yourself some objectivity and distance. Let the energy incubate and grow. Sometimes when you stop concentrating on something and engage in other activities, you allow it to assimilate in your subconscious mind, and suddenly things begin to sprout.

The breakthrough is the final step. Eureka! Aha! The solution becomes suddenly, immediately apparent, like a light going off in the darkness. The plant breaks through the ground in a glorious burst of life. In [The Courage to Create](#), Rollo May describes it this way, “If only for that moment, we participate in the myth of creation. Order comes out of disorder, form out of chaos, as it did in the creation of the universe. The sense of joy comes from the participation, no matter how slight, in being as such.”

Some ways to stimulate creativity:

- Choose to be creative. It is a choice! Acknowledge that your potential is limitless, your imagination boundless.
- Think like a child. Think back to your childhood. Adopt a playful, childlike attitude. Be that curious, fearless child, open to all life has to offer and soaking up the environment and wisdom around you.
- Be willing to seek out a new path and open to new ways of doing things.
- Be open to others’ viewpoints. Someone else may have an idea or way of looking at a situation that you never thought of or it may trigger an idea in your mind.
- Don’t be afraid to experiment. Do things in different ways. Use different media and tools than you’re used to working with. Experiment with colors and textures. Do something crazy.
- Don’t be afraid to make a mistake. Some of the greatest discoveries were actually mistakes that had extraordinary results.
- Don’t listen to other people. Follow your heart. People will tell you you’re wrong, you’re crazy, it will never work (they told the Wright brothers it would never fly!). You may meet a lot of negative energy. Stay positive and resolute in your intentions.
- Don’t conform. A conformist forms him or herself “with” (con). A creative person is a non-conformist, a rebel, an instigator of change. Nothing was ever created by a conformist.
- Don’t focus on the outcome. Experience the joy of creating without worrying about the outcome.
- Be positive and optimistic. Eliminate self-criticism, that little negative voice inside that tells you you’re doing it wrong. Catch that little negative voice and turn it into a positive.

- Be willing to take small and large risks, and challenge your understanding of your situation. Do not judge the results of taking a risk.
- Establish a creative work environment. Your studio or workplace should be as uncluttered as possible; have good lighting, preferably from windows and natural, not fluorescent bulbs; and maintain proper ventilation and balanced air temperature. Install a good quality stereo system and play jazz, new age, or classical music; classical music has been shown by researchers to heighten creativity and IQ levels. Little extras to stimulate creativity are having fresh flowers in the room; hanging inspirational artwork, sayings, prayers, or motivational quotes; strategic placement of comfortable chairs, overstuffed cushions, even a hammock; and the use of aromas, such as scented candles, incense, potpourri, and/or essential oils.

Leonardo Da Vinci, one of the most creative, brilliant, fully developed human beings ever to live, emphasized using all the senses to stimulate creativity. To master creativity, one need only study his life and learn from his example. Freud said of Da Vinci, "Indeed, the great Leonardo remained like a child for the whole of his life...Even as an adult he continued to play and that was another reason he often appeared uncanny and incomprehensible to his contemporaries."

How to Think Like Leonardo da Vinci by Michael J. Gelb, delves into Da Vinci's brilliantly creative mind. Gelb discusses the Seven Da Vincian Principles as ways to stimulate creativity within anyone willing to adopt them. They are:

Curiosita - An insatiably curious approach to life and an unrelenting quest for continuous learning. Da Vinci has been called the most curious person in the world. He remained child-like in his quest for knowledge, questioning everything. Scholars estimate that the notebook he left upon his death contained 7,000 pages of notes on thousands of subjects, and that was only half of it.

Dimostrazione - A commitment to test knowledge through experience, persistence, and a willingness to learn from mistakes. Da Vinci championed originality, rejected imitation, and questioned authority.

Sensazione - The continual refinement of the senses, especially sight, as the means to enliven experience. Da Vinci constantly trained his senses and his observant faculties.

Sfumato (literally "going up in smoke") - A willingness to embrace ambiguity, paradox, and uncertainty. Da Vinci believed that keeping the mind open in the face of uncertainty was a powerful way of unleashing creative potential.

Arte/Scienza - The development of the balance between science and art, logic and imagination; "whole brain" thinking. Da Vinci was the ultimate "whole-brain" thinker.

Corporalita - The cultivation of grace, ambidexterity, fitness, and poise. Da Vinci maintained a healthy diet (he was a vegetarian), exercised regularly, had great physical strength, and developed use of both sides of his body and mind. One of the things he advised was to force yourself to use your non-dominant hand frequently.

Connessione - A recognition of and appreciation for the interconnectedness of all things and phenomena; systems thinking. "The earth is moved from its position," Da Vinci said, "by the weight of a tiny bird resting upon it."

To be a highly creative person, don't conform to standard thinking and traditional ways of doing things. Take risks and have the courage to try new things that others may not agree with, may even condemn or make fun of ("they" told the Wright Brothers it would never fly!). If you have an idea, trust your feelings, go with your heart, and don't let anyone or anything stifle your self-confidence. In other words, know it's impossible, but do it anyway! Try a totally new technique. What's the worst that can happen? You have to paint over what you did? But, what's the best that can happen? The birth of a WOW creation.

Remember. Creativity is an attitude, a passion, a release of the natural flow of imagination. Free your mind and let it flow. And most important, never give up and never grow up!

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