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a map of the creative mind

embracing seven creative thinking
mind-sets

Are there certain mind-sets that help both individuals and teams to create more and better breakthrough ideas? And do some creative mind-sets work better than others for solving different kinds of creative challenges?

Yes.

This chapter identifies these creative mind-sets and explores how you can apply them to inspire your own creativity as well as the creativity of those with whom you work.

the seven creative mind-sets

I've identified seven creative mind-sets, although unlike the typical list of things, they do not fall easily into neat and discrete categories. Indeed most of these mind-sets are anything but discrete. The inherent messiness of the creative process means that at any time, they can, do, and probably should overlap. Such is the modus operandus of the creative mind: discrete categories often give way to creative continuums.

Curiosity

Curiosity is creative mind-set number one. It tops the list because without curiosity, the creative process never has the raw material it needs. Think of a young child who persistently, and even obnoxiously, asks, “Why?” Or consider the story of Thomas Edison visiting Louis Pasteur at his home. Pasteur had a sign-in guest book that included not only space for the guest’s name, but his or her area of interest as well. After signing his name, Edison wrote for his area of interest, “Everything.”

So if we can bring the young child and Thomas Edison together, we’ll be continually asking “why” about everything. Of course, this is not a creative mind-set that most adults can or want to keep going for any length of time. The adult mind quickly tires of asking, “Why?” either because it feels it already knows the answer or because it seems immature and a waste of time to question everything. However, a judicious use of our childlike curiosity can pay enormous dividends, as we will see throughout this book with some of the creative techniques that embody and leverage the curiosity mind-set.

Openness

Creative mind-set number two is an active and creative openness to others and their ideas. Thinking this way can be viewed as quieting the opinions of the judgmental mind long enough to allow the creative mind the time and space it needs to generate interesting insights, associations, or connections. If curiosity is about continually wanting to learn new things, an active and creative openness is the willingness, indeed the desire, to process these new learnings in ways that open up creative possibilities as opposed to superficially categorizing them into self-limiting dead-ends. To give a broad example, labeling the guy you don’t agree with a jerk may make you feel better, even superior, but it doesn’t do anything to inspire your own creative process. Keeping your mind open to that guy and his ideas—even if he and they are irritating you—may not be easy or comfortable, but it can lead to inspiration and insight.

Embracing Ambiguity

Embracing ambiguity is the third creative mind-set. Related to, but different from, maintaining an active and creative openness, it is the capacity to entertain contradictory, ambiguous, or incomplete information. It was the brilliant (and self-contradictory) writer F. Scott Fitzgerald who said that “the test of a first rate intelligence is the ability to function while simultaneously entertaining two contradictory ideas.” This is not easy to do, but it’s critical to success in the creative process. To the controlling mind-set, contradictions are a source of discomfort, even anxiety. To the creative mind-set, contradictions are an invitation to more focused creative thought. More than a few of my marketing colleagues, especially when they’re behind the glass viewing focus groups, want to jump quickly to an answer, because they cannot deal with the discomfort caused by the psychological messiness of ambiguity. Ironically, it’s often by working the ambiguity, that is, delving deeper into the apparent contradictions and ultimately resolving the paradox inherent in seemingly contradictory ideas, that a new, unambiguous, integrated, and occasionally brilliant idea may emerge.

Finding and Transferring Principles

The fourth creative mind-set is principle finding/principle transfer. As its name implies, this creative mind-set has two parts. The first part is the mental habit or discipline of continually identifying the creative principles inherent in an idea, especially (but in no way limited to) the new ideas in your field. Inventors look to understand what makes a breakthrough invention revolutionary, screenwriters the elements that make an award-winning script so compelling, chefs what makes a new combination of foods so delicious. You get the idea. But the most creative people also look to other fields for inspiration. In fact, if you look at the history of the creation of paradigm-shifting, breakthrough ideas, they tend to come from either the young or people who were trained in a different field. Philo Farnsworth was thirteen years old when he conceived of the basic operating principles of electronic television, and he transmitted the first television image when he was twenty.

And Alexander Graham Bell, after inventing the telephone, went on to cofound the National Geographic Society.

The second part of the principle finding/principle transfer mind-set is adapting the identified principle or idea to another context to create a new idea. It's the ability to work from the bottom up, moving from the specific to the general—a facility for abstracting principles or ideas from something specific, and then applying it in a different or more general way to something else. Psychologists and scientists call this mind-set *inductive thinking*. Call it *adapting*, *transferring*, or even *stealing* from one arena to create something new in a different arena. Henry Ford got the idea for mass-producing his cars from a visit to a slaughterhouse. (Think assembly versus disassembly.) Samuel Colt came to the idea for his six-shooter revolver by noticing the clutching mechanism of a turning ship's wheel. And Eli Whitney, in conceiving the cotton gin, made the connection between a cat reaching through a fence trying to grab a chicken and "claws" spreading out cotton so that a "fence" could more easily knock off or separate the seeds from cotton.

Searching for Integrity

Creative mind-set number five is the search for integrity. It's the desire to discover, and the belief that there exists, an insight or connection that will unite the seemingly disparate elements you're juggling in your creative mind into a single integrated, conceptual whole. When it happens, it's exciting and magical, and it feels absolutely, positively, and completely right. Everything just fits. Einstein would call it "beautiful." Enough said. Integrity doesn't need to explain itself.

Knowingness

Knowingness is creative mind-set number six. This is not the knowingness that accompanies the moment of connection in mind-set number five, the search for integrity. This is the knowingness that you bring with you from the beginning of the creative challenge through the difficult, even seemingly impossible challenges and inevitable creative dead-ends you encounter along the way until you make the creative

breakthrough. My business partner, Gary Fraser, and I call it “knowing that there’s a there there.” It explains in part creative persistence. It’s the confidence to know that with enough creative attention, focus, and effort, sooner or later you’ll solve your creative challenge.

Knowingness is such an important creative mind-set because like success, creativity is a self-fulfilling prophecy. To see this connection, substitute the word *creative* for *successful* in Henry Ford’s famous quote, “Whether you think you’ll be successful or not . . . either way you’ll be right.” In my world, we know we’ll get new ideas if we put enough attention and focus on the creative challenge, even if it’s for such seemingly mundane, and therefore often very difficult, new product development assignments as inventing new envelope ideas; creating a new ratchet, wrench, or socket set; or developing a new line of laundry detergents.

World Creating

Finally, creative mind-set number seven is creator of worlds, and it is the most purely imaginative of the seven. It’s the province of novelists, game designers, screenwriters, fashion designers, all children, and delusional mental patients. Think of the created worlds of *Star Wars*, Ralph Lauren’s Polo, the video game World of Warcraft, Dr. Seuss, Harry Potter, all sports, Hunger Games, cloud shapes, *Lord of the Rings*, Salvador Dalí, Candy Land, *The Matrix*, and dreams. It’s the ability to imagine entirely new worlds and everything in them, including the rules that govern those worlds. It’s imagining original places, people, and things with unique designs, time frames, personalities, emotions, “feels,” and mind-sets. It even involves role-playing roles that you yourself may write.

training your creative mind

There are of course other creative mind-sets. These just happen to be my personal magnificent seven. One I didn’t mention, for instance, is “think the opposite.” The preferred creative mind-set of bankers,

lawyers, anarchists, and teenagers, this mind-set is pretty much self-explanatory. I say “white”; you say “black.” I say “yin”; you say “yang.”

Now consider this: even an in-depth understanding of each of the now eight mind-sets I’ve discussed above won’t help you or your team much when it comes time to actually create a breakthrough idea. The reason is that being creative isn’t about understanding the creative states of mind that facilitate creativity. It’s about being creative. And that act of creation occurs most often, and most successfully, when the mind goes beyond its left-brain, analytical, self-conscious mental constructs to achieve a kind of transcendental moment where unexpected, even magical creative connections occur. In sports, it’s called “being in the zone.” And when you’re in the zone—let’s say you’re a tennis player—you’re not debating with yourself whether you’re holding the racket with the right grip, wondering if your shoulder is facing in the right direction, or thinking that your feet might be too far apart as you are about to make a winning backhand volley. You’re too busy doing, with very little conscious thinking about what you’re doing.

Think of descriptions of creative mind-sets, creativity-spurring techniques and tips, and even stories about the creative process (all of which you will find in this book) as part of a kind of creative-thinking training program. You can consciously learn about them, train yourself in their application, and even use them to become conscious of the processes that you do naturally or unconsciously. Then, with repeated contact and attention to them, you will begin to internalize them. But even if you never fully internalize them and have to always self-consciously apply them, it doesn’t matter. At the end of the day, you will still have the benefit of generating new, occasionally breakthrough ideas from their application.

In training psychology, a shift from this self-conscious, overly mental, and enforced reasoned thinking to a much less self-conscious, more natural, often effortless, in-the-moment doing, is called moving from conscious competence to unconscious competence. For most people, with enough exposure, training, and practice, different creative mind-sets, like a well-practiced backhand volley, will become automatic.

They become so much a part of your everyday thinking style it'll be easy to believe you always thought that way. And you'll be right. As kids, we were all creative geniuses. We just may have forgotten how truly creative and original we were so naturally and so unconsciously.

If you're skeptical of your former creative greatness, take a moment and review each of the creative mind-sets above with the innocence of the five-year-old child who used to be you. With a little retro-creative imagination, I believe you'll discover that in some way, you exhibited each of these eight creative mind-sets. For instance, if I revisit my five-year-old self, I can see me riding a sawhorse in the neighbors' back yard chasing bad guys in the Old West. That sawhorse was as real to me as any actual horse I'd ever seen on TV. A "sawhorse" into "real horse"? Yes, because I knew there was a pony in there somewhere. It's a good example of the creative mind-set of principle transfer. Or is it the creator of worlds mind-set? Could it be both? And if it's both, shouldn't we also include the embracing ambiguity mind-set?

I believe you'll see that these creative mind-sets are in there. They always have been and are available to all of us. With a little reeducation and retraining, you can rediscover these creative mind-sets and then eventually, and somewhat ironically, unconsciously practice them, just as you did as a child.

So how do you get started, consciously training yourself and those you might be leading creatively in these mind-sets? If you go back to mind-set number one, curiosity, you'll have your answer: it's by asking more and different kinds of questions:

- In the case of the curiosity mind-set, for instance, all you have to do is keep asking, "Why?" or maybe, "How does that work?"
- For the openness mind-set, you might ask, "What's the learning here?"
- For the embracing ambiguity mind-set, you could ask, "What can resolve this apparent contradiction?" or maybe, "If both of these contradictions are correct, what ideas might they imply?"

- For the finding and transferring principles mind-set, you can ask, “What’s *the* principle in this thing that I can apply to *that* thing.”
- For the searching for integrity mind-set, your question might be, “What would make this a simple or beautiful solution?”
- For the knowingness mind-set, you might ask, “What’s my intuition telling me?” or possibly, “If I already knew the answer to this creative challenge, what would the solution look and feel like?”
- In the creator of worlds mind-set, you could ask, “If I were to enter an entirely new world, what would I imagine that world would look, feel, smell, and sound like? And what might the rules be that govern this new world?”

a meta-creative mind-set

As you practice the seven (actually now eight) creative mind-sets by asking yourself and your team more and better creative questions, consider one last mind-set. This one is embodied in all of the previous ones, so you might think of it as a kind of meta-creative mind-set.

What helped me realize the enormous creative potential of this meta mind-set was an e-mail with the subject line, “Contact from Colombia.” I’m still surprised that I even opened this e-mail, but when I did, I discovered an interesting proposition. It was from Hans-Peter Knudsen, the president of Colombia’s oldest and most prestigious university, University of Rosario, located in Bogotá and founded by Spanish missionaries in 1653. Before becoming the university’s president, Knudsen had been a business professor who had used my first book, *99% Inspiration*, to help educate his classes about business creativity and innovation more than twelve years before.¹ Because innovation had become such a hot business topic in Colombia, he was proposing that he represent me and my company to Colombian businesses, associations, and government institutions. In due course, I agreed to a series of meetings, speeches, and innovation workshops for the presidents of some of Colombia’s most important businesses and government institutions. One such speech was for the

Colombian Association of Flower Growers and Exporters, known as Asocolflores.

I flew into Bogotá on a Wednesday night, and Peter gave me a detailed briefing over dinner on the business challenges facing Colombia's flower growers. I learned that two out of every three flowers bought in the United States is grown in Colombia, but that because of the devaluation of the Colombian peso, the Colombian flower growers were suffering. Other flower-exporting South American and Central American countries with better exchange rates with the United States were making it very difficult for the Colombian flower growers to compete.

That night at the hotel, I realized that the innovation speech I was planning to give the next morning might fall on deaf ears. Not that my innovation process suggestions wouldn't be of value for inspiring longer-term innovation successes. They certainly would. But these growers might not have the luxury of planning for the longer term. They were in a battle at the moment for their very survival, with tens of thousands of employees' jobs on the line. They needed to quickly generate short-term solutions to address their exchange rate challenge.

As I thought about the flower growers' problem, I realized that one way to address their pricing dilemma was to somehow add value to their flowers to justify a higher cost. It was a classic case of decommoditizing a product, that is, one being bought and thought about only in terms of price.

So the creative challenge, as I defined it, was, "What could be added to the flowers to increase their perceived value to American consumers?" It was this simple question that led me to generate the twenty creative growth strategies that I would recommend in my speech the next morning. The question would also help me ultimately recognize both the existence and the creative potential of a profoundly simple meta-creative thinking mind-set.

In a word, you could call this creative thinking mind-set "AND." You simply add an "AND" to whatever you need a new idea for. Said another way, you ask yourself what you could combine with the

creative challenge you're working on to bring it, and your thinking, to a new place. So for the flower growers, the question was, "Flowers AND ____ would make flowers more valuable?"

Often when I have a creative challenge, I commit to generating as many as twenty ideas. Having an idea quota ensures that you will not stop creating when you get what you think is your first good idea. I've also discovered that the first good idea is rarely the best one. Usually the first five ideas, in a twenty-idea quota, may be okay or even quite good. But they also tend to be the obvious ones. Ideas six through fifteen are often a little further out. Several of these may even be great ideas. But ideas sixteen through twenty really push your thinking to explore nonobvious, sometimes counterintuitive, even absurd or crazy ideas. It's the freedom that craziness provides that can lead you to create the best ideas of all.

So that night before I finally fell asleep at 3:00 A.M., I forced myself to generate twenty creative, idea-generating strategies for the flower growers, all based on the AND mind-set. Here are the AND creative strategies, as well as several of the concrete ideas that they suggest for adding value for the Colombian flowers:

1. Sports	11. Contracts
2. Fundraisers	12. Historic events
3. Food	13. Promotions
4. Trends	14. Luxury goods
5. Personal identity	15. Celebrities
6. Education	16. Celebratory tool/milestones
7. Sales/selling tool	17. New distribution channels
8. Hobbies	18. Emotions
9. Travel	19. Greeting cards
10. Institutions/companies	20. Religion

For instance, the "flowers AND sports" strategy might lead to the idea of marketing boutonnieres in the colors of a winning sports team: black and orange flowers for the San Francisco Giants, blue and white flowers for the Dallas Mavericks, and so on, sold in these teams' home cities. The "flowers AND food" strategy might suggest linking specific colors and kinds of flowers to specific dishes at fine restaurants to bring an added aesthetic to the dining experience. The

“flowers AND contracts” strategy might suggest championing a discounted, frequent-purchase yearly contract with heavy flower-buying individuals and companies. “Flowers AND historic events” might inspire the idea of creating a special 9/11 flower that could be used as a fundraiser for victims’ families. The “flowers AND religion” strategy could lead one to think of offering a new series of birthday bouquets for, say, Catholics that included a biography of a Catholic saint born on that same day. And so on. It’s not hard when you move from a creative mind-set of thinking about either-or to one committed to “AND.” It’s also a lot of fun.

This “AND” creative mind-set helped me create one of the most effective speeches I have ever given. It was clear from the Colombian flower growers’ reactions and their in-depth conversations with me after the speech that they liked my suggestions. They also greatly appreciated my having taken the time to customize my more general innovation process suggestions to address their specific and immediate business challenge.

So that’s it on the creative mind-sets. Again, think of them as a kind of backdrop or foundation for all the stories, techniques, and creative principles you’ll encounter in the rest of the book. You won’t find them explicitly tied to particular challenges or techniques, but they are always in play whenever creative business challenges are addressed. Knowing them—having names for them and choosing when and how to exercise them by asking the questions associated with them—will inform and inspire your and your team’s creative process and results.

In the next two chapters, we look at group ideation techniques: in Chapter Two, a framework for conceptualizing the most effective techniques, and in Chapter Three, a discussion of the techniques themselves.

