

Welcome to Everyday Creativity

Thank you for your interest in “Everyday Creativity.” By sharing my experiences and the lessons I’ve learned while trying to tap into my own creative potential, I hope to leave you with a new approach to the seemingly enigmatic process of creativity. “Everyday Creativity” offers several techniques that will help you and others within your organization or company apply this perspective.

In the video, I strive to show that creativity is not a magical, mysterious occurrence. Neither is it solely the realm of artists and authors. Creativity, in my view, is an attitude. Much of what we call “creative thinking” really results from taking a fresh look — one that is deeper and more determined — at the mundane experiences of everyday life. Quite simply, creativity is looking at the ordinary and seeing the . . . extraordinary.

We look at the ordinary and see the extraordinary; we ignite our passion. It is passion that gives us the energy we need to creatively tackle the challenges before us. When we couple passion with solid techniques and craftsmanship, we can make our vision come to life. This is true whether we’re trying to develop a curriculum plan, to find a better way to schedule part-time workers, or — as my work requires — to capture on film an image that tells a story.

It isn’t always easy. While such clichés as “a burst of creativity” make it sound as if creativity simply alights from out of nowhere, most creative inspirations are the result of persistence, hard work, and the willingness to challenge ourselves. We often must work with time constraints and limited resources. However, when we strive to exercise our creativity as best we can, our work, our relationships, and even our lives become more effective and satisfying.

I hope you will find that “Everyday Creativity” is both exciting and liberating, and that the ideas and techniques it presents will help you every day to look at the ordinary and see the . . . extraordinary!

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Dewitt Jones". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style. The first letter 'D' is large and loops around the first few letters. The name "Dewitt Jones" is written in a consistent, fluid hand.

Copyright MCMXCIX Dewitt Jones. All rights reserved under International and Pan-American Copyright Conventions. No part of this book or video may be reproduced in any form, or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, unless specifically permitted in the text or by written permission from the publisher. Address all inquiries to:

Star Thrower Distribution Corporation

26 East Exchange Street, Suite 600
St. Paul, MN 55101

1-800-242-3220

Phone: 651-602-9630

Fax: 651-602-0037

www.starthrower.com

Contents

<i>Welcome to Everyday Creativity</i>	1
<i>About Dewitt Jones</i>	4
<i>Using the Leader's Guide</i>	5
<i>Facilitation Tips</i>	6
<i>Training Tools</i>	6
The Nine Key Concepts	9
Key Concept 1: Creativity is the ability to look at the ordinary and see the . . . extraordinary.	10
Key Concept 2: Every act can be a creative one.	12
Key Concept 3: Creativity is a matter of perspective.	14
Key Concept 4: There's always more than one right answer.	16
Key Concept 5: Reframe problems into opportunities.	18
Key Concept 6: Don't be afraid to make mistakes.	20
Key Concept 7: Break the pattern.	22
Key Concept 8: Train your technique.	24
Key Concept 9: You've got to really care.	26
<i>Activity Page: Everyday Creativity</i>	28

About Dewitt Jones

Dewitt Jones has spent his life cultivating his own creativity. As a freelance photographer for *National Geographic* for more than 20 years, Dewitt captured breathtaking images in locales as diverse as the River Tweed in Scotland, the Serengeti plains of Africa, and the Grand Canyon in the United States. Along the way, he became known as a world-class photojournalist.

Dewitt's photographic and artistic skills are also well-known in the business world, where he has brought his talents and unique view to advertising campaigns for such organizations as Canon, Dewar's Scotch, Nikon, and United Airlines.

In addition, Dewitt has directed several motion pictures, two of which were nominated for Academy Awards. He has produced nine books; the most recent, *The Nature of Leadership*, is a collaboration with Stephen Covey and A. Roger Merrill, both of Franklin Covey. Dewitt's column, "Basic Jones," appears monthly in *Outdoor Photographer* magazine.

An accomplished speaker, Dewitt gives numerous presentations to businesses, associations, and nonprofit organizations, including the American Red Cross, Chevron, Fireman's Fund Insurance, Nike, and Merrill Lynch.

Dewitt holds a bachelor of arts in drama from Dartmouth College and a master's degree in filmmaking from the University of California at Los Angeles.

Using the Leader's Guide

The Leader's Guide examines the concepts presented in the video, "Everyday Creativity," and further illustrates each idea. Its purpose is to help you work with your group so that your members receive as much benefit as possible from the information. The Leader's Guide is designed for use by both inexperienced and professional facilitators.

The sections in the Leader's Guide follow the format described here:

1. Presenting the Concept

A. Key Concept – Each key concept is taken from the video.

(Note: Each key concept, printed for use as an overhead, is found on the diskette that comes with the complete Everyday Creativity package. The overheads were created using PowerPoint. You have permission to make copies of the overheads, or you may choose simply to use the PowerPoint presentation.)

B. From the Video – Portions of the video script that are relevant to the key concepts are presented. These should help identify how Dewitt Jones explained each idea.

C. Program Insight – Each insight further explains the key concept. These explanations may help you discuss the topics in your own words.

2. Developing Further Discussion

A. Facilitator Questions and

B. Possible Responses

You may find the suggested facilitator questions, along with the possible responses, helpful in generating meaningful discussion. In addition, the questions should help you check how well your group understands and applies the concepts.

(Note: The "Everyday Creativity" Workbook is available to further assist participants.)

3. Putting It into Practice

A. Team/Group Activity – A suggested activity gives participants an opportunity to interact with and get to know each other, while they continue to learn and apply the concepts.

B. Basic Jones – Each section ends with an excerpt from Dewitt's monthly column, "Basic Jones," from *Outdoor Photography*. These musings on life, art and creativity — though not always specifically related to the key concepts — provide further insight on the challenge of looking at the ordinary and seeing the . . . extraordinary.

Facilitation Tips

Before the Session

To help your participants get the most out of “Everyday Creativity,” you’ll want to review both the video and the Leader’s Guide before the session. It is helpful to consider how the concepts presented here apply to your organization. You’ll want to think about the projects with which your group is involved, as well as any obstacles that are ahead. Be sure too to think through possible comments and questions that members are likely to have after seeing the video.

During the Session

- Welcome participants as they arrive.
- Although you already will have watched the video, be sure to sit with your group and watch it again. Participants will feel that you are involved and interested in the subject.
- After the video is over, sit quietly for a few seconds before turning on the lights; give viewers time to think about what they saw.
- When you ask the group a question, be patient if they don’t respond immediately. Give them time; if they still need prompting, use Leader’s Guide questions to get the discussion going.
- If the discussion becomes sidetracked, guide it back to the subject of creativity.
- Discourage arguments and side discussions that involve only a few people. Again, guide individuals back to the topic of creativity.

Training Tools

“Everyday Creativity Presentation on PowerPoint”

A diskette containing the overheads is included in the video package.

“Everyday Creativity Workbook”

The Workbook assists in individual learning. Designed to work with the video program, it does not assume that a facilitator is involved. Of course, workbooks can be used for group study. One workbook is included with the video package.

“Everyday Creativity Pocket Reminder Cards”

The cards, which list the nine key concepts, can be given to participants as handy reminders of the ideas discussed in the video.

**For additional copies or information on any of these items,
please call 1-800-242-3220.**

Everyday Creativity

Leader's Guide

With

Dewitt Jones

Notes



The Nine Key Concepts

Listed below are the nine key concepts identified in the video and explained further in this Leader's Guide. The Leader's Guide also includes questions and activities that you can use to spark discussion and assist your group members in applying the concepts to their own situations.

1. **Creativity is the ability to look at the ordinary and see the . . . extraordinary.**
2. **Every act can be a creative one.**
3. **Creativity is a matter of perspective.**
4. **There's always more than one right answer.**
5. **Reframe problems into opportunities.**
6. **Don't be afraid to make mistakes.**
7. **Break the pattern.**
8. **Train your technique.**
9. **You've got to really care.**



Key Concept 1:

Creativity is the ability to look at ordinary and see the . . . extraordinary.

From the Video:

“What is creativity? Having spent my life in one creative endeavor after another, I can tell you it’s not something magical or mystical. It’s something very simple. To me, it’s just a moment—a moment where we look at the ordinary, but we see the extraordinary. It happens all the time in my photography. Look at the ordinary. See the extraordinary. We’ve all done it. We’ve all had those moments when the world was extraordinary. And we all know how good it feels when it happens.”

Program Insight:

Creativity often is thought of as a phenomenon that is larger than life or out of the ordinary — something that belongs only to certain people. Dewitt challenges such thinking and shows how creativity is something much more accessible — an attitude.

Most people should find this definition of creativity liberating and exciting. Creativity is no longer out of our grasp, nor is it just the province of a select group of individuals. With open minds, a solid understanding of our crafts, and the willingness to venture beyond what is expected, we can all tap into our own abilities to think creatively.

At the same time, it’s only natural to find this new definition of creativity a bit daunting. No longer can we claim that we’re not creative, and that’s why we can’t devise a better way to tackle a situation. If attitude is the key to creativity and we can control our attitudes, then we also have control over our creativity. We all can look at the ordinary and see the extraordinary.

Facilitator Question:

Ask participants to think back to a time when they handled an issue or challenge creatively, whether it was on or off the job. How did it make them feel? Can they relate to Dewitt’s claim that it is like falling in love with the world?

Keep in mind that your group’s examples don’t need to be earth-shattering. Someone can creatively tackle such everyday tasks as devising a procedure for more effectively handling customer calls or designing a more analytical spreadsheet.

Possible Responses:

It felt great!

Coming up with the solution gave me more confidence in my ability.

I got a real sense of accomplishment.

Once I came up with one creative idea, it was easier to come up with more.

Follow-up Question:

It’s likely that in coming up with creative solutions to different problems, participants used some of the techniques Dewitt talks about in the video. Do they recognize any that they’ve used?

Possible Responses:

Brainstorming (recognizing that there's more than one right answer).

Trial and error (not being afraid to make mistakes).

Taking a break or sleeping on it (changing perspective).

Trying a completely new approach (breaking the pattern).

Being passionate about wanting to find a solution to an issue or problem (really caring).

Activity:

This activity helps get everyone's creative juices flowing. It also recognizes that sometimes people who are new to a situation find it easier to "see the extraordinary" in the ordinary. That is, an outsider may notice the significance in occurrences that someone involved in the situation overlooks or takes for granted.

Ask if one or two participants would be willing to identify a task that they would like to do better or an issue that they would like to more skillfully handle. (Volunteers should feel comfortable talking about their examples.)

Now ask the other participants to offer ideas about handling each situation. Give everyone a couple of minutes, then go around the group and ask each person to politely share his or her thoughts. Let group members know that they can offer an idea that seems impractical, as it might spark another, more practical idea.

What did each person making a recommendation notice that he or she thought was significant? How did that observation affect the solution he or she proposed? Had the person presenting the problem placed much importance on this issue? For example, a participant may be having trouble getting along with a new coworker. An outsider might recognize that the new coworker is intimidated by the participant's experience and is trying to cover up insecurities.

Discuss with the group the different perspectives people bring to an issue. Did participants find it easier to "see the extraordinary," or identify what was significant, when they were outsiders? How can participants use this understanding to improve their own work? How can they become better at paying attention to the extraordinary, even in situations that are ordinary to them?

From "Basic Jones":

The vision we had at *National Geographic* was to celebrate what's right with the world. In my opinion, it's this perspective that has made the magazine so successful over so many years. Much as we are all addicted to a news media that daily tells us what's wrong with the world, *National Geographic's* success springs from the far deeper human need to stand in gratitude in front of what's right with it. It's a perspective that not only has influenced my life, it's deeply influenced my creativity and my photography as well.

For me, creativity is the moment when I look at the ordinary and see the extraordinary. And that moment where I fall in love with whatever I see through the lens is always positive. It fills me with passion. It gives me the energy to manifest my feeling into a photograph. Without the passion, without the energy, the rest of the process becomes a struggle rather than a joy.



Key Concept 2:

Every act can be a creative one.

From the Video:

“I think many of us were raised thinking that we couldn’t be creative. When I was growing up, creativity was always related to art, and art to painting and sculpture. If you weren’t an artist, forget it, you weren’t creative. But, if creativity is just falling in love with the world, then everything I do can be a creative act. My life can be my art — whether I’m taking a photograph, or working with a client, or raising a family, or volunteering in my community. In every act we have the potential to transform the ordinary into the extraordinary.”

Program Insight:

Creativity often is assumed to mean artistic talent. However, the two are not interchangeable. To create, according to Webster, is “to cause to come into existence.” While an artist certainly exercises his or her creativity, so do the rest of us: teachers develop lesson plans, community volunteers find new ways to promote their cause, and moms and dads figure out how to raise their always-changing children.

Similarly, we often think of creativity as existing outside of our everyday lives; like an evening dress or tuxedo, creativity is often thought of as something special we take out just when we have something special to do and want to make an impression. However, as the video explains, creativity can be a big part of our everyday lives. If creativity means being able to look at the ordinary and see the extraordinary, it’s clear that this is a way of thinking that can elevate our approach to everything we do.

When we are open to the potential for the extraordinary, we’re more likely to focus on finding and extracting it, despite the challenges before us. Our efforts and the insights we gain from our work will enhance our solutions. This is true whether we’re figuring out how to boost sales, to train new employees, or to better utilize equipment on the shop floor.

Facilitator Question:

Ask participants how many saw themselves as creative before they watched the video. Have their views changed? Are they looking at their accomplishments in a new light? Do they feel more confident about their abilities to creatively tackle other challenges?

Possible Responses:

Yes, I can see where I used some of Dewitt’s techniques — maybe without knowing it — and was creatively handling various situations.

No, I still don’t think I’m creative. However, I’d like to improve.

I’m not sure. It’s hard for me to say that I’m being creative when I’m in the middle of solving something; it might take someone else to see that my solution is extraordinary.

Facilitator Question:

Ask participants why people might be both excited and a bit hesitant to take new, creative approaches.

Possible Responses:

Trying new approaches takes effort and work.

Being creative means taking a risk.

Even if we come up with a great new idea, others may prevent us from implementing it.

Activity:

This activity should help reinforce the idea that everyone is creative; each individual's creativity just shows up in different ways. Ask participants to list the things they do every day. In addition to the functions they handle at work, their lists likely will include such home activities as cooking or gardening, as well as such community activities as coaching a team or serving on a church committee. Then ask group members to review their lists and identify areas in which they find it easy to devise creative solutions. For example, one person may enjoy experimenting with food to create new recipes, while another may like brainstorming new fundraising ideas each year for a civic organization.

From “Basic Jones”:

I'd love to be as sharp in my life as I am with my camera. Locking in sharply on the things that excite and interest me, yet fearlessly willing to easily change my focus as the situation develops, and continuously looking for that next right answer.

In my photography, I realize that each new vision requires new exposure, new balance. For example, I'd never stand on the rim of the Grand Canyon at noon, take a light reading, and then return that evening expecting to use the earlier reading to get the shot. Yet how many times have I set a balance in my life and then tried desperately to hold it without any regard to all that was changing around me?

When will I listen to what my photography teaches me every day? That focus and balance are always in flux, that every new experience needs new settings, and that change is all that is constant. My easy and elegant response to change not only ensures my survival but might also elevate life to the level of art.



Key Concept 3:

Creativity is a matter of perspective.

From the Video:

“Creativity is a matter of perspective. As a photographer, the first thing I have to decide is ‘What lens do I have on my camera?’ In other words, what perspective can I take on this problem to help me find an extraordinary view?”

“The right perspective is critical. If we can’t learn to change lenses, we’re trapped. But I’ve learned that there’s always another perspective. When we believe that, it can transform the whole way we look at life.”

Program Insight:

Just as a photographer must change lenses to capture a new picture, the rest of us sometimes need to change our thinking to achieve our goals or to solve our problems. We need to ask ourselves the following questions: Is our angle the best it can be? Which elements of our situation deserve the most attention, and which deserve the least? Do we need to focus on the big picture or the details?

Facilitator Question:

Answers and inspiration often hit when we least expect them. That’s largely because something has happened to juggle our thinking and to give us a new perspective. For example, your child may say something that sparks an idea that you can use at work. Or watching a mechanic fix your car may help you solve a problem on the shop floor. Ask members to recall a time when this happened to them.

Possible Responses:

Will vary from group to group.

Follow-up Question:

We’ve all had times when we’ve hit a mental roadblock and can’t seem to get anywhere with a current project. What are some techniques participants have used to remove roadblocks?

Possible Responses:

Talking with people outside the situation, or people with different backgrounds.
Getting away from the project, at least for a while.
Getting absorbed in something that is totally unrelated to the problem at hand.

Activity*:

One way to change perspectives is to find new ways to describe a situation. In light of this, ask group members to describe, in several ways, an issue or problem with which they are dealing. For example, participants might write a story or poem about it, come up with a “Top 10” list, draw a picture, or make a collage. Members can be as inventive as they wish. For example, if the group is trying to launch a new product, they may choose to write a fictitious newspaper story that describes the product. If the group is trying to get a school board candidate elected, they may wish to identify 10 reasons voters ought to consider their candidate. (Depending on your group’s size and the issue(s) with which they’re dealing, you may want to divide participants into smaller groups.)

Give the group 30 to 40 minutes to complete their project. Then ask them to describe what they have created and what it reveals. Did their work lead to any new insights? If so, what are they? If not, why not?

* You may need art supplies for this activity.

From “Basic Jones”:

Night sounds of the Serengeti infiltrate my tent. It’s our last night in camp on the shore of Lake Ndutu, and I can’t sleep. It’s mostly peaceful in the Serengeti. Thousands of animals are just hanging out, living life. Eating, reproducing, playing and sleeping. It makes for poor television, but good experiences. It all seems to work on this “endless plain” (the meaning of Serengeti).

For the first time, I have a visceral understanding of biodiversity. I realize that the animals, left to their own devices, exemplify nature’s balance. I have photographed animals drinking at watering holes, drowsing in the midday sun, and just walking along, answering an inner call to migrate. I’ve been touched by the beauty of these extraordinary, mundane moments — glimpses of the real day-to-day Africa.

There are metaphors for our own lives here. Lying there in my tent, I keep imagining my hometown without all of the houses and buildings. I think I’d see pretty much the same things I see here: people eating and drinking, working and sleeping. Just working it out together as best they could. What an interesting perspective.

Key Concept 4:

There's always more than one right answer.



From the Video:

“There’s more than one right answer. It seems so simple, but it is the key to creativity. There are a thousand ways to come at a problem to find creative solutions. I know that clearly from my photography, but sometimes it is so hard to bring over into the rest of my life.

“You can’t stop with the first right answer. Hey, the first right answer is just doing your job. Anyone ought to be able to come up with one right answer. But, you press beyond it, not in terror, but comfortably, knowing that the next answer is out there for you.”

Program Insight:

Life is ambiguous. Many situations don’t have a single solution that’s waiting to be discovered. That can make things difficult, because many of us, even without realizing it, want a rulebook; we want to know that if we do certain things, we’ll end up in a certain place or with a certain answer.

However, because life rarely unfolds that way, we need to keep approaching problems and issues from as many angles as possible. We can’t stop at the first answer that crosses our minds; while it may work, it’s likely to be “tried and true.” We need to press on and see what else we can find.

To do this we need a sense of confidence that if we keep looking, we’ll find more answers. It’s easy to believe that if we don’t grab the first answer, we won’t get another chance. However, if we keep going, we often find that there are more — and better — solutions than we initially had assumed.

Facilitator Question:

The idea that we need to keep working on a problem to find more right answers isn’t always what we want to do. Why?

Possible Responses:

We are so used to giving the “correct answer” — that is, the one that we know will satisfy the person we have to please — that we just stop there.

It’s easier to declare a problem unsolvable and give up.

We like easy, immediate solutions.

We may feel that another solution exists, but we don’t trust our intuition.

Follow-up Question:

While it can be foolish to grab the first answer that comes along, it’s often not practical to wait until we have all possible information available before we make a decision. Ask participants how people can judge when it’s time to stop searching for answers.

Possible Responses:

All the new information you're getting confirms what you already know.

You can't afford the cost — in time or money — of getting new information.

You're facing a deadline that you can't change.

Activity:

While we may realize that more than one right answer exists, when we're part of a group, we sometimes fall victim to "groupthink," blind conformity in group decision-making. For example, we may defer to what we think our leader wants without exploring other possibilities. Or a decision ultimately may be based on who shouts the loudest. Ask participants how well they feel their group encourages multiple right answers. How could they do better? For example, could they create a suggestion box and use it to encourage people to share their ideas? Could they impose a rule that every idea be given a fair hearing? Could their group work with another department to brainstorm project ideas?

From "Basic Jones":

I drove into the town of Smith River, California, where 80 percent of the country's Easter lilies are grown and there, in the fog, were fields of lilies stretching off in every direction. I knew I had the makings of a stunning photograph. But I also knew I'd have to tell the whole story in that single shot. The *Geographic* is demanding that way. They never assign a story like "Smith River: Flower of Northern California" — one that tells the story of lily production in great detail. No, they give you a title like "New England" or "Greece" and expect you to encompass the entire subject in 30 or 40 pictures.

Although I felt sure I had my shot, I was intrigued enough with the lilies to keep experimenting with them photographically. My own personal favorite shot happened later that day when I took a helicopter ride at a local festival (of lilies, of course). The chopper had risen no more than a hundred feet above the ground when a dynamite composition caught my eye. I knew it lacked the kind of "tell-the-whole-story" information that the *Geographic* would insist upon, but the graphic nonetheless delighted me. It's important, even on assignment, to take a few shots just for your own creative amusement. It keeps the juices flowing and makes the work fun. Armed with the right lens and the right attitude, you can have a real field day — in Smith River or anywhere else.



Key Concept 5:

Reframe problems into opportunities.

From the Video:

“When you come at the world with a sense of abundance rather than scarcity, you get more and more comfortable reframing problems into opportunities, finding new angles, coming at the same elements from a totally different direction, and being confident that the next right answer will be there.”

Program Insight:

When you view something as a problem, it’s easy to feel intimidated and immediately defeated. After all, when a situation appears insurmountable, why try to do anything to make it better?

That’s why the simple step of changing your perspective to view a problem as an opportunity can improve your ability to creatively approach that same situation. At once, you become more open to ideas that can lead to solutions. You may remember resources you had overlooked. Your attitude may make others more willing to keep working on the situation. As Dewitt notes, instead of thinking, “I won’t believe it until I see it,” we need to think, “I won’t see it until I believe it.”

Facilitator Question:

Ask participants why people might find it difficult to view the world with a sense of abundance.

Possible Responses:

To a certain degree, it goes against what we’ve been taught — that everything is limited and that we’ve got to get what we can while we can.

It’s easier to grab the first answer that comes along.

If you start out insisting something is a problem, rather than saying it’s an opportunity, you have an easy out if something goes wrong.

Follow-up Question:

On the continuum of looking at problems as opportunities are two extremes: seeing problems and obstacles at every step, and refusing to acknowledge the potential for any difficulties. Where are group members on this continuum? Is that where they want to be? If not, what can they do to change?

Possible Responses:

I’m pretty realistic; I don’t go looking for every possible problem that could occur, but I also don’t ignore ones that are likely.

I sometimes overlook potential glitches and have gotten into trouble as a result.

I point out a lot of problems, but part of my job is seeing the holes in others’ ideas — before they go ahead with them.

Activity:

One way to gain a new perspective on a problem and to bring new solutions to light is to describe it using an analogy. An analogy compares two things that, while essentially different, are alike in a significant way. For example, “He is like a lion ready to pounce on his prey.”

Ask participants to think of several analogies to describe a current project. For example: We’re swimming upstream, against the current; salmon can do it because they know when to leap and when to rest. Or: Tackling this problem is like getting the space shuttle into orbit; if we’re going to make it work, we need to be booster rockets.

Once you’ve come up with a few analogies, ask yourself whether thinking of the problem in these ways helps to spark new ideas or better ways to approach the situation. For instance, if members say they need to be like salmon or booster rockets, what qualities do they need?

From “Basic Jones”:

The first three days [in the Grand Canyon] were a serene drift through geologic time, slowly adjusting to my own natural rhythms. On day four, floating lazily downstream, I caught shoreline movement out of the corner of my eye. A coyote ran along the rock ledge, paralleling our boat. Coyote. The Trickster in southwestern Native American cosmology, wreaking havoc and transforming reality before one’s very eyes.

He kept pace with us for several minutes, throwing sidelong glances that seemed full of portent. I looked away for an instant, and when I scanned the ledge again, he was gone. Disappeared. A chilly wind blew up the canyon. I shivered with a mix of anticipation and foreboding. “Oh, come on,” I chided myself. “Get a grip. Nothing’s going to happen. No more mythology books before bedtime.”

By afternoon, soot gray clouds scudded across the sky gap above us. We managed to pull into camp just as the heavens collapsed, furiously slinging horizontal rain and hail. At dinner, I discovered that three other folks’ cameras were malfunctioning. That night, thunder reverberated up and down the canyon. I slept fitfully, plagued by nightmares and the unshakable feeling that the Trickster was looming over us like a shadow.

Daylight. Runoff had swollen the river and turned it into chocolate. That day, two more cameras collapsed.

Below Phantom Falls churned some of the biggest whitewater in North America — enormous waves and dory-eating holes. Drifting downstream, I began wishing I were somewhere else. This wasn’t quite what I had bargained for: big water, nightmares, malevolent weather, broken cameras, and a wild desert dog messing with my head. I wanted to go back and start over. Coyote seemed to chuckle from the water beside my boat, “You can’t go back and you can’t get off the river. Nothing to do but go on.” Words brutally honest and strangely calming. Something in me let go. I smiled, wondering if the Trickster was watching. “Got it.”

I had set out on this journey with a full load of expectations — that the trip would be beautiful and memorable in a particular way. It turned out to be beautiful and memorable in quite a different way. I think that’s what Coyote was teaching. Live fully, but hold things lightly. Be alert and attentive; you never know what the Trickster may bring you. And there’s nothing to do but keep heading downstream.



Key Concept 6:

Don't be afraid to make mistakes.

From the Video:

"If I were afraid of mistakes, this is the kind of photograph [the first picture of his daughter] that would cause me to put my cameras in the closet and never take them out again. But I don't even think about it. I'm just looking for the next right answer. Do you know that the average *Geographic* article is shot in 400 rolls of film? That's over 14,000 images to get 30! I'm not worried about making a few mistakes.

"If I were afraid to make mistakes, if I never took the risk to think out of the box, to press the edge of my envelope, to search for that next right answer, I'd still be back here at the beginning wondering why [this photo] didn't work."

Program Insight:

As a child, it's easy to think that you'll reach a point in life where you'll know just about everything you'll need to know. Of course, as we grow older, most of us realize that learning never stops. However, we hopefully assume that our propensity to make mistakes will.

Not only do we continue to make mistakes, but they get harder to take. We learn that bruises to our pride and egos hurt just as much as bruises to our bodies. So we slowly decide not to venture outside of a narrow range of expertise, not to take a risk, and not to try new things. In doing so, we may not make mistakes, but we also don't achieve anything great.

It's always enlightening to look at the mistakes and failures of individuals who are extremely successful. Whether we examine home-run hitters, brilliant musicians, or cutting-edge scientists, one thing becomes clear: Most of the world's greatest accomplishments were produced only after innumerable mistakes.

Of course, nobody is saying that we ought to make needless mistakes. We want to take the time to get as much information and as many insights as we possibly can. Then, if we do make a mistake, we can ask why things happened as they did, what we can learn, and how we can make things work.

Facilitator Question:

Ask participants to think back to one of their creative accomplishments. Would they have achieved their goals if they had been afraid of making mistakes? Did they make mistakes along the way? If so, how did they correct their situations so that they still could achieve their goals?

Possible Responses:

Will vary from group to group.

Follow-up Question:

No organization has unlimited resources. While you want to acknowledge the possibility that mistakes may happen, you also want to figure out ways to avoid expensive, irreparable ones. Ask the group to brainstorm ways that they can venture forward with their ideas and be open to the possibility of mistakes without being reckless.

Possible Responses:

We could ask other affected areas of the company for their input. That way, we'll be less likely to overlook anything.

We could work through a disciplined, rigorous "what if" session every time we need to make a major decision.

Activity:

If group members are overly concerned about making mistakes, their ability to be creative will be hampered. Ask participants to assess how much their group fears making mistakes. If most group members feel that the level of fear is so high that people avoid making mistakes (or owning up to them) at all costs, find out what is behind that fear. Is there a pattern of overly severe consequences when someone makes a mistake?

Next, ask members to describe what they think would be the ideal response when someone makes a mistake. Also ask them to list actions their group can take to encourage people to try new ideas.

From "Basic Jones":

Five hundred years ago, when asked about the motivation for a particular sculpture, Michelangelo replied, "I saw an angel in the stone and carved to set it free."

There are so many technical and aesthetic flaws in this photograph [referring again to the first picture of his daughter] that if it came up for review in one of my classes, I'd be reaching deep into my euphemism file to try and find something nice to say about it. The wide angle lens distorts Deanna's feet until they're as big as her face; I've chosen a lousy moment to photograph her face; the disparity between light and shadow leads to hopelessly overexposed light in the background. Not much photographic redemption to be found here.

Yet I saw none of this when I first looked through the lens. I saw only my daughter, the apple of my eye, the cutest, sweetest child in the entire world as far as I was concerned. I literally fell in love with her all over again.

Michelangelo's words cut to the heart of the way I view the creative process: falling in love with the subject and using the passion of that love to fuel the transformation from imagination to imagin*Action*, from dream to reality, from good to great. I think the same progression can be true in our lives when we focus on the best of who we are rather than defining ourselves by our weaknesses.

So that afternoon I just kept shooting, bringing my vision into sharper and sharper focus. Following a vision of an angel, till I could set it free.

Key Concept 7: Break the pattern.



From the Video:

“When we’re not afraid to make mistakes and when we believe there’s more than one right answer, that’s when we begin to break the patterns in our lives.

“Patterns, systems — they’re incredibly important. We can’t function without them. But, we all know that if we let those patterns go too long unquestioned, they become our prisons.

“When we begin to break the patterns in our lives, then everything is always in question, even when it’s going well. That’s the very basis of creativity. You’re always saying, ‘Why do we do it this way? How could we do it better?’”

Program Insight:

By definition, creativity demands that we break a pattern. In order to bring into existence something that hasn’t existed before, we have to form our own mold rather than fitting into an existing one. Instead of following a rulebook, we have to make it up as we go along.

That’s easier said than done. Even people who consider themselves unbound by convention often find that they work within the patterns of their culture or society more than they realize.

Facilitator Question:

Not many of us really want to go against the grain. Ask participants to list reasons that keep us from “breaking the pattern”?

Possible Responses:

We risk being wrong.

We may have to disagree with or upset other people.

It takes more effort to challenge, rather than accept, the status quo.

We may have left things unchallenged for so long that we’re not aware we even follow a pattern.

Follow-up Question:

One reason we don’t break patterns is our fear of what others might say or think. Ask the group to evaluate how receptive the environment they have created is for those who want to break the patterns. Do new ideas get shot down at meetings? Are people encouraged (even subtly) to think a certain way? Can the atmosphere be improved? If so, how?

Possible Responses:

Although we say, “Think outside the box,” we don’t do much to move new ideas forward.

We reward thinking that goes against the grain.

We think about breaking the pattern only when it relates to unimportant actions.

Activity*:

By interacting with others, you often can find patterns or rules in your life that you may be overlooking. In this activity, ask participants from one department to describe what they believe to be the “rules” of another department. (If all of the group members are from the same area, you may have to enlist volunteers from another department.)

For example, representatives from the shipping department might make a list of the “rules” they believe the sales department follows. One rule, in the eyes of the shipping department employees, may be that certain customers always get overnight delivery, even when it’s not necessary.

After the list has been completed, ask participants to look at the “rules” that others have used to describe their department. Which ones would they like to change? What can they do to make these changes?

* Part of this activity is done outside of the session.

From “Basic Jones”:

[At Marine World Africa USA, an amusement park], I found myself watching a row of dancing water fountains. The water would jump from cylinder to cylinder, spurting in a semi-random pattern from holes in the top of the fountains. I was captivated and so were several kids. One little boy in an oversized baseball cap and hot pink sunglasses was bent on intercepting the water as it left the hole.

I brought up my camera and began to shoot. The first photograph illuminated the child’s intense focus as he covered the hole with his hand, ensuring success in capturing the water, regardless of when it might appear. The second photograph was exactly what I expected. I was ready when the water sprayed through his fingers, soaking him, and I captured the moment. It’s a fine photograph; nothing wrong with it.

Yet if I’d been limited by my expectation, I would have lowered the camera and missed the best shot of the day. But I was ready for the unexpected and clicked the shutter when this boy yelled with delight and surprise at his unforeseen drenching.



Key Concept 8:

Train your technique.

From the Video:

“We have to train our technique. That’s critical, because vision without technique is blind. In photography, I want my technique honed to a razor’s edge, so that when there is a decisive moment, I’m not worrying about what film is in my camera. I’m there, ready to capture that extraordinary view.

“So I have to train my technique, then I have to put myself in the place of most potential — the place where I have the most possibilities of finding multiple right answers.

“Life presents us with windows of opportunities, or what the great French photographer Cartier-Bresson called ‘decisive moments.’ Moments when it all comes together. And we have to be there, ready to take advantage of them.”

Program Insight:

While passion and inspiration, and heart and soul are critical, we can’t kid ourselves that they eliminate our need for a solid command of technique. Whatever our game is, we need to learn, know, and become so well-versed in its fundamentals that they become second nature. Knowing and respecting our crafts will help us bring our visions to life in a way that is clear and profound.

By training, honing, and refining our techniques, we can concentrate on our visions; all of the other tasks we have to do become second nature. Then when an opportunity arises, we know we’re ready to seize the moment.

Facilitator Question:

Ask participants to recall a time when they weren’t prepared and, as a result, an opportunity slipped away. For example, perhaps a group member went on a sales call without knowing much about the company he or she was about to visit. Or perhaps a participant interviewed for a job without taking the time to figure out why he or she would be a good candidate.

Possible responses:

Will vary by group.

Follow-up question:

Ask participants to think back to a time when they experienced one of Cartier-Bresson’s “decisive moments.” Perhaps a member gave a knockout presentation, ran a winning campaign, or directed an outstanding play. How did they prepare for the experience? What did they need to do to be successful? What were the steps that they followed? Why was this the time when everything came together?

Possible responses:

Will vary by group.

Activity:

Training your technique is about being open to learning. Ask the group to identify skills and techniques that they need to do their jobs. The list may include anything from computer skills to customer-service know-how.

Ask the group to collectively look at their list and identify possible ways to develop these skills. Could an expert help them learn more? Could one or two members take a seminar or class and come back to share their knowledge with the others? Do participants know what other workers in their industry are learning? How do they currently improve their skills and techniques?

From “Basic Jones”:

Photography legend Ansel Adams once shared this pearl of wisdom: “Luck is what befalls a prepared mind.” That statement set me to pondering: What if luck isn’t just a random occurrence that befalls us as a happy accident? What if we can cultivate luck by allowing for the unexpected, by making space for what is wanting to happen? Certainly, talent, discipline, and luck are needed in different quantities at different times.

Each photograph has its own recipe. My photographer friend Rikki Cooke photographed a Hawaiian monk seal and her pup for 12 solid hours. Actually, he watched the animal sleep for approximately 11 and 3/4 hours, and photographed in small snatches when the mother roused herself to deal with her pup. Discipline and perseverance, some luck, and readiness for the unexpected yielded extraordinary photographs of this endangered animal.



Key Concept 9:

You have to really care.

From the Video:

“Creativity isn’t just about vision and passion. It’s about technique and perseverance as well; a balance of emotion and intellect that springs from really caring about what you do, really caring about the people you work with and the projects you work on.

“When the people I photograph know that they are as important to me as my pictures, they open like flowers. And, I find that the light that really illuminates my pictures is not the light from the outside — it’s the light from within.”

Program Insight:

Few of us can accomplish what we want to do without the help of others. However, viewing others simply as ways to get what we want or to go where we want isn’t right. Nor is it effective. People want and deserve to know that they’re valued for more than their contributions to a project.

Similarly, we have to care about the work we’re doing. When we take pride in what we’re doing, and are willing to give it everything we’ve got and then some, the quality of our products and services rises to a new level.

Facilitator Question:

Some might say that employees don’t need to know that they are cared about — that a fair wage and a decent job ought to be enough motivation. Do participants agree? Can this type of thinking backfire?

Possible Responses:

For some people that might be true, but most want a caring employer.

People rarely put their hearts and souls into something if there’s no connection beyond a paycheck.

People don’t like feeling that they’re being treated just as a means to an end.

Follow-up Question:

In the work world, how do participants reconcile their concern for others with the harsh realities of making a living? For example, a group member may truly care about a customer, but he also needs to make sure that he meets his sales goals. Or, while a participant may think highly of an employee, she may decide that another employee is better suited for a promotion.

Possible Responses:

You need to deliver tough news with compassion and concern.

You need to remember that we all want our concerns addressed; so you might let a particular sale go to keep a customer’s long-term business.

Activity:

For people to give their best to their work, they need to really care about what they do. Ask members to talk about what is important to each of them. What really matters to them? About what are they passionate?

Then ask the group to create a list of values that are common to everyone. These might include making a difference in people's lives, creating a high-quality product, or building a reputation as the best in the industry. Is the group addressing these values? If not, how can they address them?

Finally, ask the group to plan action steps to show that they really care. How can they best express their caring?

From "Basic Jones":

It's a staggeringly beautiful day any way you look at it. And what a way to look at it, standing on the north side of Molokai [Hawaii], atop the world's highest sea cliffs, gazing across the azure Pacific and feeling so alive I can hardly contain myself.

Whoooooaa! From out of nowhere appears an apparition — so startling I am almost tumbled backward. Wait, it's not an apparition; it's real. Frigate birds, huge with black wings, rise like Harrier jets straight up from below the cliff edge.

Higher and higher they soar on that indiscernible funnel of air. Did I say indiscernible? Not for them. I watch the subtle movements of their wings. Never a full stroke, simply tiny adjustments to bring them back to the place of maximum lift. Higher and higher. Without struggle.

I am thunderstruck. I fall into the grass with a force that reminds me only too clearly that I do not have wings. I sit staring into the sky where the birds have been. It was much too powerful an experience not to have meaning. Slowly words coalesce in my head, words that make me smile, "Quit your flapping and ride your thermals!"

Oh, how true!

The frigate birds are gone now, the sea is quiet, the clouds hang motionless. The only movement is the grass at the brink, dancing in the breeze from below. The edge beckons.

I don't know about you . . . but I'm going.



Activity Page

Everyday Creativity

So, where do you go from here? How can you start to put these techniques into practice? You have watched and discussed the video, and have begun to apply the concepts to your own situation. This worksheet is designed to help you apply the concepts to new projects and problems that arise.

Project/Problem: _____

Goal (at least for now) that I want to reach: _____

Change your perspective.

Describe your current perspective. _____

What is another way to think about the project/problem? _____

There's always more than one right answer.

What is your first right answer? _____

List at least two more possible answers to your project/problem. _____

Reframe problems into opportunities.

What problems do you anticipate facing while working on this project/problem? _____

What “opportunities” might arise because of these “problems”? _____

Break the pattern.

Describe the “rule” you are using to solve this problem. _____

If you did not have to follow this “rule,” how would you solve this problem? _____

Train your technique.

Describe the skill you will have to develop to solve this problem. _____

Describe what you will have to learn to improve this skill. _____

You’ve got to really care.

Why is solving this problem important to you? _____

How will solving this problem help others? _____
