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QUICK CURES FOR CREATIVE BLOCK

A CHEATSHEET FOR GETTING MOVING

T-SHIRT DESIGNERS
LOGO DESIGNERS
WRITERS

Get Creative.

"Sometimes the questions are complicated and the answers are simple." ~Dr. Seuss

The Zen of Creative

There is no special breed of person that's a creative. We are all creative.

Think of yourself as creative. We really are all creative. We started out creative as children. Somewhere along the way, we began to think we weren't creative. Stop thinking that. If you can get past your limits of thinking, your creative ideas will get better and better.

There are no limits. Stop limiting your thinking about whether you can pull off an idea. It can be done. If it's worth it, you'll find a way. Remember you don't always have to do it yourself. If you're a designer and need an illustration but cannot draw, there are several freelancer sites that will hook you up with someone who can draw it for you. If you're building a website, and you don't know how to code, but have a great idea, these same freelancer sites will connect you with someone who will do it within your budget. If you don't have to do it yourself, it's like a vending machine. Pour cash in the top and your idea pops out the bottom. Just remember, if you cannot do it yourself, it's automatic.

Find the emotion. Every problem worth solving has an emotional center. It has a true nature. If you are working for a client on an ad campaign, the true nature of the problem is that the client wants more response to their ads. The emotion the client wants to experience is joy from selling something. The emotion of the end-user will vary from product to product. If you are trying to sell car seats for toddlers, the end-user emotion is trying to avoid fear and to gain style/comfort/safety for their kid. Everything is motivated by the pursuit of pleasure or the avoidance of pain/fear.

Keep it simple. "Shoot it on the nose" as they say in the film industry. Remember why you're doing this project. What is the central problem you're trying to solve? Do you need people to click an ad? Do you want a reader to laugh or cry from your words? Think about the purpose. Close your eyes. Try to see it from your end-users perspective and think, "what would make ME click that ad?"
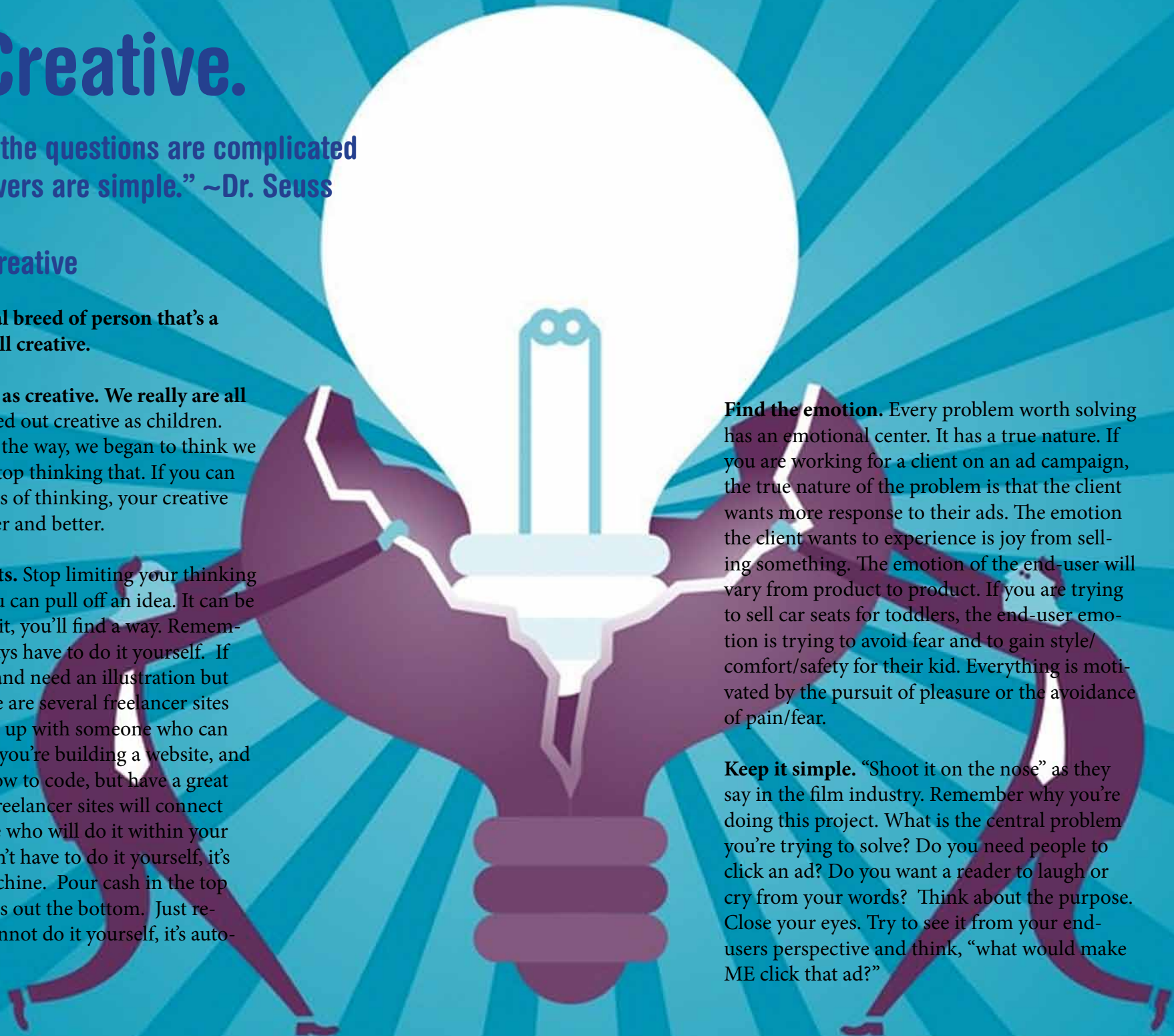
Creative Problem Solving Process

The creative problem solving process that works for me.

1. **Learn as much as possible about the project, client, competitor and subject.**

2. **Look at what has already been done.**

3. **Try to solve the problem, build the design, and write the piece.**

4. **Go play Frisbee golf. Forget about the problem.**

5. **Epiphany.**

5 minutes to 50 ideas. When I do a workshop on creativity, I teach a lesson on generating the perfect slogan for a billboard or t-shirt. I begin by giving the students 24 hours to come up with a great slogan. Often, the response I get the next day is, "I couldn't come up with anything good." The next day when the ideas are due, I listen to them. Sometimes there is a great idea, but that's rare. The magic is in what we do next.

I then have my students take out paper and set a kitchen timer five minutes. I tell them that they now have five minutes to come up with 50 ideas.

The point is that many of us don't brainstorm correctly. We reject ideas as not good enough during the brainstorming process, which limits our thinking. When we have an extreme like coming up with 50 ideas in five minutes, we're forced to stop rejecting. Even the garbage makes it in, but weeding out the garbage isn't part of brainstorming. That's editing. Most of the time, the students will get 20 to 30 ideas in five minutes.

The results, each student has at least one slogan on their list that is better than they originally created. When you consider the power of the "group" brainstorm, a room that previously had 20 ideas total for 20 people, now has 400 ideas to choose from.

Quick Tricks for Giving Your Creativity a Boost

Being blocked creatively is a mindset. Often by making a couple of tweaks to our environment, we can change our mindset.

1. **Change music; change mood.** My designs and writing change according to what I have playing in the background. If I need to do an edgy or extreme design, I play edgy or extreme music. If I'm writing, it's a bit more laid back. Either way, when you're stuck, change it up.

2. **Kill the empty page.** Do anything to get rid of the intimidating nothingness staring back at you. Writers can start typing words they remember or start re-typing a page from a book. Designers can doodle. Designers can start creating someone else's work, too. Often, the sensation of doing what we do will help kick in our creative autopilot.

3. **Do a tutorial.** When I can't come up with a new t-shirt idea, I head to YouTube. There I choose a tutorial on a technique I've been wanting to learn. Almost without fail, I will get halfway through the tutorial and switch over to my own design with the technique.

4. **Take a walk. Go outside.** Meditate. Sometimes you have to get away from what you're doing to create. When we have a zillion ideas floating around in our head that can make it impossible to focus. So get away from it, and clear your head.

5. **Exercise.** When your body moves, your brain works. If you're stuck, try doing some pushups or jumping jacks.

6. **Rub your eyes. Relax them.** This may seem silly, but it works for me. My eyes get tired from looking at the screen, which leads me to not being able to think anymore. Rubbing your hands together quickly to generate warmth and placing the meaty parts of your palm over your closed eyes can revitalize them.

7. **Think like Seuss.** Things do not have to fit a model if there is a better way. "Think left and think right and think low and think high. Oh, the things you can think up if only you try!"

8. **Re-invent the wheel.** We are told not to do this, but someone looked at a wheel once and thought, "If this thing had some teeth around it, and there were two of them, and if they could somehow fit together, they could move something else." And because they thought that, we got the gear. Look at your old, unused work. Is there something there that could be re-purposed for the current need?

9. **Read something.** This tip doesn't just work for writers. Designers may prefer to read something a bit different, but it still works. Stuck on coming up with a new t-shirt design, go read a list of funny or meaningful quotes. Stuck on coming up with a marketing campaign? Go read a blog on the subject. Stuck on writing marketing emails? You guessed it, scroll through your email box and read what you've been sent by other marketers.

10. **Play. This is BIG.** As creative, we are not unlike overgrown children. I keep silly putty on my desk. I have little games that I use to unwind or clear my head. A rubber band and sheet of paper for ammo can help me think. . Most of the coders I know have action figures and Legos on their desk. Guess what, when no one is looking, they do actually play with them. Sometimes, they do it when people are looking, too. A constant focus on work without play dulls creativity. Creativity is like a wellspring that needs nourishing to burst forth. And this nour-

ishing includes play, something that many adults who take themselves too seriously don't think applies to them anymore.

11. **Overload your senses.** When you're brain is so overloaded that you can't think, you may want peace. Peace may work for you. The opposite might work better. Put on headphones or crank up the music. Have a TV playing in the background. Smell things. Touch things. Snack. The sensory response makes the brain work. When the overload stops, the brain keeps working.

12. **Watch a "pump up" video.** Different things affect us all. There are certain videos on YouTube that can get my motor running no matter what.

13. **Get a new font.** This is especially true for designers. If you're stuck on a t-shirt or logo design, go get a new display font. Try putting one word in the font and making it big on your design. Go from there.

14. **Web surfing.** It isn't just a distraction from your work. When looking through a Google image search helps to spark your idea, it's a tool. Consider looking at what your competitor's are doing, too.

15. **Ask for input.** Can't get an idea? Ask someone else for his or her idea. It's hard to be factory churning out new creative on command, so go to your resources. My favorite people to ask about design and marketing ideas are kids. I get some really creative thoughts from them. At least one television commercial and marketing campaign was from my then 10-year-old son. I was stuck. His ideas weren't limited and were actually better than mind. The result was a very happy client.

16. **Do something monotonous.** You curse your day job for being oh-so-dull, but it might be just the place for your best ideas to incubate. The research speculates that this kind of subconscious thought may enhance creative thinking. Even if your job is incomprehensibly riveting (you lucky thing), you might benefit from the mundane. Gregor Mendel, the founder of genetics, would often count pea plants and honeybees. Most would argue the scientist reached great epiphany.

17. **Drop in an oversize image.** When I'm stuck on a design, I place one gigantic image on the page, so that I'm only seeing a small detail of it. This change in perspective often spawns several new ideas.

18. **Sleep on it.** Sleep helps generate new ideas in several ways. During sleep, the brain consolidates memories. That act of consolidation actually reorganizes thoughts, much like organizing books on a shelf. The new arrangement can help extract knowledge and generate new associations. And that half-awake period right before you fall asleep or when you wake up may also help you focus on a problem.

19. **Go Dramatic. Work backwards.** If you've tried to be subtle and it isn't working, go dramatic. Make as much of a mess of your design as possible and gradually remove elements.

20. **Use the computer in your head.** You can do a lot of designing without ever being in front of the screen. I'm as guilty as the next designer of sitting down and starting to create a design right away. But, when I'm stuck, I sit and design in my head or sketch on paper.

21. **Outrageous idea method.** Let yourself think the crazy, usually unacceptable ideas and then pare them back.

22. **What would my hero do?** Choose someone you admire greatly and imagine how that person would solve the creative problem or issue facing you. Immerse yourself in being that person, right down to the role they play daily, and imagine how they'd respond to the situation before you.

23. **Brainstorm the smart way.** Go to a nearby park, art installation or café. You'll bond with your team and feel more comfortable spurting off-the-wall ideas.

24. **Give the workplace some color.** Google doesn't have colorful, fanciful offices just for the sake of being quirky. Or bring something inspiring to your desk, whether that's a framed photograph, a potted plant or a Chewbacca figurine. Infusing your personality into your workspace brightens the office and promotes conversation — just don't be an eyesore.

25. **Change your perspective.** You might have heard the phrase 'Think outside the box'. Doing this is important for sparking creativity because it lets you see each situation from a different point of view.

When changing your perspective, approach problems by breaking them down into several elements. Then, shuffle the elements around and look for new ways of finding solutions. Think of what would happen if an idea you were stuck on were replaced.

26. **Pick-a-word method.** Pick any word and relate your creative problem or challenge to the word. For example, you choose the word "elephant". Your creative problem is to hold a party. Elephant might suggest to you to choose a safari theme, to have the guests dress as elephants, and to raise funds for the World Elephant Fund.

Bonus Points

Great books & Videos

Rules For Revolutionaries: The Capitalist Manifesto for Creating and Marketing New Products and Services by Guy Kawasaki

Aha! Insight by Martin Gardner

TedTalks has a great playlist on The Creative Spark. View it at http://www.ted.com/playlists/11/the_creative_spark

Everyday maintenance

Don't overeat. We're the sharpest when we're just a little bit hungry. It's not a metaphor. It's a primal thing.

Brain Training. A brain needs exercise. There are lots of books, videos, and websites that will help you to re-tune your brain.

Good habits. Yes lifestyle choices make a difference. Eat well. Exercise. Get enough rest. Don't abuse alcohol or drugs. All of your lifestyle choices contribute to your overall mental and physical health. If you want your brain to be at its best, act like it.

Keep a dry-erase marker by your bathroom mirror. If you haven't experienced it for yourself, you've at least heard it before: Our best ideas often materialize in the shower. Unfortunately, we tend lose the insight by the time we towel dry.

Be OK with failure in a fail-happy environment. Whether you're in a position of power or not, cultivate an office culture that rewards creative risk-taking. Human nature regularly balks at the most innovative ideas proposed. But it's critical that brainstorms and discussions take place in a feeling of confidence, not fear of ridicule or rejection. Plus, the sooner you embrace the fact that not every idea will be successful, the more wantonly you can produce ideas.

Experiment with experiences. Approach the world with a sense of childlike wonder, and see what new ideas you can identify and explore. Seek out new experiences. Get another stamp on your passport. Reach out to colleagues at other companies. Or seek out an undiscovered part of your own hometown.

Create an innovation lab. If you're a manager or leader at your organization, you are in a great position to nurture and grow creative confidence in your company. Dedicate a separate space for innovation; help a small group of innovators transcend the usual practices and constraints and generate new-to-the-world innovations. Apple did it with the Macintosh team.

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