

You Can Learn to Be Creative

by Tonya Langston

The next musical, the next day camp, even next Sunday, can be different for you if you are willing to put time and effort into learning how to be creative.

Ministry to children demands creativity.

The task is fluid, filled with constantly changing ideas, demands, and activities. Because an idea works this quarter does not mean you can do the same thing next quarter with the same results. Musicals, programs, Sunday nights, camps—all command new themes each time they roll around.

How do you keep those creative juices flowing?

Where can you get new ideas? And how do you finance those ideas on a limited budget? For some people, fresh ideas flow without effort. For others there is a constant struggle. Some may hear the compliment, “You are so creative,” but many others are heard to say, “I am just not creative.” According to Henry Ford, “Whether you believe you can or whether you believe you can’t, you’re absolutely right.” (www.brainquotes.com)

Step one to being creative is simply believing you can be.

Edward Bono, a leading authority in the field of creative thinking says, “Creative thinking is not a talent, it is a skill that can be learnt. It empowers people by adding strength to their natural abilities.” (www.edwardbono.com) People learn to do many things in life—fix their hair, brush their teeth, tie their shoes, cook, sew, play an instrument, and more. They learned, not because they could do perfectly the first time, but because they were told to practice until they had it done right. Creativity is a skill that can be learned the same way. Other people may do it faster, or more natural, but that doesn’t mean you can’t do it, too!

Once you believe you can, other steps can be taken to develop creativity.

One thing you can do is to consistently involve yourself in creative venues. Watch TV shows, browse magazines, look at books, study store displays, visit museums, view art displays, and attend performing arts events. You also can discover inspirational people. Find out who motivates you and watch them. Listen to what they say. Why do you find them inspirational? Work at developing those same characteristics.

Another way to increase creativity is to do things that produce.

When you get an idea, produce it without worrying about the outcome right now. The more you produce the more self-confidence you will gain. Do at least one thing a day that you consider to be creative. Come up with a new idea. Develop a new game. Think of a new object lesson. For inspiration, you can start with simple ideas: eat ice cream for breakfast, hang the clothes in your closet by color, rearrange your office, wear a pair of bright colored shoes, or a bright tie. The more you imagine yourself as a creative person, the more creative you will become.

Creativity is the solving of problems.

The problem may be positive or negative, but you will need to be resourceful and inventive to solve it.

Brainstorming is a great way to find solutions. Carry these two phrases around with you, “I wonder” and “What If”. Most creative solutions can begin with these two phrases.

You say, “I need a costume.” “I need a craft,” or “I need an original story.” Begin by wondering and asking: “What if ... I started with a box, or a sack,” or “I wonder if I could make a flower out of band-aids, or craft sticks, or rubber bands or paper clips or...”

Next, put those thoughts on paper or in your computer.

Putting an idea into a document promotes it. It is now not just a thought but an idea that may be brought into reality some day. When you start to solve a problem, remember nothing is impossible, everything works, and there are no boundaries. These can all be weeded out later. During the writing-it-down process, everything and anything goes! Bono says, “It is better to have enough ideas for some of them to be wrong, than to be always right by having no ideas at all.”

Another step in learning to be creative is realizing you have to spend tremendous amounts of time thinking about the solution to your problem.

It may appear solutions come easy to many people, but you may not realize the hours they have put into thinking about the problem—while driving, eating, or waiting in line.

Keep a mental back pocket and put your creative problem in that pocket. When you find yourself with a few minutes, take it out and think about it. The more you think, the more solutions you develop, the more great ideas you produce. “The best way to get a good idea is to get a lot of ideas,” two time Nobel Prize laureate Linus Pauling said. (www.ausicom.com/blog)

You also must train yourself to become aware of the creative solutions around you.

Researches say we are capable of filtering out information that is not necessary. For example, you are not aware your clothes are touching you. Yet they do so constantly. Your brain filters out that information. For creativity, it works like this. Let’s say you are in the market for a new car. You see one that you like. Suddenly, you see this type of car everywhere! It’s not that more people are driving them, it’s that you unconsciously trained your brain to retain that information. In the same manner, when you carry your “problem” around with you, you will begin noticing solutions.

If you know that you want to plan an event around a “F.R.O.G.” theme, you put that in your mental pocket. Soon you will be seeing frogs everywhere. You will notice frogs in every store, on shirts people are wearing, and on TV commercials. Retain this information in some format. Soon you will have all the information you need to plan your event (solve your problem).

When you do something often enough, it becomes automatic. Soon, being more creative and recognizing ideas around you will just happen. You will see things that will make you wonder if you could recreate them. You soon will be filing away ideas to be used later instead of coming up with ideas that you needed yesterday.

Creativity does not necessarily mean coming up with “new” ideas.

Many times someone else has put the hours into thinking. All you need to do is learn how to put the same idea to work for you in an innovative way. Use the resources available to you.

Googling images on line is a great way to inspire thoughts for designing a set or a background. Use the internet to “shop” for items that may be too expensive but can be reproduced using cheaper materials. Store displays, while done professionally, often also can be replicated using inexpensive materials. Creativity may be using another’s ideas, but discovering how to make them work for you.

Creativity may not come naturally to you, but it can be developed as a skill with time and practice. Your effectiveness as a children’s leader may depend on it.

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