

How to Have a Creative Attitude

Peak More

The simple answer to this question is to peak more - but first, let me tell you a story. Back in 1994, I was lucky enough to travel to Myanmar, which we still persist in calling Burma. Nothing has changed much there for three hundred years. It was grim and hot; the people were undernourished, gracious and very wary of tourists; the food was meagre and unappetising; the hotel accommodation was basic- hotel beds like wooden coffins, the pillow cases like rough sackcloth. People survived on much less than they needed: a luxury was an extra bowl of rice, or a ride in a car to the local hospital for medicine. Yet, the landscape, scattered with distinctive Burmese-style Buddhist *stupas* or temples, often with gold-leaf painted Buddhas, or with simple multi-coloured decorations, shone through, ever smiling, ever calm. This veneration for these temples gave people hope. Life was not ideal, yet I began to wonder if they had adapted to difficulty in ways that we in the west could only imagine.

Leaving the behaviour of the military regime aside, just watching how Burmese people cope everyday demonstrates how learning to be calm can suffer appalling challenges. To this Western eye, they have perfected the art of poise under pressure, of enduring difficult odds, just taking simple pleasures wherever they come.



Bagan

So it was in Bagan that I began to feel what I suspected Burmese people feel. Bagan is a vast plain on the right bank of the Irrawaddy river.



There are hundreds of pyramid-shaped temples and religious *stupas* or shrines, covering an area of 40 square miles. You could not just sense the atmosphere of heightened other-worldly peace and contemplation in your skin and bones, but taste it and smell it. I climbed to the top of the sunset temple just as the sun went down. Sitting there, staring out at the sun over the river, a magical hush fell. These moments are for all time, never forgotten and connected my spirit to that place. If there is a genius (spirit) of the place, then Bagan had it in abundance. This triggered a feeling of indescribable peace and joy. It was simple, transient, yet profound. This is what is known as a peak both physical and mental/emotional.



The Bagan experience is there for all those who visit. They attempt to capture it in photographs. It is not futile to try to trap beauty in glossy colour print, but it can only ever be a token of the essence which is your own personal inner landscape. It was not easy to come down as it was not just a physical going down the rough stone steps. I had to understand why it felt so good and why it reminded me of other times I had felt that way. From then on, I decided to learn how to peak more.

What Peak Experiences Show About Creativity

The psychology of these moments is fascinating, especially since they were almost overlooked. Nobody thought them worthy of attention until, in the nineteen fifties and sixties, Abraham Maslow investigated what motivated healthy people. According to Maslow, peak moments arrive when all your struggling for survival is over. You have climbed the pyramid of basic needs, security, food, finance and now have the time – not just time, the luxury- to reflect on your situation. The good news is, you do not have to go to an exotic place to experience this. They happen anywhere- while weeding the garden, walking to the bus stop, or washing the dishes.



One of the characteristics of peaking is euphoria- known to some as a 'high,' as altitude represents literally a feeling of being out and above your normal bodily restraints. Even to remember such a moment can trigger the body's hormones: serotonin and endorphins –which tend to enhance the capacity for even more enjoyment. These are the hormones you

need to counterbalance the ones we usually trigger in our bodies through stress - adrenaline and cortisol and, worse- glucocorticoids, which can damage memory neurones.

So if we chunk down the components of the Sunset Temple experience, these are the distilled ingredients:

- transcendence
- ecstasy
- love
- awe
- appreciation
- happiness and joy
- selflessness, or lack of ego

If all these were not enough in themselves, there is a bonus - it brings about a release of creative energy. What seems to happen is the peak experience clears away the dead wood that may have been preventing you from feeling creative, and lends optimism to your spirit. Once these dampeners have fallen away, you can just dip into the flow of energy that is always there. Think of it like plugging your self in to the main circuit that connects everyone together.

Maslow says that having a creative attitude echoes peak experiences, so they are equated. Many people believe for whatever reason that they are not entitled to this, but it is available to everyone. One thing that takes you directly there is to find that thing that you love doing so much, do it with focus and you find that time vanishes like tissue paper. Doing this, we lose our sense



both of time and the ordinary preoccupied self. This is what gives us relief from dull timetable ruled by the clock or by work routines.

We are in effect lost (and found) in the present, which certainly beats pasting and futurizing: being stuck in the past, or obsessed by an imagined future. Being totally immersed in the here and now, paradoxically removes us small concerns, makes us more expansive. The usual negative self talk – that’s the voice we all know well, often parental in tone, that carps, criticises and paralyses us from having those great ideas we are scared us into paralysis.

Practise at plugging into this gives it strength so you can create a trend towards peaking more. Think of it as stripping away one’s encrusted layers, to emerging more authentic, more grounded in your true self. Maslow called those who peak consistently ‘self actualizers’. There is even a state called a plateau experience where those who are self actualised have continuous peak experiences.

We might already recognise this fascinated absorption with wherever you are and whatever it is you are doing. Sports people and artists will recognize it as being ‘in flow’ or ‘in the zone’. It tends to leave an indelible imprint on the mind and, once tasted, cannot be forgotten. We seek to revisit as often as we can. But as usual there are many things that get in the way; attitudes, beliefs, distorted notions, or even caustic, unconsidered opinions.

Myths about Creativity

Similarly we are often in a mode of thinking close to creative only we just did not think it was because it did not fit our model of what 'creative' ought to be. You have to be a great artist with lots of time on your hands to be creative, right? Wrong, actually. Anyone can be creative and often do not realise when their minds are already having a good old romp around the brain. These activities include simple concentration, absorption in any task, giving attention to something, reading a book, watching a film, driving, swimming, walking, fixing something, cleaning the house, doing the dishes or any action which funnels your attention inwards. The breakthrough is to recognise that we are close to the creative mind that we thought we were. Colin Wilson said, 'Human beings do not realise the extent to which their own sense of defeat prevents them from doing things they could do perfectly well. The peak experience induces the recognition that your own powers are far greater than you imagined them.'

Ways to have more Creative Attitude

Many people strive to reach this sense of having an inner landscape to call on like Bagan. But it is possible to develop the skill. We can shape our lives in a manner which suits our highest and best impulses. Think not so much of the end result but of the doing and being in it. So, here are a few methods to start you off on your creative journey with a few reasons and pointers. Even if you are already creative, it is good to bolster the attitude.



Useful Ways to have a Creative Attitude

- 1. Focus on a particular field**

A great way to do this is to practise visualising what you want – in great detail
- 2. Engage in creative activity regularly**

Consistency beats erratic extremes of effort. A little every day goes a long way.
- 3. Guard your solitary time**

The mind needs quiet focus time to recharge mental batteries and establish the 'flow' or being in the 'zone'.
- 4. Cultivate supportive friendships**

Like minds can give the essential people interaction, but be choosy; avoid energy vampires
- 5. Indulge your passion**

'Success is loving what you do.' **Schweitzer**. So it is simple: Find what you love; then do it all you can.
- 6. Take time to play more**

Expert Stuart Brown says play is not just necessary to brain growth but to our mental health and survival
- 7. Do things differently**

Fall out of your rut by being open to the unusual instead of sticking to routines. 'A change in the weather is sufficient to recreate the world and ourselves.' **Proust**
- 8. Learn new a new skill**

New neural connections are constantly created in the brain this way
- 9. Give up things that don't help**

Being selective about what you do means being aware of energy drains
- 10. Experience a familiar environment in a new and unique way**

'The real voyage of discovery consists not in seeking new landscapes but in having new eyes'.
Proust
- 11. Model your life on the lives of creative people you admire**

Study those you admire and do what they did without abandoning your uniqueness.
- 12. Listen to the inner voice that urges you to do things**

To really listen go deep inside and open you ears along with heart and mind.

Everyone has their own particular Bagan experience to draw on, be it on a holiday or at home in the kitchen contemplating a wine glass, or listening to some inspired music. It does not matter where or when it happens, or whether you want to write a poem or a shopping list, it can be more creative if you recognise it for what it is and learn to slow down and have real fun Peaking More.

Kieron Devlin

www.kierondevlin.com

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