

Are You Creative? ©Ann Bell

Are you creative? I say, “Yes! Emphatically, yes. All human beings are creative. The more important question is: What are you doing to encourage your creativity?”

Many people judge their creativity by whether they have produced creative work. However, this gauge measures their persistence better than it measures their creativity. We usually think of creativity as applying only to visual art. Some people extend the meaning to include performing artists, such as dancers, singers and actors...even writers and poets. We seldom consider the term to describe ourselves if we do not fit clearly within the mentioned groups. But as the artist Miles Batt observed, “Creativity is a lifestyle, and ideas are the product and lifeblood of that lifestyle.”

You can make creativity a part of your life. Begin to develop your own creativity by consciously being open to new ways of doing things. Approach each activity as a new adventure. Let your creativity flow as your mind provides new ideas and new ways of working. Know that creativity becomes stronger only through being used.

Creativity involves letting go of preconceptions and exploring new ideas. Every invention was either the result of an experiment (or many experiments) or the result of an accident. If it was the result of an accident, the person had to be observant enough to notice the unexpected result and open enough to realize a possible new application for it.

Steve Jobs, of Apple Computer and Pixar fame, said “Creativity is just connecting things. When you ask creative people how they did something, they feel a little guilty because they didn’t really do it, they just saw something. It seemed obvious to them after a while.” Walt Disney “saw” a mouse acting in new ways and talking. From this idea, he built a worldwide company that has brought joy to millions of people.

Anthropologist Margaret Mead said, “To the extent a person makes, invents, or thinks something that is new to him, he may be said to have performed a creative act.” The point of these quotations is to show you that whether or not you think of yourself as having the potential to be an artist, you are indeed creative. Creativity applies to all areas of life, not just to art.

Creativity is neither skill nor muscle. Like both, creativity requires exercise to grow. You can exercise your creativity through play. During unstructured play time, the child within the adult is free to surface. As the singer and songwriter Joni Mitchell noticed, “You’ve got to keep the child alive; you can’t create without it.”

Artists, writers, and other creative people make their living through the application of their art. These people learn that when they forget to nourish that precious child inside of them, they may experience blocks. (Blocks are extended periods of time when they are unable to produce). The creative force simply stops. The cure involves nourishing that inner child (or spirit) that is the creative source, and encouraging it to reappear.

We cannot compel creativity, but we can pave the way for it. We can best encourage our creativity by allowing ourselves unstructured time and by welcoming our creativity when it decides to appear. If we are open to new ideas, they will present themselves more often.

Let's get personal. If you want to encourage your creativity, the best way to do that is to be good to yourself. Give yourself time alone and spend it doing things you enjoy. Creativity surfaces when the mind is allowed to play, but the mind cannot play when we are demanding that it perform. When we allocate time so closely that the mind can't wander and play, the subconscious brain hides, gets discouraged, and goes to sleep. The fast, structured pace of our lives is more likely to discourage creativity than to encourage it.

As a result, many people are convinced that they are not creative. They don't even recognize an area where they might have an interest. They close the door on their exploration of art, writing, music, or dance by saying that they have no talent. But talent isn't the issue. They have never given themselves the opportunity to explore.

Anyone can derive great pleasure by exploring art—whether or not they have talent. Technique and skill are built through practice and application. We might think that they are an essential ingredient when we seek to evaluate the product but the joy of the process is what keeps us playing long enough for the skills to develop. Talent, which is the mark of a great artist, may not be evident in early works. That doesn't matter, since talent is a completely separate issue. The joy for an individual is in the process, not in the product. The product comes much later, after necessary skills have been acquired.

So allow yourself the opportunity to enjoy your own creativity by being open to the possibility that it might exist. Make time in your life to welcome your creativity. Unstructured time is the essential ingredient. So indulge your inner child, which is another way to describe your creative source. Stroll leisurely. Sit and watch the clouds...or observe a butterfly fluttering from one flower to another. Follow a snail as it moves along a vine. Do anything that ignores time. If ideas occur that you would like to explore, give yourself permission to explore them.

Perhaps you can remember the joy you felt as a child when you received a new box of colors or paints, or even a new toy. Joy encourages your inner child. Always remember that this child is the root of your creativity. How would you like to feel this joy again? Well, you can. Be receptive when your newly awakened creativity sends you signals. If you feel inspired to paint, dig out your forgotten paints and brushes. If you want to dance, turn on your favorite music and begin to move your body with the rhythm. If words speak to you, sit in your favorite chair and write a poem.

If you are too intimidated or feel lost, then find a class. Give yourself permission to explore and to learn something new. Do not evaluate the result...just enjoy the process. That is where it begins.

According to businessman and entrepreneur Harvey Mackay, one way to be creative is to force yourself to learn something new.

Begin now. Look at your entire world with new eyes. Put your clothing and accessories together in different ways. Rearrange the furniture. Write a poem. Sit in the garden and observe. Try a new recipe, modify a favorite one, or make up your own. You can make your creative self feel welcome by making very minor changes in your routine and your attitude. Be good to yourself.

Try it. You will like it. And you will be richer for it.

I promise.

Robert Henri, author of *The Art Spirit*, says “The object isn’t to make art; it’s to be in that wonderful state which makes art inevitable.” You can put yourself in that wonderful state by your actions and your attitudes. As your creativity develops, your life becomes your unique work of art.

Ann Bell is an artist, writer, teacher, and creativity coach in Houston, Texas. Visit her website at www.AnnBell.net to see samples of her work and learn more about her.. If you would like to receive information about her forthcoming book *101 Ways to Encourage your Creativity*, send an email to artist@AnnBell.net requesting “Creativity Info”.