

# Success Is Yours For the Taking

..and Here's Where the  
Secrets Have Been Hiding



**Dick Kuiper**

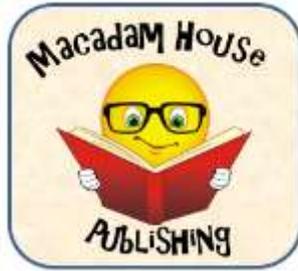
# **Success Is Yours For the Taking**

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**First Edition - 2017**

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Catalog-in-Publication Data is on file  
with the Library of Congress

**ISBN: 978-1983445514**

Printed in the United States of America

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# Introduction

**Important Note:** If you're seeking a collection of trite platitudes about how to be successful, you've bought the wrong book.

This work is based on stark realism as experienced by one man who started in the trenches, and has been on a wild roller coaster of exhilarating ups and a few gut-wrenching downs ever since. It's not a picture of a meteoric rise to success, but one of gradual lessons learned on the way.

In this book, I'll talk a lot about "secrets to success." That phrase is overworked and somewhat obsolete in today's world. Some people look at the success of others and feel they must have some sort of secret that led to their success.

While that's partially true, the "secrets" are only the pearls of brilliance floating on the surface. The real gems are the ideas behind those secrets, and those gems are the underlying principles that caused the bright ideas to germinate and bear fruit.

When looking for our own success, we should be looking at the success secrets and ideas of other successful people only for learning and inspiration. For the most part, they're already out in the open. Therefore we can no longer consider them true secrets. If we merely replicate what other successful people have done, we become "me too" copycats.

Don't get me wrong, there is usually room for followers in most industries. Look at Avis as an example. They started out by duplicating Hertz and differentiated themselves only with the slogan "We Try Harder." That turned out to be a successful strategy, but merely trying harder does not work for everyone.

Maximum success comes from innovative ideas and such ideas come from underlying principles, perhaps applied in a new and different way. So, such a principle may be “never give up.” That’s not a new idea or a secret. But the refusal to give up drives a person to keep charging forward until they do come up with a new or better idea. Viola! Success is now within reach. Of course, the idea must be followed up with solid execution. While “never give up” is nothing new, it is only a simplistic sample of the other 70+ principles I’ll introduce.

Drilling down to the root principles leading to success has become one of my specialties after several decades of research and experience. Sharing that knowledge with you is my reason for writing this book.

In addition to the well-known successes, there are many regular people who have achieved success without it ever being publicized. I might call their ideas semi-secrets. Many of my associates and I fall under that category.

Aside from success secrets, many well-known blunders, from which we can extract lessons learned have been publicized as well. While my blunders have never made the press, I’ll openly share them in these pages so that readers can learn from my mistakes.

Even with the big success stories, most people pay no real attention to the underlying principles that are often hidden. They simply go on their merry way without understanding the real underlying principles, which I’ll refer to as “non-secrets” for simplicity.

Those valuable “inside scoops” get lost in the shuffle and people who need them the most are oblivious to their value. They are still out there trying to re-invent the wheel themselves without reading all the free “instruction manuals.”

In looking back at many opportunities I failed to grasp early in life, I came to realize that I had a mental block telling me I did not deserve to be successful. Holy crap! ...Really?

As I learned more about psychology, I came to realize I was not the only one who felt undeserving. That may be the biggest secret of all. To some degree, over 90% of us have that same affliction. It's time to get over it!

Writing this book has been a fun experience but not an especially easy one. While it has been a delightful trip down memory lane as I recounted my long list of successes thus far in life, it brought up some regrets as well.

My goal for writing the book is to provide hope to anyone, young or old, who is struggling to find some “magic” formula for success. There is no such thing as a magic formula. I hope my insights will show people that with the right mindset, anyone of us is capable of fabulous success.

As I went back in time and revisited some of the stupid mistakes I made at points in my journey, I was saddened a bit by the reality that I cannot go back and correct them. All I can do is take pleasure in the wonderful lessons I learned and resolve to avoid such errors in the future.

Most of all, I get a sense of accomplishment when I think of the people – hopefully more than just a few – who will benefit from the “non-secrets” and lessons I’m about to share.

As I’ve talked to many people of all ages and walks of life throughout my travels, I have been thanked many times for sharing the lessons I’ve learned, however painful. Of all my successes, having the opportunity to share what I’ve learned is the most rewarding.

By writing this book, I get the opportunity to share the stories, tips and techniques which have enriched my life. If I can help even just a few people better their lives by reading this book, it will have been worth the effort.

I first got the idea for putting this work together when I found people asking me, “What’s the secret to your success?”

While it was flattering to be asked such a question, it always surprised me. I am no genius who dreamed up the great success secrets on my own. Almost all of what made me successful, I learned from others. I’ve also seen many triumphs happen with friends and associates and I’ve heard about hundreds more. These further fueled my research.

As I recount my own success stories and the lessons I learned from my failures, I’ll be highlighting what I like to call my “non-secrets,” which are the oft-hidden principles to which I refer.

My “non-secrets” will look like this:

**The surest route to success is to find someone who is already successful and drill down to understand their inspiration. Then follow that lead. Follow enough and you will become a leader.**

I’ve sprinkled over 70 such insights throughout these pages. Enjoy the ride. Hopefully a few of them will bring you some success in your journey.

Dick Kuiper

## Volume 1

# Success Is Abundant

*“The air is full of ideas. They are knocking you in the head all the time. You only have to know what you want, then forget it, and go about your business. Suddenly, the idea will come through. It was there all the time.”*

*– Henry Ford*

**S**taying on task with the title of this book, I want to back up my claim that it’s hard to recognize the success secrets of others. There is no treasure trove of helpful hints that must be unlocked with a special key. Hordes of successful people tout their successes but few uncover the root of the success lying below the surface. That has been my mission.

While many successes have made it into the press and biographies, the inspiration and tactics used in the process are not often discussed. It’s left up to us to learn about them and apply them in our own situations.

Most people have heard the amazing story about the seemingly “overnight success” of Post-it Notes. But few are aware of the ten year struggle of the inventors to get

their discovery on the market. I'll get to that in a minute. The "secret" behind the discovery of Post-it Notes was the failure of the adhesive to meet original expectations. The "non-secret" was the raw determination involved and it's really the true secret behind the so-called secret.

This is the reason I emphasize such "non-secrets" in boxes throughout this book. That way, they are easily envisioned and hopefully remembered.

All we have to do is expend a modicum of effort to grab them, absorb them and begin to utilize them for our own success. They are ours for the taking since most of them are in the public domain and are free of charge.

Keep in mind that ideas cannot be copyrighted; it's only things written about them that can be. The ideas I reveal in this book are not my property. Use them freely for your own gain with my blessing.

As I indicated in the introduction, the publicized "secrets to success" are not the actual secrets at all. In reality, the concept of that phrase sounds like more of an excuse to me than one of sound reasoning. People failing to realize success can shield their shortfall with complaints of not being privy to the 'secrets.' They failed to look deep enough to figure out the real secret, the underlying principle.

People who achieve success are typically very proud of it and rightly so.

Except for the minority who are pathologically shy, most successful people want others to know about their success, sometimes down to every nauseating detail. They will talk your ears off about all the steps they went

through to win the day. However, these steps are the mechanics of the process, not the underlying principle.

Based on my own personal experience, you do not want to get me started about the many clever things I did as a software developer in the early days of my I.T. career. On occasion, I've gotten carried away explaining the logical steps I used in creating my more innovative software apps. People then had to slap me upside the head to get me to shut up.

Except in cases where confidential trade secrets are involved, successful people love to talk in detail about their accomplishments. Ego often propels them to boast about what they have done. Beyond that, most get tremendous satisfaction simply by sharing their stories. Except for the overly timid ones, they love being interviewed and seeing their stories on websites, in publications or even on TV.

Aside from the prime-time broadcast media, the majority of writers and publishers enjoy focusing mostly on positive events. This is especially true of those who report on what's happening in the business world. While failures must be huge to make the business section, success stories find their way in even if they're not earth-shattering.

## **Failures Can Lead to Success**

From this perspective, information about peoples' successes outnumber that of peoples' failures 2-to-1. Accordingly, successes are publicized from two sources: 1) the person achieving the triumph and wanting to talk about it, and 2) the media wanting to feature newsworthy stories.

Failures, on the other hand are rarely publicized by the victim, only by those in the media looking for subjects with shock value. Naturally, there's a bit more to the picture since I have left out word of mouth, social media and a few other communication channels...but I'm sure you get the point. The bottom line is that we can probably learn as much or more from failures than from successes.

Bright ideas are everywhere you look – just pay attention and grab a few that appeal to you and put them into action as a practice run until you get your own bright idea. Please understand, however, that having a great idea or borrowing one from someone else is only half the picture.

The “taking action” half is where the rubber meets the road. Without action, ideas end up in the ditch. In the words of Thomas Edison, "Ideas without execution are hallucinations." I'll discuss this in more detail later in the volume entitled “Create Your Own Luck.”

**Can't come up with a great idea? Borrow one that can be improved and run with it. That will give you practice to come up with your own.**

## **Luck Is Not All It's Cracked Up to Be**

Following close on the heels of the “hidden secrets” complaint bemoaned by those failing to achieve success is the “it's mostly a matter of luck” smoke screen. Aside from the fortunate few who hit it big playing the lottery, the difference between success, mediocrity and failure almost always involves something other than luck.

When I finally reached the point in my life where I could afford to buy a house worth a few hundred thousand dollars above the market average, I was amazed at how

often it was attributed to luck. I had to chuckle when many of my young guests would make comments like, “Man, you sure are lucky to live in such a great house!”

I’m sure the parents of those children were at a loss for words since they knew luck had little to do with it. Still, trying to explain the realities of salary level economics to a ten year old is somewhat fruitless. If I found myself in that same parental situation, I’d move quickly on to another subject as my tactic of choice, simply dodging the issue.

I’m sure you’ve heard the serendipitous story of the creation of the ubiquitous Post-It Note at 3M in Minnesota as an example of plain old dumb luck. What most people don’t know is that luck alone would not have brought these sticky notes to the market. Accidental discoveries, no matter how promising, still need a big push to gain market acceptance.

Here’s the rest of the story:

In 1968, Dr. Spencer Silver, a scientist at 3M, was tasked with the chore of developing a super-strong adhesive. In one of his many formulation attempts, his experimentation resulted in a reusable, pressure-sensitive glue – interesting, but way off target. Not to be dissuaded by the failure, Silver figured there had to be a viable use for his accidental discovery.

For the following five years, the persistent Dr. Silver kept promoting his reusable adhesive to anyone and everyone within 3M who would listen. He kept hoping someone would come up with a problem for which his invention would be the solution.

Finally, in 1974 a colleague named Art Fry came forward with a small gesture. He wanted to use the glue to temporarily position a bookmark in his hymn book. Fortunately, 3M had a great policy allowing employees to further develop innovative ideas. Fry took advantage of it.



No market research was done to select the yellow color of the original notes. It was just another “accident” as the lab next door only had yellow scrap paper to lend the team.

In 1977, nine years after the accidental discovery, 3M launched the product in a few test markets but results were disappointing. The following year, 3M provided free samples of the sticky notes directly to consumers in Boise, Idaho.

After over 90% of those receiving the samples indicated they would buy them, 3M went into production and rolled them out as "Post-Its" in 1979 – over 10 years after they were fortuitously invented.

I’ll leave it up to you to decide how much of this breakthrough product was luck and how much was persistence. Hint: there is only one correct answer. It took ten years of steadfast tenacity in the face of negative corporate resistance to make it an “overnight success.”

**Never use a lack of luck as an excuse for missing out on success. It's easier than you think to create your own luck.**

## An Accidental Career

When people hear the word “accident,” they normally think of bad luck or errors in judgment. However, the term “accidentally” can go one of three ways...resulting in a negative result, a positive result or an outcome of no consequence.

On the positive side, we often think of serendipity as the accidental discovery of something positive while in the pursuit of some other goal.

People who know me are aware of the fact that I enjoyed a successful and highly rewarding career that started out in I.T. (known as Data Processing back in the day) and morphed into management consulting and high-level research and advisory positions.

Most executives in these positions began their journeys by earning at least a college degree in something like computer science or business management, and more than half topped that off with an MBA. These are admirable achievements to say the least.

My journey started off on an unconventional path when I dropped out of high school, ran away from home to become a surfer in Southern California.



I must quickly point out that while I did drop out of high school, I do not recommend this path for others. I did go back and finish high school in California. I am a strong advocate of getting a solid education.

I do not limit the term education to mean only formal education. I credit my success to getting a broad and rather hybrid education. College-level education is great but there is far more to getting “educated” than just earning a degree as I’ll discuss later in the book.

In my opinion, one’s education should be a combination of formal college courses, some vocation studies where applicable, self-education through reading, “street smarts” knowledge accumulation, workshops, seminars, travel experiences and a boat-load of continuous learning of all sorts.

After enjoying my Southern California surfing expedition, I somehow ended up in the Air Force. Actually “ended up” is a misnomer. I chose to enlist in the Air Force because my lottery number for the draft was coming up quickly.

I did not want to get drafted by the Army and take my chances as a foot soldier in the jungles of Vietnam. I have to admit, the thought of that scared the shit out of me.

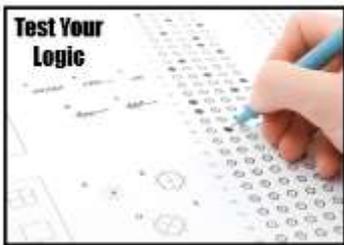
My Air Force career took off like a rocket – pardon the pun. I had scored really high on the entrance exam so I got to pick my field of endeavor. I chose the “administrative” category so I could spend my time as a desk jockey, hopefully a world away from the foxholes and rice paddies of Vietnam.

In addition to choosing my career field, the Air Force gave me dibs on which geographic area I desired to be stationed. With Southern California at the top of my list, I was fortunate to land at Oxnard Air Force Base, about 5 miles from the Pacific Ocean and less than 30 minutes from Malibu, one of the West Coast’s premier surfing spots.

While settling into my comfortable desk job at Oxnard AFB, I immediately became best friends with my buddy Ralph, a fellow surfer from San Diego. He and I went surfing every chance we got.

Then one day, a small opportunity came knocking. A memo came out saying there was an opening in the base's computer department and anyone who wished to apply could take a computer logic test. The test was scheduled for a morning the following week and the great news was that all applicants would have the afternoon free following the test.

Wow! A free afternoon for surfing in Malibu!



Since I assumed any test involving computers had to be heavy on advanced math – not my strong suit – I figured I did not have a chance of scoring high. Ralph took an even dimmer view of his chances.

“So what, Ralph, let’s just blow through the test, load up the boards and head for the beach,” I laughed. He agreed and the plan was set.

It was the perfect sunny Southern California day. We zoomed through the test in an hour and took off for Malibu. Actually Ralph finished faster than I did, mostly because I was having some fun with the questions.

It was easier than I had anticipated. Way TOO easy I thought as we headed to the beach. I just figured I had gotten suckered into choosing some overly obvious answers. But...what the hell. Surf’s up!

The following week, I was summoned to the base commander's office over the PA system. "Oh shit, what did I do now?" was my first reaction.

I almost choked when the base commander shook my hand and congratulated me for scoring highest on the test we had taken. "Pack your bags, airman," he chuckled when he saw the shock on my face. "You're off to computer school in Denver for three months and then we'll see you back here in the computer room."

When I breezed through the school with honors, I realized a career in data processing (excuse me, I.T.) was in my future. I felt a little sheepish about sneaking into such a coveted career through the back door, but I wasn't going to argue about it.

Who would have thought that a day of goofing off would launch an exciting career?

**Being open to the fact that events out of the ordinary can take you to places you never dreamed you'd reach.**

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**10 More Pages In Chapter 1**

## Volume 2

# Creativity, Your Free Ride to Success

*“Imagination is everything. It is the preview of life's coming attractions.”*

*- Albert Einstein*

**W**henever people ask me about the one skill to which I attribute to the business success I've enjoyed throughout my career, creativity wins hands down. Creative ability has always been the number one game changer for me. Although I've been blessed with a slightly above average IQ, I'm seldom accused of being the smartest guy in the room. Creativity is a horse of a different color. Since most highly creative people do not gravitate to the business world the way I did, it gives me an edge in business.

So, is creativity my secret weapon?

On the one hand, I might be inclined to say yes. But upon further contemplation, I must admit that creativity is anything but a secret. For starters, we were all born with it so everyone started out on an even keel.

One of the unfortunate realities of life is that many people surrendered their creative abilities due to a variety of societal pressures, which I'll cover in this volume. Actually, it was not so much a matter of surrendering as it was a matter of trading. Many people bartered away their creative abilities in exchange for the conformity they felt was necessary to climb the ladder of success.

Being the renegade I am, the need for conformity rarely crosses my mind. I write

**CONFORMITY COMMANDS**  
**Get a Job. Go to Work. Get Married.**  
**Raise Kids. Act Normal. Obey the Law.**  
**Don't Wear White After Labor Day.**

blog posts about creativity and have taught workshops showing people how to recapture the creative agility they had earlier in life. So, I'm doing what I can to keep it from being a secret.

## **Creativity: The Ultimate Renewable Resource**

Contrary to much popular thought, creativity is neither a birthright nor a mysterious trait exclusive to certain lucky or gifted individuals. People who claim that creativity cannot be learned or taught are categorically wrong and I personally am living proof of that.

Another misconception many people have is that creativity is manifested in the form of individual acts of brilliance; e.g. "hey, that's pretty creative." In reality, creativity is more of a process than an isolated act.

People labeled as creative understand that it is a continuously unfolding way of life. It is always being nurtured, consciously or unconsciously, and applied over

and over again as required...or sometimes just as a flight of fancy. It's the process of coming up with original ideas of value on a repeated basis.

Steve Jobs said: "Creativity is just connecting things....." Adding to Jobs' thought, I say the seed of creativity is awareness. Awareness is a trait that certainly can be learned and developed.

All that is required is an open mind and a little self-discipline. Instead of merely letting life's events pass you by without much notice, just take a little time to absorb them and learn whatever you can from them.

There is no need to thoroughly analyze events as they unfold, take any action on them or figure out how they fit into any bigger picture; just be aware of them as they pass through your field of consciousness.

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"Creativity is just  
connecting things..."  
- Steve Jobs

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Given this awareness, our brains will automatically tuck them away in the massive "database" in our cerebral cortex to remain available for access at a later time. This is where Jobs' "connecting things" comes into play.

The more events of which you took the time to be aware, the more raw material you will have stored away in your cerebral database. The more "puzzle pieces" you have stored away, the better you can connect the dots in thousands and thousands of combinations to fit problematic situations.

When faced with a challenge, look beyond the obvious solutions for something that may seem a little bizarre at first. Psychologists call this “divergent” thinking.

I firmly believe we are all naturally creative and, like every other skill, some people have more natural talent than others. However, each of us can increase our own creative skills, just as we can increase our skills in other areas such as athletics (through physical practice) or academics (through studying.)

This is not to say anyone can become an Arnold Palmer or Albert Einstein. Attaining perfection is not necessary, all we have to do is show improvement over time. In fact, striving for perfection can easily lead to overkill and a colossal waste of time...unless of course, you happen to be a brain surgeon.

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*“Speed and effectiveness beat perfection almost every time.”*  
- Dick Kuiper

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There’s an old says that goes, “Close only counts in horseshoes and hand grenades.” There is one more area in which being close enough is a winning strategy and that is general business.

In things such as business decisions, processes and product design, it’s been my experience that striving for perfection is a waste of resources. Move quickly on those activities, you can always make improvements later when cash flow starts coming In.

Our brains are built for creative problem solving, and it does not require a degree in nuclear physics to reveal and improve on our natural inventiveness. The human brain evolved over millions of years into a very complex organ that is optimized for innovation. Our highly evolved brains

are always assessing our ever-changing environment - mixing and matching our responses to fit each situation.

Every sentence we craft is unique, and each interaction we have is distinctive. The fact that we have the ability to come up with a nearly endless set of unique responses to questions that arise around us proves that we are naturally creative.

**Always know you have creative genius inside you. Stop hiding it for fear of appearing immature. Use it to your advantage.**

## Curiosity: The Kindling for Your Creativity Fire

If creativity is the answer, what was the question?

Like many great revelations in life, the aptitude of creativity did not appear from out of nowhere, it had to evolve from something. My extensive studying of famous creative people in the world points to one conclusion. Curiosity is the precursor to creativity.

According to a 2017 article in *The Atlantic*, research has shown that curiosity is one of the strongest markers of academic success. It ranks right up there with a person's IQ score as being an indicator of high achievement.



The discovery of America was made possible only by the curiosity of people in the old world about what might lie beyond the horizon.

Sir Isaac Newton's "discovery" of gravity was born from the curiosity of what made the apple fall from the tree. One has to ask, "Why didn't anyone else ask that question?"

When Orville Wright, of the Wright brothers, was applauded as an example of how far one can go in life despite not coming from a privileged upbringing, he took exception to that notion. He held that he and his brother were very privileged because they were raised in a family that greatly encouraged their intellectual curiosity.

To fully understand that all of us were created as naturally curious creatures, all we have to do is watch young children, even infants. Some parents complain they have to watch their children every minute. Why is that? It's because they are like little buzz saws getting into everything within reach. It's the result of pure curiosity.

One of the landmark moments for a parent is hearing their child speak his or her first words. What a joy!

But during the few years that follow, many parents often wish their kids would just stop with the seemingly non-stop questioning and shut up for a few minutes of peace. Why mom? But why? Yeah, but why?

It's obvious that curiosity is the chief imperative for learning. We are the sum total of our learning experiences and what we've done with that learning. Curbing one's curiosity shuts down our learning process.

I want to take a few seconds here and differentiate between learning and education. While learning is the key to true education, getting an "education" does not always mean we're learning. After all, students can ace a test in school by simply memorizing what's in the textbook. But in many cases, they have not really learned much.

In her book, *The Hungry Mind*, Susan Engel documented that curiosity is drastically underappreciated, especially in schools. Even in our country's standardized testing,

schools are missing the essential component of learning: the desire to learn in the first place. As Engel notes, teachers rarely encourage curiosity in the classroom. It's more often a reason for punishment, not reward.

Stepping back, curiosity can be defined as a burning desire to explore novel and even challenging circumstances. Many research studies have linked curiosity to happiness, improvement of relationships, personal growth and even an appreciation for our meaning in life.

**Stop stifling your curiosity for fear of appearing stupid. The more questions you ask, the more knowledge you acquire.**

Since curiosity embodies a state of active interest to know more about a given subject, it creates an openness to unfamiliar experiences, which in turn avails us of greater opportunities to experience discovery and enjoyment.

Curiosity is something that can be nurtured and developed. With practice, we can harness the power of curiosity to transform everyday tasks into interesting and enjoyable experiences. When we are curious, we see things differently through increased powers of observation. It makes us feel alive and engaged.

### **Questions: The Bridge from Curiosity to Creativity**

To proceed, we must differentiate idle curiosity from true curiosity. The former is like playtime while the latter gets down to business. Curiosity without questions is like a car without a steering wheel.

Too many people go about life merely accepting what they see or are told without thinking to question much of anything. "It is what it is." ...so you're going to leave it at that?

## **Here are just a few thoughts:**

The next time someone tells you something is the greatest thing since sliced bread, ask them, “And just what was the greatest thing before sliced bread?”

When something is not working right and you’re told, “It’s out of whack,” ask them, “What the hell is a whack anyway?”

Do you ever wonder why people refer to the nighttime as “after dark?” Since darkness comes after the sunlight goes away, shouldn’t the nighttime be called “after light?” Taking that a logical step further, shouldn’t the morning hours be referred to as “after dark” since they follow the overnight hours of darkness? Duh.

### **...Ok, so let’s get serious.**

True knowledge comes from getting answers to questions. No answers, no knowledge. So, why are so many people afraid to ask questions when they don’t understand something. I’m afraid the answer to that question is that they fear looking stupid or uninformed.

Ask yourself: What’s worse, not asking a question and remaining ignorant or asking the question and learning something.

Keep in mind the immortal words of Will Rogers, “Everybody is ignorant, only on different subjects.”

**Instead of blindly accepting things as they are thought to be, turn on your inquisitive nature to uncover their true form.**

## So, Who Stole Our Creativity?

Since curiosity and creativity go hand in hand, it follows that like curiosity, we're all born as creative beings. Just as we can observe pure curiosity in new borns and young children, we see their creative streak as well. Just ask any mom who has had to remove finger painting from the wall.



Given that we all had the penchant for creativity when we started life's journey, what happened? How have the majority of us lost it?

Like many other things in this book, the answer is no deep dark secret. It's not that it was taken from out of spite or bad intentions, it was replaced by something other people "in charge" felt we needed to succeed – conformity. With the best motives, folks such as our parents and teachers felt it was in our best interests that we "fit in" with society if we were to prosper.

Societies that prize conformity inhibit individuality. Highly creative people are often seen as rebels...but we are rebels WITH a cause.

As we moved forward in life, we encountered other forces who pushed for conformity over creativity. Among the most powerful are bosses, civil authorities and most of all, our peers.

Barriers were constructed due to those forces, some by our own doing.

- We are taught what is acceptable and unacceptable behavior
- We have adopted traditions and cultural norms

- We have acquired habits – some good, some bad
- We have been conditioned to view being wrong as a bad thing
- We encounter prejudice if we step too far over the line

Such barriers lead to conflicting feelings, anxiety and even fears:

- Fear of rejection
- Fear of being different
- Fear of failure
- Fear of ridicule or criticism
- Fear of people with authority
- Timidity
- Low self-esteem

All of these barriers rob us of our creativity even though they were not intended for that purpose. The good news is that our creativity was not actually taken away from us as it was just pushed to the background or simply buried inside ourselves. Often we did this on our own for self-preservation. Regardless, it does not have to be gone forever because the roots remain inside us.

## **And How Do We Get It Back?**

If we want to regain our natural creativity, we must first come to the realization that curiosity and creativity are competencies to be nurtured, not peculiarities that make us seem immature or weird. With that reality as a foundation, we can adopt a willingness to break through some of the conformity barriers that surround us.

Willingness is a key to Creativity:

- Willingness to take risks
- Willingness to fail

- Willingness to be different
- Willingness to laugh at ourselves

We need to envision each of these cases of willingness as skills. These new skills can be enhanced with specific tools and techniques. Problem solving exercises top my list of creativity tools. In general, we have been conditioned since birth to avoid problems. My take on it is this: Don't avoid problems; embrace them because problems are just opportunities in disguise.

Many of my career advancements have resulted from my penchant for proactive problem confrontation. I bring them to the surface so they are highly visible and then work out a solution. Then I shamelessly take credit for that solution...merely exploiting my own creative streak.

Problem solving does not come without concerted effort. One must thoroughly define the problem, fight the smokescreens (aka excuses) that surround them, develop alternative strategies for fixing the situation and take decisive and visible action.

**Regaining your buried creative streak will boost your reputation as a problem solver. That skill is rare and extremely powerful.**

The development of strategies is where creative juices can come to the surface. The technique I've found most effective is to submerge myself into my own personal "think tank." Don't laugh, but this think tank is located in my bed during the wee hours of the morning. Rather than jumping out of bed as I awaken in the morning, I lay in bed and just think deeply about the challenge I have chosen to take on. I'll dig deeper into this below when I explain my "Early Bird Gets the Worm" technique.

Another mental component essential to creativity is enthusiasm. Without getting enthusiastic about solving a problem or inventing something new, you will just be spinning your wheels and sinking deeper into a quagmire. Even the hint of a thought that there might not be a solution to what you're trying to accomplish imposes a death sentence on your creativity.

Enthusiasm leads to persistence, another essential ingredient of the creativity recipe. If you want something that excites you, don't give up on it!

Now let's examine the roadblocks that hamper creativity and they are everywhere, whether blatantly apparent or lurking in the shadows. Since birth, we have all been saddled with seemingly endless sets of rules coming at us from many angles; our parents, our teachers, peer pressure, law enforcement and society in general.

Most of us have grown up in environments that demand conformity in varying degrees. Bend the rules and you're labeled a troublemaker or weirdo. Break the rules and you become an outcast. While many rules are necessary to maintain order and prevent anarchy, too many rules construct barriers that stop the flow of creative juices.



The timeworn “thinking outside the box” platitude still has some value when it comes to highlighting the essence of conformity most people have been forced to adopt. Many people throw this phrase around without ever having seen the puzzle that led to its creation and popularity. The puzzle is all about self-imposed barriers that have come to exist in our minds. If

you have not seen the puzzle, just Google “thinking outside the box.”

Looking again at the list of ingredients for our creativity recipe, we find another one that is an absolute necessity – Imagination. Without it, we cannot even get into the game. Yet, during the course of our lives, the regular and frequent exercising of our imaginations have been stifled in favor of practicality. Most children start life with vivid imaginations but are gradually “cured” of that by the pressures of society. Get your head out of the clouds and go get a job!

Curiosity, creativity and imagination are closely intertwined. If we watch children at

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**“Imagination is More Important Than Knowledge.”**

*- Albert Einstein*

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play closely, we can see what great imaginations they all have. It comes naturally as part of the gift of birth.

As children grow, the amount of play diminishes to make way for more practical endeavors such as chores, then school and then work and parental obligations. When the playing ends, the imagination is no longer being exercised, and when the imagination slides to the back burner, creativity goes with it.

**Letting your imagination run wild is not a frivolous waste of time. With the right follow through, it can lead to career breakthroughs and serious cash in the bank.**

When we were children, imagination was linked closely to playtime. Adults who enjoy playtime are often looked upon as slackers. There is an appropriate sign I saw at a park in Winchester, Virginia decades ago that has always stuck

with me – “You Don’t Stop Playing Because You Grow Old; You Grow Old Because You Stop Playing.”

Hand in hand with play time is relaxation time. Relax and take some enjoyment away from the daily grind. Take a leisurely walk, play a game. Let your mind be free of its normal obligations.

Stop self-editing your thoughts and actions. Don’t be afraid to have an idea that you or others think a bit absurd. It’s perfectly OK to have some ‘stupid’ ideas. Allow them to “marinate” and entertain you instead of feeling bad about having them.

Give yourself permission to think freely. Critical thinking can come later when you get serious about implementing the idea.

While I see a great need for practicality, too much of a good thing is rarely good. If you keep your nose to the grindstone, all you’ll end up with is a flat nose. We must stop feeling guilty about taking some time each day to just let our minds wander. It’s great exercise.

Day-to-day life is just plain boring without a regular dosage of daydreaming. Making it a staple of our existence gets us traveling the road to creativity.

To begin your journey, gradually add some new twists to your daily routine with the understanding that increased creativity will not happen overnight.

- Daydream without feeling silly or guilty.
- Take time out to play a game or just relax.
- Stop worrying about always playing by the traditional rules.

- Ponder a few thoughts of disregarding some traditional boundaries – either mandated by society or self-imposed.
- Take a break from being so practical and do something whimsical.
- Observe some things you normally would not take the time to observe. Don't analyze them, just be aware of them.

Add some of these things to your daily mix, and some day in the not too distant future, you'll most assuredly have a burst of creativity...and then another.....and then another. Just enjoy!

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7 More Pages in Chapter 2

## MEET THE AUTHOR



Emerging from a very modest upbringing in the Midwest with my eye on a more exciting lifestyle, I dropped out of high school and ran away from home to “do it my way” as Sinatra used to say. I was incredibly lucky that it worked for me, but I strongly recommend against such a strategy. I got my education later, but it was a tough road to travel.

Ever since that breakaway to freedom, I’ve had an unusual life experience to say the least. I’ve been broke a few times and a millionaire a more than once, and I’ve enjoyed every minute of my life on the planet.

Totaling up the jobs I’ve held, the businesses I’ve founded and the organizations for which I’ve done consulting work, I’ve worked in 200+ companies across over 30 different industries. I would not trade that journey for anything in the world.

I’ve been a prolific writer, seminar presenter and public speaker internationally for over 30 years. I love sharing stories of my dazzling successes and the lessons I’ve learned from dismal failures. I’m fortunate the former outnumber the latter.

I’d love to hear your feedback about this book whether it be positive or negative.

**You can email me at: [dick@ghostwriterhelp.com](mailto:dick@ghostwriterhelp.com)**