

Career stalled out? Work at becoming creative at work

Written by Julie Desmond
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Summer has its dog days. So do careers. When work becomes too routine, or too complicated, daily tasks can seem like those heat waves that smother the lungs and keep us all from doing anything productive. Infusing a little creativity into your summer – a picnic, a beach trip, a new fan – can spice up a day; infusing some creativity into your work can spice up a career. Eugene Randsepp of Princeton Creative Research offers suggestions that can inspire even the most lackluster employee. A few of my favorites: Keep track of your ideas at all times. For some, a good idea is easy come easy go. Keeping ideas organized allows a person to come back and think again about a passing notion or solution. A notebook and pen can be tough to carry around all the time, unless yours is small and you carry a purse, which many of us do. An alternative is to call your voicemail with great ideas so you can retrieve them later.

Pose new questions every day. Constantly asking new questions, such as, “Where did this process come from?” or “Why do we put those tools way over there?” can spur you to new approaches to routine processes.

Learn about things outside of your specialty. A comfort zone is nice, but interesting experiences are waiting just outside of it, too. Talking to people outside of your industry about your challenges or taking up a new hobby for a month or two will arouse ideas that help you get ahead. For example, a chemist, not a packaging engineer, figured out how to get toothpaste into tubes. Employees from a big local company were out last week taking sailing lessons paid for by the employer. As this corporation knew, stepping completely outside of your box can pay off when you step back in.

Improve your sense of humor. In the Army, soldiers are told, “If you don’t have a sense of humor, cultivate one.” Laughing easily and often releases tension and helps people keep perspective, which in turn fosters creativity.

Finally, adopt a risk-taking attitude. Afraid to fail? What if you do? What if you don’t? Don’t bet the farm, but do take a calculated risk every day. It might be as benign as ordering the number 5 instead of the number 6 at lunchtime. Or it might be something more chancy, like approaching a long-time client with a new proposal. Failure is an option. So is success. You’ll never know unless you open yourself up to new ideas.

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