

THE BIG IDEAS

Creativity

Is a messy business.

Philosopher's Walk

Take a stroll today.

Your Genius Did It

How are YOU intelligent?

Creators Create

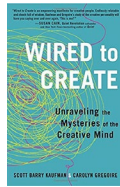
Again and again and again.

Attention

Focus it.

Stamp Life

With your own personality.



Wired to Create

Unraveling the Mysteries of the Creative Mind

BY SCOTT BARRY KAUFMAN & CAROLYN GREGOIRE · TARCHERPERIGREE © 2016 · 288 PAGES

“As you’ll notice, this book presents many paradoxes—mindfulness and mind wandering, openness and sensitivity, solitude and collaboration, play and seriousness, and intuition and reason. These seeming contradictions capture some of the polarities that come together in the creative person and that are reconciled through the creative process as the creator makes meaning out of her inner and outer experiences. Creative people learn to harness these widely varying skills, behaviors, and ways of thinking as the situation demands and to bring them together in new and unusual ways to come up with novel ideas and products.

The aim of this book is to shed light on the fascinating perplexities of the creative mind and to encourage readers to embrace their own paradoxes and complexities, and in doing so, open themselves up to a deeper level of self-understanding and self-expression. As we’ll suggest, it is precisely *this* ability to hold the self in all of its dimensional beauty that is the very core of creative achievement and creative fulfillment.

And so it is here, with the deepest respect for the intimate and complex connections between creativity, personal identity, and meaning, we begin our exploration of the things highly creative people do differently.”

~ Scott Barry Kaufman & Carolyn Gregoire from *Wired to Create*

This book started out as a blog post by Carolyn Gregoire based on Scott Barry Kaufman’s work that went viral: [18 Things Highly Creative People Do Differently](#).

Scott is one of the world’s leading creativity researchers. He is the scientific director of the Imagination Institute in the Positive Psychology Center at the University of Pennsylvania, where he investigates the measurement and development of intelligence, imagination and creativity.

Carolyn is a senior writer at the *Huffington Post*, where she reports on psychology, mental health, and neuroscience.

Together, they wrote a great little book on the mysteries of the creative mind. (Get a copy [here](#).)

The book is packed with Big Ideas and I’m excited to share a few of my favorites so let’s jump straight in!

CREATIVITY IS A MESSY BUSINESS

“Psychologist Dean Simonton, who has extensively studied the career trajectories of creative geniuses across the arts, sciences, humanities and leadership, came to a strikingly similar conclusion. Based on a detailed case study of Thomas Edison’s creative career, Simonton suggested that even at the level of genius, creativity is a ‘messy business.’ ...

*“Do I contradict myself?
Very well, then I contradict
myself. I am large, I contain
multitudes.”*

~ Walt Whitman

"One of the most powerful wellsprings of creative energy, outstanding accomplishment, and self-fulfillment seems to be falling in love with something—your dream, your image of the future."

~ E. Paul Torrance

After interviewing people across various fields for over thirty years, the eminent psychologist of creativity Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi observed: 'If I had to express in one word what makes their personalities different from others, it's *complexity*. They show tendencies of thought and action that in most people are segregated. They contain contradictory extremes; instead of being an 'individual,' each of them is a 'multitude.'"

The first rule of creativity: It's a messy business.

Even at the level of genius. (And, arguably, *especially* at the level of genius. :)

And, given that our LIVES are our ultimate creative project, let's remember that it's normal for *that* process to be messy business as well.

Remember, creative humans are COMPLEX.

[Check out the Notes](#) on Csikszentmihalyi's great book *Creativity* for more. For now, here's the full passage that Scott refers to above: "Are there then no traits that distinguish creative people? If I had to express in one word what makes their personalities different from others, it would be *complexity*. By this I mean that they show tendencies of thought and action that in most people are segregated. They contain contradictory extremes—instead of being an 'individual,' each of them is a 'multitude.' Like the color white that includes all the hues of the spectrum, they tend to bring together the entire range of human possibilities within themselves.

These qualities are present in all of us, but usually we are trained to develop only one pole of the dialectic. We might grow up cultivating the aggressive, competitive side of our nature, and disdain or repress the nurturing, cooperative side. A creative individual is more likely to be both aggressive and cooperative, either at the same time or at different times, depending on the situation. Having a complex personality means being able to express the full range of traits that are potentially present in the human repertoire but usually atrophy because we think one or the other pole is 'good,' whereas the other extreme is 'bad.'"

PHILOSOPHER'S WALK

"According to anecdotal accounts, Immanuel Kant's daily routine was punctuated by an hour-long walk around Königsberg, the German town where he lived. The philosopher embarked on these strolls religiously, at the same time, each afternoon, and was said to be so strict and regimented about his daily walkabout that the townspeople set their clocks according to the time he passed by their houses. Kant is documented to have missed his walk only once, when he was reading Jean Rousseau's *Emilie* and became so engrossed that he stayed home for several days to finish the book.

Kant preferred to be alone as he walked along the Philosopher's Walk, a street named for him, so that he did not have to engage in conversation. The physically frail philosopher preferred not to open his mouth, instead breathing solely through his nose, which he found more conducive to meditating on topics of philosophical inquiry."

That's from a chapter on Daydreaming—a key habit of highly creative people.

There are a lot of ways to constructively let your mind wander—from taking a shower (Woody Allen's favorite practice—he'd stay in there for up to an hour!), doing mundane chores or going for a walk or hike.

My favorite way to turn my brain off and daydream/think? A hike!!

Yours?!

And, I just love everything about Kant's walk. So consistent that his neighbors could set their clocks to him? (Hah!) Going solo so he can think? Good call. Breathing through his nose? My kinda guy. (And, sounds like he's studied Patrick McKeown's [Oxygen Advantage](#). :)

"A person willing to fly in the face of reason, authority, and common sense must be a person of considerable self-assurance. Since he occurs rarely, he must seem eccentric (in at least that respect) to the rest of us."

~ Isaac Asimov

A ton of other people used regular walks as a key part of their creative practice. Charles Darwin rocked it daily. Apparently William Wordsworth walked upward of 180,000 (!) miles in his life and Henry David Thoreau said he walked four hours a day—at least!

Then we have the rest of the “thinker-walker” crew: Aristotle, Nietzsche, Freud, Hemingway, Jefferson, Dickens, Beethoven and many others.

Nietzsche went so far as to say the “all truly great thoughts are conceived by walking.”

While Aristotle’s students walked so much they were called the “*Peripatetics*”—which literally means “walking ones.”

How about you?

Gone on a good thinking walk lately?

(Note: No technology allowed! Smartphones begone!)

YOUR GENIUS DID IT

“The Romans, too, grappled with the question of where creative inspiration came from—and concluded that it could not possibly arise from the mind itself. As author Elizabeth Gilbert points out in her popular TED talk on creative genius, the ancient Romans believed that one could not be a genius—rather, one *had* a genius, a sort of fickle, disembodied creative spirit that could come and go at will. ‘A genius was this sort of magical divine entity that is believed to literally live in the walls of an artist’s studio, kind of like Dobby the house elf . . . who would come out and invisibly assist the artists with their work and shape the outcome of that work,’ she says.”

That’s from a chapter on “Intuition” in which we learn the importance of integrating both our rational mastery of our domains with trusting our intuitive impulses and creative expressions.

To bring the point home, Scott and Carolyn cite Robert Greene’s wisdom from [Mastery](#) where he tells us: “*When we fuse this intuitive feel with rational processes, we expand our minds to the outer limits of our potential and are able to see into the secret core of life itself.*”

But let’s go back to that whole ancient Roman idea of having a genius for a moment.

In ancient Roman times, every person and community was said to have their own “genius”—if they ever did something awesome, it was said that their “genius” had done it.

We ALL had a genius. Same rules apply today. The question isn’t whether you are a genius or not, the question is “What’s your genius?!?” (And then, “How do we get it to show up more often—which we’ll get to in a moment.)

First, let’s have Sir Ken Robinson echo this wisdom in [The Element](#). Swap out “genius” for “intelligence” and we’re there: “*We think we know the answer to the question, ‘How intelligent are you?’ The real answer, though, is that the question itself is the wrong one to ask.*”

How are you intelligent?

The right question to ask is the one above. The difference in these questions is profound. The first suggests that there’s a finite way of gauging intelligence and that one can reduce the value of each individual’s intelligence to a figure or quotient of some sort. The latter suggests a truth that we somehow don’t acknowledge as much as we should—that there are a variety of ways to express intelligence, and that no one scale could ever measure this.”

So, HOW are *you* intelligent?

Now, back to our genius. [Here’s a link to Elizabeth Gilbert’s TED talk](#). (It’s worth watching.)

She tells us that there’s something bigger than her that actually does her best work: her genius. Elizabeth’s job? Creating the circumstances such that her genius can consistently show up.

"The creative person is constantly seeking to discover himself, to remodel his own identity, and to find meaning in the universe through what he creates."

~ Scott Barry Kaufman
& Carolyn Gregoire

Stephen King and Steven Pressfield say pretty much the same exact thing.

In his epic trilogy (see Notes on [The War of Art](#), [Do the Work](#) and [Turning Pro](#)), Pressfield hammers home the point that we need to be Professionals. Showing up ritualistically every single day. Why? So our genius can do its work.

In [On Writing](#), King calls his genius a “muse.” His muse-guy isn’t some beautiful fluttering thing, it’s more like a troll who lives in his basement smoking a cigar and polishing his bowling trophies. The way you get HIM to show up? YOU show up. And work hard. Every.single.day.

So, three parts here:

1. HOW are you intelligent? aka How’s your genius?
2. Are you creating the right conditions for your genius to show up and sprinkle the magic dust all over you? Eating, moving, sleeping. Creating before reacting. Etc.
3. What’s one thing you can do to make your life a more welcome place for your genius to visit?

CREATORS CREATE

“By replacing fear of the unknown with curiosity we open ourselves up to an infinite stream of possibility. We can let fear rule our lives or we can become childlike with curiosity, pushing our boundaries, leaping out of our comfort zones, and accepting what life puts before us.”

~ Alan Watts

“As much as they risk disapproval from others creative people also risk failure on their own terms. It’s a great myth that creative geniuses consistently produce great works. They don’t. In fact, systematic analysis of the career trajectories of people labeled geniuses show that their output tends to be highly uneven, with a few good ideas mixed in with many more false starts. ...

So how are creative masterminds so successful, if they don’t really know what they’re doing? Simonton’s extensive analysis of geniuses found two major factors to be critical in explaining the creative process of geniuses. First, creative geniuses simultaneously immerse themselves in many diverse ideas and projects. Second, and perhaps even more important, they also have extraordinary productivity. Creators create. Again and again and again. In fact, Simonton has found that the quality of creative ideas is a positive function of quantity: The more ideas creators generate (regardless of the quality of each idea), the greater the chances they would produce an eventual masterpiece.”

Creators create. Again and again and again.

In [Originals](#), Adam Grant reflected on the same research by Simonton, telling us: “If originals aren’t reliable judges of the quality of their ideas, how do they maximize their odds of creating a masterpiece? They come up with a large number of ideas. Simonton finds that on average, creative geniuses aren’t qualitatively better in their fields than their peers. They simply produced a greater volume of work, which gave them higher variation and a higher chance of originality. ‘The odds of producing an influential or successful idea,’ Simonton notes, are ‘a positive function of the total number of ideas generated.’”

So, creators create. Again and again and again.

And, that involves failures. A lot of them. By definition.

How about [J.K. Rowling](#)? Although she has made *billions* of dollars from her *Harry Potter* stories, she was rejected TWELVE times before she landed a publisher. She tells us, “Some failure in life is inevitable. It is impossible to live without failing at something, unless you live so cautiously that you might as well not have lived at all—in which case, you fail by default.”

Then we have Thomas Edison. Yah. He has 1,093 patents. Impressive. But a) most of those never went anywhere. “In fact, the number of truly extraordinary creative feats he achieved could probably be counted on one hand.” And, b) “As Simonton points a look at Edison’s entire body of patents might not reflect his creative genius as much as his creative failures.”

Tame your amygdala. Go create. Then create some more.

P.S. I love the emphasis on “Productivity” in this section. Although productivity wasn’t one of the “10 Things Highly Creative People Do Differently,” it’s worth noting that [Peter Drucker](#), one of the most prolific and “creative” people of the 20th century, said this: “*I am told I am creative—I don’t know what that means. . . . I just keep on plodding.*”

#plodding

CONTINUOUS PARTIAL ATTENTION

“It is proof of a base and low mind for one to wish to think with the masses or majority, merely because the majority is the majority. Truth does not change because it is, or is not, believed by the majority of people.”

~ Giordano Bruno

“Neuroscientist Richard Davidson has said that the way we live today is causing a ‘national attention deficit,’ while researcher Linda Stone warns that modern life is increasingly lived within a state of ‘continuous partial attention.’ Most of us know that state all too well—we’re continually having our attention pulled away from the task at hand by notifications, alerts, calls, texts, emails, and other digital stimulation. Stone explains, ‘In large doses, [continuous partial attention] contributes to a stressful lifestyle, to operating in crisis management mode, and to a compromised ability to reflect, to make decisions, and to think creatively. In a 24/7, always-on world, continuous partial attentions used as our dominant attention mode contributes to a feeling of overwhelm, overstimulation and to a sense of being unfulfilled.’”

That’s from a chapter on “Mindfulness.” It echoes the wisdom we’ve explored in [Irresistible](#), [The Shallows](#) and a number of other Notes.

Short (obvious) story: If we’re constantly living in a state of “continuous partial attention” there’s simply NO (!) way we will be in a position to do our best work. Period.

Here are some jaw-dropping stats for you: The average American spends eleven hours interacting with digital devices and checks his or her smartphone every 6.5 minutes—which is 150 (!) times per day.

As Scott and Carolyn advise: “*We’d do well to consider how little, everyday distractions might add up in a way that interferes with our creativity and well-being.*”

And... “*Resisting the siren song of digital distractions can be incredibly difficult, but our creative capacity may depend on our ability to do so.*”

So...

How many times do YOU check your smartphone per day?

Can you cut it in half?

Or, if you *really* want to go nuts, let’s play a game together and see who can win: I haven’t turned my phone on in three days... :)

P.S. Here’s another little scientific tidbit for your brain-chewing pleasure: As we know, meditation makes your brain stronger. Specifically, “*the researchers saw that gray matter density increased in the anterior cingulate cortex (ACC), a brain region located in the frontal lobe that’s associated with self-regulation, thinking, emotion, rational deliberation, and problem solving.*”

Awesome.

But guess what: “*Interestingly, high-levels of media multitasking have been linked with reduced density in the ACC.*”

D’oh. Multi-tasking is the equivalent of sitting on the couch eating Twinkies—atrophying the very parts of our brains we’re hoping to strengthen so we can consistently rock it creatively.

Therefore, drop the multitasking and get your unitasking brain workout gear on.

(Is that a unitard? No idea. Hah.)

"Here's to the crazy ones.
The misfits. The rebels. The
troublemakers. The round
pegs in the square holes.
The ones who see things
differently."

~ Apple

STAMP LIFE WITH YOUR PERSONAL SEAL

"In his analysis of creative achievement, psychiatrist Arnold Ludwig came up with a 'template for greatness'—a set of thirty variables that strongly predicted the highest levels of creative excellence. Many of the elements—such as contrariness, the capacity for solitude, psychological uneases, and resilience in the face of life's obstacles—have already been discussed throughout this book. But included in Ludwig's template was also having 'a personal seal.' As he notes, 'Individuals are not likely to assume the mantle of true greatness unless their works and achievements bear their personal seals or distinctive signatures.'

Not only in our creative work but in our own lives can we bear these distinctive signatures. Recognizing ourselves as creators and fostering creativity in our everyday lives brings us to life and connects us to who we are. Creativity isn't just about innovating or making art—it's about *living creatively.*"

Want to achieve greatness?

Bust out your personal seal. And STAMP your life with it.

[Ralph Waldo Emerson](#) would agree. He tells us: "*Enthusiasm is one of the most powerful engines of success. When you do a thing, do it with all your might. Put your whole soul into it. Stamp it with your own personality. Be active, be energetic, be enthusiastic and faithful, and you will accomplish your object. Nothing great was ever achieved without enthusiasm.*"

Of course, our LIVES are our #1 creative project.

So, when we do a thing today, let's do it with ALL OUR MIGHT! Let's put our whole souls into it.

B

Brian Johnson,
Chief Philosopher

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About the Authors of "Wired to Create"

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Brian Johnson loves helping people optimize their lives so they can actualize their potential as he studies, embodies and teaches the fundamentals of optimal living—integrating ancient wisdom + modern science + practical tools. Learn more and optimize your life at optimize.me.