

MYKEL DIXON

SAMPLE
COPY

EVERY

A DANGEROUS GUIDE

DAY

TO MAKING

CREA

MAGIC AT WORK

TIVE

WILEY

Everyday Creative is a must read for anyone who has more to give at work yet struggles to liberate their creativity. Mykel Dixon truly cares about his readers, translating the energy and excitement he generates on stages the world over into an infectious and inspiring read.

Layne Beachley AO, 7-Time World Champion Surfer.

Modern Magician, enlightened speaker, solar human being, Mykel Dixon is translating his subtle and extraordinary work in this much needed recovery book. With a bit of fear and hopefully great excitement, dive into this guide to find again the amazing, creative, powerful human being in you. A must read for any leader in this time of deep change!

**Eglantine Etienne, Executive General
Manager Digital, DuluxGroup**

Everyday Creative is brazenly heretical; a poetic affront to the business world—which is *exactly* what we need right now. Like a best-friend-in-a-book, you'll (re)discover how to tap into the creativity and courage you've always had. Everyone needs this book—buy it for your bedside, bathroom and boardroom!

**Dr Jason Fox, wizard and best-selling author of
*How to Lead a Quest***

Creativity is the defining currency of the 21st century. This book doesn't just make a compelling case for embracing a more creative approach at work, it shows you how. An instant classic written by a guy who lives and breathes his message.

Jules Lund, founder, Tribe

Mykel has the unique ability to speak to both head and heart as he challenges us to bring our full creative potential to life. This book is a challenging, heart-warming, soul-searching read that help you excavate your unique flair and fulfil your creative destiny. Read if you dare!

Dean Summlar, Vice President Human Resources - Pacific Zone, Schneider Electric

Everyday Creative should be mandatory reading for executives who want to not only stay ahead of the curve but help redefine what a curve is. A stirring read from an entrepreneur who has walked the walk, time and time again.

David Swan, Technology Editor, *The Australian*

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Table of Contents

About Mykel ix
A Story xi
Introduction xv
How To Read This Book xxiii

Part One

Preparing The Canvas | 1

Chapter One

An Identity Crisis | 3

Chapter Two

The Obstacle Is The Way | 35

Chapter Three

A Radical Rebirth | 53

Part Two

Developing The Practice | 73

Chapter Four

The Courage To Seek | 75

Chapter Five

The Courage To Feel | 97

Chapter Six

The Courage To Make | 119

Chapter Seven

The Courage To Give | 143

Part Three

Making Your Masterpiece | 167

Chapter Eight

Little Things | 169

Chapter Nine

A Big Thing | 185

A Final Thing | 195

Where To From Here? | 197

Gratitude | 199

Sources | 203

Index | 209

About Mykel

Mykel Dixon is mad about shaking up the way we do business.

A musician by trade, gypsy by nature, fierce non-conformist and prolific anti-perfectionist, he leads a new wave of entrepreneurial savants showing forward-thinking companies how to stay relevant and radical in a 21st-Century Renaissance.

As an award-winning speaker, learning designer, event curator, musician and author, Mykel works with senior leaders and teams of Fortune 500 and ASX 200 companies to unlock breakthrough creativity. His clients include Google, YouTube, Janssen, Schneider Electric, Intuit, Bayer, IAG, CBA, Telstra, Origin, Lululemon, Laminex and Seek, amongst many others.

Mykel's unconventional life (and career) experience, coupled with his daring vision for the future of work, make him the not-so-secret weapon for any company seeking an edge.

To find out more about Myke, enquire about speaking opportunities and follow his creative adventures online, head to www.mykeldixon.com

A Story

Given the state of world I questioned whether I should even write this book. Surely there are better ways for me to have a meaningful impact on the world? Maybe I'd do more for humanity by chaining myself to a tree, becoming a firefighter, or going into politics (yuk!). Surely the world doesn't need another bloody book, least of all one by me.

But I couldn't shake the idea. When I look at the world around us, and the challenges we now face as individuals and teams, as companies and nations — it seems like the only thing that will make a meaningful difference is our ability to think and act *differently*. To have the courage to think beyond what's achievable, to dream beyond what's reasonable, and build products, services and experiences that go beyond what is merely profitable.

In my current work as a keynote speaker, creative facilitator and experience designer, I am privileged to meet people from all walks of life. I get paid to engage in deep conversations about work, career and success. About the past, present and future. About money, meaning and magic. And what underpins it all is creativity.

Through all the wild activations and immersive experiences that I design and deliver, the answer to so many of the challenges that people speak about is the same. Creativity.

Time and time again I see the same thing: people who wholeheartedly believe they aren't creative find a way back to their natural self-expression, then apply it in their work to cultivate staggering positive results.

I see people walk into the room tired, frustrated and complacent only to leave vibrant, energised and enthusiastic. People who have 'seen it all before' end up staying longer than they had planned. People who 'don't have much to say' end up sharing more than they intended. People who are known for being serious end up laughing louder than they've laughed in months (sometimes years).

**Creativity is the catalyst for
professional success and
personal fulfilment.**

When I reflect on my own life, the one characteristic that has served me most, hands down, is creativity. It's been the source of my security, satisfaction and sense of self. The essence of my competitive advantage and the instrument that led to any and all of my career success.

I began my career as a musician. From jazz to rock, covers to originals, empty hotel lobbies to main stages of music festivals—creativity was my currency. And yet beyond the obvious application of creativity in my songwriting or performances, it was in fact the key driver of every element of my business.

From sales and marketing to PR and event production. From conflict resolution to crisis management. It enabled me to think differently about every challenge or opportunity and respond in ways that were unique, distinct and original. It was, without a doubt, my secret weapon.

Like so many professional artists, at various points in my career I also flirted with casual jobs to supplement my income. I've been a nanny, a barista, a security guard, an industrial cleaner, a beach bar owner, a website builder, a copywriter, a call-centre operator and a community manager, to name a few.

And every slice of success or fulfilment that I experienced in each of those jobs was the direct result of creativity. Perhaps I had to be creative to get the position or to outperform my peers. To navigate the unknown or build meaningful (and profitable) relationships. To stand out or fit in. To lead the charge or toe the line.

**Without creativity I'd be nothing,
nowhere and no-one.**

It's through my own direct experience that I've come to believe creativity is the number one driver of personal fulfilment and professional success. And that its value in the emerging economic climate is accelerating every day.

Which is how we ended up here, having this conversation at this time. This book is my attempt to share what I've learned so that you might find a little of the same joy and opportunity that I have, while making the world a bit more magical and beautiful along the way.

Enjoy.

myke

Introduction

Over the last few years, I've asked hundreds of people to describe what comes to mind when they first hear the word 'creativity'. The following are a small collection of real responses:

- ≈ endless possibility, borderless thinking, joyful expression
- ≈ fun, freedom, playfulness, curiosity, energy, excitement, colour, vibrancy, authenticity, vulnerability, uniqueness, originality
- ≈ letting go of control, hands in the air, challenging the norm, thinking outside the box, living life on your own terms, making yourself and others smile.

I then ask them to describe *their* relationship to creativity. Here are some of the responses:

- ≈ love/hate, long-distance, frayed, tortured
- ≈ 'It's something I love but don't prioritise enough in both work and life'; stigma around it being frivolous, indulgent and a waste of time
- ≈ 'I crave the time to dream up new solutions and play with interesting ideas but almost always suppress it because of the constant pressure to deliver.'

- ≈ 'It's something I know I have but often squander to get the job done. And whenever I do that I'm never satisfied with the result.'
- ≈ 'It's the thing that brings me the most joy but also the thing I find most difficult to dedicate time to.'

And when I ask them to define their *company's* relationship to creativity, I hear this:

- ≈ nonexistent, complicated, misunderstood, delusional
- ≈ 'There's a desire for more creativity but it's mostly suffocated by process and bureaucracy.'
- ≈ 'It's encouraged, especially on training days, but it often gets lost in the day-to-day pressure to get results.'
- ≈ 'There's an openness to it and a recognition that the traditional path won't get us where we need to go. However, there is a dominant, well-established operating model supported by people at all levels of the organisation who primarily value safety and certainty.'

So here we see the dysfunctional love triangle that exists between creativity, business and us.

We love it, we value it and we want more of it in our work and life. But we can't seem to squeeze it into our overflowing task list. And despite our company calling for more innovative thinking, the systems and processes that hold the business together don't seem to enable it.

This book sets out to solve this sticky situation. To give you simple tools to recover your innate creativity (if you feel you've lost it) or amplify it in your work and life (if it's just a little blocked). To reaffirm for you that creativity is the foundation of finding and forming new value, which makes it the strongest driver of your competitive advantage and commercial success.

By the time we finish our conversation, it is my hope that you become more than just an Everyday Creative, but a loud, vocal advocate for its value in life and *especially at work*.

Defining Everyday Creativity

To try and define creativity is like trying to hold smoke. It's as elusive as it is essential. As personal as it is universal. Which makes writing a book about it delightfully difficult.

The most widely accepted definition is that creativity is the process of combining two separate things to produce something original and useful. For the purpose of this book, let's start there.

Our intention is to become masterful at remixing and repurposing the world around us into something useful, meaningful and *beautiful*.

And why 'everyday'? As Annie Dillard famously said, 'How we spend our days is, of course, how we spend our lives'. It's easy to get swept up in grandiose visions of big projects, global domination and org-wide transformation. But the biggest dreams and most beautiful working lives are built on the back of small, conscious and consistent actions.

But to be clear, we're not necessarily talking about art here. We won't be working on your watercolour technique or practising scales on the guitar (unless you choose to). Having said that, if during our discovery you decide that your future lies on Broadway, I'm all for it. But our focus is on developing a mindset that has:

- ≈ a natural bias for the new and the next
- ≈ the courage to consistently choose alternate possibilities over predictable approaches
- ≈ the discipline to do it every single day, in the smallest and largest of ways.

The underlying essence of this book, however, is that you will come to define what creativity is for *you*. You'll decide, through your own lived experience, what it is, why it matters and how best to use it.

By exploring the ideas and exercises presented in these pages, you'll have the tools to rewrite your own relationship with creativity. You'll start to redesign your life so that you can more easily access it. And begin to reimagine the infinite number of ways you can apply it in your work and career to tremendous effect.

Ready?

Choose your own adventure

First, I want you to understand why this book is different, and why it's *dangerous* ...

Most books on creativity fail to demonstrate how fundamental it is for success and fulfilment in business *and* life. Nor do they express the urgency with which I believe all of us should be pursuing our own creative sensibilities.

They often leave readers with little more than a few tired platitudes, a bunch of boring anecdotes, and a handful of generic 'brainstorming activities' (that almost always involve coloured markers and post-it notes).

This book is different. It doesn't attempt to reduce or generalise the creative process. Because creativity can't be reduced to a generalised process. It's subjective, idiosyncratic and infinite. And besides, despite my best efforts to help get you there ...

**finding your way back to your
creativity is itself an act
of creativity.**

Your journey will be different from mine. Which makes it all the more meaningful. Therefore, it's best to think about this book as a series of provocations, not prescriptions. There is no 'one way' to read it, and no 'right outcome' as a result of it. However you feel and whatever you create while reading, it's entirely personal and reassuringly perfect.

Every exercise or example is taken from my own lived experience or the experiences of people I know and trust. People who found the courage to put a little more creativity into their life. A little more personality into their work. A little more humanity into their workplace.

You will have your own stories to tell. Your own roadblocks to overcome. Your own style of perceiving and processing the insights and inspiration you encounter. My recommendation is that you make the process of reading this book creative.

What does that mean?

It means scribble on the text, dog-ear the edges, tear out pages and make them into paper planes if you must. Get yourself a journal and rewrite passages you love in your own words. Draw pictures of the monsters that have been preventing you from creating. Write poems and songs and sonnets and short stories. Write business ideas, draw stage setups and design marketing plans as you go.

**If you want this book to make a
difference to you, you've got to make
it work for you.**

Just to reassure you, this book won't tell you to quit your job. It doesn't demand that you take up the violin or move to Berlin. But it will ask important things of you — things that might be uncomfortable to confront or inconvenient to apply. But that's why you're here, isn't it? To step beyond the obvious and into the outrageous. To leave the confines of convention and fully embrace your rare, radical and resplendent self.¹

So let's get to the heart of it.

¹ How good is that word! If you, like me, might not have been fully up to speed with 'resplendent' until this moment, it means 'attractive and impressive through being richly colourful or sumptuous. To shine and to glitter'. Well, if that ain't the perfect description of you and your everyday creativity, I don't know what is.

This book is a cold shower wake-up call for people who want a more meaningful experience at work.

It's for the people who are tired of the uninspired, risk-averse, bureaucratic bullshit that is rife within most corporate workplaces. It's for the courageous few who have a deep desire to put more play into their work, more joy into their job and more meaning into the relationships they share with their colleagues and clients.

This book can be the answer to the question we've all been asking about our work: 'Is this it?'

When you commit to your creative recovery you become a powerful participant in a radical revolution. You'll join a colourful cast of misfits and mavericks, rebels and renegades, outsiders and originals who are changing how and why we work.

Don't for a second underestimate how important this is. We live in crazy times. The world is burning, the robots² are coming and the challenges we face are too fast and fierce for us to follow the rules.

The world we live in used to value those who could ace the test. The ones who could memorise information, master instruction and make exact replicas of the original. Now we have machines for that. Machines that don't need to be fed or need a break. Machines that don't get upset or ask for time off. They just produce, consistently and efficiently.

What the world values now are those of us who can dream. Those who can reinterpret and reinvent the world in new and exciting ways. To survive and thrive in the emerging economic landscape you must:

- ≈ reclaim your wild, untamed self-expression
- ≈ redefine your unique, authentic value
- ≈ rewrite the way you make a meaningful difference to those around you.

² And viruses! As this book goes to print, it's April 2020 and we're up to our eyeballs in the global COVID-19 pandemic.

A word of warning

There's a reason why the tagline of this book is 'a dangerous guide for making magic at work'.

Recovering your creativity is powerful. It changes you and the world around you. And change is unnerving. When I say 'dangerous' I mean it's dangerous for anyone or anything that is too small for the person you will become.³

It's dangerous for your boss (if you have one) because they will have to shift the way they see and value you. It's dangerous for your colleagues (if you have them) because they will have to evolve themselves with you. It's dangerous to your ego because you will have to think and act in ways that are outside what you know and have grown comfortable with.

But it's worth it. You weren't born to just tick boxes, await instruction or to simply follow the rules. None of us were. You were born to make things. To change things. To improve the world in all kinds of ways that only you can.

Now is the time. Now is *your* time: to remember, to realign with and to re-create who you are and how you're going to bring more beauty, intimacy and humanity to the world around you.

The future of work will be written by those with the courage to think, feel, act and be more creative, every day.

And if you're reading this, that means you.

Welcome to the ride of your life.

³ To paraphrase a quote from the great poet and philosopher David Whyte.

CHAPTER ONE

An Identity Crisis

*It's not your fault,
but it is your responsibility*

'Myke, I love what you've got planned but I'm a little concerned. This might be a bit much for our people. Can we dial back the creative stuff a bit? We want them to be challenged but we don't want to make them uncomfortable.'

It was our fifth face-to-face meeting in as many months. The GM, HR director and L&D (learning and development) manager of a mid-sized accounting firm were sitting opposite me. We were once again crammed in a small windowless meeting room to discuss their upcoming conference (which I'd been engaged to design and facilitate). Aside from the pleasantries and a few logistical updates, this delightful group of leaders spent the vast majority of our conversation trying to lower my expectations of their people.

They seemed hell bent on reaffirming how 'un-creative' their team was. Fixated on their introversion. Obsessed with their bias for linear process. Anxious about their apparent inability to cope with anything 'outside the box'.

If my experience with people, both in and outside corporate life, has taught me anything, it's that everyone has a unique capacity for creativity. And when given the opportunity, placed in the right context and supported by the right conditions ...

Even the most reserved, rational or risk-averse among us yearns to unleash their wild, untamed self.

'We'll be fine', I said. 'I have a feeling they're going to surprise you.'

Fast forward three weeks and it's 4.30 on a mild afternoon in May. We've just finished a two-day conference and I'm waving goodbye to a busload of enthusiastic auditors who are singing and high-fiving their way back to Melbourne.

Over the last 48 hours we covered all the usual business updates and strategic content. We heard from the executives and set renewed team targets. But there was something different about how we delivered the content: embedded in every session was a multitude of creative activations to get the delegates out of their heads and into their hands and hearts.

We had a live band in the centre of the main room for the entire first day. We held a film festival later that night that featured movies created by delegates. We left more room for reflection and discussion. We leveraged colour, natural light, physical movement and tactile activities. We asked a wider array of questions and frequently adjusted the agenda to follow the flow of every conversation.

I witnessed a group of supposedly shy, left-brain, analytical people step up to the metaphorical mic and sing. At various points over the two days, the group choreographed dance routines, directed and starred in short films, played musical instruments for the first time. They wrote their team strategy as a haiku, used the hallway furniture to map out their customer journey and performed the company's origin story as a live, improvised musical.

They started raising their hands before they were prompted, stopped asking permission to change the program, and became quite comfortable breaking any real or perceived rules when working on an interactive game or exercise.

Hidden creative talents surfaced among the most unlikely of individuals. Energy levels peaked and their ideas for new products, projects or processes were surprisingly polished. There was no way you could differentiate this group of auditors from a group of professional creatives.

Now before you get all, 'Yeah, sounds a bit kindergarten to me' or 'Sure, but where's the ROI? And how is that relevant to their day-to-day work?', well, you tell me! What difference would it make to *your* work if you:

- ≈ felt comfortable and enthusiastic when facing never-before-seen challenges
- ≈ could see and sense the desires of your clients from a new, expanded perspective
- ≈ felt deep trust and psychological safety among your teammates so that you feel confident being all of who you are, all of the time?

The example I just shared was a unique experience for that company but it was far from rare for me. I see it over and over again. Across industries, functions, nationalities, gender. Boomers or Millennials. Creativity doesn't discriminate.

In the weeks following an event like that I will always receive private and group messages from participants on email or LinkedIn. I'll even get a phone call or two and they always sound like this:

- ≈ 'Myke, thank you, I haven't had that much fun in years.'
- ≈ 'It was so great to get to know everyone on such a personal level. I feel so much more connected to my team and I had no idea how much talent there is among us.'
- ≈ 'I really miss expressing myself like that. It reminds me how important it is to make time for this stuff.'

≈ ‘I can see a whole new way of working within my role. I have so many new ideas and feel so much more confident being bold and audacious.’

Then a few months after that, I’ll start getting tagged online in projects those people and teams have deployed. I’ll hear stories about the changes that have taken place in the office. The humanising of internal processes, the personalising of the customer experience, the electrifying enthusiasm that the team has been riding and applying to their work.

I literally have hundreds of these messages and it’s astonishing how quickly the impact starts to show. Incredibly, this kind of impact doesn’t just take place on two-day retreats or a year-long creative leadership program. It can happen in a 30-minute keynote.

Compelled to close the conference

Here’s an email verbatim, from a beautiful guy named Gary who I met during an event. We had a spontaneous live debate during my keynote about the merit and magic of creativity, and trusting my intuition I invited Gary onto stage to close the entire conference by sharing his perspective with a room full of strangers (while I accompanied him on piano).⁶

Subject Line: Rip off the beige and run down the street naked

Dear Mykel,

Many, many thanks for unleashing my inner emotions today. Often these corporate events are so formulated and you breathed a breath of fun and creativity and intelligence and fear (for me!) to end the day.

Your stats and research resonated with me so much I had to pipe up. I love my family deeply (wife, 13-year-old twins — one of each — and an 11-year-old son), but I’m in a constant battle with my

⁶ You can see images of the precise moment Gary jumped on stage in the VIP section of the online portal—www.everydaycreatives.com

An Identity Crisis

13-year-old daughter trying to get her to conform and fit in — she is incredibly creative (not sure where she gets it from!), and will look at every opportunity to buck conformity.

My wife studies positive psychology and neuroscience, and has tried in vain to get me to understand the value of our daughter's creativity and free spirit. Mykel you challenged and converted me in 30 thoroughly enjoyable short minutes. If you've done one thing today you've converted a stoic, by-the-book rule-bound father to remember his childhood and become a five-year-old again. Think Tom Hanks in *Big ...* in reverse.

Keep doing what you're doing, and shaking the tree. Love your work, and I look forward to reading your book.

Big love back at you brother,

Gary (or Gaaaarrrry)

I'm so fortunate I get to observe this flourishing of the human spirit on a weekly basis. People who believe wholeheartedly that they aren't creative (or aren't anymore) reconnect with the creative spark within them. And within days, weeks or months they transform their work and life in ways they couldn't have imagined.

Now, I'm not telling you this to stroke my ego, but rather because to me, it's abundantly clear:

**We don't have a creativity crisis,
we have an identity crisis.**

We're not struggling against a lack of creative talent. We're suffocating beneath a misguided story. Drowning in a dangerous delusion that we're not who we naturally are and don't have what we've naturally got.

We're adrift in a sea of lies about who we are and what we think we're capable of.

So when did we adopt such a limiting view of our creative potential? And who or what is to blame for such a disempowering narrative?

Well, to understand that, we've got to go back a hundred years to the second industrial revolution and a man by the name of Frederick Winslow Taylor.

Blame Tay Tay

Taylor was a curious man. He spent his early career working in the steel industry. And while observing what he described as 'gross inefficiencies among workers', he became interested in how an organisation could improve its productivity.

In 1902, he published a paper known as 'The Principles of Scientific Management'. In it, he proposed that companies could massively improve their productivity by applying a scientific method to their work. By separating and simplifying every stage of production; by training unskilled workers to perform specialised sequences of tasks; and by closely monitoring and measuring every aspect of a job, organisations could optimise their output and increase their profit.

Under Scientific Management, workers were never encouraged to make their own decisions or evaluate any actions that might produce a better result. In fact, they were forbidden to. They were even punished when they did. Taylor was known for having no concern whatsoever for the satisfaction or motivation of workers; he cared only about the company's output. Charming.

Before Taylor showed up, work was mostly performed by skilled craftspeople. They learned their profession through lengthy apprenticeships and often took vast amounts of time to produce their best work. They made their own decisions about how to perform their job (agency). They developed their own expertise through experience and experimentation (learning agility). And they were mostly responsible for the entire process of production (ownership).

An Identity Crisis

Scientific Management, however, gave companies a way to produce at a speed and scale like never before. They could employ more people with very little knowledge or experience, train them to complete a specific task that was easily monitored and measured, and replace them without losing productivity (or profits).

(Sheesh, I bet he was popular at Friday night drinks.)

Let's look at the four principles of Scientific Management in a little more detail. You tell me if anything sounds or feels familiar:

1. Replace 'rule of thumb' methods with 'scientific methods' to determine the 'one best way' to complete each and every task (i.e. remove all autonomy, disregard previous expertise and prioritise data over human experience).
2. Scientifically select, train and develop each worker rather than leaving them to train themselves (i.e. define a job description then find a worker to fit into it; train employees to become competent in their specific tasks, not competent life-long learners capable of mastering multiple tasks).
3. Cooperate with workers to ensure that the scientifically developed methods are being followed (i.e. micromanage everything, performance review everything else and ensure KPIs are embedded everywhere).
4. Divide work between management and labour so that managers can plan and train while workers perform and execute (i.e. build a bureaucracy, establish a hierarchy and maintain the division of silos).

Make no mistake, we're living in the long tail of the industrial era. A time during which workers were made to be machines. A time that robbed us of our freedom to think for ourselves, explore alternate possibilities and produce work that was personally meaningful to us.

But that's only half the story. The rewiring of our natural creative capability and the adoption of an unnatural identity began long before we entered the workforce.

School's out

Ten years before Taylor released his principles of Scientific Management, there was a group of scholars and educators in the United States called The Committee of Ten. They were led by the then-president of Harvard, and in 1892 established the standardised form of education most of the world adopted and still uses today.

The Committee of Ten were the first folks to decide on the optimal size of a class. The ideal layout of a classroom. The most suitable subjects to fill a curriculum. They separated students by age and determined what subjects should be introduced at what year level.⁷ They installed methods to monitor and measure a student's progress and performance by way of testing and examination.

Wait a second. Does any of that sound familiar? It's almost as though we educate our kids the same way we run our factories.

We sort and separate the raw materials (kids). We introduce new parts (subjects) at different stages of production (year levels). We test, measure and evaluate the product at each stage of the process to ensure there are no defects (exams). And with one last tick of approval from the regulators (final exam results), the finished product is ready to hit the shelves (graduation).⁸

I like to believe the intention of the Committee of Ten was noble — to give more people access to education and elevate the employability of society — but there were unintended consequences.

⁷ For example — geography in year seven, biology in year ten.

⁸ These ideas have been articulated by many leading scholars, most notably by the brilliant Sir Ken Robinson in his book *The Element* (required reading).

What we teach matters, but not nearly as much as how we are taught to learn.

Beyond literacy and numeracy, history and biology, what we really learned at school was how to conform. How to prioritise what's being measured, not what we find interesting. How to colour inside the lines, not make a mosaic on the walls. How to sit quietly and await further instruction, not proactively pursue our passion.

To put it bluntly, we were reprimanded and punished anytime we were creative. In a study called 'Creativity: Asset or Burden in the Classroom?', elementary school teachers were asked to rate their favourite students and rate each student's creative capability. The researchers found that students displaying creative characteristics were the most unappealing to teachers.

And as Adam Grant points out in his *New York Times* best-selling book, *Originals*,

Teachers tend to discriminate against highly creative students. Labelling them as troublemakers. In response, many children quickly learn to get with the program, keeping their original ideas to themselves. In the language of author William Deresiewicz, they become the world's most excellent sheep.

When we're taught there's only one correct answer, we're robbed of our ability to seek and hold multiple truths. When we're taught that success goes to those who can memorise the most information, we learn to retain only what will be on the test. When we or our peers are

punished for speaking up or speaking out, we decide the safest thing to do is to keep our head down, do what we're told and wait for the bell to ring.

Replication over **originality**.

Memorisation over **imagination**.

Conformity over **curiosity**.

Efficiency over **experimentation**.

Perfection over **play**.

Compliance over **defiance**.

Buttering up the teacher over **speaking truth to power**.⁹

Although there's a growing movement of visionaries advocating sweeping educational reform, we still have a long way to go. And I'm certainly not trying to throw shade at the people who currently work within it. Teachers, in my opinion, are grossly undervalued and, given the constraints and pressure they're under to deliver, they're doing a phenomenal job.¹⁰

I just want you to be crystal clear on all the ways the world has influenced you to become the person you are.

You've been heavily conditioned to believe the things you believe about what is valuable and what is possible.

⁹ No prizes for guessing why I had such a hard time at school. What about you?

¹⁰ If you're thinking, 'But my kids are doing all sorts of awesome things at school', I'd like to point out Australia's education system is currently ranked 39 out of 41 of the world's developed nations. And our current focus on STEM is misguided as it doesn't fully appreciate the speed and power of our technology. Soon algorithms will be building algorithms far better than we can. If you want to prepare your kids for the future, immerse them in the arts and humanities. Entrepreneurship and emotional intelligence. But more on this later...

And it doesn't stop there. What about the stereotypical narratives we're bombarded with every day?

Unhelpful stereotypes

Hollywood has long presented artists and creatives as flaky, unshaven, and self-absorbed. Born talented, lived alone, died poor. Destined to a life of extravagance or destitution.

Over the last few centuries, we were told to see science, logic and reason as the preferred apparatus for progressing our world,¹¹ while art, emotion and intuition have been relegated to merely decoration or entertainment.

We were told we're either left-brained or right-brained, a myth first made popular in 1979 by the book *Drawing on the Right Side of the Brain* by Betty Edwards. The concept has since been proven to be a gross reduction of the brain's capabilities.

And let's not forget the endless array of personality tests and strengths diagnostics that love to pigeonhole us as either creative or non-creative by way of a series of inane, leading questions.

¹¹ Due in part to the influence of Aristotle and the lingering residue of the Enlightenment.

We don't care what she does.
Medicine, finance or law,
it's her choice...



Art?



Is it any wonder we have a dysfunctional relationship with our creativity? Or why so many parents nudge their kids away from a life in the arts toward the safety and security of medicine, finance and law?

But it's often so much more than the desire for a more respectable, affluent lifestyle that stands in the way. Most of us have deep, psychological trauma that keeps us from going anywhere near our latent creativity.

Battle scars

During a podcast with Elizabeth Gilbert (author of *Big Magic*), Brené Brown, the best-selling author of countless books on vulnerability, and the world's foremost expert on shame, said something that really struck me.

In Brown's research on shame, she revealed 85 per cent of people have a significant emotional scar from childhood. Something that cut so deep it shaped how they came to view themselves and their place in the world. Which in turn shaped the decisions they made and the life they came to live.

Of that 85 per cent, 50 per cent were scarred as a result of direct shaming around creativity. They were told they couldn't sing. That they looked stupid when they danced. That their writing was terrible. That their ideas were dumb, wrong or not good enough. And that's all it took. One throwaway comment from a teacher, relative, stranger or friend and we put away the paint, for good.

Our brains have instinctively shaped our identity to protect ourselves from further psychological trauma. Once bitten, twice shy.

For so many of us, our creativity has been contaminated by feelings of shame. And like any sane person, we will do whatever we can to avoid feeling that way again. To be laughed at, ridiculed or ostracised for daring to dance — it's just not worth it. To engage with our creativity is to reopen the wounds that have defined our sense of self.

Um ... no thanks.

It's safe to say, we've all got a significant psychological handicap when it comes to our relationship with creativity.

Any good news?

The good news (ah finally, some good news!) is that, despite the influence of our education, our work environment and our childhood, we are, in fact, biologically designed to create.

Thanks to radical advances in neuroscience, there is a growing body of research that confirms all of us are born with roughly the same capacity for creativity. And the factors that determine whether we retain it later in life come down to environment and encouragement, not God-given talent or a genetic predisposition.

But the best research, which proved once and for all that we were always intended to create, was done decades ago. And it all began with the mother of all moonshots: our attempt to reach for the stars.

Born to create

Back in the 1960s, right after JFK declared the United States was going to put humans on the moon, NASA realised they would need an army of unbelievably gifted individuals to make it happen. They turned to a guy named George Land to help them find the boldest, brightest and most brilliant minds to complete the grandest mission of all time.

He created a test that measured the creative capacity of an individual and an individual's ability to access their creativity. And, as we all know, it was a pretty effective test. Somehow, that collective of wildly creative humans pulled off a rather large miracle.¹²

Once the champagne had worn off and he had stopped receiving so many party invitations, George had to decide what project he'd take on next. He recalled his infamous creativity test and, on a whim, decided to try it on a bunch of five-year-olds.

¹² Unless you don't believe we ever made it to the moon. Right on. We're all about diversity and inclusion here. And I love a good conspiracy theory after a few wines. So you keep on believing whatever works for you!

So he gathered over 1600 little cherubs and gave them the exact same test he'd given the astrophysicists and engineers, the psychologists and lunar specialists.

The results revealed a staggering 98 per cent of five-year-olds could be classed as creative geniuses. They exhibited the same level of creativity as the most innovative minds at NASA — the ones that put us on the moon in 1969.

Keep in mind, these children weren't from NASA's school for the gifted. They weren't playing the violin with one hand while cooking a risotto with the other, speaking Mandarin and Cantonese at the same time, like my boys.

They were ordinary, everyday kids. Snotty noses, grubby knees. Kids, I assume, like you and I once were.

So, astounded by the results, George decided to make his test into a longitudinal study. He brought the same focus group of kids back to do the same test, under the same conditions, five years later. So now they're 10 years old.

Have a guess what percentage of kids could now be classed as creative geniuses.

Is it:

- a) 80 per cent
- b) 95 per cent
- c) 30 per cent
- d) 65 per cent

The answer? Well, you'll have to look in the footnote.¹³

He measured them again at 15. Same kids, same test, same conditions, and guess what? The number dropped again, this time to 12 per cent.? He measured one more time. Now they're 30 years old and many have

¹³ The answer was 30 per cent — thanks for playing along!

kids of their own (again, like many of us!). The results showed that only 2 per cent of participants could be classed as brilliantly creative. George went on to say: 'The research is conclusive: non-creative behaviour is learned.'

Let's just take a minute to let that sink in. Ninety-eight per cent of us are born with an ability to access our limitless creativity. And by the time we turn 30, only 2 per cent of us exhibit the same natural creativity we were born with.

Ouch.

Here's the skinny

We were all schooled to follow the rules. Trained to be cogs in a wheel. Wounded by careless words and bombarded with harmful messages that told us being creative would leave us:

- ≈ misunderstood
- ≈ isolated
- ≈ poor.

We hero worship those who have retained and expressed their creativity in the arts and humanities. In science, tech, business and beyond. But the vast majority of us have adopted the disempowering story that we are not privy to the same innate sensibilities of those gifted few.

Our lives have been shaped by a set of beliefs that we embraced to help us navigate the uncertainty of our childhood or the uncomfortable nature of our workplace. As Seth Godin puts it, 'We have embraced the industrial propaganda with such enthusiasm that we have changed the very nature of our dreams'.

**If you don't feel like an
Everyday Creative, it's not your
fault, but reclaiming it is
your responsibility.**

If we're going to recover your innate creativity, we've got to go straight to the source: head for the jugular and start with your identity. We've got to rewrite the story of you, for you.

This is why most creativity training doesn't work or doesn't last. It doesn't address the root cause. It merely dances around the surface, posturing with post-it notes or word association exercises. You can do all the creative capability training in the world, but if it's just a bandage stuck over a deeply entrenched story that you're not creative and never will be, how effective do you think it will be?

Now we're going to determine how you currently identify with creativity. By doing so, this will help address the entrenched narratives you've absorbed and give you a clear picture of what stops you from becoming the Everyday Creative you were born to be.



Used to be

Never was

Kinda
sorta



Love to be

Natural
born

Everyday

The six creative identities

Most people see themselves as one of six creative identities. Each specific domain leads to particular behaviours that reaffirm the existing narrative. But all can be transformed and transcended by following the practices in this book.

I'll briefly outline the six identities, but I recommend heading over to www.everydaycreatives.com. You'll find more detail on each of the six identities as well as an interactive diagnostic tool to uncover which personality you currently identify with.

1. Never Was Creative

These folks are by far the most deluded. They wholeheartedly believe that, of all the people on the planet, despite all the research I just took you through, they 'haven't got a creative bone in their body'. They chose a career that reflects this belief. Even if they ended up in a creative industry, they have made sure the work they actually do is anything but.

Perhaps they never had access to anything creative as a child. Or the environment they grew up in didn't value creativity. Maybe they had a sibling who excelled early on in a particular creative pursuit, which resulted in their family labelling them 'more of a sporty type'. Or 'the left-brained one'. And so they went along with it, accepted their role and chose a more conventional path.

Ironically, this group are often most at peace with their perceived (but unproven) lack of creativity. They marvel at those who express themselves creatively, and are eager to support any creative projects or people, but will never put themselves or their ideas forward. It's not necessarily through fear of failure, but through absolute acceptance that they couldn't possibly have anything creative to contribute.

2. Used To Be Creative

This group of creatives are the most heartbreaking and heartbroken. They have a creative past. They cared deeply about something, but at some point they were burned, scared and wounded for life. So much

so, it's easier for them to lock up their creative desires and throw away the key.

But of course, they can't. And it claws at them. They see others creating and want so badly to be a part of it but their fear of getting hurt again stops them from jumping in the ring.

If left unchecked, Used To Be Creatives can be quite dangerous. As a reaction to their own unrealised potential, they can unconsciously seek to sabotage any creative projects or people, lashing out or passively-aggressively blocking any meaningful progress.

They, like the Never Was, believe creativity is something others do and are. And that they are no longer allowed or able to enjoy or experience its benefits.

3. Kinda Sorta Creative

Kinda Sorta Creatives are fence-sitters. They probably played an instrument for a few years in school, or occasionally indulge in something 'creative' as an adult (like a cooking class with hubby or helping a neighbour renovate their granny flat). But they like to stick with what they're good at.

They'll always wait for others to go first or choose an activity they've done before to ensure they don't look foolish. They enjoy creative pursuits and love to be a part of innovative projects but their preference is to fly beneath the radar. They're happy to be on a winning team, but not as captain, and preferably not holding the ball when there's 10 seconds to go and they're two points behind.

Deep down, Kinda Sorta Creatives know that their desire to be close to creativity will never be enough. They live in a constant state of inner conflict. They want to tear down the walls, rip off their clothes and cut loose, but they hesitate and wait: for a better time, for a partner in crime, or when they can be sure no-one else is watching.

4. Love To Be Creative

Simply put, Love To Be Creatives love to be creative. They know it's something they're capable of and they enjoy bringing it to their work

and life. It's just that they're so focused on doing everything else right now that they can't seem to find the time. They look forward to when the workload eases, or when a new project opens up more opportunities to express themselves. Next week, next quarter or next year.

Their work ethic is admirable but they're victims of a misguided belief that getting more done will lead them to more success. They've adopted the 20th-century story of productivity and efficiency so thoroughly, they've forgotten that their advantage is both the thing they love and the thing they're good at: creativity.

Love To Be Creatives always express their natural creativity on a team offsite or at a leadership retreat. They're the first to volunteer and will often have the most innovative or hilarious suggestions during group activities. But all that creative potential fades the moment they step back into the office. And with it the respect, intimacy and connection they'd built with others by revealing more of themselves.

5. Natural Born Creative

Natural Born Creatives are those fortunate fools who slipped through the net of our industrial influence. They somehow retained their innate creativity and have no problem expressing it whenever and however they see fit.

They're a vital asset to any team or organisation thanks to their effortless ability to think differently. Through their unique approach they inspire others to more innovative action. But they can often fall victim to their own success.

Because creativity comes so naturally to them, they can often take it for granted. They might unknowingly hoard their ideas, snub someone's first attempt or become lazy with creative opportunities. And their individual talent doesn't translate so easily to group success: the people around them might initially marvel at their natural talent but will eventually overlook them in favour of someone who is more willing to show up consistently, act inclusively and contribute more meaningfully to the whole.

6. *Everyday Creative*

Which brings us to the Everyday Creatives: the fabulous fine folk who have made it their mission to bring small and large moments of creativity to their work and life every single day.

These people have plenty of wounds and scars from childhood. They might have a bit of natural talent, but their real talent lies in their ability to be courageous. To keep asking bigger, broader and more beautiful questions. To keep stepping over the fear of being laughed at or locked out of the boardroom. To keep doing the best they can with what they've got to help others recover their own relationship with their creative potential.

Everyday Creatives don't do what they do for recognition or reward. They're not following orders or starting a global movement. They're merely acting from their own truth, listening for and leveraging their own unique expertise and experience to bring more light, love and laughter to the moments that matter.



Where are you on the spectrum? Where would you like to be? Wherever you are, you're now on the path to becoming an Everyday Creative. And since the biggest roadblock to our creativity is the story we tell ourselves *about* ourselves, that's where we'll begin. By writing our own Creative Manifesto.

TIME TO PLAY

Your Creative Manifesto

Organisations spend an awful lot of time (and money) trying to write their reason for being. It's sometimes called a mission statement, a vision statement or a declaration of intent. And it's important: it acts as their compass, lighthouse and anchor to shape and sustain their desired culture while giving them the clarity and confidence to fulfil their strategic objectives.

We're going to do the same, *but for you*. You're going to create a living document that clearly articulates who you are, what you're here to create and why it matters. You're going to make your own **Personal Creative Manifesto**.

The best manifestos function as both a statement of principles and a bold, sometimes rebellious, call to action. It should make you evaluate the gap between the principles that matter to you and your current reality. It should challenge assumptions you have about your creative capability, foster a deep commitment to your creative recovery, and provoke lasting, meaningful change to your identity.

Simply put, your manifesto is a statement of creative ideals and intentions. It is a powerful catalyst that will push you beyond your comfort zone and hold you accountable to your continuing creative flourishing.

**If you want to change your identity
(and you do), creating a personal
manifesto is a great place to start.**

Writing a Personal Creative Manifesto (and living by it) can have a tremendous impact on the way you are at work. If you're someone who knows what you stand for and the difference you intend to make, you'll inevitably stand out (whether you want to or not). Clarity of purpose is magnetic, distinct and rare.

So let's have some fun with it. Remember, this is for you. You don't ever have to show anyone. So go for it.¹⁴

Now it's your turn.

1. Write down all the things you believe to be true about creativity (from an aspirational perspective). All the things you love about creativity. All the ways it makes your life better.
2. Write all the things that you have learned while living your life. Everything that stands out to you. The principles, the mottos, the adages. What are the attitudes and beliefs that serve you well when life goes a little pear-shaped?
3. Finally, ask yourself: 'What is the change I'm seeking to make?' How are you going to make a dent on the world? What will people say about you once you're gone, dead and buried?

¹⁴ If you're feeling like it's a little too soon to start declaring who you are and what kind of magic you're going to make, just go with it. You can return to this at any point during the book. In fact, I recommend it. Keep it alive. Keep tweaking it, testing it, trying things on. The more you give your attention to rewriting an empowering story regarding your creativity, the more effortlessly creativity will start to bleed into your life.

Once you've done that, spend some quality time playing with each phrase. Expand and contract each sentence. How does it feel to say out loud? How does each sentence feel in relation to the others? Are these statements best delivered in sequential order or a random flow of expressions?

Keep coming back to this. You don't have to do it in one sitting (but rock on if you do!). You can sleep on it. Leave it for a week. But commit to having it done by the end of this book.

I've left you room on the following two pages to scribble a few ideas right now. But make your finished product something far grander. Something that's a match for the miracle of creativity that you are.¹⁵

Three things to keep in mind

1. I recommend writing in short declarative statements. There is power in brevity. It makes your manifesto easier to remember and recall when you need it most.
2. You're not just defining where you're going, you're defining where you're coming from, cultivating a meaningful context for you to operate in and create from. A set of tenets, values or principles that anchor you to who you are and hope to become.
3. Make sure it doesn't become a 'set and forget' kind of document. I strongly recommend making a physical artefact to hold your creative manifesto.

¹⁵ I've included a bunch of examples of manifestos in the online portal—www.everydaycreatives.com. Use them as inspiration if you're stuck, but remember this is your manifesto. It could be seven words or seven hundred. It could rhyme or it could be a story. It could be full of big, fancy words, or full of colourful, intricate pictures. Make it your own. Use this exercise in reclaiming your creative identity as an exercise in creativity.

BONUS POINTS

What if you cut out letters from magazines and made your document look like a ransom note? Then hung it over your desk in a frame you found in an op shop?

Or what if you wrote your manifesto with a permanent marker all over a mannequin, giving it a full body text-tattoo with meaningful messages scawled across the torso (kinda like Guy Pearce in the film *Memento*)?

Or what if you wrote a spoken-word piece, and recorded it over a video montage with a soundtrack to match? Perhaps it could even become the cover letter for the next position you apply for.

Take your manifesto out of your head, off the page and into your life. You can check out mine on the next page.

Myke's manifesto

I am a man, son, brother, friend
An artist, poet, storyteller and musician
I am a lover of love and a believer of dreams
A warrior, wanderer, barefoot gypsy

I am whoever I say I am
The product of my imagination
The result of my consistent action
A multidimensional manifestation
I am an inspiration, if not to anyone,
at least unto myself

I am the context from which I feel the world
And the content that I create for it
I am the headline and the fine print
And I reserve the right to redefine who I am
every single day.

I came here to dance, to dream, to play
To love, to give, to make
To seek, to strive, to will, to thrive
To drink, touch and taste every experience
I am blessed enough to receive.

I came here to explore, embrace and express
The infinite creative potential that I am
And to serve the sacred intention from where I came
I vow to bring light, love, truth and beauty
to each and every breath.
I do what I do to show my gratitude.

To honour the gift that I am who I am,
at this time, in this place

To join the galaxy of human stars who already shine
So that others, including myself,
may find their way to a better place.

I do this because I can.

Because I have an ability
and an opportunity to make magic
And it would be both wasteful
and disrespectful to do anything else.

I am an Everyday Creative.

Your manifesto

WANT TO BE MORE CREATIVE? DON'T KNOW WHERE TO START? YOU'RE NOT ALONE...

We all have a dysfunctional relationship with creativity. We love it, value it and want more of it but just can't seem to find the time or resources to give to it. And despite desperate calls for more innovative thinking, the systems and processes that hold most businesses together don't allow or enable anything like it.

This book is for anyone who feels like they have more to give but struggles to get it out. Packed full of powerful, practical and poetic tools, this inspiring and infectious read will help you cut through the barriers that prevent creativity at work while giving you the clarity and confidence to unleash your wild, untamed self-expression into every pocket of your personal and professional life.

In the emerging economic climate, creativity isn't just the strongest driver of your competitive advantage, it's the foundation of a meaningful, adaptive and fulfilling career. *Everyday Creative* shows you how to make magic with the mundane, find joy in your current job and transform your everyday work into a work of art.

MYKEL DIXON is an award-winning speaker, learning designer, event curator, musician and author. A musician by trade, gypsy by nature, fierce non-conformist and prolific anti-perfectionist, he works with senior leaders and teams of Fortune 500 and ASX 200 companies to unlock breakthrough creativity.


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