



**How Creatives Can Thrive
In The 21st Century**

ASTRID BAUMGARDNER, JD



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PROLOGUE

There is a lot of confusion surrounding creativity and creatives, the people who make it happen. So, let's begin by getting clear on the meaning of these terms.

Creativity is the process of generating and actualizing ideas that are new to you and solving problems in a new way.

The MacArthur Foundation, which each year awards its *genius grants*, broadly defines creativity as follows:

Creativity comprises the drive and ability to make something new or to connect the seemingly unconnected in significant ways so as to enrich our understanding of ourselves, our communities, the world, and the universe that we inhabit. Creativity can take many forms: asking questions that open onto fields of inquiry as yet unexplored; developing innovative solutions to perplexing problems; inventing novel methods, tools, or art forms; fusing ideas from different disciplines into wholly new constructions; producing works that broaden the horizons of the imagination.¹

Who Are The Creatives?

Creatives are problem solvers, whether it is a problem of how to fill the empty canvas, the empty page, or the empty stage. Creatives thrive on new ideas and, according to the MacArthur Foundation, possess the “ability to transcend traditional boundaries, willingness to take risks,

persistence in the face of personal and conceptual obstacles, capacity to synthesize disparate ideas and approaches.”²

Positive psychologist Mihalyi Csikszentmihalyi, who has studied creativity, explains that creatives possess seemingly contradictory characteristics that can be summarized as follows:

Energetic, yet often quiet and at rest
Smart, yet naïve
Playful yet disciplined and persevering
Imaginative yet realistic
Extroverted and introverted
Humble, yet proud
Flexible in gender roles
Rebellious yet conservative
Passionate, yet objective about their work
*Open and sensitive, experiencing suffering yet also a great deal of enjoyment.*³

These inherent contradictions suggest why creatives have the capacity to see things in a different way and come up with new solutions.

If this sounds like you, keep reading.

CHAPTER ONE

Debunking The Creative Myths

Creativity matters to our world. Once thought of as a nice (but not necessary) characteristic limited to the realm of artists, creativity is now recognized as an essential twenty-first-century skill set. Creativity involves complex thinking to generate novel solutions that make our world a better place. Creatives work hard because what they do really matters to them and they love what they do. And many opportunities exist in today's world to make a living and thrive in the twenty-first century.

This book lays out a three-part *Creative Success Now* Methodology consisting of the mindset, authenticity set, and skill sets that can empower you to pursue the creative life—both for your personal journey toward success *and* because the world needs your ideas. Ultimately, this book will help you to solve the many problems you encounter as a creative person so that you can live as a successful creative in the twenty-first century.

Let's start off by debunking four of the top myths about creativity and creative people.

MYTH NUMBER ONE: Creativity Is Only For Artists

For many people, creativity is siphoned off to the arts. It's easy to see why: A great painting, an inspirational piece of music, an exquisite ballet: these are clear manifestations of new ideas. But creativity is a lot more than inspiration for the arts.

Reality: Creativity is an essential, wide-ranging, twenty-first-century skill.

Welcome to the twenty-first century. We live in a time of change, uncertainty, and enormous opportunity.

We have evolved from the agrarian age to the industrial age and now to the information age, in which digital and communications technologies have made it possible to access enormous stores of information and communicate rapidly, without boundaries. And these technologies are upending many traditional institutions while giving rise to a whole new economy.

This is where creativity comes in, because creativity—the problem-solving process of generating and actualizing new ideas—is a highly-valued skill in today's world and creatives can be found in many different parts of our culture.

THE CREATIVITY SKILL

For starters, creativity is now recognized as a critical skill for the twenty-first-century workforce.

A 2010 IBM survey of 1,500 global CEOs revealed that creativity was the number one skill required to navigate the uncertainties of the global economy.¹

The World Economic Forum now cites creativity as the third most important skill that companies want for their employees and recruits in the next five years.²

THE CREATIVE CLASS

And while creativity resides in our artists, musicians, designers, and writers, it extends well beyond the arts to many sectors where actualizing new ideas is critical to success.

Richard Florida has coined the term *The Creative Class* to describe the people who create “new ideas, new technologies or creative content.” The creative class spans design, education, arts, music, and entertainment, but also extends to scientists and engineers, university professors, poets, and architects. The creative class in the United States is estimated to comprise one-third of the workforce, numbered at forty million people and growing.³

Indeed, the MacArthur genius grants have been awarded to writers, scientists, artists, lawyers, social scientists, humanists, teachers, and entrepreneurs.

CREATIVES ARE EVERYWHERE

What does this mean to you as a creative?

Just about anyone can be a creative. In my work, I have helped not only musicians and composers but also arts leaders, lawyers, designers, entrepreneurs, journalists, and business, marketing, and advertising executives. Indeed, throughout this book, you will hear stories of success from the realm of the arts and beyond.

Bottom line: While creativity may have once been seen as a “nice but not necessary” quality found only in artists, it is a vital part of today’s world.

MYTH NUMBER TWO: The *Eureka!* Moment

Another pervasive myth around creativity is the *Eureka!* or *Aha!* Moment: that creativity is a burst-of-genius idea.

Icons of the *Eureka!* Moment abound:

- **Isaac Newton** developing the theory of gravity while sitting under a tree and getting hit on the head with an apple (Reality: The discovery took years, and evidence of the apple is sketchy).⁴
- **Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart** producing his symphonies in one brilliant sweep of genius (Reality: Mozart’s creative process was nuanced and labored).⁵

- **Thomas Edison's** invention of the light bulb (Reality: Edison built upon the work of many predecessors).⁶

Indeed, we tend to romanticize creative genius. That is understandable, because the public only sees the end product of creativity, not the process.

Reality: Creativity involves hard work and multiple cognitive processes.

In fact, creativity is not just a burst of brilliant ideas arising out of nowhere. Research on, and the practice of, creativity tell another story; one of complexity, nonlinear messiness, in order to liberate the imagination and come up with new solutions.

Having a great idea is just the start of a creative process. Creativity involves defining the right problem to solve, experimenting, risk-taking, reframing, developing ideas, putting ideas together in new ways, incubating to leave time for ideas to evolve and mature, and refining the product until it is just right.

What about the right-brain versus left-brain distinction? Not so fast.

Research from neuroscience confirms that creativity involves both sides of the brain, with a complex chain of connections. As explained in *Scientific American*, the creative process involves many different brain regions that interact both consciously and unconsciously, along with different emotions.⁷

Creativity is “messy,” according to researcher Scott Barry Kaufman, scientific director of The Imagination Institute in the Positive Psychol-



Another pervasive myth around creativity is the *Eureka!* or *Aha!* Moment: that creativity is a burst-of-genius idea.

ogy Center at the University of Pennsylvania.⁸ Dr. Kaufman goes on to explain that creative people exhibit tremendous cognitive flexibility and can “juggle seemingly contradictory modes of thought—cognitive and emotional, deliberate and spontaneous.”⁹

When you talk to creative people, you hear a mix of intuition, idea-generating, hard-core problem-solving, and risk. Pulitzer-prize winning composer David Lang views creativity as “solving problems” to create something that has never existed before. Lang observes that creatives can never become complacent and must put out their ideas with as much commitment and strength as possible. “I like the risk, knowing that [in order to create], I have to use my wits.”¹⁰

For award-winning composer Reena Esmail, a composer’s job is not to find answers, but to find the next questions. This involves deeply intentional, consistent creative engagement. Esmail writes every single day because she knows she has “very little control over what comes into my mind, or over the result of my work. I only have control over how much time I spend creating.”¹¹

In an attempt to harness the messiness of creativity, multiple processes exist to encourage the fruition of new ideas. These include design thinking, now taught at Stanford’s famous d. school and creativity problem-solving, the subject of a master of science in creative studies at the SUNY Buffalo^{12, 13}. My class at Yale University’s School of Music blends these processes to help my students generate innovative solutions to the big problems facing classical music today.¹⁴

And even with these processes, creativity is still the result of cognitive and emotional messiness and complexity.

Bottom Line: In short, creatives work hard to get it right.

MYTH NUMBER THREE: The Mad, Miserable Artist

A corollary to the myth of the genius creative is the myth of the mad, miserable genius: that creative genius goes hand-in-hand with mental illness.

Think Vincent Van Gogh, cutting off his ear and languishing in an insane asylum in the South of France.

Or Michael Jackson, with his many eccentricities.

Or tortured souls, like Sylvia Plath and Virginia Woolf, who ultimately committed suicide.

But is this so? Are creative people mad and miserable?

Reality: Creativity can promote happiness and well-being.

While there is some association between mental illness and the creation of art, research from positive psychology indicates that creativity contributes to a sense of well-being and happiness.¹⁵ Positive psychology is the study of human flourishing and what makes us happy, with happiness defined by positive psychology researcher Sonja Lyubomirsky as “the experience of joy, contentment, or positive well-being, combined with a sense that one’s life is good, meaningful, and worthwhile.”¹⁶ As we will see, creativity promotes positive emotions and correlates with several other measures of happiness.

CREATIVITY AND POSITIVE EMOTIONS

Creativity feels good. In fact, the research shows that people who engage in creative activities experience positive emotions. In one study, people who participated in everyday creativity like cooking and writing reported that they were happy and energized when engaging in these activities.¹⁷

Another study shows that being in a positive mood helps you to be more creative in your thinking.¹⁸

CREATIVITY AND FLOW

Another link between creativity and happiness is flow.

Flow is the state of optimal experience described by psychologist Mihalyi Csikszentmihalyi as the total immersion in a complex activity of creation that you are intrinsically motivated to pursue where your skill level meets the challenge at hand and time goes by to the point that you do not even notice.¹⁹

And when you experience that zone, flow gives rise to happiness.²⁰

CREATIVITY AND RESILIENCE

Did you know that the chances of winning a job with a major orchestra—a grueling process in which hundreds of musicians audition

before a panel of judges behind a blind screen to perfectly execute lots of short musical excerpts with the hope of winning one coveted seat in that orchestra—have been described as lower than the chances of entering the NBA?²¹

So, why do so many musicians continue to audition for orchestra jobs, despite the slim odds of making it, and the many rounds of rejection they face?

Because of their calling and their capacity for resilience—another aspect of happiness.

In a longitudinal study of musicians, psychologist Sasha Dubrow found that musicians were incredibly resilient in the face of the challenges they face in their careers because they experienced their careers as a “calling,” or the pursuit of one’s passion.²²

CREATIVITY AND SENSE OF PURPOSE

What do musicians at Yale, arts leaders in the opera world and creative business executives looking to transition to work in the *do-gooder space*—three groups with whom I have worked— have in common?

As creatives, they are fueled by a sense of purpose.

Creativity is “full-blast living,” in the words of Mihalyi Csikszentmihalyi, who goes on to say that:

“Of all human activities, *creativity* comes closest to providing the fulfillment we all hope to get in our lives....Creativity is a central source of meaning in our lives. Most of the things that are interesting, important, and human are the result of creativity.”²³

This is another attribute of well-being in life that creative people possess: working toward meaningful goals that they are intrinsically motivated to achieve.²⁴ That’s why arts graduates report deep satisfaction from their creative education and pursuit of professional work.²⁵

Bottom Line: No wonder creatives work so hard. What they do really matters to them, and they love what they do.

MYTH NUMBER FOUR: The Starving Artist

Many people still think of the starving artists in *La Bohème* and *Rent* as the model for making one’s living as a creative artist. As in, you can’t.

Why are so many parents loathe to let their children major in the arts?

Why the emphasis in higher education on STEM disciplines (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) to the detriment of the humanities?

My answer: The fear that one cannot make a sustainable living in the arts.

To add to this fear, crafting a career in the creative sector often does not follow a linear path to success. Yet today, it is not just creative careers that do not afford readily accessible career paths. Many professions are suffering from an oversupply of qualified candidates and a diminishing demand, whether it's tenure-track university teaching, classical music, or even my former profession, the law.²⁶

And in today's complicated, wired, fast-moving world, many traditional career paths—from the recording industry to traditional publishing to media—are in decline due to the myriad changes ushered in by the digital revolution and free access to information through the internet.²⁷

Reality: A closer look at our economy reveals another story. In fact, creatives are able to make a living in today's economy.

THE CREATIVE ECONOMY

Not surprisingly, with creativity as an essential twenty-first-century skill, we now speak of the creative economy. Recognized as a significant force in the world economy, the creative economy encompasses advertising, architecture, arts and crafts, design, fashion, film, video, photography, music, performing arts, publishing, research and development, software, computer games, electronic publishing, and TV/radio.²⁸

Another study shows that globally, eleven creative industry sectors have generated \$2,250 billion in revenues (3 percent of world GDP) and accounted for 29.5 million jobs, or 1 percent of the world's active population.²⁹

On a practical level, there are many good jobs for creative thinkers, ranging from the arts to the sciences and the tech world, with 46 percent of arts graduates earning over \$50,000/year.^{30,31}

OPPORTUNITIES FROM THE DIGITAL REVOLUTION

While the digital revolution has eliminated jobs, it has created other opportunities for creative people.³² It's time to get rid of the "false binary between pro-technology optimistic futurism and anti-technology digital pessimism."³³

The digital revolution means that there are more options out there for creative people.³⁴ In the music business, you can still have a label release your recording, but digital technologies make it possible to write, distribute, market, promote, and access music without the need for intermediaries. The result has been new ways to generate revenue as a musician.³⁵ Filmmakers can reach their audiences through YouTube and Vimeo in addition to working with studios, and authors can choose to publish their books with both traditional and independent publishers, along with Amazon and e-books. Creatives freelance and have portfolio careers, assembling work from teaching, performing, writing, and selling their creative content through expert services, products, and merchandise. And thanks to their flexible ways of thinking and solving problems, creatives have a leg up in spotting opportunities and creating their own career paths.

The caveat here is that many of these digital opportunities are not especially lucrative, which means that creatives need to juggle many different professional opportunities and revenue streams. Yet those who are committed to using their creativity are finding ways to make it work.

Throughout this book, you will find many examples of creatives who are living a wonderful life from their creativity.

Bottom Line: The digital revolution has fundamentally changed the twenty-first-century workplace, and creatives can take advantage of many opportunities for making a living and contributing to the global creative economy.

GOOD NEWS FOR CREATIVES

Creativity is a highly valued skill set that drives a significant portion of the global economy. It does not depend on a random stroke of genius, but instead on inspired hard work that creatives dive into, fueled by a sense of purpose and meaning with the potential for well-being and happiness—and a job that pays.

So, for all of you out there who thrive on your ideas, work hard to get your ideas out into the world, are driven by a sense of purpose to create meaning from your creative work and want to thrive in the twenty-first century: This book is for you.