



graphics by nilesh jurelekar

# myths BUSTED



## TAKE CHARGE

Chris Griffiths, author of *The Creative Thinking Handbook* and founder and CEO of OpenGenius, the company behind innovative task management tool Ayoa.com, unfolds the path to creative thinking.

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original ideas are  
new ideas

02

emotion hinders creative  
decision-making

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creativity is inherent

04

go with your gut

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keep working to  
uncover ideas

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**A**round the world, education in school encompasses a large number of subjects—children are taught about everything from math to science, history to art. Most people see the benefit of schooling children on a broad range of topics; while kids will grow up to narrow and refine their ability in a particular niche, it is still considered important that each individual is given the opportunity to experience a range of academic areas. Yet, what do schools teach children about creativity? Or being aware of their own thought process? These things are seen as non-essential. A fact that seems ridiculous when you consider that creativity and metacognition (thinking about thinking) impact each and every person's life—regardless of sector or industry.

A lack of education leads to a cloud of misconceptions. Creativity, in particular, is seen as an elusive talent—something specific to those with artistic sensibilities. In reality, it is a skill that should be learned, practised, and refined—just like anything else. So, let us take a look at the biggest myths impeding your creative decision-making and unpick exactly why they are wrong:

### **01 original ideas are new ideas**

You would definitely be forgiven for thinking that an original idea is something entirely new. In fact, in a way, an original idea is something new. The myth lies in the concept that the fresh idea has popped into existence of its own accord. All truly original ideas are a combination of other, existing ideas—mixed up and fused together to produce something different.

The printing press was created in 1440; a revolutionary, historic invention which transformed the sharing of information in the Western world. But where did the idea come from? It all started when Johannes Gutenberg combined the pressure of a wine press with a coin-imprinting mechanism. Symbolically, this is a good example of how new ideas work—they take existing concepts and turn them on their head and merge them with other altered ideas. In many ways, ideas are like colors—while you cannot imagine a new color, you can mix existing ones together to make a new shade.

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### **02 emotion hinders creative decision-making**

Emotion is frequently positioned as the antithesis of reason and logic. We see our own emotions as temperamental, something that limits our ability to make good decisions—even when it comes to problems requiring creative manoeuvring. Neuroscientist Antonio Damasio conducted a study with patients who had lost the ability to experience normal emotions and feelings—including irritation, pain, and passion—the results were enlightening. Rather than being liberated by their lacking emotions, Damasio found the subjects were paralyzed by their own logic. Even basic decisions like choosing which color pen to use became impossible; decisions such as these are not powered by intellect, but subtle emotional reactions.

Of course, approaching creative decisions from a wholly emotional standpoint is not a good idea, either. As with many things in life, the real answer lies in balance; do not attempt to remove emotion entirely from creative decisions; instead, balance your feelings with logical and rational thought, too.

### **03 creativity is inherent**

Nature or nurture? It is a classic question in psychology. While debate around the intricacies of this question is ongoing, the general consensus is that we are shaped by both. While our genes can provide us with natural potential in certain areas, they can never guarantee it. This applies to creativity, as much as anything else.

People do not always like to hear this fact: saying 'I'm just not creative' is just an easy way out for individuals who feel they lack imagination. It removes the pressure they

might feel to ‘practise’ creativity otherwise. While it is true that some people have certain gene clusters which make creative ability more viable, claiming this prevents others from being creative. It is a bit like saying you cannot get fit because you do not have the genetic makeup of an athlete. As with any skill, creativity can be developed through knowledge, practice, and application. The first step is believing in your own ability to ‘achieve’ creativity.

#### 04 go with your gut

This is a classic saying—but the ‘gut’ to which it refers, is of course, actually your mind (no one is doing thinking with any other internal organs, after all). This is not to say all gut instincts are wrong, but that our initial reaction to a problem is more often than not triggered by our internal cognitive biases.

Human nature means we naturally develop certain tendencies and thought patterns—while these can be helpful in survival terms, they are not so useful when it comes to making informed, creative decisions. The three key pitfalls are: selective thinking—the tendency to validate certain ideas, more than likely your own; reactive thinking—where we react to a situation without seriously considering our actions; and assumptive thinking—where we accept beliefs and conventions without any proof to back them up. So, before you go with your gut instinct, take a step back, check your bias, then look for the best, considered move forward.

#### 05 keep working to uncover ideas

Our productivity-obsessed society thinks work is the solution to everything. Got a problem? Work through it.

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**Think of your mind as a machine with lots of cogs and wheels, when you try to process a problem or force new ideas, the cogs get tighter and tighter—forcing them to keep moving only gets them more wound up.**

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Lacklustre ideas? Knuckle down and come up with new ones. Not sure how to keep progressing? Plot, plan, and analyze until you are moving forward. The value in taking a step back from our work is not valued at all. Time off from head-down tasks is seen as lazy, but in actuality, walking away from your desk is a must, especially for creativity.

Think of your mind as a machine with lots of cogs and wheels, when you try to process a problem or force new ideas, the cogs get tighter and tighter—forcing them to keep moving only gets them more wound up. Focused daydreaming is the oil which keeps things moving, so you can keep ideating. To practise this, you must read up on your related area, then move away, and focus on something else—go for a walk or do some doodling. By the time you return to your desk, fresh ideas will be waiting to meet you.

#### to wrap up...

From King Arthur to Hercules, some myths are there to be enjoyed—but ones that hold back your creativity? Not so great. Setting the record straight and eliminating your personal misconceptions relating to creativity is the first step to taking charge of your creative ability and decision-making—so you can let your imagination run wild, free from the chains of misinformation. ■