



# Creativity, Play and Care of the Soul

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by Tian Dayton

Creativity, Play and Care of the Soul Recovery is about more than sobering up. It's about recapturing a sense of creativity, spontaneity and aliveness. As we recover, whether from alcohol, drugs or psychological trauma, our emotions wake up. We need to find positive, natural outlets for these newly freed up emotions, ways to channel them that nourish our spirits and motivate us to continue on a path of emotional, psychological and spiritual growth. Following are some tips, based on those studies, for motivating change and channeling emotion. Much interesting research has been done on how creativity, play, exercise, sunlight, sleep, prayer and realistic expectations affect our bodies and hence our emotional and psychological well being.

## **Creativity**

Creativity is often times seen as the province of the right brain but we need the prefrontal cortex (read: the thinking/left brain) to, in the blink of an eye, synthesize our experience and make high level and symbolic meaning of our experiences. This makes being creative, full brain exercise. It is the seamless interplay between the right and left brain that allows us to think creatively. Our "thinking brain" allows us to play with, order and reorder the visions, sense impressions and emotional impulses coming to us from deeper regions of the brain and weave them into a coherent and usable template, story or picture. The prefrontal cortex might be seen as the brain's CEO as it manages complex brain interactions. So creative thinking is also good brain management training, not only is the brain thinking it is practicing translating emotions and sense impressions from the deeper regions of the brain into words and meaningful information about the self and the world we live in and then channeling those emotions into relevant, meaningful and inventive active activity.

## **Learning to Think in Novel Ways**

To be creative, people need to break away from and reexamine what they have been taught to believe. Divergent thinking is our ability to follow increasingly different or separate paths of reasoning and imagining. Creative innovation is "the ability to understand and express novel orderly relationships," says Dr. Kenneth Heilman, Professor of Neurology and Health Psychology at University of Florida's College of Medicine " In order to come up with novel approaches, the trick is to get parts of the brain to interact creativity." To arrive at a creative solution to a persistently unsolvable problem we need to change the method by which we're already trying to solve it--in other words, think outside the box. Two components indispensable to divergent thinking appear to be a certain detachment along with the ability to develop alternative solutions. This ability to be detached while developing alternative solutions is a wonderful counterfoil to trauma based (also codependent) thinking in which we tend to remain glued to scenes from the past and see the world (and feel our emotions) in black and white terms.

## **Templates and Paradigm Shifts**

Templates play a key role in creativity. We need to know the rules, but then we need to know when to break free of them. Picasso is a perfect example of an artist who had complete mastery over line and form. If you look at his early work, he had all the skill of the great draftsmen of the nineteenth century; his ability to draw a human face was dazzling. This may be why, when he took all of these elements and distorted them, moved them about in order to reflect accurately an inner experience of self he was so stunningly successful. Templates help keep people's attention



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and provide a secure base from which to move out. Even large departures from what is normally expected are often the juxtaposition of familiar elements brought together from different contexts. This allows the audience or anyone looking at, listening to or participating in someone's "creation" to safely stay anchored in what they know as they follow the mind of the artist who is creating something new. The "unexpected," novel or even hidden symmetries and previously accepted templates that we discover as we view or listen to a work of art are our source of pleasure as we enjoy and participate in the artist's creative flight. Creativity is a way to nourish the spirit, to create release and relief; it reaches far beyond the realm of art and into ordinary life. The ability to think creatively about how to live each day can allow us each to bring our artist self into our day to day lives. It let's recovery take flight.

## **Play and Leisure**

Trauma shuts us down in body, mind and spirit, which is why so many in our population can be "terminally serious." The ability to play, to think, hope and dream, is part of what we need to learn in recovery. Play is defined by researchers as an activity that *encourages positive emotions and allows people to complete high-order relational goals, such as getting to know each other, learning about each other or engaging in a mutual interest together, at a higher rate than expected.* Play is accompanied by smiling and laughter, and should also allow participants to control their onset and their offset in the activity. In other words, play is not forced, it encourages autonomy, spontaneity and creativity. Friends or couples who play together report feeling greater intimacy and closeness. And this sense of closeness develops at a faster rate than normal.

## **Play is Bonding and Preventative**

Play bonds those who engage in it and helps to shake off tensions and aggressions that might interfere with work or relationships. Adults spend too little time at play according to research, and would benefit greatly from spending more time at it. In the workplace, "adult play helps to alleviate boredom, release tensions, prevent aggression, and create workgroup solidarity," says Norman C. H. Wong of the University of Hawaii. Play also facilitates organizational learning, creativity, community-building and group cohesion, and overall, enhances adaptivity and attentiveness.

Almost every species of animal engages in some form of play, play helps all species, animal and human alike, to learn the adaptive behaviors that increase their chances of survival. Play performs two important functions. First, it allows both animals and humans a safe way in which to release aggressions. Second, it provides practice in behaviors that are typically associated with adulthood. Children play like puppies grabbing toys, falling over each other and learning what it means to share and work as a group. We all recognize child play, "you be the Mommy and I'll be the Daddy; now you be the teacher and I'll be your student." Children are constantly slipping in and out of roles, releasing pent-up frustrations, becoming, for a moment, the admonishing authority or the nurturing, all-knowing parent. This gives them a chance to gain some relief from the confines and frustrations of their child roles, and at the same time practice at more mature roles.

Just a note, one of psychodrama's contributions to therapy is that it is playful, interactive and in the moment. It requires active engagement, group participation and split second decision making. JL Moreno, the father of psychodrama, sociometry and group psychotherapy wanted to be remembered as the Dr. who brought laughter to psychiatry.



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## **A Walk in the Sun**

When we ignore the body in recovery, we are making getting better *much* more difficult than it needs to be. The soothing body chemicals that nature gave us in order to self regulate don't get a chance to work their daily magic if we don't stimulate them through exercise of some sort. Exercise releases serotonin into our bodies elevating our moods, our motivation and our pleasure in living. We need dopamine, serotonin and norepinephrine to be released into our bodies in order to *feel good*. This prescription, according to research, is as effective as a drug is for healing depression. In a recent study at Duke University, researchers Michael Babyak, Ph.D., and James Blumenthal, Ph.D., found that depressed patients who exercised had declines in depression equal to those who received antidepressants. In addition, those who continued to exercise after treatment were 50 percent less likely to become depressed again.

A ten-minute walk gives you more energy in the long run than a candy bar. Researchers find that exercising in whatever way is most convenient works best. If it's a brief walk during a lunch break, walking the dog or biking to work, exercise seems to work well when it's combined with purposeful activity or works naturally into our lives. Studies also reveal that exercising with other people helps us to make it a more regular part of our lives. This is also a way to build a recovery support network and find new, life enhancing ways to be with other people. When we try to get our lives to work on strictly a psychological level, we ignore the fact that we live in a body, and that that body has significant power over our moods. This is one of the easiest places to start to turn our lives around or to get out of an emotional slump. A daily, brisk thirty-minute walk outdoors is free, and one of the best habits we can cultivate for our bodies, minds and spirits. It can elevate our moods, keep us fit, control weight, relieve depression and gives us time with friends....to say nothing about exposing us to natural sunlight and the great outdoors. There's just no downside to this one.

## **Sleep, Rest and Find Down Time**

Sleep issues are a common issue in recovery and, for that matter, in modern day life. When Shakespeare referred to sleep as "knitting the raveled sleeve of care" he may have been right on the money. Researcher Thomas Wehr at the National Institute of Mental Health conducted studies during which he had people lie down in a quiet, darkened room for fourteen hours each night. These conditions were similar to those under which we evolved during the millions of years before the discovery of artificial light. While under these conditions, the people in the experiment reported experiencing a state of pleasant relaxation along with a crystal clear consciousness.

Sleep is actually mood elevating; while sleeping for these long and relaxing stretches our pituitary glands release prolactin into our blood streams. Prolactin is associated with a state of calmness and serenity, meditation also releases prolactin. This is the chemical that stimulates the breast tissue to release milk in nursing mothers causing mother and child to feel lulled and deeply serene. But even a slight, low level of anticipation during sleep can be enough to keep prolactin from working to calm the body. In continued experiments, these same researchers told subjects that at some point a nurse would enter the room to take blood. This semi-conscious awareness during their sleep, that they could be interrupted at any time, was enough to stop the release of prolactin.



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## **Spirituality and Prayer**

Amazingly, prayer is also a way to release serotonin into the body. Simply talking to God in our minds produces a sense of connection and calm. Larry Dossey MD culling through the research on prayer for a decade while writing *The Healing Power of Prayer*, came to the amazing discovery that cardiology patients who were in a prayed-for group were five times less likely to require antibiotics and three times less likely to develop pulmonary edema (fluid in the lungs). This held true even in double blind studies when the prayed for group had no idea that they were being prayed for so no placebo effect was in play. The mind, it would seem, has a power to reach through the ether towards another mind whether or not that other mind is in a receptive state or not according to these studies.

Prayer is deeply calming and also allows us to have a sense of control when we feel out of control, it helps us shift from a collapsed, helpless state to a chosen state of surrender, one of those creative, paradigm shifts.

## **Keep Expectations Realistic**

The yogis would tell us that *expectations are the mother of disappointment....* program tells us that *expectations are premeditated resentments*. You will remember that a rise in dopamine levels is one of the motivating factors when it comes to gambling, hi risk behaviors, over eating and a high from alcohol and drugs. In fact, manipulating the brains spill of dopamine is part of an addictive cycle. In studies done on animals, dopamine levels went up when the animal received a pleasant surprise, the more unexpected the pleasant stimulus, the higher the rise in dopamine. However, *when a stimulus was expected but did not come*, the animals' disappointment could be measured by a *drop in dopamine levels*. This little experiment clearly demonstrates why wanting what you have and Good Orderly Direction encourage the kind of emotional and physiological sobriety that can lead to a balance and contented life.

*Tian Dayton, MA, Ph.D., T.E.P., is a board certified trainer in psychodrama and a licensed creative arts therapist. Dr. Dayton is a fellow of the American Society of Psychodrama, Sociometry and Group Psychotherapy ASGPP, winner of their scholar's award, editor in chief of the Journal of Psychodrama, Sociometry and Group Psychotherapy and sits on the professional standards committee. She is also the winner of The Mona Mansell Award and NACoA's Ackermann Black Award. Dr. Dayton has been a guest expert on NBC, CNN, MSNBC, Montel, Rikki, and is a regular contributor to NACoA publications and a Huffington Post blogger. She is an active member of NACoA's Board of Advisors.*