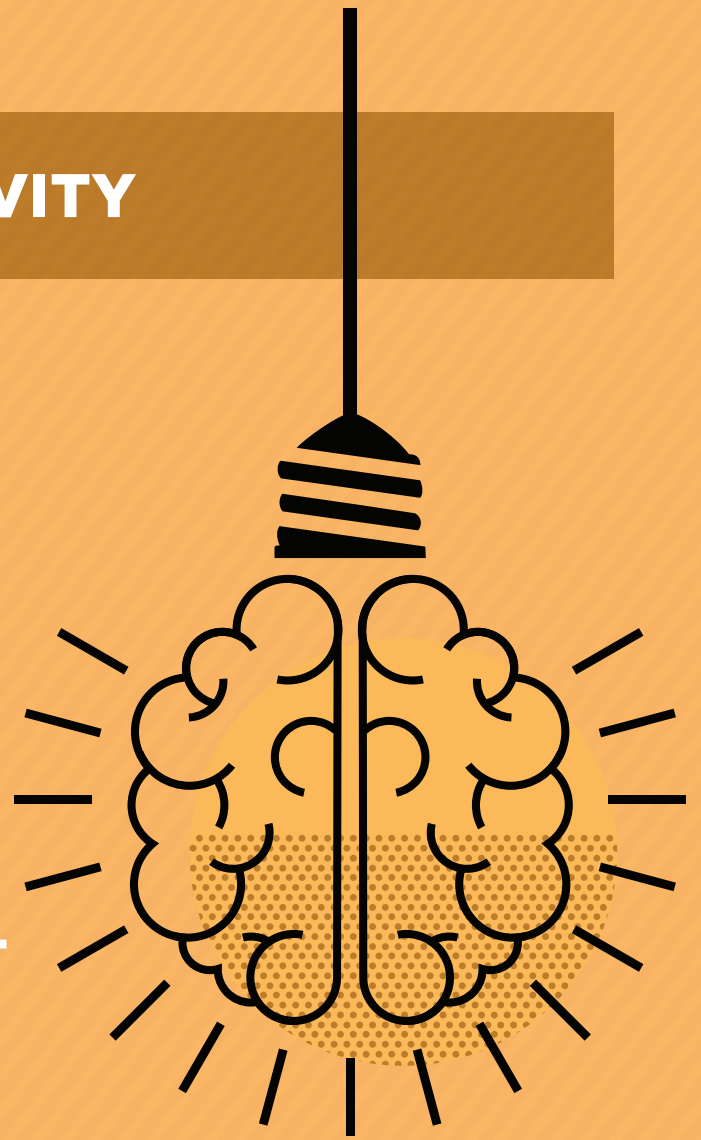# ALL IDEAS ARE IMPORTANT IDEAS

David Kelley, CEO of legendary design firm, IDEO spoke about the importance of building creative confidence. He relayed the experience of a classmate of his early on in elementary school being ridiculed by a peer about the project he was trying to create. As a result, he immediately shut down and quit the project, feeling discouraged about his peer's opinion. Kelley went on to talk about how we can often "opt out" of being creative due to this kind of experience – we tell ourselves that we're not creative, so therefore it's somehow true. He stressed how wrong this is, and how important it is for us to understand and realize that we are all naturally creative - we're not divided up into "creatives" and "non-creatives."

I always stress in the creative workshops within the accounting industry the need for these professionals to think about more than just facts. Accountants are very facts-oriented people - the challenge is to get them to see that there's more to their profession than just the facts and figures. Many of them feel just as Kelley described, that they somehow aren't cut out to be creative, or that they aren't capable.

However, that is the important thing for us all to realize – especially for those of us in technical professions, who otherwise considered "not creative." We are, and your involvement in the creative process is just as important as anyone else's. I tend to think of creativity as the generation of ideas – so, the more, the better!

IMPROV BEYOND THE STAGE

Business schools across America have taken note of the importance of creative thinking in the business world. For the past several years, programs have started offering courses that help students not only learn ways to promote freer thinking and brainstorming, but to adopt principles of improvisation in order to facilitate this creativity. One of the most powerful principles of improv is found in the practice of the "yes, and…" approach.

Bob Kulhan, an influential promoter of getting improvisation into business schools across America, summed up the idea of "yes, and…" in a Slate article best, "When they're collaborating onstage, improv performers never reject one another's ideas—they say "yes, and" to accept and build upon each new contribution. "It's a total philosophy of creativity," says Mandel. "Yes, and' creates, while 'no' stops the flow."

It's this "yes, and…" principle of improv that gets ideas out of people's heads. This is applicable not only for our approach for others, but for ourselves as well. We are often our harshest critic – in order for creativity to surface, we need to silence that critic within us that is quick to dismiss our ideas for stupid ones. In reality, there are no stupid ideas and it's important when brainstorming to let all ideas rise. In creativity workshops, I stress the importance that really no idea is bad, because it will lead to a better idea. Therefore, ALL ideas are important. So whatever is in your head, let it out—within reason—even if it doesn't seem the best of ideas. Seeming "bad" ideas lead to good ones. No idea leads to nothing.

GETTING THOSE IDEAS OUT

I often introduce a technique called mind mapping and clustering to help individuals share ideas. If you have an objective, think about things associated with that objective. Some will be attributes, and some will be details.

Let's say you have been asked to write an essay on "what I do on Saturdays," but you have writer's block. You don't know where to begin. Clustering helps you to lay it all out. You might think of things such as mowing the grass, kids' soccer, housework, playing golf, or fixing a leaky faucet. As you think about them and write them down, you will be able to group them: some are chores, for example, and others are sporting events. Those are attributes, which the details describe.

This is a very simple example, but the concept works well when dealing with complex matters. From a creative perspective, once the mind is able to see the details and attributes, it often will connect the dots in new ways to produce novel associations and ideas.

If your objective is to open a new restaurant, you start by considering some of the details and attributes of what you anticipate you will be doing. What type of food do you want to serve? Do you want to open it in the city or the countryside? Is there a particular theme you want to emphasize? What will be your reputation for service? As you imagine your restaurant, you will be able to list dozens of details, and they will readily cluster into attributes.

You just connect the dots. Whatever your dream, you can quickly create a specific picture from a general concept through this technique of mind mapping. It goes back to associations and the use of the improve principle, "yes, and…". In your brainstorming session, you take two things that may not seem to go together and put them together. That's the essence of creativity – considering something that perhaps you haven't considered before.

IMPLEMENTING A CREATIVE WORKPLACE

In the end, the workplace needs leaders that inspire and encourage the expression of creativity. John Dragoon, CMO of Novell was quoted in Forbes speaking to this saying, "Truly creative leaders invite disruptive innovation, encourage others to drop outdated approaches and take balanced risks. They are open-minded and inventive in expanding their management and communication styles, particularly to engage with a new generation of employees, partners and customers."

This doesn't happen overnight, but if the leadership encourages the generation of ideas, some of them are bound to produce impressive results. Not all the ideas are going to work, no matter how much product testing and field work a company conducts. Some ideas will go nowhere, but if you have no ideas, you certainly will go nowhere.

When it comes to creativity and generating ideas, all are needed and all are wanted. While what comes out might be a bit rough, with a little polishing and fine-tuning, the result can be quite extraordinary.

Peter Margaritis is an author, keynote speaker, trainer, and CEO of The Accidental Accountant, an organization committed to helping business leaders strengthen their business success skills and to create positive results. As a speaker and trainer Peter has delivered hundreds of seminars, conferences, workshops, and keynotes on both technical and non-technical topics to clients that include Fortune 500 companies, large and national regional accounting firms, state CPA associations and the American Institute of CPAs. In addition, he currently teaches select courses for the American Institute of CPAs and The Mind Gym