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DOING CREATIVITY IN THE CLOUDS

(PROCESS ON THE MOUNTAIN TOP)

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Ford and Full-Fanny Creativity

You may have noticed that Henry Ford is a painless teaching tool. In the process of narrating his efforts we've just walked through the entire coping matrix in Figure 1, because Ford tried every single compartment, except being a wall-flower (see Figure 2).

FIGURE 2

	CONTEND	EMBRACE	WITHDRAW
ACTIVE	Change reality Pave the roads	<i>Control reality</i> Change minds	Create Reality Redefine roads
PASSIVE	<u>Adaptation</u> More clearance	<i>Join reality</i> Use corporate tools	<i>Exit reality</i> Go belly up

- He tried adaptation via a raised running board
- He wanted to change reality by building roads
- To do so he had to join the existing realities in engineering and finance
- He decided to control reality by changing people's minds
- And he did that by creating a new reality, one in which the world was viewed in terms of empire and glory instead dollars and cents.

11-B

Killing Bad Ideas

(KEEPING YOUR BRAIN UNDER CONTROL)

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After spending so much time talking about getting ideas, it may seem odd to talk about getting rid of them. However, it's just as important, and often harder to do. It's important because the vast majority of the ideas that come to mind aren't much good. But it's difficult to do because we work so hard to get an idea that we're reluctant to let it go.

THE WASTEBASKET'S YOUR FRIEND

In what seems like the distant past, I financed my way through grad school as a cartoonist. That sounds like such a quick and easy way to make money; but it was wrenching. I'd work for hours on one sketch - erasing, altering, adding, removing, and redrawing - never willing to give up on any idea until I had beaten it into submission. I made enough to pay the bills, but never moved beyond the point of doing toss-away art for training manuals. Meanwhile Steve Elde, a college buddy, had landed a job as the editorial cartoonist for Seattle's major paper.

My envy was mixed with the need to discover his secret, so the next time he came to town I invited him to a cartoon party. He accepted, on condition that he could assign the task. We sat down side by side working toward the goal of

Ford did not timidly leave one bun firmly gripping the old wall of rationality, for the sake of an easy retreat. He boldly took both cheeks out into the meadow, and then fought to save his backside with every tool he knew. This full-fanny approach to creativity encompasses the best of what we need to reignite in America --- the drive to be great. "But how", you may ask yourself, "do I get to that point myself?" I'm glad you asked.

*You zip up your equipment and make a choice
to enter the fray; on a quest for Greatness*

The Quest for Greatness

There was a crusty old Dane named Kierkegaard, who wrote a book called Purity of Heart Is to Will One Thing. Don't read it. Honest. It's so dry it'll give you dandruff. But the points he makes are terrific, so you really ought to read it. Damn. What to do? I know. Why don't I tell you about it. That way I look smarter than I am, you get the knowledge, and Kierkegaard gets the footnote, right here.²

COMMITMENT

"Put your hand to the plow and don't look back."

"Keep your eye on the prize."

"Full speed ahead and damn the torpedoes."

"Purity of heart is to will one thing."

Pick your cliché. They all say the same thing. If you want to succeed, you have to be so committed that nothing, not even death itself, can sway you from your course. Very heroic, but a tad bit overblown. Frankly, most decisions aren't worth dying for. However, the general spirit of the clichés is right on target. Creativity is long hard work and it must be fueled with the kind of commitment that enables you to do what Henry Ford did; keep jumping and/or destroying hurdles.

drawing an Indian that would make the viewer laugh, without the use of a written gag line. Steve was nerve wracking to work around. He sputtered, he laughed, and he ripped paper repeatedly. When we finished, my drawing sat on the same page I had originally touched. His sat on about the 30th, with the rest ripped and piled in the trash can. My drawing was cute. His gave you laugh-spasms. At that point he told me the secret of cartooning ... the trash can is your most important tool, not your pencil.

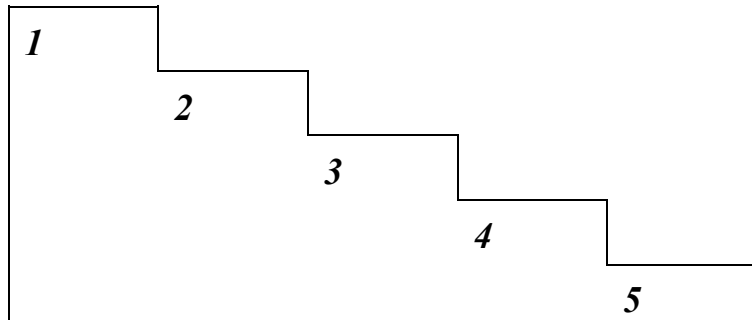
Instead of obsessively trying to fix a partially good idea, let it go, so that a better one can take it's place. That's pretty frightening advice because most of us fear that idea #2 will never come. But have faith, there's more in you than you know.

I'm a case in point. I learned to throw away a lot of work, and in the process I got good enough so that my editor let me do the cartoons for this book. So now I'm a published artist.

REMOTE CONTROL

The wastebasket works just fine if motivation is the only roadblock to dropping an idea. But sometimes you just can't get a bad idea out of your head even when you want to. It's like a scrambled satellite signal on TV; every time a new picture starts to come into focus, the old one comes roaring back to obliterate it. So what do you do? Try going with the TV analogy. Let your brain be the screen and your nose, the on off button. Push it. It's pretty silly, but it often works. A variation is to imagine that your kids are watching trashy TV in the other room. Simply shout, "Turn that thing

How do I get committed? You could act very strange around your relatives. That's one way. But we're talking about a different kind of commitment here, so try the following, instead. Draw a staircase with 5 steps. Then write something you want to accomplish on each step - putting them in descending order - with the most important thing on step number 1.



Now that you've done this little exercise, let's discuss it. One of the important discoveries of research on motivation and commitment is that attention is the key element. We tend to pour our energies into the things that are uppermost in our minds. So commitment takes care of itself, if we have our priorities in order. That's where the staircase exercise comes in.

If you're like most people, your staircase will look something like the one below. The order of the top three steps may be different from one person to the next, but the broad contents usually aren't. That's very normal. It's also very interesting, because there is a clear dichotomy between steps 3 and 4. The top three priorities are outcomes, what we get. It's not until we get down to step 4 or 5 that most of us think about the inputs, what we give in order to earn the top 3 steps.

off!" It's even sillier than pushing your nose, and a whole lot noisier. But it works pretty well, if you're not sitting next to a diamond cutter. If you are, you may want to try some quieter options.⁵

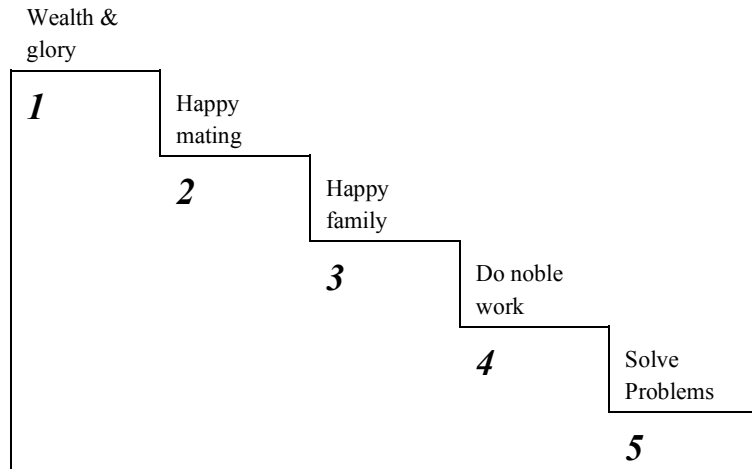
DIVERSIONS

If you wake up with a nightmare, you usually try to think about something more pleasant as you tentatively drift back to sleep. You're purposely creating a diversion. The same strategy can work when you're wide-awake. Simply think about something else totally unrelated. Think about fishing, fantasize about singing opera, or reminisce about your first date with so and so.

If that doesn't work, more drastic measures are needed. Change your scenery, go for a walk, or change your task. What the heck, go out and cut the grass. Primal urges are also a good distraction, which is why creatives are voracious consumers of food, spirits, sex, exercise and debate. Or if you're a bit more sedentary, curl up with a book or magazine ... or watch TV. Distraction is its chief value.

FANTASY EXITS

I used to have a recurring nightmare common to many parents -my son David was hit by a car. I would wake up in a cold sweat with a severe case of the shakes. Yet as soon as I put my head down the nightmare returned, no matter what else I tried to think of. After several sleepless nights, I decided that the physician should heal himself. I disciplined myself to stick with the dream and shift it from reality to fantasy. David would still get hit, but he'd instantly turn into Mighty Mouse, complete with the ears and screwy



If this is true for you, don't get depressed or guilt ridden. Just welcome yourself to the human race, and realize that most of us get the cart before the horse. When we try to get creative we clutter our thinking with the rewards or punishments that might result from our efforts (the outcomes) rather than pouring our attention into the effort itself (the input). Our priorities get reversed and we put two roadblocks in the way of our own actions. First we make ourselves tense, start to second guess ourselves, and start to worry about how we can manage the risk. Second, we get so busy planning our acceptance speeches or excuses, that we clutter our brains and use up the space that could be used to generate brilliant ideas.

The key to commitment, therefore, is getting your priorities straight.

Concentrate first on "what you can do", and let "what you might get" take a back seat for now. Obviously, our favorite in this book is the current occupant of step 5, "solving a problem". That's because this is a book on creativity. If it were a book on

looking tights. But he was so muscle-bound that he actually needed the auto-impact to achieve liftoff. So every time he got hit, the Mighty Mouse theme song would swell in the background and Mighty Dave would say "Thanks little buddy. I needed that." Eventually the dream got so silly it ceased to be a nightmare. Then it stopped altogether and I haven't had it for a couple of years now.

Weird? Yes. Silly? Of course. That's why they call it fantasy. The point is that a fantasy exit can work wonders.

Let's say you come up with a promotional idea for your shoe store. You'll give a Baby Ruth to every kid who walks in the door. After a moment of reflection, though, you realize that your location near the mall's centerpiece fountain spells disaster. You won't sell a single extra shoe. All you'll do is feed the teenagers that hang around all day making eyes at each other, and they'll chase away the paying customers. You need another idea. But every time you try, the teenagers re-occupy your mind: they sit on the counters; lounge on the chairs; beg for seconds; and chase away that blue-haired lady that'll buy 12 pair of shoes in a single sitting.

If you want to lose those brain suckers, shift into fantasy mode. Don't run away from the troublesome thought. Make the troublesome thought so bizarre that it dies from its own weight of absurdity. Puberty invades the store. You immediately cork every mouth with a candy bar, and while they gag on the paper you steal Daddys' credit cards and ring up a \$300 bill on each and every one of them. The cops come and throw you in the slammer for 20 years. As you

productivity I'd probably champion the current occupant of step 4 "doing good/noble work". So don't try to lead your entire life based on problem solving. Just realize that when you're trying to be creative, its a pretty good priority to have as number 1. And when you're trying to lead the rest of your life it's a good idea to follow the general rule ...focus on **what you do**, and let **what you get** take care of itself.



shuffle around the exercise yard one day you realize that you're in the middle of a gold mine; and upon your eventual release, you sew up the shoe concession for the state prison system. You become a multi-millionaire and get your picture on the cover of Business Week.

Yoo hoo. They're gone, aren't they. The teenagers. You stopped thinking about them when the cops hauled you away. And you also came up with an idea you can pursue without going to jail. That's killing an idea with flare.



Some follow up questions

A. If you were going to restate your priorities, what would they be?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

B. What one thing in your life gets the benefit of a purity of heart approach from you?

Use the comment box for your responses

TAGS: Creativity, Henry Ford, Coping Matrix, commitment, purity of heart, Kierkegaard, priorities, killing ideas, diversions, fantasy exits, discard, remote control