

Managing Creatively

By Lynn Bell

“Live *CREATIVELY*, friends... Make a careful exploration of who you are and the work you have been given, and then sink yourself into that... Each of you must take responsibility for doing the *creative* best you can with your own life.” (Galatians 6:1, 4, 5, *The Message*, italics added.)

Paul’s advice on living and working creatively turns mundane, mindless passing of time into fulfilling work and provides solutions for the myriad of dilemmas found in our organizations and the world. For example:

▶ A design team from Denmark, Holland and Israel developed a creative solution for the 1.1 billion people without clean water. The LifeStraw, a portable water-purification device that provides one person with drinking water for an entire year, costs just \$3.

▶ Architecture for Humanity took a creative approach to the AIDS crisis in South Africa, designing and building a sports arena for the local youth, a group said to be three times more likely to become HIV positive than those in any other part of the world. It drew not only athletic events, but became a gathering place for health education.

You say you don’t manage any such life-giving creative process? Ah, but you do, even if only indirectly, by the way you listen to and embrace the creative ideas of others.

How do you build that creativity into your busy life, let alone your responsibilities as a manager in a fast-paced workplace? Here are five guaranteed places to find fresh wind for your sails:

1. Wake up—your senses and imagination. Oswald Chambers said the greatest gift God has given the believer, next to salvation, is the ability to imagine. Pay attention to what’s going on around you. Take in the world on every level.

2. Cross-pollinate. Surround yourself with other inspiring people, especially if their expertise has nothing to do with yours. Yves Behar, an expert at applying something learned in one area to another not-so-obvious area, created things ranging from plasma screens for Hewlett-Packard to Birkenstock sandals.

3. Incubate. Bruce Claxton, Design Integration at Motorola, says creative people “tend to live with an uneasy idea longer, letting them percolate to see how they settle in,” and “businesspeople kill opportunity for breakthrough by judging right out of the gate.”

4. Act. Creative energy requires an outlet, a place to actually work and play with your ideas, not just think about them. Do something—a drawing or create a proto-

type. Toshiko Mori, head of the Harvard Design School, describes this engaging of the hand and the head: “You begin the hard work of really seeing.”

5. Rejuvenate. When do you get those absolutely amazing ideas? Washing dishes, in the shower, walking on the treadmill? It’s during down times, when the brain crosses over from left-brain linear thinking into creative right-brain

thinking. Don’t feel guilty for down times.

We serve a God who made Aaron’s dead staff not only blossom but produce fully formed almonds—overnight. Too often we sound like the Samaritan woman at the well when Jesus said he would give her living water. She said, “Sir, you don’t even have a bucket to draw with, and this well is deep.” (John 4:11, *The Message*)

We, too, think we know who we are and what we can do, based on what we can see. But we haven’t believed in what we cannot see. McNair Wilson, a Christ-follower and former imagineer for Disney, once summarized it for me this way, “Lynn, the sky is NOT the limit!”

Lynn Bell, founder and president of WOILA, is the author of *Harnessing the Power of a Balanced Life*. She is a member of the CMA Management and Leadership Section Resource Commission, and is a trained Life Coach. Contact her at lynn_bell@msn.com.



Fear—of change or criticism

Stress—hormones block creative thinking; no time to rejuvenate

Judging too soon—ask questions instead

Assumptions—keep looking for the second or third right answer

Success—hinders childlike wondering

ONLINE HELP

CMA Management Resource Center
CMAonline.org/mrc



Bill James

Management & Leadership Section Resource Commission. For more resources on management and leadership, visit CMA’s Management Resource Center at CMAonline.org/mrc. Email or call the volunteer members of this Section Resource Commission, or contact: William T. (Bill) James, Section Leader (2004-2006) Management & Leadership Email: Billj@northway.org, Phone (724) 935-6803 Bill James is president of William T. James Consulting, Inc., Wexford, Pa. and serves as CMA’s national coordinator for CEO Dialogues.