MAJOR OBSTACLES TO CREATIVE THINKING 3.0
by Michael Iva

(A comment and on going compilation by Michael Iva)

I believe that we have been conditioned and controlled from infancy to seek and value the approval of others, thus the major obstacle to achieving consistency in creative thinking are the countless different forms of FEAR. Such as, but not limited to: the fear of criticism, the fear of ridicule, the fear of scorn, the fear of rejection, the fear of not being appreciated or belonging, the fear of appearing lazy, crazy, or stupid, the fear of not conforming, the fear of not being able to repeat or top previous success, or even the fear of self-actualization…ETC.

Fear is also fueled by SELF-ESTEEM and INSECURITY ISSUES of creative people simultaneously combined with their tremendous EGO, and need for attention.

It is interesting how self-image and confidence and the ability to be creative go together. Perhaps a sign should be posted by the 'entry' door of our business that says, 'only the self-assured need apply.'

Research confirms that in I.Q. tests given to children between the ages of 2 - 4 years, 95% of the children were found to be highly creative with curious, questioning minds and an ability for abstract thinking.

When the same children were tested again at age 7, only 5% still demonstrated high levels of creativity. In the ensuing years, they had learned to conform; "If you want to get along, you had better go along," is what these children had discovered.

The DANGERS of CONFORMITY: Most children learn to color between the lines, to sit in neat little rows, to do and say what the other kids did and said, and to do as they were told by the propaganda of the system set up by the GLOBAL FEUDAL ELITE and by their parents, by their school, by their religion, by their government, by their laws, by corporations, by their peer group, and by other people /groups who have bought into the same bullshit that was previously on their diet. Over time, people lose their fearless spontaneity and the wonderment of their youth and learn to suppress ideas and insights that were unusual or different.

Through the control and manipulation of children using a vast assortment of propaganda tools, the global feudal elite is therefore able to maintain power, seemingly able to do as they wish while the masses linger in complacency and pacific lethargy.

Retaining the loyalty and the blind trust of the masses is critical in order to maintain the status quo, and this the Establishment does extremely well.

The illusion presented, the fantasy espoused and the manipulated behaviors controlled must be pervasive and omnipotent, conditioned into the citizenry from cradle to grave the benefits of the feudal elite, hiding truths and reality, espousing fictions and lies in order to maintain balance, power and the indispensable yet ever-threatening blind loyalty of the people.

Based on faith in the system, brainwashed into the mind from an early age, the citizens of a nation become ardent supporters of the same system designed to exploit, command, and control their lives. Historical ways the 'few', have, are, and will continue to command and control the 'many'.

Welcome to reality, at the dawn of the twenty-first century.

(NOTE: It is useful to remember that ideas that originally sounded ridiculous or were somehow feared by others, more often than not become the basis for all major breakthroughs.)

What other creative professionals from around the world say about this premise:

• "The biggest obstacle to creative thinking is the idea that we already know the right answer. Don't get me wrong -- very good incremental improvements can come from doing what you already know. But creative thinking in the very purest sense only happens when you abandon what you think you know. The jazz pianist Thelonius Monk had it right: The only cats worth anything are the cats who take chances. Sometimes I play things that I never heard myself."

-Tom Cunniff

• "In my office, the biggest obstacle to creativity is that anyone with a title of 'Manager' or higher knows how to do your job better than you do and is extremely eager to let you know about it regularly. Ever have the chief accountant critique your designs? Or the CEO's wife will 'correct' a design? I have. Enough of that and you start doing just what they want and nothing more."

-Jim Clements

• "Thinking is theoretical...by definition then creative thinking is nothing more than daydreaming. True creative people DO THINGS....and think about it later. Yes we all

daydream, where the fear comes into play is inhibition of the doing. My opinion- Just do...and worry about it later."

-Chris Boardman

• Someone one said, "It's easier to beg forgiveness than to ask permission."

-Steven Christensen

• "Don't ever be afraid they'll laugh at you."

-Kim Rahilly's late brother-in-law Curt Sayer told her, on his death bed

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• "Fear is the major obstacle to everything in life. Bless your heart, Michael, you do have a way of cutting through the crap."

-Barb Sallee

• "Fear is often a boulder in the way of creative thinking. In fact, it is not just the fear of ridicule that is the boulder; but 'unproductive thinking' that perhaps comes in the way of good ideas. There are those who think themselves and their thoughts 'above' the rest; and there are those little creative men out there who get killed out in the stampede to rise to the top. These men often proclaim to deaf ears that 'this was after all my idea'. Perhaps communication comes in the way of creative thinking, or perhaps mankind itself does not want a good idea to get across since that would in some way surpass the average ideas and stand out amongst the average ideas. But what if this good idea is my idea? Human mentality comes in the way of creative thinking not just fear because even the brave are sometimes trampled by the merciless honchos."

-Reshmy Warrier

• "What do you want to be remembered for--my answer: For helping people feel good and seeing the best in themselves. It's a way of beating back the fear... help make someone feel good about themselves."

-Barbara Pflughaupt

• "But is fear the only reason I've decided to give up my artistic integrity so that my MD, or head of web development or even my director doesn't just turn around and say, "I don't like that" or "change this"? I think I've fought enough to know that I'm tired of fighting, and being the only designer in a company you would think that my job is safe, well not when it's slowly but surely moving into software development and less web design.... so my bloody job is on the line too, great!"

-Patrick Ooi

• "Creativity is very difficult to turn on at will. My experience is to try as hard as possible to be true to myself and not be influenced into 'doing the right thing', especially for commercial considerations. YOU JUST HAVE TO KEEP DOING WHAT YOU DO. It's funny how the best ideas and solutions just seem to come when you are not trying, or sometimes even consciously thinking about a problem."

-Nancy Honey

• "I reckon you just need the confidence of not giving a toss what anyone thinks of your mad ideas. Usually the more out the blue and crazy early ideas in a brainstorm or other creative process, are the more original the final resolution will be. You'll never get there if you're sitting round a table with people who are more concerned with their image than the creative problem! Oh and do it in the pub."

-Simon Smyth

• "Ah creativity - It's all subjective. I always go with my gut. There's no sense in letting peoples positive or negative opinions of my creative work influence me too much. Don't get me wrong, I take note of sound advice. But if I let too many people influence my work, it wouldn't be my work."

-Cori Haagensen

• "What you really have to do, if you want to be creative, is to unlearn all the teasing and censoring that you've experienced throughout your life. If you are truly a creative person, you know that feeling insecure and lonely is par for the course. You can't have it both

ways: You can't be creative and conform, too. You have to recognize that what makes you different also makes you creative."

-Sunil Shibad, quoting Arno Penzias

• "Fortunately, I got de-socialized to what people think when I was a kid. I was a stutterer. Kids and adults can be cruel to a person with any kind of handicap. So thank the master creator for giving me that minor inconvenience. I learned as an outsider to think for myself, to rely upon myself. I had difficulty speaking but I was ALWAYS thinking and observing minutiae. Stuttering gave me a view of the world that said human beings had an indefatigable capacity to be cruel, to gather into like minded packs and be exclusionary, to make the world an 'us and them' matrix.

Creativity is a process. We did a podcast recording last night with creative musician Ernerst Dawkins about improvisational music and composed music. He talked about waiting for ideas to come, allowing them to naturally flow. A luxury few of us in advertising have. He said in the process there is no right or wrong. In the end, you have to have the courage to believe in what you have produced.

What someone thinks about you is just what they think. Nothing more. I hate to get all Zen on you guys, but, let it go. Your opinion adds to the mix. One word, can change a poem, one note can change a piece of music, one concept can change a campaign. You are there because you are supposed to be there.

Rejection is a reality. But it is deadly to the person rejected if he believes he deserves it. I know, I grew up black in Mississippi in the 1950s and 60s. The presence of the Klan did not define my every waking moment. American apartheid did not define who I was. It is about self-confidence and knowing the world is mine. That I MUST create my own reality. And yes, that world-view carries consequences. Life is an infinite series of actions and consequences. Embrace them and let them change you and make you grow.

Bucky Fuller talks about the infinite potential of whole systems. When I walk into a meeting I see myself as part of a whole system. My presence is part of that infinite potential. As long as I function to my most positive capacity, I can influence and contribute to the function of that system. I know, this all sounds like a bunch of crap. Works for me.

My oldest son wanted to go to LA. I helped him get there, put him with friends who worked in the industry. He hung out, went to industry events and one month later he turns up, back in Chicago. I asked him what happened. He replied, 'I figured out real quick, I will never get used to the taste of ass.'

My early lessons to him paid off, I guess. I once read to him from the Tao te Ching:

'Chase after money and security

and your heart will never unclench.

Care about people's approval

and you will be their prisoner.

Do your work, then step back.

The only path to serenity.'

I like to think my son got it. Hell, sometimes I like to think I got it too."

-Floyd Webb

• "Now, to Michael's observations: since we were children our parents, society and doggone near everything else has made us 'risk adverse' by penalizing us every time we do something wrong. Initially, this was done for safety reasons and then, eventually, to turn us into sheep.

What is needed is 'risk tolerant' businesses that encourage taking risks (creativity) by allowing the person to fail and then working with that person to find out what went wrong, learning from it and moving on.

Without risk, everything stays in the same old box or a slightly larger box. There are no dramatic breakthroughs, just incremental ones that all your competitors can read like a book and see exactly where you are going, thereby neutralizing your competitive edge.

Without failure we might not have electric lights for one.

What is needed is for those of us in decision-making capabilities to forget how we were penalized and institutionalized by society and quit the further institutionalization of this practice. Then we need to build a more tolerant workplace. Once that is done, we will need to help our employees adapt to the new working paradigm and free them from society's bonds in this area. Not an easy task.

Am I advocating allowing an employee to continually fail? In some ways yes, and in others ways, no. Most importantly, if the failures continue to be of the same type, again and again, there is a problem of that employee being locked in and not learning. Otherwise, it is a matter that is as individual as we are."

-Jim Lane

• "I fear lots ... But every time I take the leap it pays off in the end... It is the only way we grow, for sure. A favorite quote of mine to add is... 'I must not fear, fear is the mind killer, fear is the little death that brings total obliteration. I will face my fear. I will allow it to pass over and through me. And when it has gone past I will turn the inner eye to see its path. Where fear has gone there will be nothing. Only I will remain.' - Frank Herbert, Dune. It cracks me up, I find myself whispering it in my head when I am at the dentist or when I am about to make a cold call."

-Amy Frissore

• "To us art is an adventure into an unknown world which can be explored only by those willing to take the risks."

-Mark Rothko, Adolf Gottlieb, Barnett Newman, brought to my attention by Jeffrey Riman

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• "Don't let one man bring you down when the rest of the world is standing up for you."

-Bianca Zen

• "Don't act your age. Unless you're 8."

-Errandboy

• "I've done my best creative work when I didn't worry about deadlines. It's when you have 2 days to do 10 days of work after the AEs have spend 2 weeks on a 'brief' that you succumb to the 'just do what's worked before' mentality rather than trying to break through and do something excellent."

-Marc Lefton

• "Nothing matters anyway."

-EXIT3A.com

"Creativity is all that matters. Destruction is easy. When you're angry, use it to make a positive change in your world. That's the ultimate creative challenge."

-Tracey Lawrence

"Getting in the creative zone is a gift and staying there is task. In my experience the creative zone vanishes."

- Bret Carpenter

"Michael as you once told me, 'You stop being successful when you stop doing the things that made you successful in the first place.' When you stop being successful, that can also stop you from being creative."

-Buddy F. Wachenheimer

WHAT DO YOU THINK ABOUT THIS ISSUE? What are the major obstacles to creative thinking that you have noticed? Please email your comments to me at ivamichael(at)hotmail(dot)com so they too can be included in future versions of this essay. Thank you--Michael.