

Zeitgeist - Soap box

Your Creative Soul

Every business has a creative soul. It's your job to find it nurture it and help it to grow. Rod Petrie

Rod Petrie was one of the founding partners of UK creative agency, Design Bridge, and is former creative director. He has over 30 years' experience in the world of brand communication, and has been involved in the creation & evolution of some of the world's biggest and most famous brands. He describes his purpose as the promotion of fresh thinking to empower people to achieve success. Here, he discusses the creativity at the root of this.

For many business leaders it's lonely at the top. Support, motivation, trust and direction are not always easy to find. Of course, the best leaders are optimists who use the power of positive thinking to face challenges, get the best out of their own people and keep one eye on the Big Picture so they spot those elusive business opportunities before anyone else. Great leaders are also not afraid to ask for help. Great leaders are people who motivate and create a shared vision amongst their team. But for those who aspire to be all these things, but haven't quite got there yet, where should they look for support, and what form should it take? Should it be at a personal level – coaching or mentoring, or some sort of corporate advice - management consultancy perhaps?

Organisations are run by people, and people come first

Management consultancy has a valuable role in business – and will often interview individuals as part of a management consultancy exercise – but I'd like to focus on personal development. People run businesses, and their staff are the people who make those businesses successful. So if personal development falls under the various titles of coaching and

mentoring (and there are others too), let's start by establishing just what the differences are and where the boundaries lie. Coaching is work focused. It means changing behaviour and is great for maximising untapped potential. It doesn't have to be specific to your industry – when you're looking at why people aren't fulfilling their potential, it doesn't really matter what job they do or who they work for, it's how those things make them feel that's important. Mentoring usually involves a relationship between experience and experience.

It traditionally involves a younger, less experienced individual learning from the successes and failures of someone older (though not always) and wiser (perhaps!)

Coaches and mentors are not counselors or therapists although they need to have a keen interest in people and what makes them tick and the obstacles and barriers that get in the way of an individual's development – the things that turn excitement at a new opportunity into a fear of failure.

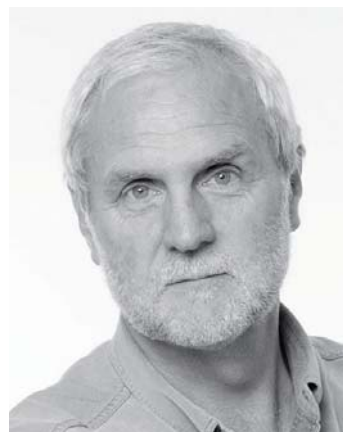
We are complex creatures and should never underestimate the power of past experience and our own perception of things to influence our behaviour, whether in a home or work context.

Simply put, our beliefs influence our thoughts which in turn affect our behaviour and performance.

Approaching personal Development with a creative mindset

Here I'd like to introduce the concept of creativity and explain why a creative mindset, coupled with some or all of the tools above, can make a real difference to leaders and the organizations they run. A creative organisation like a design company nurtures an environment of openness, idea generation and empowerment. In a brainstorm, there is no such thing as a stupid idea, designers are encouraged to be as bold and imaginative as they like, and often the removal of familiar boundaries and comfort zones leads to truly innovative new ideas.

They say that the other side of fear is courage, and courage is the basis of creativity. Creative companies rely heavily on their staff – without happy, productive minds they effectively have no product.



So there's a great deal that other organisations can learn from creating, and nurturing this kind of environment.

Leaders create environments for creativity to shine through. 'Create the conditions and then they will come,' as Kevin Costner so aptly said in Field of Dreams.

Being creative director of your own mind

Put all this together and you reach a goal that I call 'being the creative director of your own mind'. It means using a combination of coaching, mentoring, plus some of the principles used in creative businesses to 'get it real in your head, and then in the real world'. It's what I do every day, with different types of leaders and their staff, in all sectors of business. I listen. Then I question. I keep questioning until I have challenged, pulled people out of their comfort zones and unearthed the real barriers to progress – and these are often the reasons why specific goals have eluded them for many years. It is this questioning that uncovers real insights and makes connections between past behaviours and future actions.

I like to use analogies and metaphors especially in sport where I believe many individuals are succeeding in becoming creative directors of their own minds. The secret is in using parallels to 'turn the light on' and wake people up to the areas on which they need to focus. They need to be inspired by fresh thinking. Only then can we collaboratively put together a plan of action that people really buy into. And without that personal commitment and a real belief that out of this will come change, there'll be no new patterns of behaviour, no different result and little point in all the preceding exploration.

It's about creating focus, directing potential and then promoting action. When people have become creative directors of their own minds, how does it manifest itself?

How do we recognise the change?

They'll have clear goals. They'll feel valued. They'll want to win and they'll know what it takes to do that. They'll have optimism and a positive mental attitude. New opportunities will be embraced with courage, enthusiasm and excitement. They'll see things differently.

This change will keep on improving, because success fuels success and change makes us more accepting of other changes. Once they become creative directors of their own minds, they'll have 'got it real in their heads, and now in the real world.'

Athletes are often creative directors of their own minds

The use of sports analogies are good because in sport, both the individual and the teams are often much better than the rest of us at becoming creative directors of their own minds.

In the sports arena, there's no shame in having coaches and trainers, and it's about individual "best performance" as well as teamwork. In sports like cycling, it's even about the team making one individual look good, with everyone else accepting this as their role. How many businesses could cultivate that kind of relationship between staff and still keep everyone happy?

Golf is the ultimate 'inner game' and it has made Tiger Woods one of the greatest exponents of creatively directing his own mind. He allows himself a ten yard radius after each shot to enjoy the moment or get rid of his frustration. As he steps over the ten yard radius, he abruptly leaves the moment behind to focus on the next shot.

Are you a leader of producers or creators?

So if you are a business leader, and you recognise yourself or your organisation in these words, what should you do?

Find your business's creative soul – the creative truth behind you and your organisation, its unique way of thinking and doing.

Stick your head above the parapet. Get comfortable with being uncomfortable. Look after your staff's creative souls – make sure they are happy, productive and taking on new business challenges with a fresh approach.

Think outside the box. Better still, bin the box and think open air, blue skies, radical waves. Recognize that not everyone is born to create.

Some don't have the same creative passion, but most people want to produce something, so as a leader help them to produce something that's even better.

Lead by example. Get yourself into a position where you are the creative director of your own mind and then help your staff do the same.

You'll reap tangible benefits – and not just in your business life. And if you apply the same thinking to your staff, the payoff in your business will be confident, motivated and focused people who are in control of their working and personal lives.

They'll be effective leaders and decision makers which will produce

results for your business, and a positive effect on the bottom line.

Do you have the fire within you to pursue your visions with passion and purpose? And how well do you motivate this in others?