

# Calm the chaos of the creative mind

If you have a creative mind, you may find you are also easily distracted and prone to over-dramatising situations, leading to a loss of perspective. Renée van der Vloodt offers these guidelines to help calm the chaos



Do you know a quirky, creative outsider? Perhaps you are one yourself. These are people who favour using the creative right side of their brain over the more logical left side; people who tend to be charismatic, out-of-the-box mavericks in their thinking and doing.

With a creative mind there are enormous and divergent talents present, but these go hand in hand with a number of unique challenges such as a difficulty staying focused, impulsive behaviour and mood swings.

Sometimes the talents don't get to see the light of day, as they remain buried under the rubble of everyday life. A creative can live with a constant undercurrent of discontent, a feeling of being mismatched and guilty for not getting things right.

### Stay focused

The ability to pay attention when you need to is an important one and there are few things more frustrating than wanting to pay attention but not having any control over losing it. Distractibility stops a person's full absorption of what's going on and will affect how they learn and interact with others.

Consider the patterns of your behaviour. Once you notice that there are patterns to your poor attention habits they are easier to tackle.

Do noises or passing thoughts throw you into a spin? Or do you become distracted when you feel a physical sense of agitation? Or perhaps it's that plummeting feeling of boredom? Which situations trigger off boredom? (You will notice that boredom is often a default mode we adopt in response to an old trigger.)

Take regular aerobic exercise. It will stop you feeling like a caged bird if you get to spread your wings regularly.

Exercise will transform internal energy and agitation into chemicals that will serve you better. So plan those stiff walks, visits to the gym or hard physical labour on the bike or in the garden.

Take up mindfulness to become aware of what your mind is doing and then, to gently bring it back to the task in hand.

And finally, do yourself the favour of cutting down on multi-tasking. Develop the habit of 'mono-tasking'.

### Black and white thinking

Creative people can be very subtle and more observant than others. Alongside this gift, they can also be shockingly unsubtle and polarised in their reactions. Black and white thinking – as it is referred to – can manifest itself in behaviour and feelings too.

The high levels of emotional arousal that occur when life is out of control block access to our higher intelligence, or prefrontal cortex and then subtle shades of thought become unavailable. Creative people are often naturally highly aroused, impassioned and more alert.

Do you incline towards absolute terms such as, 'always' and 'never', 'terrific' or 'terrible'? These cognitive distortions may seem accurate reflections of strongly felt observations at the time. If a word is repeated enough it can replace the experience and will then affect your belief system. (Even if, at the time you say it, you know it's slightly over the top.) The language we use eventually shapes our reality.

Perfectionists too, see life only in terms of success or failure without a middle ground. Such unrealistic expectations inevitably lead to frustrations and a great many disappointments.

When you're more aware of the way you use language, calm down by letting the out-breath be slightly longer than the in-breath and now there'll be an immediate opening: the ideal opportunity to rephrase your words. When I do this it feels as though I'm literally pulling myself in from the edge. 'Everybody' can become 'many' or 'most people'; 'it never works' is replaced by 'it doesn't always work' and so on. Using language more subtly can have a surprisingly calming effect.

### Tackle time management

How does the prospect sound of achieving more while doing less? Although it's not easy, I assure you it's really possible. I know what it's like to have ever expanding ideas and intentions. It can sometimes feel as though you're running ever faster without moving at all. So here's an idea that has helped me and many of my clients achieve more by using time more efficiently.

Jot down all the things you'd like to be doing in your life now, that would make you feel your life was balanced. Also list the things you have no choice about, but which contribute to a greater good, such as shopping or housekeeping or any other errands.

Think back to an earlier time, perhaps when your life did feel more satisfying. What were you doing then that isn't happening now? Maybe you felt you were learning things, seeing more of real friends or going on proper dates with your partner. Perhaps you need more time that isn't accountable to anyone. I call this 'drifting time'.

If you feel you have too many dreams, prioritise them and start with just one.

Next – get a template of a week planner and book in time for hobbies, friends or drifting time. Take a step back and walk yourself through each day in your mind and find out how comfortable and do-able it feels.

Now there's one more little routine to get into the habit of doing. Once a week – let's say on Sunday afternoons – you look back on the last week and assess how satisfactory it was. Did you spend time on things that were important to you? Did you allow for enough sleeping time? Rejig the plan if necessary. It's very easily done on a digital planner.

### Work on your relationships

The more charismatic and energetic the creative mind, the easier people find it to make contact with others and surround themselves with people. I have noticed two frequently recurring patterns however, that can cause a lot of distress.

The first is that, ironically, this popular person can feel pretty isolated and disconnected in spite of the constant

company. The inner experience belies what we see.

Second: striking up new relationships can be much easier and feel more exciting than maintaining existing ones.

Discovering which of the two applies is a good start.

Learning how to calm down and pay good quality attention to others will help enormously. Added to this, if you are easily bored and looking for novelties a lot of the time, consider your tendency to take your nearest and dearest for granted. They might even seem a bit dull and deep down you might just assume that they'll be there anyway.

The fact is, to feel connected you need to nurture those very important connections. You need to put time into those people who are most likely to celebrate with you when you achieve something, or who'll be there when the chips are down. This is the only way for relationships to deepen and mature and last. Start there and make room for these people in your time planner. Life will soon feel much more substantial, and it will be less lonely if you invest in real friendships.

### Which you is you?

If you lead your life reacting to things that come along, instead of being proactive and deciding which 'you' you want to put out there, you may become a master chameleon or shape-shifter but without a sense of your own core identity. Give this question some thought: which you are you, really?

Following the previous exercises, you may in fact already have a good idea of which parts of you, you want to see more of and become better acquainted with.

Think about the people you spend time with regularly or the activities you spend your time doing. For each person, group of people or activity, analyse which personal qualities they allow you to express or put out into the world. Then draw your own conclusions. Are you able to show enough of the best of yourself?

You will be well on your way to making better use of your talents, and to feeling more at home with yourself and embodied in yourself: a real coming home, I hope.

Renée van der Vloodt has had a private practice for over 20 years, which is now in Rye, East Sussex, and Ashford, Kent. She works with children and adults to help them overcome life's challenges and emotional difficulties including stress, burnout, anxiety, depression, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), anger and addictive behaviour. Renée also runs stress management workshops and programmes in schools and businesses

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