

MAKING A PAIR OF GLOVES

Creative Thinking

in the Real World

A Combat Manual for Young Adults

Steven C. Levi
P.O. Box 241467
Anchorage, Alaska 99524-1467

FORWARD

As a student it is easy to say to yourself that you “don’t have to worry about the real world until you get there.” Well, you are “there.” You live in the real world and every lesson you learn in school is one less lesson you will have to learn in the “real world.”

If there is any one reality that is identical in both school and “real life” is that there is only one direction of travel for successful people: forward. People who do not move forward sink into the muck. Their forward motion is stopped and there they sit, possibly for years, waiting for the chance to move forward again. Sometimes they retire before that chance comes.

Traditionally the way forward is by playing the politics of the office. You know all about that in school. You may think the teacher is an idiot, but you don’t say it. You arrive in class on time and do the homework assigned even though you know there is not a whit of “real world” importance to that homework. You are not a troublemaker and you are not a clown. You do the same thing in the “real world.” You do what the boss tells you and hope that when it comes time for promotion you get the nod.

One of the ways to beat the system is become a creative thinker. You show that you have value because you can solve problems. You are not a drone. You have a different perspective. You think differently and in the incredibly competitive world, being different is an asset. Fortunately for you, creative thinking can be learned, and this book will give you guidance. And since every successful student expects to make ***MONEY*** it is written as if the student were headed for the business world.

Chapter I

THE *DANGERS* OF THINKING

François Rabelais, the great French writer of the 1500s, was a master of creative thinking. He had an unconventional view of the world and was thus able to wring fortunate outcomes from adverse circumstances. Once, for instance, far from his home in Paris, he found himself without cash and stranded in the countryside. Not one to let such trifles stand in his way, the clever French humorist booked himself into a convenient roadhouse and asked for the best room in the house. Alone in his room he sealed two small envelopes on which he wrote "Poison for the King" and "Poison for the Dauphin." Then he went out for a sumptuous feast that, of course, he could not pay for.

But he was careful to leave the small packets in plain view because he was sure the landlady would pilfer his belongings while he was away.

He was correct in his presumption. As soon as the woman entered the room she spotted the apparent packets of poison on the table. Frightened that she might be harboring an assassin, she immediately reported her findings to the local constabulary. The rural *gendarme*, not accustomed to handling high treason and not wanting to be considered part of any conspiracy, immediately arrested Rabelais and shipped him to Paris under heavy guard. Rabelais, who had many friends in court, was immediately released when it was discovered that the envelopes were full of a mixture of ash and tobacco. Everyone at the court of Francis I had a good laugh over his clever ruse.

But Rabelais never had to pay for his lodging and meal in that remote roadhouse.

He never had to pay for his trip home to Paris either.

Regardless of the era, nation or ethnic persuasion, creative thinking is *the* most highly prized of all human personality traits. Anyone can be smart. Anyone can be talented. Anyone can be perceptive, insightful or any of a thousand other personality attributes, but creative thinking is

what gives all of these other traits value. It's the basis of the concept of 'brains' in all culture, from African folk tales to medieval legend and modern entertainment. It is what makes Brer Rabbit, Bugs Bunny, Sherlock Holmes, Cleopatra and James Bond immortal. This worship of creative thinking cuts across cultural lines as well, from Raven, the trickster in Tlingit legend to Themistocles at Salamis and examples from Sun Tzu's classic THE ART OF WAR. Every culture pays homage to its creative thinkers, though many are not honored until long after they are dead.

A creative thinker is a very special person. This is an individual who can make something that had never *been* before or generate a solution no one had previously considered. It can be very profitable. A chemist who creates an anti-aging cream can retire a billionaire. The chemist who has no desire to be creative might as well be making magic potions by mixing dog intestines with eyes of newt and legs of frogs.

The key to success, as every parent has told every child since the industrial revolution, is not to work hard but to 'work smart.' Anyone can work hard. Millions do. Not that many people work smart and that's why success is not that common. The true personal successes in every era of world history are those who 'work smart,' achieve success by developing new products, services, or views of the world. Where others see only problems, creative thinkers see opportunity – and milk them for personal gain.

Creative thinking, it is important to add quickly, is not to be confused with genius. Genius is something one is born with. A genius is someone with a high Intelligence Quotient, the origin of the term IQ. But having a high IQ just means you have the ability to learn faster and more efficiently than someone with a lower IQ. It doesn't mean you are better at what you do. It just means you can learn the ropes faster.

Further, there is no correlation between a high IQ and competence, common sense or professional success. People with high IQs do not have an inside lane on the racetrack to success. They may not even be able to tie their own shoelaces. They are not of any one ethnic stock either. They are black and white and yellow and red. They are male and female, gay and hetero, old and

young, crippled and strong, criminal and law abiding. They are Christian, Jewish, Moslem, pagan, Zen, Buddhist as well as Ba'Hai, Zoroastrian and New Age.

As a consequence, you will find people with high IQs in all walks of life. Yes, there are some who are doctors, college professors and rocket scientists, but they are also garbage men, taxicab drivers, carpenters, autoworkers, plumbers, tollgate operators, used car salespeople and derelicts living under a bridge. There is neither rhyme-nor-reason why people with high IQs end up where they do.

But there is a correlation between creative thinking and success. Creative thinkers are the people who are working smart, not hard. As a result, they work faster and more efficiently. Even more important, they come up with innovations that solve problems, not prolong them. In sports parlance, they are the home run hitters. They don't swing for doubles or triples; they hit home runs. Their ideas create products that make millions.

Perhaps most important for anyone reading this book, creative thinkers are not born. They are created. Rather, they create themselves. Anyone can be a creative thinker. It's just a matter of learning how to use your own natural intellectual talents to your own advantage. It's not a matter of WHAT you know but HOW you think.

[For most of us, people who think creatively are usually labeled "clever," a word that carries negative connotations. "Clever" is not a good thing to be. Clever people are not to be trusted. They are legal pickpockets. They pluck the gold from your fillings without you even knowing you've been victimized. A sting is a clever way of stealing money from an unsuspecting rube. Lawyers are clever. Accountants are clever. Scam artists are clever. On the other hand, a successful businesswoman is "sharp," "astute," "shrewd," or "adept." But she is not "clever." That word is reserved for the people who skitter through life at the very edge of the law and are very successful at it.

This change in the connotation of "clever" has been of recent derivation. If you look up the word in Webster's, even the big-book-they-only-have-in-libraries, there is no indication that

“clever” is anything but a positive adjective. Since so many people dislike the word "clever" this book will refer that kind of thinking as "creative" or "innovative." It's the same mental attribute but just sounds better!]

Probably the most important lesson to be learned about creative thinking -- and if you learn nothing else from this book remember the last half of this sentence -- there is no such thing as a born creative thinker. That's right. Creative thinkers are not born. They are made. In most cases the difference between the person who is extremely talented with the guitar and someone who couldn't write a song to save his life is about 25 years of practicing five hours a day. Professionals make things look easy. That's not because they are easy; it's because the professional is so proficient at doing the task that it looks as though there is no effort involved at all. Seasoned creative thinkers seem to come up with ideas at that the drop of a hat. It seems easy to them. It is. But it is easy for them because they have spent decades perfecting their technique.

But they do not hold a monopoly on that technique. You can do it too and, with enough practice, you can be just as good as any of the creative people you admire now.

"Fine," I hear you saying. "What you are telling me is that I can train myself to be a creative thinker. Other people did that, not me. I'm not creative. When I get out of school and go into business I'm going to hire marketing and advertising people to come up with creative concepts. You can't train someone to be creative."

Well, you are wrong. You can train yourself to be a creative thinker and in many cases, you can be more effective than the people you will be hiring in the future to come up with good ideas. After all, unless you are an absolute imbecile, you are going to know your business better than any marketing or advertising person you can hire. You are the best resource the advertising and marketing resource the people have. What this book will do is show you how to take

advantage of your own talents. It will teach you how to think creatively so you can create real world opportunities for yourself, your business and your career.

Just as important, the more you know about creative thinking, the more effective your own advertising and marketing will be. Far too often business people think that advertising is like a magical potion. "If I only had enough money to really advertise my product," they whine, "my sales figures would really go through the roof." Well, not really. With the right marketing advice and the right advertising format, yes, your sales figures will go up. But it's the quality of the advertising that counts, not the quantity of advertisements on television or radio. Keep in the mind that the most powerful political advertisement of all times, the Lyndon Johnson commercial showing the little girl with the daisy that erupts into the atomic explosion, *ran fewer than a dozen times* on television. It was the intellectual impact of the advertisement that made the difference. It was a powerful ad and the few times that it ran was all that was needed. That advertisement, as they say in the political biz, moved numbers.

The key to being a creative thinker – and the emphasis of this book – is the realization that it's not **WHAT** you know that's important; it's **HOW** you think. While most people have the potential to be creative, they fail to rise to the challenge for a number of reasons.

The single most pervasive reason for failure is rut mentality or groupthink. Imagine, for instance, a team of police detectives is looking over the scene of the crime. Six of the six people have degrees in law enforcement, maybe even from the same college. Six of them have been through the Police Academy, and probably the same Police Academy. All of them might have been born in the same town and are wearing the uniform of that town's police department. They all "think" like cops. While this is not bad, what it does do is exclude a different point of view. They all "see" the crime scene through the same eyes.

If these police officers are seasoned veterans, they may see even less. While detective novels are famous for slipping in critical yet free-floating clues, in fact, with most crimes it is easy to ascertain what happened. The appearance of foul play is usually obvious and when there is a mystery, it's usually where the known associates of deceased were at the time of his demise. Often the police even know who did the deed; they just don't have enough evidence for an open-and-shut case.

Worse, a fact rarely brought out by those same detective novelists, there are oodles and oodles of things at a crime scene that have no explanation. Why was there a vacuum cleaner in the bathtub where the deceased was hacked to death? Is it significant that the six most likely suspects have no alibis for the hour and night in question? What happens when six eyewitnesses to a bank robbery identify the getaway car as, in sequence, a 1954 baby blue Chevy with moons, a dark blue late model car with big headlights, a light black sedan with tinted windshield, a "Ford or GMC" that was dark with plastic dice hanging from the rear vision mirror, a car with bad exhaust system, "the kind of a car a [choose your minority] would drive," and a low rider with scavengers and twice pipes?

Rut mentality or groupthink is when a group of similarly minded – or similarly trained – individuals look at a problem in the same way. They view the situation through the same tinted lenses. In the case of the police in the example above, the only difference in their individual views is brought about by their personality.

"What's the problem here?" some reader is mumbling. "If they solve the crime, that's all that's needed, right?" Correct – if that's all you want. But the fact of the matter is that the police are not paid to plod through their shifts like automatons. They are paid to be fast on their feet, physically and intellectually. Just as every person is different, so is every ticket pullover and

interrogation. Crime scenes are not identical. Each moment of every job is different. The danger is believing that because you've done something before, it's a piece of cake. In real life, every morning is different. Change is ongoing and just because you don't see a difference between yesterday and today doesn't mean that both days are identical.

New technology is opening doors to every field every day. Business – and art and government and politics – are responding to these changes and we are all being forced to look further and further ‘down the road’ to anticipate change, any change, every change. For some industries, the technological change is downright chilling. If you happen to work for a telephone utility, for instance, you know that your days are numbered. Within a generation, telecommunications as we now know it will cease to exist. The network of electrical wires strung from pole-to-pole-to-pole that linked us with Aunt Betty and grandma will be gone. So will the necessity to have six phone lines in the same house – in addition to the cable television coaxial cable.

The bad news for the telephone utility is that the industry is just one tick of technology away from combining all of these numbers into one incoming line. One routing device could read all incoming signals and distinguish between FAX, Internet, cable television and voice transmissions. Eventually there won't even be a cable coming into the home at all, just an electronic beam to a dish the size of your hand on the roof or side of your house. The days of charging for telephone line extension are gone as well. With cellular phones you don't even need an extra line much less a line extension. The days of making a profit from the sale of terminal equipment like phones, FAX machines and answering machines is rapidly coming to an end as well.

Does this mean that telephone utilities are going the way of the dinosaur? Yes and no. Those utilities that do not understand the dangers of the future will pass. Those who realized they have to keep pace with technology and began offering services of the future today will survive. Across the country there is a mad scramble to form joint ventures or even companies that offer a spread of communications, entertainment, and education services. That's because the telephone industry is not the only industry that is in danger. So is entertainment and education.

Well within the lifetime of quite a few readers of this book, there were only three national networks: ABC, NBC and CBS. These three networks controlled home entertainment because local, non-affiliated stations weren't offering much that was worth watching. So America was locked into what the networks chose to offer. The consumer didn't have much of a choice; the networks did.

But it was worse than that. If you didn't like what ABC was presenting you could switch the channel to NBC. But the problem was that to make a profit, all three networks had to offer programming that had the widest possible appeal. Thus, changing networks didn't give you a choice of variety of programs, it just gave you a choice of which type of generic program you wanted: GUNSMOKE instead of HAVE GUN WILL TRAVEL, OZZIE AND HARRIET instead of FATHER KNOWS BEST.

Then the story of American entertainment became predictable. To maintain profitability, the networks had to keep increasing their audience size. At first this was easy. As the population the nation increased so did the number of homes with televisions. It was a natural process. As families could afford televisions, they bought them. Thus, there were larger audiences year after year. All networks benefited as the market pie size increased. But gradually the increase slowed.

Then there were real programming problems. Since time is a limited commodity, there were only two ways to increase viewership. One was to steal viewers from other networks. This was only marginally effective because all three networks were stealing from each other and unless there was an overall increase in the viewing population, the networks were simply trading patrons back and forth.

The other way to increase viewership was easier. All the networks had to do was reduce the quality of programming to attract a larger audience. The New York Ballet did not attract as many viewers as SECRET AGENT or WILD WILD WEST. So the New York Ballet went the way of the dodo. Thus, began a three-decade rush to find larger and larger audiences willing to watch dumber and dumber programming.

Hollywood also discovered this second method of attracting viewership over the same time period. Movies were becoming more and more expensive, but they were earning more and more money. Audience size continued to grow modestly but the quality of movies declined. By the 1980s, movies were making more money than ever. But this had nothing to do with quality. The number of viewers was dropping in terms of real numbers while, at the same time, the price of tickets was rising. Second, video sales were surging, and foreign sales of American movies accounted for a sizeable slice of their gross revenues.

Then the industry took a number of hits. Cable television took a substantial bite out of the movie and video market. The marketing of low budget movies changed from being an enterprise of black magic to one of dollars-and-cents programming. The population of the United States began to gray as the baby boomers became grandparents and special effects began to be considered more important than content. There was a shift in the economic dominance of the world as well and foreign films, which were considered 'artsy' a decade earlier were finding

mainstream acceptance in the United States. Next came DVD sales which were eclipsed by Netflix and who knows what will be the next innovation in the entertainment field?

What is happening to entertainment now will be happening to all industries America over the next decade: a resurgence of individualism and quality. The era of forcing consumers to be satisfied with a mass-produced product designed to satisfy as many people as possible at the lowest possible denominator is gone. Locally produced, high quality local products will gnaw away at the foundation of the multi-national giants. High quality, low budget movies will successfully compete with television network specials. In the workplace, the emphasis is going to be on quality and personal contact, not generic products and services.

This is bad news for large companies and excellent news for the growing fields of small businesses that are exploding into bloom from Maine to California – and Alaska and Hawaii, of course. After a generation of kitsch and mass-produced products, quality is coming back into the American mainstream. Even more important, because of the ongoing diversification of the American marketplace with the Internet, quality products, specialty stores and catalog driven sales, there has been a diversification of the product mix. Thirty years ago, it was not profitable to bring out a book that would only sell to 1,000 people across the country. That's because there was no efficient way to reach those 1,000 people. Today that has changed. With the Internet, you don't even have to go looking for those 1,000 people; they are looking for you. As the Internet becomes more sophisticated, web pages easier to find, the marketing of unique products is going to make millionaires of mom-and-pop operations around the world.

But the key to success in this next generation is not going to be capital available; it's going to be ability of the entrepreneur to be creative. But this means more than just coming up with a good product. It means injecting creativity into the entire business process, from design

to marketing. You can build a better mousetrap, but the world will not beat a path to your door unless it knows where your door is. That will take creative thinking. The 'same old same old' will not work in an economy dominated by Internet access and cyberspace target marketing. It's the creative thinking that will divide the winners and losers in the next generation. This book will teach you how to fan the creative spark within you for fame and fortune.

[The entire text is available in the full version of the site]