



Seminar Pre-reading: Lateral Thinking™ Edward de Bono's Methods & Concepts of Lateral Thinking

This material may not be copied, reproduced, reprinted, used in films or video recording, or stored in electronic devices without written permission of the copyright holders. The material may not be incorporated into training programs except under the supervision of a certified Lateral Thinking instructor.

Published by de Bono Thinking Systems, Inc.
Des Moines, Iowa 50322

Copyright 1999. The McQuaig Group Inc.

De Bono Thinking Systems, Inc., Inc. Official Edward de Bono Thinking Methods

THE SUBJECT OF "CREATIVITY"

Creativity is a messy and confusing subject. Much of the difficulty arises directly from the words "creative" and "creativity." At the simplest level "creative" means bringing into being something that was not there before. Understanding the need for creativity in business and industry today is the easy part. Everyone is faced with the need to create a new product or service, solve a problem, or have the leading edge over the competitors. Understanding the process of creativity and how individuals can learn skills to be creative is what causes the confusion. This creation requires a special skill. The Lateral Thinking program teaches individuals creativity and the skill of generating ideas while using their knowledge and experience.

LATERAL THINKING® AND DR. DE BONO

Dr. Edward de Bono is regarded by many as the leading world authority in the field of creativity. He is the inventor of the phrase "Lateral Thinking" which is now in the Oxford English Dictionary. His Lateral Thinking tools are based directly on how the brain functions as a self-organizing information system. He has worked for over thirty years in the field with major corporations all over the world.

Here are some notes from Dr. de Bono on the definition of Lateral Thinking.

There are a number of ways of describing or defining Lateral Thinking.

1. "You cannot dig a hole in a different place by digging the same hole deeper."
2. "Lateral Thinking is for changing concepts and perceptions instead of trying harder with the same concepts and perceptions."

<http://www.deBonoForBusiness.com>

Since 1994: de Bono for Business is a thriving member of the de Bono Thinking Systems, Inc., global network, a de Bono organization.



3. "In self-organizing information systems, asymmetric patterns are formed. Lateral Thinking is a method for cutting across from one pattern to another."

In my writing and seminars, I use the terms "lateral thinking" and "creative thinking" interchangeably because creative thinking is much more widely known. I introduced the new term "serious creativity" in my book *Serious Creativity* (Harper Business, New York, 1992) in order to make a distinction between formal creative techniques and just messing around and hoping that an idea will happen.

The word "creative" in the English language has a very broad meaning and includes the bringing into existence of something new. We do not accept creating a mess as being creative because the new thing is supposed to have value. For example, artists are creative because they create new things that have value. Yet many artists are productive stylists who produce within the same perceptions and style of expression. There may be very little of the change in perceptions and concepts that is central to Lateral Thinking.

So, one of the reasons for creating and using the term "Lateral Thinking" is to distinguish this kind of artistic creativity from the thinking involved in creating new perceptions and new concepts. There are, of course, artists who also change concepts and perceptions and who do use Lateral Thinking as such. This seems to particularly apply to musicians in both popular and classical music. There are also playwrights, novelists, architects, and others who have used Lateral Thinking to open up new concepts and perceptions. Even so, the Lateral Thinking course does not pretend to turn a participant into an artist.

MISCONCEPTIONS ABOUT CREATIVE THINKING

Have you ever heard the following?

"You have to be an artist to be creative."

"Ideas have always happened."

"Creativity is a talent that some people have and others do not."

"Creativity comes from rebels."

"Being liberated is enough."

"Tools and techniques are confining."

<http://www.deBonoForBusiness.com>

Since 1994: de Bono for Business is a thriving member of the de Bono Thinking Systems, Inc., global network, a de Bono organization.



Here are some thoughts on these misconceptions.

"YOU HAVE TO BE AN ARTIST TO BE CREATIVE."

This is totally untrue. There have been many creative engineers, scientists, financiers, entrepreneurs, etc., who have not been artists. Creativity, and especially Lateral Thinking, is also concerned with changing perceptions, concepts, and ideas. In any situation where perception and concepts are important, creativity is also important. That applies to most situations.

Because artists are creative in their own field does not mean that they have a general skill of creativity that can be applied to any field. An artist usually has the motivation to try something new, and sometimes the artist can provide an "innocent" mind on a subject. But it is certainly not true that creativity is limited to artists.

"IDEAS HAVE ALWAYS HAPPENED."

There is an attitude which says that great new ideas have always happened in different fields and that they will continue to happen from time to time. So there is no need to pay special attention to creativity. It is enough just to wait for new ideas to happen. A related version of this says that new ideas happen by evolution and that this cannot be speeded up. There is a story about the origins of roast pork. It is said that roast pork was discovered when a pagoda burned down in China and a pig in the yard was also burned.

Pagodas will burn down from time to time, but we do not have to wait for such occasions to get roast pork. We can roast pork more directly whenever we choose. In the same way new ideas will continue to happen from time to time, but we can also seek to get ideas in a more direct way through the use of deliberate creativity. One does not exclude the other.

"CREATIVITY IS A TALENT . . ."

This is a very traditional view and one of the best excuses for not doing anything about creativity. It is true that some people have a natural curiosity. It is true that some people have an active imagination. It is true that some people are always trying to change things. But all these effects can also be obtained through developing the formal techniques of Lateral Thinking.

If a number of people run a race, someone will come in first and someone second and someone last. This is determined by natural running ability. Ability can be altered by coaching, training, and fitness regimens. If everyone who ran in this first race is now given a set of roller blades and is taught how to use them, then everyone will go farther in

<http://www.deBonoForBusiness.com>

Since 1994: de Bono for Business is a thriving member of the de Bono Thinking Systems, Inc., global network, a de Bono organization.



the same amount of time. Someone will still come first and someone last, but not necessarily the same person as before.

It is the same with creativity. If we do nothing about it, then we can only depend on natural talent. But if we develop formal techniques and offer training in these techniques, then everyone will be much more creative than before. Some people will still be more creative than others, as with any acquired skill.

"CREATIVITY COMES FROM REBELS."

Rebels are creative because rebels want to be different. They are not much good at playing the game everyone else is playing. They may not even want to play the game at all. They want to play their own game. This has been a good starting point for creativity in the past.

Today things are changing. We are beginning to understand the "game" of creativity. We can understand how self-organizing information systems form asymmetric patterns and how we can move across patterns. From such an understanding come the formal tools of Lateral Thinking. It may well be that the conformists will also be better at playing this new game of creativity. The rebels will not want to play this game and may not be any good at it. So we may have the very strange paradox that the conformists may actually become more creative than the rebels.

Of course, the conformists have to want to be creative. They have to want to learn the game of creativity, and they have to want to play that game. The rebels always have the motivation to challenge and to be different. So the conformists can become creative but they have to want to.

"BEING LIBERATED IS ENOUGH."

Many of the approaches to creativity in North America are based on the notion that everyone is creative but is inhibited. So the effort is toward freeing people up and liberating them so that they can be creative. People are encouraged to be playful and childlike. Traditional brainstorming itself is an attempt to liberate people by permitting them to say what they like without fear of censure.

But this notion of liberation is not enough.

An ordinary person tied up tightly with a rope cannot play a violin. That is obvious. But if we now cut the rope, does this make the liberated person a violinist? Cutting the rope is indeed a necessary step but only a small step. The person still has to acquire the skill of violin playing. It is the same with creativity. Being liberated may be a necessary step, but

<http://www.deBonoForBusiness.com>

Since 1994: de Bono for Business is a thriving member of the de Bono Thinking Systems, Inc., global network, a de Bono organization.



it is by no means the whole process. It is also necessary to acquire creative skills. Indeed, understanding the logic of provocation achieves the same effect as liberation.

The analogy comparing creativity with the playfulness of children is not a good one. Children have the creativity of innocence because their minds have not yet formed many patterns. But the minds of adults are full of patterns, so the creativity of innocence does not work. We have to develop techniques for getting out of these established patterns.

"TOOLS AND TECHNIQUES ARE CONFINING."

Some people protest that any development of systematic tools and techniques will be contrary to the very nature of creativity, which must be "free." This shows a complete misunderstanding of tools.

Language is a formal tool that allows us to have and to express creative thoughts. A ladder is a tool that allows us to get to places that might otherwise be difficult to get to. A carpenter's saw is a tool that allows the carpenter to make beautiful furniture. Mathematics is a tool that allows us to handle complex relationships.

Tools are liberating devices that amplify our skills and enable us to do things that would be very difficult to do otherwise. A key is a formal tool that allows us to escape from a locked room. But the key does not determine where we then go.

In general, a lot of the thinking about creativity is very old-fashioned and much influenced by notions of artistic creativity. Too often creativity is just seen as "being different." Creativity is also seen as the opposite of being formal. Yet music and ballet are both creative and formal at the same time.

USING TOOLS AND TECHNIQUES

Attitudes are fine, but tools are more reliable. Many people attempt to teach creativity by encouraging attitudes of "freedom" and "playfulness." These attitudes may work in the presence of the instructor but are difficult to resurrect later.

Tools are much more concrete. Once you have built up skill and confidence in the use of the Lateral Thinking tools, then you can apply these to any situation at any time. You do not have to wait until you feel inspired.

It is sometimes argued that tools are fine, but without motivation tools never get used. There are two approaches here. You can motivate and inspire people to be creative and then teach them the tools. Or you can teach them the tools and when they find they can use the tools and get new ideas then they become motivated to be creative. That's because now they have seen how it can be done and how it works. The second approach can be

<http://www.deBonoForBusiness.com>

Since 1994: de Bono for Business is a thriving member of the de Bono Thinking Systems, Inc., global network, a de Bono organization.



very effective. People who have never considered themselves to be creative learn the Lateral Thinking tools and surprise themselves with their creativity.

Over the years, many people who are highly creative in their own fields have said they get the best ideas when they use the Lateral Thinking tools systematically. Such people are never short of ideas, but they surprise themselves with a new idea only when they use the tools deliberately.

THE LEARNING PROCESS

At first, as a participant, you may have to fight the urge to start thinking of creative ideas without bothering to use the tools. The systematic formality of the tools may seem to slow you down at first. It is easier to have spontaneous ideas on a subject. At first, the tools will seem awkward to use. Learning the tools is just like learning to ride a bicycle. At first, riding a bicycle is awkward, and you would get there faster by walking. But when you pick up the skills of cycling, then it becomes greatly superior to walking.

DO THE TOOLS WORK?

The tools laid out in this course have been used over the years by many different people in different jobs and in different cultures. The tools do work and have produced powerful results. If someone claims that the tools do not work, the answer is that maybe the tools do not work for that person because he or she has not yet developed a skill in using the tools. We know that skis work, so it is not much use for a novice skier to complain that skis do not work. Mathematics works even though some people may not be very good at mathematics.

PRECISE USE

Because creativity seems vague and open-ended and because you cannot be sure of a result at a defined point, many people have come to believe that it is enough mess around. For this reason, the precise use of the tools may seem strange to some participants of creativity. Yet the tools work best when used in a precise way.

1. At any moment, know exactly what you are doing.
2. Be aware of the next step.
3. Follow the technique and do not allow yourself to be distracted.

<http://www.deBonoForBusiness.com>

Since 1994: de Bono for Business is a thriving member of the de Bono Thinking Systems, Inc., global network, a de Bono organization.



TIME TESTED

There are many instructors who come new to the field of creative thinking. They pull bits from different programs (and even blatantly steal them), change them around a bit, and offer themselves as instructors in creativity. Such people can do a lot of damage and can turn people away from creativity.

All the material in Lateral Thinking has been tried and tested over many years - in some cases, over twenty-five years - with thousands of students. There are today many thousands of people in the world who regularly use the tools of Lateral Thinking, sometimes with spectacular results.

SYSTEMATIC USE

The importance of the systematic use of the Lateral Thinking tools is stressed in this introduction as well as the course itself. The goal of the course is mastery of the tools. With many of the examples, you may indeed feel that you can generate a wonderful idea without using the tool at all. But this is not going to be of much use to you because the purpose of the course is to develop skill in the use of the tools, not just to have some ideas about the exercise. Until you master the tools, it is not surprising that your use of them will not be very productive.

Being systematic about learning and practicing tools is essential. But even when you have mastered the tools, you will still get the best results when you use the tools systematically. Many people who are highly creative in their own fields have told me that they still get the best new ideas (the ones that really surprise them) when they use the tools systematically.

A carpenter has a full set of tools and uses them systematically to make beautiful furniture. Mastery of the woodworking tools is essential. So is the deliberate use of the tools. A carpenter does not flop about and hope that things will happen.

You are likely reading this to prepare to attend a Lateral Thinking seminar led by de Bono for Business. We look forward to working with you to help you become a skilled Lateral Thinker. If you have any questions, please contact us at: 818-507-6055.

If you are attending a "Put it to Work" application and coaching Lateral Thinking™ seminar come prepared to apply the tools to current job challenges.

<http://www.deBonoForBusiness.com>

Since 1994: de Bono for Business is a thriving member of the de Bono Thinking Systems, Inc., global network, a de Bono organization.