Wherever you go, go with all your heart.
—Confucius

Creative Chai

18 life-embracing, ego-boosting, thought-provoking ideas. And one to grow on.

by Jan Sokoloff Harness
Dedicated with love to the best creative instigators anyone ever had... my parents, Lillian and Allen Sokoloff

For a daily dose of inspiration, please visit www.creativeinstigation.com and enjoy where it takes you.
Creative Chai

has nothing to do with tea. Although, I do recommend reading this while sipping a nice hot cup of tea. But I digress. “Chai” in this case is actually:

It’s a wonderful Hebrew word with multiple meanings. Think life, luck and, oddly enough, “18.” For this Jewish mother, it’s a great title that creates a logical structure. 18 ideas. The one to grow on? Read on...
Grow

There are times in our lives when someone says something to us and we take it to heart. We believe them. We let them change how we see ourselves, how we feel, how we act.

Wizards
Bad wizards say things like:
You can’t draw.
You aren’t smart enough to go to college.
You’re too tall to dance.
You’ll never amount to anything.

**Bad wizards are very dangerous.**

**But take heart.**

**There are good wizards too.**
**People who encourage our dreams and inspire our best.**

And here’s the wonderful thing;
You grant the wizards power. *Only you.*

You decide if you’ll listen to the good wizards.
Or the bad wizards.
I say, let’s turn those bad wizards into powerless puppies.
Starting here.
Starting now.
Walk the Talk

My daughter Mary made this perky penguin.
Now, I don’t generally decorate with penguins – perky or otherwise. But this one is displayed in a place of honor in our house. Why?
Because actions speak louder than words.
Mary knows we’re proud of her creativity, because she can see our pride – and her penguin – every day.
So, consider this: When you receive a gift from a colleague or a kid, what do your actions say?
I write. I bake. I don’t often make sock monkeys. But, when someone you love needs a sock monkey, what’s a girl to do? Learn how to make the monkey.

Fortunately, there are instructions for everything on the Internet – from making nuclear weapons to making sock monkeys.

Just as fortunately, none of my friends requested a nuclear explosive. That looked a tad more challenging than finding the right sock and googly eyes.

Pattern in hand, I soon had adorable sock monkeys to give away – and one to keep.

When you get in a creative rut, try something totally different. Monkey around.
Sweat the Details

I know, I know.
You’re not supposed to sweat the small stuff.
That’s a guy’s advise. I’m not a guy.

Here’s my advise: Pay attention.
**Small** stuff makes a **big** difference.

For example, take these details on one of the antique recipe boxes I collect. The details make this more than a utilitarian storage item. The details make this art.

In creativity – as in life – details matter.
There's one sure way to deliver peak performance:
Just say “no” to beak performance.

Beak performance is a common and insidious ailment that kids on a farm understand and CEOs don't. Here's how it works. If you draw a line in the dirt, and you put a chicken's beak on the line, the chicken will faithfully walk that line. Day in. Day out. He won't lift his beak, he won't look around, he won't move off the line.

In business terms, the chicken accepts, “We've always done it that way.” In personal terms, the chicken believes, “There's nothing I can do about that.” The longer you're on a job or with a person, the more likely you are to display the dreaded beak performance signs.

But here's the good news: You're not a chicken.

So lift your head up and take a good look around. You'll be amazed at what you see.
Appreciate good luck.

There are times when you’re driving down the road, or flipping through a book, and you see it.

The very word you’ve been searching for or the exactly right image.

You just got lucky. Ain’t life grand?
Here's a fun way to start the day.
Wear your Groucho glasses.

What do you mean, you don't have a pair of Groucho glasses? How is that even possible?

Now and then, it's good to consciously change your perspective – take a new look at people and projects. There are subtle ways to do that, but I rarely advocate subtle.

And here's one reason why:
Every time I pull out these glasses and put them on, everyone laughs.

Everyone laughs. Now there's a slice of creativity heaven – everyone engaged, everyone happy.

**Buy the glasses.**
I’m going to tell you a secret: The piece of pottery you see here really isn’t as pretty as it looks.

I know this because I made it. I can tell you where every flaw is – from the dribbled glaze on the side you can’t see to the uneven width of the walls.

But you know what? Leslie Adams took this photo – and she made my pot look beautiful.

Work with the best, and you’ll look better.

P.S. Yes, you’re right. I shouldn’t focus on my flaws. Good catch.
When I was knitting this scarf, I hit the mother lode of all knots. What was once yarn became a relentlessly twisted wreck of unforgiving fiber.

Being a newbie knitter and a crazed over-achiever, I refused to admit defeat. I spent hours trying to untie the knot. Hours. Then, I finally realized: All I had to do was cut the knot.

**cut the knot.**

The next time you hit a creative roadblock, remember: If at first you don’t succeed, try, try again. If that doesn’t work, cut the knot.
The recipe for Creative Brilliance?

Mix things up

And don't measure.
Type. Doodle. Play with clay.

Pick up a pen and write a poem.

Write a postcard. Fingerpaint.

Plant a flower. Plant a potato.

Draw a picture with sidewalk chalk.

Get your hands

Dirty.

It feels good.
Ask for help.

It’s that simple. Or, if you’re used to being a solo creative genius, that challenging.

Here’s what you need to remember:
1. Never be afraid to ask for help.
2. Ask people you trust, whether they’re “authorities” or not.
3. Don’t wait until it’s an emergency.
If you turn on a faucet that hasn’t been used for a long time, the water is brown and glunky. Let the water run for a while, and it turns clear and clean.

It works the same way with writing and other creative acts – whether you’re managing people, painting a picture or planning a party.

If you don’t use a skill, you get rusty. Use it daily, and watch the good stuff start to flow!
Seriously.

Breathe.

Here's a quick creativity exercise. Find a quiet space – an office, a bathroom, inside your car, wherever. Breathe in deeply through your nose. Then, breathe out fully through your mouth. Repeat 9 times, for a total of 10 breaths. You can do this sitting or standing. If you're driving, I recommend sitting.

Now that your brain is fully oxygenated, think back. Was “I don’t have time for this!” your first response?

For the record, that's ridiculous. Along the same lines, I've heard people exclaim:

“It's 3 p.m. and I haven't had time to go to the bathroom yet!”

They say this with some pride. Snap out of it, folks. Breathe.
Be Whole-Hearted.

Wherever you go, go with all your heart.
—Confucius
Years ago, at a family reunion in Heber Springs, Arkansas, one of my husband’s cousins whittled while he chatted with us.

Without ever looking at what he was doing, he carved a perfect rosebud.

I was amazed. I ooooooohed. I ahhhhhhhed.

He looked at me like I was crazy and quickly walked away.

Not surprisingly, it was the last time I complimented his whittling.

Want other people to appreciate your talents?
Set a good example. Appreciate yourself.
Be generous with applause!

Start the day off right. Give yourself a hand! And, while you’re at it, applaud the person next to you and the person next to that person.

What are you applauding? You tell me.

I’ll tell you this: If you look for something to appreciate and celebrate, you’ll find it.
My daughter Kate painted this for me several years ago. She went with a Georgia O'Keefe look, knowing I liked that style.

I like Kate's style.

Kate lives in Manhattan now. Not that Manhattan. Manhattan, Kansas. She's attending K-State.

That's right. My first baby is out of the house and on her own. And that brings us to a very important creativity tip: Life is letting go. Make sure the people you love know you love them. Today.

(How does that apply to creativity? Look at the picture. There's nothing more creatively instigating than love.)
Back in 1998, I was watching the Academy Awards when Kim Basinger won for Best Supporting Actress.

I remember her grabbing the Oscar, holding it up proudly, and proclaiming: “I want to thank everyone I ever met!”

I remember this moment because she was thanking me.

I met Kim Basinger once. I interviewed her when she was a starlet. Did that meeting change her career? Not likely. Would she remember me? Again, not likely.

But she and I agree on this:

**Every step you take gets you where you’re going.**

And everyone you meet along the way, matters. Say “thank you.”
Thank you!

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