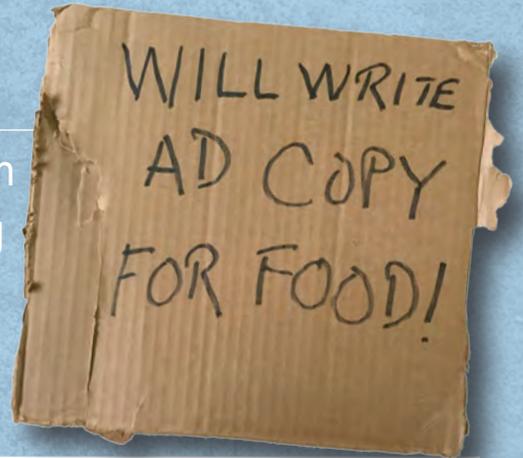


# THE UN-COMFORT ZONE

With Robert Wilson

## Here's When Creative Thinking Kicks In

In the early 1980s, when I was a young man fresh out of college, I wanted to work in the advertising industry as a writer. I took the traditional approach and sent resumes with my three best writing samples to 80 advertising agencies.



The response I got: ZERO. I made several follow up phone calls only to learn that my resume had not even been looked at. One creative director told me that he had a stack of resumes from writers that was four feet high and that he had not looked at one of them. I was frustrated... but that frustration stimulated a humorous way for getting those creative directors' attention.

Around that time I had begun to notice a number of homeless people having particularly good success at begging by holding up a piece of cardboard ripped from a box with these words written on it: "Will Work for Food." They had discovered an effective way to advertise and motivate people to give them money. Recalling the old saying, "*imitation is the sincerest form of flattery*;" I created my own such sign which read: "Will Write Ad Copy for Food." Then I had a friend photograph me holding it. I made 80 copies; stamped my contact information on the back; and mailed it to those same ad agencies. It was amazing, I heard back from more than half of them!

Innovation and creativity are all about solving problems or satisfying needs. And, there are three times when we are most likely to think creatively. The first one is when we are forced into it. Suddenly you find your back against a wall with nothing at your disposal but spit and a prayer (you'd give anything for some duct tape). There is a proverb you've heard dozens of times that succinctly describes this situation: "*Necessity is the mother of invention.*"

The concept of necessity motivating us to improvise brings to mind a story

that my third grade teacher, Ms. McCoy, shared with my class. The imagery was so gross, I never forgot it. She was living in California and had gone to her hair-stylist for a permanent wave. While she was waiting for the solution to set, the room began shaking, glass was breaking, and people were screaming. It was an earthquake. When it stopped, everyone in the building ran outside.

Knowing that the perm solution must be rinsed out soon or her hair would fall out, my teacher asked the stylist to wash her hair. He, however, fearing an aftershock, refused. Ms. McCoy, more concerned about baldness than getting squashed, went back into the building.

She went to the hair washing sink and turned on the faucet. Nothing. She checked the other sinks. Again no water; the main was broken. Finally she went into the bathroom and found just enough water to wash her hair. She said it only took an instant to decide between losing her hair or not, before she plunged her head into the toilet.

The second occasion in which we are likely to be creative is when something annoys us. Irritation motivates us to fix the problem. Remember it is the "*squeaky wheel that gets the oil.*" I wrote about this at length in a previous column, titled "*STOP Bugging Me!*" In it, I suggested that applying some creative thinking to some of the tasks you hate to do each day could lead you to a million dollar idea.

The third occasion in which we are likely to be creative is simply when we want to be. It is human nature to improve things. Whether it is an artistic pursuit or something more

practical, developing something new brings us joy and fulfillment.

Sure, it's exciting to solve a problem, but there is more to it than that. Feeding your creative spirit is exciting and invigorating. Creative energy is highly motivating, and makes life seem worthwhile. There is nothing more satisfying than seeing the results of your own personal genius. It's about the journey, or as the American painter, Robert Henri, put it, "The object isn't to make art, it's to be in that wonderful state which makes art inevitable."

Sometimes it is simply inspiring to observe all the innovation around you. Just look around you at all the man-made objects, whether it's the building you are in, the ballpoint pen on your desk, or the chair you are sitting in - each one began with a thought... an idea. And, it's not just about things you make, it's about new theories, new ways of doing things, new efficiencies, the list is endless... and always will be as long as minds are free to create.

Have you been neglecting your ideas and creative energy? Take some time today to get back to it. You'll be glad you did.

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