

It's OK to Color Outside the Lines: 5 Ways to Access Your Creativity

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“Creativity is inventing, experimenting, growing, taking risks, breaking rules, making mistakes, and having fun.” - Mary Lou Cook

“I’m not creative!” is a common complaint in our culture. “I can’t *do* art. I can barely draw a stick figure.” Creativity is different from artistic ability. You don’t have to paint like Picasso or write like Maya Angelou to be creative!

We all have some element of creativity in our makeup. Old belief patterns, often from childhood, keep us stuck but can easily be reprogrammed. As an adult, there are no grades, no mandatory class projects and no parents or teachers to say things like “don’t color outside the lines!”

When we access our creativity on a regular basis, life is fresh and fun. For entrepreneurs, creativity is a key component in keeping products and services interesting and relevant in the marketplace. Engineers access creativity to stimulate their problem solving abilities. Parents engage creativity for everything from meal planning to family scheduling to communicating with their children.

Here are five ideas to help you engage with your creative, playful self.

1. **Connect with your inner kid.** Spend time recalling creative projects you might have done as a kid. Did you build mud pies or forts? Perhaps you played a musical instrument or wrote plays and made your stuffed animals act out the parts. Did you doodle? Keep a journal? Create collages from pictures in magazines? Remember your youth and see if you can reengage in one or more of those activities.
2. **Take yourself on an artist’s date.** In her best selling book, “The Artist’s Way”, Julia Cameron suggests scheduling a regular “date” with yourself – for an hour or a day – to coax your creativity out of hiding. You could wander a local bead shop, take your journal to a lake or visit an art museum. The idea is to set time aside every week to engage in right brained possibilities! Try it for a month and see what unfolds for you.
3. **Go on a retreat.** Stepping out of ordinary time and disengaging from everyday responsibilities of work, household chores and family commitments allows your mind to rest. A retreat could be as simple as spending an hour at the park sitting under a tree or as luxurious as whisking yourself away for a weekend (or more!) of naps, good books, walks in nature, yoga and meditation. Taking yourself on retreat is a great way to press the “reset” button of your life and to connect with your intuitive, creative inner self.
4. **Pay attention to feng shui.** In the ancient Chinese tradition, there is a part of your land, home and office that corresponds to creativity

(interestingly, it is often linked to children as well!). If you want to start a new business, start a family or simply be more playful, this is an area of your home to set some intentions and place some cures. Karen Rauch Carter's book "Move Your Stuff, Change Your Life" has some great suggestions.

5. **Take a class.** Engaging with others is a terrific way to stir up those creative juices. Check out your local community college or art studios in the area for classes on a variety of subject – pottery, painting, calligraphy, dance, music, gardening, stained glass, cooking. You'll learn a few things and you'll make some new friends who share some of your interests.

Check your calendar right now. See when you can schedule your first artist's date or creative retreat day. Remember that accessing your creativity doesn't have to be complicated or boring. Play with new ideas, explore new worlds and most of all, don't be afraid to color outside the lines!

Elizabeth Barbour, M.Ed. is a Tallahassee based business coach, professional speaker and retreat leader who stopped saying "I'm not creative" years ago. She can help you recover too! Learn more about her retreats and programs for busy professional women at www.elizabethbarbour.com and www.solituderetreats.com .