

The Creative Leader

By Todd D. Long

Graphic designer Deborah Adler was having dinner with her parents and they were discussing how her grandmother had taken the wrong prescription medicine and been rushed to the hospital. She had taken the wrong medicine because her pill bottle and labeling looked just like her husband's pill bottle.

Deborah asked, "Why can't we create a safe pill bottle with large, easy-to-read labeling?" She created the prototype for the new Target pharmacy ClearRx pill bottle. The new bottles are "upside down," with the labeling flat and wrapped over the top so that there's more space for large type. The coolest feature is the color-coded ring at the base that acts like the color ring on an electric toothbrush designating the user. The new ClearRx has been a real success, and it's probably already save lives. (Source: *What A Great Idea! 2.0* by Chic Thompson)



Do you consider yourself a creative person? Many people would say "no" to this question. However, the truth is that everyone is creative. Anytime you have a new thought, write an idea, think of a new way of doing something, draw a picture, create a new meal, or numerous another daily activities, you are being creative. We all have the ability to create.

However, often times we get stuck in routine patterns or ways of seeing things. It is difficult to break out and bring to life new creative ideas. New ideas lead to breakthroughs just like the idea of the new ClearRx pill bottle. As a leader, it is critical that you lead people toward creative thinking.

Why is it important to encourage creativity?

- When people are allowed to create, they have more ownership of the creation.
- When people create together, there can be increased team cohesiveness and morale.
- Creativity can open up new and improved processes or products.
- Lack of creativity breeds stagnate and lifeless systems.

When we look at creativity from a leadership perspective, what can a leader do to encourage creativity with those he or she is leading? Here are some simple ideas to stimulate creativity with those you are leading.

- Have a creative session with those you lead. A creative session is simply a facilitated time when people come together for the sole purpose of thinking creatively about a specific topic. I would suggest doing this in a place that is different from your normal meeting environment. Provide participants with ways to share their ideas for everyone to see (i.e. flip charts, dry erase boards, [collaboration software](#)). Keep participants focused on being creative. If participants start to evaluate ideas or become critical, refocus them back to the sole purpose of being creative. Make this a fun environment that allows people to share, laugh, and engage with one another. Once you have the creative ideas, you can evaluate ideas, select the best ones, and develop action plans.
- Do not "fire hose" ideas. This simply means shooting down ideas quickly. Allow people to share their ideas freely without fear of being shut down.
- Don't think all the ideas have to come from you. Your job is to lead people, not be "mister/misses know-it-all." Great leaders will tell you that they have great people around them.
- Listen to the people you lead.

As a leader it is your responsibility to stir up and draw out the creative ideas in those you lead.