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Mather LifeWays researchers, educators, and other professionals who are leaders in creating Ways to Age Well.<sup>SM</sup>

# Oh, Think of the Possibilities!

## *Creative Thinking at Work and at Play*

*Brought to you by Mather LifeWays Institute on Aging*

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*Creativity, in all its forms, adds meaning and richness to your life and the lives of those you impact. It is important to set aside personal time for yourself each day.*

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Remember the last time you were in an art museum viewing paintings or sculpture and found yourself thinking, “This person was a creative genius...I could never do that.”? Well, creativity is about more than the idea of “genius”; it is an innate human ability that every individual possesses. **Yes, that means you.** You just need to learn how to tap into your natural wellspring of creative prowess. Read on to learn how.

## WHAT IS CREATIVITY ANYWAY?

According to Dr. Keith Simonton, dean and professor of psychology at University of California-Davis, creativity is generally considered to be a form of “optimal functioning” among human beings. It is both a tool to lead a more productive life and a blessing to lead a more relaxed and happy life. As a complex skill, creativity has been defined and understood in many different ways. Most simply, Simonton states, “creativity is the ability to create something original that is useful and solves some kind of problem.”

Creativity is a mental process that can be practiced and strengthened by nearly anyone, as with any other skill. Simonton asserts that creative potential seems to be most encouraged by a developmental environment that includes multicultural experiences that expose individuals to possibilities outside of the culture to which they have been socialized, and difficult experiences that strengthen the ability to persevere. According to research from the Center On Aging, Health & Humanities at the George Washington University Medical Center, the power to be creative is an innate ability, something that each of us is born with, and it does not decline with age.

Creativity lies in the intersection between your current creative thinking skills, your current knowledge of the problem, and your motivation to solve it. Each of these factors is under your control; therefore, you have control over your creative thinking ability and what you do with it. Consider this quote from Nolan Bushnell, founder of Atari and Chuck E. Cheese: “Everyone who’s ever taken a shower has had an idea. It’s the person who gets out of the shower, dries off, and does something about it who makes a difference.” What great idea did you have this morning?

## CREATIVITY AT HOME

What do you like to do outside of work? What activities do you participate in simply because you enjoy them? Make note of what they are, because they are the key to your health and happiness. Having activities in your life that you are intrinsically motivated to participate in can be deeply fulfilling. Just look at so-called “starving artists,” for example. They are compelled to spend their time in creative endeavors to the point of not being able to pay bills. They love it that much.

Activities you want to participate in are an important form of self-expression and a way of creating identity. No one forces you to paint watercolor landscape paintings on the weekend or write songs at night—you do it because you feel compelled to

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do so, and these activities bring you joy. And since research indicates that creativity appears more often when someone is intrinsically motivated, you are more likely to be creative in these types of situations.

Becoming engrossed in an enjoyable activity can lead you to experience *flow*, a euphoric experience where you are so engaged in an activity that you become entirely engrossed in it. This state is characterized by being highly focused and unaware of your surroundings, feeling peaceful and ecstatic. Think of it as being “in the zone.” You can increase the likelihood of experiencing *flow* by: engaging in an activity you genuinely enjoy, setting goals that are slightly above your skill level, continually raising the challenge level as your performance improves, screening out distraction, seeking feedback, and concentrating on the sensory elements of the experience.

And according to researchers, creative activities and the satisfaction they bring can reduce stress and anxiety, sharpen the brain and stem the onset of dementia, boost self-confidence, and improve overall health and well-being. Positive experiences can make you emotionally, mentally, and physically healthier. So, the next time you feel guilty about indulging in an activity you’re not obligated to do, remind yourself that pleasurable activities improve your health and make you happier and more well-balanced!

### WHY CREATIVE THOUGHT MATTERS

Creativity, in all its forms, adds meaning and richness to your life and the lives of those you impact. It is important to set aside personal time for yourself each day. Pleasant activities provide an outlet for identity creation and personal expression, and when we are fully engaged in an activity we truly enjoy, we have the potential of experiencing the euphoria of *flow*. When we participate in meaningful activities that we enjoy, we are happier, healthier, and have a more positive sense of well-being.

Take it from actress Sophia Loren: “There is a fountain of youth: it is your mind, your talents, the creativity you bring to your life and the lives of people you love. When you learn to tap this source, you will truly have defeated age.”

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*Mather LifeWays is a unique nonprofit organization that enhances the lives of older adults by creating Ways to Age Well.<sup>SM</sup> Learn more about our award-winning research at Mather LifeWays **Institute on Aging**, our **senior living residences**, and our **community initiatives**.*

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