

# The Creative Edge

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There is a great discrepancy between what we know about the creative process, and our ability to use this knowledge to gain a creative edge. First, I would like to look at the ideal conditions that foster creativity in the individual. Then, I will focus on how I try to gain a creative edge in the real world.

According to Silvano Arieti, a noted psychiatrist and author of "Creativity: The Magic Synthesis," there are five conditions that foster creativity in the individual: aloneness, inactivity, daydreaming, free thinking, and alertness and discipline.

Let's take a look at the first, *aloneness*. According to Arieti, "Aloneness is recommended as creative work is in progress." Certainly, corporate life argues against it. Imagine today's perfumer, bombarded by telephone calls, besieged by meetings of all kinds, pulled by conflicting requests from salespeople, evaluators, customers—begging for some quite time to get inspired and experiment on a new accord! Not an ideal situation; yet we continue to create. In fact, the emphasis today is on teamwork. And while an original idea seldom is generated by a team, the team effort is useful and often necessary to finish a perfume, particularly when creators arrive at an impasse.

The second condition that promotes creativity is in direct opposition to the spirit of American culture: *inactivity*. This does not mean withdrawing or loafing, but rather taking time off to

do nothing but develop inner resources. Time off to break the routine—to think and feel about other things besides work. Time off to allow our creative process to continue at our own pace, be it fast, slow or irregular. Inactivity, of course, is totally counter to our modern notions of productivity.

*Daydreaming* is the third condition offered by Arieti. This form of mental activity is not too popular in corporate America, yet it allows you to stray into the irrational world, away from the usual path of existence. We all know the importance of fantasy in perfumery, and yet we don't allow ourselves to indulge in the almost childlike trance that is healthy for the creative mind.

*Free thinking*—to allow the mind to wander without restraint or organization—is another creative condition. In this state, similarities and analogies between perceptions tend to occur, and the creator has to be ready to capitalize on these occurrences. Arieti mentions that, "The person who wants to enhance his creative process must allow himself to indulge in the practice of catching similarities." In our field, the perfumer might visualize a pivotal note similar in two totally different perfumes, and have an idea for a new accord.

*Alertness and discipline* is the last condition, and perhaps the most important for an artist. It is often thought that only inspiration, intuition and talent are sufficient for creation. However, rigorous learning and systematic work are necessary

for continuous success. Often the joy of creating is in the broad artistic strokes. But we must endure to finish a creation. And then create another. Over and over again, with determined attention to refinement and details.

We cannot will creativity, but we can raise our level of creativity through dedication and commitment. That dedication to innovation and discipline in the creative environment is a legacy from chief perfumers. In my case, Ernest Shifan and Bernard Chant.

There might be another more elusive condition to be added to Arieti's list, *feeling good*. Scientists at the University of Maryland discovered that what creativity really requires, is for the creator to feel good. Students' performance on creativity tests improved significantly when they were in a good mood. The suffering genius, may be the exception after all, and not the rule.

Aloneness, inactivity, daydreaming, free thinking, alertness and discipline as well as feeling good. These are ideals, not often obtainable, yet we still must create. And to be successful, we need an edge.

Where does that edge come from? It comes from knowing when to break all the rules. From

knowing what the rules are before you even have the ability or right to break those rules. Knowing the rules means trusting market research, the marketer, the consumer, and the trends. Breaking the rules means trusting yourself.

Trusting yourself is creating your own style within your creative environment. My vision of style is clarity in perfume creation, not excess. Style is the ability to isolate a crystal-clear idea, magnify it and make it bigger than life for the entire world to see.

Clarity sends a signal to the consumer, a signal the consumer needs repeated again and again to reignite his/her vision of what's exciting. As a perfumer, I have to make people stop and take notice. Like Georgia O'Keeffe said, "Nobody sees a flower really . . . it is so small . . . we haven't time." So she painted it big and clear and magnified it to the point where the central idea of the flower, the accord, became a dazzling show of color and light and form. And she surprised art lovers into taking the time to look at her creations.

That's what I do with a perfume. I take what the consumer can't see, what she/he hasn't time for and I surprise her/him into taking the time to stop and smell the flowers.

Throughout perfume history there have been quantum leaps of faith, where the perfumer has had the courage to trust himself, to break the rules, use new ingredients, and gain the creative edge. I have had the good fortune to be a part of, and witness to, many of those occasions. And although:

I rarely get to be alone or inactive,  
I cannot daydream as much as I would like,  
My thinking isn't so free, and  
Being alert and disciplined is very demanding,

I generally feel good. There is tremendous satisfaction in breaking the rules. While the risks are usually greater, the chance of success is greater still. While we in the perfumery business might be praised for our creativity, we are ultimately measured by our successes.

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### References

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