

Ten Things Creative People Know by Peggy Taylor, Charlie Murphy

Everyday creative activities like knitting and cooking can boost your levels of serotonin and decrease anxiety.

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Do you consider yourself creative?

If the answer is "no," you are not alone. We have been working as creativity facilitators for close to two decades, and whenever we ask people this question, shockingly few hands go up. It turns out that you don't have to be a great artist to be creative. Creativity is simply our ability to dream things up and make them happen.

Cooking breakfast, planting a garden, even developing a business plan are all creative acts. But here is where the arts do come in. Participating in the arts—even as amateurs—unlocks our creativity and empowers us in our everyday lives.

A recent UCLA study found that when young people engage in the arts at an early age, they outperform their peers in every category, from academics to life skills. Cross-cultural anthropologist Angeles Arrien tells us that in many traditional cultures, when an ill person goes to the healer, he or she is asked four questions: When did you stop singing? When did you stop dancing? When did you stop telling your story? When did you stop sitting in silence? She calls these the healing salves. Numerous studies show that activities like drawing and creative writing—even knitting—raise serotonin levels and decrease anxiety.

Creative expression opens the door to the inner world of our imaginations. It is here that we make meaning of our lives. It is here that motivation takes root. The more creative we are, the more capacity we have to imagine what's possible and make those visions real.

1. Our lives have meaning.

All life is interconnected and full of purpose. There is, as teacher and philosopher Parker Palmer says, a hidden wholeness in each of us waiting to emerge. Discovering our unique purpose is one of the great adventures of life.

2. We are all creative.

Creativity is not found just in the chosen few who exhibit artistic talent. It is a force that flows through every single one of us, allowing us to dream things up and make them happen.

3. Creative expression empowers us.

Making art—when we’re not judging ourselves—supercharges our creativity, makes us happy, and heals our wounds.

4. We are good at heart.

At the core of each person is compassion and love for the world. Creative expression gives voice to our goodness.

Try Out a New Story

The power of creative expression to transform is rooted in our human need to be seen and heard. One of the most basic ways to exercise our creativity is to tell our stories. The next time you are in a meeting, at a party, or among a group of friends, try this exercise: What story could each of you tell about yourself in three minutes that would significantly shift people’s views of you? After three minutes, the listeners take a moment to acknowledge the storyteller. What new insight did the listeners learn about the storyteller?

5. Life is an adventure to be lived, not a problem to be solved.

Something quite different—and more creative—happens when we live life from the vantage point of possibility rather than pathology.

6. Change is an inside job.

We each have a life on the inside that is as real and vast as life on the outside. Coming to know who we are on the inside empowers us to make our lives count.

7. Diversity is a resource.

Nature thrives on complexity and diversity, and the same is true for the human community. Our differences in age, gender, race, culture, and backgrounds provide a rich source of learning.

8. We thrive when we feel supported.

When we identify our strengths and celebrate our successes, we become more powerful.

9. We each have the power to make change.

Regardless of our age or life situation, each of us has something to bring to the table. Learning the skills to make positive change needs to be at the center of education.

10. The challenges of our time require intergenerational collaboration.

When adults take the creativity and vitality of young people seriously, whole new possibilities emerge. Given the challenges currently facing us, we need to walk forward together.