

Sparkling Your Creativity

by Kimberly Wulfert, PhD

I wrote this article with quilt making in mind, but the concepts can be easily applied to other creative activities in business and at leisure. Discover the stimulating factors in your creative endeavor and use them to your advantage as I talk about here.

Traditional quilt-making methods begin with a pattern and measurements for templates or rotary cutting. Precision in cutting and sewing is essential to the outcome of the quilt and the value placed on it. Some of today's contemporary quilt teachers encourage their students to abandon the usual methods of making a quilt. Piecing, pinning, rulers, matching point and patterns require accuracy they say, and this gets in the way of the creative flow.

Their premise for jumping into a project without a firm plan or measurements, instructing us to rip instead of cut, fuse instead of sew, is to avoid the anxiety associated with the strive for precision. This free-form, and often haphazard approach, certainly evokes a creative outcome, and it can be loads of fun, but will you like the quilt in the end or not? That is a question only some will care to ask. Others are more interested in the process than the out come. Both are right but they are arrived at by different approaches.

Giving up the usual traditional methods can be fun to do. Teachers tell us risk and creativity goes hand in hand using this free-form approach. Evoking the creative process this way is a gamble. Will you like the quilt in the end or not? The teachers say not to worry it can be saved. Embellish it or choose a quilting pattern that will distract the eye.

If all else fails, cut the quilt top up and sew it back together again, differently. There are no mistakes, is the essential message of this approach. What I hear is, there are no mistakes IF you are willing to accept whatever you get in the end.

It seems that neither careful control, nor letting go of control, will guarantee the quilt maker's creative satisfaction. Then how can a quilt maker stir up creative juices to pour an unstoppable flow into her or his work? My approach does not require abandoning anything to get there.

I find creative thinking naturally happens when I am highly stimulated by at least one factor associated with the quilt. I define a "factor" as a motivating aspect and list six associated with quilt making:

- fabric
- theme,
- pattern or visual design,
- quilting
- embellishments,
- making the quilt for someone important to you,
- or for a quilt competition you highly value.

How do you know when one of these factors is stimulating enough for you?

When a particular factor, or combination of factors, stays on your mind for a period of days or weeks, intriguing you to play with different facets of it, while simultaneously giving you a feeling of excitement, then you know you have an intense stimulating factor. You feel a creative power that you did not feel before you arrived at this particular factor of design, theme, fabric, challenge contest, gift, or specialty thread. Creative

expression derives from power in these highly charged factors for you, which connect to thoughts and feelings inside of you. When the factor is stimulating you enough, you unhesitatingly release the potential you now see in your mind's eye and begin. This is "being creative". None of this requires abandoning your tools, methods or image of the quilt you would like to produce.

Surrendering to this internal drive is not the same thing as the free form approach. Surrendering in this way clears the path for a steady flow of creativity to come through in a personal way, using the tools and methods you are accustomed too. Perfectionism can stop the flow, it is the monster, not the method you chose. With a highly intense focus factor, precision will not appear to be an insurmountable wall to overcome with sweat and tears, but will appear when it is important for making the quilt you will really like to look at when you are done.

There is a sense of timelessness that occurs when you are "really into" making a quilt, inspired internally. It is not filled with doubt, criticism, nor is it a regurgitation of another's design. Surrender to a method of no rules quilt making without internal inspiration (the factor) produces mundane results. Originality you can own and love is the child of inspired action, not abandonment of your tools and methods. The hallmark of originality is not less than your best workmanship in exchange for free form methods. Instead, your honed skills mix with new ideas and the strong desire to try them right now; advancing through fear and anxiety by surrendering to a powerful internalized, but visceral, focus on a stimulating factor which brings complexity and a multi-dimensional perspective to your creative toolbox. Regurgitation of another's work will not be a choice any more.

Being creative and making a quilt with an extremely pleasing result usually takes time. Here I use a weekend road trip as a metaphor for making a quilt. You tune up your car, pack maps, tools, food and water. Farther from home, feelings surface as unknown roads twist and turn, some smooth, others bumpy, and you are comforted that you have packed your tools. Changing views and landscape colors keep your imagination heightened, and time passes quickly. You see road signs, some interesting, some useful, while others do not relate to where you are going. You make many decisions on your trip. When you get home you note what you liked and what you would not waste time on again.

Your creative ride is a personal one, finding that exciting factor, sign or unknown road that inspires your focus so powerfully you cannot get it out of your mind, driving you to originality and confidence to overcome obstacles in the road, using your tools of the trade for the tracks. By choosing stimulating factors, your focus, experience and tools, spark creativity in you to create a quilt you design and love the look of when it is finished.

A blending of methods and approaches is still an option, where parts of your quilt you make with a free form approach and direct other aspects by the outcome you seek. Anxiety can be helpful when it is not overwhelming; when it triggers paralysis, restraint, or a dull answer to the challenge. If anxiety spurs you on to take action, complete an aspect, or try something a little risky, then it is your friend. Who has not turned down an unmarked side road and to this day still tell about the journey they had. Mystery is alluring anywhere you find it. Invoking creativity can be mysterious, but blazing the trail of your personal stimulating factor will help you along the road of making a quilt.