

Is your creativity kaput? Wrangle it back into working order with these four tips.

By **Melanie Brenneman**

The aliens have arrived – and they're angry.

The one with the most arms, taller than a bodega, comes at you. You spit on the ground, casually reach for your weapon, and ...

Wait.

Wait ...

Where is it?

Your holster is empty. Your sling holds no bow. And the knife in your boot is gone.

Your oomph is kaput.

I'm not talking about productivity, or willpower or actually fighting aliens (although we've all been there, right?). Instead, it's that secret ingredient that makes a lot of what we do stand out – creativity.

Creativity plays into your job no matter what your title. A leader finds a delightful way to excite a team. A designer delivers an intriguing ad inspired by an everyday item. A marketer finds an overlooked service to monetize.

Everyone needs creativity.

But what do you do when it goes missing? When you're slamming your head against a corkboard trying to brainstorm your way out of a problem and all you've come up with is "Ask Carl"?

Here are four ways to wrangle that creativity back to work.

Visit the upside down.

Creativity thrives with new experiences. But patterns sneak into all of our lives. We build them for comfort, for sanity. You get up at the same time. Drive the same routes. Buy the same groceries at the store down the street. Cheer on the usual heroes on TV. You get the idea.

If you're feeling low on creativity, visit the upside down. Challenge the way you experience life – in small or large ways.

Walk backward.

Type in a ridiculous font.

Ditch your smartphone for a day.

Talk to a stranger in the checkout line next to you. (You get the best stories from strangers. A wedding planner once told me that her chowchow ate a chicken and “got the taste of blood” before showing me an itinerary.)

Swap desks with someone, or take a project to a conference room or coffee shop. If you regularly work from home, sit in a different room. My personal favorite: Go to a friend's house and work there for a few hours.

Say yes to things you normally wouldn't. Yes, I'd love to go to that Linda Ronstadt concert. A workshop on Ayurveda? Sign me up.

You get the idea. By shaking up your common patterns, you'll reinvigorate your creativity.

Jolt your senses.

Does the smell of brass polish remind you of your high school marching band days? Or does the sight of a forest make you sigh happily? Our senses have a keen hold on our brains. Beyond their day-to-day activities of helping us interact with the world, they stimulate memories, moods, and mojo.

Unexpected smells in a familiar place can jump-start inventive thoughts, like eucalyptus, lemon, clove or cinnamon. If you're feeling really adventurous, find some not-so-friendly smells like a dumpster or wet dog. (Something will definitely come up that way.)

Don't forget sounds. Switch out your phone's ring tone. Ask a coworker to pick a playlist for you. Listen to a foreign language. Or take the opposite route and go quiet, letting small sounds pack a big wallop.

Museums and art galleries stimulate vision, much like puzzles with optical illusions or finding designs and colors that inspire you.

Let taste pop you back into the creative zone with new cuisines, hot peppers, craft cocktails or delicate sweets. The more unusual, the better.

And don't forget touch. Get a massage or manicure. Stroke a starfish at the city aquarium. Dig in the dirt or wade in a pool.

Move it, move it.

Yes, I just referenced a cheesy song to make a point. (I'll wait if you want to Google it. Just remember to add "I like to" ahead of "move it, move it.")

Sometimes physical activity is the best way to break through the cobwebs. Learn a new dance move. (I believe in your floss.) Take a walk or go for a hike. Ice-skate. Try one of those places that use a big fan to simulate skydiving. Jump on a trampoline. Engage your body in a new way.

Indulge the "why"

Curiosity fertilizes creativity.

Humor that part of you that really wants to jump down the rabbit hole. Find a subject that intrigues you – whether small or large – and spend 10 minutes or more, depending on your schedule, looking into it. How do you make pasta from scratch? How do family trees help police identify criminals? Why does helium make your voice go higher? Explore your way back to creativity.

Recapturing your creativity is all about the new. Have fun!



About the Author

Melanie Brenneman joined Edge Marketing in 2010 after an in-house career focused on public relations, marketing and communications for private- and publicly-traded technology companies. As senior account manager, she helps organizations successfully market their solutions to law firms, corporate law departments and accounting firms. A typical day for her can include everything from strategic planning to analyzing email or social media performance to drafting that urgent press release you just told her about five minutes ago. It is all about results.

Melanie's colleagues would say that she and "shut up" aren't good friends. That's a problem if you are a spy, but she makes it work as a marketer.

Known for her "helium hand" (but she likes to call it leadership), Melanie is a past president of the Austin chapter of the American Marketing Association (AMA) and a former board member for the Houston chapters of AMA and the Public Relations Society of America. She earned her Bachelor of Arts in English from the University of Houston and despises Texan stereotypes.