

Feeling Stuck about Your Career? Try Doing the Opposite By Leonard Lang Ph.D

If you watched the classic sitcom “*Seinfeld*,” you probably recall the character, George. At one point, George decided he had failed in everything. He concludes all his instincts and thinking must be wrong. Therefore, he decides to do the opposite of everything his instincts tell him to do.

He tells off Yankees owner George Steinbrenner during a job interview because his instinct would be to suck up to the boss. It gets him the job. He attracts women by telling the sorry truth about his life. George becomes a success.

Please don’t do what George did. But George is on to something. We can all benefit from at least thinking the opposite.

Don’t Start by Looking for the Right Answer

When we attempt to determine the best or the right answer, we tend to worry we might do something wrong. We all remember how it felt when a teacher asked us for an answer when we didn’t feel prepared. Instead of being able to think, we acted out of fear and worry. It’s true today for most of us as adults as well. Trying to get the right or best answer, we begin to lose our creative abilities. We’re no longer able to take even mental risks. We think along the safest paths, the ones we already know, which may be the ones that haven’t been working.

But not if we start our creative processes by thinking the opposite. For instance, in writing this article, instead of thinking about how to **communicate** one great way to be more creative, I can think about how to get you more stuck than ever—such as telling you to always try to have the right solution immediately and to avoid laughter when preparing for something serious, etc. It’s then easy to reverse this list of ideas and have the basis for what I really want to write.

Have Fun, Get Moving, Get Answers

In my book, “*Guide to Lifework: Working with Integrity and Heart*,” one of the steps in an exercise is to get goofy and write an opposite personal mission statement. I started doing it to have fun in my workshops and just get people moving. Everyone had a great time. But I also found that it was extremely practical in helping participants get the answers they needed

For instance, workshop participants have written statements like, “I love to cut down old growth forests and to lead volunteers to bring gas guzzling, polluting vehicles of all types into national parks and forests in order to degrade the environment and destroy the heritage of our children.” After reading such a statement aloud and laughing, it’s much easier to then write, “I love to preserve forests and to lead efforts of volunteers to plant trees, remove nonnative species and generally educate people in ways to clean our environment and maintain its heritage for our children.”

Any problem can be looked at for its opposite. To handle a job interview, prepare by first practicing the opposite way to act and speak as if your goal is to never get the job

or even to make sure the job itself is eliminated. As you play at this, you will relax, and then can more easily practice the way you truly want to act.

So take a tip from George. When you feel yourself stuck, uncreative and worried about getting the right answer, loosen up by thinking about how you can produce the opposite result. You'll laugh, get creative and, like George, might find unexpected success coming your way.

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