

Wired to Create

excerpted from the book,

"Wired to Create: Unraveling the Mysteries of the Creative Mind"

by Scott Barry Kaufman, Ph.D., Carolyn Gregoire

Reflecting on their biggest breakthroughs, many innovators have described elusive solutions as coming to them in a flash of insight, while artists often describe their best ideas arising out of nowhere. The unconscious mind is the governing force behind many of the myriad decisions we make each day—from the mundane (what to eat for breakfast) to the more impactful (whether to quit your job).

Gut feelings and inner knowings—those unconscious nudges that propel us to action or bring about sudden shifts in perspective—are a guiding force in our lives. This was certainly the case for Steve Jobs, who first began to explore the power of the unconscious mind when he was traveling through India after dropping out of college. Later, Jobs went so far as to call intuition “more powerful than intellect.” In a 2011 essay for the *New York Times*, his biographer Walter Isaacson described intuition as being at the core of the Apple founder’s genius:

His imaginative leaps were instinctive, unexpected, and at times magical. They were sparked by intuition, not analytic rigor. Trained in Zen Buddhism, Mr. Jobs came to value experiential wisdom over empirical analysis. He didn’t study or crunch numbers but like a pathfinder, he could sniff the winds and sense what lay ahead.



Archimedes discovered the calculation for measuring volume, which had long eluded him, while relaxing in the bathtub.

It’s not uncommon to hear creativity described as a mystical process of inspiration from somewhere beyond the self. “What I capture in spite of myself interests me more than my own ideas,” Picasso once said, explaining that he had to simply begin drawing—and stop thinking—in order to let inspiration flow from his paintbrush.

Many writers have also said that to do their best work, they must enter a deeper state of mind, beyond everyday thoughts and emotions. E.M. Forster said that a writer, under the spell of inspiration, enters into a dreamlike state. “He lets down as it

were a bucket into his subconscious and draws up something which is normally beyond his reach. He mixes this thing with his normal experiences, and out of the mixture he makes a work of art.” Henry James, too, allotted the unconscious an important role in writing fiction, saying that he would drop good ideas into the “deep well of unconscious celebration,” in hopes that “buried treasure might come to light.”

Fahrenheit 451 author Ray Bradbury even insisted that a writer ought to avoid developing his rational thinking skills, for fear that they’d get in the way of his intuition. College wasn’t a suitable place for writers, Bradbury said, because learning to overintellectualize things threatened to crush the intuitive mind with reason and analysis. The writer himself kept a sign above his typewriter for twenty-five years that read, “Don’t think!” As Bradbury explained in a 1974 interview, “The intellect is a great danger to creativity...because you begin to rationalize and make up reasons for things, instead of staying with your own basic truth—who you are, what you are, what you want to be.”

The original Eureka! moment famously occurred when the Greek philosopher and mathematician Archimedes discovered the calculation for measuring volume, which had long eluded him, while



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relaxing in the bathtub. Suddenly and without warning, he realized exactly how to calculate the amount of space occupied by a three-dimensional object. He then—so the story goes—ran naked through the streets in rapture shouting “Eureka!” Deep intuitions like Archimedes’s, bolstered by high levels of scientific expertise, were also what guided famous insights such as Hofmann’s discovery of LSD, Watson and Crick’s discovery of the double-helix structure of DNA, and Darwin’s formulation of the theory of natural selection. As Pasteur said, in science, luck is granted to those who are prepared.

Intuition tends to be overlooked or deemed unscientific because of its connections to the psychic and new age, but its power is real, and we’re starting to have a better idea of what it looks like in the brain and how it might be maximized. The U.S. military is even investigating the power of the unconscious mind, which has helped troops make quick judgements during combat and can end up saving lives.

We now know that intuition *is* a form of thinking—but it’s a different mode of cognition than the one we use for conscious, effortful deliberation. Intuition arises from unconscious, or spontaneous, information-processing systems, and it plays an important role in how we think, reason, create and behave socially.

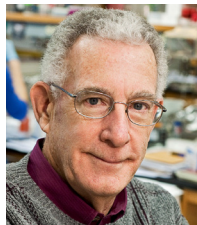
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