

CREATIVITY UNLEASHED

48-DAY METHOD USING MINDFULNESS

THE ANCIENT SECRET OF MANIFESTING YOUR
CREATIVE SPIRIT



GOPI KRISHNASWAMY

B L O O M S B U R Y
NEW DELHI • LONDON • OXFORD • NEW YORK • SYDNEY

APPRECIATION FOR THE BOOK

I wrote a Facebook message to Gopi in mid-2016 in response to a short story he had written, which had really moved me. I remember writing: 'You're really talented, you should write a book.' I introduced him to my partner, Jim, who's also a writer and he described Gopi's writing as 'perfectly rendered'.

A little over a year later, we got an excited response back, and here's the book. Gopi is one of those rare people who can toggle between deep spirituality and deep pragmatism, and managed to bring both those to bear when we worked together at IDEO. I'm really happy that his book has come to fruition; the notion of bringing together mindfulness and creativity is the perfect topic to explore right now with the world around us in swirl and chaos. Gopi brings gravitas and centricity to the concept, while at the same time encouraging the reader to 'stay young, stay a beginner, stay playful'.

—Paul Bennett
Chief Creative Officer
IDEO

Gopi has created a wonderful guide to creativity and mindfulness. His playful writing style keeps you engaged, allowing the lessons to sink in. Reading this book will deepen your understanding of the role of creativity in our lives.

—Haben Girma

Disability rights lawyer, author and speaker
Forbes' 30 under 30 (2016)

Creativity Unleashed provokes us to think of the limitless potential of creativity in all of us. Gopi offers simple and doable exercises that would help one stay mindful and open-minded to innovative possibilities. An engaging read.

—VR Ferose

Senior Vice President and
Head of Globalization Services, SAP SE
Author and columnist

WHY 48 DAYS?

Because 48 is a special number in many traditions.

The duration of a mandala in the yogic system is 40 to 48 days. It is believed that any form of practice takes around 48 days to integrate into our system and produce results. It takes this much time to create space for the practise in our bodies and minds and synchronise it with the environment.

Lord Buddha sat under a bodhi tree for 48 days until he attained enlightenment.

In Judaism, it is believed that wisdom from the Torah is acquired in 48 ways.

In Chinese numerology, 48 is an auspicious number that stands for prosperity. Possibly the prosperity that will follow the unleashing of your creativity!

CONTENTS

<i>Preface</i>	xi
<i>Acknowledgements</i>	xv
PART A	
1. But I'm not creative!	3
2. So, what exactly is creativity?	11
3. A brief history of creativity	16
4. Creative heroes from history	20
5. History to neurology	27
6. The path to creativity...	34
7. Mindful or mind full?	43
8. More brainy stuff	49
9. The 10 laws of creativity	56
10. Manifesting your mantra	59
PART B	
11. The six-day boot camp	65
12. Week 1: Dealing with our fear of evaluation	84
13. Week 2: Coping with our fear of failure	110
14. Week 3: Working with the limitations of rules	124
15. Week 4: Embracing the pain of comparisons	134
16. Week 5: Understanding the myth of talent	142
17. Week 6: Acknowledging our limited knowledge	156
<i>Epilogue</i>	169

PREFACE

The central idea of this book was born with me. At least, that's how I like to think of it!

The notion that I, like everyone else, was born creative and could stir up my creativity was always in my mind, trying to find newer dimensions as it expanded, grew and pushed outwards, becoming fuller and fuller. Initially, it struggled to express itself through my confused study choices as I first picked science and then arts. It probably found more meaning at work as I gravitated towards creative professions. Later, my creativity became a part of self-experimentation as I tried to write a book (not this one). During that period, it became such an overwhelming force that it decided to come out of me in the form of this book.

For someone with little formal schooling, my creativity always found unique expression. Looking back, connecting the dots, I see it was always there. My creativity began to develop with voracious reading, constant storytelling, imaginary conversations, setting up competitions between clouds in the sky and seeing trilogies play out in ant colonies in the garden. Music, language and literature along with sport, motorbikes and long hair were the more typical manifestations during my childhood and teenage years. My experiments in my 20s with methods of mind control and uncovering deeper levels of consciousness possibly

also shaped my subsequent career choices and led me into design-related professions. Many years later, mindfulness or present moment awareness came knocking. And along with that came many ahas!

Some years ago when I was working at IDEO, I tried to write a novel about a guy's journey to self-discovery. All I discovered was that writing a book was hard. Incredibly hard! As I tried to find ways to be more creative, I kept going back to my mindfulness practices. One day, I realised what was happening—something far bigger than the book I was attempting to write was trying to manifest through me. So I set up a parallel track and started recording all my experiences and ideas. I also started researching and speaking to people individually and at forums about the idea that creativity is inherent in all of us and the really creative ones are those who have found ways to keep it alive, or uncovering it when needed. I even set up a separate table to write this book! What you are holding in your hands right now is the result of what occurred over the next few years.

Along the way, I've not only been able to test these exercises on myself and people I have taught, but also refine them to make them more effective and fun.

So, is this a textbook? Or is it a manual?

Whatever you call it, this is not something you read and put away on your bookshelf. While this book is no treatise on anything, it is meant to be your guide, friend, companion and a canvas for the journey to rediscover your creative self. Carry it with you, make notes, record your thoughts, ideate, scribble and treat it like an extension of your personality because that is exactly what it is!

This book is divided into Part A and Part B. Read Part A completely and then start the programme outlined in Part B. However, while in Part A, keep diving into certain exercises in Part B that you are advised to do.

As you read and work with this book, many changes will be set in motion. Some will be visible, many invisible. You do not have to believe this right now. Simply suspend judgement, observe and note the process as it unravels, for when you look back, you will have tracked your own creative rebirthing.

PART A

1. BUT I'M NOT CREATIVE!

'Gosh, I wish I was more creative!' Most of us have heard this statement and many of us have said it sometimes. Almost all of us have experienced it, at least on a few occasions. And those who say they have never felt this way, well, they probably lie.

Creativity is often thought of as a mysterious and wonderful gift that the right-brained and talented other half of the population has. Writers, painters, sculptors, poets, designers and such are widely considered creative, while us ordinary folks like software engineers, bankers, lawyers, business managers, taxi drivers and cooks are not. But bankers and taxi drivers can be extremely creative. Just ask someone who lives in New York, London, Hong Kong or Mumbai!

Creativity is also often thought to be genetic. You are either born with it or you are not. But ask any child to create, and whether it's a painting, sand castle or consistently dreaming up impossible worlds inside a discarded cardboard carton or makeshift quilt tent, he or she has no hesitation jumping in and getting swept away by the beautiful energy of creating!

Why does this happen so easily? How is it that a child does not seem to face any barriers to being creative?

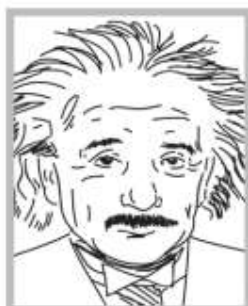


Every child is an artist. The problem is staying an artist when you grow up.

Pablo Picasso

More importantly, what on earth happens after childhood? Why have so many of us been unable to tap into the creativity we had as children? Is it the fault of education? Does it suppress creativity? Does education truly prepare us for anything apart from a career?

Are teachers afraid of creativity? Who, then, cultivates our creative skills that allow us to derive the most out of our lives, our relationships? To get wealthy? Or build a business that impacts the world in a great way?



It's a miracle that curiosity survives formal education.

Albert Einstein

Perhaps it's society; with all its norms, expectations and cultural biases, it kills creativity at some point in our adult lives.

Or, maybe it is our professions. Our workplaces, where employers force us behind desks and make us do things we never want to do or are meant to do. Before you thump your desk in agreement, consider this. An oft-quoted IBM study¹ of over 1,500 CEOs from 60 countries and 33 industries found that CEOs rate creativity as the most

1 <https://www.ibm.com/news/ca/en/2010/05/20/v384864m81427w34.html>

important skill in today's volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous world. Strange. Why would they rate creativity so highly if they indeed are responsible for its loss in the first place?

In another survey across three continents by Adobe Systems,² only 25 per cent of the 5,000 polled felt they were living up to their creative potential. So, is the loss of creativity our own failing? A loss caused by fear of failure, our judgemental nature, the rules we create to govern our thinking and our lives, and the need to do the logical and sensible thing? Perhaps it has something to do with the fact that we have allowed ourselves to be conformed into comfortable moulds. Maybe, it's a loss caused by our need for standards, and the consequent adhering to, and judging or being judged by them.

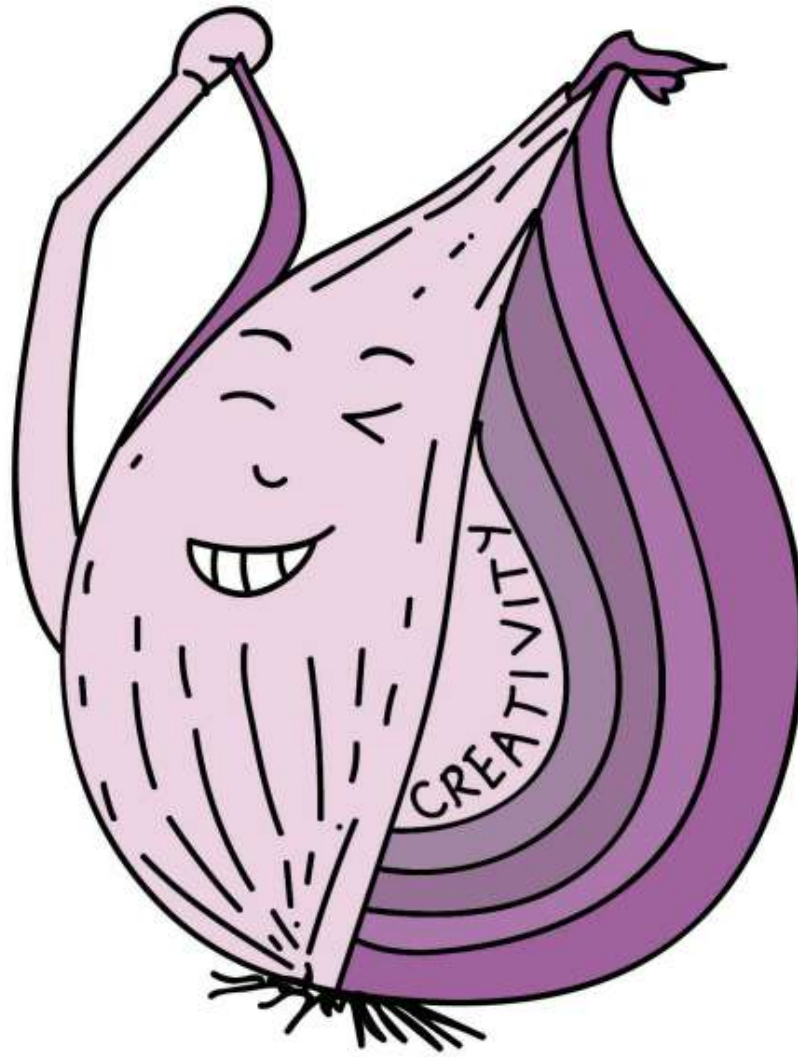
The loss of creativity could also be a mental dysfunction. Does it go unrecognised because it has become the new normal?

If you feel all these factors have contributed in different degrees to the loss of your creativity, I agree with you. And if you believe that creative moments are vital in life—in work, relationships, families, society—you are probably taking the first step towards introducing the power of creativity in your own life.

A number of studies have been conducted on creativity, including studies of the brain, and many good books have been written on the subject. All point to the fact that creativity can be revived through various methods.

So, how do we expand our mind and unleash our creative potential to achieve all that we are meant to in a lifetime? How do we hack our brain to do our bidding and solve problems in amazingly creative ways?

2 <https://www.adobe.com/aboutadobe/pressroom/pressreleases/201204/042312AdobeGlobalCreativityStudy.html>



FINDING MY CREATIVITY IS A-PEELING!

Let's start with two things that impact the way we see the world and consequently, the way we live.

1. **The hardware or our beliefs.** These are mostly picked up during our growing years and remain fairly static even as everything around us changes. Some psychologists say that around 70 per cent of these beliefs are disempowering. Imagine a computer from the 1980s, 1990s, or even 10 years ago operating in today's hi-tech

environment without an upgrade! A RAM built during those years in a machine that's operating in the artificial intelligence age! Likewise, most of us operate on beliefs we probably picked up as children and never changed. Maybe one of those beliefs was formed when you were told you were not creative.

2. **Our software or our life systems.** Life systems are the way we live, the way we exercise our bodies and our minds, how we conduct our relationships, etc. And like software runs on hardware, your life systems run on your beliefs. So, maybe the way you live is based on the belief that you are not creative.

We always strive to upgrade our computers' systems to newer versions, if not the latest ones. But have you ever done that to your thinking? When was the last time you refreshed your Thoughts App? Most people never do. Are you still surprised the system hangs?

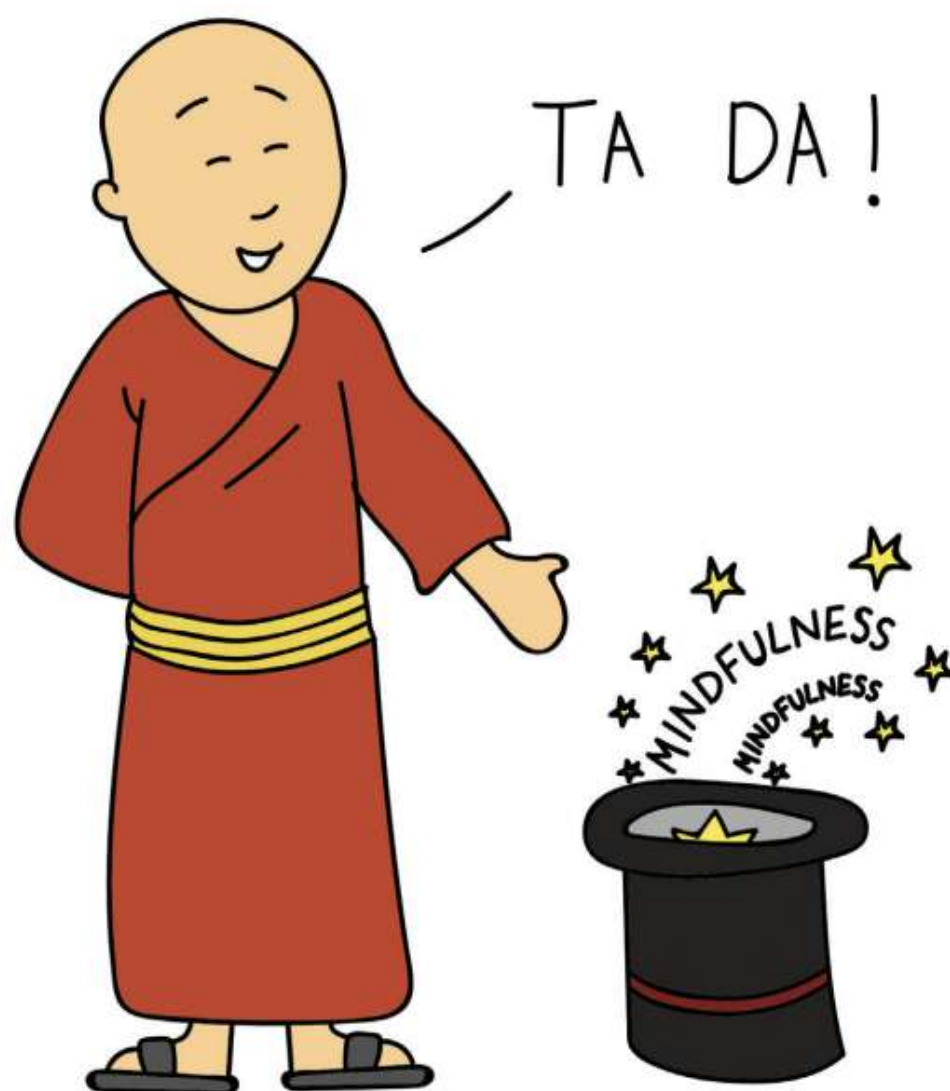
What if there is a powerful way to kick-start your unlimited human potential? A way to upgrade your hardware and software, a super-method by which your creative spirit could be revived? Benefits like improved concentration, better health and greater well-being are add-ons?

What if I told you that with adequate practice, this method could even make fairly impossible things happen? (In my case, it was my mother-in-law getting to like me!) It's like a buy-one-get-two-free deal!



Creative confidence is like a muscle—it can be strengthened and nurtured through effort and experience.

Tom and David Kelly of IDEO,
in their wonderful book *Creative Confidence*



Modern English calls this secret mindfulness, and on this journey, you'll see how it works. Come, upgrade your life! You will find new states of being you didn't even know existed.

The origins of mindfulness can be traced to meditation and other ancient contemplative disciplines. Buddhist meditation, in particular, is probably what has most inspired the practices that are today defined as mindfulness.

English Lesson 1

Do you remember learning in grammar class that adding 'ness' to a word makes it a noun? By that definition, *mindfulness* has to be a thing. For me, it is a state of energy.

English Lesson 2

Mindfulness is the opposite of mindlessness, where mindless represents an autopilot mode in which we operate in a conditioned manner governed by rules and routines and trapped in rigid mindsets to make fewer mistakes. Of course, all this occurs while being completely oblivious to the present moment.

But what does being aware of the present moment have to do with our ability to become creative problem-solving ninjas?

Aha! Well, *that's* what this book is all about.



This book is designed to be read and worked on at the same time. You will keep diving into Part B while reading Part A.

Note: Gift yourself a creativity journal to accompany your reading. You are going to want to track your progress. Writing about your experiences and thoughts during your reading of this book and reflecting on them as you go along, or even after you are done with your first complete reading, will help you capture your journey and strengthen the process. You will also be using the journal during many of the exercises in Part B.

Excited? Feel like getting a taste of things already?
Try the exercise in Part B called 'Getting to Ness'.

12. WEEK 1: DEALING WITH OUR FEAR OF EVALUATION



If you know the enemy and you know yourself, you need not fear the result of a hundred battles. If you know yourself but not the enemy, for every victory gained you will also suffer a defeat. If you know neither the enemy nor yourself, you will succumb in every battle.

Sun Tzu

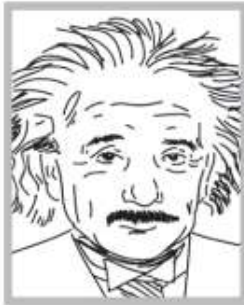
Inspired by the ancient Chinese philosopher Sun Tzu, in Week 1, we will start a dialogue with the chief of the creativity goblins, Mr Evaluation.

He finds his way into our lives when we are still young. Remember the picture of the sun you painted as a child? It was an irregular yellow circle with crooked lines sticking out of it, and your teacher and parents said it was very good. Well, Mr Evaluation, Chief Goblin, was born then.

As you kept quiet in school because quiet was good and didn't voice your opinion because arguing was bad, Mr Evaluation started growing bigger and stronger. You started gravitating towards things that led to good evaluations and avoided or hid those that led to bad evaluations. Growing up, you even learnt to act, think

and feel as if things were good or bad in themselves. So, drunkards became bad and priests became good. Dreaming became bad and efficiency became good. As long as you behaved in accordance with these definitions, life was good and the Chief Creativity Goblin had you firmly in his grasp.

There's only one small problem.



“A person who never made a mistake, never tried anything new”

Albert Einstein

I'm not advocating that you ignore the danger of making a mistake and cross a busy road when the walk sign is red. All I'm doing is inviting you to see the paradox.

Let me share a personal story. I've had little formal schooling. Until I was thirteen, I was home-schooled by my writer-teacher parents so as a result, I don't have some of the more established behaviour patterns we see around us today. Looking back armed with knowledge of neuroscience, I wonder what kind of neurological connections were established in my childhood. For example, the need to be the first one with an answer isn't in me. I'm often happy to just walk around with a problem or ponder a question from multiple perspectives without a sense of urgency. I've found joy in exploring different subjects, even though I sometimes failed the exam.

I did my graduate studies first in science, then the arts—an uncommon combination in an age where you are expected to know your professional calling by the age of three or be deemed a failure. I've worked in the corporate world as a manager, consultant and designer, and been an entrepreneur with a couple of successful startups, and

more than a few failed ones. In hindsight, I feel that a large part of my journey had to do with not fearing mistakes and never desiring to walk the beaten path. At IDEO, a client once said, 'It shows', when I shared an audacious idea for his company and, in another context, told him I was not formally schooled. I never summoned the courage to ask him exactly what he meant.

We are all abundantly creative, but as we grow up, our fear of evaluation and need to conform and enjoy the praise that comes with it become barriers to our creativity. Many times, we need to be non-conformist and reject the fear of evaluation to create something new.

Why did people praise your first drawing of the sun? Because you were a complete beginner. But at six or seven years, if you drew the sun in the same way, you would have been judged. 'Look at that kid. His/her drawing is so much better', is what you would have heard. Slowly, you would have stopped drawing. Do you know why most adults draw like kids? The skill is killed at some point during childhood by the fear of evaluation. Those who overcome the fear become artists.

So, make the most of inexperience and remain a beginner in your mind, open to anything. Don't *know* how things *should* be done. If you don't get stuck with what is *right*, nothing in particular would be *wrong*. You can grow older without growing up.

The world needs creativity and originality more than ever. Ironically, it's within us, but we go about seeking it elsewhere and in others. So, stop evaluating yourself constantly against the perfect son or daughter or the perfect husband or wife or the perfect employee. Remember, their drawings of the sun were no different from yours.