

Boosting Your Creativity Quotient

by Mary Corrigan, Tracking the Wisdom

Intelligence is the ability to adapt to change. – Stephen Hawking

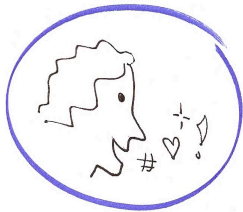
The first female chief of the Cherokee Nation wore a necklace of carved abalone shell depicting two wolves locked in battle – a dark wolf and a light wolf. She said the dark wolf represented the voice of self-doubt and criticism. The light wolf represented our trust in our gifts, our natural knowing and our creativity. When asked which wolf was winning the fight, she replied, “The one that I feed the most.”



These metaphorical wolves are what we call the Voice of Judgmentⁱ and the Voice of Wisdom. Whichever we habitually feed – or heed – will influence how much creativity and resilience we have available to us when navigating change and encountering uncertainty.



I call this our Creativity Quotient, and it works like this: Take the number of times you listen to your Voice of Wisdom and divide it by how often you listen to the Voice of Judgment instead. The result is your Creativity Quotient.



VOICE OF WISDOM



VOICE OF JUDGEMENT

————— = YOUR CREATIVITY QUOTIENT



For example, if, when we are faced with challenges, we listen to our Voice of Wisdom three times for every time we listen to the insidious Voice of Judgment, our Creativity Quotient will be 3/1, or 3. That’s good! It means we have more of our creative resources available to problem-solve and find a solution for whatever tricky situation we’re in.

If, on the other hand, we are plagued by the nagging Voice of Judgment and allow it to carry the day five times for each time we heed our Voice of Wisdom, our Creativity Quotient will be 1/5, or 0.20 -- and our choices about how to proceed will be equally small.

The first step to increasing our Creativity Quotient is to learn to recognize which voice is speaking. When something comes at you out of left field, do you take on the persona of Chicken Little - certain that the sky is falling and the worst possible outcome will surely come to pass? Is there a yammering in your brain that thinks you should have been able to predict every contingency and berates you for not seeing this one coming? Do you throw up your hands and think what's the use; there is no point in planning if I can't predict the outcome? Do you criticize yourself for making mistakes? That's the Voice of Judgment.



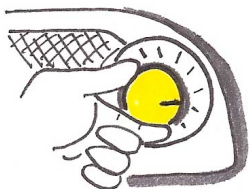
Sometimes it doesn't even have to use words. It simply drives our emotions and actions. For example, when you are uncertain or fearful about how to move forward with a project, do you procrastinate and fill your day with busy work that isn't a priority? When plans change, does wanting to know how things are going to turn out obsess you? When a problem arises do you rush to find the fastest solution without taking some time to consider new ways of looking at the issue? Do you feel like a victim of circumstance and powerless over influencing your situation? That's the Voice of Judgment again.

Fear, self-doubt, and the inability to move forward are just a few of the ways that we fall under the spell of the Voice of Judgment. For many of us, it's been running the show for a long time – often in the guise of our protector.

While some aspects of the Voice of Judgment may have served as survival strategies and been useful in the past, when it comes to boosting our Creativity Quotient, the Voice of Judgment is not a helpful ally. Its job is to protect the status quo. It can keep us stagnant and stunt our growth. If it digs in its heels at the first sign of change, it can weigh us down and pull us into the quicksand of self-doubt, self-criticism and endless second-guessing. It can sap us of the momentum needed to generate new ideas or possibilities. The struggle can be exhausting.



To successfully navigate change, it is critical to shift from being victimized by the Voice of Judgment to generating new listening skills attuned to our Voice of Wisdom.



We all have a Voice of Wisdom. Unfortunately for many of us, it doesn't get nearly as much airtime as its critical counterpart. Our Voice of Wisdom is curious and objective. It is appreciative and kind. Its job is to help us learn, grow and develop as creative beings. If it seems like yours is AWOL, the good news is you can learn how to turn up the volume.



The Voice of Wisdom can most easily be recognized when we listen to professional athletes. The great ones are clear and specific when evaluating their performance. "I hesitated in the turn and wasn't able to regain my stride." They do not blame or

point fingers at teammates or situations. They are consistently attentive to learning and progress, not perfection. There is an old saying: “A good workman never blames his tools” that could easily be adopted as the tagline for the Voice of Wisdom.

Developing our Voice of Wisdom calls on us to value curiosity over criticism. It invites us to see uncertainty as an opportunity: to ask open ended questions, to be flexible, to entertain new ideas and perspectives, to limit knee-jerk criticism and judgment (of ourselves and others), to stay open to pleasant surprises, and adapt without strain or worry.



Fundamentally, our Voice of Wisdom requires us to have faith in our own journey and our own inherent creativity – to be fluid with whatever comes our way. It asks us to trust our own instincts, listen to our own inner voice, imagine new possibilities we have not considered before, and, above all, stay open and engaged in learning.

 VOICE of JUDGMENT	VOICE of WISDOM 
Sees problems	Sees opportunities
Seeks perfection	Seeks progress
Plays it safe	Experiments
Keeps it neat	Gets messy
Constricts	Expands
Says, “How come?”	Says, “What if?”
Is harsh and critical	Is clear and objective
Second guesses	Takes clear action
Strives for control	Is open and curious
Listens to the chattering of the mind	Listens to the stillness of the gut and heart for guidance
Diminishes our self esteem by focusing on our shortfalls	Champions our self esteem by appreciating our gifts and strengths
Is a bully	Is a compassionate ally
Berates and retreats	Learns and adapts

Practice – *Which Wolf Will You Feed Today?*

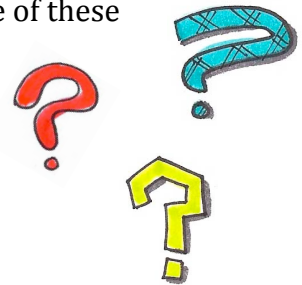
In order to change any behavior that no longer serves us, we must first notice what we're doing. For the next week, your assignment (should you choose to accept it) is to act as an investigator in your own life. Remembering that we get more of what we pay attention to, notice where your thoughts go when faced with uncertainty. Observe yourself without judgment and with as much objectivity and compassion as possible.



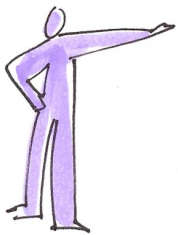
Pay attention to what triggers you and how you react when confronted with the unexpected. In what situations and with whom are you able to stay open and curious? In which situations do you tend toward criticism and constriction? Record your observations.

Be playful! If you find yourself irritable, judging, or blaming in the face of change (and you probably will), step back, take a breath and say one of these phrases to help shift your attention to the Voice of Wisdom:

- Isn't that interesting?
- I wonder why I'm so upset by this?
- How could I see this from a different perspective?
- What do I think this means about me?
- What can I learn from this situation?
- What if this outcome is exactly what I most need right now?



When you make a mistake or feel yourself constricting and getting defensive, stop, breathe and get curious instead. Use one of these expressions instead of the four-letter ones you might normally have chosen:



- Ay, carumba!
- That's funny...
- Well, that clearly didn't work!
- Wow, what an amazing blunder that was!
- How can I look at this differently?
- What is this situation teaching me?

Since we get more of what we pay attention to, celebrate when you are able to listen to and take action from the Voice of Wisdom. See how it feels in your body when curiosity and flexibility are present. Over time, you'll notice your Creativity Quotient will rise and your ability to cope creatively and joyfully with change will improve dramatically.

ⁱ The term Voice of Judgment originated in the Creativity in Business program developed by Michael Ray at the Stanford University Graduate School of Business.

Mary Corrigan is an internationally experienced organizational consultant, coach and facilitator specializing in employee engagement and thriving through change. She is trained in conflict resolution and mediation and is a certified teacher of the Creativity in Business program pioneered at the Stanford School of Business. Her experience includes a vast spectrum of work in corporate, government, education and not for profit sectors and at all levels of organizations. Clients include Genentech, Unocal, U.S. Forest Service, Women for Women International, The Atlantic Philanthropies, UCSF and Kaiser Permanente.

Interested in learning or exploring more in depth work in this area or hearing more about the Creativity in Business program? Contact me at www.TrackingTheWisdom.com