

CREATIVITY TIME BANDITS: Making Wise Choices for a Fulfilling Creative Life

by Chris Zydel, MA

In my work as a creativity coach I talk with many, many people who want to be more creative, either as a way to deepen their spiritual practice of self nurturing or who have a specific dream that they long to manifest, like writing a book or forming a rock band. But too often something gets in the way. And the major culprit, as they see it, is that they are too busy and don't have enough time.

When these folks tell me that they don't have time for creativity, they trot out the unassailable list of essentials that obviously need to come first as the reason that they can't have the creative expression that they so achingly desire. They point to things like the need to feed themselves and their families, to exercise, to pay their bills, to care for their children, or to go to work . But these honorable and necessary tasks are rarely the culprit in stealing the energy needed to fuel a passionate and creative life.

What stops the majority of people is usually not so straightforward and irrefutable. The real bad guys that suck the juice right out of our creativity are most likely to fall under the heading of non-essentials. We have all frittered away enormous amounts of time watching bad television, mindlessly surfing the internet and sport shopping. Engaging with your creative process ALWAYS wakes you up and even though our souls really do want that much genuine aliveness, it is also scary, so we will blithely waste our time and energy finding any number of ways of putting ourselves into a stupor.

The second category of time stealer's comes under the heading of putting others needs ahead of our own. There are, of course, circumstances when that is necessary. But it is particularly insidious when we allow our valuable and limited time to be swallowed up based on a false sense of duty or responsibility that exists only in our imagination.

For example, I offer creativity retreats at some of the most beautiful places in the world, and I needed an assistant for one that I was facilitating in New Mexico. I asked a friend of mine, another expressive arts therapist, to be my assistant, which meant she would pay the minimal expenses and help me set up and take down the studio. Other than that she would be free to participate fully in the rest of the workshop. She said that she would really like to take me up on my offer but a cousin who she had no relationship with and didn't even really like all that much was MAYBE going to be in town that week and MAYBE would like to go out to lunch with her . I just looked at her completely flabbergasted and said " In my career as a creativity coach I have heard some sorry excuses about why people won't let themselves have creativity in their lives, but you have just come up with the LAMEST excuse I think I have ever heard!" Luckily she was not only a good friend but also pretty self aware so we both cracked up laughing and she DID come on that retreat and had a fabulous time.

When you are choosing how to spend your precious life energy, ask yourself the question, " What really matters to me at the end of the day or at the end of my life? " One of my favorite barometers is the deathbed test, which goes something like this. When you envision yourself in the last days, or hours or minutes of your life, are your final thoughts going to be something along the lines of , "Gee, I'm sure glad that I reorganized my sock drawer for the 10th time, or that I played internet solitaire until I got carpal tunnel syndrome, or I will always fondly remember the time when I took that last load of clothes that I never wear anymore to the dry cleaners."

Or are you going to have a glowing memory of the risk you took in setting aside some time for yourself to paint or write or make music ? Will you be savoring the recollection of the exquisite excitement of putting color on paper, of watching your own words turning into an original story, the sweet pleasure of sitting at your piano or with your guitar, strumming away, playing well or badly and singing your fool head off, consumed with the joy of allowing your voice to be heard out in the world ?