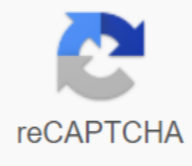




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Twyla tharp the creative habit pdf free

CLICK HERE TO REGISTER my mother, Lecille Conifer Tharp, to make sure she had all the tools she would need. To my father, William Albert Tharp, for giving me the DNA to build things from scratch. My son, Jesse Alexander Huot, for helping me create every new day. And those who had seen him told how he who had been possessed with demons was healed.—Luke 8:36 CONTENTS 1 I enter a white room 2 Preparation Rituals 3 Your Creative DNA 4 Take advantage of your memory 5 before you can think outside the box. You have to start with a box 6 Scratching 7 Accidents will happen 8 Column 9 Skill 10 Ruts and Slots 11 An A in Failure 12 Long-term recognitions Creative habit Chapter 1 enters a white room entering a large white room. It's a dance studio in downtown Manhattan. I'm wearing a sweatshirt, faded jeans and Nike sneakers. The room is lined with eight-foot-tall mirrors. There's a box of feathers in the corner. The floor is clean, practically spotless if you don't count the thousands of slip marks and footprints left there by the dancers who rehearse. Apart from the mirrors, the pen box, the sliding marks, and me, the room is empty. In five weeks I fly to Los Angeles with a group of six dancers to perform a dance program for eight consecutive nights in front of twelve hundred people each night. It's my company. I'm the choreographer. I have half the show in my hand, a fifty-minute ballet for the six dancers set in Beethoven's twenty-ninth piano sonata, the Hammerklavier. I created the piece over a year ago about many of these same dancers, and I've spent the last few weeks rehearsing it with the company. The other half of the program is a mystery. I don't know what music I'm going to use. I don't know which dancers I'm going to work with. I have no idea what the costumes will be like, the lighting, or who will play the music. I have no idea the length of the piece, although it has to be long enough to fill the second half of a full program to give the audience that pays the value of their money. The length of the part will dictate how much rehearsal time I need. This, in turn, means talking on the phone with the dancers, scheduling the study time and starting the ball, all under the premise that something wonderful will come out of what you fashion in the coming weeks in this empty white room. My dancers expect me to deliver because my choreography represents their livelihood. L.A. presenters expect the same thing because they've sold a lot of tickets to people with the promise that they'll see something new and interesting about me. The owner of the theater (without really thinking about it) also expects it. If I don't go in, your theater will be empty for a week. It's a lot of people, many of whom I've never met, counting on me to be creative. But right now I'm not thinking none of this. I'm in a room with an obligation to create an important dance piece. The dancers will be here in a few minutes. What are we going to do? For some This empty room symbolizes something deep, mysterious and terrifying: the task of starting with nothing and working your way to creating something whole and beautiful and satisfying. It's no different for a writer who rolls up a sheet of fresh paper on his typewriter (or more likely shooting the blank screen on his computer), or a painter who confronts a virginal canvas, a sculptor looking at a raw piece of stone, a composer at the piano with his fingers floating just above the keys. Some people find this moment—the moment before creativity begins—so painful that they simply can't deal with it. They rise and move away from the computer, canvas, keyboard; take a nap or go shopping or arrange lunch or do chores at home. They procrastinate. In its most extreme form, this terror totally paralyzes people. White space can be humiliating. But I've faced him all my professional life. It's my job. It's also my calling. In short: Filling this empty space constitutes my identity. I'm a dancer and choreographer. In the last 35 years, I've created 130 dances and ballets. Some of them are good, some are less good (that's a euphemism, some were public humiliations). I've worked with dancers in almost every space and environment you can imagine. I've rehearsed in cow pastures. I have rehearsed in hundreds of studios, some luxurious in their austerity and expansion, others dirty and sandy, with rodents literally running around the edges of the room. I spent eight months in a film set in Prague, choreographing the dances and directing the opera sequences for Milos Forman's Amadeus. I've organized horse sequences in New York's Central Park for the film Hair. I have worked with dancers at the opera houses in London, Paris, Stockholm, Sydney and Berlin. I've run my own company for three decades. I've created and directed a hit show on Broadway. I have worked hard enough and produced with enough consistency that at this point seems to me not only challenge and fear, but peace, as well as promise in the empty white room. It's become my home. After so many years, I've learned that being creative is a full-time job with its own daily patterns. That's why writers, for example, like to establish routines for themselves. The most productive start early in the morning, when the world is calm, the phones don't ring, and their minds are rested, alert and not yet contaminated by other people's words. They could set a goal for themselves—writing five hundred words or staying at their desk until noon—but the real secret is that they do it every day. In other words, they are disciplined. Over time, as daily routines become a second nature, discipline becomes it is the same for any creative individual, whether it is a painter who finds his way every morning to the easel, or a medical researcher who returns daily to the laboratory. Routine is both a part of the creative process and the maybe more. And this routine is available to everyone. Creativity isn't just for artists. It is for entrepreneurs looking for a new way to close a sale; it's for engineers trying to solve a problem; it's for parents who want their children to see the world in more ways than one. For the past four decades, I have been dedicated to one creative search or another every day, both in my professional life and in my personal life. I've thought a lot about what it means to be creative and how to do it efficiently. I've also learned from the painful experience of doing it in the worst way possible. I'll tell you about both. And I'll give you exercises that will challenge some of your creative assumptions: make you stretch, strengthen, last longer. After all, you stretch before you jog, loosen up before exercising, practice before playing. It's no different for your mind. I will continue to insist that creativity be increased by routine and habit. Get used to it. In these pages a philosophical tug-of-war will periodically raise its head. It is the perennial debate, born in the romantic era, among the beliefs that all creative acts are born of (a) some transcendent and inexplicable act of dionysal inspiration, a kiss of God on the forehead that allows you to give the world The Magic Flute, or (b) hard work. If it's not obvious yet, I'm on the side of hard work. That's why this book is called The Creative Habit. Creativity is a habit, and the best creativity is the result of good work habits. That's all in a nut words. The film Amadeus (and Peter Shaffer's work on which it is based) dramatizes and romanticizes the divine origins of creative genius. Antonio Salieri, who represents the talented trick, is cursed to live in the time of Mozart, the gifted and undisciplined genius who writes as if he were touched by the hand of God. Salieri recognizes the depth of Mozart's genius and is tortured that God has chosen someone so unworthy to be His divine creative vessel. Of course, this is hogwash. There are no natural geniuses. Mozart was his father's son. Leopold Mozart had gone through an arduous upbringing, not only in music, but also in philosophy and religion. He was a sophisticated and thought-old man, famous throughout Europe as a composer and educator. This is not news for music lovers. Leopold had a huge influence on his young son. I question how natural this young man was. Genetically, of course, he was probably more inclined to write music than, say, playing basketball, as he was only three feet tall when he caught the public's attention. But his first good fortune was to have a father who was a composer and a virtuoso on the violin, who could approach keyboard instruments skillfully, and who, recognizing some skill in his son, said to himself. This is interesting. He likes music. Let's see until we can get there. Leopold taught young Wolfgang all about music, including and harmony. He made sure that the child was exposed to all Europeans who were writing good music or could be useful in Wolfgang's musical development. Fate, very often, is a certain father. Mozart was hardly a naive prodigy who sat on the keyboard and, with God whispering in his ears, let the music flow from his fingers. It's a good image for selling movie tickets, but whether god has kissed your forehead or not, you still have to work. Without learning and preparation, you won't know how to harness the power of that kiss. No one worked harder than Mozart. When he was twenty-eight, his hands were deformed because of all the hours he had spent practicing, acting and grabbing a feather feather to compose. That's the missing element in Mozart's popular portrait. Certainly, he had a gift that set him apart from others. He was the most complete musician imaginable, one who wrote for all instruments in all combinations, and no one has written major music for the human voice. However, few people, even those who are very talented, are able to apply and focus that Mozart exhibited throughout his short life. As Mozart himself wrote to a friend, people are wrong and think my art is easy for me. I assure you, dear friend, that no one has devoted as much time and thought to composition as I have. There is no famous teacher whose music I have not studied industriously through many times. Mozart's approach was fierce; it had to be for him to deliver the music he made in his relatively short life, under the conditions he endured, writing in coaches and delivering scores just before the curtain went up, dealing with the distractions of raising a family and the constant need for money. Whatever scope and greatness it attaches to Mozart's musical gift, his so-called genius, discipline and work ethic were the same. I'm sure this is what Leopold Mozart saw so early in his son that, when he was three years old, one day he jumped impulsively on the stool to touch his older sister's codex figure, and was immediately beaten. Music quickly became Mozart's passion, his favorite activity. I seriously doubt that Leopold would have to tell his son for a long time, go in there and practice your music. The boy did it on his own. More than anything, this book is about preparation. To be creative you have to know how to prepare to be creative. No one can give you your theme, your creative content; if they could, it would be their creation and not theirs. But there's a process that generates creativity, and you can learn it. And you can make it usual. There is a paradox in the idea that creativity should be a habit. We think of creativity as a way to keep everything fresh and new, while habit involves routine and repetition. That paradox intrigues me because it takes the place where creativity and skill rub against each other. It takes skill to bring something you have imagined into the world; to use words to create credible, credible lives, select the colors and textures of the painting to represent a haystack at sunset, to combine ingredients to make a tasty dish. No one is born with that skill. It develops through exercise, through repetition, through a mixture of learning and reflection that is both thorough and rewarding. And it takes time. Even Mozart, with all his innate gifts, his passion for music, and his father's devoted tutelage, needed twenty-four youth symphonies under his belt before composing something that persevered with the twenty-fifth number. If art is the bridge between what you see in your mind and what the world sees, then skill is how you build that bridge. That's the reason for the exercises. They will help you develop skills. Some may seem simple. Do them anyway, you'll never be able to devote enough time to the basics. Before he could write Coso fan tutte, Mozart had practiced his scales. While modern dance and ballet are my métier, they are not the subject of this book. I promise you the text won't be full of dance jargon. You won't get confused with the first positions and the pliés and tendus on these pages. I assume you're a reasonably sophisticated, open-minded person. I hope you've been to the ballet and seen a dance company in action on stage. If you have not, be ashamed of yourself; that's like admitting you've never read a novel or strolled through a museum or heard a live Beethoven symphony. If you give me that much, we can work together. In my view, my work habits apply to everyone. You'll see I'm a preparation buff. My daily routines are transactional. Everything that happens in my day is a transaction between the outside world and my inner world. It's all raw material. Everything is relevant. Everything is usable. It all feeds on my creativity. But without proper preparation, I can't see it, hold it and use it. Without the time and effort invested in preparing to create, you can be struck by lightning and it will leave you dazed. Take, for example, a wonderful scene in the film The Karate Kid. Teenager Daniel asks the wise and cunning Mr. Miyagi to teach him karate. The old man agrees and orders Daniel to first wax his car in precisely opposite circular movements (Wax on, wax off). He then tells Daniel to paint his wooden fence in precise up and down movements. Finally, he makes Daniel hammer nails to repair a wall. Daniel is perplexed at first, then angry. He wants to learn martial arts so he can defend himself. Instead, it's confined to household chores. When Daniel finishes restoring Miyagi's car, fence and walls, he explodes with rage against his mentor. Miyagi physically attacks Daniel, who without thinking or hesitation defends himself with the central impulses and karate parios. Through tasks deceptively of Miyagi, Daniel has absorbed the basics of karate, unknowingly. In the same spirit that Miyagi teaches karate, I hope this book will help you become more creative. Ensuring that everything you'll create will be wonderful, that's up to you, but I promise you that if you read the book and listen to even half the suggestions, you'll never be afraid of a blank page or an empty canvas or a white room again. Creativity will become your habit. Chapter 2 preparation rituals begin every day of my life with a ritual: I wake up at 5:30 a.m., put on my workout clothes, my leg warmers, my sweatshirts and my hat. I leave my manhattan home, take a cab and tell the driver to take me to pumping iron gym on 91st Street and first avenue, where I exercise for two hours. The ritual is not the stretching and weight training that I put my body through every morning in the gym; the ritual is the taxi. The moment I tell the driver where to go I have completed the ritual. It's a simple act, but doing it the same way that every morning makes it normalized, makes it repeatable, easy to do. Reduce the chance of me skipping or doing it differently. It's one more element in my arsenal of routines, and one less thing to think about. Some people might say that simply tripping out of bed and getting into a taxi hardly qualifies the honorary ritual. It glorifies a worldly act that anyone can perform. I disagree. The first steps are difficult; it's not anyone's idea of fun waking up in the dark every day and taking their tired body to the gym. Like everyone else, I have days when I wake up, look at the ceiling and wonder, do I feel like working out today? But the quasi-religious power that adheres to this ritual prevents me from rolling and going back to sleep. It is vital to establish some rituals—automatic but decisive patterns of behavior—at the beginning of the creative process, when you're in danger more than backing up, cowering, giving up, or going the wrong way. A ritual, the Oxford English Dictionary tells me, is a prescribed order to perform a religious service or other devotional service. All of that applies to my morning ritual. Thinking about it as a ritual has a transformative effect on activity. Turning something into a ritual eliminates the question: Why am I doing this? By the time I give him the taxi driver's addresses, it's too late to wonder why I'm going to the gym and not sleeping under the warm covers of my bed. The cab's moving. I'm engaged. Like it or not, I'm going to the gym. The ritual erases the question of whether I like it or not. It's also a friendly reminder that I'm doing the right thing. (I've done it before. That was good. I'll do it again.) We all have rituals in our day, whether we are aware of them or not. A friend, a tough pragmatist with a non-spiritual bone in his body, practices yoga in the morning at home to overcome back pain. Start each session by lighting a candle. You don't need the to make their poses (although soft shine and weak smell have a tonic effect, he says), but the ceremonial act of lighting this votive candle transforms yoga into a sanctifying ritual. It means it's the session seriously, and that over the next ninety minutes he commits to practicing yoga. Candle. Click. Yoga. An automatic three-step call and response mechanism that anchors your morning. When it's over, blow out the candle and continue with the rest of your day. An executive I know starts each day with a twenty-minute meeting with his assistant. It's a simple organizational tool, but turning it into a daily ceremony for two people intensifies the bond between them and gives your day a predictable and repeatable start. You don't have to think about what to do when you get to the office. You know it's your twenty-minute ritual. The dancers are totally ruled by rituals. It starts with the class from 10:00 a.m. to noon every day, where they stretch and warm their muscles and put their bodies through the classical dance positions. They do it every day, without fail, because all the dancers who work in class know that their efforts to strengthen the muscles will shield them against injuries in rehearsal or performance. What makes it a ritual is that they do it without questioning the need. As with all sacred rites, the beginning of the class is beautiful to see. Dancers can lag behind and grind, but eventually assume, with terribly formal rigor, their usual place in the sweep or on the ground. If a main dancer enters, it automatically changes locations to give the star the center point in front of the mirror. Of such beliefs and traditions are rituals made. It's like going to church. We rarely wonder why we go to church, and we don't expect concrete answers when we do. All we know is that it feeds our spirit somehow, and we do. Many regular creative people have preparation rituals linked to the environment in which they choose to start their day. As you get into that environment, you start your creative day. Composer Igor Stravinsky did the same every morning when he entered his studio to work: he sat at the piano and played a Bach escape. Maybe he needed the ritual to feel like a musician, or the performance somehow connected him with musical notes, his vocabulary. Maybe he

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