



Lawyers are problem solvers. We often see situations we've never seen before. Our creativity is required for everything from how to argue for a change in longstanding law to how to help a jury like our unlikeable client. But what about our creativity outside of the office?

I've been coaching lawyers for fifteen years. Our profession is a serious one. Mistakes we make can cost a client their life's savings or cost us the continued privilege of practicing law. Add to this pressure long hours and looming deadlines.

Where is there room for the possibility of play? It calls for creativity to find out.

No Talent Required

Luckily for me, no talent is required to be creative.

I long associated creativity with the paintings of Matt

Higgins that make my jaw drop, the songs of Tom Shomaker whose sweet singing made me weep, and stage performances by Dennis Carlson and Jennifer Gilg that wow packed theaters.

"I'm not creative," I insisted. As a student, two courses guaranteed to crush my GPA—art and physical education. As an adult, I muddle through multiple private lessons with a seasoned dance instructor to master a basic box step.

While artistic talent is an obvious expression, creativity comes in countless containers. Like the practice of law, it is not about being a mere technician. Our creativity cannot be outsourced. It cannot be found in an app (although it might lead to you developing one). Indeed, the very definition of creativity is that it is unique.

I can lose myself in arranging a bouquet of wildflowers or be exuberant over a holiday dinner place setting. No two bouquets or tables ever look the same.

You have always been creative. You are continuously creating. It is that call to creativity that propels us to dance, even if family weddings and the kitchen are as far as we get. Regardless of talent, we feel delightfully compelled.

Are you curious about where your creativity is calling you?

What Will It Get You?

One study of 658 volunteers showed that those with creative pursuits were significantly more engaged, enthusiastic, and simply more excited about the next day. What lawyer couldn't use that?

When we are creative, our focus is on the flow of the process, no matter the ultimate outcome. We can lose track of time, getting lost in pure pleasure. The risotto may not come

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BRINGING BACK CREATIVE

out perfectly creamy, but you don't regret the time you spent stirring it.

As lawyers, our brains spend their days analyzing statutes, pouring over precise word choices, and calculating contract dollars. Our brains work hard.

We worry about where to get our next client. We stress over high stakes negotiations. Billable hours become burdensome. Even when the work day is done, enjoyment of our time away from the office can be robbed by our anxiety about tomorrow.

Our brain functions by firing neurons along pathways. Our neurons are smart. They take the easiest path, which is along the well-worn road of our old thoughts. Coming up with a new idea requires our brain to travel a new path. This is only possible if we allow space—room for the formation of new connections—for our thoughts to take a different path.

We leave no room for our creative ideas to enter our minds when they are so crammed full we get tension headaches. When a mind is relaxed by baking a batch of blueberry muffins from scratch, there is space for new ideas to emerge. Neuroscience aside, we know the benefits of more balance in our lives.

Engaging in creative pursuits quiets the lawyer's busy brain and gives it some breathing room. When we are not constantly taking in information from briefs, texts and emails, there is space for something else to emerge. Something new. Something we never thought of before.

What Gets in the Way

Law school can be the beginning of the end of much of what once brought us joy. When there are hundreds of pages to read, taking time writing a short story can seem absurd. Once we land a job, we put in long days proving our worth and hoping we meet expectations. The demands of family, friendships and our firm push our creative pursuits farther and farther down our list of priorities.

Workaholism is rampant among attorneys, whether of our own making or of the cultures in which we work. When exhaustion and anxiety become a way of life for a lawyer, energy for playful possibility diminishes. Even if we can find the time, our ever present phones are built to take our brains to buying things rather than being makers of our own creations.

Even the lawyer who is no longer required to put in long weeks at the office does so out of habit, the satisfaction of the work, or the desire for the income. We gather our evidence to make the case that we need to work each and every weekend.

Meanwhile, our saxophone stays stuck in its case in the closet corner.

Felt Fun

My law partner Angela is an impressive role model for living a creative life. Her home is a holiday happening year round. From the red, white and blue of the 4th of July to the shamrocks of St. Paddy's Day, she celebrates her creative side in every season. She expresses her love of life in the colors and objects she surrounds herself with.

While many might think of Angela as creative because she's a blogger and an author (*Patched Up Parenting*), few know that her passion is creating works of art out of felt. Stitching beads by the hour, she creates sparkling treasures from tooth fairy pouches to family heirlooms.

Sewing hundreds of tiny sequins by hand is a solace to the mind of a litigator who manages a caseload, a law firm, and a household with two active adolescents. She rediscovered the satisfying pastime she learned from her mother as a young child.

Angela's time with a needle in her hand and a cat near her feet is restorative. She began from the sheer cheer

of it. When she had exhausted gift giving of her felt works to her family, she began sharing with others. Now her creative craft brings delight to people as far away as the Netherlands and Germany and there is a wait list for creations.

The joy Angela's felt fun brings to others is obvious by the demand for her creations. But those recipients are not the only beneficiaries of every sequin sewn. The legal team she manages and her clients alike get a happy burst from her when that effervescence bubbles out from this part of her life.

Courage in Countless Containers

Creativity comes in countless containers. You might be the lawyer who wears fuchsia bow ties or socks with little yellow giraffes. Those who reveal their uniqueness in their personal style expose a piece of themselves to the outside world. Others will play the flamenco guitar in their basement where no one else will ever hear.



Felt work-of-art made by Angela Dunne.

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Courage can be required to connect with our creativity. Being human, we fear being rejected by our tribe. Consequently, we are reluctant to go against the grain of usual behavior. For many years when I lawyered in the courthouse every week, I was recognized by wearing one of my many hats from my collection. Others may have considered it charming, odd, or simply silly. But for me it felt genuinely joyful.

To be your authentic self is to be vulnerable. We fear our imperfection. We fear failing. We fear being mocked or at a minimum not fitting in. And yet to own our true selves is to live the life we were called to live. After all, do you want to live anyone else's life but your own?

If you've neglected this part of your life lately and are ready to reconnect, consider these simple steps.

Select a passion, a pursuit or perhaps a playfulness. It's been said that our greatest power is the power of choice. What creativity has been calling you? Perhaps you know exactly what it is. If not, ask yourself:

How often have I said, "I've always wanted to _____?"

When I was a child, what was one of my favorite activities?

What do I hope to do more of when I retire?

If I had more time, I would enjoy _____.

When I was a girl, our home had one cookbook. It was green and tattered with broken binding. We rarely had the ingredients to make any of the recipes, but I enjoyed experimenting with possible substitutions to have a batch of fresh baked cookies. To this day, the bricolage of making a frittata out of whatever is available in the refrigerator gives me great joy.

When we don't pause in life long enough to reflect, we make the choice to ignore areas of our life that matter. If you're tempted to skip to the end of this article, take that moment now. Make a choice.

Start. Lawyers are really good thinkers. The downside is that we are at risk for overthinking. Perhaps you've always dreamed about doing leatherworking. You've thought about the designs you would create. You've imagined the smell of the leather in your workroom. You've thought about it a lot, yet you've never done a minute of it.

Lawyers can also be great researchers. Rather than restoring that El Camino that's been sitting in the garage we stay studying car restoration books and googling special tools for hours on end. Soon we've become experts, but haven't lifted the cover off the car in three years.

Many an estate sale is filled with yarn from someone's unfulfilled intentions to create. Don't let it be yours.

Step small. If you have always been fascinated by photography, you don't need to travel with tripods to Machu Picchu. When our enthusiasm for something new runs high, it's easy to overdo a interest then give up because it's too much. The idea is to reduce burnout, not add to it. Try taking a picture of a scene at the farmers' market or a leaf in your own backyard instead.

What would it be like to allow yourself merely 5 minutes a day in something you love? What might spending a few minutes at the end of your day playing your ukulele get you?

Seek a support. If you are already engaged in a rich creative life, you may not need support. But many of us find ourselves pushing it down to the bottom of our long list of "shoulds." Give yourself a little help.

- Invite a buddy to join you. Ask a person who has a personal trainer why they are having such success. Most of them will tell you that a big part of their progress is simply having someone hold them accountable. When you know someone is waiting for you, you're more likely to show up.
- Set specific times in writing. If you've seen the success of calendar blocking for work projects you know its value. When we are vague about the "when" our promises keep getting put off to the tomorrow that never comes.
- Keep a symbol to remind you. The mere sight of the cover of books of collections of poems by Maya Angelou or Rumi can remind me that when inspiration hits I'll want to heed the call to pen a poem, even if it never makes it beyond my tattered spiral notebook.

Stay the course. We all get derailed at times. The big case. The flu. The business trip. Recognize that it's normal to fall off the path from time to time. Give yourself a little grace, then put on your gloves and get back out into that herb garden that's been waiting for you.

Who doesn't want to love their life just a little bit more? Connecting with our creative lives enables us to be better problem solvers for our clients, happier people in our relationships, and experience a little more fun in life.

It's said we all need something to love, something to do, and something to look forward to. Maybe it's your ukulele. 