

Thrive – 3rd Edition

Creating a Thriving Life
Week Ten – August 2, 2021

Self-Protection and Self-Care

This week we explore some of the perils that can ambush us on our creative path. Because creativity is a spiritual issue, many of the perils are spiritual in nature. In this week's material we will learn to recognize the toxic patterns we cling to that block our creative flow.

Dangers Along the Way

Creativity is God energy flowing through us, shaped by us, like light flowing through a crystal prism. When we are clear about who we are and what we are doing, the energy flows freely and we experience little or no strain. But we often resist that energy, because it makes us feel a little out of control. We feel the fear of living more deeply from the creative soul we really are. So we shut down the flow, slam on the psychic and spiritual brakes, to regain our sense of control. Each one of us has our own favorite ways of blocking creativity. Here are a few.

Food. Sugar and carbohydrates leaves us feeling dulled and unable to focus. As the creative juices flow we start to feel we're going to fast and God knows where, so we eat. A bowl of ice cream, an evening of junk food.

Alcohol. It slows us down, mellows us out, numbs the edge of our fears.

Work. Busy, busy, busy, we distract ourselves with tasks and to-do lists. Must-do's prevent us from a half-hour of work on a creative idea.

Love. We miss it, crave it, rehearse the good memory of past love, or play over and over again the LP of lost love.

Sex. It might be great, but is it keeping you from the eros of your creativity and purpose?

Food, work, love, sex are good. It is the *misuse*, *abuse* of them that makes them creative blocks. We are invited to recognize the fear that underlies our *misuse* of these good things.

When we sense our potential, the wide range of possibilities open to us, and we begin to move toward what gives us life, it scares us. Once again, we meet our fear. But if we listen to that fear, I bet we can recognize the blocks that are toxic for us. The clue: we defend this block as our "right."

Which block makes us angry to even think about giving up? Which is the explosive one that causes us to derail regularly? Examine it. When asked to name our poison, most of us can.

The reason for all this blocking is to alleviate our fear. We turn to our "drug" of choice to block our creativity whenever we experience the anxiety. It is always fear – often disguised but *always* there – that leads us to grab for a block.

Blocking is an issue of faith, trust. Rather than trust our intuition, our talent, our skill, our desire, we fear where our creativity is taking us. Rather than paint, talk to the boss about a business idea, apply for a grant, audition, we pick up a block. Blocked, we know who and what we are: unhappy people. Unblocked, we may be something much more threatening – happy. For most of us happy is terrifying, unfamiliar, out of control. No wonder we grab for our blocks.

As we become more aware of our blocks, we see they no longer work effectively. We begin to sit with the anxiety and fear a bit longer, and we find it becomes a fuel for us. The very anxiety we are avoiding, becomes fuel for our creativity. We use it to paint, talk to the boss, write a grant, perform the song.

I faced this last year while working on a painting. I'd been painting for a couple hours, then got to this place where I had to make a choice to do something risky, and I put the paintbrush down and said, "I'll get to it tomorrow. I think it's Happy Hour anyway. Time for a beer!" And I watched myself run away, I saw the fear, and I knew if I had one beer I'd have another and then I wouldn't do anymore work on it for the day. I just admitted I was scared, I turned around, and went back and put a big tree in the middle of the painting and it worked! I got past my fear, I avoided a preferred block, and I worked for another hour or two with good results. And I was happier with the results more than I would have been happy with the beer! I could feel the difference!

When we recognize our fear, we can use it for good.

Workaholism

Let's look more closely at work, busyness, as an addiction that blocks creative energy. If we are too busy to do Morning Pages, Creative Soul Dates, we are probably too busy to hear the voice of our authentic creative desires. The phrase "I'm working," has an unassailable air of goodness and duty to it. But we are often working to avoid ourselves, our spouses/partners, our real feelings.

One of the tasks for this week, is to take a Workaholism Quiz. 20 questions to see if workaholism is getting in the way of our creative soul.

There is a difference between zestful work toward a cherished goal and workaholism. That difference lies less in the hours than it does in the emotional quality of the hours spent. There is a treadmill quality to workaholism. We depend on our addiction and resent it. For a workaholic, work is synonymous with worth, and so we are hesitant to jettison any part of it. One way to achieve clarity is to keep a daily record of time spent at work, and time in creativity. Even an hour a day of creativity can go a long way to offset our workaholism.

Because workaholism is a *process* addiction, not a *substance* addiction, it is difficult to tell when we are indulging in it. An alcoholic *abstains* from alcohol, a workaholic gets sober from *overwork*. We must figure out what *overwork* looks like. It helps to set a *bottom line*. If we have no time, we must make time. We have the time, but are mispending it. Keeping a time log will help create healthy boundaries.

Drought

In any creative life there are dry seasons. Everything feels mechanical, empty, forced; have nothing to say, no new creative ideas. Droughts feel like they'll last forever, we momentarily lose our faith in the Great Creator and in our creative selves. What to do? Keep going. Particularly the Morning Pages, they are difficult, but most valuable in a drought. They will lead us to the well, if we are patient and persistent. In a creative life, droughts are a

necessity. The time in the *desert* brings us clarity, compassion, and eventually purpose. Like the Hebrews in the wilderness, it shaped their hearts, desires, and their faith.

Fame

Fame is not the same as success, and our souls know it. Fame is addictive, and it always leaves us hungry. Fame is a spiritual drug. It is often a by-product of our creative soul work, but like nuclear waste, it can be a very dangerous by-product. We begin to focus on “How do I look to them?” instead of “How is my work going?” Instead of being creative in our own way, we want to be recognized. But there is never enough of the fame bug. We fear that without fame we won’t be loved. There is something called Fame Induced Apathy. Without fame we become apathetic about anything. But fame is a shortcut for authentic self-approval, and personal integration. Satisfy our soul, and we won’t need fame. Love is the answer. Love of ourselves and love for what we do creatively. When we are joyfully creative we can release the obsession with how others see us.

Competition

Competition is another spiritual drug. When we focus on competition we poison our own well, impede our progress. When ogling the accomplishment of others, we take our eye off our own true north. We ask, “Why do I have such rotten luck? Why did she get that promotion?” instead of asking ourselves, “Did I work on my music today? Did I reach out to make more connections in my creative field today? Did I sign up for that class I want to take?”

Competition lies at the root of much creative blockage. As creatives we must attend to what our inner guidance is nudging us toward. To be better than so-and-so, chokes off the desire to be our selves. Competition leads us away from our own voices and choices, and into a defensive way of living. We define our own creativity, in terms of someone else’s. Originality is not rooted in competing with others in our creative field. It is rooted in being true to ourselves.

The spirit of competition – as opposed to the spirit of creativity – urges us to winnow out whatever does not seem like a winning idea. It pressures us to abandon a project rather than bring it to full term. We abort the awkward or unseemly projects/plans that may be our finest work, our best creative ugly ducklings. The workings of a creative soul need time to mature. Judged early, it may be judged incorrectly. A lousy painting may bring about a shift in style, a failed business plan may be the thing that leads you in a surprisingly different direction.

Weekly Tasks:

1. The Deadlies: Take a sheet of paper and cut seven small strips from it. On each strip write one of the following words: *alcohol, drugs, sex, work, money, food, family/friends*. Fold these strips of paper and place them in an envelope. We call these folded slips *the deadlies*. You’ll see why in a minute. Now draw one of the deadlies from the envelope and write five ways in which it has had a negative impact on your life. (If the one you choose seems difficult or inapplicable to you, consider this as resistance.) You will do this seven times, each time putting back the previous slip of paper so that you are always drawing from seven possible choices. Yes, you may draw the same deadly repeatedly. Yes, this is significant. Very often, it is the last impact on the final list of an annoying “Oh no, not again” that yields a break, through denial, into clarity.
2. Workaholism Quiz
 - a. I work outside of office/expected hours: seldom, often, never?
 - b. I cancel dates with loved ones to do more work: seldom, often, never?

- c. I postpone outings until the deadline is over: seldom, often, never?
- d. I take work with me on weekends: seldom, often, never?
- e. I take work with me on vacations: seldom, often, never?
- f. I take vacations: seldom, often, never?
- g. My intimates complain I always work: seldom, often, never?
- h. I try to do two things at once: seldom, often, never?
- i. I allow myself free time between projects: seldom, often, never?
- j. I allow myself to achieve closure on tasks: seldom, often, never?
- k. I procrastinate in finishing up the loose ends: seldom, often, never?
- l. I set out to do one job and start on three more at the same time: seldom, often, never?
- m. I work in the evenings during family time: seldom, often, never?
- n. I allow calls to interrupt – and lengthen – my work day: seldom, often, never?
- o. I prioritize my day to include an hour of creative work/play: seldom, often, never?
- p. I place my creative dreams before my work: seldom, often, never?
- q. I fall in with others' plans and fill my free time with their agendas: seldom, often, never?
- r. I allow myself down time to do *nothing*: seldom, often, never?
- s. I use the word *deadline* to describe and rationalize my work load: seldom, often, never?
- t. Going somewhere, even to dinner, with my laptop is something I do: seldom, often, never?