

The Path to Creative Success

Strategies To Facilitate Your Creative Vision and Actions



An E-book by
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Spark Your Creativity Using Your Intuitions

Worried that you're not creative? You are, but you may be out of touch with it. Your intuition can lead you into a world of novel ideas, experimentation, and brainstorming that will perk up your work life and stimulate innovation and problem-solving. Intuition training is not just for New Agers. Many executives, business owners, and research and development professionals attribute their successes to following intuitive clues.

Intuition is your internal information and feeling source. It is an inner library of physical and emotional cues that can direct you onto the right avenue. It is the composite of "gut feelings" and perceptions unique to you. It is an inner way of knowing. Too often, we are trained to discount or repress that knowledge and therefore purposely neglect it, devalue it, or refuse to recognize its message. Intuition is a tool for insight and illumination. Can you recall a time when your intuition prompted you to follow a different course and connected you to a result you were looking for?

Quentin recalls a time when his intuition prodded him to take an unfamiliar exit off the expressway on his way home. As he turned off, he felt foolish and almost turned around. But he followed this country road and passed an intriguing building with a "for sale" sign on it. He stopped in amazement--this building fit his image of the gourmet shop he wanted to open someday. Here was his dream in reality; the rest was up to him.

The creative process demands, like Quentin, that you're willing to step into the unknown and see what happens. Creativity is born of inspiration and your inspirations evolve from your passions. So follow your whims and see where they lead.

These excursions will stimulate new thought patterns and generate new paradigms for you. To help you to massage your intuitive talents, you can try a series of exercises to evoke creative prospects for you.

Exercise # One: What Inspires You?

What do you feel excited by or passionate about? What kinds of books or magazines do you read? What kinds of people do you most like to talk with? What kinds of interests/projects are you drawn to in your leisure time? If you went back to school, what would you most like to learn about? What do you fantasize about? What are your aspirations? What kinds of activities stimulate your creative expression? Do you long to paint or write or build or organize or sing or play something? Write down everything and anything that comes to mind.

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No idea is wrong or silly. What is your internal voice urging you to explore/experience? Let this exercise be the beginning of a creative journal. You may be surprised at the wisdom and guidance stored for you in these seemingly random thoughts.

To facilitate the new, it helps to clear away the past. Think back to any regrets you have about lost opportunities. Kim wishes she had studied engineering in college instead of teaching. Paul had a chance to go into business with a friend and turned it down as he was too scared. His friend is now a millionaire who works part-time. It may not be too late for you.

Exercise # Two: What Creative Dreams Have You Abandoned and Why?

Make a list of all of the things you wanted to do, but didn't. Then think back to what your intuition told you about this option. Are you still interested in this path? What does your inner voice tell you about this choice now? Note any patterns that are still possible or an enduring vision that you want to manifest.

You need to make peace with these cast offs. What can you learn from these mistakes? Rudy learned that he hadn't been ready until now to write his play. His vision just became vivid enough for him to tell the story. So he was able to release his regrets. Melissa, on the other hand, always wanted to become a lawyer. Now at age fifty, she thought she was too old, but the dream still beckoned her.

This was a choice point for her. She could either live the rest of her life with the sorrow of not having become a lawyer or she could go to law school. Or she could leverage her skills and become a lobbyist, a political activist, a paralegal, a city official, or fulfill her dream in numerous alternative ways. It was time for Melissa to move on.

Grieve what you must and then turn the corner and make room for the next episode.

Learning to trust your intuition is the critical foundation for creativity. Think back to the times when you were clear that a particular choice was not a wise one. Your "gut" warned you against it.

Silvie, a billing consultant, recalls a phone call she received from a potential client. The woman owned an antique store and sounded stressed, disorganized, and demanding. Silvie had a negative visceral reaction to the woman's voice. Yet, Silvie needed more business and this was a big account, so Silvie hushed up her intuitive radar and accepted the woman as a client. A year later, the woman sued Silvie for malpractice.

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During the legal proceedings, Silvie learned that this woman had sued her last two billing agents and that lawsuits, not antiques, were her primary source of income. Silvie swore to heed her intuitive doubts in the future.

Exercise # Three: I Am Grateful to my Intuition for the Following

When has your intuition steered you right? Make a list of the times when your intuition helped you to make the right decision or prompted you to try something. What have you learned about how it operates on your behalf? One of the greatest blocks to creativity is fear. Fear keeps you from exploring new ways. Fear of failure keeps you from enjoying an experimental mind set where failure is expected and welcomed as new information. Fear of being wrong or criticized also clips your creative wings. Almost everyone can remember trying something fresh and new and being chided.

Therefore we learn to play it safe, cease taking risks, and stop the flow of creative solutions. While most people are educated in a school system that advocates one right answer, today's workplace requires you to invoke new answers. The beauty of the entrepreneurial mind set is that it allows you to innovate and make up your own solutions. Fear of "getting the wrong answer" halts your flow of unique ideas.

Exercise # Four: What Frightens You Most About Expressing Your Creativity?

What is your fear about? What creative traumas from the past still hold power over you? What do you fear from your internal critic and others? What person(s) from your past criticized your ideas and actions? Write this all down so you can see it.

Fear is a component of risk and risking is essential to creativity. If you read about writers and artists and businesspeople, they all acknowledge fear. You will never be free of fear but you can minimize it and strategize around it. Just don't let fear keep you from your true self. Whenever you accomplish something, you become vulnerable to criticism. Leaders are often controversial and therefore targets for someone's arrow. Are you living your life for them or yourself?

When I get scared to write, I pick up a book called *Walking on Alligators: A Book of Meditations for Writers* by Susan Shaughnessy (Harper, 1993). Writing often feels dangerous to me and reading about other writer's similar terrors helps me to forget my doubt and just start typing. You need to find antidotes for your fear. Mentors, support groups, classes, coaches, readings, etc. all offer support systems which can undo the demons from the past. Figure out what solutions will most help your fear to stay in the background and use them.

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Another form of support for your creativity is a nurturing environment. Where do you do your best thinking? Where does your inner self feel most daring and alive?

Exercise # Five: Creative Stimuli

Describe the ideal environment for your creative process. Imagine it in all of its detail. What distracts and what stimulates you? Are you alone or with others? Is there music playing? Are you outdoors? What tools do you need? Are you at home or at a quaint inn? Knowing what sparks your creative fire allows you to make that space. Lots of creative people talk about having a studio or room of their own.

Kay, a painter I know, can paint anywhere that's light enough if she has her female jazz singers serenading her in the background. Music is her cue to let go and play with her colors. Trudie, a landscape architect, built an office for herself above the garage. As she lives in the city and doesn't have a view of trees, her office walls are plastered with pictures of plants and trees and gardens and she has silk flowers all over. Her rug of outdoor carpet spreads out like a lawn and her desk is a table inside a rickety old trellis with strings of vines and garden tools attached to it. She keeps bags of dirt and peat moss in the corner so she can smell them and pretend she's in the garden. You know what business she's in. Even if you only have a small space, make it your own and fill it with personal catalysts.

Sometimes when you have a business problem or feel stuck on a decision, nothing seems to help. Sit quietly and ask your intuitive guide for suggestions. You can also write yourself a note requesting an answer and put it in a drawer and let go for a while. Or you can change the format of your project or question and see what happens. I often find drawing a picture of what I'm trying to write about opens up new angles.

Other innovators try techniques like turning a project upside down or sideways or miniaturizing it or making it into a story or photographing it or discussing it with a child. These configurations often cut through the haze. You've heard tales of inventions that were actually mistakes or the result of a hair brain scheme. Experiment with your dilemma and watch the solution appear.

Comparisons are also helpful. For example, Brian's intuition urged him to ponder how his decision about whether or not to cut staff was like a tree. So he bundled up in his parka and went out to look at the oak in his front yard. He finally realized that his employees were the roots of his company; they held the tree up. Cutting an employee was like chopping off a necessary root, yet, he had to cut the payroll. So, he went back into the house and began to draft plans for reduced

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hours, part-time positions, and job sharing. Honor your intuitive messages and allow them to help you.

Exercise # Six: Your Creative Saboteurs

Write down all the things, people, places, activities, or thoughts that diminish your creative energy. What would you like to subtract from your life that interferes with the clarity of your intuitive channel?

Your intuition is a valuable asset; you can't afford to have it compromised by clutter, other people's needs, or busyness. Even if you only find the time to write in your creative journal or sit quietly for fifteen minutes a day, you are connecting with your intuition. Preserve the messages and insights.

From the above list, what can you subtract from your life to free up more creative space for yourself? What life choices support your ingenious energy? Honor your individual cravings and notions. Do you thrive in tranquility or excitement? Diligently restructure your lifestyle to cultivate your intuitive knowledge and its creative offshoots. Enjoy the new and exciting adventures that will result.

Creativity Creed

The goal of this exercise is to help you to develop a creativity creed, similar to a personal mission statement or an artist's statement. Using these questions as a guide, you can then write a paragraph or a one page statement that reflects your creative purpose and goals for this year.

1. What are you called to create and what's your attraction?
2. What is your personal creative process and style of working? What facilitates joy in your work and what detracts from it?
3. What comes easily for you as a creator and what do you struggle with?
4. Where are you in the creative cycle of birth, death, and rebirth?
5. What kinds of specific supports do you need so that you can make significant progress this year?
6. What is the larger meaning in your work?
7. How does your work impact your personal prosperity?

MY CREATIVITY CREED IS...

Creativity Catalysts

We know we are creative beings. Yet, we are also well aware that sometimes our creativity stalls, plays tricks on us, or appears to have vanished completely. It is at those moments that we need to reconnect with our vitality around our creative process or project and leverage our inspirational powers to stimulate our ability to make new connections.

The following tips are meant to arouse your natural creative gifts so you can surmount those obstacles in your journey and achieve maximum potential. Have fun with them and enjoy the wonder of discovery as you expand your imagination and allow yourself to be a conduit for excellent work!

1. Keep a daily excitement list about why you are passionate and committed to your exploration or creative project
2. Visualize your end result and make a collage of images that support that vision and post it where you can see it regularly
3. Take a field trip relating to your project to explore a particular facet of it
4. Experience your project using the three learning styles of visual, auditory, and kinesthetic experiences
 - a. Draw a picture of it, make a mind-map of it, or take a photo of it and play with it on photo-shop
 - b. Talk about your project into a tape or video recorder or teach a real/pretend class on the topic to an audience or your friends
 - c. Act it out with props and maybe even other characters
5. Record and follow your intuitive clues relating to your project
6. Go to a toy store and select a toy that reminds you of your project and let your inner child play with it
7. Set up a series of experiments related to your project with hypotheses to test out
8. Exercise regularly to clear your head
9. Find someone who is an opposite thinker (a devil's advocate) from you, tell them about your project, and let them challenge/stimulate your thinking
10. Select inspiring music that resonates with your project and play it at the beginning of your work time

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11. Create a water experience—sit in a hob tub, go swimming, take a shower, or visit a spa to increase your flow of ideas
12. Take your project away with you as a companion and see how it changes in a new setting
13. Meditate or pray about your topic
14. Find a symbol of your creative process and keep it close by when you are working or contemplating
15. Initiate creative rituals, such as lighting a candle or reading first, to invite your muse into the process
16. Look at visual representations relating to your project, like paintings, or special destinations, or a murder scene
17. Send your inner critic to a foreign land so you feel free to make mistakes and cast about for new connections
18. Change your location—work on your project in bed, outside in nature, in a museum, or simply change rooms
19. Take a day or two off so you can take a fresh look at your project when you return
20. Keep a file card packet in your office, car, etc. to jot down all related ideas and thoughts even if their meaning is a mystery
21. Read related books and articles, etc. and take notes to jog your inspirations
22. Look for the metaphors—i.e., how is your project like a pine tree or a trolley car?
23. Keep a separate journal/computer file for each project and keep track of new impressions
24. At the right time, share your project with trusted others and gather new insights
25. Take creative risks using your fascinations as a guide to unique explorations

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Procrastination Strategies

The progressive realization of worthy goals propels you towards that vision of prosperity. The addition of positive choices everyday improves the quality of your journey. So, why not get started? In case you're a procrastinator, here are eight tips to help you begin:

1. Acknowledge that procrastination creates needless stress for you. By procrastinating, you put yourself under an energy-draining emotional strain. Procrastination is the opposite of success. If your procrastination represents indecision, then identify what information you need to make that decision and get moving.
2. Breakdown overwhelming tasks into small ones. You want to write a two hundred-page book? Write a page a day and you'll be done in seven months.
3. Do a start-up task to break the stalemate. If your goal is to start a home-based business, go to the library and check out some interesting books and periodicals on the subject or do some research on the internet.
4. Work on your goal for ten minutes. Doug hates filing, but if he sets a timer for ten minutes and puts on his favorite CD, it gets done.
5. Use your moods to your advantage. Recently, Judy had a big marketing proposal to write which could earn her a coveted promotion, but the words eluded her. Feeling social, she called several contacts in her marketing association and brainstormed more ideas for her proposal. These conversations illuminated why she had writer's block and the next day, the proposal flowed.
6. Procrastination can also mask ambivalence. If you're still doubtful about your goal, list out the pros and cons of accomplishing it. If the advantages don't outweigh the disadvantages, then the job isn't worth it.
7. Make a contract with a friend or a colleague that you'll meet your goal by a specific date. If nothing else, fear of embarrassment will motivate you. This is why job-hunting groups, leads groups, small business planning groups, and support relationships, like mentoring, work. Use the advantage!
8. Lastly, reward yourself for meeting your goals beginning with your first steps. Latoya loves inexpensive costume earrings and treats herself to a pair whenever she crosses off an action step.

Procrastination rates as a prime time-waster. Make sure that you stay in charge of it! Whenever you find yourself falling into the procrastination rabbit hole, whip out a procrastination worksheet and fill it out. The truth will be clear to you.

Procrastination Worksheet
Use one sheet per goal or task

1. Goal/task being avoided:
2. Is this goal/task important to you? Why?
3. What is blocking its completion?

Solutions:

Decision: Choose one

- A. I have decided to complete this goal/task
- B. I have decided not to complete this goal/task myself.

If you picked A, move to the Swiss Cheese List. If you picked B, discard your goal!

Swiss Cheese List:

Breakdown this goal/task into many tiny components and target a completion date for each one.

Component	Due Date	Difficulties
1.		
2.		
3.		
4.		
5.		

Remember, every day is an opportunity for you to gain headway towards your life of positive choices. All these exercises will increase your proficiency and increase your likelihood of a fortunate outcome. Act today!

Prosperity, Goal-Setting and Visualization

What is prosperity for you? A key element in the Positive Choices strategy is the addition of positive choices to your life that reflect your prosperity goals. Prosperity for most people is not simply money in the bank. Your health, peace of mind, and well-being all count. Think about combinations of fulfilling work, great relationships, a sense of community, healthy lifestyles, harmony with nature, personal growth and creative expression. You are the author of your own life and therefore your prosperity plan reflects your uniqueness.

I recently met a photographer at Yosemite National Park who lives in a tent and sells his numerous photographs of the park's stunning mountains and streams to the local gift shops. He told me that he's living his prosperity dream—fresh air, intimacy with nature and a serene lifestyle. When he talks about his slides of the park, his joy radiates. He is living the life he relishes. Successful people know what they desire and set about making it happen.

Think about your work of choice. Most people intuitively know where their talents and interests lie. If not, then discovery emerges as your first goal. Are you on or off your mark? Barbara loved teaching but found public school politics oppressive. She fantasized about starting an innovative pre-school filled with community volunteers and multi-media. Fear of financial insecurity clouded her motivation to begin. Yet, every day in her traditional classroom wore her down.

Jake dreams of leaving his high stress middle management job and going back to school in computer graphics. Paul is unhappy with the anti-environmental direction of his chemical company and wants out. Susan, a working mother of three, resents missing the everyday milestones of parenting, and longs to work at home.

What do you want? Forget reality for a moment and tell the truth. Write down a paragraph describing your ideal workday. Be as specific as possible. Then, write a second paragraph about what you would like to do with the rest of your day. Do the pictures fit together? If not, what needs to be subtracted? If it's your job then you've got some career management research to do. A terrific prosperity technique entails designing a collage of pictures illustrating what you're trying to create. This visual portrayal helps you to "try out" your desires. If you don't have a clear picture, begin with what you do know.

Sarah knew that she wanted to use her drawing skills to earn a living, but she didn't know for what purpose. Her collage consisted of a picture of a woman drawing next to a collection of charcoal pencils, colored papers, a computer, and a wall of art books. That's all she knew. But never underestimate the power of step one.

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Goal-Setting

As a workshop leader, I've seen many people roll their eyes when I mention goal-setting. Goal-setting doesn't have to be tedious. A goal is simply a statement of intention—a target point. Starting an intention helps you focus your energy on that direction and increases the likelihood of a positive result. Goal setting allows you to set the agenda. Here are a few tips to help you write powerful goals:

1. Be specific. State the exact result you want in detail. For example, Jake wrote "I want to complete a master's degree in computer graphics at my state university by December, two years from now."
2. Be realistic in terms of time and ability. Carmen wanted to be a rock star but couldn't sing so achieving that goal is unlikely. So she has to decide if she wants to try voice lessons or find an aspect of the music business that matches her skills. Barbara wants to raise a millions dollars for her pre-school so she needs time for an effective public relations campaign. Some prosperity experts advise writing down what you really want even if it's unlikely and see what evolves. Try both, but an attainable and manageable goal often inspires patience and diligence.
3. Break down each goal into detailed action steps. These action steps help you make continual progress on the path. Develop a framework that spells out what you can do today or this week to further you along.
4. Be clear about the challenges of your goal. Fill out a Personal Challenge Contract for each one:

Personal Challenge Contract

1. I am committed to this goal because...
2. The barriers to achieving this goal are...
3. I need to do the following (usually develop skills or supports) to increase my likelihood of success...

Setting goals is positive risk-taking...the word risk is derived from the Greeks and means to sail around a cliff. It beckons traveling into the unknown for the benefit of adventure, growth, excitement or purpose. You can't grow unless you risk and goals can help you approach that risk in a prepared, strategic manner.

Preparation demands talking to other successful risk-takers, researching your project and experimentation. Factor in your own strengths and weaknesses and

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allow for the unexpected. Jake's wife became pregnant while he was in computer school and they had to hire a nanny to support Jake's timetable.

It always helps to be flexible and have a back-up plan. Barbara's fund-raising efforts proved overwhelming so she decided to take a sabbatical for a year so she could fund-raise full time. Stay tuned into your intuition about your goal. Sometimes we don't really want what we thought we wanted in the first place.

Sarah's drawing collage scared her into the realization that she didn't want to work alone at home, so she redirected her efforts towards affiliating with a company. Carmen explored the music business and decided she disliked the constant travel. She's now the entertainment booking agent for a major local restaurant and singing in a chorus for fun.

Visualization

Visualization simply means creating a picture in your mind of the results you want. Relaxation exercises or meditation are meant to calm you and put you in the alpha state. That is the primary goal, although meditators will tell you that there are numerous auxiliary benefits like increased clarity of mind and good health. Visualizing your goals allows you to prepare yourself to have them.

It's like practice. It also elucidates if the goal is truly right for you and stimulates any emotional baggage you may have about not deserving it. Collages, as we've discussed, illustrate your vision so you can experience the future. Mental imagery helps you do the same.

Sean's goal was to double his income in the next twelve months. He had ten years of experience as a builder. For the past two years he worked as a general contractor with a crew but found supervising other people irritating and inefficient. He finally admitted that he only wanted work he could do himself; he liked having his independence. But if he continued to do general building jobs solo, he couldn't meet his goal. His monthly average net income was \$6000.00.

So he began to sit quietly every morning and evening for ten minutes and imagine depositing \$12,000.00 per month into his bank account. He imagined receiving checks from his customers and going to his bank, inserting his card, pushing the right buttons, and receiving a \$12,000.00 deposit slip back. He also imagined buying a new truck and new tools and hiring a landscaper for his own home. He also mentally set up that IRA account for his retirement that he hadn't been able to do before.

Not much was happening except that Sean was getting very excited about having the extra income. He asked me if I had any suggestions to improve the impact of his visualization. I suggested that he focus on the faces of the people

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who were handing him the checks and their words: “Thank you for.....”. After two weeks, he told me that, in his visualization, they all thanked him for building their sunrooms. “I love sunny rooms”, he said, “Maybe I could specialize and double my income”.

And that’s what he did. Visualization enhances the way you are able to tune into a dilemma and sometimes surfaces new information that propels you in the right direction. It took 18 months instead of 12 but Sean did double his income.

Pick one goal that you want to visualize and follow all the previous steps we’ve discussed. Pick two times a day to focus your complete attention on this goal and its outcome. Some people create an altar or sanctuary somewhere in their home or office, other people sit in a favorite chair and still others relish the peace and quiet in their car or on the beach. Select a location that will foster your results.

In your quiet place, begin by focusing on the words of your goal and then move to associate a picture or pictures of what you want to manifest. Let your mind go and take whatever images you get. Nothing is set in stone; you can change the slant when you want. See what clues you can pick up from your creative mind about how your goal may happen.

Pay attention to key people who show up or specific locations or symbols that arise. Tune into how you feel having achieved your goal. Trevor pictured himself living in St. Thomas and enjoying warm weather and tropical drinks all year long. Yet, his eyes filled up with tears during his exercise. He suddenly realized that he would be all alone in St. Thomas and felt overwhelmed with affection for his friends and family. He later decided that he only wanted to winter in St. Thomas and needed a mobile career. When he visualized that configuration, a laptop image showed up and he knew technology held the answer.

Many people who use visualization find it helpful to have a small notebook handy and keep a journal of emotions and experiences each day. You can also write down your doubts, i.e., Who do I think I am trying to get a job on television? Watch for patterns of both success and sabotage. This process engages your unconscious. Knowing what you really want takes time.

Visualization allows you to experiment with your ideas on a daily basis. Statistics collected on athletes and other performers support the concept that visualization works. Use it to enhance your path to creative success and prosperity. Good luck!

ABOUT GAIL MCMEEKIN, M.S.W., L.I.C.S.W.



I have been in the personal empowerment business since 1976 and feel grateful everyday to have had the opportunity to inspire and guide clients navigating the challenges of change for over 25 years. I began as a child and family therapist with a strong commitment to prevention programs. I then became fascinated with the concept of “why do so many people hate their jobs”? This question prompted me to pursue a certificate in Human Resource Management with a focus on career and organizational development. I started my own business of career consulting and organizational workshops and projects in 1982 called Guided Growth.

After a challenging schedule of clients and training programs, it was time to slow down and begin developing learning products. At the request of many of my stress management workshop participants, I created my first product: a workshop-on-audiotape called Positive Choices: From Stress to Serenity, complete with a mini-workbook and visualizations, and enticing music by my talented brother.

My own creative renaissance unfolded and I started painting, writing, and studying the lives of creative men and women. I then became outraged that there were not positive, viable role models for modern-day, sane, creative women, so I wrote my first book, *The 12 Secrets of Highly Creative Women: A Portable Mentor* (Conari Press), which appeared in March of 2000 and sold out its first printing in 8 weeks. In 2001, Conari Press published my second book, *The Power of Positive Choices: Adding and Subtracting Your Way to a Great Life*. Since then, I changed the name of my business to Creative Success, completed the training program with the Coaches Training Institute in California, began my monthly e-zine, and gained national exposure as an expert.

In addition to radio and television appearances, my work has been featured in Redbook, The Boston Globe, Health, Investor’s Business Daily, Boston Business Journal, Woman’s Day, Shape, One Spirit Bookclub, First for Women, etc., as well on the Career Center on AOL.

I have a B.A. from Connecticut College, an M.S.W. from Boston University, and a certificate in Human Resource Management from Bentley College, and completed the coursework for the Coaches Training Institute.

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Additional Readings by Gail McMeekin:

The 12 Secrets of Highly Creative Women: A Portable Mentor

The Power of Positive Choices: Adding and Subtracting Your Way to a Great Life

Boost Your Creativity, Productivity, and Profits in 21 Steps

Creativity Courage Cards

All books are available at <http://www.creativesuccess.com>

Additional Support with Gail McMeekin, LICSW:

Are you ready to leverage creativity in your life, and vision and achieve your personal, professional, and creative goals? Expert and coach Gail McMeekin can help you to achieve the following results:

- Activate your creativity to create the life you want and advance your creative work,
- Discover fulfilling work that uses your best strengths and talents and makes you excited to get to work everyday,
- Restore inner peace in your life using Gail's unique stress reduction program called Positive Choices which helps you to release your Serenity Stealers and replace them with the Life Choices you truly want, and
- Grow your business into a successful and heart-felt business.

For a 30 minute complementary sample coaching session, email Gail at gmcmeekin@comcast.net.