

How Limitations Influence Creativity

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Illustration by Glitschka Studios.

History itself is replete with examples of human ingenuity showcasing its creativity when faced with restrictive resources. So much so that a popular saying has survived a millennium and is still in use today to describe such situations. You have probably heard it.

“Necessity is the mother of invention.”

When I first started out in this industry I thought the most creative assignment you could possibly have is one that had a huge budget affording you to do anything you wanted. You know, the sky’s the limit and all that. Unfortunately that didn’t prove itself to be true.

As my career proceeded and reality kicked in, I was faced with projects that had small to no budgets and yet I was still expected to find a unique creative solution for them. What I found out pretty fast is something that has been proven over the years: creativity is often fostered in the midst of sparse resources or time.

When you think about why this is you can isolate the possible reasons. When someone possesses abundance they have less needs in general. Proportionate to this abundance, is the tendency to have less motivation and creativity to meet the remaining needs they have yet to gain. In a nutshell, they take their work for granted.

Instead of being unique problem solvers, they become participants in the status quo. You know the type “Just get it done and out the door.” That element of creative challenge to accomplish something usually isn’t there.

A person who possesses little tends to make good use of what they do have, and seeks to find new ways they can stretch it to accomplish more than what is expected. The creative challenge is paramount in exercising creativity to solve problems, and when that happens you tend to get something profoundly simple, yet simply profound.

There are those moments in the creative process when you’re brainstorming ideas and stumble upon that precious jewel of inspiration. Doing this -while being in the midst of scant resources and time- is unfortunately becoming more rare as our industry moves at light speed into the digital realm. It can be done and it doesn’t take unlimited resources, it takes unlimited creativity and proves once again that necessity is indeed the mother of invention.

Thus we should embrace the challenge of having minimal time or no budget. These types of restrictive perimeters are what you can capitalize on in your own work flow. View them as an opportunity rather than a problem and you’ll marvel at the brilliant ideas birthed from limitation.

So the next time your boss or client says “We don’t have the budget for that.” or “We need this in a hurry.” you can respond by saying “No problem.”

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