



## Creativity, Part I: Waking up Oscar

We should all allow our chaotic sides more latitude in generating ideas.

**W**e all have two conflicting personalities inside us. Think of them as Oscar and Felix from *The Odd Couple*. The Felix personality resides in the left hemisphere of our brains. He's a well-organized, highly literate individual who loves lists, plans everything he does, and never deviates from the plan. He's driven by rules and the clock. If rules don't exist, he develops some that define what's expected of him. He likes to have goals, either self-determined or set by others. He strives to please others and is very disappointed if others don't recognize his efforts.

Oscar, on the other hand, inhabits the right hemisphere of our brains, the creative side. Oscar's personality is unrestricted, reactive, and driven by whims. For breakfast, he drinks beer opened the night before. He challenges authority and rejects conformity. He feels best when he's working on many projects at the same time. He believes that rules were made to be broken. He marches to his own drum and relies on self-gratification to keep him going.

Felix achieved a 4.0 grade average in college. He loved exams because they proved to his teachers that he'd done his assignments and learned his lessons. Oscar squeaked by with a 2.0 average. He was a troublemaker in class. He told jokes. He was more interested in making friends than in making grades. Felix works to accomplish something; Oscar works for the joy of doing it.

We go to school and study to satisfy Felix's needs—to establish more rules, define how things are done, and to develop plans for attaining certain goals. From birth on, we're trained—first by our parents, then by our teachers, and later by our organizations—to conform to some predetermined norm. Felix is held up as an example of good, and Oscar is the

example of bad. Felix always wears a tie, knows the correct time, and has learned from past experience or training what should be done next. Oscar—well, he's out to lunch.

Felix weaves rules and regulations into a creativity screen, so he can concentrate his efforts on getting the job done. The more new rules he can establish, the finer the mesh of the screen, and the more creative thoughts can be filtered from his attention. The first step in increasing creativity is to start eliminating the rules that combine to screen out creative thoughts.

Things would work fine if either Oscar or Felix lived in our minds alone, but this isn't the case. During the day, both Oscar and Felix are awake in our minds and must therefore coexist—but Felix rules. Oscar functions like a child, reacting emotionally to outside circumstances. Because Oscar's viewpoints are radical and reactive, Felix intervenes before we can put them into action. Felix takes Oscar's impulses and tries to put them in order, reshaping them according to Felix's rules for acceptable performance. This process often results in Felix rejecting an idea and chastising Oscar for even suggesting it.

For instance, one morning Oscar suggests, "Smell the socks. If they don't smell too bad, put them on." Felix reacts in disgust: "No way! Rule No. 1,593 states, 'Put clean socks on every day.' How dumb can you be?"

In some cases, Felix reshapes an idea so drastically that Oscar can't recognize it. After years of rejection, Oscar just gives up and stops submitting ideas, content to come out only at night in the dream state. This is a problem most of us face today: How do we get Felix to encourage Oscar to submit ideas? How do we get Felix to react to these ideas in a manner that Oscar will perceive as positive? How do we

encourage the creative side of our personalities in our day-to-day activities?

Everyone has three thinking patterns—analytical, creative, and practical. We use the analytical pattern when we make judgments and solve problems. This pattern rests in the left side of the brain and is a "Felix" thinking pattern.

We use the creative pattern when we're developing a way to do something that we haven't done before, and when we can't rely on someone else's input to tell us what to do. This pattern, often used to develop new and clever solutions to situations, rests in the right side of the brain. It's an "Oscar" thinking pattern.

We use the practical thinking pattern to help implement ideas that were developed by the two other thinking patterns. It's the ability to turn theory and concepts into accomplishments. This pattern, which rests in the left side of the brain, is a "Felix" thinking pattern.

Note that two of the three patterns rest in the left side of the brain. This enables us to convert ideas generated by the analytical thinking pattern so that they will be accepted and implemented by the practical thinking pattern.

This month we talked about the theory of creativity; next month we'll talk about how to improve your creativity.

### About the author

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