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UNLEASH YOUR CREATIVITY

This book revolves around the six Marketing Superpowers. But before diving into them in more detail, let's first examine the source they all come from: creativity. It's the force with which we generate new ideas, develop new strategies, and literally create the world around us. It's the ability to stretch our thinking and come up with new solutions. Our thoughts become our reality. With help from both our creative right brain and logical left brain, we can develop plans to change our world. Our own creativity is our most powerful force of creation. And like any other muscle in our bodies, it can be—and should be—trained.

Right-brain Versus Left-brain Thinking

The human brain is truly ingenious. We have unlimited capacities for coming up with new ideas and creative strategies. To get the best results, you need to learn how to switch between the two sides of your brain. Both have very distinct functionalities necessary to come up with the best solutions, but we need to know when to tune in to which side of our brain. Much of what is known about how our brain functions is thanks to Nobel Prize winner Roger Sperry, whose experiments examined the way our brain's hemispheres operate both independently and together. The logical left hemisphere of your brain controls your rational thinking. It helps determine the most logic way to address a problem, evaluate the facts, and rationally pick the best—or, at least, the most optimal—solution you're after. In short, it determines the pros and cons of each idea. When we use the left side of our brains, we mainly think in words. Left-brain thinking involves math and language, processing what you hear, and doing most of the talking. It's also in charge of logic and exact mathematical calculations. Whenever you try to remember something, your left brain comes into play. Clever, isn't it?

The brain's right side helps us comprehend visual imagery, in order to make sense of what we see. It also plays a role in language, particularly in interpreting context and a person's tone of voice. This is where your imagination lives. This is where new ideas are formed and new connections are being made, where beautiful music is composed and wonderful pictures are created. This is the emotional side of our brains. The non-verbal part, where intuition and feelings reside. It involves holistic thinking—the so-called helicopter view—and daydreaming. The right brain does do a little math, but only rough estimations and comparisons.

The right hemisphere is also where your sense of creativity is. It has the ability to generate or recognize possibilities that could be useful in some way. It taps into the field of problem-solving and our communication with others. Finding new patterns and relationships, creating meaningful new interpretations. A fun exercise to train your creative right brain is the Alternative Uses Test, developed by Joy Paul Guilford in 1967. This exercise stretches your creativity by giving you two minutes to think of as many possible uses for an everyday object, like a paper clip, chair, or brick.

Here's an example brainstorm for alternative uses for a butter knife:

- cutting food
- screwdriver
- hammer
- letter opener
- conducting baton
- paperweight
- use two as drumsticks
- use the back to stir the sugar in your coffee
- back-scratcher to reach the itch between your shoulder blades

The Alternative Uses Test measures divergent thinking across four subcategories:

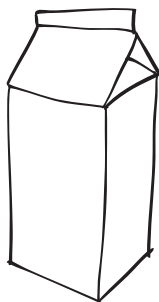
Fluency – how many different uses you can come up with within those two minutes

Originality – how uncommon all of those uses are (for example, “conducting baton” is a less common use of a butter knife than for “cutting food”)

Flexibility – how many areas your answers cover (in this example, “screwdriver” and “hammer” are both in the DIY area)

Elaboration –the level of detail in responses (“back-scratcher to reach the itch between your shoulder blades” would be worth more than “paperweight”)

Now try it yourself: How many uses for
an empty milk carton can you think of?
You have two minutes. Go!



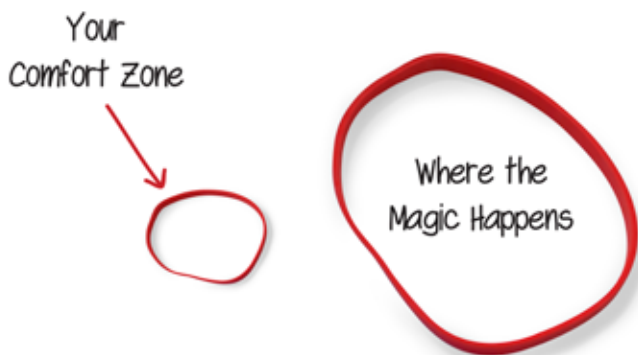
In the creative process, you need both sides of your brain, although not necessarily at the same time. Brainstorming is essentially a process of divergence—getting as many ideas as possible — followed by the process of convergence—in which you (and possibly your team, if you’re doing this as a group) select the best solutions.

Brainstorming is essentially a process of divergence—getting as many ideas as possible—followed by a process of convergence.

First, you need to stimulate the creative right part of the brain, allowing thoughts and ideas to wander freely. By deliberately postponing judgement, you temporarily shut down your logical left-brain thinking. When you start brainstorming, everything is possible and nothing is weird. That way, you create as many options and ideas as you can. If you deliberately ignore your left brain, all solutions could work, no matter how crazy they might seem. These suggestions can inspire you and others in your group to come up with even more ideas, using each other’s thoughts as stepping stones. After you’ve come up with a long list of ideas, you can let your left hemisphere help you decide on the best solution, using criteria like feasibility and time constraints. Pay attention to how your logical left brain is a master at coming up with reasons why things won’t work. It wants to really keep you within your comfort zone.

Expand Your Comfort Zone

Staying inside your comfort zone feels good. Hence the name: it's where you feel most comfortable. All seems clear, under control. But deep down, you know that this is just an illusion. You also know that "out there" is where all the magic happens.



So how can you stretch yourself comfortably? Here are five ways to get started:

1. Change the Little Things

Change your breakfast routine. Order tea instead of coffee. Try a different flavor of ice cream to tickle your taste buds. Pick up a magazine you've never read before. Watch a different TV channel. There are many little things you can do to make a change. It will provide new inspiration and help to build up momentum for bigger things to come.

2. Wander About

Take a different route to work. Enjoy an afternoon walking through the city where you live. Be a tourist in your own town.

Be amazed by the architecture of the buildings around you. You'll be surprised at what you might see. Perhaps you will discover a new coffee place, or a cool shop to visit. Sometimes, we can become so blinded by the routines in our lives that we don't notice the environment around us.

3. Talk to People

Open your mouth—kindly—to people you have never met before. Talk to the person sitting at the next table when you go out for lunch. Smile at the person waiting in line at the supermarket, and ask what they'll be having for dinner that night. Start a conversation with the person behind the cash register. Everybody's got a story to tell. Who knows what you might hear? Perhaps you'll meet your new business partner, or make a new friend. You might even find the love of your life! Make it a habit to interact with five strangers every day.

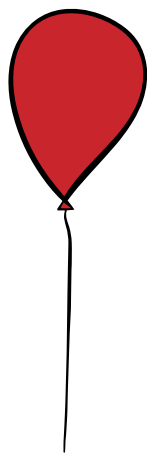
4. Say "Yes" More Often

Especially when you're a person who tends to hold things off. Force yourself to be more spontaneous. Go on that adventure. Allow yourself to have fun. Accept that invitation to that party where you don't know any of the guests. Go see that foreign movie your friend wants to watch. You might even enjoy it. At the very least, you will discover new things about yourself.

5. What's the Worst That Could Happen?

Imagine what would be the absolute worst that could happen when stepping out of your comfort zone. How realistic is that fear? Do you think it will actually come true? And if so... is it really that bad? Either you win, or you learn. There are only positive outcomes in the end.

Imagine blowing up a red balloon. Before you can fill it up with air, you first need to overcome a little bit of resistance. Once you have blown the balloon up to a nice round ball, let out all the air. (I'll leave it up to you whether or not you want to make those funny, squeaky noises.) When your balloon is fully deflated, you'll notice it's slightly bigger than before. The same concept applies to your comfort zone. Once you have expanded it in one direction, it automatically expands to all other areas in life too. So be bold, and stretch yourself. When was the last time you did something for the first time, Marketing Superhero?

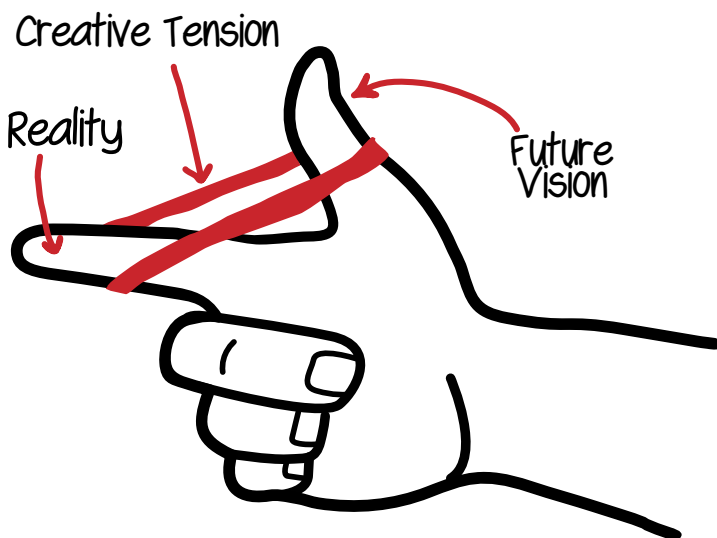


Once you expand your comfort zone in one direction, it automatically expands to all other areas in life too.

Creative Tension and Setting Goals

The Creative Tension model was developed by Robert Fritz, and illustrates the stretch between the current reality and the desired vision of the future. It's based on a basic principle found throughout nature: tension seeks out resolution. There is tension between the future vision and the current reality you're facing. During the creative process, you need to keep one eye on where you want to go, and one on where you currently are. Since we're creating a future that doesn't yet exist, there will most likely be a discrepancy between what you want and what you've got.

To illustrate this, imagine you have an elastic band between your thumb and index finger.



Not enough tension results in little or no improvements; the rubber band slips right off your fingers. Too much stretching results in stress and a potential burnout. In other words: the elastic band will snap under too much tension. You need to find the right balance, by formulating your goals in a stretching, but not overly tense way. This is both true for your business and for personal goals.

Goals should not be based on the past. The future is ours to design. Remember the pen exercise from our previous chapter? On the right-hand side, representing our future, there was just empty space for us to create in. First, determine where you want to go, then choose how you're going to get there. Many people work the other way around: they start with their means—let's say they have a car—and then start planning their destination.

The distance they can bridge by car is much smaller than the distance they could have gone by plane. Imagine if they'd have picked a space shuttle to fly them to the moon! If it's a truly remarkable goal, something that gets you excited, you will find the necessary means to make it reality—even though you currently might not have a clue about how to get there.

A classic example for goal-setting happened more than 50 years ago, on May 25, 1961. On that day, President John F. Kennedy stood before Congress and announced: “This nation should commit itself to achieving the goal, before this decade is out, of landing a man on the moon and returning him safely to Earth.” At that point in time, nobody at NASA knew how that could be done. Nevertheless, on July 20, 1969, Apollo 11 commander Neil Armstrong stepped onto the moon's surface and made history.

Besides being very clear and very compelling, President Kennedy did a third important thing. He made his “man on the moon” goal public. A goal is a dream with a deadline. So be brave: declare what you set out to achieve and by when. There is always a way, as long as you're committed. Let the world know what you're dedicating your time to, so others can motivate you, support you, and hold you accountable. Formulate your own goals in the present tense, so your brain starts to actively look for evidence that it's already true. Be sure to make it positive and exciting. Choose something that you really, really want. This will give you the energy and drive to make it a reality.

Having a goal means you're a failure until the moment you succeed. Working on a project means you're succeeding until the moment you fail.

Write down your own goals, both personal and professional. Check yourself: are they in the present tense? Are they positive? Do they excite you? Did you set a distinct deadline?



Personal Goals:

Business Goals:

It's important to transform goals into projects. Goals are future-oriented. Projects are in the here-and-now. Goals are things you work towards; projects are things you work on. Having a goal means you focus on the desired result. With a project, you focus on daily actions. Having a goal means you're a failure until the moment you succeed. Doing a project means you're succeeding until the moment you fail. Notice the difference? Now look back at your list of goals above. How can you transform them into projects you can work on as of today? Which actions do you need to take?

Grab That Oppotunity

When you set clear goals, you greatly increase the chances of spotting the right oppotunity when they pass by. Clear goals help to tweak and fine-tune the filters in your mind, so it unconsciously keeps an eye out for those oppotunities that will help make you reach your goals. I was handed the oppotunity for great insight during a seminar run by Nisandeh Neta, which I want to share here with you. It could be a life-changing experience for you as well.

But let's first do a little test. Have you noticed something while reading this section? Did you spot the missing letter "r" in the word "oppotunity" in the heading and throughout the first paragraph? (Maybe you even got a little upset, and questioned my expertise as a writer.) Or were you eager to read on and curious to see what this part could bring you?

This brief test can teach you a great deal about the way you approach everything you do. Either you focus on what is, or you focus on what is lacking. Let me make one thing clear, I'm not making a plea for bad spelling here. I'm sharing this illustrative example with you to help you determine where your initial focus lies. Do you look for the possibilities life brings you, or

do you spot what is wrong? And rest assured that if the latter is the case, we've all been trained to spot what is missing. Our whole education system is based on learning not to make mistakes. However, that means you might be missing out on some great opportunities. After all, you never know how they arise. Opportunities simply pop up, unannounced. And some might need a little fine-tuning. Spotting the right ones remains an interesting challenge. Look at what is being presented to you and embrace the possibilities. Say "yes, and..." instead of "yes, but..." and add ideas for improvements and adaptations using your own sense of creativity, instead of discarding them and stating why things won't work. That's what thinking in possibilities all comes down to.

Here are three habits to help you become a magnet to new opportunities, as you might be creating them yourself.

Be Curious and Pay Attention.

Notice what's happening around you. Notice the kind of preparation and responses people value. Think about how you can make processes and meetings work better. Notice what makes people's lives easier, faster, and more meaningful. Develop a habit of paying attention. Not only will you grow as a person, you will also become a natural resource to the people around you. And that will allow you to grasp new opportunities for your brand or business the moment they emerge.

Be Aware of Your Own Impact.

The way you look, smile, answer your emails—they all cause a response in someone that you might never be told about. Everything you do has an impact. When you make decisions, think them through to understand how they will affect other people. Develop a habit of considering how your actions affect the people around you. People will see that you make their life easier, rather than creating more work for them. It will become more natural for them to think of you when new opportunities arise.

Imagine Opportunities Everywhere You Look.

Opportunities are everywhere. Look for ideas and trends that match your brand or business. Bend and twist those ideas to make them uniquely yours. Develop a habit of looking at everything to see how you might improve it—how can you make it better, easier, faster, friendlier, more fun, more exciting, more inviting, more... anything. Choose opportunities that benefit other people, and they will support your taking advantage of that opportunity—in business and in your personal life.

By nature, opportunities come with a time frame of their own. Some are gone in an instant, while others linger a little longer. But in the end, every opportunity has an expiry date.

Sometimes it will be communicated clearly, but quite often, you'll only know in hindsight that you missed a great chance. The challenge lies in grabbing the right ones at the right moment. But don't beat yourself up for missing one. To quote Sir Richard Branson on this: "Opportunities are like buses. If you miss one, there's always another one coming."

We often get very creative when we think of why an opportunity might not work. Our logical left brain is happy to point out where our ideas will fail. But just because you don't know how something can be done, that doesn't mean it's impossible. You might be lacking some skills. A good place to start is learning to think of more possibilities by regularly training your creative mind.

Train Your Creative Muscles

Creativity works just like a muscle: it can be trained. When you work out regularly, your muscles will become stronger. The same applies to your creative thinking. If you use it more often, you'll become better and better at developing new ideas, at being able to come up with more alternative solutions to choose from. A true Marketing Superhero does regular creative workouts. Here are some suggestions to help you get going.

Freewriting

One great way to do a creative workout is to set up a freewriting routine; preferably in the morning, or late at night before going to bed—depending whether you're a morning or an evening person. Use pen and paper to capture your ideas during these designated time slots. Just keep writing down your thoughts, uninterrupted, until you have about two or three pages of text. Don't worry too much about what comes up. Just write. Afterwards, review the outcome and make new connections.

Walk the Talk

This is a simple and flexible technique to help you access your subconscious. It's nothing more than talking quickly—and uninterrupted—while taking a walk with a friend or coworker. Don't think too much about what to say, just keep on talking to clear your mind. During this exercise, your partner is your sounding board; only there to listen and to summarize the overall themes once you're done talking. Ten minutes is a good length for this exercise, as it allows you to pass through all the familiar stuff and provide space for other things to pop up from your subconscious.

Think in Images

Start drawing, or cut out pictures from magazines. Make a mood board or collage. A picture says more than a thousand words. It captures and translates emotions. So if you're stuck in your creative flow and don't know what to do, grab a pile of magazines and tear out pictures. Collect images on your smartphone. Imagine what your ideal outcome would look like. Along the way, you'll become clear on what you need to do in order to get there.

Fresh Eyes

Look at the world with a fresh pair of eyes. Take a step back and see the wider perspective. Examine the problem from various angles, and you will get a different view on your challenge. If you keep doing what you always did, you end up getting what you always got. If you want things to change, you need to alter your ways. Another way to do this is by inviting other people in. It's often easier for outsiders to pinpoint what needs to be done in a certain situation. Listen to their advice and feedback with an open mind.

Formulate a Challenge

Our brains work in a very interesting way. When you formulate your problem as a creative challenge—How can I be more engaging? How can I reach more customers?—your creative mind immediately comes up with solutions. Ask yourself—or anybody else, for that matter—open-ended questions, and be amazed at what you can come up with.

Analogies

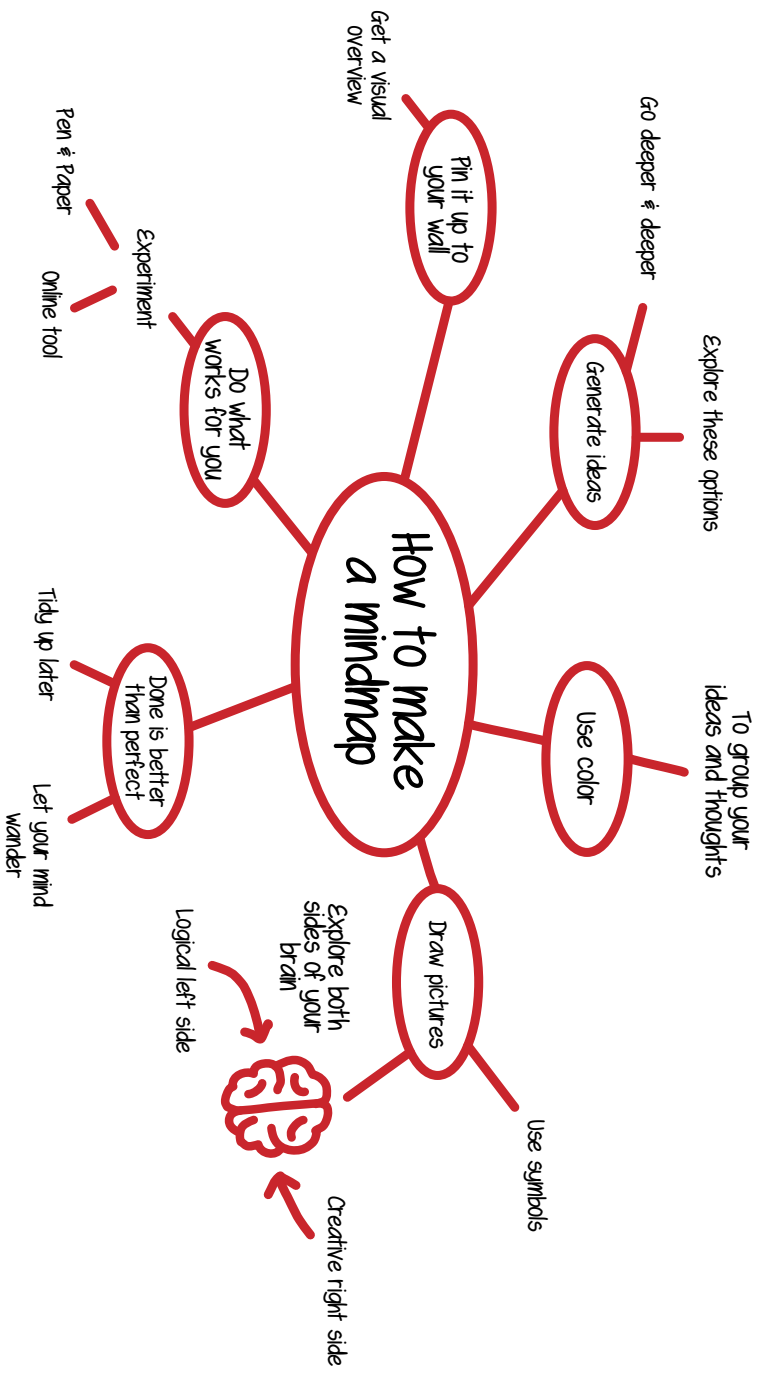
Think in analogies to see which solutions from other industries, brands, or countries could help you in your situation. Adopt and adapt. Don't be afraid to steal a good solution. Just be sure to modify it to your personal situation, brand, or category. It's better to use proven strategies than to fail on your own! Nature is also a great source of inspiration. Several brilliant ideas, especially in the field of technology, have come from mimicking Mother Nature; Georges de Mestral invented Velcro because he wondered if the plant seeds that clung to his pants and his dog's fur after a walk in the woods could be transformed into something useful.

Personality Switch

Another creative technique is the personality switch. Ask yourself or your team: how would Steve Jobs approach this? Or Sir Richard Branson? Einstein? Mother Teresa? Walt Disney? Any other inspiring person you can think of will do, dead or alive. Place yourself in their shoes and explore your challenge from their perspective.

Mindmapping

For this technique, claimed to be developed by Tony Buzan, you need a big piece of paper. Although there are some great



computer programs and free apps out there for mindmapping as well, I personally prefer using pen and paper. Put your challenge in the middle and place key words around them, based on free association. Then brainstorm around these topics some more. This is also a great way to get a visual overview of all the things you've got on your mind. See page 54 to get an idea of how to make a mindmap.

Force Fit

Another great way to get new, creative ideas is to force fit two random things, like words or images. For example, pick any two words from your mindmap and think about new solutions to your challenge with the use of these two, random stimuli. As mentioned before, our brains love puzzle-solving. Use the outcome as stepping stones to come up with even more options and ideas.

The 6 Marketing Superpowers

The following chapters will be devoted to the six powers of a true Marketing Superhero. They all come from the same source: our creative minds. However, these six Marketing Superpowers are all linked to creativity in slightly different ways, as will be explained at the end of each chapter.

1. Transferable Thinking comes down to keeping an open mind; adapting ideas and strategies to fit your own situation. It's about actively asking yourself: how could this work for me?

2. Consumer Centricity is putting your customer at the heart of everything you do. This requires empathy: putting yourself in someone else's shoes in order to find creative win-win solutions.

3. Superior Business Sense is knowing which buttons to push in order to create value for you and your target audience. This requires your creative mind to look for new patterns in business information. It also means you have to have the guts to break some of the established rules in your business area.

4. Knowing Your Nemesis—your metaphorical archenemy—forces you to be clear about the cause you and your brand, product, or service stand for. Why do you do what you do? Purpose-driven action is infused with determination and passion. And that’s what makes you unstoppable.

5. Focus Pocus is the magic spell of choosing those things that make the biggest impact. This comes down to saying a firm “no” in order to live a true “yes”. It’s taking the “busy” out of “business”, so you get the most out of your precious resources.

6. Executional Excellence is all about implementing your “good enough” plans in an excellent way, by always keeping in mind that “done” really is better than “perfect”.

Before diving into these six Marketing Superpowers in more detail, be sure to capture all your actions from this chapter first!

