



PERSONAS

Seeing Through New Eyes

by Mitchell Ditkoff

If you've ever gone to a costume party, dressed up for Halloween, disguised your voice or pretended to be someone else, you've already experienced one of the most powerful tools for stimulating creativity: *changing your persona* – that is, your public “face.”)

Let's start at the beginning. When you were very young – before you had personality, social security number, PDA, or any regrets – you were basically happy. Life was simple. And so were you. OK, so maybe you didn't have a corner office or a single stock option, but life was great nevertheless. As time passed (and your brain cells began dying, as they do after the age of 20), you worked hard and became **SOMEONE**.

You formed your opinions, got a business card, established credit, got some credentials, and created a resume. In short, you developed an identity, a *persona* – the appearance of a “self” – who you thought you are – the face you showed the world. This self was what you trotted out at parties, business meetings, and whenever



you needed to “relate.” If the world was not receptive to your persona, chances are good that you modified it or, in an courageous act of self-preservation, ignored the opinions of others and held tight to your carefully constructed sense of who you were

(even if you weren't quite sure yourself.) Nothing wrong with that now, is there?



Of course not. Except one thing. Along with having a persona – no matter how well crafted it may be – comes a style of thinking that tends to become habitual. “You” becomes a noun, not a verb. Rote. Lock step. Predictable. Bottom line, you see

things "your way" and forget there are a million *other* ways, equally as valid as yours – or maybe even more so.

Is it terminal – this looking at the world through the peephole of your persona? No, it's not. Is it reversible? Yes, it is. *And the easiest way to do so (thereby opening up thousands of previously unexplored horizons) is let go of the notion of who you think you are* – at least for a little while. (NOTE TO SPIRITUALLY INCLINED: I'm not going to get into the philosophical question here of "Who are you, really?" That's an entirely different hill of beans and will be addressed in a later article on this website). For now, all I'm doing is offering you a simple tool for sparking a higher octave of creativity. To accomplish this goal, all that's required is for you to lay down your current persona for a moment and don another one. Bob Dylan did it when he went from folkie to rocker. Madonna did it/does it every couple of years. And so did Phillip Morris.

I'm talking about letting go of your old worldview and seeing with new eyes.

Kids are very skillful at this. Their ability to change identities on the fly is extraordinary. Give them a cape and they're Superman. Give them a wand and they're Glenda the Good Witch. Hey, forget the cape and wand! With kids, you only need to SAY the words and they're off to another world, trying on entirely new identities and conjuring up all kinds of new possibilities.

If YOU are committed to coming up with a creative solution, idea, or breakthrough way of getting results, put down your old persona for a moment and try on a new one. It's free. It's fun. And it works.

HERE'S HOW: 1) Think of a current project of yours – a challenge, opportunity, or venture; 2) Phrase this project as a question, beginning with the words "How can I?" 3) Select a new persona you are willing to "be" for a few moments – any one you find fascinating; 4) Ask yourself how this person might approach your current project or challenge 5) Look for the underlying principle hidden within their approach – then, using

this underlying principle as a catalyst, conjure up as many possible ideas as you can in the next five minutes.

Here's a real life example: 15 years ago I was attempting to close a deal with a bank who, for the past year, had been waffling about licensing one of idea Champions trainings. I was tired of their procrastination and baffled about how to get closure. One day, on a lunch break, I decided to try my own medicine and asked myself how Tommy Moe, the Olympic gold medal skier, would approach my challenge. I imagined Tommy at the top of a mountain, in full tuck position and his aerodynamic spandex, making a "beeline" to the finish line. That's when it dawned on me. I had to find my sales version of the way he skied. I had to stop "traversing the slope," afraid to fall, afraid to fail, afraid to "wipe out." In short, I had to let go of my safe way of relating to my prospect.. Wolfing down the last of my tuna melt, I returned immediately to my office and sent a fax to the bank in question, giving them four choices 1) Commit today; 2) Commit next week; 3) Call for more information; 4) Decline to license our training, but tell us why. Next to each choice, I placed a handy dandy box for them to check off.

Three hours after I faxed my "Tommy Moe" ultimatum, they faxed me back, having checked off the "Commit Now" box. I am not suggesting that this particular method will work every time. It won't. But what it will do is help you go beyond assumed boundaries into a new domain of previously unconsidered possibilities. And you'll have some fun in the process.

**HOW WOULD ALBERT EINSTEIN APPROACH YOUR PROJECT? MOTHER THERESA?
JOHN LENNON? ROBIN WILLIAMS? ATTILA THE HUN? MADONNA? STEVE JOBS? ALADDIN?
HILLARY CLINTON? BART SIMPSON? YOUR MOTHER? BUDDHA? YOUR BEST FRIEND?**

*This article is excerpted from **BANKING ON INNOVATION**, a 172-page workbook that accompanies Idea Champions' nationally acclaimed creative thinking training. Log onto www.ideachampions.com/banking_on_innovation.shtml for more info.*

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