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Focus on Innovation

Focus on Innovation is a monthly electronic newsletter designed to provoke thoughts and ideas on how to bring innovation to life within the organizations in which we work.

For Those on the Run

Read this month's newsletter to find out how positive moods can positively impact creativity. Discover ways to enhance your mood and increase your creativity.

Feeling Cranky Lately? It May be Affecting Your Creativity

*"Positive emotions are like putting on a wide-angle lens; it's a very broad view of the world."
- Professor Adam Anderson*

It's that time of year again when many of us are over extending ourselves trying to get everything done on our 'to do' lists and for some, getting increasingly more cranky. For those of you who are in this state, it may be affecting your creativity. A University of Toronto study presents the first direct evidence that our mood literally changes the way our visual system filters our perceptual experience suggesting that seeing the world through rose-coloured glasses is more biological reality than metaphor. When people are in good moods, compared with neutral or negative ones, they change the way they perceive their surroundings which in turn positively impacts creativity. Specifically, the study showed that "when in a positive mood, our visual cortex takes in more information, while negative moods result in tunnel vision (For more on this study, refer to the *Journal of Neuroscience* at www.jneurosci.org)."

The University of Toronto study found that "under positive moods, people may process a greater number of objects in their environment, which sounds like a good thing, but it also can result in distraction." Taylor Schmitz, a graduate student of Anderson's and lead author of the study, indicated that "good moods enhance the literal size of the window through which we see the world. The upside of this is that we can see things from a more global, or integrative perspective. The downside is that this can lead to distraction on critical tasks that require narrow focus, such as operating dangerous machinery or airport screening of passenger baggage. Bad moods, on the other hand, may keep us more narrowly focused, preventing us from integrating information outside of our direct attentional focus."

The good news is that this study shows that people can actually be put in a more creative mindset by putting them in a positive mood. For example, increasing the amount of information a person absorbs leads to more creativity. A person can take in more factors and think of better solutions says Anderson. "Positive emotions are like putting on a wide-angle lens," he said. "It's a very broad view of the world."

Anderson's study involved people listening to music or studying facts about Canada to put them in a positive, negative or neutral mood. Then each participant completed some basic exams to test their focus. Subjects in a positive mood tended to focus less on a specific task and absorb more peripheral information, spurring creativity. Though if someone is trying to be accurate on a repetitive task, a positive outlook won't help, Anderson said.

Although you can't force yourself to be creative and that positive moods can be distracting if the work you are doing is very task based, there are things that can be done to enhance your mood (without taking mind altering drugs!). Here are a few suggestions to get you started.

Ways to Enhance Your Mood - From Cranky to Positive

- **Stop hanging out with "Negative Nancy's."** Look around you; are you hanging out with the wrong people; ones who could be bringing you down. Negativity breeds negativity; positivity breeds positivity.
- **Adjust your attitude.** As one colleague once said, when she was at the height of her crankiness, "It's time for an attitude adjustment!" Either figure out what is bothering you and either walk away from it or fix it. If that doesn't work, decide to adjust your attitude about life in general.
- **Listen to Uplifting music.** Go through your music list and pull out all your favourite music that you know will uplift you. Turn it into a playlist that you play when you start to get cranky. While you have it on consider dancing to it.
- **Check in with yourself.** Many of us get crankier as we become more tired or hungry. Tired - learn from our pets - take a nap or multiple naps or go to bed early for a week. Hungry for some means hyperglycemia which often results in crankiness. Keep snacks i.e. nuts, fruit, cheese, etc. on hand to take to avoid this from happening. If everything else fails, chocolate will always help.
- **Watch an old episode of "I Love Lucy.** Remember the chocolate or wine making episode. Check out old episodes on Youtube by clicking on http://video.google.ca/videosearch?hl=en&source=hp&q=i+love+lucy+episodes&um=1&ie=UTF-8&ei=qHQqS66kM5OTIAe4y5GbBw&sa=X&oi=video_result_group&ct=title&resnum=1&ved=OCBYQqwQwAA#
- **Play.** Play with a dog; laugh, smile, run around and be silly!
- **Hang out with a small child for an hour.** Read a Robert Munsch book with them (this website provides a list of all his books <http://www.robertmunsch.com/booklist.cfm>) or play a silly game like *Operation* or *Worms*.
- **Count your blessings.** Okay, this may be corny for some, but making a list of all the things you are grateful for and reading it once a day, will affect your mood.
- **Pretend to be a photographer.** Grab a camera, go out and take pictures of beautiful things. Just focusing on beautiful scenery or things will guarantee a positive mood.

What's the Bottom line

Although we all have days where we feel cranky, extended periods of crankiness will impact your ability to solve problems and situations creatively.

Adapted from articles and information found on the *Affect & Cognition Lab (ACLAB)* website
<http://www.aclab.ca/research/>



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If you would like more information about the ideas and topics listed in this issue, contact Judy Laws, Ph.D. at jlaws@foursightconsulting.com.

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