

Editor's notes:

Creativity and music: Although you can't summon inspiration with a flick of the radio dial, or a tap on your iPod, nevertheless music can set the stage for creativity. Certain types of sounds can stimulate alpha waves in your brain, which normally occur when you're close to sleep. The relaxed sensations created by alpha waves can lower your mental barriers and help you see new connections and possibilities.

Experiment with using music to spur your creative juices by remembering these guidelines:

- **Don't play music nonstop.** It may distract you when you need to focus your attention on details. You may also train yourself to tune it out. Use music when you need a boost. The best time is usually the mid-afternoon, to get through the post-lunch energy slump.
- **Choose the right music.** What's right? That depends on your own tastes, but many creative types find that classical music of the baroque style relaxes their mind and makes them more receptive to new ideas.
- **Keep your balance.** You need a variety of fast-paced and slower music, or your brain will get tired quickly. Choose music you're familiar with, so you can pay attention to it without being unable to do other things. It should be rhythmical but not too repetitive, so your mind can wander freely.
- **Be patient.** Just turning on a song won't instantly turn you into a genius. Feed your mind in other ways, with art, games, and sufficient rest so you're ready and able to be creative when the time is right.

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Here's what's special about this month:

Canada Day, July 1 -- Canadians celebrate the birth of their country on this day, the anniversary of Confederation in 1867, which joined the British North American provinces under one federal government. "Canada" comes from an Iroquois word "kanata," meaning village. Other country names that were considered at the time of confederation included Victorialand, Borealia, Superior, Norland, and the United Provinces of North America.

Halfway point of the year, July 2. At noon, 182½ days will have passed and 182½ days will remain in the year.

Dog Days of Summer, July 3-August 11 -- Ancient Romans believed that this 40-day stretch of hot, sultry weather was the result of Sirius, the Dog Star, rising in conjunction with the sun. Because it is the brightest star, they believed its heat reinforced the sun's, raising temperatures during this period.

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Independence Day, July 4 -- The Fourth of July celebrates the adoption of the Declaration of Independence by the original 13 colonies of the United States 234 years ago.

Running of the Bulls, July 6-14 -- As part of the festival of San Fermin, each morning young men race through the streets of Pamplona, Spain, "escorting" to the bull ring the bulls fighting on that day.

Bastille Day, July 14 -- The beginning of the French Revolution in 1789, when French citizens stormed the medieval fortress and prison known as the Bastille, freeing seven prisoners.

News flash:

Most enjoy weekends more than work

Researchers at the University of Rochester found workers tend to have better moods, more energy, and fewer physical complaints on the weekend.

News of the incredibly obvious? Maybe not. Even people with interesting, desirable jobs reported being happier on Saturday and Sunday, which may suggest that job satisfaction isn't just a question of pay and status.

In the study, 74 adults ages 18 to 62 completed a brief questionnaire three times a day, rating their positive and negative feelings and physical health. From Friday evening to Sunday afternoon, the subjects generally felt greater autonomy and a better sense of connection, whereas their workweek was dominated by feelings of time pressure and external demands.

Workplaces that can create a better sense of self-direction and connection may find that their employees are more engaged and productive Monday through Friday.

Get centered in a minute or three

Having a tough day? Try taking a mini-meditation break, suggests Kathleen Hall, founder of The Stress Institute. You can do a mini-meditation nearly anywhere -- while you wait in line at the store or when you're stuck in traffic. A mini takes only about one to three minutes. Here's how you do it: Take a breath and, if you are able (use discretion), close your eyes. Now take several deep breaths and repeat a short affirmation that is meaningful to you, such as "I am calm" or "I'm letting go." After a couple of minutes, you should be able to notice a shift in your energy. Keep in mind, Hall says, that tension is sometimes simply exhaustion, and giving yourself the space to relax can reenergize you and clear your head.

Final verdict: An asteroid killed the dinosaurs

The asteroid that killed the dinosaurs 65 million years ago crashed into Earth at 20 times the speed of a bullet, creating a destructive force a billion times more powerful than the Hiroshima atom bomb.

That's the latest conclusion from a review of the evidence exploring the cause of the Cretaceous-Tertiary (KT) extinction, which enabled mammals to evolve into the dominant life form on our planet.

The asteroid was about 15 kilometers wide (nine miles), and fell into the Mexican region of Chicxulub. The impact would have sparked fires on a huge scale, as well as earthquakes, continental landslides, and tsunamis, while blasting enough material into the atmosphere to cut off sunlight and set off a global winter that existing species couldn't survive.

Yahoo News reports that some scientists had speculated that the KT extinction was caused by a series of volcanic eruptions over 1.5 million years in the region of the world that is now India, but the scientific review found that the mass extinction occurred too rapidly to be explained by long-term volcanic activity.

The Secret of Happiness revealed!

What makes us happier: the things we do, or the things we own? The answer is a little more complicated than you might think, according to the Journal of Consumer Research. When we're satisfied, we tend to be happier with experiences like a vacation than with goods like a plasma TV.

But when something goes wrong -- the airline loses our luggage (experience), or the TV breaks (product) -- our negative reaction to the experience tends to be stronger than the negative response to the product. One conclusion: Consumers should be very careful when choosing experience-based goods to buy (like vacations or concerts), since the impact of a bad experience will lead to greater unhappiness.

Time is crucial when disaster strikes

Who survives and who perishes when a disaster strikes may depend on how much time people have to react to the danger. Researchers at the University of Zurich, the Center for Research in Economics, and Queensland University looked at data from two famous disasters—the Titanic and the Lusitania.

The Titanic hit an iceberg, and the Lusitania was sunk by a torpedo. The Titanic took two hours and 40 minutes to sink, while the Lusitania went down in only 18 minutes.

The research found that a child was 50 percent more likely to have survived on the Titanic, and a woman was approximately 50 percent more likely to survive than a man. On the Lusitania, however, men were almost 8 percent more likely to live through the emergency. The researchers speculate that the extra time passengers had on the Titanic allowed males to conform to social norms and give their lifeboat seats to "women and children first," whereas when men had little time to make a decision, they opted for survival over chivalry.

Don't try forcing yourself to sleep

The harder you try to fall asleep, the more elusive dreamland becomes. That's the finding of a 1996 study in the journal, Behavior Research and Therapy.

In an experiment, 100 college students were split into two groups. One group was told to fall asleep as quickly as possible; the other was instructed to go to sleep whenever they could.

The "fall asleep quickly" group took longer to drift off than their counterparts. The scientists theorize that trying to fall asleep creates a sense of frustration that drives sleep away. Insomniacs who constantly monitor their state of consciousness will wake themselves up time and time again, creating a self-fulfilling situation.

Is it a tool, or a toy?

How science becomes entertainment

No one can ever be 100 percent sure on how technology will be used. Guglielmo Marconi, for example, expected the radio to become a tool for ship-to-shore communication, not a form of entertainment. And early computers were designed to study the weather, and processes within nuclear explosions. The computers built in the 1940s and 1950s were about the size of a truck, and at the time nobody could have even envisioned that teenagers would be sitting down to them for "social networking." When you look at technology, think of entertainment. You may see applications no one has thought of yet.

Seek alternatives to brainstorming when you need a range of ideas

Everyone knows that brainstorming is the best way to generate ideas in a group, right? Actually, some recent research suggests that might not always be the case.

In experiments conducted by researchers at Texas A&M University, participants were found to produce fewer ideas when they were part of a brainstorming session than they did when working individually — a difference of up to 44 percent. When working separately, participants also generated a wider variety of ideas.

In addition, the researchers found that people in brainstorming meetings have a tendency to quickly conform to the first few ideas they're exposed to, thus leading to a narrower range of options overall.

The researchers were careful to point out that they're not advocating for the complete elimination of brainstorming sessions. But in situations where you need the widest variety of ideas possible, you might get better results letting people work separately before sharing their ideas with the group.

On the other hand, when you want to explore a limited number of options in depth, interaction during a traditional brainstorming meeting is probably your best bet.

Have a Safe and Happy Summer!