

WHAT READERS LIKE YOU ARE SAYING:

I have always considered myself a creative person, but David's book has given me a whole new range of tools to help me get my creative on! *Crystal McGregor*

Loved this book! David has articulated a refreshing and clever perspective on creating change in your life and world. Highly recommended for anyone feeling stuck and wanting to make some changes. *Jen Jeavons*

Mentally exhilarating! Revisiting childhood thinking was akin to jumping naked from a rope into a cold creek – when the world feels fresh again and everything seems possible. A brilliant book! *Suzanne Bouchier*

A simply wonderful book packed full with new ways of viewing creativity and cultivating new creative practices. So many of the tools I've discovered in this book I've already implemented. Brilliant. *Liana McCluskey*

Each chapter is succinct, but packs a punch. Watch out, I say! *Sue Heathwaite*

Inspirational, awe-inspiring. A must-read. *Tanya Kirkegaard*

A fantastic book filled with enlightened wisdom and inspiring stories. *Rick Barry*

Since reading this book I am seeking silver linings, rather than being overwhelmed by clouds. It helps you to see beyond the cage of rational constraint. *Wally Wight*

I highly recommend this book to everyone. It helps you to analyse many aspects of your life and to work out *why* you're doing what you're doing. It gives you permission to change the rules and live life on the edge. I've never read a book that posed so many relevant questions to me. It got me thinking outside the box. *Jackie Orme Ward*

Brilliant. So inspiring! A deeply personal and profound story. *Andrew Keast*

YOUR NEW WINGS

living life more creatively



DAVID ENGWICHT
CHANGE COACH

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We all have wings

‘WHAT IS THE SECRET of your creativity?’ asked Professor David Begg, the minister in charge of Edinburgh’s transport system. ‘Could you teach my managers to think like you do?’

‘Who, me? Creative?’ I was taken aback by David’s question. I had never thought of myself as ‘creative’. And I didn’t have the foggiest idea how my brain worked, and if this was somehow different from the way the minds of the other people at the table operated.

But I’m getting ahead of my story. First, I should explain how a high-school dropout from Australia ended up at a dinner party in Edinburgh with a politician and a group of senior bureaucrats – and how that led to the writing of this book two decades later.

In 1987 I was washing windows for a living when a brochure arrived in my letterbox announcing a public meeting to discuss a plan to widen a road through my neighbourhood. I left the meeting a member of a community group set up to fight the proposal. A week later I was elected media

spokesperson. I had no formal education, and certainly no background in transport or urban planning. One year later I produced a small booklet, *Traffic Calming*, that became an underground bestseller. By 1991 I had written a second book, which is still being used as a text in university courses. In that book I proposed a number of social innovations, including the *Walking School Bus* – an invention that is now operating in cities around the globe.

In 1966, David Begg, a lecturer in economics at Edinburgh Napier University in Scotland who declared himself a great fan of my writings, invited me to Edinburgh to meet his senior staff. I couldn't account to him for the secrets of my creative way of thinking about issues, but I was left with a nagging thought that it could have something to do with my marginal experiences as a child.

My father was an itinerant gospel preacher in the Assemblies of God, a fringe Pentecostal church. Our family would roll into a small, conservative country town towing a caravan with the question 'What think ye of Christ?' emblazoned on the side of the gospel truck. The 'circus' was in town, and we were the circus freaks. Mum would get out her battered old piano-accordion and Dad an oversized Bible. They would sing a hymn or two, if you could call it singing. Mum would fumble with the keys, while Dad droned along in a monotone. He would then thump his Bible and preach to the town drunk and some stray dogs: 'Repent ye, for the end of the world is nigh.' I cowered inside the truck, trying to be invisible, because I knew what was coming.

The next day I would go to yet another new school, and

the bullies would rejoice because Jesus had just sent them a brand-new punching bag. Long before the novelty of beating the crap out of the freak wore off, we would pack up and move to the next conservative country town, where the ritual would start over. Apparently, this happened 26 times, but I wasn't counting. I was too busy trying to be invisible.

I vividly recall sitting alone in the classroom one summer's day, staring out the window at the kids below on the quadrangle. They were doing folk dancing, while I was doing spelling and times tables. My parents had sent a note to the teacher asking that I be excused from the activity, out of fear that folk dancing would ignite illicit passions in my loins. I was overwhelmed with the sense of being totally alone – stranded in some kind of no man's land. My parents were deeply anti-intellectual, which meant I didn't fit into the school system. On the other hand, I wasn't really a part of the religious sect into which I had been born. I was a PK – pastor's kid – and PKs didn't mix with the other children in the congregation. Besides, my father considered himself a misfit among the other ministers, which is why he became an itinerant preacher, constantly on the move. Not only were we on the outer fringes of society, but I also felt like an outsider within my own family, placing me on the fringe of the fringe.

When I arrived back in Australia from Scotland, I decided to do some research and attempt to answer David Begg's questions. I rode my bike to the Queensland State Library, and as I was chaining it outside, I had a flash of inspiration. At school I had learned that, in nature, the most productive

place for new life to evolve is where ecosystems meet and overlap, such as tidal mudflats where the sea meets the land, a space that is both sea and land. One of the scientific terms for these spaces is 'edge territory'. As I ambled into the library, I began to wonder whether my experiences as a child, living on the edge, were indeed the 'tidal mudflats of my creativity'.

I knew from science that there were other environmental conditions that govern the level of creativity in nature. As I searched the library shelves, I began to formulate a hypothesis. If the human brain is a result of the creative drive in nature, then the laws governing creativity in nature would also govern creativity in the human brain.

This *evolutionary model of creativity* turned conventional wisdom on its head. It proposes that the human brain has evolved over millions of years into a fantastic 'creativity factory'.

Inside our skull is an organ built specifically and primarily to continue the creative processes evident in nature. These abilities are intrinsic to the very nature of the brain. We were born with metaphorical wings that enable our creativity to take flight. But sadly, our education and other life experiences have a tendency to clip those wings. In fact, most people were more creative as children than they are as adults. I concluded that the only difference between me and the senior managers at the dinner party in Edinburgh was that circumstances had helped me to preserve what nature had gifted me at birth. My lack of education, and the fact that I lived the first 37

6 | years of my life in a cultural backwater, put a protective wall around my instinctive creativity.

I also concluded that it was entirely possible for those bureaucrats to recover what they had lost, and to bring this creativity into their professional and personal lives.

My answer to David Begg's question, 'Can you teach my managers to think like you do?' was a resounding, 'Hell, yes!'

Meet Dell, Malcolm and Jacinta

OVER THE NEXT two years, I researched and thought about creativity, and wrote down what I had discovered in the draft of a book called *Unlock Your Creative Genius*.

When my life as a ‘doctor of public places’ snowballed, the manuscript gathered dust. I would pull it out every now and then and do an edit, then return it to the filing cabinet. I would go back to running training courses for planning professionals, giving keynote addresses and producing town-centre plans.

My passion was helping communities to reinvent dysfunctional public spaces. This work eventually led to my company developing the *7 Day Makeover*, where volunteers transform their town centre, from planning to celebration, in just seven days. While the process produced spectacular places, the most satisfying outcome for me was the deep-seated shift in the communities themselves. The traditional methods of bringing about change – attending community consultation meetings, reading reports, writing submissions and sitting on advisory boards – have resulted in deep levels of cynicism

and disengagement because of their extremely poor track record in delivering real results on the ground. But during the *7 Day Makeover*, volunteers experienced a new way of making change happen, right here, right now, without endless talk, and sometimes on a shoestring budget. Suddenly they glimpsed new possibilities. Towns like Paihia, in New Zealand, used the methods they learned during the makeover to transform their entire town, one small step at a time – with the occasional giant stride forward. As Michael Duff, Group Manager, Assets and Infrastructure in Westport, said after his town's makeover, 'They say that "the stories we tell is the culture we create" and the new conversations here in Westport are full of pride, hope and positivity. All thanks to *7 Days*.'

I began wondering if it would be possible to use the techniques we pioneered in the *7 Day Makeover* to help people change their lives in a very short period of time – people such as Dell, Malcolm and Jacinta. Let's meet them now.

Dell

Dell has spent the last twelve years as a support worker for young people with mental health issues. She took the job because she wanted to make a difference in the world, but for the past two years she has felt increasingly frustrated and burnt out. The culture of her organisation, coupled with government regulations, makes creating change feel like wading through quicksand. The more Dell struggles, the deeper she sinks. As she looks at the mounting pile of files on her desk, she asks: 'Is this how I want to spend the rest of my life?'

Dell would love to throw in her job and find more fulfilling employment, but she feels trapped. She has a mortgage and two children to support.

But dig a little deeper and we discover that Dell has felt stuck for as long as she can remember. As a child she struggled at school, while her brother, Bryant, topped all his classes and went on to become a surgeon. Bryant is the apple of his father's eye. When Dell was ten, it was discovered that she had blurred vision. While the new glasses allowed her to see the blackboard, they gave rise to a new problem – merciless teasing. At sixteen she became so depressed, she started cutting. At eighteen, she fell pregnant and married a guy whom she later learned was stripping stolen cars and selling the parts. At 23 she was separated, with two children to feed and a restraining order against her ex. Three years of court battles later, she was granted sole custody of the children.

Malcolm

Malcolm thought he had a charmed life. As a kid he had loved solving puzzles, so his job as a software engineer gave him great satisfaction. He married his childhood sweetheart and owned the best house on the street, which was constantly filled with music and the laughter of three wonderful children. But six months ago, Malcolm lost his job and hasn't been able to find employment since. This was the final straw for his marriage – an event that took him totally by surprise. He hadn't the foggiest idea how unhappy his wife of sixteen years had become. Now he finds himself living in a tiny room in a friend's house, utterly alone. There isn't even enough

room for his children to sleep over. Malcolm is confused about what he really wants to do with the rest of his life. He feels that his boat isn't just drifting: it's slowly sinking.

Malcolm believes that he's a victim of other people's choices; as a result, he feels powerless to change his circumstances.

Jacinta

Jacinta, forty-seven, is a jewellery maker who has won two prestigious jewellery awards. Unfortunately, she earns only a meagre income from selling her unique creations at markets and festivals, where most people are looking for bargains, not high-end art. To supplement that income, she teaches jewellery making part time at an art school. Jacinta loves sharing her knowledge with her students and is on a high for hours after each class. Whenever she sells one of her pieces, she feels like she is sharing a piece of her soul with someone, and that she is somehow linked to them forever. If you asked her how satisfied she is with her life, she would score it nine out of ten. She is deeply connected to a wellspring of creativity that flows effortlessly. In fact, she has so many creative ideas, she doesn't have time to implement them all.

But sometimes Jacinta is vaguely aware that there is a ceiling that limits what is possible for her to achieve in life. Even though she feels totally fulfilled at the moment, she wonders what may lay beyond that invisible barrier. What if she has reached only a tiny fraction of her potential? How could she live her life even more creatively? How could she make every minute detail of her life become an amazing work of art?

Where are you on the continuum?

Dell, Malcolm and Jacinta represent a continuum, and at this moment of time, you sit somewhere on it.

Dell is *habitually* stuck. Even though she isn't aware of it, being stuck has become an ingrained part of her identity. Malcolm is *temporarily* stuck. Before losing his job and his marriage, he was living a relatively fulfilling life – albeit with infinitely more potential than he realised. He has suffered a temporary setback, though at this point in time it feels permanent. Jacinta is an *activated creative* with potential for even greater levels of fulfilment, but she lacks the tools to make this happen.

It is important to know where you sit on this continuum because it determines how much grit and determination you will need to don your new wings and make change happen.

If you are more like Dell, and have felt stuck most of your life, it will require a Herculean effort to get unstuck, even if you have an intense desire for change. There are several



Where do you sit on the continuum?

reasons for this. First, being stuck has become a habit, a way of life, and ingrained habits are hard to break. Second, you have never experienced living an unstuck life, so moving from what you know to what you don't know can feel very risky and requires a great deal of courage. Third, believe it or not, you are getting rewards for being stuck. Stuck people get a lot of attention from friends and family because their life is always in crisis. This attention can be very addictive. Getting unstuck requires you to go cold turkey and give up this attention. Finally, being stuck has become part of your self-image, so getting unstuck requires you to fundamentally change who you see when you look in the mirror. And that is a very scary proposition.

Unfortunately, this book won't be for the majority of Dells in the world – not right now, anyway. There is very little I can say that will give you, if you're stuck like Dell, sufficient motivation to overcome these challenges. You'll have to dig deep within yourself to find that courage. This process starts by realistically assessing the size of the challenge. Acknowledge that being stuck is a habit and that living unstuck is a whole new lifestyle that is foreign to you. Be honest about the rewards you are getting for being stuck. Face the fact that you have to ditch your current identity and totally reinvent yourself. Ask yourself the question: 'Am I *really* ready to attempt this? Am I motivated enough?' If you are ready, read on and I will give you tools to create the new, unstuck you. If you aren't ready, put the book on your bookshelf, pull it out once a year and ask: 'Am I ready now?'

If you are more like Malcolm, then this book will give

you practical tools to harness your adverse circumstances and turn them to your advantage. But first you need to ask yourself: 'Is this truly just a temporary state of stuckness, or is it the latest episode in a long-running series?' If it's the latter, you may be further down the continuum towards Dell, where being stuck is deeply entrenched as a way of life.

If you are more like Jacinta, then this book will help you to unleash your potential and create a purposeful, deeply satisfying life. Even so, it is worth asking if deep in the recesses of your heart there is a tiny bit of Dell or Malcolm.

Getting the most from this book

I suggest that you do a quick initial read of the book to get an overview. The first part deals with the nature of creativity, and with how our brains are hard-wired to operate like a massive creativity factory. We then get into the practicalities of how to turn everyday living into *creative living*.

The last part of the book contains some practical exercises to help you don your new wings and build an amazing life. One of the things we learned from the people who read an early draft of this book was that some felt overwhelmed by the sheer number of ideas the book gave them for improving their life and work. I have therefore included some exercises that will help you to clarify the priority areas that need your attention. Like our early readers, you will probably find yourself going back a second and a third time to digest relevant sections.

You may feel very enlightened after the first read-through. But knowledge alone produces very little change.

Deep-seated change requires symbolic actions. When I was in the process of getting unstuck (yes, I have lived the contents of this book), my counsellor would ask me to do ridiculous things – such as take ‘Little David’ (my inner child) to the park and give him a swing. On one occasion I went to a fairy shop and bought Little David a goblin doll. The shop attendant asked if I wanted magic fairy dust sprinkled in the gift-wrapping. When I said yes, she asked who the lucky kid was. I replied: ‘Me.’

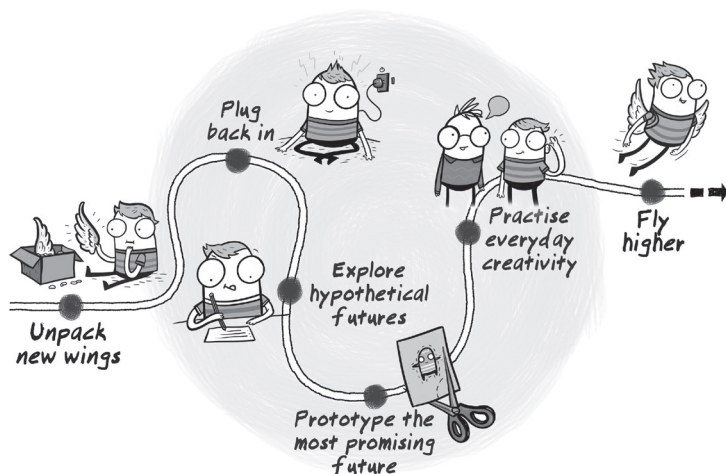
Relax, I’m not going to ask you to do anything this extreme, but I can tell you from my own experience that these types of activities shifted something deep inside me. At one level, the nature of these activities was irrelevant – there was no ‘magic’ in the magic fairy dust. What was important was that I got off my arse and did something, and that these exercises stretched me well beyond my comfort zone. In fact, a large part of their value lay in that they were an affront to my rational mind. The rational part of our brain has an inbuilt bias towards preserving the status quo and justifying our choices about how we live our life. Doubts and change are a risky business. Deliberately defying what we consider to be rational actions can not only get us thinking outside the box, but also living outside it. For this reason I encourage you to use the back section of the book to help you design your own symbolic actions that will get you moving forward.

I also encourage you to find ways to make yourself accountable – just like my counsellor would do when she asked, ‘So, did you take Little David for a swing?’ Ask a friend or a colleague to be your change buddy. Discuss with them

the challenge you have set for yourself each week, and report back the outcomes of undertaking the challenge.

I believe that, within a few weeks of taking concrete action, you will feel that you have begun to build an extraordinary life, brick by brick. I can't promise that you will feel like this every day. Some days you may feel depressed, overwhelmed, deflated or frustrated. This mood may last for weeks or even months. But this book will show you how those days, too, can be harnessed in your quest to build a life that counts.

So, together, let's get you flying higher!



The journey you will undertake

STOP 1



PLUG BACK IN

Unknowingly, most of us have unplugged from two power sources: our instinctive creativity and our sense of purpose.

At this stop on your journey, you are going to plug back into both.

The creativity factory in your head

DELL DOESN'T CURRENTLY THINK of herself as being highly creative. Malcolm sees himself as a little bit creative, but only when it comes to software engineering. The rest of his life is a creativity desert. He is fond of telling his more arty friends, 'I don't have a creative bone in my body.' Both Dell and Malcolm are unaware of the creative potential that is hard-wired into their brain, a gift of evolution.

Jacinta is plugged into her instinctive creativity, but sometimes wonders if the plug is fully inserted into the socket.

I'm reminded of a story my dad used to tell about a man who used his life savings to buy a passage on a ship from England to Australia. Totally broke, he spent his last few pennies on dried crackers to keep himself alive during the journey. On the last day at sea, after many weeks of eating dried biscuits, one of the crew asked him why he was eating alone in his cabin and not joining the rest of the guests at the captain's banquet table. 'Because,' he replied, 'I have no money.' The crew member looked at him in amazement. 'Young man, the banquet was included in the price of your ticket.'

Creatively, Dell and Malcolm are existing on cracker biscuits, totally unaware that their ticket to life, handed to them at birth, included a never-ending, all-you-can-eat feast and that the banquet hall is located in the neural pathways of their brain. Jacinta is aware of the banquet but is skimping on what she takes from the table.

The latest research suggests that our brain's most innovative stages occurred when we were still in the womb and then during the first seven years of life.

Most of us were more creative as children than we are as adults. The more we learned, the more we lost our creativity. Erik Wahl, author of *The Spark and the Grind: Ignite the Power of Disciplined Creativity*, starts some of his keynote presentations by asking members of his audience to raise their hands if they can draw. Only a small sprinkling of people will raise their hands. He then asks, 'If I had a room full of five-year-olds, and asked them the same question, how many hands would have gone up?' All of them. Some would have both hands up. All the people in Wahl's audience were once five. When and how did they lose the ability to draw?

The *evolutionary model of creativity* proposes that the human brain has evolved over millions of years into a fantastic 'creativity factory', an organism built specifically and primarily to continue the creative processes evident in nature. These abilities are intrinsic to the very nature of your brain.

The evolution of life on earth has progressed in fits and starts, with both creative outbursts and mass extinctions. Scientists believe that for new life forms to evolve, particular environmental conditions are needed. When these fac-