

# FESTIVAL OF US

## The Importance of Boredom and Creativity

*'Boredom is just the reverse side of fascination: both depend on being outside rather than inside a situation, and one leads to the other'*

**Arthur Schopenhauer**

The concept of boredom rarely receives a positive press but being bored can often be the catalyst for creativity.

As organisations start to venture out of lockdown, many will be entering a moment of recalibration. In a similar way to the start of the year get together, people will come together, explore possibilities, and set out plans for recovery and adaptation.

One of the best sessions I have attended was facilitated by inventor, humourist, and creative genius Dominic Wilcox, who is without a doubt a modern-day Heath Robinson. His credentials include the family rain poncho, no place like home GPS shoes and the stained-glass driverless sleeping car. His ideas are bonkers, yet I learned a lot and there were two messages that really struck home.

The first was the importance of boredom, something that in today's world is almost impossible. With instant gratification surrounding us, from mobile phones, to computers, to watches that are both phones and computers (I think they also tell the time), to the advent of being able to shop seven days a week, our sensory matter is constantly alive. We do not allow ourselves time to think – we are constantly stimulated. Boredom is simply not an option.

Creating the time and space for boredom may be challenging and it may be one of those undeliberate things that you accidentally stumble across. I doubt that Archimedes decided that taking a bath would unlock the principles of buoyancy, and if Isaac Newton consciously sat underneath a tree with the intention of defining gravity I would be amazed. The point I am making, is that I suspect that Archimedes was totally and utterly bored whilst naval gazing in his bath, in the same way that Newton may have been musing the generalities of life, when all of a sudden a change in water levels and an apple falling triggered their imaginations.

The second message to come out of this session, was a discussion around whether it is better to create as an individual or as a group. When asked which was best, Wilcox, who always seems to have a balanced opinion, was committed to the former. His sentiment was that groups can often be hindered by history, procrastination, personality and posturing; whereas individuals, particularly when under the pressure of a timeline, often get on and come up with an idea. This line of thinking resulted in some push back from the attendees, however when explained, it started to make some sense. The argument is that a spark of imagination comes from one person's brain and that this can

# FESTIVAL OF US

then be developed further by a team of people, but if the brain is not allowed to come up with a Eureka moment there will be little material to work with.

I wonder if the real challenge to solving problems and searching for ideas is to find an environment that is going to bring the best out of your brain. The trouble with problem solving with the team you work with, day in day out, is that there often can be too much 'white noise'. Our ears and our brains get accommodated to the voices and lines of thinking we are used to without truly listening, absorbing, and exploring.

Personally, I get some of my best ideas when I am out running, rarely at the start of a run, but typically after 15 or 20 minutes. I used to think that was due to the physiological changes that are reported to happen in the grey matter when we exercise; now I wonder if there maybe another reason I get these good ideas when plodding the streets – I just find running incredibly boring! The first mile has switched my mind off from life pre-run, and towards the end of the second mile my brain is starting to revitalise with fresh thinking. My personal challenge is then remembering the good ideas so I try to remember to tuck a pencil and bit of paper into my back pocket, and will stop and jot down a couple of words that can be used as an aide memoire on my return home.

If you need to adopt a creative mindset, you might find it useful to indulge in the occasional bout of boredom!