Insights from *Originals* by Adam Grant

"Ultimately, the people who choose to champion originality are the ones who propel us forward. After spending years studying them and interacting with them, I am struck that their inner experiences are not any different from our own. They feel the same fear, the same doubt, as the rest of us. What sets them apart is that they take action anyway. They know in their hearts that failing would yield less regret than failing to try." – Adam Grant

5 Ways to Increase 'Originality'

1. Question the default

"The hallmark of originality is rejecting the default and exploring whether a better option exists. I've spent more than a decade studying this, and it turns out to be far less difficult than I expected. The starting point is curiosity: pondering why the default exists in the first place." – Adam Grant

A study containing 30,000 customer service agents showed that those who rejected the default browser (Internet Explorer & Safari) and installed Chrome or Firefox were found to be better at solving customer issues. Those who questioned default options came up with more creative solutions to customer issues and increased their job satisfaction. You can boost your creativity/originality by questioning default options and experimenting with other alternatives.

"When you remember that rules and systems were created by people, it becomes clear that they're not set in stone—and you begin to consider how they can be improved." – Adam Grant

2. Protect your downside

Two of the most original entrepreneurs of our time - Microsoft co-founder Bill Gates and the automotive pioneer Henry Ford - were NOT huge risk takers. Bill Gates made sure he could go back to Harvard if his software company didn't take off. Ford worked for Thomas Edison two years after building the carburetor that revolutionized the auto industry. Endeavor co-founder and CEO Linda Rottenberg has trained many entrepreneurs over the span of several decades and she says "the best entrepreneurs take the risk out of risk-taking."

"Having a sense of security in one realm gives us the freedom to be original in another. By covering our bases financially, we escape the pressure to publish half-baked books, sell shoddy art, or launch untested businesses." – Adam Grant

Protect your downside before diving into a creative pursuit (i.e. don't quit your day job if you want to start a business). Working without a sense of security limits your originality.

3. Broaden you interests

Based on a Michigan State University study, scientists with a broad range of interests are more likely to make original discoveries and win the Nobel Prize:

- Musical Interest (playing an instrument, composing, conducting) = 2x greater chance of winning Nobel
- Art Interest (drawing, painting, printmaking, sculpting) = 7x greater chance of winning Nobel
- Writing Interest (poetry, plays, essays) = 12x greater chance of winning Nobel
- Performing Arts Interest (amateur actor, dancer, magician) = 22x greater chance of winning Nobel

4. Generate more bad ideas

You need to generate more ideas (and produce more shitty work) to generate original ideas:

- Shakespeare produced 37 plays & 154 sonnets over his lifetime
- Mozart composed 600 pieces before he was 35
- Einstein published 248 papers

Highly creative people throughout history simply produce more work. *"When it comes to idea generation, quantity is the most predictable path to quality. 'Original thinkers,' Stanford professor Robert Sutton notes, '(Originals) will come up with many ideas that are strange mutations, dead ends, and utter failures. The cost is worthwhile because they also generate a larger pool of ideas—especially novel ideas.'"* – Adam Grant

5. Procrastinate on purpose

Adam and his team conducted a study to determine which participants could come up with a creative solution to a complex problem: those who started and finished a task in a single sitting or those who started a task then procrastinated and completed it later.

The reason our creativity increases when we procrastinate on purpose is due to the 'Ziegarnik Effect': *"Once a task is finished, we stop thinking about it. But when it is interrupted and left undone, it stays active in our minds."* – Adam Grant