Cultivating A Growth Mindset

We all have a narrative inside of us that tells us stories. These repetitive stories become ingrained and take up residence as if they are true. They can limit our actions and our experiences.

We live our lives with certain routines, speaking to the same people on a daily and weekly basis. One of the most important pieces of discovering new opportunities, changing your thinking and creating possibilities is by getting new inputs; New information that allows us to expand our mind and re-wire our thinking.

Think of a time you have gone on a hike, or a daytrip or a vacation and suddenly life seems a little more expansive, your body was more relaxed and your brain was stimulated. New experiences can leave you feeling “lighter”. For example, meeting someone new and having a conversation you didn’t expect or trying a new activity.

Planned "New Inputs" is an important part of the Design Thinking process. These can be small (looking through a community education course catalog and thinking about which classes interest you) to large (asking for an informational interview with someone you don’t know). The key is to change up your thinking, imagining what is possible and giving your brain new information to process.

So how do you start? Pick one of the NEW INPUT exercises below:

**Community Education Catalogues**

Look at 2 different catalogues in communities close to you and circle classes that seem interesting. Don't judge it simply pay attention to if it piques your interest or not. I have taken everything from *Worm Composting* to *Making Paper* to *Organization Strategies* to *Tango Dancing lessons*. Each one of these classes put me in touch with people I had never met before, new ideas I had not thought about before and got me out of my “comfort zone” which allowed for new inputs. I also had some interesting stories at the next social gathering I was at! The bottom line is to actively cultivate a growth mindset.

*Easy* – Look through the catalog, circle what interests you

*Medium* – Write out the following answers 1) Why you were drawn to the various classes, 2) What tapes go through your head when you think about signing up for one (“I don’t have time”, “This has nothing to do with my career”, “Worm composting is weird and I am not one of those type of people”) and 3) If you were to pick ONE of those classes to sign up for which one would it be?

*Hard* – Sign up for the class.
Get Outside

**Easy** - Pick a place you don't normally walk and go.
Commit to leaving your work every day in the middle and taking a 10-minute walk without your phone. If you can't do 10 minutes do 5 – a simple walk around the block. Getting out and getting a change of scenery can change your perspective.

**Medium** – Drive (or train) to a place you have never been and explore. Don't look it up ahead of time or do a lot of research to avoid any preconceived notions

**Hard** – Strike up a conversation with a stranger during your outing. They don't know you and will never see you again so you can try out introducing yourself in different ways or sharing different aspects of yourself.

**Friends**
Who do you normally “hang out” with? Is it the same group of people? Are you a parent and you are usually watching sports from the sidelines? Whatever it is, pay attention to your circle and your patterns.
Is there someone you want to get to know better that you don't normally see?
Is there a parent at the games that you don't normally talk to?
Reach out and talk to someone who you don't normally interact with. Cultivate a new friend.

**Outings**
Take a mental health day and plan an outing for just yourself. Go to the beach, go on a hike, take yourself out for lunch and a movie, read a book in a coffee shop. Whatever you do, make it out of the ordinary for you. Bring a journal or something to write with and jot down free associations that come to you during your outing.

**News/Radio**
Listen to the opposite of what you are usually attracted to. If you are interested in liberal politics, listen to a far right talk show. If you normally listen to rock, listen to talk radio. Give your brain a shock and see what thoughts come up.

**Create your own experiments. Ask yourself:**
1. Is it out of the ordinary for me?
2. Is it a bit uncomfortable?
3. Does it interest me (even if it's a bit scary)
4. Have I removed preconceived notions?
5. Am I open to simply seeing what happens?
6. Am I willing to try again with something else if this one doesn't work out?