

# YES! AND... CREATIVE GORILLA # 83

*Creative Tension is something you must use if you are to be more creative...*

## Use Creative Tension...

*"I believe that working together is about institutionalizing tension so we can make breakthroughs,"*

*Jim Farley, Chief Marketing Officer at Ford Motor Company*



### *Do you have creative tensions?*

When you think of Venice, do you imagine riding in a gondola, cruising the sun dappled canals, an operatic gondolier at the helm?

Wake up. The gondolas are still there (for the tourists), but if you go, you'll notice the locals use water buses and taxis, *vaporetti* and *motoscafi*, in the local parlance.

Riding a *vaporetto* on holiday last year, I noticed how fast they sped along the canal and the wash they caused. This wash erodes the very buildings the Venetians are striving to preserve, leading to tension between the preservationists and the boat owners.

I reflected that this is a good example of what I call "Creative Tension".

You may be aware that Dr Peter Senge, Senior Lecturer at Massachusetts Institute of Technology, describes Creative Tension in this way:

*"Creative Tension comes from seeing clearly where we want to be, our "vision," and telling the truth about where we are, our "current reality." The gap between the two generates a natural tension."*

Personally I consider this to be Strategic Tension. Creative Tension to me is: "Differing views on how something should be achieved lead to creative tension between the different parties, resulting in a better outcome".

This last point is important. Without the better outcome, we simply have tension that leads to stalemate or one party imposing their views on the other. Have you ever experienced that in your organisation or life?

Creative Tension is about building a "win win" situation.

### SO

How might you achieve this? My process is simple but adopting it is quite challenging. Adapt it as you see fit:

- Recognise that there is a difference; the first sign for me is a feeling of frustration with the other party
- Listen to the other viewpoint; stop thinking of the next argument to support your viewpoint and really listen!
- Take time out to reflect on the different views and establish why they might be different

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- Highlight to the other party that Creative Tension might exist, explain how you think or feel and establish how they think or feel
- Work together to create a way forward that combines both viewpoints

To give an example; I was developing a training course. I created a course outline that relied on people creating their own meaning and outcomes; there were Powerpoint slides but these were for use as source material rather than presentation aids.

I presented the outline to the client. They said there should be much more explanation, more presentation of facts rather than creation. I felt frustrated and began to mentally resist, sensing the client was equally frustrated.

Before the next meeting, I reflected on the situation and realised that I probably had a different learning style to the client and that we were both trying to ensure our styles were included in the course design.

I revised the outline so that it balanced the styles, sent it through to him and mentioned that we might have some Creative Tension, but that this had lead to a better course design.

We fine tuned that design and despite adding more slides and more presentation, the pilot course worked very well.

## ACTION

This is not something that you can just put in to action. Take the opportunity next time you are feeling frustrated with someone, to identify if there may be some Creative Tension there and adopt my suggestions. I would love to know how you get on.

## TO CLOSE

When researching the vaporetto, I discovered that the water taxi owners have now commissioned new water taxis designed to create mimimum wash, whilst running at reasonable speeds. Is this an example of Creative Tension producing a better output? I like to think so.

Make the most of any creative tension you encounter this week!

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