

Cultivating Imagination: Embracing Your Possibilities



By JEANNE FARAH

For me, imagining is a daily activity as important and natural as water on the nightstand, a fresh muffin at breakfast, and salutations to the sun. Like the sun, come rain or shine, imagination is there for us daily. It's both miraculous and expected—and sometimes disturbing. For me, imagination is part of my workplace toolkit and my personal life.

Imagining is the process that produces new images—multisensory holograms of alternative realities. Though I can't say from where new images come, I do know that nearly one in 10 proves to be useful, seven entertaining, and two might scare the living daylights out of me. I am further jolted when a dark-side image becomes the seed of opportunity.

In my work as an organizational consultant, I guide leaders to envision alternative futures, to see new pathways around obstacles, and to picture the array of roles to choose for themselves that bring their visions to life. You might say I'm an imagination coach. When something beyond linear thinking, formulaic projections, and problem-solving is needed, it's time to add imagination to the mix. Who knew imagination could be a core competency in the 21st century?

There's a question I'm often asked by those who doubt the practicality of investing in their imaginations: "Isn't imagining like dreaming—it either comes to you or it doesn't? Can a person

actually learn to imagine at will and on the topic at hand?"

While imagining seems to be spontaneous, there are ways to cultivate it. A daffodil can't be forced from the bulb, but it can be planted in a nurturing environment. It's within the daffodil to want to face the sun, and so it is with fresh images lying beneath the surface of your current reality. Your imaginings will emerge quite naturally in an inviting environment that you establish for yourself. After all, you are the gardener of your imagination.

Not all the pictures that sprout from my imagination or yours will be daffodils. Some draw forth from the dark side of the moon. Personally, I struggle with my desire to quickly pluck these images from the garden of possibilities.

An early mentor once invited me to "dance with your dark-side image when he visits—embrace him as a prospective lover, looking into his eyes, seeking what truths he offers. The Other is often foreboding, but worth knowing." Easier said than done, but to my surprise, these dark images have shown me old habits to abandon before a new reality could take hold. They also have suggested new roles to try—some that caused me considerable anxiety while deciding to take the plunge.

This morning I saw myself reflected in the eyes of the dark-side dancer. I imagined myself heading west of Indy, in a hot air balloon. I held an oversized pin to pop the balloon. Now what is that about? I'm both fascinated and fearful. Am I more afraid of drifting west, away from my Indiana roots, or am I more afraid of falling back into familiarity after popping the balloon?

The dark-side dancer saw my dilemma before I did. Is my spirit ready for a new place, or am I making ready to intensify my commitment to this place? It's up to me to imagine the possibilities.

Jeanne Farah is the principal consultant for Excelleration, Inc.