

More Creativity: Avoid Ambiguity

"We have learned to avoid ambiguity because of the communication problems it can cause. In imaginative situations, however, there is the danger that too much specificity can stifle your imagination." Roger von Oech

Exercise: In the following line of letters, cross out six letters so that the remaining letters, without altering their sequence, will spell a familiar English word.

BSAINXLEATNTEARS

An avid computer user was given this same problem.. He went home that night and said, "I'll show that Roger. I'll write a program to cross out 6 letters, and have the computer figure out the answer. I'll just take a shower while it does this, and when I get back the answer will be printed out." When he came back, he had a roll of printout thirty feet long containing such glittering possibilities as:

SAINXEAEAR	BSAIXEEARS	BSINLEANEA
BINXLTEARS	AINXLEANAS	BANEATNTER
SINXEATNTE	BAINLATNAR	SNLETNTARS
SANLATNTAR	INXLEANEAR	INXEATEARS
BSNXLENTAT	INLETNTARS	SAIZNTEARS
SABXATNTEA	SINXLETTERS	SAILTNTEAR
NLEATNTEAS	IXLEATNTAS	SAINLATEAR
IXLEATTEAR	BIXLETTEAR	BAINEATARS
SNXLETTARS	BSNLENEARS	INEATNTEAR
BSAXLETARS	BLEATTEARS	INXATNTEAR
BAINNEANTS	SXLEATNTES	BINLATTEAR
SNXLEATNRS	ANXLEATNAS	AINLTNTEAR
BAINXATEAR	BAXLEATEAR	BSIXLANERS

As soon as he saw the list, he realized that he had been asking the wrong question!

The nine other mental locks:

The Right Answer

Follow the Rules

That's Not My Area

Don't be Foolish

I'm Not Creative

That's Not Logical

Be Practical

Play is Frivolous

To Err Is Wrong