Creative freedom

By [David Limbert](#)

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The general belief is that great ideas happen when people are free to think and that creatives thrive in situations that grant permission to make mistakes. I don't disagree with the sentiment, ?creatives like many, do thrive when uncertainty is minimised, and convention is applied responsibly,? but I do see a challenge with the word freedom.

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Freethinkers

Where did the notion of creative freedom come from? Is freedom an accurate description of an inventor's circumstances and part of the mythology of invention? A lone genius and their eureka moment. We want to believe that freedom is a necessary ingredient for success, but perhaps it also gives us an excuse for failure? "My client didn't give me the freedom to explore, so this isn't as good as it could be."

So, do successful inventors and designers ever *feel free*? If freedom refers to a mental state, is that how high performing creatives describe themselves? In my best moments as a creative, 'liberated' isn't how I would describe my mindset. It isn't like parameters or limitations suddenly lift, and I say, "now I can get down to business."

Quite the opposite: a full understanding of the assignment's parameters and the bigger why or purpose behind it, is what drives my creative thinking forward and allows the magic to happen.

Many stories of invention include crucial breakthroughs outside active work, for example when going for a walk or taking a shower. Sure minds are wandering free, but even unconsciously we're compelled to turn over the problem.

In short, we can't tell stories of creativity with freedom alone. The metaphor is misleading, and I believe at least only half of the story.

The assumption that total freedom is good and constraints are bad, isn't entirely correct. The danger with the word freedom is that inexperienced creatives may interpret *constraints as barriers*. Constraints benefit us in the right context; it forms boundaries and processes that give context and can ultimately enable innovation.

Following a process yields better ideas; I say this because a process nurtures them, prepares them for the realities of implementation and validates through research.

Creativity needs enablers

Processes, research, requirements, technical capabilities: we call them constraints, but they actually inform creativity and give the outcome merit. They inspire, giving us conceptual tools to play with. They help us narrow ideas, evaluate the efficacy, test them for feasibility.

When a client hands you a problem statement, see it as an enabler. Great ideas are nothing without a problem to solve.

We must be prepared to embrace different mindsets to let an idea flourish. It's a nurturing process, we're testing, coaxing, and judging, but we're also giving ideas a chance to fly on their own.

In summary, when we talk about creativity, we use the word freedom to describe our situation and cognitive state. When people think they need complete freedom to be truly creative, they reject enablers seeing them as constraints.

Creativity is at its best when teams engage with their ideas in various ways, letting them simmer, studying them further, evaluating them, and sharing them with others. And ultimately solving a specific problem or need.

ABOUT DAVID LIMBERT

David Limbert heads up the creative services department at Magnetic Storm and has a solid background in theatre. Following his studies at the Guildford School of Acting and qualifying as a stage manager, he cemented his reputation for excellence in the UK theatre world and worked at the Rep Theatre, the London City Ballet, and the world-famous, West End theatres.

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