

# The Early History of the American Creativity Association

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## Introduction

In 1987, Dr. William Nash, from Texas A&M University, mentioned his interest in starting an organization devoted to the promotion of creativity in all segments of society to Joyce Juntune as they sat at the head table of a national educational organization meeting in New Orleans, Louisiana. They both had some laughs as they thought of interesting names for this organization that could result in not so interesting acronyms. One of the early rejects was World Association for Creativity and Innovation. Somehow the acronym of *WACI* would certainly project the wrong image!

During the next four to five months, Bill Nash shared his dream with some of his other professional colleagues. Several of them were intrigued. Discussions continued for several months. In the summer of 1988, a cluster of professionals convened on the Texas A&M University campus in College Station and laid the ground work for the dream to become a reality.

This paper examines the early years of operation of this organization. The findings come from analyzing the public documents that are a part of association membership such as newsletters and announcements, the legal documents such as bylaws and Articles of Incorporation and the minutes of the Board of Directors.

From these documents, we follow the development of the organization, the challenges it faced on a regular basis, and the refinement of its purpose.

## The Phoenix Rises

In 1988, the American Creativity Association was born. Dorothy Sisk from Lamar University in Beaumont, Texas; Cecil Reynolds from Texas A&M University in College Station, Texas; and Joyce Juntune from St. Paul, Minnesota gathered together in College Station with William Nash and discussed the concept, their dreams for such an organization and the possibility of its formation. There was no budget, no membership core, no guarantee of their dream being shared by anyone other than the individuals in that room. Yet, by the end of the week-end, a mission was set and an organizational design was laid out.

A Charter Board was set up to get the organization off the ground. From this Board would come the bylaws, the Articles of Incorporation and the organization's first President, Dorothy Sisk. The following individuals served on the Charter Board:

- William Nash - Texas A&M University, Chair
- Cecil Reynolds - Texas A&M University
- Dorothy Sisk - Lamar University
- Michael Dady - Lindquist & Vennum Law Firm
- E. Paul Torrance - University of Georgia

From the beginning, there was a commitment to make this organization both unique and diverse. It must transcend any one career field or discipline. This organization was about the development of the creative thinking abilities of people from all walks of life.

With only the basic framework for guidance, Joyce Juntune agreed to serve as the Executive Director and Dorothy Sisk agreed to serve as the first President. Ann Anderson, a colleague of Joyce Juntune, was excited by the concept and agreed to work on membership marketing, newsletter publication, and do the legwork for getting a convention off the ground. With no budget, no mailing list, no income and no home, Ann and Joyce begin the task of making a dream into a reality. Everyone helped out. Bill Nash volunteered to print 10,000 membership brochures. He also loaned Ann a computer. Joyce Juntune volunteered a room in her Minnesota home, the use of her business telephone line, her fax machine, several rolls of postage stamps, and any needed office supplies.

Each person on the charter board went through their rolodexes and sent contact names to the Minnesota office. Ann and Joyce headed to the library and poured through business references books copying the names of contact people who might be interested in a creativity organization. Each person on the combined list was sent a personal letter describing the newly formed organization and an invitation to join. From this list came the people who to this day are known as the charter members of the American Creativity Association. There were about thirty charter members. Many of them are still active in the organization today.

## **The Mission and Structure**

The original mission of the organization was simple and straight forward:

The American Creativity Association (ACA) is dedicated to increasing the awareness of the importance of creativity in society and to promote the development of personal and professional creativity in all segments of society.

This mission was carried out through the variety of articles that appear in the regular newsletter - *FOCUS*, the types of session presented at the annual convention, and the design of the ACA societies.

### **The Uniqueness**

The *FOCUS* Newsletter carried a summary of the address given at the first convention by Ned Herrmann. He was just coming on to the Board of Directors and later would serve as the second President. From his keynote, a clearer picture of the American Creativity Association in its early history emerges:

I am attracted to this organization because it is the first ever multi-discipline, professionally diverse national association dedicated to the development of creativity in all spectrums of society. I have been looking for this. What I have seen previously has been too narrow in focus or too homogenized. So I like the idea very much of a multi-disciplinary and might I add multi-cultural and multi-global association.

Each of the ... societies represents a very different approach to creativity and problem solving. We must understand that. Some prefer an approach that is very analytical, others a holistic exploration.

As an organization, we need . . . to differentiate and discriminate and learn the language of those disciplines and professional populations and then begin to bring them together. (*FOCUS*, Vol. 1, No. 3, 1990)

### **The Challenges**

The struggles began with "Where do we start?" and evolved to the usual areas of "How do we reach the people who should be involved?" and "How can we better serve our members?"

In the beginning, there were no committees. Individual board members took on the normal board committee tasks. There was a great deal of trust among the board members. They were just happy to see a task done. They really did not care who did it. This lack of "political turf" allowed many things to happen quickly.

The commitment to membership involvement resulted in a day long planning conference prior to the inaugural convention. During this time, about thirty-five interested individuals met in Society interest groups and developed ideas for both the building of the

Society and its contribution to the greater organization. Ideas included everything from special retreats to publications comprised of contributions by Society members.

To encourage the Societies to be aggressive, the Board of Directors approved a policy that encouraged Societies to apply for grants relating to their Society interest. These grants did not need the approval of the entire Board of Directors, only the executive officers.

The Society Planning Sessions met again the next two years. Then, they seemed to disappear. Very few of the great ideas from these planning sessions were given feet and developed into actual contributions. As with many groups, there seemed to be too many ideas for too few people to carry out.

Nevertheless, the members in attendance at the working meetings still held to the original vision of moving from a diversity of thinking to an integrated whole. They worked to prioritize their goals for ACA. In the end, one goal emerged. It was - the opportunity to *network* in one's own profession and with other professions.

### **The Pivot Points**

After a few years of creative chaos, people and ideas began emerging. Committees were formed. Two of these committees took off: the convention committee and the membership committee.

The pivot point came for the convention in fall of 1992. Marilyn Schoeman Dow was named the chair for the convention. She jumped in with both feet. Suddenly the newsletter reflected the ongoing plans in each issue. A local committee was formed in Delaware, the site of the 1993 convention. DuPont Corporation agreed to be a co-sponsor of the convention.

Marilyn's excitement and energy spread across the organization. Marilyn designed different types of sessions - formal and informal, serious and crazy. The convention had a theme. The speakers were people that drew attendees. The Board determined that the focal point of the association would be the annual convention.

The Board of Directors now realized the need for better continuity. They decided that all committee and task force chair appointments would be for a minimum of two years. This meant that Marilyn was planning for two conventions not one.

The decision paid off. The later Board minutes reflect the power of this decision. There was less recreation of the same ideas and more building on the ideas and actions of the previous year.

The other major pivot point came with the election of Dr. David Tanner to the Board of Directors. He was a Vice President of DuPont at the time of his election. He took on the Membership Committee. By his second meeting, he suggested changing the name from Membership Committee to Growth Committee, The Board agreed.

Through his committee he designed the establishment of chapters. Ten people in a geographic area, at a work site and /or an institution can ban together, pledge to meet at least

once during the year and receive membership in the American Creativity Association at a reduced price. The idea was enthusiastically embraced.

It was no surprise that both Marilyn Schoeman and David Tanner were to eventually serve as the President of the American Creativity Association.

## The Triumphs

The most obvious triumph is that an organization with no budget, no mailing list, and no formal institution connection has survived and grown into a permanent place on the palette of creativity.

The people who attend the conventions make comments such as:

- "Insights and Ahas were the rule, not the exception at this exciting convention."
- "I was excited about the many ideas I will be able to take back to our company from which we will immediately benefit."
- "A perfect example of creativity at work. I learned so much."

The annual convention is drawing from such diverse groups as: Mobil, Dupont, 3M, Eli Lilly Company, NASA, IBM, General Mills, Medtronic, the U.S. Air Force, Merck, The Rohm & Haas Company, Toyota, McNeil Pharmaceuticals, the U.S. Navy, the Philadelphia Museum of Art, Exxon, the National Inventors Hall of Fame, Harvard University, the University of Michigan, and Texas A&M.

As Dr. Kenneth Schuler, in an early *FOCUS* article reminds us:

Creativity is not subject specific, but cross-disciplinary...it can occur in any field. Recognizing this diversity is an inherent condition of creativity....

This elusive nature of creativity is a direct result of the inherent diversity of creativity. The fact that creativity is at least conceivable in every conceivable field contributes immensely to the sophistication of the concept. (*FOCUS*, Vol. 2, No. 5, 1991)

## Summary

The development of this organization is an example of creativity at work. Extracting themes and looking critically at what actually was going on during the development of ACA has been an inspiring and rewarding task. This organization has benefited from the amazing efforts of extraordinary people.

The American Creativity Association presently has members in states across the continent and in countries across the globe. The Board of Directors is a representation of

many geographic areas as well as a variety of professions. These people and ACA's sound organizational framework point to a bright future for this organization.