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# Your Bottom Line

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## Cutting the cord

Take three minutes to try this simple, but meaningful test. You may find the results interesting. Then, continue reading to understand and interpret your results.

Take out a sheet of paper and pencil. Now react to the following instructions:

**GIVEN TWO PARALLEL LINES...MAKE A DESIGN.**

Remember, you have three minutes to complete this test. There are no other directions other than the above. Do not read on until you have completed the test. Don't cheat.

You are probably wondering what this unconventional test is all about. Actually, it is a test of one of the most important artistic attributes a photographer can use. It is a simple test of your willingness to express your creativity.

Creativity is something that we all talk about. Many of us promote our photography as being highly creative and some of us even use the word creative in our studio name. But seldom do we stop to think just exactly what creativity is or how we develop it in the first place. Is creativity a characteristic you are born with or is it something that can be developed?

Psychologists define creativity as the ability to see things in new and different ways...and to find new and different solutions to problems. In many respects, it is a human characteristic much like intelligence. It is an innate characteristic which can be influenced by your environment. Society encourages intelligence, however, while our society says creativity is important, society usually squashes creative expression in children and adults. Because creativity is an element of individuality, and society often has difficulty accepting individuality, society restricts creativity.

Remember when you were in the first grade and you were asked to draw a snowman? Remember how you might have been criticized for coloring the snowman funny colors and for going outside the lines? Do you remember what happened when you came to school with a creative combination of clothing? Children are frequently criticized for express-

ing creativity and often learn not to be creative. Conformity is rewarded by parents, teachers and friends.

Now, let's look at your drawing. If you simply drew two parallel lines and nothing more, your creativity has been severely inhibited. You did not add anything to the lines because you were not told that you could. On the other hand, you were never told that you couldn't add any lines which means you were not inclined to take a chance.

If you drew a few lines inside the two parallel lines, such as a railroad track, don't pat yourself on the back. You were still completely confined within the lines. The two lines served as a prison and you stayed inside.

The uninhibited and more creative person would have drawn a more elaborate design using the two parallel lines as the beginning of an idea. This test does not demand art ability, it only opens the doors for uninhibited creativity. Of course, one little test does not truly differentiate between the creative and the noncreative individual but it does serve as a simple example.

So, what does this have to do with photography? A great deal. Many of us consider photography a creative profession, yet many of the rules of photography are extremely restrictive and in essence, anti-creative. Photographic print competition judges give few points to really creative photography. Instead, judges generally present points to photographers who adequately copy a style that is in fashion at the time. For a while, it was old men with character faces, then it was natural window light photography and glamour. Tomorrow, the fashionable style will be something else. Today's photographers who create unique prints may score in the 60s because it may be considered too unusual or too creative, yet future photographers who copy that creative style may score in the 90s.

Print judges are not the only restrictive agents of creativity. Society as a whole is restrictive and it is difficult to change

society because it gradually moves along when accepting new ideas. In a creative art such as professional photography, unique and creative work should be recognized and rewarded by the leaders in our own profession. But, it is often the general public that recognizes and rewards creative photographic work first by purchasing it. Years later, professionals begin to recognize and reward the new style.

Let's look at some specific examples. Remember how Bill Stockwell's wedding "misties" and casuals were once laughed at in competition? Do you remember the first reactions to double exposures? Recently, many judges have positive reactions to new abstract styles. Compare our studio work with that which the public views in popular magazines. Frankly, the photography community is years behind.

If you wish to be a more creative photographer, you will have to realize that much of your natural creativity has been stifled and you will have to fight hard to regain that which you have lost. You will have to have a stiff upper lip when judges and colleagues ridicule your work. However, the public does respect creative photography and the public's reward for creativity is money.

The next time you have a "way off the wall" idea, don't stifle it...do it. If it looks good, dare to submit it for competition. If the judges score it at 50, don't fret. If you like it, be proud that you have created something unique and different. It is an expression of your creativity. It is your red, white and blue snowman with colors that go outside the lines. Most people are good copiers but only a few people can be original. Maybe in 20 years your colleagues will respect what you created. More important, your customers who buy your work may be willing to pay for it today. The most important judges are your customers. Their merits are called dollars.

Dare to be different. Dare to express creativity. You may not win merits but free expression of your unique creative style will make you feel good and don't be surprised if a liberal sprinkle of individual creativity results in a significant increase in your studio's bottom line. ■