Chapter 1 Innovation Wired You Evolved to Create

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The question is not whether you are creative. You are! The better question is, am I living up to my creative potential? And, assuming there is always room for growth, a natural follow-up question is, in what ways might I be able to enhance my creativity? This opening chapter uses information extracted from science, biology, and anthropology to demonstrate that all humans with normally functioning brains are endowed with creative thinking and therefore possess the ability to create. Our species alone has the imagination and the dexterity to make complex tools and to produce new technology. Creative thinking is the competitive advantage of our species; thus, through evolution this competitive advantage has been selected for and developed through the millennia.1 You were born creative, and we contend that you can enhance your success as an innovator and entrepreneur if you tap into your innate creativity. To that end, we use lessons from evolution to present the first set of tips you can follow to extend the natural creative talent you already possess. Let’s be honest about our species. When you compare humans to other animals with whom we share planet Earth, it is plain to see that humans are not the fastest, strongest, or biggest. Humans cannot fly away from danger nor hide underwater (at least not for very long). Even though the human body is not particularly well insulated from cold temperatures or designed to efficiently cool down in blistering heat, our species has found a way to expand around the globe and to inhabit a wide range of climatic conditions. How is this possible? To what quality can we attribute such adaptability and flexibility? If it is not strength and speed, nor other forms of physical prowess, could it be the size of our brains? It is not size alone, however, for humans cannot claim to have the largest brains; the prize for size belongs to elephants and some whales. What is unique about the human brain is its rare and valuable cognitive ability—creative thinking. Humans may not be fast, strong, or big, but humans can employ imagination in a way that leads to mental and behavioral flexibility that, through experimentation and evaluation, leads to novel solutions.2 It is likely that the mental ability to generate creative solutions was present in its nascent state in prehumans and then developed in ever-expansive ways from early humans through to the creative minds now found in modern humans. Although human evolution did not advance along a straight line, with competing branches often existing at the same time, evolutionary psychologists have concluded that developments in the size and structure of the human brain over time led to corresponding increases in the complexity of products generated by the evolving Homo species.3 In 1974 an unusually complete skeleton of a species that served as a forerunner to humans was found in Tanzania, Africa. The skeleton, nicknamed “Lucy,” had been preserved in sediment for more than 3.6 million years. Lucy and others from her species, called *Australopithecus afarensis*, were about the size of chimpanzees and walked upright. These diminutive creatures survived for about 700,000 years, from about 3.6 million years ago to about 2.9 million years ago, an impressive longevity for an animal so small and fragile. Imagine the frightening conditions this prehuman species must have faced, an easy meal for any number of four-legged animals and birds of prey. It is likely that the mental conditions that eventually blossomed into the highly functioning creative brains humans enjoy today were beginning to form in Lucy’s mind. According to science writer Douglas Palmer, Lucy and her tribe lacked sharp teeth, claws, and speed; however, they made up for these physical deficiencies with cooperation, communication, and creative intelligence—exemplified by the use of sticks and stones as weapons.