

CREATIVITY

An Oration

by
Gordon Smith



Wetmore Declamation Bureau

Box 2695
Sioux City, IA 51106

www.wetmoredeclamation.com
Email: speeches@wetmoredeclamation.com

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From a speech delivered at Macalester College, December 14, 1961. Permission granted by the author to the WETMORE DECLAMATION BUREAU, Sioux City, Iowa.

...On Broadway, a new offering called "How to Succeed in Business Without Really Trying" is playing to packed houses. It recounts the story of a young man in a hurry to reach the top.

One episode in the young man's master plan for success, finds him arriving at the office in the morning, fifteen minutes before his boss, and unshaven. In due course, the boss arrives to find our unshaven would-be executive with tousled hair, bent over a desk awash with papers. At this point, the ambition-ridden youth looks up and says: "Oh, hello sir, is it morning already?" Misguided though he may be, this man is creative.

In a somewhat different vein, there's a story about an actor who thought himself unbeatable when it came to playing the role of Abraham Lincoln.

One day he heard such a part was open. Deciding that he and no one else would get the job, he hurriedly donned a frock coat, stovepipe hat and took off for the office of the casting director. Unfortunately, he never arrived--he was assassinated. A painful example of a man who mistook imitation for innovation. This is uncreative.

This story would seem to suggest that man can choose whether or not he wishes to be creative. I subscribe to that thinking wholeheartedly. But, let's be more precise: anyone within the sound of my voice who does not try to be creative is perpetrating a fraud on those around him, but most of all on himself.

Who ever said that creativity had to be limited to art, music and the theatre? Why can't it apply equally to government and science? Or everyday living?

Too often creativity is dismissed with a shrug as something inaccessible to ordinary mortals. People say--"He's such a clever fellow"--or, "I wish I could get on my feet before people and make a speech the way Jack does"--or, possibly, "Jim is so reliable, he always gets things done."

Seldom, however, is there any real understanding of the hard work involved in producing creative accomplishments.

Michelangelo spent many years doing the magnificent mural paintings on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel in Rome. His statue of Moses, his painting of the Last Judgment, and his design on the dome of St. Peters all rank high among the world's most famous works of art. His friends in Rome said: "This Michelangelo is a genius--isn't it wonderful what he can do?"

Michelangelo had a ready answer for them: "If people knew how hard I had to work to gain my mastery, it would not seem wonderful at all."

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