

# **Unblock Your Creativity**

## **Toolbox Teleclass Transcription**

**By Debra Russell**



**Professional Program**

**Track 2: Believe & Receive: Confidence,  
Perseverance, Courage & The Law  
Of Attraction**



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## INTRODUCTION

### WHAT IS A BLOCK?

Welcome to the membership...the Foundation Membership call, Unblocking Your Creativity. Has anyone beeped in? Okay. Well, I'm just going to get started.

So we're going to talk today about creative block. Now depending on what kind of creativity you're engaged in that might be writing block. It might be painting block. It might be whatever, song writing block. It shows up differently for different people and different mediums obviously, but I want to talk about this because it seems to me that creativity block shows up for just about everybody at least once in a while.

It will help to know some methods, some ways to jog yourself out of that feeling of being blocked. Now I think it's really critical to understand that very often we define a particular experience as being blocked, but it might not actually be what's going on.

And I think it's, you know, it's important to really get to know yourself and to understand kind of what's happening, because if you can understand and be conscious of what's happening, then you have some power and choice around it.

*GENIUS IS ONE PERCENT INSPIRATION AND NINETY-NINE PERCENT PERSPIRATION.*

*THOMAS A. EDISON*

I think the first thing is that we have this illusion, many of us have this illusion that creativity should be easy. It should be light. It should be joyful. It should be fun. Blah, blah, blah. But as Thomas Edison put it, "Genius is 1% inspiration and 99% perspiration."

The truth is that creating something is a lot of hard work. It just is. It's a lot of hard work. So very often what's really happening is that you're resisting the hard work or you're thinking because it's not easy it's not working, but really it's not working because you're not working.

So sometimes the way to move through a creative block is to just start working, and we're going to talk a lot more about that, but I think it's really important for you to kind of get a sense of yourself. I want you to do some thinking about your personal experience of creativity block.



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#### HOW DOES IT SHOW UP?

So first of all, how does it show up? What's it feel like? Taste like? Smell like? Look like? What are you doing or not doing? How does it show up for you? What's the experience like? Is it always the same? Does it have many different faces? Because the truth is if it has many different faces it may be many different things.

#### HOW DO YOU KNOW YOU'RE BLOCKED?

So how do you know you're blocked? How do you know that? How do you know that this is what blocked feels like? In my experience, the blocks that get in the way of accessing our creativity tend to be caused by one of three things.

Either it's voices from the inner critic, voices from the outer critic or a lack of creative space, and that lack of creative space could be temporally meaning you haven't set aside the time to be creative. It might be physically, meaning you don't have a physical space that supports you in being creative.

Maybe it's too cluttered. Maybe it's too small. Maybe it's too noisy. There's too much else going on in that space. Maybe it's too quiet, you know. I very often like to write at a coffee shop. I just seem to get more writing done at a coffee shop, but when I'm sitting in my office, I find it much more difficult to write, which is a little counter-intuitive.

You would think noisy, distracting, people coming and going, loud coffee machines, people talking on phones and what not, would make it harder to write. But for me very often what makes it harder to write is sitting in my office and thinking of all the work that I have to get done.

So I find going to Starbucks and plug it in I can get a lot more writing then. It's kind of interesting. So it may be a lack of creative space or it may just be that you're trying to work in a creative space that doesn't work for you.

I talk a lot more about this in a newsletter article that I published back in 2009, and I'll put a link to that newsletter article in this post once I get it up, but I talked a lot about that.



## THE BLOCKS THAT GET IN THE WAY OF ACCESSING OUR CREATIVITY

### INNER CRITIC

I want to talk a little bit more about the inner critic and the outer critic. See, the inner critic is that inside voice that perhaps when you sit down to write, and you're looking at the blank page or the blank music sheets or the blank whatever, blank computer screen or the blank, you know, canvas, that voice that says, "Oh you can't do this. This isn't going to work. You suck," whatever. Whatever that inner critic says to you in your mind.

I've also had clients and people, who I've talked to in various places, talk about having gotten a bad review or a bad feedback from a submission or rejected on something that you thought was really, you know, right for you, and as a result, you had a very hard time getting back into a creative space.

### OUTER CRITIC

So it was that outer critic, but I actually think that for people who have a really powerful and positive relationship with their inner critic, the outer critics can't affect them that way.

The people who get strongly affected by outer critics are usually very much enthralled to their inner critic, and are either in a wrestling match with their inner critic, have completely bought in to everything their inner critic says, or in some other way has not got a functional relationship with their inner critic.

And I talk a lot about how to develop a functional relationship with your inner critic in the [Transform Your Inner Critic into Your Staunchest Ally](#) class.

And so I'm not going to cover too much here, but I think that that's very often the thing that gets in people's way and they call that writer's block, but really it's just you haven't figured out a way to work -- to get your inner critic to work with you, not against you.



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### LACK OF CREATIVE SPACE

## HOW TO GET UNBLOCKED

### NEWSLETTER ARTICLE

In the newsletter article, I give you a 5-step process for how to get unblocked. The primary, and I'm not going... again, you can go ahead and read that article. I'm not going into that in this class, but the primary concept behind this step-by-step program is mostly that... it's mostly that when you sit down to create, you are trying to churn out a finished product and not giving yourself the opportunity to have the process of creation.

And so you tend to edit yourself out of anything. Anything you start to write, anything you start to put down, anything you start to think about, any ideas that start to come, because they're not finished, they're not perfect, get dissed, get thrown out, get edited.

And what ends up happening is you just stop creating, because really why bother? Because nothing will ever be good enough for that inner critic, and you know, so why even bother. One of the exercises I gave a client, who is a novel writer who came to me and she was really blocked and having a really hard time getting started on writing.

She had some great concepts, but just couldn't seem to make herself sit down and do the writing. I gave her an assignment to write a thousand words a day really, really badly. The worst writing she's ever done in her entire life. She was actually supposed to try to write schlock, to write bad characters and hackneyed expressions, and just write really badly.

And boy did that unblock her. And she just started producing, and once she started, you know, once she took off the onus of having to write perfectly or having to write a final finished product, she was able to just write and write and write and write, and then go back and edit.

So the idea is that you let yourself create without editing, and make your editing and your polishing and your honing and your juicing, and all of the other stuff that you do besides just getting out ideas and concepts and doodling and bits and pieces of melody and whatever, that once you separate those activities, then you can really start being very creative and very free, because you know that, you know, 99% of what you're doing is in order to get to the 1% of inspiration.



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And then the 99% of what you do after that is to take that inspiration and bring it into fruition, because that's really where the work is. So the best way to get unblocked in my experience is to, first of all, separate the process of creation and polishing completely. Do them at different times, different times of the day, different times of the process. Just separate them, and I find very often that that alone is enough to get people unblocked.

Now that might not be enough for you to get unblocked, so let's talk about some other things that might be going on. One of the things that I've recently discovered about myself when I get blocked is actually I'm not blocked.

Actually what's happening is almost like I'm germinating. It's like, you know, you plant the seed and you cover up with a little bit of dirt, and you water it and nothing happens.

And you come back the next day and nothing happens, and then next day and nothing happens. And you know, the next day and nothing happens, and then, you come back and you've got this plant.

How did that happen? Well, that seed was doing all this work underground that you couldn't see. And I've learned about myself is that very often I need to do a bit of that germinating in my unconscious, like I'll get an idea, but I need to like sit with the idea for a while.

And then I can sit down and put stuff out on page. And very often if I really, really let myself sit with the idea without stressing about it, without trying to manufacture, that when I do, when I am ready, it just flows out of me.

Now that doesn't mean that I don't have to go back and edit the heck out of it, because I do, but very often the outline, the overview, the big chunks just come floating right out.

And then maybe a few days later, even after I've edited what I've got, a few days later another chunk will like come floating out of me. So my point is that it's not that I am blocked. It's that is stuff is happening in the unconscious that I'm not quite ready to bring out yet.

And if that's your process, I think the best thing you could do is to accept it and own it and embrace it and stop stressing about it, because that may just be how you work.





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I think another thing that goes on for people has to do -- talked quite a bit about the, you know, that inner critic and trying to create perfection out of the gate, but I think it has to do with what you've decided it means.

What you've decided creating means. What it symbolizes for you if you will. And very often we put a lot of weight, a lot of pressure on ourselves and that comes from how we defined our product. And I think if you really allow yourself to be in the creative process that not only will you feel less stress, not only will you be able to create more quantity, but I think you're going to find that the quality will go up as well.

#### DIAGNOSE WHAT'S REALLY GOING ON

So I think it's really important to diagnose what's really going on, and I'm going to give you some ideas about how to do that in the moment. Diagnose what's really going on. Think about it -- try and take a part the process for you.

Those first questions that I asked at the very top of this: What is this block? How does it show up for me? What does it look like? Feel like? Taste like? Touch like? How do you know your blocked? How do you define it? How do you know it's time to get blocked?

What is the triggering event that blocks you? Another thing that I've seen happen is that people get burnt out and aren't able to create for a while after they've had a very intense spout of...like bout of creating, like they've just put out a CD.

And then like they find they that they can't create for a few months. Well, you know, that's actually okay. What you want to focus on during those few months when you feel like, "Boy, I just laid it out there, and now I'm in a dry spell."

You're not actually in a dry spell. You need to refill the well. You need to take care of yourself. You need to have some fun. You need to go listen to other people's music or see other people's art or go for artist's dates to craft stores, or I don't know, whatever gets your -- whatever fills your creativity well.

It may be something really physical. It might be going dancing or yoga, or you know, whatever, but find the things that make you feel rejuvenated. Get a massage. Go to a spa, you know. Take a hot soak.

Do that every day for a couple of weeks, and I'm betting that when you come back to create, you'll find yourself able to do it again. So that's another thing that might be going on. You might just be exhausted. You might be burnt out.

And also find ways to not burn yourself out in order to create. Create on a more regular basis, so that you don't have to push when you're up against the deadline. You know,



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have a well spring, a catalog if you will, of pieces that you're always in process working on.

On that Taxi forum, they talked a lot about that. Basically it's, you know, write, edit, get feedback, rewrite, submit, write, edit, get feedback, rewrite, submit, write, edit. So that you're always kind of in process. You're not submitting something, and then sitting back and waiting to see if it works.

So I would suggest that you figure out some kind of a schedule that allows you to do that on more of an ongoing basis.

#### BRAINSTORM IDEAS TO ADDRESS THE ISSUE

You want to also do some brainstorming about ideas for things that you could try to get unblocked, and be playful with this. It doesn't mean like squeezing the toothpaste and trying to squeeze your brain out in order to create.

It might mean that when you sit down to be creative you have a little ritual. This is how you know it's time to create. You've done some stretching. You've lit a candle. You've cleared your desk, and now it's time to create.

Or you've read the funny pages, played a game of solitaire on your computer, and now it's time to create, or you've spent 15 minutes warming up doing scales and now it's time to create. I would suggest experimenting and trying a bunch of different stuff out and see what works for you.

You may also find that different things work at different times when you're working on different phases of a project, you know. A particular ritual might work really well when you're in the brainstorming phase, but not work at all well when you're in the editing phase.

#### EXPERIMENT

So you know, so you might need to experiment a bit in that way as well, and then just test. Test, test, test. Try stuff out. Ask other people what their rituals are, and steal them, you know.

As far as I know, there's no copyrighting on creativity rituals. Find stuff that works and use it, but you may also need to change things up because rituals can get stale. So just test, test, test.

Okay, I need a break for a drink of water. I'll be right back.



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So once you've gotten unblocked the best thing to do is to find ways to prevent those blocks from happening in the first place.

## AND WAYS TO PREVENT THOSE BLOCKS FROM HAPPENING IN THE FIRST PLACE

### AWARENESS

The first step, the first thing I want to talk about as a way to prevent blocks from happening in the first place, is awareness. Self-awareness. You know, a lot of this is about getting wise to yourself and understanding how you operate.

Both on a conscious and unconscious level. Excuse me. Huh, speaking of pushing, I've been working very hard for the last 2 weeks on the new membership format, so I have a bit of a frog in my throat.

### *FOCUSING TAUGHT IN INNER CRITIC RECORDING*

Okay. One of the ways you can get more aware is a process that I teach in the [Inner Critic](#) class called focusing. I may also teach that process in a couple of other places, but I forget where, and I know for certain it's in the [Transform Your Inner Critic](#) class, which I'll put a link to on this post.

The key with focusing and the reason it's so incredibly effective in improving and increasing your awareness is that it's really about having a conversation with your unconscious. Now you access that unconscious through a somatic method, through your physical sensation, and having a conversation with that physical sensation

I lay out the steps in the [Inner Critic](#) class, but really who you're talking to is that kind of inner voice. And really all you're doing is asking, you know, "Hey what's going on? What do you need me to know? What do you need? What's going on here?"

It can be hugely helpful, because sometimes you can clear a block just by finding out what it is. Just by floating it up from the unconscious into the conscious. I've cleared...frankly, I've cleared lifelong issues using the focusing process.

So you might, for example, if you're feeling blocked when you sit down to do some creation, you might just do some focusing on the block. Like put your attention on the block and notice how you feel in your body, and then run the focusing process on that sensation.



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So you know, if you feel blocked and maybe it's a clenching in your throat, or you know, pain in your mid back or whatever. Focus on the physical sensation and use that to find out, "Well gee, what's going on here? What's this block?"

#### *REFRAMING*

Another thing that you could do to increase your awareness is look at ways to frame and reframe your beliefs around your creative process. So for example, if you have a belief that you're not a very good song writer, when you sit down to write songs, it's going to be hard, because you believe that whatever comes out is not going to be very good.

So what if you believed that the more you write, the better you get? Or what if you believed that you're learning how to become a better songwriter? Now neither of those beliefs are a huge shift from the original belief, "I'm not a very good songwriter."

You're not saying, "Yes I am. I'm a great songwriter!" If you try to do that without my help, doing some NLP of...like really doing, you know, hypnosis and NLP to go in and change those beliefs, and you just decide you're going to use an affirmation, "I'm a great songwriter! I'm a great songwriter," that's a very hard way to work with beliefs.

In my experience, when you try to go in direct opposition to a belief that you really actually believe, what ends up happening is you just resist. You actually strengthen the belief you're trying to eliminate, because you know, what you resist, persists.

So I recommend kind of just very gently doing like a 5 degree shift, instead of a 180 degree shift. Just shift a little bit and pick up beliefs that you actually believe. Like you actually could believe that you get – you're getting better

As a songwriter, the more you practice, the better you get, or you actually believe that some of your songs are actually pretty good. So you have the possibility of writing a good song.

So find an idea that you actually believe that you can use to shift the belief that's creating the block for you. That's called re-framing. I do this a lot when I'm working with people on their finances, because people think that doing their books is going to be boring or it's going to be hard or it's going to be scary, and you know, just by re-framing their beliefs around their finances can actually make doing their books easy and fun and really empowering. So re-framing really works.

If you have trouble coming up with a new belief, I would suggest you submit it as a question on an Ask Coach Debra call, and let me coach you through it a little bit. You



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know, come be on the call live and let me coach you through it a little bit, because I can be really helpful.

#### MORNING PAGES

The third thing that I recommend for awareness is a process from *The Artist's Way*, which by the way, is a book all about recovering your creative self, and if you've never read *The Artist's Way*, I highly recommend it. It's actually how I got into coaching.

*The Artist's Way*, the process I'm talking about is "Morning Pages, and you basically, every morning as early as you can stand it, when you first wake up, you sit and write three pages long hand, not typing, long hand, three pages with no rhyme or reason to it.

You just write whatever comes into your brain, and you write as fast as you can and you don't stop writing, even if what you're writing is, "I don't know what to say. I can't think of anything. My brain is dead. I'm not awake. I need coffee." Doesn't matter. Just write for three pages.

A lot of times what you will find coming out of those pages are the vocalizations of your block. It will start speaking to you through the "Morning Pages." It will start becoming much more conscious, because let me tell you something, you can't write, "I don't know. I don't know. I don't know," until...without something coming up. You'll think of something to write

Even if, "Boy, this chair is hard, and it looks like it's raining." But you...very often what ends up coming out is what Julia Cameron calls "blurts," and it's in the blurts that are the – the kind of the foundation of the things that are blocking you.

So I recommend the book, and I recommend the "Morning Pages" process as a way to build awareness. So the three awareness processes are focusing, which you can get by listening to the [Inner Critic](#) class, reframing, and "Morning Pages."

#### EMPOWER YOUR ARTISTIC VOICE

Now the second thing I want to tell you as a way to prevent those blocks from happening in the first place is to find ways to empower your artistic voice. to encourage, strengthen, feed, entice, inspire your artistic voice, to value highly your artistic voice, and to relish the uniqueness of it.

#### SCHEDULE SPECIFIC TIME THE DIFFERENT STAGES OF CREATION

So here's a couple ways to do that. First of all, schedule a specific time that you're working on the different stages of creation. Schedule it in your schedule, and protect



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those appointments with yourself like they're appointments with the Pope or the President or the biggest record exec you can think of or anyone you think, "Boy, if I have an appointment with that person, I wouldn't give it up for anything."

Schedule the time to be creating and protect it, and again the specific stages that I'm referring to I explain in details in the newsletter article on unblocking.

#### *IF YOU AREN'T SURE IF YOUR CHOPS ARE WHAT THEY NEED TO BE – TAKE SPECIFIC ACTION TO BOTH GET AN OBJECTIVE EVALUATION AND IMPROVE YOUR CHOPS*

The second thing to do to empower your artistic voice is if the belief you're wrestling with is that you're just not sure if you're chops or what they need to be, if you're creative skills are at the level they need to be, then take specific action to both get an objective evaluation, because you know what, you might be better than you think. You might be worse than you think.

Try to be objective about yourself, and I'm not talking about the objective voice of your family, your friends, or you know, your vocal teacher, who you're paying to give you feedback. I recommend getting feedback from people, and by the way, I talk a lot about how to get feedback in the Feedback...[How to Use Criticism and Feedback Constructively](#), I think it's called, but I'll put a link to it on this post as well.

Get feedback from an objective person, preferably someone who is a professional in your medium, and even better, in your genre. So if you're a songwriter, it's good to get feedback from a songwriting person, but if you're a country songwriter, it's even better to get feedback from a country songwriting person. Okay?

It's worth paying for, and you know, get objective feedback, and if the feedback agrees with your worry that maybe your chops aren't up the snuff, then get them up to snuff. Take classes. Work with a teacher. Practice, but I have to tell you something, practicing bad habits won't make you better. So I highly recommend if your chops are not up to snuff that you study with someone who can give you specific directed feedback.

You know, studying and learning from experts is really key to perfecting this, you know. They talk about 10,000 hours, that it takes 10,000 hours to get good at anything. Well, you need to get good at this. You need to get as good at this as you can in order to allow your artistic voice to shine, because your artistic expression is limited by your skill level.





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I'm going to say that again. Your artistic expression, your ability to capture the concept that's in your mind or in your heart in a way that other people can receive it and be impacted by it, is limited by your skill level.

The more highly skilled you are, the more you can successfully translate your inspiration into an outcome, into an impact in your audience. Okay?

#### *ENJOY THE CREATIVE JOURNEY – ARTIST DATES, DOODLING, PLAY*

The third thing to do to empower your artistic voice is to enjoy the creative journey, like start having fun with it. Stop making it all about, you know, are you worthwhile as a human being, and start making it about you getting to be who you truly are, and express that with joy and fun.

Now that doesn't mean it's not hard work. Let me tell you something. I love what I do for a living. Love, love, love it. It is the most fun, the most rewarding thing I've ever done in my life, and I work my butt off.

I work really hard, but I love it. It's fun, and so I don't resent it. So start enjoying the journey, enjoying the process of creating, and a lot of that will have to do with re-framing it, because honestly, it's not that the process has changed, it's how you're holding it changes.

Okay? But I also encourage you to do things like "Artist Dates," which is another exercise out of *The Artist's Way*, where you take 2 hours a week by yourself and you just go play. It's a date with your inner artist or your inner child, and you just go play, and it's important to do it by yourself. So that it's not, you know, in order to please anyone else.

Go do something. Go see a movie. One of the things that I loved to do when I lived in San Francisco, there's an amazing store called Gumps, which has just exquisite stuff, and I used to...it's like 3 floors of really amazing, cool stuff, and I used to just like to walk through it.

I'd take 2 hours and walk through the entire store top to bottom. One of my favorite Artist Dates ever.

So just go do something that's fun. Doodle. I had -- I gave a painter client of mine the assignment to finger paint for 2 hours, and she sent me the actual finger painting. It was some of the most gorgeous finger painting I've ever seen, but to just finger paint. Just have fun. Play...not be...to not be outcome-oriented. Okay? Enjoy the creative journey. Give it to yourself.



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#### PRACTICE, PRACTICE, PRACTICE

So the third thing I recommend you do to prevent those blocks from ever happening again... the first was awareness. The second was to empower your artistic voice. The third is to practice, practice, practice.

#### *THE ONLY WAY TO WORK THROUGH YOUR BLOCKS IS TO DO JUST THAT – WORK THROUGH YOUR BLOCKS*

Frankly, sometimes the only way to work through your blocks is to do just that. Work through your blocks. Let yourself create badly. Just put something down. Just get something on the page or the program or the, you know, clay or whatever it is you're creating through.

Sometimes the best way to do it is to say, "Okay. I'm going to do brainstorming and the first step of creativity three times a week from 8-10 in the morning, Monday, Wednesday and Friday."

And you're blocked, and you sit down Monday and nothing's coming, so just start doodling, but show up for that 2 hours, and don't walk away. Don't let yourself get distracted just because you're blocked.

You know, do some brainstorming. Do some thinking about, you know, ways this could look, ideas, concepts. Just, you know, show up for yourself on a regular basis, and I promise you if you show up for yourself on a regular basis, your inner artist will start trusting that he or she is free to create during that period and will start showing up too.

#### *SHOW UP TO THE TABLE AND BREATHE*

The other thing to do is make sure you're breathing during that process. Sometimes you just need to breathe. So show up to the table and breathe.

#### *GET SUPPORT*

And finally get support. That support might look like working with a coach. It might look like having an accountability partner. It might look like getting a massage. It might look like really taking care of yourself.

It might look like asking your spouse or significant other to...for their permission to have this time to do nothing else but create. You know, if you find that you sit down to create and that's the time when your kids or your spouse or whoever says, "Oh well you have free time now, can you help me with this or that the other thing?"

Ask for their support. Tell them you're really struggling with this and could they support you by leaving you completely alone during this time. Turn off your telephone. You





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know, turn off your email buzzer. Just turn off everything, except the, you know, what you're focusing on. Okay?

There's a lot of ways to get support. You could get support through the Ask Coach Debra call. You could get support by asking for support on the Yahoo group. You know, "Hey I'm really struggling with this. I can't think of an alternative belief to this belief. Can anyone help me? I'm looking for an accountability partner."

You know, use the membership to get support. So those are my suggestions for ways to prevent the blocks from happening in the first place. I hope you found this helpful. If you have questions or you feel like your particular block was not addressed here, feel free to submit it for the next Ask Coach Debra call. You could submit it right this moment.

Just go on the Ask Coach Debra website, [AskDebraRussell.com](http://AskDebraRussell.com), and submit it and I will happily answer it in the next call. I hope this was helpful. Have a great day, and we'll talk to you next time.