

# The Anti-Cliché Manifesto

How do you live a life of originality? NEIL SCOTT provides ten pointers.

**A** CLICHÉ is a dead thought, one that drains all the wit, youth and freshness from the world. We use them when we have renounced beauty and are content to eke out a miserable existence consisting of stock phrases and stock experiences. The path of originality is more challenging, yet also far more exhilarating.

In this 10-point manifesto, I outline the strategies that allow you to escape the heavy chains of cliché and really fly.

**1. QUESTION EVERYTHING** You see that pavement, there is no reason why it has to be like that. You see that blue sky, we can paint it red if we want to. Nothing has to be the way it is. We are blinded by convention and assume that we have found the most functional way of doing things. Forget so-called functionality! It is based on a mean and mindless attitude towards existence. Question everything and think what it would be like if we could start again from scratch.

**2. CULTIVATE YOURSELF** Your personality is like a garden. It can be neat and barren, wild and messy, fragrant and colourful, or somewhere in between. The sooner you realise that it is cultivated by small interventions rather than by razing it to the ground, the sooner you can start being creative with your self. What seeds of thought will you plant? If you do too much, will some parts become neglected? When do you give up on a patch of ground and start again? Cultivate yourself a little bit each day and in Spring you will flourish.

**3. LOSE YOUR EGO** Most people start from their ego and look out on the world. At first it feels comfortable, sitting within the big armchair of the ego, but soon enough your thoughts ossify and your feelings become stale. Ignore your ego and keep nimble by being mindful. Don't let the 'I' turn the experience into a cliché. If you are picking your nose, channel all of your energy and

attention into picking your nose. Feel the clefts and crevices, explore the hairs and catch that bogey, experience the fullness of breath that you get from a clear nose.

4. GO AGAINST THE FLOW If you really want to build up your anti-cliché muscles, you have to go against the flow. The current of modern life is strong, but through various refusals, you can explore other, more interesting tributaries. Once your muscles are exercised by going against the flow, it makes it much easier to swim to where you *do* want to go.

5. DESTROY THE PAST All that stuff that you don't use but think you might use at some distant point in the future, lose it. To make space for your new, non-clichéd self to flourish you have to get rid of the things that are constricting your growth. Anything that you haven't used for a few months is ripe for disposal.

6. OBSESS Find something that you find interesting and then obsess about it. Learn as much as you can about it, lose yourself in it. Don't just learn facts to impress other people, learn things that no one else would even think of

asking. By making something your own, you lose the indebtedness that prevents originality.

7. BECOME AN ACTOR Neuroscientists tell us that if we change our bodily posture, our mental chemistry is likewise changed. The same principle applies if you decide to act in a certain way, your brain will change. Act seriously, act as a parody of other people, experience things as you want to experience them rather than settling for reality as it is. In the Victorian period, people had a public persona that they separated from their private self. We tend to look down on this nowadays, but perhaps it is the only way to experiment with your self successfully.

8. LET GO Ultimately, nothing really matters. In the short term, there may be consequences for your actions but long term we are all just temporary blips in an enormous and uncaring universe. Don't be scared, let go of your anxieties and doubts.

9. CHANGE YOUR MIND If you have a strong opinion about something, change your mind about it. Opinions are never so dull as when they are adhered to without perspective. We believe

things because we look for evidence to support them, blocking out anything that causes us to be uncertain. By reversing your opinions, you can see how the other side live. If you're a lefty, try being a righty, and vice versa. Discern your own set of opinions rather than accept a pre-packaged collection.

10. TAKE ACTION If you're looking at all of these

thinking that it sounds like a lot of work, then don't worry about the previous nine and just do number ten: take action! Original or not, you are worth nothing if you're not prepared to take action, make mistakes, and learn what fits with you. Experiment and liberate yourself from your old clichéd self.

