

# Liminal Space



by Rosanne Banc

THERE IS A COMMON, yet mistaken, belief that creativity is all about flashes of insight and inspiration followed by confident applications. More often than not, creativity requires us to step into uncertainty. "I'm not sure this will work, but let's try" and "Well that wasn't what I expected, how about this," are more frequent expressions than "Eureka!"

Certainty may be comfortable, but it can be deadly to creativity. If you "know," you never pause to consider a different perspective, to ask open-ended questions, or seek innovative ways to do things. If necessity is the mother of invention, uncertainty is its father.

Deepak Chopra writes, "In the wisdom of uncertainty lies the freedom from our past, from the known, from the prison of past conditioning. Without uncertainty and the unknown, life is just stale repetition. You become a victim of the past. Uncertainty is the fertile ground of creativity and freedom."

Consider a creative activity you've done recently: initiating or implementing a new project at work, planning and planting a garden, making a craft project, writing a letter or a poem. Recall the moments of uncertainty as clearly as you can. How did you feel when you didn't know exactly how to begin? What moved you through the inertia of not knowing what to do next? Where did you find the willingness to step into the unknown and welcome that uncertainty as the place where creative change is born? Keep those recollections handy.

In the course of a life well-lived, there are times when the moments of uncertainty stretch into weeks and months. You feel lost at times, betwixt and between, neither here nor there, when some old, familiar pattern or belief just doesn't fit anymore, but you don't know what new pattern or belief will replace it. You don't know exactly what to do, you just know something has changed, and you don't fit into your own life anymore.

## Liminal Space

Major life changes—you change your job, your children grow up and move

away, you and your spouse aren't connecting the way you used to, or your parents need your support—propel you into "liminal space," meaning the in-between place, neither inside nor out. To get anywhere new, you have to step through the liminal space of being no longer in the old place, but not yet in the new.

All cultures have special regard for people who are in transition—rites of passage for moving from child to adult, from unmarried to married, from living to honored dead. The community treats people in these transitions with special regard. When someone is in liminal space, no longer a child, but not yet an adult for example, she or he is vulnerable and a little dangerous. Not-yet-adults are no longer protected by the taboos against harming children, but they are not ready for the full responsibilities of adulthood.



During your challenging transitions, remember that you have traveled through liminal space on a smaller scale every time you have moved through the creative cycle. To be creative, you have to check your ego at the door and be willing to be surprised. You step into liminal space. You don't know exactly how or what you'll create, but you're willing to find out.

Because it's neither here nor there, liminal space can take you anywhere. It's like entering a transporter in a science fiction movie. You could end up anywhere. Liminal space opens possibilities—scary possibilities, yes, but marvelous, expansive, dream-fulfilling possibilities as well.

## Take the Journey

You can make your journey through liminal space easier in three ways:

1. **Welcome uncertainty.** Instead of

resisting situations where you don't know what will happen, embrace them. Give up attempts to control. Release the demand to know what will happen, when, and why. Schedule a day to be completely unscheduled. Go to places you've never been before without getting information about what to expect. Drive someplace new without getting directions or consulting a map. Let yourself be lost for awhile. Look for opportunities to say, "I don't know."

2. **Practice leaping.** The more you practice taking short leaps, the better prepared you are when the major gaps open beneath your feet. Expressing your creativity regularly prepares you to live your entire life with courage and grace. You could try a daily habit of freewriting, which is writing whatever comes into your head for 10 minutes without worrying about punctuation, spelling, or content. Or doodle or sketch or color with crayons and markers without any preconceived ideas. Take a class in a physical activity, mental challenge, or creative expression. For a weekly opportunity to play without thinking first, sign up for an improvisation class.

3. **Create a vision map.** When you find yourself moving through liminal space, a vision map will give you direction and hope. A collage of your hopes, dreams, and intentions for the future, the vision map is a powerful union of images and words that balances left- and right-brain thinking styles. Making the collage is a fun exercise in moving through liminal space. Begin by gathering images, words, and small objects that represent your vision of where you'd like to go and who you want to be. Look at magazines, catalogs, greeting cards, stock photography books, photos, and souvenirs. Stay open during the search—you probably won't know what you're looking for before you start. Without planning, glue the images, slogans, and objects on a large piece of foam board or art paper. Display your vision map where you will see it often to reassure you as you move through the uncertainty of becoming a new you.

Stepping into liminal space can change your life. Sometimes you can influence where liminal space will take you. Sometimes you can't. That's what it means to check your ego at the door and be willing to be surprised. It's a risk. It's your life. Take it!

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**ACTION:** Use these activities to step into your liminal space.