

Chaos Theory

■ LOU ELLEN HORWITZ, MA

There's a danger in overthinking things. If you play golf, or are a juggler, or have ever managed or created something enormously complicated, you are familiar with that moment when you know that if you think too hard about what is happening it will all fall apart.

Most of creativity is a pretty wobbly process. All of the metaphors related to creativity involve a degree of messiness. Some of the ideas you throw at the wall don't stick. Sometimes "spitballing" something just gets spit all over everyone. Thinking outside the box leaves a lot of stuff lying around on the floor. Scientific experimentation often leads to evaporated eyebrows, and so on.

And yet professionals don't like to think of themselves as messy people. Team members don't like to think of their bosses as being a mess. Messiness creates chaos, uncertainty, fear and sometimes actual danger.

But the need for change demands creativity, so how do we all balance these competing, conflicting needs and our feelings about them? Do we just have to accept it or clench our teeth and get through it, or is there a better way?

You can probably guess that I think there's a better way. I'm talking about faith, and confidence, and belief.

Chaos theory is an interdisciplinary theory stating that, within the apparent randomness of chaotic complex systems, there are underlying patterns, interconnectedness, continuous feedback loops, repetition, self-similarity, fractals, and self-organization. What this means to me is that when it seems like your work or process is teetering on the edge of falling apart, there is apparently more at work than all of the little plates you've got spinning. There is something else going on that is impacting how it holds together that is not random. It can even be mapped mathematically.

So whether your faith is in mathematics, science, a higher power, the general powers of optimism, or you feel like you



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don't have any, that helps identify how you deal with chaos, uncertainty, and the creative process.

The first three quarters of 2020 have been a time of chaos and creativity. Much of it has been messy, when we've deeply wished it to be otherwise. But what I've seen emerge, in stories from all of you and even here inside UCA as we figure out where we are going next, is the beginnings of something new. Though I don't think any of us know exactly where it is going, it's already a little exciting.

This is that moment when we need to have confidence in ourselves and each other. When we need to have faith that all that we are doing and putting into place is going to work out. That no matter what the upcoming flu season throws at us, we believe deep down we will be able to handle it. Don't overthink it. Don't be overly critical. Do your best. Keep your options open.

Remember, you have been through chaos before and always come out on the other side into something new, something of your own making, and you were still standing. You will do it again, and so will UCA. I have faith in that, and I hope it's something we all share. ■



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