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Throughout this course, you have been encouraged to expand your creativity through a number of exercises. Creativity and our ability to think freely and outside the norm is imperative for real success in many fields. Why?

Creativity brings new ideas to the table, fresh perspectives. Sometimes we become so entrenched in a problem that we miss viable, simpler solutions that would become apparent if we only step back and consider them. A programmer will spend hours trying to figure out the best way to have a form return an error using server-side script, when a client-side script is the better solution. A database developer will spend weeks working on a stored procedure, when the correct answer was to simply pass the raw data onto a business layer programmer and have them massage it into a usable state.

These are examples of developers who need to “think outside the box,” the box of their own field. “When you’re holding a hammer, everything looks like a nail,” is the old adage that comes to mind, and this applies to all stakeholders in the development lifecycle. Everyone must be able to think beyond of their piece of the puzzle, and have the creative mindset to understand the tools at their disposal in the minds of everyone else on the team.

While creativity is important, it must be informed, well educated. It’s not enough to simply come up with a novel solution to a problem; we must develop solutions that are based on established paradigms and principles. An individual must have the understanding of the big picture in order to know the paths available to reach their destination.

Just as we extol the virtue of “thinking outside the box,” it is also oftentimes important to get everyone back inside the box. Creativity is valuable, but so is having the

discipline to follow an established methodology or adhere the requirements and documentation. Individuals left on their own, will often express their creativity at the expense of solving the problem set before them.