

# The Yin and Yang of Creating

Robert Fritz

ROBERT FRITZ is a composer, author, filmmaker, organizational consultant and founder of [Robert Fritz Inc.](#), which offers range of programs, services and products designed to help individuals and organizations create the results they want. His books include *The Path of Least Resistance*, *Creating*, *The Path of Least Resistance for Managers*, *Your Life As Art*, *Elements*, and he co-authored with Bruce Bodaken *The Managerial Moment of Truth*, which was one of BusinessWeeks' best books of 2006.



YIN AND YANG, THE IDEA OF OPPOSITE BUT COMPLEMENTARY FORCES, has been popular in the West for many years now. Emerging from many Eastern traditions, it seems like a universal principle that is built into the fabric of the world. As in the Robert Frost poem “West Running Brook” (a brook that is running in the opposite direction of all the other brooks which are running east):

*It must be the brook  
Can trust itself to go by contraries*

Frost goes on to show how the nature of things is always something in contrast to itself, and that this dynamic is the source of life, “It is from that in water we were from long, long before we were from any creature.”

Yin and Yang is a phenomenon in which a whole divides itself into two contrasting parts of itself: winter/summer, masculine/feminine, vacuum/that-which-fills-the-vacuum, sun/moon, forceful/yield-

ing, and so on. Of course, the idea of Yin and Yang is found most often in philosophy and religions such as Hinduism, Sikhism, Taoism, Buddhism, the I-Ching, and there is even a Western version of it in the Kabbalah. As a philosophical concept, Yin and Yang helps one understand the workings of the world through a universal principle. But when we think about the creative process, we can go beyond understanding into the realm of how to use Yin and Yang as an approach to creating.

The creative process is dimensional, not linear. That is to say, while some aspects of the creative process are sequential – first the vision, then current reality, then the action steps, etc. — other aspects happen simultaneously. And one thing that is simultaneous is creating's Yin to its Yang.

The Yang is the thrust of the creative process, focused on driving forward to realize and accomplish a specific outcome, perhaps a piece of music, a film, a building, a business, a product, some technology, etc. This element is highly focused, directive, active, generative, and goal oriented.

But the Yin within the context of this vigorous drive is a yielding open space, a vacuum, a kind of nothingness into which something may enter. It is non-directive and receptive.



Certainly this can be easily seen as the contrast between the masculine and feminine principles. But, as is usually the case, metaphors can give us the wrong impression by being close to what they are trying to express, without the precision needed to express it.

**THE YANG IS THE THRUST OF THE CREATIVE PROCESS, FOCUSED ON DRIVING FORWARD TO REALIZE AND ACCOMPLISH ... BUT THE YIN WITHIN THE CONTEXT OF THIS VIGOROUS DRIVE IS A YIELDING OPEN SPACE ... INTO WHICH SOMETHING MAY ENTER.**

When we create, we are doing two things that can seem opposite. We are actively focusing the creative process toward a particular aim, the full manifestation of the vision, while, at the same time, allowing ourselves to be aimless and non-directive. We are narrow and wide, active and passive at the very same time. This state is found when Michael Jordan plays basketball. We see it when the Rolling Stones perform, or when we view great actors, surgeons, writers, dancers, project managers, race car drivers, fighter pilots, Olympic athletes, and so many more professionals. These people have mastered the art of being completely focused, while at the same time, completely relaxed.

Too often people obsess on only one of the two parts of the Yin/Yang equation. Some make a point of being open and aimless to the point of not having an outcome in mind. Go with the flow, don't try to control, let it all hang out, wait for inspiration to hit. Others are will-power freaks, trying to overcome obstacles, attempting to stay positive, and trying to use determination and "commitment" to forge their way to success.

Neither approach can be productive. We need to have both elements, which means to narrow our attention on what we are creating while, at the very same time, broaden our awareness to allow unimagined insight to surface.

Some people have created systems in which one is supposed to handle these two opposite gestures in sequence: first you are focused, and then you let go, and then you focus again. This type of system, while well intentioned, misses the non-sequential, multi-dimensional, and simultaneous co-existence of both active and passive. You need both control and lack of control to occur at once.

In music, there is a technique called circular breathing. You breathe in and out at the very same time. Because swing legend Tommy Dorsey could do this, he could hold a note forever it seemed. He would breathe

in through his nose while simultaneously breathing out from his mouth. And while this technique is simply an example of doing two opposite things at once, it can give us the impression of how useful it is to be able to do two opposite things simultaneously.

**WE NEED TO ... NARROW OUR ATTENTION ON WHAT WE ARE CREATING WHILE, AT THE VERY SAME TIME, BROADEN OUR AWARENESS TO ALLOW UNIMAGINED INSIGHT TO SURFACE.**

When we create, we can be both actively involved in the dynamic decision making process, with high levels of control, while at the very same time, be in a state of relaxation, passively receptive, relinquishing control, and able to let go of the vision we are so hotly pursuing.

While both the Yin and the Yang co-exist, sometimes we are more focused on one aspect than the other. And we may shift our attention often. Yet a true balance of both aspects of the Yin/Yang principle are in play the entire time, always playing an equal role in the creative process. ■■

