

Episode 24: How to Be More Creative and Have Big Ideas with Craig Case



Would you like to be more creative? Would you like more insights & aha moments? This is a fascinating conversation about the brain, creativity & inspiration with Craig Case, author of *Big Ideas*. Discover the three ways to access the subconscious mind and learn the reasons you aren't as creative as you would like to be. From parents to entrepreneurs to leaders, everyone can benefit from accessing more of their creativity. Find out more about Craig and his book, *Big Ideas* at <https://bigideastraining.com/>

[Ty Bennett:](#) Hi, this is Ty Bennett. You're listening to the Relevant Leadership podcast, my podcast where I get to share superstar stories, leadership lessons, and influencer interviews. Today's influencer interview is with Craig Case. I am so excited for you to listen to this episode. This is a fascinating conversation with Craig Case, the author of *Big Ideas: How to Unleash your Creative Self and Have More Aha! Moments*.

You guys, this is a book that was given to me by a friend, Dan McCormick. I was told about this book. It sat on my shelf for probably a month or two, and I finally dove into it, and it's fascinating. It is all of the research around the brain, and what we're doing wrong, and what we're doing right, and how we create the opportunity for us to be more creative, more solution oriented, to have Aha! Moments and inspiration in our life, which all of us need. If you are a parent, this is going to be a great episode for you to listen to.

If you are an entrepreneur, you definitely need to listen into this. If you are a leader who is leading an organization that wants more creativity and innovation, there are some very practical things that Craig is going to teach. He's going to share how the brain works, how we operate in a beta state on a constant basis, and what we need to do to change that, so that we can have more depth, and more wisdom, and better solutions to the ideas that we're looking for.

He shares three ways to access the subconscious mind. This is just so full of great information, so I'm excited for you to listen to this interview with Craig Case. Here

we go. Craig Case is my guest today. I'm so excited to jump into this conversation, Craig. Thank you for being here.

[Craig Case:](#) Ty, I'm pleased to be with you. Thank you.

[Ty Bennett:](#) Craig, you and I met through some mutual friends, Dan McCormick and some others who knew you. I've heard about your book BIG IDEAS that came out, I think, right at the beginning of the year. Is that right?

[Craig Case:](#) Yeah. We published it on the 4th of January.

[Ty Bennett:](#) Okay. It has been sitting on my desk waiting to read, and I am kicking myself that I took so long to read it. I finally dove in. You wrote a fascinating book, my friend, so I'm excited to jump into this. This book, *Big Ideas: How to Unleash Your Creative Self and Have More Aha! Moments*. We're going to jump into a fascinating conversation for the listeners around brain science, and how you increase your creativity, and some of the things that you may not even know you're doing that are stifling your ability to have this inspiration, aha moments. I'm curious what led you down this road. Why decide to focus on this area? You've done a ton of research. What was it about this idea of aha moments that grabbed you?

[Craig Case:](#) Thank you. I have a couple good friends who were really doing a deep dive on inspiration, what happens when you have these ideas that just are life-changing for you or maybe for the world. I continued with the research past where they were headed and found out, interestingly, that throughout history, as far back as you want to go, whenever there have been world-changing ideas, they tended to come in an instant through an Aha! Moment experience, if you will.

As we did our research, and I never knew this until we went down this road, that the people with the great ideas tended to use the same thought patterns beforehand that drove that aha experience. We asked, "What is the pattern, and is it replicable?" Can anybody do it?" To our delight, we found out that insight and better ideas are available to everyone if they'll follow the model. Everybody can have more aha moments. Not only can they have more of them, but they can be more impactful. It was a fascinating research. Happily, the journey is not over yet. We found that there's not only the concepts of brain science, but there's also a model of how to have better ideas. Hence, we wrote the book.

See, all innovation, all creativity is problem-based. When we have problems, we're frustrated because life isn't as smooth as we want it to be, but problems drive innovation, and make the world a better place. Innovation comes from problems, or from deep questions. Questions that are existential, life-changing, have changed the world.

[Ty Bennett:](#) You think about that idea around problems. I speak to a lot of entrepreneurial groups. Entrepreneurs, in essence, are those that find those problems and discover some type of solution people are willing to pay for. Maybe we flip that on its head. Problems are good things because they do lead to solutions. They lead to aha moments. They lead to more creativity, right, in that process. I love that all you old FranklinCovey guys are sitting there thinking about fascinating topics like this instead of just what all us normal people think about on a daily basis. You can call it different things. You can call it inspiration. In a religious sense, you can call it revelation. In a business, we often probably call it innovation or creativity, these aha moments.

There's a lot that you've discovered around the brain science of this, how the brain works. I find the brain fascinating, understanding it. What I love is that you did enough research that you were able to explain it simply. Maybe walk us through some of the key components of that in terms of how the brain operates, at what different states, and what's happening in those states.

[Craig Case:](#) Yeah, thank you. How the brain works is research that's as interesting right now as anything in space, or anything in science. The interesting thing is that our brains have evolved over hundreds of thousands of years. What we have in our head is something that has evolved based upon the needs of the environment over time. We're not talking just a generation or two. We're talking thousands of generations. The interesting thing is we live in a time which is unlike any other in the past, particularly in the last 20 years. Traditionally, people had times of learning, and then they had times of resting. But no more. We can go non-stop if we want, and that is killing us, and destroying our ability to think more effectively.

The brain has developed to transition to different speeds or brain states, faster and slower states, whether you're asleep or awake. At night, you'll go through four or five different transitions. About every 90 minutes your brain will speed up when you're dreaming, and then it'll slow down and go into a very deep sleep, a very slow state. That's how the brain works. As it transitions from fast to slow, it takes information that it's acquired in the fast state and starts to integrate the new knowledge with the old knowledge. That's where insight and wisdom comes from. When we're dreaming, it's really important that we have those dream times because that's when the brain is saying, "Where does this new stuff go and how does it connect with what I already know?" That's where insights come from, and that's where new knowledge or wisdom comes from.

What's taken place in the last couple of decades is we have had access to more information. What used to take a century for new information to be assembled now takes place in as little as 12 months. We are just overwhelmed with new information and our access to it. With our cell phones and other technologies, it keeps our brains in a stimulated, agitated state. And this is hurting us. What's happened is we've habitualized what we refer to in the book as the beta state. The

beta state is when your brain is operating at a very fast pace. Right now, Ty, you and I are in a beta state where you're asking questions. I'm giving you information. We're thinking, we're responding. After a couple hours of high beta, your brain becomes less effective at being able to use that information.

When we've been in beta for a couple of hours, the brain needs to transition to what we call an alpha state. Alpha is a state that you go in when you're daydreaming or resting with your eyes closed. This is a state that you go in when you're in a mindful state or meditative state. Your brain slows down, and as it slows down, the unconscious brain says, "I can take the information that I just got, and I can start to organize it." The brain doesn't organize information in the beta state, that faster state. That state is for gathering information. The slower brain states are for connecting information. However, the world that we live in keeps us in beta throughout the day and night. We go from one beta meeting, to the next beta meeting, to the next beta meeting. By the time the day is done, we are mentally exhausted.

The brain uses about 70% of the glucose that we consume just to power it. It uses 25% of the oxygen. The brain uses tremendous amounts of fuel to keep it working. You can become very tired from that. What's more important, we continue to keep ourselves in a beta state. We get in our cars, turn on the radio. We listen to what's going on. We get home and turn on the TV. Screens tend to keep us in beta. It's really important about every couple of hours to allow yourself about a 15-minute window of time when you can leave the technology and go walk around the block to allow the brain to recharge and make connections. And the amazing thing is, it does this all behind the curtain. You don't even realize it's happening. It recharges with two minerals, sodium and potassium. The minerals generate the positive and negative charges in the brain that allows information to flow. It's just really important that we do that, but we don't.

In fact, in North America, we idolize the corporate athlete where we can get up early and work late. We don't take breaks in between. 56% of all lunches are eaten at the desk. We don't give ourselves the freedom to be able to shift down mentally, so that the brain can take the data and start to use it to address problems and issues that we are dealing with. Whether you're a blue collar worker working in a garage, or whether you're making \$10 million bucks a month, we all have significant problems that we're dealing with, and we all need better answers than we've got. Most of the time, we settle on inferior answers because we haven't gone through the right process to generate insight, to generate the superior answers that we need.

[Ty Bennett:](#) Yeah, that's what I was going to say.

[Craig Case:](#) When I'm driving mindlessly down the street on a highway that I've driven a thousand times, my brain slows down. When it slows down, it starts giving us the information that's so relevant to the issues we've got to deal with.

[Ty Bennett:](#) If I understand it right, when we go into that alpha state, we allow that subconscious mind to kick in and start working. Is that how that functions?

[Craig Case:](#) Yeah. It's really interesting that according to some research done at Harvard, very little information makes it our conscious brain - less than 0.00005%, that's a decimal point with four zeros and a five.

[Ty Bennett:](#) That is very small.

[Craig Case:](#) Yeah, a very small amount of the information that comes to your body makes it to your conscious brain.

[Ty Bennett:](#) Wow.

[Craig Case:](#) The majority of the data, of the sensory input that you're getting doesn't hit your consciousness at all. It hits your unconscious mind, which is where deep wisdom lies. That's where insight, that's where profound wisdom is generated, in the unconscious brain. The interesting thing is there's no clear path from the unconscious to the conscious, so we have to do the right things to access that information. I've identified three ways to access the wisdom of the unconscious brain.

1. One is through paying attention to your dreams. All sorts of wisdom is there in your dreams, but it's very symbolic. That's why if you'll pay attention to what's happening particularly, in the mornings where you're dreaming most, that's where most dreams take place in the second half of the night, you'll find that there's a lot of wisdom showing up in those dreams that's relevant to issues you have.
2. Secondly, and this is what our research highlighted, is that when people hand write - when they actually sit down and write about a problem, or an issue, they get insights that they didn't have before. If you're typing, and have an EEG helmet on your head, very few areas of the brain light up. But if you hand write, many areas of the brain light up, in part, because the brain has developed to support that kind of thinking.

As you hand write, the brain is able to, it makes all sorts of connections that just weren't there before. What journaling does for physical and emotional health and healing, for accessing wisdom, is just amazing. People who journal tend to have far more insight and wisdom than people who don't. It's because they're accessing the unconscious mind. Millennials have a real problem with this. They're saying, "I can do it all on my phone." You can do it on your phone, but you're not expanding the wisdom that can be tied to that idea. Hand writing, or even writing it in a journal, you have access to wisdom that you don't have typing. In fact, there are a number of colleges that won't allow technology inside the rooms, the University of Chicago, in

their legal department and medical schools because people who have keyboards, they are constantly distracted. More importantly, when they're hand writing, they have almost a 50% higher retention rate than if they're typing when they're note taking,

3. The third is paying attention to and capturing Aha! Moments. The brain is very ineffective as memory. If you have a thought, and you're driving down the street, and you say, "That's a great idea," a few moments later that idea will have come and gone. It will stay with you if you write it down and capture it, which is one of the reasons why we're saying, "Have a small little journal that you carry with you to capture your ideas as they flow from the unconscious mind." The BIG IDEAS book is about how to get them, and how to keep them, and leverage them. Our recommendation is when you have an aha moment, it might be not a gamma spike, but a gamma bump. It's important that you make note on that because there's wisdom there. A lot of small gamma bumps turn into gamma spikes, and they are world-changing or life-changing.

We talk about the 5 I's Model in the book. The first I is identify. It's identifying in detail what it is you're trying to understand or what issue you're having. Identify and then ideate. Ideate is simply gathering data, gathering information. Then you can go to an incubate stage. When you incubate, you're giving your brain alpha breaks. This is walking through the woods. This is just closing your eyes. When you close your eyes your alpha waves start happening in your brain much more frequently. Alpha is always the precursor to what's called a gamma spike. That gamma spike is when the brain finally says, "Okay, I'm going to give you some insight here." Gamma spikes are Aha! Moments.

The gamma spike starts on the right side of the brain just above the ear. It goes to the back of the brain and to the front of the brain 40 times a second, and encompasses the entire brain. It's a very fast mental process. Three-tenths of a second after you have a gamma spike, you will have a conscious Aha! Moment. When you have that moment of insight, pay attention to it. Write it down. I go to the gym every morning, and I have a little journal that I put in my gym bag. It's full of aha moments that I've had while I've been sitting on that exercise machine. It's amazing. We're all having them, or at least we're having them often, but most of the time they just come and go.

[Ty Bennett:](#) Let's go back to earlier in the conversation when you talked about what's stopping us from having these aha moments. It's interesting in the leadership work that I do in speaking to companies. More often than not, companies are asking about how do we create a culture of innovation? How do we have more innovation, more creativity, more solutions coming from our people? I think for all of us on an individual basis, like you mentioned, we all have problems. We all have certain things we're looking for answers for and trying to find the right inspiration and

insight. Technology seems to be a big piece of what's stopping us, the fact that we're constantly stimulated. We're constantly in front of screens. We're in that beta state where our mind is just going, going, going, and ultimately, depleting over time.

What are the practical applications? You mentioned about every two hours taking a short break, taking a 15-minute break where you go on a walk, or you sit and close your eyes, and allow your mind to just rejuvenate. What are the other practical things that we're not doing that we should be doing to allow ourselves to be more creative?

[Craig Case:](#) Those are great questions. Technology is like fire or money. They can be incredibly useful, or they can be very damaging based upon how we tend to use and manage them. GenXers and Baby Boomers are all suffering from technological overload almost, but it's very prevalent with Millennials and that next generation. In fact, half of the millennials are addicted to their phone. If they don't have their phone – they panic! When I've gone into workshops, and I say, "Okay, one of the first things we're going to do is give me your phones. Put them in a bag. Put your name on it, and you're not going to access it for the next three hours." It freaks people out.

[Ty Bennett:](#) I bet.

[Craig Case:](#) There's a syndrome called FOMO, fear of missing out. Gosh, there might be something that comes through, and I don't want to miss it. I've got an important thing, or this, and that. The problem is we become so ingrained in having that phone and access to that information that it's making us psychologically and emotionally sick. It's really hurting us, and it's really hurting our children and our grandchildren. Parents need to be taught about what we're talking about here and manage it well. Technology is specifically designed to interrupt and distract. Texting while you're driving is twice as dangerous as driving under the influence of alcohol. I teach this, but I'm driving down the street, and I'm on my phone. I think, "What in the world am I doing here?" The first step is simply becoming aware that technology can get in the way.

You're standing in the slow line at the grocery store and you're a little indignant that you always choose the slow line, but you're there. Instead of allowing mindfulness, which is paying attention to the present moment, instead of allowing that to take place, we pull our phone out. We start looking at emails, or we start going through Facebook posts. We can't allow our mind to slow down. We're waiting five minutes at the soccer practice, and instead of enjoying the moment, we're on our phone. It's amazing how not only does it get in the way of how we interact with others, but it gets in the way of how our brain works. Choose to leave the phone in your pocket and pay attention to the present moment. Your brain will thank you and send better answers.

In North America, according to research done by Microsoft, a goldfish has a nine second attention span. The average North American has an 8.7 second attention span. Most of us can't pay attention as long as a simple goldfish. When you're watching TV, Ty, you'll see 15 commercials in between segments of whatever you're watching - little fast commercials. They're getting shorter and shorter because that's all the time we can pay attention to. What's happened is we've become a society of I can go broad, but I can't go deep. I can't pay attention.

[Ty Bennett:](#) Interesting. Say that again and expand on that because I think that's a fascinating concept.

[Craig Case:](#) In the book, *The Shallows: What the Internet is Doing to Our Brain*, author Nicholas Carr says, "Our brains are being rewired, so that we can look at multiple things simultaneously, but we are losing our ability to go deep..." Wisdom isn't in breadth - it's in depth.

[Ty Bennett:](#) It's in depth.

[Craig Case:](#) Yeah, it's in depth. Most of us don't have the attention span to be able to go deep to go where the better answers are. We're spending our time in the top two inches when the solutions we need are three feet down. That's where the wisdom is that's going to make a difference in your life, in your relationships, in your ability to deal with the complexities of the world. They aren't in the shallows, they're in the depths. In order to get there, we need to learn how to pay attention to the present moment.

[Ty Bennett:](#) Two questions: What's the link to the increase of anxiety and some of the other things that you're seeing spike in huge ways? Does your research show what that link is? I would assume they're connected.

[Craig Case:](#) It's really getting back to what we started out with. The brain has evolved over hundreds of thousands of years. The brain doesn't function in an environment of staying in a high-beta state. Its response to never unwinding, never getting to alpha is: "I'm going to make you feel anxious." Anxiety is the number one mental issue in America today, and it's killing the next generation. You can spend \$10,000 a month sending your child to an environment where they learn how not to be anxious. The first thing that's done is the phone is taken away and they're pulled off social media, and they teach them how to meditate. 45 days later they are different human beings. They've learned how to slow down and how to interact with others.

The blessings of meditation are overwhelming, but one of the most important blessings of meditation is you learn how to pay attention for a longer period of time. You learn how to focus on an issue at hand.

The most important thing you can do in this process is learn how to get to alpha. Don't see it as wasted time. It's the most beneficial time you've got. Then make sure that you identify the issue well. Don't assume that you understand it because you don't, whatever the issue is, whether it's a business issue or personal issue. The more you write about it, the clearer it becomes. That clarity drives wisdom.

[Ty Bennett:](#) This is fascinating to me. There are so many good things here. The line that got me was that we are developing the ability to have breadth, but not depth. I agree with you that it's in the depth that we're going to solve big problems. It's in the depth that we're going to become better people. It's in the depth that we're going to be able to make an impact on the world. Another question for you. How much sleep should we be getting? This is going to hit me square between the eyes because I'm not the right one to fulfill this, but I want to hear it.

[Craig Case:](#) There's some fascinating research that shows that deep sleep, which primarily happens in the first of the eight hours of sleep, that's where your brain is doing an interesting thing where the glial cells in the brain are actually harvesting random thoughts, thoughts that really don't matter. They're going in, and they're dissolving those neurons. Once they do that harvesting, which is in the deep sleep when you're snoring when you're just out of it, then the REM sleep starts. You have a little bit of REM in the first half of the night, but most of your REM sleep happens in the second half of the night - after the harvesting takes place, the brain is then able to do its problem-solving work, which is where it connects disconnected thoughts. That's what creativity is. It's the connection of disconnected information. That happens mostly in the second half of an eight-hour sleeping period.

Ideally, you should get close to eight hours of sleep. But we say, "I'm a workhorse. I don't need eight. I can get by on six." What you're losing is the unconscious brain's gift to you, which is its wisdom - the gift will arrive in a dream or as a gamma spike. But if we lose that REM sleep time, we lose the wisdom as well, so we deal with life's problems with inferior solutions. We've habitualized getting less sleep to the point where we don't even realize it. We feel slobby but think that's how we are supposed to feel. We've felt slobby for so long that we think that's normal. When we go on vacation, when we're in environments where we can rest, we're astonished at how much better we feel. My recommendation is, and science backs this up, if you can get around eight hours of sleep a night, your brain will do what it's been designed to do.

We have the ability right now to access unlimited amounts of information. I can get up at 2:00 a.m., and turn on the TV set, and I've got 500 stations I can watch. I can get on the internet and surf forever. I can do all that, but that's not the way the brain has developed over hundreds of thousands of years. The brain reacts, and it rejects this continual flow of unending data, and it responds with anxiety and worry. That's how come we feel that way.

[Ty Bennett:](#) I've got to change, that's first on my checklist. I need more sleep. Second on the checklist, I think of things to do. You talked about meditation. I've done this. I think there's different ways to go about meditation. My wife is a huge proponent of meditation and is very consistent in that. What are your recommendations around meditation, how people use it or get into it?

[Craig Case:](#) There was some interesting research done by a bunch of Buddhist monks who meditate two and a half hours a day. The Dalai Lama spends over two and a half hours a day meditating. What they find is their brains are more efficient and effective. They feel less stress and are happier. They have far more joy. They are far more compassionate, and they're far more loving. On intelligence studies, they're off the charts. When you meditate your brain starts working more effectively, so 10 minutes in the morning, 10 minutes in the afternoon can do wonders. The biggest problem with people who meditate is they say, "I can't stop the brain from thinking random thoughts. My brain just takes over. It starts giving me unending random thoughts." The reason for that is we've never gone to a place where we've allowed our brain to slow down.

[Ty Bennett:](#) You have to train it.

[Craig Case:](#) Most of the time, when we start to meditate, we start thinking about how stupid we are. We start thinking about the mistakes we've made. We start thinking about the problems that are just around the corner. We've habitualized worry, and we've habitualized poor self-talk. If you get into a state of meditation, and you allow the brain to stop those thinking processes, the benefits are just enormous in terms of how you feel about yourself, and how you feel about the world, and how you feel about other people. The other benefit on meditation is it increases your ability to pay attention to the present moment.

[Ty Bennett:](#) Second on the checklist is meditation. Yeah, absolutely. I think third on the checklist, you talked about this, but about every two hours in working we need to give ourselves some kind of break whether that's to go on a walk, to meditate, to allow our brains to slow down where it's no screens. It's no stimulation from that standpoint. Even listening to a podcast like this, as great as this is, sometimes we've got to turn it off and find time to let our brains rejuvenate, right?

[Craig Case:](#) Yeah, absolutely. You'll find when you start to do that how difficult it is. I can't leave my phone. What if something important shows up? Those are the mental processes. It's silly where we've landed. Yeah, every couple of hours take a little mental break. If I would put one more in there, Ty, it would be spend some time defining what you're anxious about. Just sit down and say, "What am I worried about?" Make a list. That will help with anxiety.

[Ty Bennett:](#) We talked a little bit about journaling, but that process is probably best done writing it out by hand, right?

[Craig Case:](#) Yes, it is, simply because when you're writing by hand, the brain gets far more involved holistically than when you're typing.

[Ty Bennett:](#) Craig, here's the thing. One, I'm coming away with a whole checklist of things that I personally need to do a better job with. That is great in and of itself. As a parent, these are things that I think I can do a better job with my kids, and make sure that they're having that time, and not overly stimulated, and allow their brains to develop in a way where they have that attention span, can be in the present, can go deeper. With the leaders that I work with and those that are listening, I think for all of us we can probably recognize areas in which we can do this. We work too much. We don't stop. We're too stimulated, but allowing for that creativity and innovation, and solutions to problems, which is what we're after.

There's some fascinating research, Craig, that you've shared here. Your book, Big Ideas, we will link this in the show notes. If you are listening to this, you need to get a copy. I would get multiple copies and share it with people. This is one of the more fascinating books that I have read in several years. Really, really good work, Craig. Thank you so much for not only the book and what you've put into it, but today the insights and the wisdom that you've shared. I've found this to be extremely helpful.

[Craig Case:](#) Thank you, Ty. It's just been so good to be with you and to share this information. This is important right now for the world in which we live. We need better answers, and they're available, if we do the right things to access them, so thank you. Real pleasure to be with you.

[Ty Bennett:](#) Awesome. Thank you, everyone, for listening. Let's go and have some great aha moments, big ideas. Craig, thank you once again. We will talk to you soon.

[Craig Case:](#) Thank you.

[Ty Bennett:](#) Thank you for listening. This was such a fun interview, something that I found really useful. I walked away, as you heard, with a checklist of things that I need to do better, personally, to allow myself to be more creative and to have more aha moments. I hope you did as well. My name is Ty Bennett. I want to thank McCullough for editing this episode, and I want to thank you for listening. If you haven't done so already, please subscribe, download, rate us, review us, five stars. I'm always grateful for the reviews that I receive and for people who share this podcast with others. Thank you once again, and I'll talk to you soon.