

# The smart creative: How to spot them, how to use them

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Innovation & Creativity

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The term “smart creative” is often heard today in the hallways and conference rooms of some of the nation’s leading tech companies. Not surprising, since it [was coined by Eric Schmidt](#), Google’s executive chairman. But the concept is not necessarily unique to Google, or even to the tech world.

Smart creatives (SCs) can be found almost anywhere, from the corner coffeehouse to the corner office.

- How can you tell if you are a smart creative?
- How can you spot a smart creative?
- How can you maximize smart creatives’ potential in your organization?



Google's Eric Schmidt (Credit: Google)

Here are four key characteristics to look for:

1. **They are master integrators.** SCs are analytically savvy but also business savvy. They know how to analyze problems and issues, but they avoid getting stuck in analysis paralysis. Instead, they use their analytical skills to create excellent products and services. They know what the consumer wants because they are early adopters themselves, power users of their own products. Combining their technical and creative skills produces overall [business success for the enterprise](#).
2. **They are highly competitive.** Not the cut-throat, take-no-prisoners competitiveness that often leads to an unpleasant, if not hostile, work environment. Rather, they are self-competitive first of all. They constantly ask themselves, “What am I doing to improve myself, my product, my team? Are we better today than we were yesterday, last month, or last year?” They [thrive on innovation](#), and don’t subscribe to the 9-5 work mentality that stifles creative completion among their more mediocre counterparts.
3. **They are master communicators.** There’s no hiding behind a desk or huddling in a cubicle for the SCs. They are out and about. They share openly, challenge the thought processes of others on the team, use humor freely, and are thought of as highly charismatic and fun to be around by their colleagues. They are hands-on in every project, always encouraging the free [flow of ideas among members of their team](#).
4. **They are risk-seeking.** Where the average worker may try to avoid risk at all costs, SCs go looking for it. They are not afraid to fail. Rather, they are always ready to try something new and if it doesn’t work out, their question is, “What can I learn from this?” They exhibit a high degree of self-confidence, knowing that no matter how far they fall, they can pick themselves up and begin again.

Obviously, the company that gave us the Android, Gmail, and Chrome — among other things — is leveraging the smart creative concept as a core component of its corporate culture. So once you’ve spotted your SCs, take a look at

some of Google's application techniques and put them to work for you.

Specifically, [Google encourages creativity](#) by making messiness a virtue. Creative people often express themselves in unorthodox, highly visual ways. Let them. At the same time invest in everything they need to get their jobs done. Ditch the fancy furniture and designer decor. Instead, go for the best technology you can lay your hands on and turn your people loose to discover what they can do with it.

Google also follows what they call "**The Rule of Seven.**" Keep your organizational structure flat by giving each manager no less than seven direct reports and maybe as many as 15 or 20. Most companies do exactly the opposite. But with a large number of direct reports, you'll have no time to micromanage. Your people will, of necessity, have the freedom to act on their own, innovate, and solve their own problems.

**Bottom line:** Do whatever it takes to cultivate the SCs you have and find more of them if you can. Take the lead to inspire creativity and mesh your creatives with the rest of your staff. Your SCs will inspire the rest of your workforce and they will bring about the positive change that will move your organization to the next level.

*Joel Garfinkle is recognized as one of the top 50 leadership coaches in the U.S. As an [executive coach](#), he has worked with many of the world's leading companies, including Google, Amazon, Starbucks, Deloitte, Cisco Systems, and The Ritz-Carlton. He is the author of seven books, including "[Getting Ahead: Three Steps to Take Your Career to the Next Level.](#)" More than 10,000 people subscribe to his Fulfillment@Work newsletter. [If you sign up](#), you'll receive the free e-book "41 Proven Strategies to Get Promoted Now!"*

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