

# **Imagination is Everything**

By Paul Mothapo

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## The Default State

Every child imagines. Not because they are taught to, but because they have not yet been told not to. Before the world has a chance to explain what is realistic, what is practical, what is appropriate for someone in their position \_\_\_ the child is already building something. A world behind the wardrobe. A business made of mud. A solution to a problem nobody else noticed. **Imagination, in its earliest form, is not a skill. It is a default state. It is what the mind does before it learns to limit itself.**

This is where everything starts. Not in boardrooms or laboratories or institutions. It starts in the mind of a child who does not yet know the word **impossible**.

*“I remember building bridges out of sand. Roads. Houses. Me and the other children, on the ground, making things that had no name yet. We built small carts from wood and wheelbarrow wheels. We shaped cars out of steel with our hands. We took maize branches and constructed houses out of nothing \_\_\_ sometimes with makeshift bricks, sometimes without. Sometimes they fell on us. We got up and built them again.*

*Nobody told us to do any of it. Nobody assigned it or supervised it or gave it a grade. It came from somewhere internal \_\_\_ a need to look at what existed and turn it into something that did not yet. The materials were whatever was on the ground. The imagination was already fully formed.*

*That same impulse \_\_\_ the one that started in the dirt \_\_\_ eventually produced automated bridges powered by batteries and radio motors. Not metaphorically. Literally. The sand bridge became a real bridge. The rehearsal was real all along. It was just waiting for the materials to catch up.”*

## What Imagination Actually Does

Imagination is not decoration. It is not a luxury for artists or dreamers. It is the mechanism by which things that do not yet exist get made. Every object you have ever used, every system you have ever moved through, every idea that changed how people live \_\_\_ began as something someone pictured before it was real. Imagination is the first step in a chain that ends in the world being different from how it found you.

That chain moves through innovation. Innovation is simply imagination that survived long enough to be tested. Most of it does not survive. Most of what people imagine never leaves their heads, or leaves their heads and dies on the floor of a room where nobody was listening. But the fraction that makes it through \_\_\_ that gets built, refined, argued over, broken and rebuilt \_\_\_ that fraction is responsible for most of what we call progress.

*And then there is success. Which is where the story gets complicated.*

## **The Brutal Gap Between Imagination and Arrival**

Most imaginative people do not succeed. That is not a motivational warning. It is just the count. **For every person whose imagined thing made it into the world and was recognised and rewarded, there are thousands whose imagined thing made it into the world and was ignored, stolen, mistimed, or simply not enough.** Imagination does not come with protection. It does not guarantee that the world will be ready for what you have made, or that the right people will see it, or that you will still have the resources to keep going by the time it matters.

The ones who are celebrated \_\_\_ the innovators, the founders, the names attached to things that changed everything \_\_\_ are the visible end of an invisible graveyard. Behind every celebrated imagination is a field of equally vivid, equally serious, equally committed imaginations that simply did not make it. Not because they were lesser. Because the distance between a good idea and a recognised one is not talent. It is circumstance, timing, access, and a particular kind of luck that has nothing to do with what you deserved.

This does not mean imagination is pointless. It means success is a poor measure of it.

## **The Quiet Dimming**

Somewhere between childhood and adulthood, most people stop imagining the way they used to. It does not happen in a single moment. There is no door that closes, no decision that is made. It is quieter than that. Slower.

It starts with small corrections. A teacher who redirects. A parent who explains what is realistic. A room full of people who do not respond the way you expected. Each correction is minor. Each one makes sense in context. But they accumulate. Over years, the imagination does not disappear \_\_\_ it just learns where it is and is not welcome. It learns to stay inside certain lines. And eventually, for many people, it stops pushing against those lines at all.

By adulthood, most people carry only a version of the imagination they were born with. A managed version. A practical version. The original was larger, stranger, less concerned with what was possible. The original did not know enough to be cautious. And that not-knowing was not a weakness. It was the thing that made it useful.

What is lost in the dimming is not just creativity. It is a particular relationship with the future \_\_\_ the sense that what does not yet exist could exist, and that you might be the one to make it. That sense is not naive. It is the foundation of every thing that has ever been built. And most people lose it so gradually that they never notice it is gone.

They just notice, one day, that the world feels more fixed than it used to. More settled. More like something that happens to them rather than something they are making.

*And they cannot quite remember when that changed.*

## **About the Author**

Paul Mothapo is a human, just like you. Nothing more to say and nothing less to say.