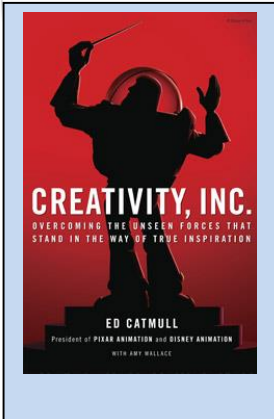


Creativity, Inc. Ed Catmull



Why read this book?

“Creativity, Inc. is a book for managers who want to lead their employees to new heights, a manual for anyone who strives for originality, and the first-ever, all-access trip into the nerve center of Pixar Animation—into the meetings, postmortems, and “Brain trust” sessions where some of the most successful films in history are made. It is, at heart, a book about how to build a creative culture—but it is also, as Pixar co-founder and president Ed Catmull writes, “An expression of the ideas that I believe make the best in us possible.” (CreativityIncbook.com)

“The thesis of this book is that there are many blocks to creativity, but there are active steps we can take to protect the creative process.” (P. xv)

Key Quotes

“Walt Disney and Albert Einstein were my two boyhood idols and represented the two poles of creativity. Disney was all about inventing the new...Einstein, by contrast, was a master of explaining that which already was.” (P. 7)

“There is nothing quite like ignorance combined with a driving need to succeed to force rapid learning.” (P. 45)

“You don’t have to ask permission to take responsibility.” (P. 51)

“To be a truly creative company, you must start things that might fail.” (P. 118)

Steve Jobs said, “The best way to predict the future is to invent it.” (P. 224)

“Driving the train doesn’t set its course. The real job is laying the track.” (P. 235)

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Braeuler Consulting works with organizations to leverage Strategic Thinking and Execution Planning and we encompass many of the principles in these books into our Four Decisions™ methodology and development of company's One Page Strategic Plans. Whatever system or systems you decide to use, I encourage you to understand them fully, implement them slowly and completely and maintain the discipline and rhythm necessary to see concrete results. Employees tire of “Flavor of the Month” initiatives. They also thrive on organizational alignment, execution of plans and achievements that garner a sense of accomplishment.



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Part 1 – Getting Started – From a passion for animation

A biography of Ed Catmull

Passion begets reality – Ed had a dream to make the first computer-animated movie.

May 1977 release of Star Wars and by 1979 George Lucas was determined to create a computer division and Pixar was born (Pixar – a made up Spanish verb “to make pictures” plus Radar – for high tech).

George gets divorced and Steve Jobs has a blowup with CEO John Sculley and when the dust settles in 1985 PIXAR is sold. Yet Steve spends most of his time trying to establish NeXT – his personal computer company. Steve sunk \$54M in business, they sold only 300 units and were bleeding red. Couldn’t sell (for what he wanted) and in 1991 they struck a three-picture deal with Disney who provided financing and distribution.

With the pending release of their first animated film, Toy Story, Steve convinced the team to go public to be in a better position to renegotiate deals with Disney and they were the biggest IPO of 1995 at \$140 Million.

You need to have a defining goal

Watch out for simple advice; for advice that STOPS you from asking questions; Price high because it is easier to drop prices than to raise them.

Deming and Japanese approach in essence means: “The responsibility for finding and fixing problems should be assigned to EVERY employee, from the most senior manager to the lowliest person on the production line.” (P. 50)

The entire growth of PIXAR “had been in the service of a single goal: making a computer-animated feature film.” (P. 60)

Watch out for GOOD STUFF hiding the BAD STUFF!

‘When downsides coexist with upsides, as they often do, people are reluctant to explore what’s bugging them, for fear of being labeled complainers. And this kind of thing, if left unaddressed, could fester and destroy...your company.’ (P. 63) [Production managers vs. artists and technicians]

Two principles:

1. “Story is King” – don’t let technology or merchandising possibilities get in the way of our story.
2. Trust the process – while there are inevitably difficulties and missteps in any complex creative endeavor, you can trust that ‘the process’ will carry you through.” (P. 66) but in reality # 2 should be
3. “Trust in people – take more responsibility and ownership of our work, our need for self-discipline, and our goals.” (P. 79)

Question: Which is more valuable, good ideas or good people? – And why?

The remake of Toy Story 2 required replacing the initial directors. “Getting the team right is the necessary precursor to getting the ideas right. It is easy to say you want talented people, and you do, but the way those people interact with one another is the real key. Even the smartest people can form an ineffective team if they are mismatched. That means it is better to focus on how a team is performing, not on the talents of the individuals within it. A good team is made up of people who complement each other. Getting the right people and the right chemistry is more important than getting the right idea” (P. 74)

Part 2 – Protecting the New

Honesty and Candor

“Everyone should be honest yet there are often good reasons not to be honest or times when we choose not to say what we really think...To address this reality, we need to free ourselves of honesty’s baggage...One way to do that is to replace the word honesty with another word that has a similar meaning but fewer moral connotations: candor.” (P. 86)

Basic truth: People who take on complicated creative projects become lost at some point in the process. (P.91) ...so we offer them the counsel of the **Brain trust**. It is made up of people with a deep understanding of storytelling and it has no authority! It is intended to bring the true causes of problems to the surface – not to demand a specific remedy.

“An important corollary to the assertion that the **Brain trust** must be candid is that filmmakers must be ready to hear the truth; candor is only valuable if the person on the receiving end is open to, and willing, if necessary to let go of things that don’t work.” (P. 99)

Fear and Failure; the Beast and the Ugly Baby; Change and Randomness and the Hidden

“**Failure** comes with baggage...From a very early age, the message is drilled into our heads: Failure is bad; failure means you didn’t study or prepare; failure means you slacked off or – worse – aren’t smart enough to begin with. Thus, failure is something to be ashamed of.” (P. 108)

“In a fear-based, failure-averse culture, people will consciously or unconsciously avoid risk. They will seek instead to repeat something safe that’s been good enough in the past. **Their work will be derivative, not innovative.** But if you can foster a positive understanding of failure, the opposite will happen.” (P. 111)

“If we as leaders can talk about our mistakes and our part in them, then we make it safe for others. You don’t run from it or pretend it doesn’t exist.” (P. 111)

Two approaches: be wrong as fast as you can or think through every outcome and plot all your moves.

Feeding the BEAST (streamlining, efficiency, and increased productivity) prevents attention to the ugly baby (new ideas, first generation concepts)

“Self-interest guides opposition to change, but lack of self-awareness fuels it even more.” (P. 153)

Randomness – systems delete of Toy Story 2; Backup systems failed; tech director had copy on home computer – working from home. **[We can’t plot them, find patterns, and create simple explanations or solutions.]** You cannot prevent every problem so you need to enable employees to respond to them and fix them.

“If we allow more people to solve problems without permission, and if we tolerate (and don’t vilify) their mistakes, then we enable a much larger set of problems to be addressed.” (P. 164)

The Hidden: “It behooves us to ask ourselves constantly: how much are we able to see? And how much is obscured from view?” (P. 168) Always be vigilant in bringing hidden problems to light as soon as possible; avoid complacency; don’t believe your own B.S.; be self-aware; how are people treating one another?

“What stands in our way are these hidden barriers – the misconceptions and assumptions that impede us without our knowing it...the Hidden – and our acknowledgement of it – is an absolutely essential part of rooting out what impedes our progress: clinging to what works, fearing change, and eluding ourselves about our roles in our own success.” (P. 185)

Part 3 – Building and Sustaining

Four ideas on managing (p. 190)

1. Our models of the world so distort what we perceive that they can make it hard to see what is right in front of us.
2. We typically don’t see the boundary between new information coming in from the outside and old, established mental models – we perceive both together.
3. When we unknowingly get caught up in our own interpretations, we become inflexible, less able to deal with the problems at hand.
4. People who work or live together have, by virtue of proximity and shared history, models of the world that are deeply intertwined with one another.

Competing and often at odds models lead to a kind of inertia that makes it difficult to change or respond well to challenges. As more people are added to the group there is an inexorable drift toward inflexibility.

Mechanisms to put collective heads into a different frame of mind (p. 192-222)

1. Dailies or solving problems together – check your egos at the door; show incomplete work; midstream feedback; everyone is free to make suggestions.
2. Research trips – if you rely too much on references to what came before you are doomed to creating a derivative. Research trips challenge our preconceived notions; they fuel inspiration; creating vs. copying
3. The power of limits – fix the beautifully shaded penny; it is impossible to do everything – set a deadline and force a priority-based reordering of the list and discuss what is absolutely necessary. Create a stick=person-week. Where are you going to take a stick from to get it done?
4. Integrating technology and art – our specialized skills and mental models are challenged when we integrate with people who are different.
5. Short experiments – short films – stumble on a piece of the puzzle (see page 209). It is better to have train wrecks with miniature trains than the real ones.
6. Learning to see – learning to draw requires shutting the L-mode off. Draw what is NOT the chair.

7. Postmortems – vary the way you conduct them – mid mortems; narrow focus; what works/doesn't work; use of data (measure what you can, evaluate what you measure, appreciate that most of what you do can't be measured)
 - a. Consolidate what's been learned
 - b. Teach others who weren't there
 - c. Don't let resentments fester
 - d. Use the schedule to force reflection
 - e. Pay it forward
8. Continuing to learn – Japanese Zen – don't be constrained by what we already know – the “beginners mind”. The attempt to avoid failure, makes failure more likely.

The Unmade Future

“Creative people discover & realize their visions over time & through dedicated, protracted struggle.” (P. 223)

Steve Jobs said, “The best way to predict the future is to invent it.” (P. 224)

Mental models help directors work through the creative process. You can't think too much about the process. “Athletes and musicians often refer to being in ‘the zone’ – that mystical place where their inner critic is silenced and they completely inhabit the moment, where the thinking is clear and the motions are precise.” (P. 226) “if you think, you stink.”

“People want decisiveness, but they also want honesty about when you've effed up.” “The director or leader, can never lose the confidence of his or her crew.”

“Good producers – and good managers – don't dictate from on high. They reach out, they listen, they wrangle, coax, and cajole.” (P. 233)

“Driving the train doesn't set its course. The real job is laying the track.” (P. 235)

Part 4 – Testing what we know

All about the merger of Disney Animation and Pixar

“There is nothing like a crisis, though, to bring what ails a company to the surface.” (P. 277)

Rising production costs, economic pressures, and self-censoring employees created NOTES DAY. “Managers of creative companies must never forget to ask themselves: ‘How do we tap the brainpower of our people?... Creative people must accept that challenges never cease, failure can't be avoided, and ‘vision’ is often an illusion. But they must also feel safe – always – to speak their minds.’” (P. 277)

They set aside a full day – company shut down and 1200 employees all spent an entire day working on how to solve the problem of making 3 films every two years with the same resources that had right now. Preplanning included town hall meetings, electronic suggestion boxes for topics and process ideas, 4000

emails, creating 293 discussion topics, facilitators recruited (internally), exit forms created. 106 topics, 171 sessions, 138 facilitators, 1059 people, 66 meeting rooms. What made it work?

1. Clear and focused goal
2. Idea championed by those at the highest levels of the company
3. Led from within.

The book ends with five pages of bullet points – thoughts for managing a creative culture. (P. 315)

First you have to understand and provide tools that foster “Creative Thinking”. Next you must create the right environment that will foster a creative process.

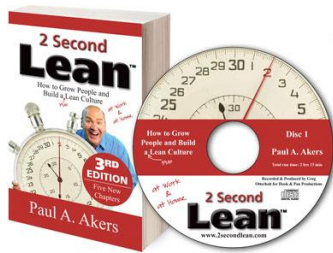
Actions to take from the book

- What tools do you have in your organization that helps people to tap their creative juices and what additional resources can you add to improve in this area?
- How does your environment provide the genesis for creativity and what changes can you make to improve this in your company?

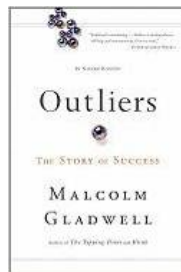
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Friday June 26th



Friday July 24th



Friday August 28th

