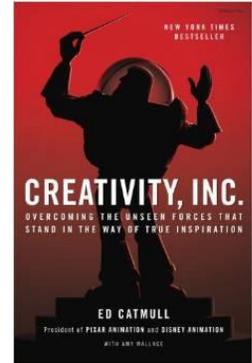


*Creativity, Inc.: Overcoming the Unseen Forces that Stand in the Way of True Inspiration* by Ed Catmull with Amy Wallace (Bantam Press, 2014), reviewed by Steve Gladis, April 2015.

**Overview:** This is a book about the journey of creativity as seen through the eyes of a man who created an entire industry – animated films. Ed Catmull, co-founder of Pixar and president of Pixar and Disney Animation, has written a book to guide other companies that need to innovate in an uncertain environment – like today. Readers get a mini-autobiography starting with Catmull’s childhood dream of one day being a Disney animator to his ascent to president of animation. We also get a world-class explanation about how to foster creativity in diverse groups by listening to input from everyone we work with, by using processes like the “braintrust” and “notes day” to make sure there is systematic evaluation and diversity of thought. Catmull also offers some great advice and wisdom on People, Teams, Truth, Failure, and Change. For example: “There should not be more truth in the hallways than in meetings.” Read and heed this book if you want to innovate and survive in a changing world.



1. **Getting Started** – This section of the book covers Ed Catmull’s formative years – a mini autobiography. He dreamt of being an animator for Disney one day. In college, he studied physics and computer science and always wanted to merge art with computers. His first animation as a university student was a short film, “The Hand” – a great success. George Lucas hired him to work on *Star Wars*. There, he met John Lasseter and later linked up with Steve Jobs when Lucas sold Pixar to Jobs. Then, Jobs, Lasseter and Catmull grew Pixar into the powerhouse it has become. After they signed a 3-film deal with Disney, “Toy Story” became the first full-length animated film and Catmull’s dream came true...but much more was to happen.
2. **Protecting the New** – Catmull discusses the importance of trust and candor in relationships. In the book, he focuses on how to reframe the fear of failure as useful, normal and the path toward success – more of a learning experience.
  - a. To get to the truth, he created “the Braintrust” of various stakeholders to gather periodically and give very honest feedback about what worked and did not work in a film.
  - b. Catmull found that the industry was always hungry for the next box office smash – he call this insatiable lust for content, “The Hunger.” However, early ideas were what he calls “The Ugly Baby,” which had to be protected from a

George Mason Enterprise Center  
4031 University Drive Suite 200  
Fairfax, VA 22030  
703-584-5504 (o)  
703-424-3780 (c)  
[sgladis@stevegladis.com](mailto:sgladis@stevegladis.com)



premature release to *The Hunger*. Lots of conflict happened at Pixar when there was tension between “the Beast [*Hunger*] vs. the Baby.”

- c. Catmull introduces the concept of “The Hidden,” the blind spots we all have in our personalities. Often we have a personal mental model that can keep us from exploring alternative paths – like not crossing a threshold into the unknown future.
  - d. This section covers collective problem solving, setting limits, integrating art and technology, and doing post mortem meetings on a produced film in preparation for the next film. Change, unpredictability and randomness are certain, and all are opportunities for creativity. Catmull explains the value of play (as release) and that changing course on a project is not a sign of failure.
3. **Building and Sustaining** – Catmull believes that we all have our own mental models that determine how we see the world – what we filter out. To sustain creativity and energy, Catmull developed 8 mechanisms. Here are some of them. 1. Solving problems together as a group. Editors, animators and others showed their dailies in early form, making them all vulnerable and exposing them to differing points of view. 2. Taking research trips. The teams visited venues that helped the film. For example, when working on *Ratatouille*, the team went to Paris to eat! 3. Conducting short experiments. Producing short films helped the teams test out new technologies and stories by experimenting. 4. Learning to see. Catmull brought in an artist to teach the teams to be more observant.
4. **Distilled Wisdom:** Ed Catmull has developed principles and advice from his Pixar experiences. Here are a few aggregations.
- a. People: Hire smart ones, let them have a voice, make them know they matter, and help them grow.
  - b. Teams: Mediocre teams will kill a great idea, but great teams will grow a mediocre idea.
  - c. Truth: Invite differences, disagree, drive out fear, share problems; “there should not be more truth in the hallways than in meetings.”
  - d. Failure: Failure is and must be an option, uncertainty is part of life, and managers should not prevent risk taking but make it safe to do so.
  - e. Change: Don’t wait for perfection to expose new ideas to the light, don’t measure competence by mistakes made but by ability to solve problems, think differently, protect new ideas from naysayers; it takes a lot of energy to change.