

CREATIVITY, INC.

OVERCOMING THE UNSEEN FORCES THAT
STAND IN THE WAY OF TRUE INSPIRATION

BY ED CATMULL

After giving the world films like *Toy Story*, *The Incredibles*, and *Finding Nemo*, Pixar has established itself in animation and film for whimsically creative, authentic storytelling. The company has also managed to keep its momentum for nearly twenty years.

Creativity, Inc. is a book loaded with ideas for leading teams and building a culture in a way that is uniquely excellent, genuine, and innovative.

1 | MANAGING WELL: PEOPLE AND IDEAS

Lesson one in Ed Catmull's journey to learning how to manage well was a lesson from his first boss, Alex Schure: have total confidence in the people you hire.

This led Catmull to a realization: "When faced with a challenge, get smarter." And the pledge to get smarter led him to adopt a policy of hiring people he believed were smarter than himself. Doing so required a higher level of personal confidence and investment in the company vision.

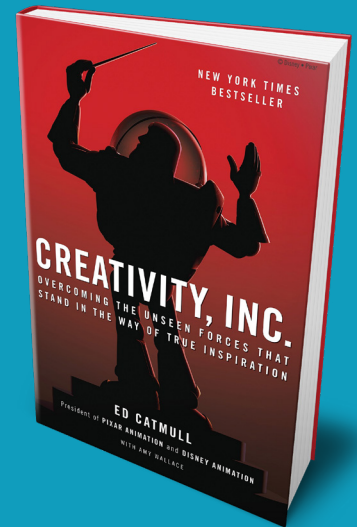
"I needed to attract the sharpest minds; to attract the sharpest minds, I needed to put my own insecurities away."

During the production process for each new film, Catmull and his team learned valuable lessons that shaped the culture of the company and became "defining goals" that guided Catmull's purpose with the company.

During the production of *Toy Story*, the team learned to trust their own storytelling instincts and allow themselves to be humbled by failures and challenges. They backed each other through the challenges that came, which increased trust and deepened the team bond.

When producing *A Bug's Life*, Catmull learned that his "open door" policy and assumptions that all was well didn't protect the company from issues happening below the surface of their team. He realized the good things (the success of movie projects) were hiding the bad things (true feelings of the movie staff: undervalued, frustrated, marginalized).

BOOK BREAKDOWN



MINISTRY INSIGHTS

The creative process and principles that drive Pixar's success can be translated for churches to manage people and projects effectively. The Body of Christ has many incredible stories to tell that can illustrate the Gospel to the world.

The Church has even more reason to pursue excellence than Pixar does—we are representatives of God's image and mission.

Ed Catmull emphasizes the importance of communication structure when it comes to managing people and projects. But clarity in communication and organizational structure is also God-honoring and sets churches up to be on mission efficiently. It prevents error and champions excellence.

The end result of creative processes may be different between Pixar and the Church, but the general principles are powerful for both environments. Treat and lead your team well, steward your resources strategically and creatively—then watch your team brilliantly carry out ideas to the glory of God.

“When downsides coexist with upsides, as they often do, people are reluctant to explore what’s bugging them, for fear of being labeled complainers.”

Catmull's team began to approach fear and failure differently. Leaders had to learn to talk about mistakes and their own parts in them to make it safe for the rest of the team to do so and experimentation had to be seen as necessary and productive.

“If you aren’t experiencing failure, then you are making a far worse mistake: You are being driven by the desire to avoid it.”

Sometimes organizations make a lot of systems but don't spend enough time on what it is they've set out to create. Creating a system or process isn't the goal—making something great is. If everyone is rowing the boat toward the goal but there's no forward motion, you're still no closer to the goal.

2 | MANAGING WELL: PROJECTS

Catmull learned many project management techniques from his first meeting with Steve Jobs. Specifically, from the questions Jobs asked. The questions are great to note for evaluating projects:

- What do you want?
- Where are you heading?
- What are your long-term goals?
- What can your idea do that others on the market can't?
- Who do you envision using it?
- What's your long-term plan?

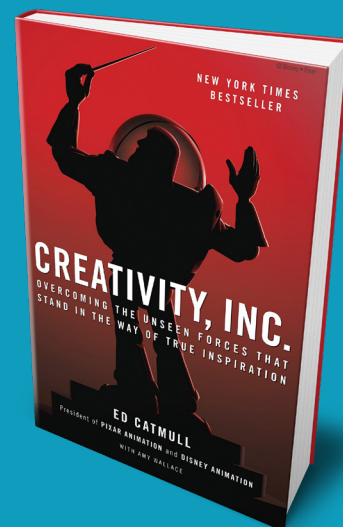
When criticism has to be delivered during a project, Catmull defined “good notes” by these characteristics:

- It's specific and says what is wrong, what is missing, what isn't clear, and what makes no sense
- It's offered at a timely moment, not when it's too late to fix the problem
- It doesn't make demands or have to include a proposal to fix but if it does, the fix is offered to illustrate a potential solution, not to prescribe an answer

“If you don’t try to uncover what is unseen and understand its nature, you will be ill prepared to lead.”



BOOK BREAKDOWN



MY
NOTES

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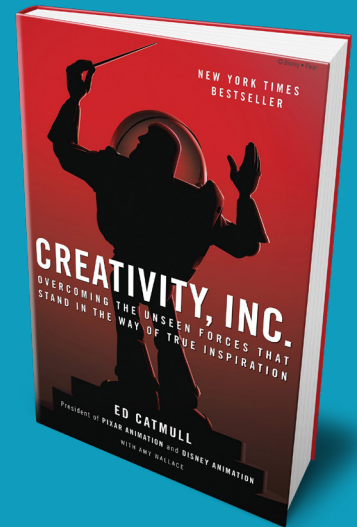
Through meetings called Dailies, Pixar team members received constructive feedback and learned to be comfortable showing incomplete work. When everyone is free to make specific, meticulous suggestions, projects are less likely to stall and the team learns to solve problems together.

Through post-project meetings called Postmortems, the team explored what was done and what didn't work. Catmull gave five reasons to have meetings like Postmortems:

1. To consolidate what has been learned before it's forgotten and analyzing what wasn't possible to focus on during the project.
2. To teach others who weren't there, allowing them to learn from or challenge decisions.
3. Not letting resentments fester by airing out any misunderstandings that happened.
4. To use the schedule to force reflection. Everyone knows the meeting will be held after the project and therefore prepares to reflect ahead of time.
5. To pay it forward by raising questions to ask for future projects.

“No one—not Walt, not Steve, not the people of Pixar—ever achieved creative success by simply clinging to what used to work.”

BOOK BREAKDOWN



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. After discovering issues happening with his team that he was unaware of, Ed Catmull had new “defining goals” that guided his purpose with the company. What are the “defining goals” of your role?
2. How can we handle fear and failure differently? How has a fear of failure hindered our team’s execution of ideas?
3. How can meetings similar to Pixar’s “Dailies” and “Postmortems” help our team manage projects better?
4. In what ways can our team improve in the areas of storytelling and creativity?