Creativity, Inc. Summary

1-Sentence-Summary: _Creativity, Inc._ is an instruction manual for instilling inspiration into employees, managers and bosses, by revealing the hidden forces that get in the way, based on over 30 years of experience of the president of Pixar, Ed Catmull.

Read in: 4 minutes

Favorite quote from the author:

"Failure isn't a necessary evil. In fact, it isn't evil at all. It is a necessary consequence of doing something new."

– Ed Catmull
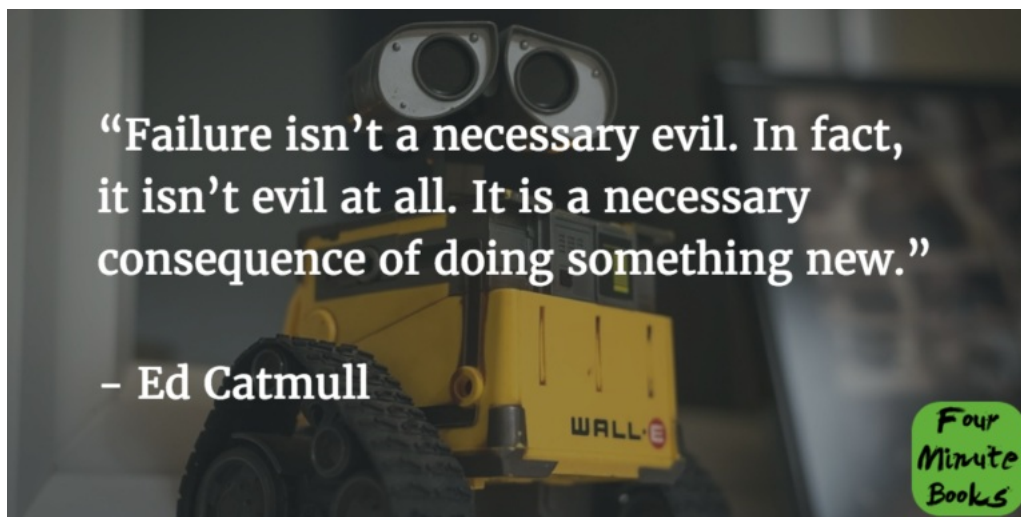
How do you keep coming up with fun, creative, inspiring movies for children for 30 years? Have you thought about that? Every few years Pixar comes up with a new, groundbreaking movie that lights up our hearts and happiness centers in the brain.

Most of the studios feature films have become absolute smash hits. When it comes to answering how they do it, many point to Pixar's president of 30 years, Ed Catmull. In this 2014 book, which he wrote with the help of freelance writer Amy Wallace, he lays out Pixar's creative processes with an all-access, behind-the-scenes tour of the company.

Originally he was hired as the head of the new Graphics Group, which was founded as part of Lucasfilm's computer division in 1979. Ed Catmull stayed on as president, together with 40 employees, when George Lucas decided to spin off the group as its own company, in order to protect it from declining Star Wars revenues and keep it profitable until computers would have enough power to create fully animated films, in 1986.

Now, without further ado, here are 3 lessons from _Creativity, Inc._:

1. Having a good team is more important than having a good idea.
2. Never blame failures on single people, always hold the entire team responsible.
3. Encourage employees to decorate their own workspaces.

Creativity, here we come!

Lesson 1: Great teams are more important than great ideas.

One of the most popular and insightful quotes from the book is this one:

> "If you give a good idea to a mediocre team, they will screw it up. If you give a mediocre idea to a brilliant team, they will either fix it or throw it away and come up with something better."

It's one of those things that you'd never think of instinctively, but once you read it, you know it's true. **As long as you manage to hire talented people, who work together well and communicate freely, the ideas aren't as important**.

Imagine the character designers, storyboard writers or animators that were part of the Toy Story team had been mediocre at their job. We might never have seen a heartbroken Buzz Lightyear, who finds out he's "just" a toy and not a real space ranger, a dramatic rescue mission to save him from the gruel hands of Sid, or a beautifully animated potato head.

Hire inspired people, then give them good ideas. Never try to do it the other way around.

Lesson 2: Mistakes are always made by teams, never by individuals. Everyone is equally responsible.

Instead of being surprised by failure when it happens, the people at Pixar acknowledge it up front. They greet it right at the door. By accepting that mistakes are just part of the deal, they can design their processes to be iterative, meaning they can weed out the mistakes they find with the next project and not repeat them again, and don't have to obsess over correcting them with the current project.

In the same vein, **at Pixar mistakes are never made by individuals, only by teams**. When failure happens, the entire team is responsible, and no finger is pointed at anyone in particular.

What this failure-sharing mentality leads to is that employees feel much safer in taking risks, because no one ever has to take 100% of the blame. It feels so much better to know that a major screw-up will be divided equally among five people than thinking you might be fired because of one, stupid mistake.

Another way Pixar does this is by giving people more time to explore and correct during the development stage of a film, where mistakes aren't as costly as in actual production.

In Ed's words:

> "It's not the manager's job to prevent risks. It's the manager's job to make it safe for others to take them."

Failure-sharing is exactly that. Only when everyone feels safe to take risks do you have an environment where everyone can have the courage to be creative.

Lesson 3: Let everyone design their own workspace to keep boredom out of your building.

While you should greet failure at the door, there's one thing you should definitely hand over before you enter your building, and that's boredom.

Imagine working for a marketing agency, startup or entertainment company, where all success depends on creativity, and then having to work in one of 137 identical, lame, cold, sterile cubicles. It just doesn't make sense.

For example, the initial table at which meetings were held at Pixar was long, rectangular and had place cards at every seat. This super formal environment made people stiff the minute they sat down, so they replaced it with a square table, no place cards and voilà, everyone felt a lot more comfortable voicing their ideas and concerns.

Similarly, creativity is about embracing that people are different – that's how it happens in the first place, so you should **encourage your employees to show who they are by letting them design their own workspace**. Imagine the tons of ideas and inspiration you'll get just from walking by vastly different offices!

Also, don't obsess over how people work. Let everyone work according to their own working style, whether that's remote or in-house, in the morning or at night, more alone or more in teams. Focus on the results, not the design.

One way Pixar does this is by giving people in the tools department two days a month to tinker with personal projects (). Upside down "Let's make better mistakes tomorrow" sign, here I come!

Creativity, Inc. Review

Ed Catmull is over 70 years old. And he's still going. That's probably the biggest sign that he loves his work, the people love him and that they all know what they're doing. _Creativity, Inc._ is a truly inspiring book, even if you're not running a company, one of my absolute favorites this year!

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What else can you learn from the blinks?

- Why Ed visits all of his employees personally

- What "Notes Day 2013" was about
- Why Ed threw out the two-year plan an HR manager made after their merge with Disney Animation Studios
- How Pixar changed his entire animation process, based on one simple employee suggestion
- Why even a vague overall company goal is a good one
- Where Ed learned to value teams over individuals
- Why Ed only hires people who are smarter than him

Who would I recommend the Creativity, Inc. summary to?

The 21 year old graphic designer, who's just getting started with her first job after college, the 43 year old movie project manager, who needs to get people to work together productively, but still be creative, and anyone who loves animated movies and wants to know how they're made.