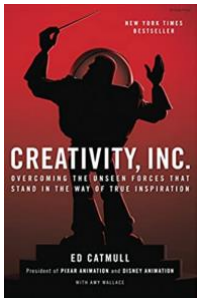


# CBODN: In The Know Recap

**DO YOU LOVE BOOKS ON LEADERSHIP, NEUROSCIENCE, AND BUSINESS, BUT NOT HAVE TIME TO READ?** Join the **“Cliff’s Notes” club**—where there's no pressure to pre-read the book, no membership required, no cost, and lots of discussion in just 90 minutes. Each month, you will hear a **summary of highlights** from a recently-published business book. We'll keep you "in the know" on the latest and greatest concepts and models. **Register here** for upcoming events.



June, 2020 In The Know Summary

## **Creativity, Inc.**

Overcoming the unseen forces that stand in the way of true inspiration  
Ed Catmull

The notes below were prepared for the Chesapeake Bay Organizational Development Network (CBODN) Book Club. The notes are not intended to be a full book summary or review—rather they are highlights that guided the group discussion.

**Book Notes Courtesy of [Laura Mendelow](#)**

*Book Description from Amazon.com*

*Creativity, Inc. is 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 “Braintrust” sessions where some of the most successful films in history are made.*

*For nearly twenty years, Pixar has dominated the world of animation, producing such beloved films as the Toy Story trilogy, Monsters, Inc., Finding Nemo, The Incredibles, Up, WALL-E, and Inside Out, which have gone on to set box-office records and garner thirty Academy Awards. The joyousness of the storytelling, the inventive plots, the emotional authenticity: In some ways, Pixar movies are an object lesson in what creativity really is. Here, in this book, Catmull reveals the ideals and techniques that have made Pixar so widely admired—and so profitable.*

**A few quick, interesting details of Ed Catmull’s background (pp. 3-44)**

- Grew up in Utah in a Mormon community; 1969 graduated from University of Utah with degrees in **physics and computer science**.
- Admirer of **Walt Disney** to bring stories to life and **Albert Einstein** (Art and science). Two poles of creativity – Disney was all about inventing the new.. he brought things into being that did not exist before. Einstein, was a master of explaining that which already was... and changed our understanding of reality.
- Met Ivan Sutherland - joined computer science graduate program and experienced a collaborative, **supportive community that inspired creativity and experimentation**. → looked to replicate this at Pixar.

- Classmates included Jim Clark found Silicon Graphics and Netscape, John Warnock – co-founded Adobe (Photoshop, PDF file format), Alan Kay- windowing graphical user interfaces
- It was Prof. Sutherland who forged a relationship with Disney Animation but was met with resistance. Preferred hand-drawn animation. Eventually **took a job with George Lucas**. Goal was to design a specialized computer that had the resolution and processing power to scan film, combine special effects images with live-action footage and then record the final result back onto film... took four years and the **Pixar Image computer** was born.
- In 1983 – George got divorced and lost a big settlement, needed to streamline and **didn't have the same vision** to create an animated feature film- George wanted to enhance live-action.
- Met animator, John Lasseter, who had the story for Toy Story, pixar's first animated film.
- Alan Kay introduced Ed to Steve Jobs- at the time director of Apple computer.
- **Influenced by W. Edwards Deming**- a statistician known for his expertise in quality control. One philosophy- the responsibility for finding and fixing problems was assigned to EVERY employee.

### New goal came into focus: Build a culture of Creativity

- For **twenty years, my life had been defined by the goal of making the first computer graphics movie**. Now that that goal had been reached, I had what I can only describe as a hollow, lost feeling. **Now what?** (p. 60)
- After Toy Story, uncovered issues between production and creative. - “The good stuff was hiding the bad stuff.” (p. 63)
- We **confused the communication structure with the organizational structure**. Decided that comm would no longer have to go through “proper channels”→ led to mission of how to build and sustain a creative culture (p. 64)
  - o **Story is King** – and sometimes gave us false assurance that things would be OK (p. 66, 79)
  - o **Trust the process**- also coaxed us into letting down our guard and making us passive (p. 66, 79)
- We would be a company that would never settle – didn't mean we wouldn't make mistakes but we would strive to face them without defensiveness and with a willingness to change. **Embrace introspection.** (p. 82)

### Strategies for building a culture of creativity

- **Allow everyone, at every level, to own and solve their own problems**
  - o Enable employees at every level to own their problems and have confidence to fix them: A culture that allows everyone, no matter their position, to stop the assembly line, both figuratively and literally, maximizes the creative engagement of people who want to help. (p. 163).
  - o 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. (pg. 164). Steve Jobs never wanted people to ask, “What would Steve do?” (p. 166)
  - o Ask, How do we enable people to solve problems? Instead of, “How do we prevent our people from screwing up?” (p. 203)

- **Getting the right people**
  - Getting the team right is the necessary precursor to getting the ideas right. And the way those people interact with one another is the real key... it is better to focus on how the team is performing, not on the talents of the individuals within it (p. 74)
  - 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.** Getting the right people and the right chemistry is more important than getting the right idea (p. 74)
  - **Efficiency was a goal, quality was the goal** (p. 76)- people come first. Never again would the needs of a movie outweigh the needs of our people
  - It was management's job to take the long view, to intervene and **protect our people from their willingness to pursue excellence at all costs.** (referencing **Toy Story 2 incident** with the infant) Not to do so would be irresponsible (p. 77)
  
- **Embrace Candor**
  - Developed a **Braintrust** – a delivery system for straight-talk. Put smart, passionate people in a room together, charge them with identifying and solving problems, and encourage them to be candid with one another. They have no authority and are people who have **been through the process themselves.** They focus on the root of the problem, not necessarily the specific remedy (pp 86-87)
  - You are not your idea (separate person from problem). Candor isn't cruel. It does not destroy. On the contrary, any **successful feedback system is built on empathy,** on the idea that we are all in this together, that we understand your pain because we've experienced it ourselves. (p. 104)
  - The people you choose must a) make you **think smarter,** and b) put **lots of solutions** on the table in a short period of time. Seek out people who are willing to level with you and when you find them, hold them close. (p. 105)
  
- **Uncouple fear and failure** (p. 123)
  - **Trust is the best tool** for driving out fear. Trusting others doesn't mean they won't make mistakes. It means that if they do (or you do), you trust they will act to help solve it. The best way to demonstrate trust overtime is to respond well to failure. **Be patient. Be authentic. And be consistent.** The trust will come. (p. 125)
  - Disentangle the good and the bad parts of failure. Be wrong as fast as you can.. **aggressive, rapid learning.** Failure is a manifestation of learning and exploration. (p 109).
  - If we as leaders talk about our mistakes and our part in them then we make it safe for others. My goal is **not to drive fear out completely... I want to loosen its grip on us.** Must think of the cost of failure as an investment in the future. Being open about problems is the first step toward learning from them (p.111)
  - Use iterative **trial and error.** Experiments are fact-finding missions that, over time inch scientists toward greater understanding. That means any outcome is a good outcome, because it yields new information. Armed with new facts, you can then reframe whatever question you're asking (p. 113).
  - When to step in... **how many errors are too much? When a director loses confidence in his/her crew. Or the crew loses confidence in the director's ability.** (p. 119)

- **Managers are teachers** - Proven directors have the responsibility to be teachers- this should be a **central part of their job**. Can we teach in a way that our directors will think smart when we're not around? Being thoughtful about how people learn and grow. (p. 123)
- Management's job is **not to prevent risk but to build the ability to recover** (p. 128)
  
- **The Hungry Beast and the Ugly Baby** (p. 129)
  - The Beast is any large group that needs to be fed an uninterrupted diet of new material and resources in order to function. (p. 129)
  - Our job is to protect our babies from being judged too quickly (p. 131)
  - Protect the new from people who don't understand that **in order for greatness to emerge, there must be phases of not-so-greatness** (p. 132)
  - The Beast is a glutton but also a valuable motivator. The Baby is so pure and unsullied, so full of potential, but it's also needy and unpredictable and can keep you up at night (p. 135)
  
- **Embrace Change**
  - When made the decision to sell Pixar to Disney in 2006, Ed assured them that Pixar would not change... "one of the dumbest things I've ever said." (p. 145)
  - People want to hang on to things that work... And, as we become successful, our approaches are reinforced, and we become even more resistant to change (p.147)
  - Like **musical chairs**: We **cling as long as possible to the perceived "safe" place** that we already know, refusing to loosen our grip until we feel sure another safe place awaits. How, as managers, do we differentiate between sticking with the tried-and-true and reaching for some unknown that might—or might not—be better? (p. 148)
  - The unpredictable is the ground on which creativity occurs (p. 148)
  - **Strategies to manage the fear of change**:
    - Have a **finite list** of problems is much better than having an illogical feeling that *everything* is wrong. (p. 151)
    - **Pretend** or Imagine: "This would be a big change if we were really going to do it, but just as a thought exercise..." or "I'm not actually suggesting this, but go with me for a minute..." (p. 152)
    - Encourage people to **play**: Shut down the conversation and change the mood completely... Watch YouTube videos, tell stories from the weekend (p. 152)
  
- **Uncover what is unseen**
  - Complex environments are, by definition, too complicated for any one person to grasp fully. Yet many managers, afraid of appearing to not be in control, believe that they have to know everything—or at least act like they do. (p. 173)
  - Better approach is to **accept that we can't understand every facet of a complex environment** and to focus, instead, on techniques to deal with combining different viewpoints. (p. 173)
  - Hindsight is not 20-20. **The past should be our teacher, not our master.** (p. 177)
  - We aren't aware that the majority of what we think we see is actually our brain filling in the gaps. (p. 179). Our mental models aren't reality. The key is knowing the difference. (p. 182)

- **BROADENING OUR VIEW- Four ideas about managing:** (pp. 190-191)
  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 don't typically see the boundary between new information coming in from the outside and our old, established mental models—we perceive both together, as a unified experience.
  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 (sometimes hopelessly) intertwined with one another.
  
- **Methods to encourage collaboration and creativity:** (pp. 189-222)
  1. Dailies
  2. Research Trips
  3. The Power of Limits
  4. Integrating technology and art
  5. Postmortems
  6. Continuing to Learn

**About the CBODN In the Know Book Club** In this monthly book club, a presenter shares highlights from a book related to leadership, business, neuroscience, or coaching. Membership is not required, and there's no obligation to pre-read the book. [Register here](#) for upcoming events. For the full set of discussion summaries, [click here](#).