

Creativity, INC.-Ed Catmull

Reflection & Connection

Ed Catmull describes the process and systems he and his team at Pixar established not only to take Pixar to great heights but also Disney Animation Studios once they were acquired by Disney.

As a leader it is incredibly important to establish and nurture an organizational culture that is built on trust, candor, and constructivism. First, the leader and leadership team must actively work to demonstrate this in their own actions. If there is a gap between what the leadership says should happen and what they actually do then mistrust is bred and culture deteriorates.

A lot of the ideas presented in the book made me think of [A Team of Leaders](#) in that teams should be working to set goals and solve ideas without the minute oversight of 'superiors'. The need to be open and candid and growth-oriented is important in a creative organization and this is no different than in education. Schools face multiple levels of problems every year and it is imperative a culture of creativity and problem-solving is fostered. Seeing problems as "administrative" or simply "not mine" can undermine the ultimate success of the school's mission. This happens a lot when teachers and administrators are in their silos of isolation. Leaders need to work to bust these dividers down and bridge a comradery among teachers and staff towards a common mission. In this mission those within the building need to feel trust and confidence they can solve problems as they arise without having to consult administration.

Teaching is a highly creative field, except if your organization is operating under a scripted curriculum that offers little flexibility. However, for all the creativity exhibited by individual teachers and perhaps pockets of schools, education has been ultimately facing the same 'problems' for decades (if not centuries). In order to truly rid ourselves of persistent problems we must, as leaders, cultivate an organization described here.

Notes

- *Start with the assumption your people are smart, talented, and want to contribute
- if any idea gets created, piggyback and push it to the limit
- *To attract the best people you need to put your insecurities away
 - When faced with challenges, get smarter (people)
- Your communication structure should NOT mirror your organization structure--anybody should be able to talk to anybody else no matter their place in the 'hierarchy'
- get the right people on the team; focus on how team is doing vs. individual talents of the team--this is a group/team effort
 - good people > good ideas (ideas come from people after all)
 - truly take care of your employees: personally & professionally
- every team needs a group of problem solvers that are open and honest about problems and solutions (a braintrust @ Pixar)
- people have visceral reactions to failure, even those that know it's a learning experience--this has roots in our earliest levels of school as failure is looked upon as something to be avoided and afraid of

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*in a fear-based culture, risk is avoided which means innovation is stifled

-Jump right into process with mindset failure is OKAY; over-planners and thinkers are just as likely to fail...it just takes them longer to fail & may be overly attached to their plan they spent so much time to create

-don't assume people have necessary skills; discover strengths and weaknesses and help to develop

-trust=best tool for driving out fear

-true honesty helps battle fear because there are no secrets

-as organizations become successful, more resistance forms to altering the status quo because "it has always worked before)

**If one stakeholder "wins" their objective outright, nobody actually wins

NO success or growth without change

-change causes discomfort, could be seen as weakness or admitting you don't know what you are doing...both are false

-Once you master a system you become blind to its flaws (reason our school systems are so flawed? We have 'mastered' an imperfect system)

-confirmation bias: when people favor information, whether true or not, that confirms previously held beliefs--and deny information that opposes/negates their viewpoints

-organizations perceive the world through what they already know how to do

-can we become blind to alternatives because of this?

How to enter a different frame of mind:

- Dailies: meetings each day used to encourage openness, vulnerability, & improvement

-Research field trips: get in the field/arena/setting you are attempting to create; cannot stumble upon unexpected if you only stick to the familiar

-Set limits: establish priorities, requires working smarter

-Tech & art integration: don't be afraid of new technology

-Short experiments: can be used to push innovation; can allow for cheap mistakes from which to learn

-Learn to see: realize preconceptions in order to actually see what is going on

-Postmortem: reflection period upon completion of a project; what went well & what didn't go well. Use data to inform but do not only use data because there are hosts of alternative factors that go into success/failure

-Continuing to learn: Pixar University-importance of everybody to learn, does not have to be job related; need to push our brains to grow

-the way we predict the future is to CREATE it...create by taking risks, being open

-once a roadmap is predetermined people will work hard to stick to that route, but we must be willing to be open to alternative routes and possibilities

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-following success, deliver a personal 'thank you' to those involved in success---powerful connections made

- *hire for people's potential, not their current skill level

- *the process won't be pretty; embrace it

- *if more truth is had in the hallways than in the meetings, you are doomed

- *anybody should be able to 'stop production line' if a problem arises in order to fix it

- *always hire people who are smarter than you