

Creative Confidence:

Unleashing The Creative Potential Within Us All

In the 2013 book “Creative Confidence: Unleashing the Creative Potential Within Us All” David Kelley, founder of IDEO and Stanford’s d.school, and his brother Tom Kelley write of societal preconceptions that create barriers for expanding personal creativity as well as the route to unlocking hidden creativity in all of us.

The story begins with the introduction to the major issue, a universal belief in the “creativity myth”. This is defined as the belief that creativity is innate in only the creative, that our perception of ourselves as being uncreative justifies our lack of an attempt to stimulate our personal creativity. The book posits that for this book to be affective it needs the reader to accept that all people are creative and their creativity can influence the world around them.

Fear becomes a major inhibitor in building creative confidence, psychologist Albert Bandura explains that through “guided mastery” one’s fears can be overcome. This technique is the repeated exposure of the source of our fears to “alter our belief in what [we] can accomplish”. An example is used where patients who suffer from fear of snakes must touch a large boa to help eliminate their preconceived fears. Fear concerning confidence is found in the fear of failure, that our education system has reinforced an idea that it is wrong to fail and we are afraid to try new things because of that fear. This fear makes it impossible for us to learn through “constructive failure”. Much like the child fearfully ascending the ladder of a slide, maybe failing a step of two, but fear turns to joy when he reaches the top of the slide and succeeds.

The authors empathize with the reader and understand how inspiration can be difficult to find. They give eight options that can increase exposure to inspiration:

1. Choose Creativity – proactively decide on being a creative.
2. Think Like a Traveler – always perceive all aspects of situations as new.
3. Engage Relaxed Attention – trust in day-dreaming.
4. Empathize With Your End User – understand why your product is needed.
5. Do Observations in the Field – discover new paradigms.
6. Ask Questions Starting With Why – look deeper into situations.
7. Reframe Challenges – change your point of view.
8. Build a Creative Support Network – work with others to grow.

The authors go on to give the reader advice in cultivating their own creativity, a chapter is dedicated to habits that the reader can form to reinforce a creative lifestyle. Simple habits and exercises such as keeping a journal of every moment that you feel especially satisfied with who you are and analyzing what aspects of those moments made you feel that way.

As well as asking the reader to invite inspiration into their life, the authors also make a call to action. They insist a “do something” mindset is needed to be a creative, that it is required to have an

active voice in one's own life. They emphasize action rather than planning, understand that prototyping quickly is important to produce a final product, and rely on constraints to produce the most creative solutions.

Personal Perception (anecdotes that struck a chord with me) -

While the entire novel is not only about creativity, the authors tend to emphasize the personal empowerment of every person. Their insight into personal satisfaction was particularly interesting when they warn the reader about the "Looks good, Feels Bad" trap, this is the perception that society's vision for our life overrides our individual passions and we are never taught to seek out what makes us feel whole. Another interesting common misconception the novel highlights is the distinction between creativity and artistry and that commonly people see drawing as a litmus test for creativity. I personally never questioned this mentality as a child and the novel explains how the ability to draw is merely a skill that can be learned and its core attributes can be aroused from all of us.