

## BOOK REVIEW

# CREATIVE CONFIDENCE: UNLEASHING THE CREATIVE POTENTIAL WITHIN US ALL

Author: Tom Kelley and David Kelley  
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### OVERVIEW

Creativity is usually equated with the arts, architecture, or design. However, *Creative Confidence: Unleashing the Creative Potential Within Us All*, aims to debunk this myth. The creativity that manifests itself in the form of innovation is the major driving force of business as evidenced in tech giants such as Google, Facebook, Airbnb, or even Alibaba. The book has been recommended by top names among the tech stars including Joe Gebbia, Co-Founder of Airbnb, who has applauded the book for combining the pursuit of creativity with the pragmatism needed in business. Todd Spaletto, President of The North Face, advocated the book by saying that it was an indispensable guide to help build creative muscles, when they are needed most. In addition, the book was complemented by Tom Peters,

best-selling author of *In Search of Excellence*, who recommended the book, saying that it is poised to change the world and advised that it should not just be read but be used.

Co-author, David Kelley is the founder of IDEO, a consulting company, and Stanford d.school, through which he helps students, entrepreneurs, and businesses discover their creative potential through the design thinking process. IDEO specializes in the training and development of innovation techniques to help firms unlock the creative potential of their employees. In the same vein, the Stanford d.school formerly known as the Hasso Plattner Institute of Design, was developed to teach design thinking to those in Stanford's graduate schools. The highlight of the program is the course, Design for Extreme Affordability, which is a multidisciplinary melting pot to foster creative innovation, and

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is offered to students all over the university. Tom Kelley, is the best-selling author of, *The Art of Innovation*, which documents the process IDEO uses to help organizations in both the public and private sectors, and which includes well-known names such as Apple and The North Face.

## REVIEW

*Creative Confidence: Unleashing the Creative Potential Within Us All*, posits that creativity is a mind-set. It is akin to muscles that become stronger when they are used often. Thus, the book uses the stories derived from the work of the authors, from IDEO and the d.school at Stanford to illustrate their point. As a result, the book opens with “*The Heart of Innovation*” as an invitation to readers to embark on a quest to embrace creative confidence, which is defined as the way individual’s see their own potential and their place in the world without unnecessary anxiety and doubt (p.11). In addition, there are eight chapters that follow a guideline for developing creative confidence.

The book has eight chapters starting with *Flip, From Design Thinking to Creative Confidence* and ends with *Next, Embrace Creative Confidence*. In each chapter the authors start with an anecdote drawing from decades of collaboration with creative thinkers, to illustrate the main point of each chapter. Within each chapter the authors provide tools that empower

the pursuit of new ideas with confidence (p.10). For instance, Chapter 7, *Move, Creative Confidence To Go*, provides ten, *Creative Challenges*, designed to exercise the design thinking process because “thinking about new behaviors does not count” (p.243). These exercises build on the lessons from the previous chapters. For instance, *Creative customers, employees, and other end users* builds upon Chapter 3, *Spark, From Blank Page to Insight*, which explains the importance of going into the field to learn about the actual user experience.

The chapters in the book can be presented as follows:

Chapter 1, *Flip, From Design Thinking to Creative Confidence* focuses on the balance between three factors, people, business, and technology, known as the human-centered approach to design and innovation. The tool provided in this chapter is the *Design Driven Innovation* technique (p. 22 – 24). Chapter 2, *Dare, From Fear to Courage* invites readers to have a “can-do” creative mindset by layering the design thinking methodology on top of their own existing skills. The tool provided in this chapter is *Ways of Gaining Empathy* (p. 45 – 46). In Chapter 3, *Spark, From Blank Page to Insight*, the authors illustrate the use of several strategies in order to come up with innovative ideas. An important part of the authors’ message is that good ideas are never enough, it is also important to act; this is the focus of Chapter 4, *Leap, From Planning to Action*. The authors

present the tool, *Action Catalysts* (p. 125 – 126) in order to drive ideas into action. Chapter 5, *Seek, From Duty to Passion* addresses the problem faced by many, a lack of passion in what they do. The authors encourage readers to explore new skills to rekindle a passion in their work, which can in turn greatly improve their performance. Having a creative individual is not sufficient to improve the performance of an organization, it is also important to have a great support team, which is the topic of Chapter 6, *Team, Creatively Confident Groups*. The tool presented in this chapter is *Care and Feeding of an Innovative Team* (p. 190 – 191). In Chapter 7, *Move, Creative Confidence To Go*, the authors invite the readers to engage in 10 exercises that would exercise their creativity. In addition, they end with a note that suggests readers to develop their own exercises to strengthen their creative muscles. After the successful development of creative potential, the authors recommend the readers to foster an atmosphere to nurture creative confidence in Chapter 8, *Next, Embrace Creative Confidence*.

## COMMENTS

The authors provide an easy to read guide to developing creative confidence. They emphasize the importance of creativity in generating innovative solutions to the problems faced by consumers, in order for firms to have a profitable endeavor. For

instance, in Chapter 1, *Flip, From Design Thinking to Creative Confidence*, the authors recall an anecdote from GE Healthcare who developed an MRI designed to make kids more comfortable with the experience. Another heart-warming anecdote in Chapter 3, *Spark, From Blank Page to Insight*, presents the development of Embrace, a simple tool developed by students of the Design for Extreme Affordability course which aimed to help reduce the death rate of pre-mature babies in India.

A strong point of the book is the *Notes* section which provides the necessary links and explanation for some of the anecdotes presented by the authors. This helps to create a more in-depth understanding of the cases and tools developed throughout the course of the book. In addition, the book invites readers to try to develop, present, and implement ideas, with easy to follow advice such as *Tips for Quick Videos* (p. 134 – 136).

However, the weakness of the book lies in the form of its writing, which is similar to cases in the Harvard Business Review. It entails a detailed exploration into the characters in the anecdotes that might be considered irrelevant. In addition, sometimes these anecdotes dive into so much detail that it seems to distract from the focus of the chapter. Also, the frequent mentions of d.school methods might come across as using the book as a sales pitch for the program.

## Why it is better to read

Throughout its entirety the book aims to propose that creativity is not a talent people are born with but a skill that can be acquired. They examine people like Steve Jobs, to decipher their secrets and create simple guidelines for readers who could be anyone, from students, to entrepreneurs, and even business leaders.

First and foremost, the authors provide a very compelling case on the importance of creativity. They have cited numerous examples from enterprises of all sizes to prove their point. These include major companies such as Apple and Lockheed Martin, smaller firms such as Steelcase and PNC Financial Services, and even student start-up ideas such as Embrace. This proves the importance of creativity in driving business success. It also proves that it does not depend on individual talent or availability of funds.

Secondly, the inclusion of tools and in particular the *Creative Challenge* available in Chapter 7 is a valuable guide to help nurture creative confidence. These tools can be applied in training for entrepreneurs and students, who wish to discover their creative potential for application in their careers.

Lastly, the most important contribution of this book is the emphasis that all of us can be creative. By unlocking this latent potential, we can generate real changes around us making us happier. The Embrace case

illustrates how creativity and innovation can be used to solve a real-world problem that could really change the lives of those in need.

## CONCLUSION

This book is an inspirational read empowering readers to discover their true creative potential and exercise it for maximum benefit. The book also makes a subtle point that success is not just a pursuit of wealth but includes satisfaction in a job well done and in doing something which makes the world a better place. At the core of it all is empathy, which opens new doors of understanding. The authors invite the readers to build new skills, learn how to apply their creativity, find the courage to speak up or experiment, and act on creative impulses. They end with a quote from Noel Coward, “work can be more fun than fun” (p. 255).

This book provides an excellent guideline for developing one’s creative confidence, to transform one’s individual potential, as well as innovate for a better world. As explained by Tim Koogle, former President and CEO at Yahoo, the book challenges “us all to have the courage to break out of our ruts, innovate, and create”. Thus, it can be said that this is a good book on practical knowledge, presented through interesting anecdotes. However, this book is not suited for those looking for a theoretical in-depth analysis or “from theory to practice” kind of book.