

Inside the Box: A Proven System of Creativity for Breakthrough Results

Jacob Goldenberg

Drew Boyd

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Using skillfully recounted real-life examples, Boyd and Goldenberg show how just about anybody can dramatically increase their number of eureka moments.

Conjuring up creativity: could it be possible to produce those eureka moments on a consistent basis? Drew Boyd and Jacob Goldenberg, the authors of this intriguing manual, believe that our creative powers can work more efficiently if we use specific techniques to contain and channel them. Mining the most detailed academic research on innovation, they conclude that creativity is not an innate force magically bestowed on merely the fortunate few, but that by using certain research-based methodologies, just about anybody can dramatically increase his or her problem-solving skills.

Through a series of skillfully recounted real-life examples, the authors systematically dispute the notion that creativity is essentially an incomprehensible and unpredictable force of nature. Outside-the-box thinking has been elevated to cult-like status; Boyd and Goldenberg believe that history's greatest thinkers have—either consciously or unconsciously—generally used a certain defined number of templates to decipher the seemingly unfathomable. It seems, paradoxically perhaps, that the real innovators have always thought “inside the box.”

Through the recounting of their own professional experience, the authors wittily portray the horde of creative “experts” they’ve encountered who, with hackneyed aphorisms and quirky gewgaws, have preyed on corporate America in recent years, conveying the one-size-fits-all notion that the only way forward is to overhaul, disassemble, and reinvent everything from scratch—a long-winded process that not surprisingly results in many, many billable hours!

What’s particularly compelling about this book is how it synthesizes the academic theory of structured innovation in situations ranging from the development of scented dryer sheets to life-saving methods of rescuing trapped miners to changing car tires when the nuts are rusted through. It’s the breadth of these examples and the skill with which they are told that will captivate readers and lead them on an engaging journey to master a series of defined and replicable steps toward boosting creativity.

Anybody who has ever faked enthusiastic interest throughout an interminable free-form corporate brainstorming session will appreciate this book and the willingness of its authors to challenge the “creative chaos” of the MBA-credentialed whiz kids with their faux-bro-camaraderie and wannabe realness. This endearing tome convincingly contends that the pseudoscience of brainstorming (as it is generally practiced, at any rate) tends to generate ideas at either one extreme of the conventionality scale or the other—with a preponderance of wacky ideas that lack utility, or many rehashings of the blindingly obvious—with no thought leadership or profitable results. Boyd and Goldenberg bravely concede that their techniques will produce fewer ideas than the seeming cornucopia generated by conventional brainstorming, but that thankfully these outcomes will include a far greater proportion of real innovations, rather than ego gratification and dubiously useful breakthroughs.

On a practical note, the book could benefit from fill-in worksheets for the templates described. This extra feature would

fully realize the book's potential.

The next time your boss entices the gang to the conference room to toss some ideas around over pizza and soda, be sure to scan this book the night before. That way, the hours you spend away from your desk might actually produce something that enhances your work life and, quite possibly, your company's bottom line. The proof will be in the pudding, the windshield wipers, the software, or the enhanced customer service—that is, whatever product or service to which you devote your career. All around—as the jargon would have it—a “win-win situation” for you, and for the universe.

SEAMUS MULLARKEY (November 26, 2013)

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