

Creativity Needs Candid Conversations

Do you know how to unleash the creativity of your team?

In our fast-paced digital life, church leadership teams need to be creative in order to deal with the changes coming their way today – or they risk irrelevancy tomorrow.

Creativity then, becomes a constant process for every ministry area of any church rather than an occasional requirement for the worship pastor at Christmas or only limited to those “creative” churches.

Like farmers and their crops, leaders cannot dictate creativity, but they are called to cultivate creativity. Thinking and acting creatively doesn't just happen because a leader desires it or orders it to happen. With the right environment, resources, mindset, and vision, your team will be able to develop the required motivation to be creative on their own.

Solution - Create a Braintrust

THE QUICK SUMMARY - [Creativity, Inc.](#), by Ed Catmull

Creativity, Inc. is a book for leaders who want to lead their teams to new heights, 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.

It is, at heart, a book about how to build a creative culture—but it is also, as Pixar co-founder and president Ed Catmull writes, “an expression of the ideas that I believe make the best in us possible.”

For nearly twenty years, Pixar has dominated the world of animation through joyousness of the storytelling, the inventive plots, and 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.

A SIMPLE SOLUTION

Among the many necessities for creativity is the freedom for a team to share ideas, comments, and critiques with one another. The flip side of that freedom is the danger of being too critical, or that critical comments are taken the wrong way.

How can leaders walk the fine line between encouraging open, honest dialogue among their team while at the same time avoiding negative, destructive criticism?

Creativity has to start somewhere, and we are true believers in the power of bracing, candid feedback and the iterative process – reworking, reworking, and reworking again,

until a flawed story finds its throughline or a hollow character finds a soul.

One of Pixar's key mechanisms is the Braintrust, which we rely upon to push us toward excellence and to root out mediocrity. The Braintrust is our primary delivery system for straight talk. Its premise is simple: Put smart, passionate people in a room together, charge them with identifying and solving problems, and encourage them to be candid with one another.

It's not foolproof – sometimes the interactions only serve to highlight the difficulties of achieving candor – but when we get it right, the results are phenomenal. The Braintrust sets the tone for everything else we do.

Participants in the Braintrust do not *prescribe* how to fix the problems they diagnose. They test weak points, they make suggestions, but it is up to the director to settle on a path forward.

People who take on complicated creative projects become lost at some point in the process. In order to create, you must internalize and almost become the project for a while. Soon, the details converge to obscure the whole, and that makes it difficult to move forward substantially in any one direction.

No matter what, the process of coming to clarity takes patience and candor.

The Braintrust differs from other feedback mechanisms in two ways:

- It is made up of people with a deep understanding of the process at hand and who have been through it themselves;
- It has no authority – the director (leader) has to figure out how to address the feedback.

We believe that ideas only become great when they are challenged and tested.

- Ed Catmull, *Creativity, Inc.*

A NEXT STEP

Does your leadership team debate, disagree, discuss, dump—or do you *dialogue*? The group dynamics of a team can make or break your effectiveness as a leader. Imagine what could happen in your ministry if you could lubricate your team's communication skills.

Engaging the methods of dialogue results in two-way, open communication that generates an uninhibited flow of ideas in a "braintrust" environment.

Dialogue relates to more than communication—it involves creating an environment of trust, discipline and commitment to a common purpose where teams "think together."

With an understanding of the basics of dialogue, the team must relentlessly:

- Practice listening to hear, not to react
- Practice asking to explore ideas, not to judge
- Practice advocating an idea that focuses on the question at hand, not to defend a position

The core of dialogue is that there is understanding and discipline on the team that the question—the problem at hand—always remains the focus of the dialogue, with the church’s vision as primary filter. It works because individuals put aside egos, assumptions, emotions and agendas to focus on the question for the good of the whole—the collective vision of the church or ministry. In a true “Braintrust” dialogue, ideas get affirmed or challenged, not people.

Auxano has developed a hands-on tool to use in collaborative meetings that not only reinforces understanding of dialogue and team dynamics, but personally engages each individual to enter into productive, healthy collaboration and apply what they have learned.

We call it the **Collaboration Cube**.

Our Collaboration Cube takes these ideas to an experiential level that not only encourages team involvement in dialogue, but gives them the ability to apply it. The cube is used by the facilitator to guide the group, and by team members to communicate within the Braintrust.

Imagine creating a “Braintrust” at your church: a unified team that can work together and support decisions because they are results that people really care about and they evolved from a shared experience. What could you do with that kind of cohesive culture? Give this method a try and watch the collective intelligence of your team and your decisions increase with results for your ministry that are unprecedented.

[Read more about the Collaboration Cube](#), or [visit our online store to purchase them](#).

Creativity and innovation are the life blood of a thriving ministry. But even the most creative team can become stale or fall into a rut of the same old same old. Your actions as a leader will determine if your team stays the same, or is constantly reinventing itself.

*This is part of a weekly series posting content from one of the most innovative content sources in the church world: **SUMS Remix** Book Summaries for church leaders. SUMS Remix takes a practical problem in the church and looks at it with three solutions; and each solution is taken from a different book. As a church leader you get to scan relevant books based on practical tools and solutions to real ministry problems, not just by the cover of the book. Each post will have the edition number which shows the year and what number it is in the overall sequence. (SUMS provides 26 issues per year, delivered every other week to your inbox).*

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