



# Executive Book Summaries®

## Born to Create

How Creativity Sparks Connection, Innovation,  
and Belonging in Our New World of Work

by **Anne Jacoby**



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### THE SUMMARY IN BRIEF

Given that over one-third of our lives is spent on work, isn't it only fair to make every day as fulfilling as possible?

The book *Born to Create: How Creativity Sparks Connection, Innovation, and Belonging in Our New World of Work* unravels how leaders can tap into vital creative skills and bring them into business in an impactful, engaging, and memorable way. Weaved in the form of a delightful three-act structure of a theatrical script, the book paves our path toward building creative confidence and resilience and living a creatively fulfilling personal and professional life.

By stitching together stories of artists, business leaders, and entrepreneurs, author Anne Jacoby helps leaders tap into their own creativity to lead others and build a vibrant culture where everyone gets to tap into their creative prowess and contribute to business success. The pages ahead guide us to foster stronger bonds, spark innovation, and ultimately find a deeper sense of purpose in our work.

### IN THIS EXECUTIVE BOOK SUMMARY:

- Develop your creative skills and apply them in business.
- Learn how to lead effectively and authentically through creativity.
- Understand the importance of building resilience and a culture of creativity for business success.

## Introduction

If your work doesn't currently light you up, it could be time to focus on something else that does. Life is short. With an estimated one-third of our lives spent at work, I believe more creativity can help it become something that fuels you.

I've structured this book as nine scenes within three acts as a nod to my roots in the theatre, but also as recognition that creativity leads to performance, "the action or process of carrying out or accomplishing an action, task, or function." I won't just talk abstractly about creativity; I'll help you apply the skills to get things done.

Act I is The Spark, where we'll focus on your individual creativity. There, we'll dive into the power of creative confidence, how to strengthen your imagination and put things on their feet, and the importance of continuously gathering and integrating feedback.

Act II is The Blaze. That's the section to learn how to lead more creatively and develop creativity in others to innovate. We'll examine how our workspaces influence creativity and also take a closer look at how creativity can build collaborative team dynamics.

And finally, Act III is The Bonfire, where we'll discover how to build the creativity culture that we all crave. Filled with practical exercises to create an organizational North Star, this section will include the building blocks of creativity culture and the rituals that enable us to authentically foster this connection at work.

## Act 1: The Spark: Igniting Your Creative Confidence

### Scene 1: Building Your Creative Confidence

When we cultivate the confidence to welcome our own bad ideas, to not hold back, we can foster creativity. We are all born to create. We just have to muster the confidence to believe it. Creative confidence can be strengthened with practice.

Today, our relationship with work is changing. That's one of the big reasons I believe creativity is such an in-demand life skill. Creativity enables us to spot problems and view them as opportunities and then imagine how we can be part of the solution. Whatever your big goals are, they require an entrepreneurial mindset. And that translates to the need for creative confidence. Successful entrepreneurs have a few things in common:

- Resilience and grit to push through the discomfort of making mistakes.
- An insatiable curiosity and appetite to learn.
- A vision to see the possibility in their ideas.
- Resourcefulness and a bias toward action.
- The ability to be a talent multiplier, possessing a subtle magnetism to attract people to join in their journey.

Entrepreneurial thinking requires a beginner's mind. Start a project or creative idea with a sense of wonder: What might I learn from this? If it's successful, what could be the outcome? Envision your creative output even before it's produced. We have more agency over building our creative confidence than we may think. Getting our creative mojo takes effort and a willingness to adapt.

Creative constraints can lead to sharper creative output. It's true, that we can't always control when creativity comes, or exactly how. But we have to be ready to receive it when it does. Make time for Creativity Boosters. Write down three words that reflect your creative energy. Circle the one that feels most unexpected. Write three more words that relate to the circled word. Circle the one that surprises you most. Take your final circled word and see if or how it shows up in your daily work. Finally, know yourself, including how, when, and where your creativity shows up.

### Scene 2: Strengthening Your Imagination and Putting It on Its Feet

Trained actors are skilled at getting into the heads of imaginary people. They transport themselves to a human experience separate from theirs. Using that new lens, they then filter the world in a new way. To bring this power to life in the workplace, journal in great detail about a day in the life of this future version of you. Be sure to jot things down in the present tense, as if they're happening now. What is your typical routine? Who's in your life? What projects are you working on that light you up?

Finally, reflect on the day-long story you just created. What surprised you? Maybe you're no longer at your current job and your day starts with a long neighborhood walk with your dog. You see, memory plays a powerful role in creative thinking, too. Harkening back to that moment our hearts first opened, we can draw on the details of past experiences to inspire more specificity in what our imaginations are creating. Find your motivation and Ikigai. Ikigai is a Japanese philosophy around our life's purpose. A quick Google search will yield dozens of visual frameworks on Ikigai, but

# Being aware of our brain's hardwired fear when facing feedback underscores the importance of actively seeking it out to regain some control.

here's my take on it: Ikigai is the intersection of:

- Love (What I love doing)
- Talent (What I'm good at doing)
- Commence (What I can get paid doing)
- Demand (What the world needs)

Make time to be creative and create a lifestyle that supports your creative journey. You might start by considering if the work that sustains you can be done at least part of the time remotely. Or perhaps you'd find more fulfillment by working fewer than forty hours per week to make space for other creative passions.

## Scene 3: The Art of Seeking Out Feedback (Taking the Note)

Being aware of our brain's hardwired fear when facing feedback underscores the importance of actively seeking it out to regain some control. We can develop techniques to prepare ourselves to move through it: deep breaths to manage the physiological reaction, and self-talk to remind ourselves that it's only one person's perspective. "Love Notes of Resistance" can indicate where we might want to pause or gather feedback. These can look like: "Something feels off. Am I on the right track with this idea? Is there any business value in what I'm creating?" A response to the Love Note might be:

- Hmm, I wonder why I'm not feeling connected to this work... What would it feel like to be on the right track?
- How can I get a fresh perspective on this idea, or whom can I ask for feedback?
- How might value from this idea show up in the business (e.g., happier employees or customers, more revenue, reduced cost, a differentiated product or service)?

The best way to overcome or respond to Love Notes of Resistance? Ask more questions. Be objectively curious. Remember, feedback is merely a perspective that can come from many inputs: ourselves, peers, managers, or what the data is telling us.

Start with self-feedback. Seek out peer feedback. Be specific in asking for manager feedback. By taking more control over

the areas where you'd value more guidance, you can boost your level of autonomy, owning your development. Connect this feedback from work to other parts of your life. Take notes, incorporate what's helpful, and then move on - don't take feedback too personally. Beware the Creativity Killers that might be blocking your creative expression. Here are some common patterns that can easily stop creativity in its tracks:

- Overthinking
- Judgment about our creative product too early
- Lack of sleep
- Hunger
- Fear
- Perfectionism
- Overvaluing the status quo
- Encountering those with a fixed mindset (e.g., "This will never change")

Dropping in to follow our passion is a form of self-feedback. Think about your spark. Reflect on what lights you up and gift yourself that personal feedback. Think about the thing in your life that is not only deserving of your focus but invites the metaphorical tap on the shoulder, reminding you of the moment your heart first opened.

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## Act 2: The Blaze: Cultivating Creativity in Others to Innovate

### Scene 4: Trust Falls: What's Required to Be a Creative Leader Today

Creative leadership starts with trust and having a mindset of believing in your team's limitless potential to be creative. Building trust and psychological safety is the foundation of a creative team. Creating that culture of possibility is up to everyone, but the leader sets the tone. Belonging at work leads to greater work satisfaction, including the social permission to create, experiment, and be imperfect.

Creativity in times of crisis is often born out of necessity.

For instance, you may be in the position of leading creatively through challenging economic times and are looking for untapped revenue streams or eliminating waste in expenses. Whatever the case, your foundational skill as a creative leader is to build trust with your team and the broader organization to bring these creative ideas to life.

When facing a thorny challenge, find a quiet hour all to yourself. List all of the common solutions that may have been tried before. Next, look for hidden parts of the problem. What hasn't yet been examined? Are there areas where no one has looked or re-examined? Start there. Aim to see the problem in a different light.

### Scene 5: Creative Physical and Psychologically Safe Workplaces

The physical workspaces your team inhabits may impact creativity. Create an office like a set designer to demonstrate your commitment to psychological safety. Offer choice. With creative leadership, you can listen to what your employees value and build a strong culture across multiple team structures.

For leaders who aim to inspire a creativity culture, the environment - the office décor and physical structure - reflects the people and company mission within it. Ask your team what equipment or materials would make them more comfortable and effective at work, ranging from an office chair, improved lighting, standing desk, or ergonomic keyboard setups. Invite team members to share what environment helps them to focus and share best practices for technology (and analog!) tools. Not only may it help others to try out and adopt new, effective habits, but it's also a great way to learn more about your team's individual preferences and unique work styles.

Embrace the nonlinear workday. Find processes that support both synchronous and asynchronous work experiences. Spot creativity gatekeepers and consider how to mitigate the risk of Creativity Killers, such as:

- “We'll leave the creative ideas to x team.”
- “Let's save all of our creative thinking for our team-building event.”
- “Let's go with what's been done before since we know it works.”

Knowing the propensity to reject creativity, it often falls to the creative leader to help position new ideas as safe, accessible, and relatable. This might require:

- Walking through a potential user experience and pulling in common fact patterns and emotions.

- Outlining other successful creative leaps or incremental improvements made across the company.
- Sharing breakthrough inventions in a similar industry that may have looked foreign at first, but led to new operating and consumer norms (think about the leap from horses to cars, faxes to email, or Polaroid pictures to the ubiquitous use of cameras on our phones)

Creative leadership comes in all shapes and sizes. Your job is to define the challenge at hand, note any gaps from where you are to where you'd like to be, and experiment.

Resist the impulse to obsess over what could be and celebrate the creativity you already have within your team. Be the learn-it-all.

### Scene 6: Collaboration Is a Jam Session (Creative Team Dynamics)

As creative leaders, we are the conductors. You may find yourself leading a team full of individual superstars, but if they struggle to play off and support each other to blend their individual voices, those lofty objectives are doomed to fail. The creative leader can spot the unique needs across the team and coalesce them around a shared purpose. Your collaborative teamwork becomes the music, the soundtrack to your company's journey. Then you can jam. When we collaborate with others, slowing down is often the best way to find our team's rhythm together. It's how we fully see the talents on the team to let them shine. There are a few things we can do to help slow things down:

- Observe. In rushed or panicked moments, consider zooming out to objectively recognize what's happening.
- Ruthlessly prioritize. Remember, if everything's a priority, then nothing is a priority.
- Practice saying no. Saying no can also mean passing the baton to others who are ready and able to say yes!
- Get perspective. To fully gain the benefits of slowing down, experience the good stuff that happens after a vacation away from home.

To solve each problem, perform:

- Root-cause analysis. What's the potential source of the problem? What would need to change to address this root cause?
- Divergent thinking + mind mapping. What are the emotions and downstream consequences of this problem? How would these feelings change if the problem

Remember, creative work is messy. Feedback on our creativity can wound us. But it can make us even more determined to build something of value.

were solved, and what would be the business impact?

- Perspective-taking. How do different stakeholders in your company (e.g., sales, marketing, finance, product, HR) think about this problem? Next, think of a leader you admire outside of your industry. How might they approach this problem?
- SWOT analysis. Consider a leading solution to the problem. What are the strengths of the solution? What are the potential weaknesses? What opportunities lie within this solution? Are there any threats to consider before implementing it?

Finally, know your role. You may define roles as:

- The Culture Carrier. The role that represents your team culture and evaluates if the candidate brings compatible attributes.
- The Skills Champion. The role to evaluate if the candidate has the mindset, skills, and experiences to effectively thrive in the position.
- The Seller. The role in charge of marketing the opportunity and company experience, bringing some razzle-dazzle.
- The Closer. The role responsible for the recruiting process, managing the next steps, and facilitating all communications with the candidate.

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## Act 3: The Bonfire: Fostering Creativity Culture Across Your Organization

### Scene 7: Your Company's North Star: Finding Purpose at Work

Creativity culture has three pillars: connection, innovation, and inclusion. If you have connection and innovation but lack inclusion, you get an insular culture, one that may lack perspective and create an echo chamber. With connection and inclusion but no innovation, you can find yourself with a family culture and a bad environment. Finally, if your company embraces innovation and inclu-

sion but lacks connection, that can lead to a transactional culture, one that's transient, with high turnover. When all three elements of connection, innovation, and inclusion are present, that's when creativity culture can thrive.

I've found these three pillars of creativity often help bring the North Star into sharper focus. You start to break the mold of what you think your company should be and inhabit the space of who you authentically are. Then you can shine light on the path to a creativity culture of your own. Remember, creative work is messy. Feedback on our creativity can wound us. But it can make us even more determined to build something of value. Building a creativity culture requires a heightened focus on the words that bring your organizational messages to life. When crafting these marketing and communication messages to best reflect your company culture, it's helpful to:

- Start with your North Star. Define your organizational purpose or reason for being.
- Define your different audiences. This includes your employees, prospective employees, customers, board members, investors, community, and anyone else who may interact with your company experience.
- List your communication channels. How does each audience receive the message of your north star?
- Consider your timeline. Much like evaluating your communications channels, think about the right cadence or timeline for each messaging opportunity.
- Evaluate consistency or impact gaps. Much like the quantifiable value of a strong brand, the strength of your North Star message can have an impact on your ability to attract, retain, and develop talent, drive a qualified pipeline of business, or improve your investment options. The clarity of this message matters.
- Create ongoing measurement. Learn how to track engagement levels, evaluate email open rates, gather customer input, and solicit employee and customer sentiments about your North Star.

### Scene 8: Be the Conductor: Applying the Culture Strategy Framework

Workplace culture is influenced by why you exist, who thrives there, how you engage, and when and where you co-create and this is what the Culture Strategy (CS) covers:

CS 1: “Why We Exist.” The key questions to help discover WHY your organization exists include:

- Purpose, Vision, Mission: Why does our company exist? How do we communicate that purpose?
- Core Values: What three to five stories demonstrate the behaviors of living the values that each team member should know? What do we do when someone is not living our values?
- Value Proposition: What are three to five customer impact stories that each member of our team should know?

CS 2: “Who Thrives Here.” A few starter questions to prompt thinking around WHO thrives at your company:

- Demographics and DEIB (diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging) strategy: What strategies do we have in place to increase diversity and equity across the business?
- Competencies, behaviors, and learning: What are our leadership principles and how are they consistently applied? What EQ/power skills do we want our people to develop and how do we support them?
- Culture fit and assessment: Who are the change champions across our business and how do they embody our culture? How do we celebrate different identities, backgrounds, and lived experiences across our organization, through employee resource groups (ERGs) or other methods?
- Moments that matter, milestones, and social impact: What social causes does our organization care about that are aligned with our values, and how do we support employee activism?

CS 3: “How We Engage.” Here are a few questions to determine HOW you engage:

- Listening and feedback: What different methods do we have to listen and gather feedback on our culture from ALL stakeholders? How do we model giving real-time feedback and ensure 1:1 manager-report meetings are happening?
- Business operations: What constitutes an effective meeting and how do we measure success? How do people in different functions or regions collaborate on shared business challenges and opportunities?

- Goals: How does goal achievement link to future growth opportunities?
- Team building and community: How are we communicating our culture to our board and/or investor community? Do we have a culture dashboard, and if so, what are we measuring?

CS 4: Where and When We Co-Create. Here are a few questions to think about when reviewing WHEN and WHERE you co-create with colleagues at your company:

- Organizational structure and shared organizing principles: When do we connect as a team to build relationships? When and where do we meet as a leadership team, either in person or virtually?
- Physical work environment: What physical artifacts represent who we are as an organization? How do our virtual or in-office team-building experiences reflect our culture?
- Conflict and concern: Do team members know the code of conduct, policies, behavior guidelines, and what to do if something isn't right?

Think like a marketer to transmit your “culture messages.” Effective marketing - as well as a distinctive workplace culture - is designed to feel fresh, not canned versions of things you've seen dozens of times before. Remember, being the conductor is much more than simply standing on a podium. Embodying the mindset of a conductor within a creative culture means deeply listening. It means applying a strategic outlook to shape the arc of the employee experience.

## Scene 9: Activating Values with Stories and Rituals

In a healthy culture, early employees keep the business drumbeat as new joiners layer in new perspectives, riffs, and rhythmic syncopation of their own. Ideally, a fuller, more sustainable song emerges. Then, we can be willing to accept the last first tooth with an appreciation for what's ahead, without diminishing the loss of what's right in front of us. As your company scales, be sure to:

- Ensure your onboarding process has an experiential way of activating company values.
- Take regular people-pulse surveys and examine key culture questions quarterly.
- Review meetings, town halls, and company communications to layer in North Star principles, semiannually.

- Reassess core values annually, ensuring they still feel relevant to your growing business.
- If there's growing tension between new joiners and the OG, create culture carrier opportunities, like Tiger Team working groups or rotation stretch opportunities, to strengthen bonds between the two groups.

need to create is already within you - your personal spark is lit, and you're ready to cultivate creativity in others and foster a creativity culture across your organization!

Consider answering questions like: What business rituals can we develop or continue? What leadership habits should we let go of and retire? What are the values and behaviors we'd like to carry forward in our next chapter, and how can we reward and celebrate them? How can we intentionally set up collaborative teams that honor our veteran team members yet welcome new perspectives?

Even after culture has been established within a more mature organization, there are still ongoing opportunities to influence and shape it. Be mindful of the practices that no longer serve your organization or team. Reflect on the meaningful rituals that you want to preserve as you grow. Consider the different maturity stages and sizes of your organization when operationalizing initiatives and building a creativity culture. Finally, scale creativity by sharing and operationalizing memorable stories.

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### Conclusion: Director's Notes: After the Final Curtain Call

So now, I put down my paintbrush. Not because I feel like I'm done, but to step back and reflect on what's been created. To sit with it for a moment. I'm ready to generously share what I've learned so that you can build on the ideas that resonate with you - and discard those that don't. Now it's your turn. The fire is burning brightly. Everything you could ever



**Anne Jacoby** is founder and CEO of Spring Street Solutions, a consultancy dedicated to sparking creativity at work. Through culture assessments, workplace strategy, leadership programs, and coaching engagements, Anne partners with leaders who crave more connection, innovation, and inclusion across their teams. Her clients range from high-growth tech startups to F500 global organizations. With an MBA from NYU's Leonard N. Stern School of Business, Anne blends her creative roots and over twenty years of business know-how to enable desired organizational change.

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