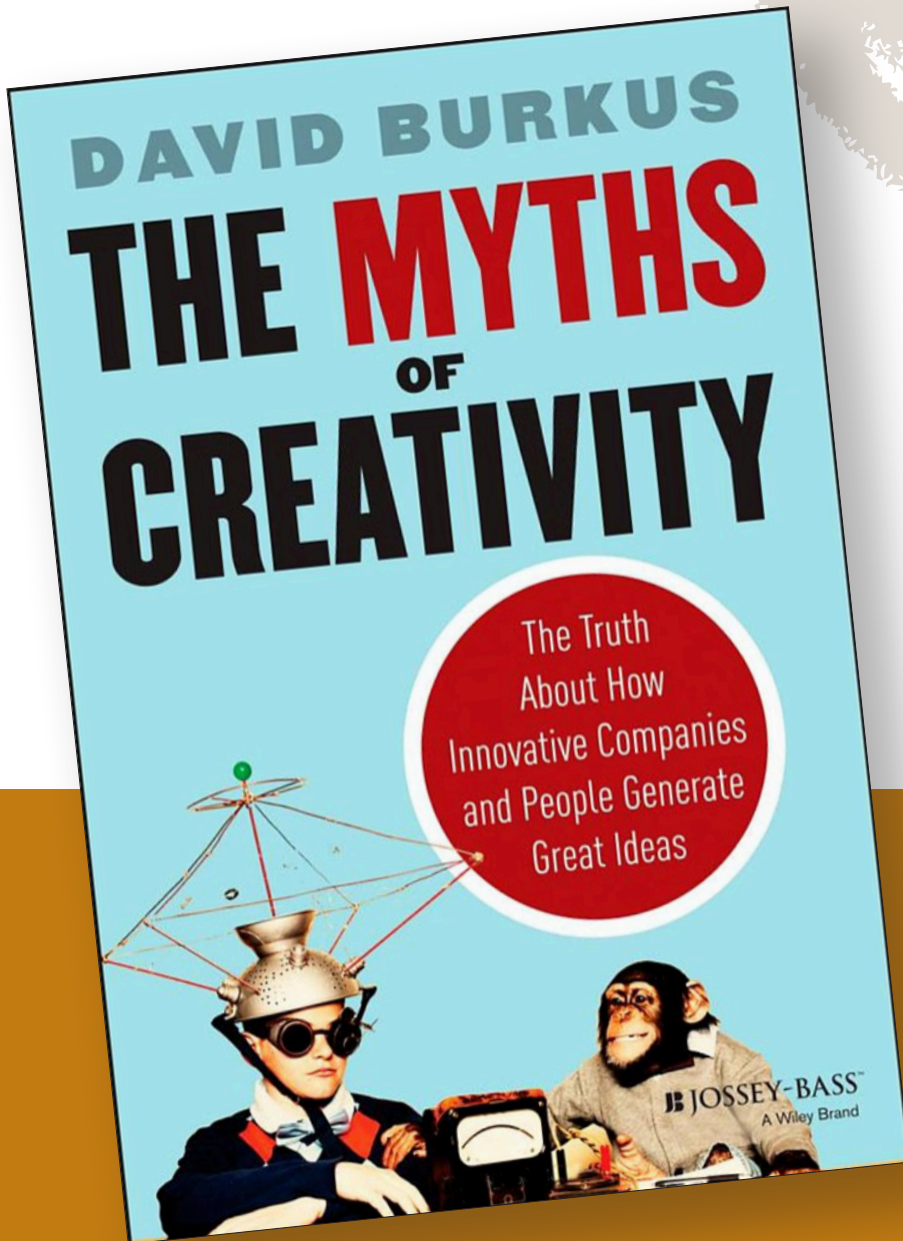


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The Truth
About How
Innovative Companies
and People Generate
Great Ideas

The Myths of Creativity | *David Burkus*

The Myths of Creativity: The Truth About How Innovative Companies and People Generate Great Ideas
Jossey-Bass: San Francisco, CA, 2014. 214 pages.

There is a mythology that surrounds creativity.

Cultures develop myths when they can't rely on existing knowledge to explain the world around them. They are developed and passed down in an effort to explain why certain mysterious events occur, or to affirm how we should behave and think.

Creativity is no different.

The Ancient Greeks created the muses, who received and answered the prayers of ancient writers, musicians, and even engineers. The muses were the bearers of creativity's divine spark. They were the source of inspiration. Over time, the Greek influence on the Western world ensured that the legend of the muses continued on.

The belief that creativity is a divine gift isn't limited to the ancient Greeks. Theologians from a variety of religions throughout history have asserted that God was the sole sources of creativity in the universe.

During the Enlightenment, many of the leading thinkers of the 18th century sought to re-establish a "cult of the muses" as a means to further their own intellectual pursuits.

Our modern culture still feels the effects of their efforts in words such as "museum," whose original meaning was "cult place of the muses," but has since come to refer to any place where public knowledge or creative works are displayed.

While the influence of the Greek mythology of creativity can still be seen in modern times, the modern scientific method has helped us move away from a belief in the muses. Research is moving us toward an empirically proven model of creativity that can be used to generate innovative ideas.

In *The Myths of Creativity*, author David Burkus lists ten myths about creativity that are widespread in the modern world. These are myths in the traditional sense: they're based on observing something seemingly unexplainable, and then crafting a logically sound (but faulty) explanation.

Like many traditional myths, the myths of creativity are useful for putting our minds at ease. But if we want to generate truly great ideas, we can't rely on mythology.

In order to lead innovation efforts, we must have a better understanding of where creativity comes from and how to enhance the creativity of the people we lead.

It's time to rewrite the myths of innovation.

Ten Myths of Creativity List

- | | |
|-------------------------|---------------------------|
| 1. The Eureka Myth | 6. The Lone Creator Myth |
| 2. The Breed Myth | 7. The Brainstorming Myth |
| 3. The Originality Myth | 8. The Cohesive Myth |
| 4. The Expert Myth | 9. The Constraints Myth |
| 5. The Incentive Myth | 10. The Mousetrap Myth |

The Myths of Creativity | *David Burkus (cont'd)*

1

The Eureka Myth

We tend to assume that creative insights happen in a flash, or that the idea was brought to us from something outside ourselves. That's why we use language like "it just came to me." The truth is that the creative process typically requires a time of incubation, where ideas and relevant knowledge linger in the subconscious. Sometimes the ideas connect suddenly, seemingly in a flash, but more often the right connection takes some work after incubation. The most creative individuals and companies regularly schedule incubation time, or shift from one project to another, to allow conscious minds some time off from thinking about the project.

2

The Breed Myth

When we look at outstandingly creative individuals, it's easy to assume that they are a certain type or breed. The truth is that there is no evidence supporting a creative gene or personality type. We're all cut from largely the same cloth, with the same ability to generate ideas. Walk through a kindergarten class and observe the creativity in every student.

There is a wealth of evidence showing there is creative potential inside of everyone.

While it's easy to separate out "creatives" from the presumably non-creative workers, many of the most innovative companies purposely do not draw that distinction. They make creativity a part of everyone's job.

3

The Originality Myth

When a creative idea is presented to us, it's easy to look at it as wholly original—a departure from the old way of thinking. The truth is that all new ideas are built from combining older ideas. The novelty comes from the combination or application, not the idea itself.

The printing press combined the technology of the wine press with moveable type. The film saga *Star Wars* is a mash-up of previous science fiction movies with samurai films set against a plotline borrowed from ancient myths. Our brains are a jumble of connections, and new connections are formed all the time. Research demonstrates that the most creative people are the ones whose brains form new connections the easiest.

It's not about originality; it's about making original copies.

4

The Expert Myth

When we face a tough creative challenge, we always look to those with the most expertise. The truth is that some level of expertise matters, but the most creative solutions come from those on the fringes of the subject area, who know enough to understand but not enough to block their creative thinking.

Research shows that, over the course of their careers, most individuals tend to reach their peak creativity productivity early on, and then begin a downward trend. Those who continue at high levels of productivity are the ones who cultivate outsider mindsets by constantly learning new fields and applying those new lessons to old problems.

The Myths of Creativity | *David Burkus (cont'd)*

5

The Incentive Myth

In organizations, if you want something done well you incentivize it. But that can get tricky when the “something” that needs to be done requires creativity. The truth is that extrinsic motivators like incentive pay have been shown to have a modest effect on creativity at best, and a negative one at worst.

Creativity is driven by intrinsic motivation, and unless an incentive is aligned with our intrinsic desires, the incentive won't have an effect.

6

The Lone Creator Myth

We tend to think that great creative work happens in isolation. We envision a lonely artist slaving away in his studio. The truth is that most breakthrough ideas come from teams formed out of the right network of collaborators. Thomas Edison had a team of around 15 other inventors working alongside him on various projects. Michelangelo painted the Sistine Chapel with the help of 13 other artists.

Research shows that the best teams have a blend of long-time colleagues and new collaborators. When we think alone or with the same old team, we rarely capture new ideas.

Creativity is a team sport and the most creative companies get that way by building the best teams.

7

The Brainstorming Myth

When most of us have to “think outside the box,” we resort to one method: brainstorming. The method itself has been the subject of debate for quite some time. One thing that isn't up for debate is that brainstorming as a creative method is not sufficient by itself. The truth is that the creative process requires various stages.

Almost all fixed creative methods (from creative problem solving to design thinking) involve a period of rapid idea generation, but then also allow for a time where ideas are combined and externalized.

Brainstorming works to generate a list of ideas, but it's what we do with that list afterward that makes the results truly creative.

8

The Cohesive Myth

If you look at the most innovative companies in the world, it's easy to see signs of cohesion. The truth is that the most innovative companies and teams build conflict into their creative process. Film studio Pixar schedules regular “Braintrust” meetings where directors screen a film-in-progress and open it up for criticism. The result of “shredding” the film is always a better film.

While steps need to be taken to make sure criticism stays task-focused (not people focused), research suggests that even brainstorming as a technique is more beneficial when teams debate ideas.

Conflict is a sign that new ideas are being suggested; cohesion is often a sign that there are no new ideas.

The Myths of Creativity | *David Burkus (cont'd)*

9

The Constraints Myth

When we're stuck on a creative challenge, it can become easy to place blame on our constraints. If we had more resources or less specific requirements, then our creativity could really soar. Researchers found that individuals are more creative after engaging in tasks laden with obstacles and roadblocks. That's why many of the most creative organizations build limitations into their projects.

Constraints help us by giving structure to the challenge we are trying to overcome.

Without that structure, there is no understanding. Without that understanding, there is no solution. Creativity doesn't just love constraints; it thrives under them.

10

The Mousetrap Myth

We've heard the saying, "If you build a better mousetrap, the world will beat a path to your door." The truth is that if you build a better mousetrap, the world will either beat it down or ignore it. History is filled with innovative ideas being rejected when they were first presented. Kodak invented the digital camera and never marketed it. Xerox invented the personal computer and handed it off to Apple and Microsoft. Psychological research suggests that we actually have a bias against creative ideas.

The most innovative companies know they don't need to make their people more creative, they need to get better at recognizing the creative ideas their people have.

There is a gap between what we think we know about creativity and innovation and what research and history actually tells us. There is no shortage of books on how to be more creative or how your company can innovate more. All of these books seek to meet a need. Few would dispute that our society needs more creativity and our organizations need more innovation. So we turn to books that promise simple tips or proven methods to leveraging creativity.

But what if it's not about creative thinking methods?

What if it's about how we think about creativity?

If we want to develop more creative individuals, and build more innovative organizations, then we need to question our models. **We need to rewrite the myths of creativity.**

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The Myths of Creativity | *David Burkus (cont'd)*

Recommended Resources

1. **Read** a list of 11 high-impact ideas for creativity developed by Auxano Founder and Team Leader Will Mancini.
2. **Watch** author David Burkus as he introduces how to get past the most common myths about creativity to design truly innovative strategies.
3. **Listen** to a podcast as author David Burkus debunks a few of the most destructive myths about creativity.
4. **Read** an excerpt of *The Myths of Creativity* from Fast Company magazine.

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Go Ahead Actions for Vision Clarity

by Clint Grider, Ph.D., CFRE

Vision Clarity Connection

Brad Bird, an Academy Award-winning director from Pixar, recently noted: “Making a film, you have all these different departments, and what you’re trying to do is find a way to get them to put forth their creativity in a harmonious way. Otherwise, it’s like you have an orchestra where everybody’s playing their own music. Each individual piece might be beautiful, but together they’re crazy.”

In *The Myths of Creativity*, author David Burkus unabashedly confronts common misperceptions about creative thought to help leaders become catalysts for true beauty that most organizations only dream about.

As we consider Burkus’ myths described earlier in this SUMS, we must remember that all team members can play a critical role in breakthrough innovation if leaders champion a *culture* that allows it to happen. Yet, too often, well-meaning leaders miss subtle hindrances to building this type of culture. For example, some may—perhaps unintentionally—create a “busyness” paradigm where our people so busy doing “good” or “urgent” things that their ultimate synergistic potential is never harnessed.

Do we, as leaders, truly embrace and value the potential that focused margins for our people can bring? Asked a different way, do we ever look at intentional creative collaboration as fairly isolated events that happen between the “real” day-to-day work that has to happen? This subtle virus can be deadly to achieving our organizations’ true potential. If we are to transition into an innovative culture that achieves far more than we could ever imagine, we must consistently beat back such paradigms that hinder us from true transformational breakthrough.

Go Ahead

As a starting point, in your next leadership meeting, write on a whiteboard the tens myths that Burkus outlines. Briefly define each. Ask everyone to rate each one from 1-5, with a “5” being “We don’t struggle with this at all—we’re doing great” to a “1” being “We struggle with this significantly.”

Add up and discuss the results. Use this discussion to start honestly assessing areas you might intentionally change or improve to embolden your culture of innovation.

Have you identified someone who can help you assess your culture? Do you need objective help creating next steps to maximize your potential for innovation and effectiveness? Call or email me for a free one-hour assessment.



More About Clint Grider

Highly regarded as a “vision optimizer,” Clint can keenly identify the key people and strengths that are at the core of an organization’s culture. With this discernment, he guides leaders through vision clarity processes leading to meaningful results and sustainable momentum. Bringing the gifts of encouragement and creativity to the process, he helps teams advance vision through increased passion and ownership. Blending these abilities with years of experience building healthy organizations, Clint guides churches and non-profits to realize big dreams.

A Certified Fund Raising Executive, Dr. Grider has an additional ability to serve organizations in developing and aligning resources to achieve their goals. Clint has served in leadership roles for successful campaigns ranging from \$2 million to \$637 million. He also has served as a strategic planning consultant for universities, schools, churches, and other non-profits, with a particular emphasis on helping organizations improve their systems and capacity. This unique combination of skills and experience have enabled him to effectively serve ministries and organizations like America’s Family Coaches, the Texas A&M Foundation, Sky Ranch, Houston Baptist University, and Baylor College of Medicine.

Clint received his bachelor’s in business administration and marketing from Baylor University, master’s in educational psychology from Baylor, and Ph.D. in educational administration with specializations in process improvement and strategic planning from Texas A&M University.

He and his wife Kindra have been married 23 years and live near Dallas, Texas with their two daughters.

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