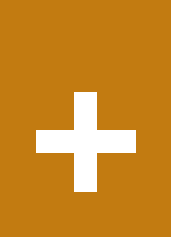
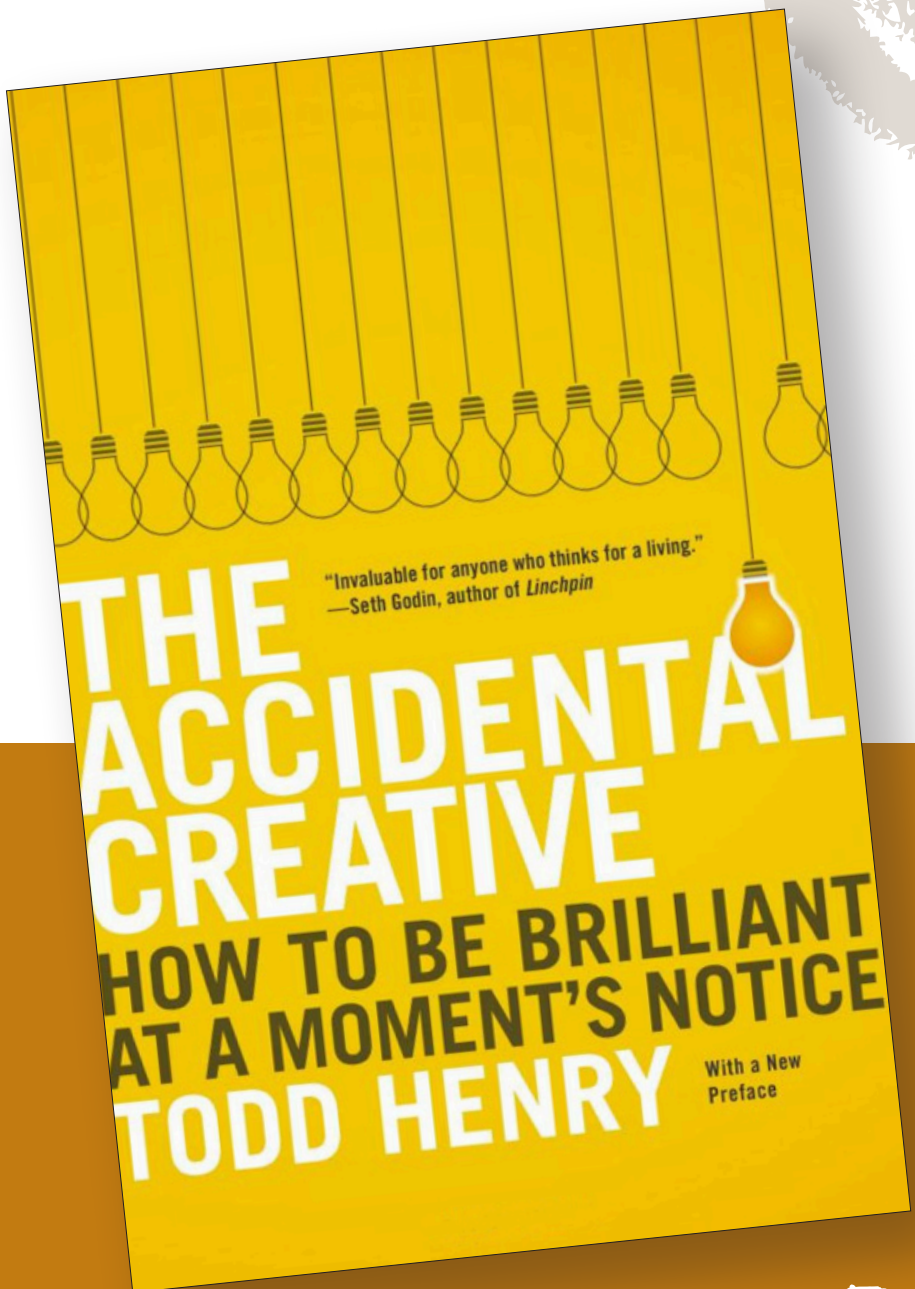


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## The Accidental Creative | *Todd Henry*

The Accidental Creative: How to be Brilliant at a Moment's Notice  
Penguin Group: New York, NY 2011. 230 pages.

Creativity expert Todd Henry believes that the tag “creative” applies to far more people than just advertising gurus and design studio staff. According to Henry, if you’re responsible for solving problems, developing strategies, or otherwise straining your brain for new ideas, you are a “creative” – even if you ended up being one accidentally.

***If you want to deliver the right idea at the right moment, you must begin the process far upstream from when you need that idea.***

You go to work each day tasked with (1) inventing brilliant solutions that (2) meet specific objectives by (3) defined deadlines. If you do this successfully you get to keep your job. If you don’t, you get to work on your résumé.

***The moment you exchange your creative efforts for money, you enter a world where you will have to be brilliant at a moment’s notice.***

To unleash your creative potential now and thrive over the long term, you need to establish your own rhythm – one that is independent of the pressures and expectations you face each day. This Creative Rhythm will provide you with the stability and clarity to engage your problems head on. According to Henry, this rhythm is set by how you structure the following five elements of FRESH.

### **FOCUS: Zeroing in on what’s critical**

If we could harness the sum total of wasted energy each day in the workplace, we could probably power the earth for a year. There is so much ineffective work because there is often a lack of clarity around what we’re really trying to do. In order to create effectively, you need a clear and concrete understanding of your objectives. You must learn how to weed out urgent but unimportant activities, and how to increase your level of creative engagement.

***Assumptions can be disastrous to our creative process because they limit how we look at problems.***

We live in an age of unprecedented access to information. If we want to know something, we can gain access to that knowledge within a few keystrokes. With smartphones, netbooks, and tablets connected 24/7 to anything and everything we could want, we have unprecedented capacity to be in a state of perpetual distraction.

***In order to do our best work, we need to learn to pay attention to what’s in front of us and to develop the capacity to stay focused on our objectives.***

## The Accidental Creative | *Todd Henry (cont'd)*

As you strive to gain focus, there are three modes you can fall into in your work. In order to work effectively you must broaden your focus enough to allow you to see potential connections, but not so much that everything seems random and you are unable to gain traction.

1. **Drifter** – someone who does whatever work they feel like moment to moment.
2. **Driver** – very focused on outcomes
3. **Developer** – purposefully approach each task or element of a project as an opportunity to develop new connections or potential ideas.

*The more quickly you can focus your mind on what you're really trying to do, the faster you gain creative traction.*

### RELATIONSHIPS: Being brilliant together

One of the most powerful sources of creative inspiration and rejuvenation is other people. When you “go outside yourself,” it frees you up and unlocks latent parts of your creativity. If you want to thrive, you need to systematically engage with other people in part to be reminded that life is bigger than your immediate problems. You must learn how to be purposeful about the relationships in your life, how to build creatively stimulating friendships, and how to limit access to creativity vampires.

*When we obsess over getting our own buckets filled, we not only find ourselves disappointed with the results, we also regularly disappoint everyone around us.*

#### Three strategies to enrich relationships:

1

##### Start a circle

- What are you working on?
- What is inspiring you?
- What would you like prompting on?

2

##### Head to Heads

- Set a time and be consistent
- Vary your subject matter
- Prepare about fifteen minutes of content

3

##### Establish a core team

- If meeting for coffee or meal, always pick up the bill
- Choose people outside your company
- Choose visionaries from a variety of industries

## The Accidental Creative | *Todd Henry (cont'd)*

### ENERGY: Your Invisible Ally

Simple time management is not enough. It does you no good to micromanage your time down to the last second if you don't have the energy to remain fully engaged for that time. To make the most of your day, you need to establish practices around energy management. You must learn how to account for energy in your daily life and how to build bulwarks against some of the more pervasive energy drains.

*When you are planning your life, you need to account for every commitment you make in every area.*

There are three horizons of whole-life planning to be aware of:

1. Weekly
2. Monthly
3. Quarterly

It is critical to get ahead of your energy commitments and examine them objectively. Saying no to a new opportunity is very difficult in the moment, but if you have been strategic in your planning and know what a new commitment will truly cost you, then you can refuse new opportunities with confidence. Once you understand your limits, you will be able to manage your energy more effectively.

As you examine your life, and especially your creative work, it is important to identify the Red Zone activities that will really make a difference and generate forward momentum during the particular season you're in. Red Zone activities include:

1. Activities that you can uniquely do or add value to because of your position or expertise and that move a project forward
2. Activities that increase your personal capacity to generate ideas, such as study, purposeful ideation, or intelligence gathering
3. Activities that provide cohesion or creative traction for your team in such a way that it increases future capacity
4. Activities that feed your energy, such as adequate sleep, exercise, or spiritual practice

### STIMULI: What Goes in Must Come Out

The quality of the output of any process is dependent on the quality of its inputs, and this holds true for the creative process. Henry refers to creative inputs as "stimuli" because they stimulate creative thought. Despite their importance, remarkably few people are intentional about the kinds of stimuli they absorb on a day-to-day basis. If you want to regularly generate brilliant ideas, you must be purposeful about what you are putting into your head. You must learn how to ensure that you are getting good creative nutrition.

*While our minds are unparalleled in their capacity to experience and assimilate information, they also have a limited bandwidth for doing so.*

## The Accidental Creative | *Todd Henry (cont'd)*

The stimuli we experience can stretch us to think differently, to open our eyes to new ways of seeing the world. But many creatives don't give much thought to what they allow into their minds. Solutions to creative problems are unlikely to come from staring harder at the problem, but can instead be found by immersing ourselves in higher-quality stimuli. Here are three characteristics of high-quality stimuli:

1. **It's challenging** – it will help you grow in your capacity to comprehend complex things.
2. **It's relevant** – it will help your mind focus more effectively on the problem.
3. **It's diverse** – it will expand your capacity to process information, help you form new thought patterns, and stimulate different parts of your brain.

Maintaining a study plan will help you cultivate the kinds of stimuli you allow into your life and ensure that you are putting the most important pieces in place first. There are three criteria you want to apply when determining what should make the cut for your study plan:

1. Where are you lacking information that you will need over the next three months?
2. What are you curious about now?
3. What would be good for you?

With all this emphasis on study and reflection, you don't want to neglect actual experiences. You absorb much of your understanding of the world through sensory interaction and experiment, and to ignore this would be to cut yourself off from the most significant source of inspiration. You need to regularly seek experiences that will enlighten you, help you see the world in new ways, and open you to new ways of thinking. Suggestions include:

1. Take a walk around a local park or make a trip to a local museum
2. Serve others
3. Attend an uncomfortable event

### HOURS: They're the Currency of Productivity

Time is the currency of productivity, and how you handle it will ultimately determine your successes or failure. But in order to really thrive, you need to shake yourself of our collective obsession with time efficiency and learn instead to focus on effectiveness. You need to ensure that the practices that truly make you a more effective creator are making it onto your calendar. You need to learn how to ensure that your time is being spent effectively and to great result.

*To spend our time effectively means we are willing to view our time as a portfolio of investments, not as a slot machine.*

If you want to have a lot of great ideas, you need to structure formal time into your life to generate them. Sounds intuitive, right? Unfortunately, common sense is not common practice. The following series of questions will help stimulate new ways of seeing the problem.

1. **Future** – What would a solution to this problem look and feel like?
2. **Past** – What are some assumptions that are presently keeping us in gridlock around this problem? Do these assumptions need to be challenged?
3. **Conceptual** – What are other problems and corresponding solutions that you are aware of that are similar to the current one?
4. **Concrete** – What are the specific and concrete attributes of the problem? Can the problem be broken down into three words? Do these words give you a new way of perceiving the problem?

## The Accidental Creative | *Todd Henry (cont'd)*

### Putting it all together

The objective of the methods described in *The Accidental Creative* is to establish a supporting infrastructure – a rhythm – that will provide stability and increased creative capacity. It will work only if you are diligent and consistent about incorporating the practices into your life.

Once you've established deep patterns in your life around the FRESH practices, you'll likely notice that insights and ideas are emerging that you'd not expected. This is because you are no longer living reactively but are instead filling your life with more of what really matters to you. You are finding your Creative Rhythm, and that is a great place to be.

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## The Accidental Creative | *Todd Henry (cont'd)*

### Recommended Resources

1. **Read** Auxano Founder and Team Leader Will Mancini's thoughts on redefining the fresh, new, and creative in leadership.
2. **Discover** additional resources for The Accidental Creative by author Todd Henry.
3. **Watch** author Todd Henry in a brief video on the dangers of false assumptions.
4. **Watch** an engaging video outlining the ideas found in The Accidental Creative.

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## Go Ahead Actions for Vision Clarity

by Clint Grider, Ph.D., CFRE

### Vision Clarity Connection

Lee Iacocca once pointed out: “You can have brilliant ideas, but if you can’t get them across, your ideas won’t get you anywhere.” In *The Accidental Creative: How to be Brilliant at a Moment’s Notice*, author Todd Henry helps leaders uncover and unleash extraordinary ideas in intentional, transformational ways.

To tap into this potential, Henry asserts that every leader must enter into daily problem solving with a unique Creative Rhythm that, somewhat paradoxically, is independent from the expectations around those problems. In other words, every leader should define and hone a personal strategy to increase his or her level of creative engagement, regardless of the specific issues faced. As outlined earlier, Henry defines the components required for this as Focus, Relationships, Energy, Stimuli, and Hours.

While we may, at first glance, agree that these “FRESH” elements are important, how often do we take the bold steps needed to proactively improve them in our lives? In a demanding world of rapid change, many leaders find they sometimes miss opportunities to focus on what impacts their effectiveness most. Wherever you might currently rate yourself in this area, imagine how refreshing it would be to fine-tune next steps to enhance your capacity.

At a minimum, such intentionality would provide increased creative traction. And just possibly, it might become transformational in your effectiveness as a creative, even “brilliant” leader. Consider the impact of being better prepared “at a moment’s notice.”

### Go Ahead

1. Review the author’s Checkpoint approach (beginning on p. 181) and schedule personal time to create a weekly, monthly, and quarterly Creative Rhythm.
2. In your next leadership meeting, write on a whiteboard the five practices described in the book and quickly describe the sub-categories of each (a brief summary is on p. 185). Ask everyone to force rank the five practices from “I do a great job at this” (5) to “I struggle with this” (1). Add up and discuss the results.
3. For the overall lowest ranking practice, break up into three sub-groups and assign one of the three sub-categories of that practice to each group. Ask the groups to review the chapter section that relates to their topic, answering: “How can we create a culture that better supports our leaders in this area?” Have each group capture their ideas on a flipchart, and present to the overall team for further dialogue. Consider breaking out the other practices in future meetings.
4. Have you identified someone who can help you develop your leadership culture more effectively? Do you need objective help to look at where you are and next steps to consider? Call or email me for a free one-hour assessment.





## More About Clint Grider

Clint Grider, Ph.D., CFRE 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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