



# ENGAGE

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The Journey from Inspiration to Innovation

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ILLUMEA PRESS

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“It had long since come to my attention that people of accomplishment rarely sat back and let things happen to them.

They went out and happened to things.”

- Leonardo da Vinci

## From Inspiration to Innovation

Inspiration is a lot like falling in love.

It's this wonderfully giddy feeling where we see further, feel deeper and the entire world seems to fit within our hands. In those moments anything seems possible.

Innovation on the other hand is more like giving birth.

As soon as we begin to comprehend what it takes to act upon our inspiration in terms of risk, pain, facing the unknown or just plain hard work, that initial rush can disappear pretty quickly.

And yet inspiration doesn't mean a thing until we've done something with it.

This book is all about that journey.

How do we get from pie-in-the-sky day dreaming to real momentum on projects that actually transform the world?

As quick warning before we begin:

There are no long self-help how-to lists in here.

You won't see extensive references or studies based on reams of data either.

If that's a show-stopper, you can save yourself the time and read one of a thousand other books written along those lines.

This book on the other hand is an artist's perspective on the topic.

The way I see it, a subject like inspiration is best imagined in the format it arrives, story-like and surrounded with big vibrant images.

## The Way We See the World

Would you please do me a favor?

Sometime today, take a few moments out of your busy life and take a moment to try really seeing.

Find something intriguing to focus on and put in the effort to notice the details: shapes, textures, negative spaces, light and shadow, contours, shades of color etc.

Contemplate for a minute, why that detail caught your attention and how it moved you once you took note of it

Learning to really see the world is a labor common to the inventor, the writer, the leader, the musician, the teacher, the entrepreneur and anyone else who might bear the title of artist.

It's one of the reasons I get irked when people learn I'm a photographer and the first question out of their mouths is which kind of camera do you use?

- I just point to my eyes -

The magic isn't in the black box, it's in the way we see the world.

Our vision is what begets creation.

It is the lenses through which we look that ultimately determine the world we live in.



## Free to Dream

Freedom is largely a state of mind.

We can make ourselves prisoners in a free land or live freely even under the cloud of tyranny.

Real freedom is a reflection of our deepest desires and our willingness to pursue them to the fullest.

As such, the freedom to dream and to innovate is something which cannot be legislated.

Laws, policies and the like can only go as far as creating space for this freedom to exist.

Making it exist, giving it life, that is left to us and not much else matters until we have.

That's because every innovator's journey begins by embracing the freedom to work against the natural resistance to change and to see beyond the here and now.

Once we realize the magnitude of our freedom to create, to change and to transform without having to wait permission, the whole world opens up.

The same fears that once held us hostage, the prospects of leaving our comfort and wading into the unknown are transformed into a sense of adventure and creative energy, propelling us forward as we re-imagine the world.



## Courage in the Face of Comfort

As a farmer in Mount Vernon, George Washington, led about as idyllic a life as one could hope for.

Like many of the founders of America, he had a lot to lose, joining the Patriot cause.

It would have been so much easier to stay home than to brave the winters of Valley Forge or the political pressures of the 1st Presidency.

Then again, once established in power, it may have also been easier to remain there rather than to return to the humble work of the farm.

Luckily for America, Washington was someone who knew great courage in the face of comfort.

One of the greatest enemies of freedom and innovation is getting too comfortable.

For the most part we don't fear calamity nearly as much as we fear losing the comforts we cling to.

We gravitate easily and naturally toward mediocrity and develop a proficiency in excuse making.

Indeed, rarely are we more creative than when coming up with ideas for procrastinating the real and meaningful work in our lives.

We might tell ourselves that our dreams are unattainable, or that we don't deserve them and that even if we realize them they probably won't last.

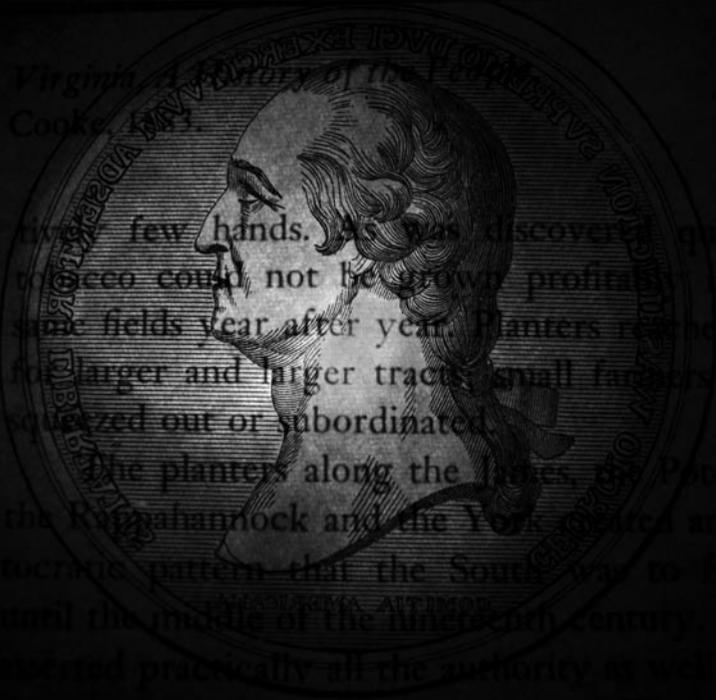
We might even convince ourselves that everything important and noteworthy has already been thought of and created.

It hasn't.

Instead of resigning ourselves to life, we need to be designing the life we long for.

Face, recognize and understand the fears, but once you've decided on a dream, don't look back!

from Virginia  
John Cooke



... few hands. As was discovered quickly, tobacco could not be grown profitably in the same fields year after year. Planters reached out for larger and larger tracts; small farmers were squeezed out or subordinated.

The planters along the James, the Potomac, the Rappahannock and the York took an aristocratic pattern that the South was to follow until the middle of the nineteenth century. They owned practically all the authority as well

## Where we Set our Sights

I grew up in Bulgaria.

A place that, for centuries, was filled with the magic of an incredibly rich culture and a history that predated Alexander the Great.

It was a land once known for its idyllic landscapes of lush forests, pristine beaches, snow capped mountains and magical forests.

Forty years under the thrall of Communism changed much of that image, leaving in its wake a picture that was mostly bleak, colorless and devoid of the enchantment that had once defined this amazing country.

My grandfather knew this country before Communism.

He was an outspoken news editor at the time the Communists came to power.

His refusal to parrot the party propaganda landed him in a Soviet concentration camp and he died shortly after he was released.

While I never met him, his life became an inspiration for my entire family.

In a police state where you couldn't even trust your neighbor for fear they might report you, I inherited one of the strongest pro-democracy heritages imaginable.

From the time I was old enough to understand the concept of America, I knew I was going there.

I had no connections, no money and no chance most thought, but it didn't matter because I had two of the coolest parents in the world.

My father was a cab driver by day and the world's greatest undiscovered story teller and artist by night.

He painted things like huge murals of the Beatles and other symbols of freedom on our apartment walls as a reminder of a world beyond the cynicism and dejection that lay just outside our doors.

As an artist he was also my mentor in learning to see the world through a lens of possibility.

He saw color where there was mostly gray and he noticed the beauty in small details within even the most austere places.

We would be walking home in the city and he would point out the flowers growing through cracks in the sidewalk or the way the chimneys of buildings would line up if you stood in just the right place.

In the end their greatest legacy was simply that they believed in me, stood for me and championed my dreams.

Not once did they tell me to lower my expectations for fear I might be disappointed.

They showed me that freedom is something we can embrace no matter what our circumstances and that, doing so, we determine and take responsibility for who we will become.



# The Lens of Freedom

## The Night the Wall Fell

I still remember when one night, around 1:00 a.m., my parents woke me up from a deep sleep and we rushed together to the city center of Sofia to witness a turning point in our country's history.

The national government offices were set ablaze, the red star of Communism had been ripped from its perch and a throng of people took to the streets with chants of Freedom and Democracy.

I still get chills thinking about that night and the wave of opportunity that seemed to flood over an entire nation.

Simply having freedom however, did not produce immediate prosperity for the country of Bulgaria.

In fact, within a few years after the wall fell, many of those same people who had clamored for deliverance from the Communists were now demanding a return to the security of bread and jobs which Communism had provided, albeit poorly.

Freedom by itself does not guarantee anything, it merely provides an opportunity.

It makes me wonder, when we have some free time and space, what do we do with it?

Do we do our utmost to just look busy?

Or do we push ourselves to create, to pursue, to foster and engage?



## Freedom's Light

All of us, deep down, kindle a certain fire when it comes to freedom.

It's a yearning we all share and one of the most profound parts of being human.

Freedom is ours to treasure, to live for and to realize the best that is in us.

Or, it is ours to squander and fritter away with excuses.

But most importantly, it is ours to choose

2011 marks 125 years that a lady has stood in the harbor of New York City, holding aloft the symbol of Freedom's light in her outstretched hand.

The real flame of freedom though is not in that torch, it's in each of us.

It is ours to carry, ours to keep brightly burning.





# The Lens of Learning

## Hitch it to a Dream

Learning is one of the most powerful engines on the earth.

It is also one of the most underestimated and underutilized.

To realize its tremendous potential though, it has to be connected to a dream.

There were plenty of subjects that bored me to tears when I was in school.

English was never one of them.

From the moment I realized that my dream to make it to America rested on my mastering the English language, it went from being just another subject, to that thing I did from the moment I got out of bed until my head hit the pillow.

At every opportunity I would go see the American films in the theater bringing my little 3x5 cards to write down every new word I heard so I could look them up later.

I accosted American strangers on the street to strike up conversations. I'm sure my early attempts at English sounded ridiculous at times, but hey I was speaking and I could have cared less.

I was often sent to the Headmasters office for reading English in my Russian class and when school got out I would rush home and tune my radio to the top 40 countdown where I hung on to Casey Kasem's every word.

Learning English in this context became an incredible adventure.

It was fraught with struggles and more gaffes and mistakes than I care to count, but I kept moving forward devouring one new word after another.

Successful innovation is built upon this kind of learning.

It is driven by dreams, fed by exploration and experimentation and improved by making and fixing mistakes until you have something that really works.

When viewed at this level, learning is an art form, drawing upon the deepest sentiments of our souls as we labor to give full-bodied life to the ephemeral whispers of inspiration.



## Don't Wait...Create!

William Penn once wrote: “The first Thing obvious to Children is what is sensible; and that we make no Part of their rudiments.

We press their Memory too soon, and puzzle, strain, and load them with Words and Rules.”

These days we find creativity touted as a must have attribute for the complexities, abstractions and guaranteed change which defines modern business and society.

Our problem is often not that creativity is undervalued within our society.

It's that we place such a high premium on creative thought and action, that we effectively reserve it for some class of super-people who have already demonstrated mastery.

The fact is that mastery is almost always the product of something that began as a creative and passionate bit of exploration filled with wrong turns and flawed ideas.

Only with time and experience did those ideas start to shape into what will later be recognized as pure genius.

If we buy into the idea that we must first memorize, absorb, comprehend, analyze and apply subject knowledge within a scripted environment, before we can begin to follow the stirrings of our imagination, we are bound to miss the creative boat.

It is the very act of creating, however awkwardly or imperfectly at first, which becomes the catalyst for any significant progress and innovation.



## D.I.Y.

I love do it yourself!

It's that thrill of learning something new, tackling a challenge and the pride you feel when you finally finish something you had no clue about before you started.

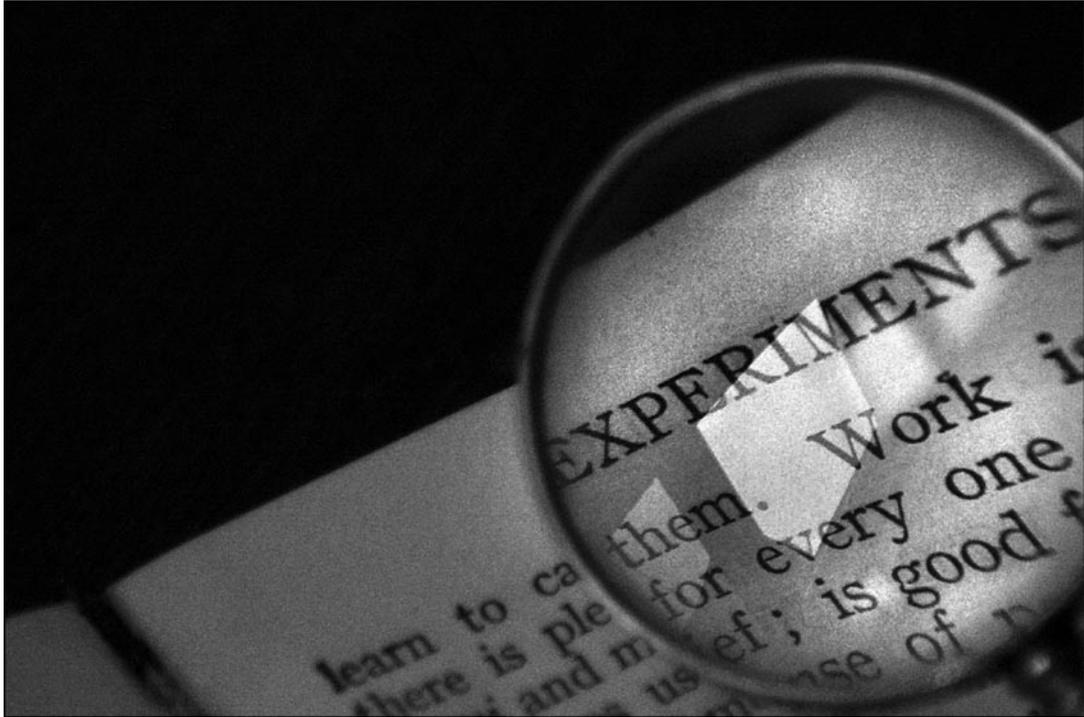
Between economic pressures and the explosion of information on the web, DIY has now spread from home renovations and auto-repair, to realms like law and even higher education.

Especially intriguing to me is the fact that DIY as a brand or idea would never have existed 100 years ago simply because it was all done yourself.

You learned it all, or at the very least came to understand whatever was essential to life.

Nowadays technology and division of labor have compartmentalized so much of our daily lives.

It's refreshing to go back and explore, opening those black boxes that are reserved for the "experts" and learning something new about ourselves in the process.



## It's Not Exploration Until You Feel Lost

At times it feels like we have unwittingly traded exploration's fire for the lulling glow of an LED.

In ancient mythology heroes would brave perilous journeys across the world simply to ask a single question of the all-knowing Oracle.

It's hard to imagine writing an epic about someone asking a question of the modern day Internet oracle.

As information and the answers have become more plentiful and so much easier to come by, the searching has lost much of the allure it once held.

There was a time not all that long ago when, our maps were still drawn up with the edge of the world or the uncharted domain of dragons marked mysteriously along the borders.

Today, we feel naked if we leave home without a GPS.

Here's the thing: exploration doesn't begin until you've lost your bearings.

If ever life starts to feel like you could never possibly become lost, because you've mapped every square inch, that's your cue:

Evacuate the comfort of your cave, go in search of adventure, come up with some fantastic questions, turn down a road you've never been down before.

Seek out the boundaries so that you can push past them.

Embark on a voyage that will carry you closer to the ultimate source of your inspiration.



## Soul Design

Physical spaces are one of the most under-utilized sources of renewable inspiration. Yet too often we spend enormous effort to make those spaces functional without enough thought about making them inspirational.

A couple of ideas along these lines.

Start with your library.

When it comes to exploratory thinking, libraries are easily some of the most potent places on the planet.

Where else can you go to experience the instantaneous blanket of silence or that sense of pure focus entwined with the limitless feeling of exploring to your heart's content.

The libraries we create are the culmination of ideas, interests and values that shape our identity as individuals and as organizations.

They become epicenters of innovation, creative commons and idea incubators where we surround ourselves with great stories, even as we endeavor to write our own.

You could digitize every book on the planet and yet that physical experience, the rush of memories mingled with imagination, the adventure of intellectual discovery and connecting ideas would be enough to keep the space of the library alive.

Unless they adapt though, airports may not be so lucky.

Even if all the long lines, invasive security, barely palatable food and hours of staring at the tarmac were necessary evils of modern air transportation, it does not excuse losing sight of the soul of an industry.

Airports are sterile, boring and uninspiring places which have largely forgotten that their soul lies in one of the all-time most captivating themes of human history...FLIGHT!

The science, the mythology, the behind-the-scenes operations, the history, the future technology, the imagination and everything else that makes the miracle of flight so absolutely enthralling, is utterly and unnecessarily missing from the entire experience.

It's no wonder that you rarely hear someone comment about how much they love to fly.

What if airports dedicated just a fraction unused space to create inspirational teaching galleries around the soul of flight?

Suddenly, what had been a hassle, an experience avoided whenever possible, now becomes a cultural center, something we are keen to associate ourselves with and to experience on an altogether different level.

Now what would be the impact if we designed our offices and organizations this way, tapping into the imagination, proliferating intriguing questions, celebrating great projects and artful work in physical manifestations and galleries we would walk past and gaze upon daily?

Once we start designing, teaching and exhibiting around the soul of an enterprise, the very air becomes thick with inspiration.

## The Velocity of Curiosity

Have you ever paid attention to the speed at which we dream?

Dreams can become epic and sweeping, but they almost always begin in the quiet stillness of reverie.

Just so, the dreams that fuel and shape deep innovation are rarely concerned with reaching point B in the shortest possible time.

Rather they are about depth of sensation, texture, giving voice to our inner artist and pausing long enough for the creative winds to gather one inspiring breath at a time.

Of course slowing down can feel uncomfortable in today's hyper-competitive environment where business, education and personal success are commonly described in terms of winning some massive race.

We race against the competition, against the nation on the other side of the world, against our neighbors next door and while this blur of busy-ness may feel like progress, it is dulling our senses and clouding our vision.

If we want to see clearly into the future, we've got to regain the discipline of slow. We need to be getting off the track at regular intervals and for long enough periods to dig deeper, to consider the real why's of what we are doing.

Moving at the more natural speed of curiosity is where we generate genuine interest it's where the great ideas surge from and where all these disparate floating ideas coalesce into a unified and eloquent scheme.

The insights and breakthroughs will come, sometimes we just have to sit still long enough for them to materialize.



THE  
R E P U B L I C  
O F  
P L A T O.  
I N T E N B O O K S.

TRANSLATED FROM THE GREEK BY  
H. SPENS, D.D.



# The Lens of History

## A Window to the Future

When you walk into an Oxford College you can feel the weight of a few hundred years bearing down on you.

It's an institution so steeped in lore that you often feel as though you've wandered into a fairy tale.

As a photographer working for the University, I had the privilege of wandering its cloistered corridors and scaling its majestic spires at off hours, where I could immerse myself fully in the enchantment of the setting.

What impressed me most, was that this medieval University, built on centuries of tradition and ceremony, hadn't become stuck in the past like so many other ideas and institutions of that era.

Rather, it had leveraged its history to create a rich culture that has lives and breathes cutting edge innovation no matter the era .

The dreams, the stories and the legends of great minds that have walked and taught and discovered there are so deeply interwoven with the fabric of the University that they have become the catalyst of continued greatness.

History does two things for those institutions, businesses, and nations which harness its power.

It builds a brand that perpetuates itself through inspiring stories and a shared sense of culture.

It also offers some of the best views of the next best thing as we examine the trajectory of the events, ideas and big picture perspectives provided by hindsight.

Indeed the past can be a window to the future, we've just got to pull back the curtains.



## Do Your Research

There is a tremendous power in heritage built over generations, whether you consider universities, corporations, cities, nations, or individual families.

Chances are that if you're looking to create something new and without precedent in the world, you probably don't have 100 years of heritage behind you just yet.

This doesn't mean though, that you can't leverage the power of history in developing your ideas.

The past holds a myriad of clues, ideas, references and sources of inspiration for the aspiring innovator. As such history can be a guide creating a heritage that stands the test of time.

In fact, by taking a historical perspective to innovation you are more likely to understand the substance that differentiates ideas, models and brands with timeless appeal from the flash in the pan fads that were so short lived, we probably wouldn't even know about them if it weren't for the historical record.

This means doing your research.

Learn what has been done already in this arena, learn about the greatest successes as well as the most notable failures.

Seek to understand the evolution over time of the problem or issue you are addressing.

What factors have complicated the

picture, what tools or paradigms might simplify it.

After studying the immediate history of the problem and attempted solutions, look for insight within other domains and walks of life not directly related to your problem.

Biographies are often excellent sources of such inspiration.

More often than not, it is this cross-pollination of domains, industries, eras and perspectives that produce the most convincing and elegant solutions.



## Defrosting the Past

How is it that so many people make it into adulthood without ever having experienced the real wonder of history?

My guess is that they never really got to taste it.

You see, the historians are experts at deep-freezing a slice of time so that it can be preserved for the ages.

Problem is, it usually hasn't been defrosted by the time it gets to us.

So instead of savoring each bite of an intriguing past, we come away with this icy taste in our mouths, wondering what the big deal is with all these names, dates, events etc. and feeling no real connection.

So how does one thaw history in a way that brings out its full flavor?

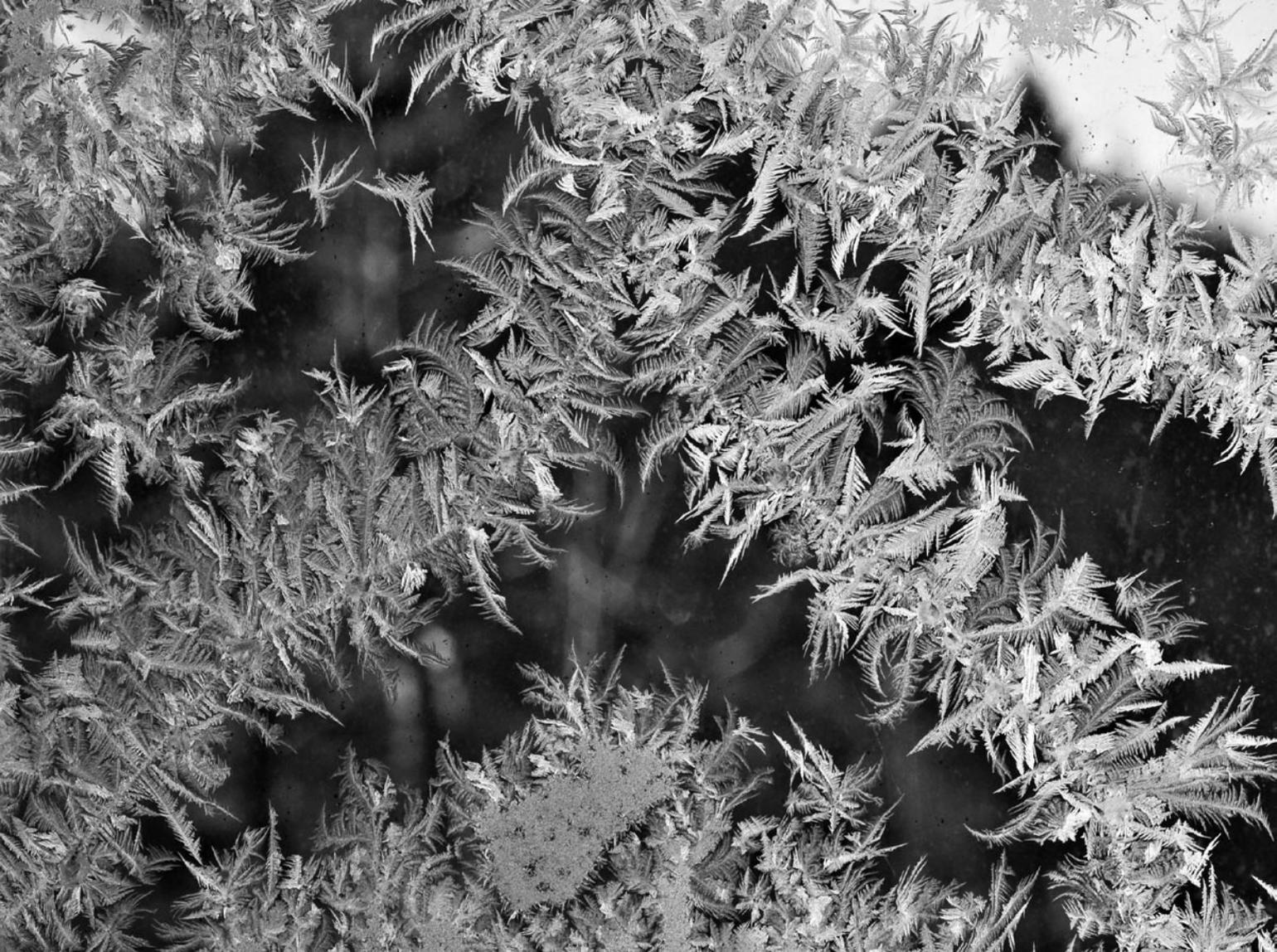
Here in New England we have a fascination with reenactments.

My kids have been to the battlefronts of the Revolutionary War, listened to the fife and drum and felt the cannon's blast still reverberating through your chest long after the field is quiet.

They've shaken the hand of Abe Lincoln and sat down to listen to his elocutions on the Civil War.

They've seen the rudimentary instruments of 18th century surgeons and watched a wet plate photograph magically appear on a piece of tin.

These immersive large scale events are fantastic, but they also take tremendous resources and organization to pull off.



On a more intimate scale, bringing history to life comes down to good story telling.

When setting out to create the historic photography project *Lost in Learning: The Art of Discovery*, the central question was:

“If one could capture the very spirit of innovation or the spark of discovery as it was happening during the Renaissance, what would those stories look like?”

Digging through old manuscripts, culling through artifacts in museums and antique shops, each photograph was designed to tell the story of the dreams, the whims, the questions and the seeking behind the history.

Whenever we seek to leverage the influence of history, it helps to remember that it is the warmth of well- woven tales that transforms the utterly uninteresting into something of rhapsodic relevance.



## The Odds of Innovation

If there's one thing history has to teach us about innovation, it's that it is almost never guaranteed.

In fact, in the adaptive and evolving process of working outside the box, it is nearly certain that whatever innovation ends up succeeding in the end will bear but little resemblance to the ideas that started them.

If it ever seems like your efforts to create or innovate is an endless battle against impossible odds, keep in mind that you don't have to hit the exact mark you were anticipating to leave your mark on the world.

Columbus' calculations of the world's diameter were all completely wrong.

Like a true serial entrepreneur, he left the material comforts of Spain to sail again and again to the New World, always expecting to round one more cape and set his sights on China or India.

He never even came near them.

His failure to meet his own expectations does not change the fact that his exploration opened up the entire world.

He saw a path where others saw only endless ocean and in the end his vision, however imperfect, was enough.

Galileo too would have done well enough financially if he had just focused on developing and improving his telescopes.

His curiosity though, led him to push the technological envelope, re-purposing a military instrument into a scientific one.

It may not have been his intent when he first laid eyes on the moon, but his expanded vision of the Heavens literally flipped mankind's vision of the Universe around and sent a disruptive shock wave through a close-minded culture, which laid the groundwork for the scientific revolution.

As most of the doers of history started into the unknown, they certainly couldn't see the end from the beginning, but they saw far enough and felt deeply enough about their convictions that they forged ahead. Now their examples have come to embody innovation and discovery at its pinnacle.

Whenever we labor in those uncharted spaces beyond the boundaries, we are probably not going to be very good at predicting precise outcomes.

Odds are though, if we keep at it, we will open up the world in ways we would never have imagined.



## The Genius is in the Details

I love details.

They're one of the reasons, I so enjoy reading about the Renaissance with all these amazing lenses which brought both the cosmic and the microscopic close enough to notice every single detail.

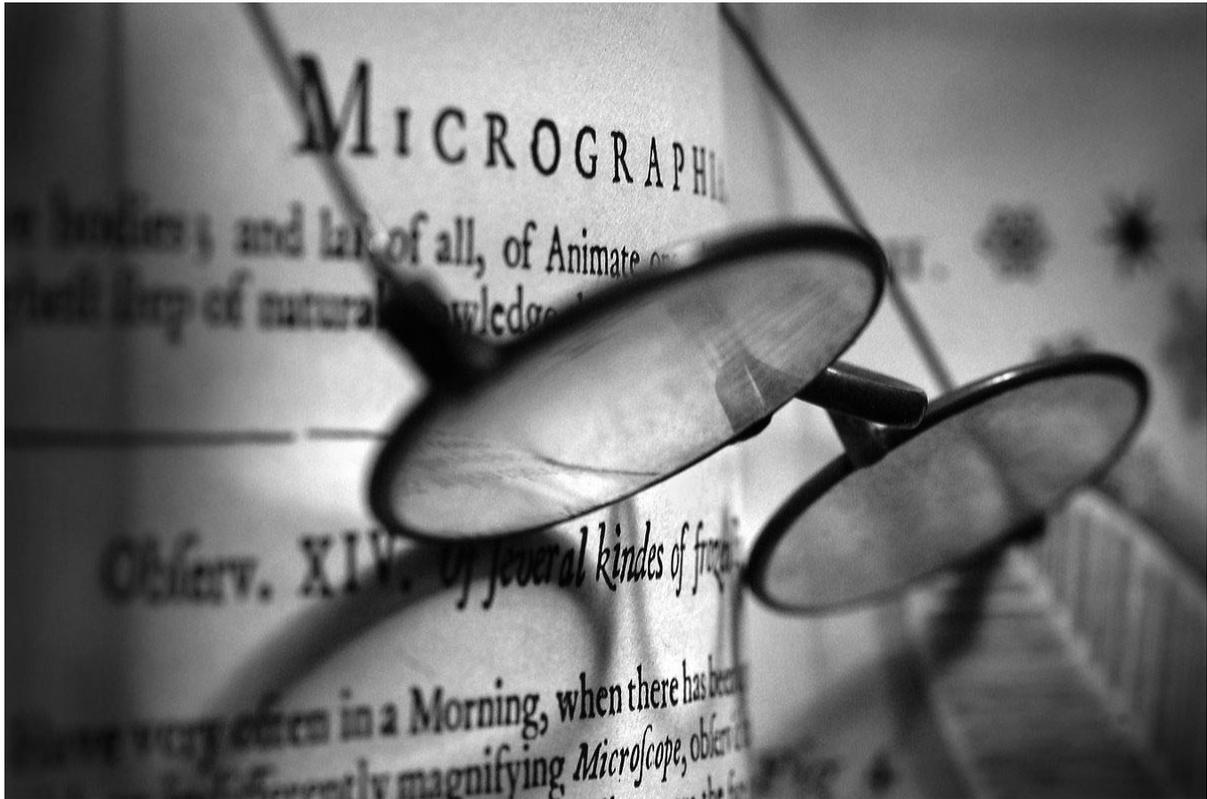
In art as in business, it is the big picture perspective which takes your audience's breath away.

That wow factor though, is the result of tremendous attention to the details that give significance and depth to the whole.

Looking closer and thinking more deeply, we discover worlds within worlds, ideas and understanding on a scale that is exponentially greater than when we settle for the superficial glance.

The interesting thing is, the decision to delve into the details, usually isn't about time.

It's about attention, which, in an age of incessant distraction, has become an increasingly scarce commodity.



## Conducting Inspiration

There's a lot to admire in a guy like Ben Franklin.

He was one of those people who just couldn't stop thinking about ways to improve and transform everything he came in contact with from publishing to politics or from science to seafaring.

(His influence was such that for a brief period he even had an extra-legal U.S. state named after him)

Franklin the scientist became especially renowned for his work with electricity which is appropriate given the fact that he was such a conductor of inspiration himself.

Indeed, inspiration seems, at times, to follow the same principles as electricity.

It abhors a short-circuit, following the path of least resistance and maximum continuity.

When we're too easily distracted or perpetually procrastinating, inspiration tends to knock less frequently and less forcefully until it finally fizzles.

If we're serious about courting inspiration, we too have got to become conductors (in every sense of that word).

Conductors, who use our words and our work to follow through and nurture the spark of inspiration until it blazes.

Conductors, who learn to orchestrate diverse perspectives, connections and resources into the symphonies that make genuine innovation possible.

Conductors, who having laid the tracks, become the outspoken orators of their convictions whose enthusiasm rouses those, still waiting at the station, to get up and climb aboard.



## From History to Heritage

Innovators often advise starting out working on a problem you need to solve for yourself.

Authors too, will tell you to write the story that only you can.

Ultimately, the histories we read about others are there to aid us in writing our own.

I remember, after having my 3rd child, feeling so inundated with the demands of motherhood that I often wondered whether continuing to pursue my passion for photography was worth it.

During that period, I read about the indomitable Isabella D'Este, a remarkable & talented woman who managed to not only raise a royal family of some 8 children, but also to become one of the greatest patrons of the arts and education of the Renaissance.

Her story and others from that period inspired the belief that one could be both creative.

I came to believe that keeping the creative spirit alive inside me and sharing it with my children, would do far more for them in the long run, than giving them an extra few hours a week with a mom who had lost her fire.

Trying to balance and create synergies between these two sides of life was exhausting work at times. On the other hand, there was part of me that had never felt so engaged and alive.

I would watch my kids refusing to go to bed at a reasonable hour simply because there was too much that they were interested in and sleeping was boring by comparison.

They were on fire with imagination, soaking up life and all that it had to offer with every waking moment.

I didn't want them to ever lose that.

I didn't to ever lose that .

I wanted so badly to pass on a love for exploration, for liberty and creativity, all things that were dearest to me and I found the means through the camera.

When we reach that point, our art becomes about creating a heritage.

We have a story to tell, something we feel so deeply that, the moment we give voice to it, it emerges with a certain resonance.

The closer we come to that resonant point, the nearer we are to writing a history that will stand the test of time .





# The Lens of Imagination

## Seeing Things

In some circles, if we see things that aren't really there, it's considered delusional.

In the world of innovation though, the capacity to envision a solution when all that is apparent is a problem or to see a finished product when staring at a blank page, is absolutely imperative.

The seeds of great dreams are most often sown in the fertile fields of the imagination.

It's there that we build in the beauty, the simplicity, the novelty and wonder that allows our dreams to pierce through the mass of chatter and capture the hearts and minds of those we are hoping to reach.

It's also the place we go whenever we need to rekindle the spirit of whatever got us dreaming in the first place.

True creators realize that imagination isn't something that simply disappeared the moment we "grew up", but rather is something that can be cultivated and expanded upon throughout every stage of our lives.



## The View from 3 ½ Feet

I try and teach my children that cultivating the gift and power of imagination throughout their lives will be every bit as important as the skills they are developing in math, science and literacy.

For without it, they will never fully understand or engage with the vast ocean of knowledge and possibility that lies before them.

Of course they do most of the teaching in this regard

There is something absolutely remarkable about the view from 3 ½ feet.

It's a time when you can still find grass that's taller than you.

At that altitude, the distractions we are so prone to as adults and the pull of consumption away from innovation, don't seem nearly as pronounced. Children provide the most incredible examples of the kind of critical creative focus that spurs innovation.

For those of us living closer to that grown up elevation of 5 or 6 ft., our attempts to see the world from a child's perspective can often require an altitude adjustment.

Many of the things we deem most urgent and important don't hold much water down there.

I refer to this as the "last-night-in-the-nursery" syndrome or the theory that there comes a point when we must simply grow up and leave that whole world behind.



Of course that's all a lot of rubbish and the whole thing is quite admirably documented in Antoine de Saint-Exupéry's book, *The Little Prince*.

In essence we start out in this place where the world is our playground, pretending is the real deal and caring deeply, taking risks and exploring are the focus of life.

Then somewhere along the way, our heads emerge from the clouds and we descend to earth where we start to construct an air of self-importance, built predominantly upon our ability to seem busy at all times and to worry extensively about things we once didn't even know existed.

As artists and as innovators it is imperative that we develop eyes for seeing beyond the literal world.

Whether it is the castles in the clouds,

the transformation of a forest in that golden light just before dusk, the garage that becomes a secret hideout, or the trampoline turned into a space shuttle , these are the stuff of stories which hold the power to capture the imagination and to bring us back to those altitudes when we still remembered how to fly.

“When once you have tasted flight, you will forever walk the earth with your eyes turned skyward, for there you have been, and there you will always long to return.”

- Leonardo da Vinci

## The Aperture of our Imagination

By the time we reach adulthood, we've often had enough toughening-up experiences that between a cemented sense of cynicism and our training to live within the box, imagination just doesn't come as naturally.

I mean, can you imagine the looks you'd receive if, walking into the office tomorrow you felt suddenly struck by the inspiration to create an aviary of talking birds from the paper clips in your desk.

Even if and when such surges of imagination come, we've learned to suppress them and to act our age.

While there are many wonderful things that accompany the coming of age and adulthood, a wilted capacity to see the world with fresh eyes and to believe in what is possible, even when it's improbable, isn't one of them.

We are taught the importance of living in and dealing with reality.

The problem with narrowing our vision in this way, is precisely that reality has no power to lay hold upon our imaginations.

Reality in Bulgaria was poverty, oppression, the kind of austere and foreboding world you would never want your children to grow up in.

I count myself wonderfully fortunate to have had the parents I did in this environment.

Their lives and outlook was like something straight out of that movie, *Life is Beautiful*. They fully understood the principle of seeing and living beyond a bleak reality.



Stories filled our evenings, we spoke of dreams, we played, joked and laughed together no matter how tough things were.

Looking at the world through their eyes, I learned to suspend disbelief long enough to let the power of possibility take hold..

My mother just turned 64 this not long ago (we all belted the Beatles tune at her birthday).

Both she and my father still maintain the dignity of childhood.

They are both apt to laugh, to dance, to believe and to dream.

My dad still turns his kitchen table into a tent, crawls under it with his three grandchildren and spends an hour or two with a flashlight down there telling stories.

Age doesn't determine the aperture of our imagination.

We do.

To realize our potential as creators, we've got to keep a lookout for windows to let the creative sunshine in.

## Welcome Distractions

There are enough distractions in modern life to keep us endlessly chasing the peripheral and the trivial.

When we prepare to enter the creative realm, it helps to get rid of the noise, turn off the phone, forget email for a while and seek out a place free of distraction.

Just the same, there are certain times when distractions are essential.

When you drive through New England at the height of the fall foliage, you could care less about where you're going.

When my 8 year old is supposed to do workbook problems and he starts instead to draw an epic adventure incorporating the characters on the page, I don't treat it as a distraction, but as a welcome detour into the creative realm.

When my daughter stops me as we're racing through town, so that she can observe a small colony of ants, its tempting to pull her along.

But once I've learned to down-shift, to stop and observe, I gain the privilege of entering her magical world for a moment.

In the end what constitutes a distraction is dependent upon what we are aiming for.

Developing our imaginations, often means learning to look differently at what we had deemed to be distractions and to recognize those that either invigorate or impede our ability to engage in meaningful work.

Bring on more of life's great distractions!



## Eating our Words

So you can't literally eat your words, but I've found they still make a huge difference when it comes to dining.

In Bulgarian folklore, food is a central theme throughout every single story, so my kids have grown up hearing story after story about wonderful food.

This carries over to mealtime in our home and we make a point of talking about the food at length: its color, its texture, the way flavors run together and of course what we feel and think about as we savor it.

I think back too to all the stories where vegetables, which kids find uninteresting, are transformed through the power of imagination (a pumpkin carriage, a giant bean stock, strength inducing spinach etc.)

I'm probably biased that Bulgarian food is some of the best in the world, but taking the time to talk about the food has won over my family to the point that my kids have no real interest in candy or the empty calorie processed foods otherwise marketed to children.

If our imagination has that power over food, what else in our lives and work could be rethought or more fully felt simply by taking the time to imagine it in greater depth and with greater artistry.



## Awakening

A prescription for awakening the imagination:

### 1) Find your Time Machine

Find something from your childhood that is steeped in nostalgia.

It can be a book, a movie, a game, a photo album or whatever, just so long as it helps you remember for a moment the way you saw the world back then.

### 2) Play

Anything.

No matter however un-serious or unessential it may seem to your already busy life.

It doesn't matter if it's board games, card games, computer games, sports, acting, golf or whatever, play is an essential ingredient in our lives if we are going to find the power to tap into our imaginations.

### 3) Log it

The only thing better than the amazing stuff going through your head, is that amazing stuff being written down somewhere.

Writing your thoughts down makes the fleeting images of the imagination less elusive and provides some continuity to your stream of consciousness as you play with ideas, look for connections and try to remember what it was that sparked your interest the other day.

### 4) Mentor

One of the best opportunities to unleash our inner creator comes through the interactions with the children in our life.

Whether they're our kids, our grandkids, or the neighbor's kids, taking the opportunity to treat them the way you wish you had been treated when you were a kid has a profoundly cathartic effect.

Let them fly, offer mentorship and encourage their dreams.

Of course you can say it's for them, but you're likely to find that cheering on the imagination of the next generation is an awfully effective way of firing our own.



# The Lens of e-Motion

## e-Motion

Anyone trying to do “amazing” things in life quickly arrives at the realization that this kind of work requires much more than just the detached labor of logic.

It demands pretty much every faculty of our body, mind and heart bearing upon our dreams to generate and maintain some forward momentum ,even when everything doesn't go according to plan.

In short it requires e-Motion.

Not e-motion as in your computer feeling sorry for crashing and losing your important documents, but as in the idea that forward momentum in life is captured through feeling.

If we're going to live life as dreamers it's going to require a willingness to feel..a lot!

We have a natural tendency to try and avoid negative emotions by feeling less.

The problem is that the less we feel, the less propelled we are to do anything.

The deeper we learn to feel and the further we push ourselves from our comfort zone, the more we learn to see the possibilities and the beauty in our lives.

e-Motion on this leads to enthusiasm, to gratitude, to motivation and the kind of drive that carries us over the bumps and through the bruises so that we can engage in breathtaking work.



## Move It

Ever notice just how inspired you feel after a long stretch on the couch watching TV or right as the alarm goes off in the morning.

As Newton so succinctly put it, “a body at rest tends to stay at rest.”

Exercise and pushing our physical selves to work through the resistance is a fantastic way to release the emotional floodgates and engage the gears of insight.



# The Power of Laughter

My parents always had a way with humor.

In the midst of Communism, poverty and grave seriousness all around us they would still find something daily to laugh about.

It would begin as a chuckle then one of us would add something and it turned into a guffaw.

Then back and forth it went becoming just a bit funnier each time, until tears were rolling down our cheeks, our sides ached and we could barely even get out the next statement through our laughter. In those moments we felt the weight of the world become lighter.

Life was wonderful and there was no doubt that it would all be OK.

Every now and then a good belly-laugh can set the world aright again.



## The Art of Receiving

Receiving is a gift in and of itself.

That ability to be moved by friendship, kindness, inspiration or thoughtfulness strikes from a state of comfort and complacency to a place of gratitude and appreciation.

It may also be a dying art.

In the U.S., we've managed to take a century old tradition of Thanksgiving and transition it seamlessly into a week of Holidays focusing on all about the stuff we don't have.

I'm convinced that we can receive better.

We can spend that extra effort to understand the efforts and sacrifices behind the gifts we are given.

Growing up in Bulgaria, I learned to absolutely cherish each and every gift.

They were small, few and far between so it was easier in a sense.

Still they seemed larger than life and their value was increased a hundred-fold by the attention I lavished upon them.

Gratitude of this sort has a wonderfully propelling nature. Instead of leading to contentment and complacency it stirs within us the catalyst of obligation. Not necessarily to repay the gift, but at the very least to use our gifts and the opportunities we've been given to do more.

It forces the self-centered questions of "What Now?" or "Why me?" to give way to expressions of "What if?", "Why Not?" and "What Next?"



## UnderReaction

Life's much too short to spend it worrying about appearing overly exuberant or enthusiastic.

Instead we should concern ourselves more with our under-reactions.

Too often we swim against the waves of emotion, in a valiant effort to fit in, when we need to be standing up and trying to surf!

We need to wear our emotions on our sleeves a bit more, lay bare our aspirations, get excited, start talking, sharing and letting our dreams know that we actually believe in them.

Living and reacting with boldness makes it that much harder for our dreams to ever slink back into that place of perpetual procrastination.



## Mental Magnification

The magnifying glasses of our minds are potent things.

We can readily blow up the shortcomings, the missteps and mistakes in such vivid detail that they become larger than life and crowd out our ability to see much else.

What happens though when we magnify the good stuff ; when we think first about our best moments, our greatest gifts and our bravest dreams?

Could that focusing on our strengths give us the push we need to overcome our fears as well as the permission to focus on, praise and celebrate the strengths in those around us?



## The Great Optimism

There's a lot to be said for living life joyfully, looking on the bright side and hoping for the good which life might bring.

You don't need rose colored glasses to do this nor do you need to stick your head in the sand.

Real hope is optimism with eyes wide open.

Have I ever been disappointed...you bet!

Had my hopes dashed...of course!

Been hurt, trust broken, lost something that meant a lot to me?

Yes, yes and yes, but I've found the best way to deal with the inevitable let-downs is to keep a lookout for the next bright ray.

In a big dark room a single candle is extremely bright, but you've got to keep your eye on the flame.



## Why Planets Don't Need Pushes

Most of us need little pushes through life.

It starts when we're first learning to swing and we keep asking our parents to push us to keep the fun going.

In adolescence we face challenges that seem daunting or too hard and again we rely on others to push us to keep working through them.

As we get older, we often still need nudges.

At times it's to face the daily grind at others it's to pursue something we're passionate about.

In this campfire approach to dreaming, you spend much of your time gathering wood to keep the flame going, looking for the next push.

Eventually though you run out of ideas and external motivators and when the fire goes out it takes a tremendous amount of energy to get it started again.

This on again/off again cycle is not uncommon, though its chances of delivering meaningful innovation or personal fulfillment are slim.

The ones who make it, are often those who have discovered why planets don't need pushes.

They simply find a star that is big, bright and hot enough to set them in orbit.

Shooting for the stars is more than wistful wishing.

When we genuinely seek out, find and follow those big, fiery dreams that define our lives, we find we no longer need the pushes.

Engaging in the task, collaborating with like-minded individuals, discovering something new and solving meaningful problems all create something akin to perpetual motion.

At that point, the dream itself is enough to keep us moving.





## A Taste of Light

As a photographer, one is continually dwelling on, dabbling in, and directing (as well as one may)...LIGHT.

It's the source of vision, exposure, and revelation for the camera as well as for the mind.

Without a tangible presence, it can open, shape, beautify, and transfigure a subject.

It can even be tasted; filling a space which food never will.

And of course light tastes amazing - that kind of creative, mind expanding, inspirational surge through the system.

If you want to taste light:

You can sit by and wait for it, hoping for a break in the clouds.

You can hunt it, seek it out and give chase, hoping to capture it before it escapes.

Or you can cultivate and nurture it, the way you would a seed.

The last requires the patience of the first and the labor of the second, but it is by far the most consistent and ultimately the most fulfilling.



## A New Day's Dedication

A philosophy of LIVING

Not merely happening to be

But a conviction to become

A decision with a focus on Seizing each day

Leaving the torrent of waylaying distractions

By the wayside

And pursuing the path of Greatest feeling and Ultimate Freedom

The willingness to live with a grateful heart

Taking in each moment with every sense

Especially a sense of wonder

The mettle to spurn the easy way  
Of escape, when life throws a curve  
So that the latent light might shine the brighter  
So that the story you weave of you own life  
Might be the adventure  
You dared to dream of  
And that facing your fears and failures you might grow into a being  
Alive and Knowing Joy  
Steeled against the buffeting storms of apathy and the cynic's frost  
Ready, Willing & Able  
To blaze a fiery trail and illuminate a better way

## Lost & Found

I think it's a common refrain among explorers, artists, innovators and the like that, while doing creative work, we often feel a bit lost.

Not lost in a bad way, like having taken a wrong turn and not knowing how to get back on track.

This is more of the feeling that we can't pinpoint exactly where we are on any map.

We don't know what the future holds and we understand that by venturing into the unknown we are taking great risks with no guaranteed outcomes.

Somehow though, this brand of being lost just feels right.

We may not be sure of where we are or where we're headed, but we have this wonderful sense that we are in the right place, headed in the right direction...so we go for it!

Such wandering holds a certain magic and we begin to understand the nature of both inspiration and innovation as never before.

We see that it isn't really about us, at least not in the way we might have expected when we set out on this journey.

All the thoughts of attention, fame, wealth and status that may have dominated our senses early on, now fall into the periphery as it were.

In their place we come to focus on the wonder of having brought something forth, something new, alive and real which had once been nothing more than a fleeting image in our mind's eye.

In our journey we've abandoned temporary security and alleged guarantees to fully embrace freedom.

We've renounced our need to project perfection and lost our fear of making mistakes, viewing them instead as the stepping stones of progression and learning.

We've turned away from the well-trodden exit routes of escapism to follow a path of creative engagement with life.

We've disregarded enough "grown-up" propriety, to remember what its like to wander the realms of the imagination.

We've relinquished the gravity of ego and seen how gratitude for the creative gift can launch us into orbit around a dream greater than ourselves.

And from that vantage, if but for a fleeting moment, we see our part and purpose in the grand plan .

Losing ourselves, we have may just have found what it was that we were looking for all along.



## PostScript

The best part about a book of this sort is that when you reach the last page, you're just getting started.

While words, images and ideas each have a way of leaving their mark upon us, it is our actions which have the most lasting impressions upon who we become.

As we launch, dive, try, fall, rise, return, and re-imagine we aren't just laboring to shape the world for the better.

These iterations of innovation, this process of perfecting something is also shaping (and we hope) perfecting us.

It doesn't happen in a moment, but every moment we are living life ENGAGED, we're drawing a step closer.

Thank you for reading and we hope you enjoyed your time among these pages!

If you're feeling inspired, what better time to start work on something amazing.

We'd love to hear of whatever exploits, adventures or other exciting projects you've managed to lose yourself in so please keep in touch ([engage@illumina.com](mailto:engage@illumina.com)).

And if reading made you think of someone who would enjoy this, feel free to share.

Carpe Diem!

Adam and Eva

~The Beginning~

# Acknowledgements

We'd like to thank those past and present whose words, examples and lives of innovation have inspired this book.

Especially -

Leonardo da Vinci

John Taylor Gatto

Seth Godin

Richard and Linda Eyre

Dan Pink

The Business Innovation Factory

Derek Sivers

Whitney Johnson

Sir Ken Robinson

Ralph Windle

Ben Franklin

Lubomir Kolev

David Bednar

Jason Fried

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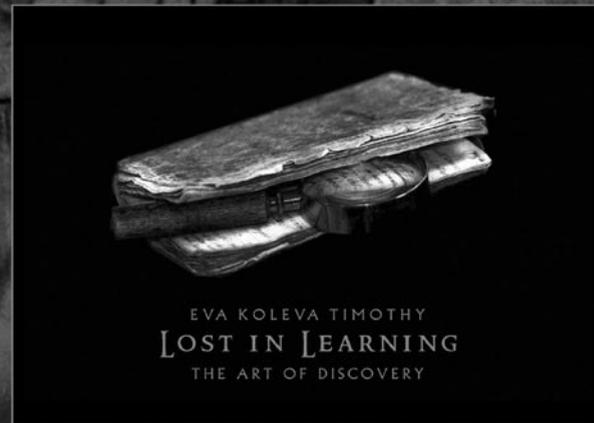
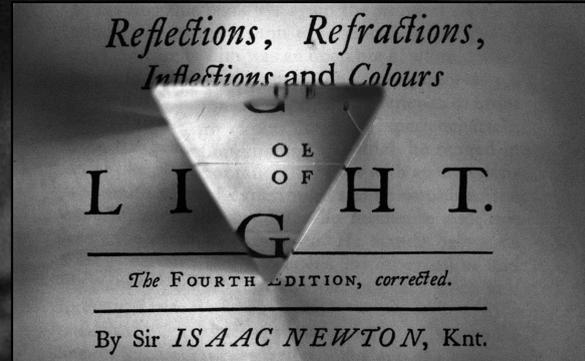
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— John Howe

(Concept Artist for the Lord of the Rings Movie Trilogy)



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