



INTRODUCTION

Boot Camp is a military term that describes basic training for recruits. It's used as an indoctrination into the culture of the corps and helps prepare the necessary skills needed to succeed as a soldier.

Creative Boot Camp takes this same immersive model and applies it to basic creative training. It will be used to indoctrinate you into the culture of ideation and will help prepare the necessary skills you need to succeed as a creative.

And shaved heads are not a requirement unless you want one; then by all means shave your head.



Tell me if any of this sounds familiar.

Four days in the summer of 2004 changed my life. I had graduated from college eight years prior with a degree in Communication Arts and had been practicing graphic design professionally and recreationally. I was captivated by design and still am, but as much as I loved art, on its own the art wasn't enough. I was drawn to the subject of the art, the central focus of the design: the idea. I began to explore other mediums: writing, photography, and coding. Never before had I really explored any of these mediums, but I felt my passion for design beginning to wane. My interest was spreading and expanding into other areas. It wasn't until I embarked on a surprise trip to San Diego that summer that I found out why.

In a last-minute decision, my agency sent me to a design conference in San Diego. I'd never been to this conference or any other design conference for that matter. It was a four-day affair, complete with sessions and workshops, networking opportunities and parties, and conversations in the hallways and across hotel lounges. For those four days, I took 31 pages of notes. I just couldn't stop. Every speaker offered insights and processes different than my own; every random conversation sparked ideas and possibilities. I picked up few usable productivity tips but a wealth of process experiments, philosophical explorations, and energy boosters.

I returned from the conference as fired up as I had ever been professionally. It was like returning from camp as a kid. It was the type of experience where you come back all hopped up to make strange new things with odd new skills, with a confidence that's uniquely tied to being forced into a comfort-zone annihilation.

Unlike camp, however, that feeling didn't slowly fade. And I didn't return to the person I had been. My energy kept building. I designed more, wrote better, and conjured up more and better

ideas. Before long I had a list of projects I wanted to undertake, and instead of that list starting strong and petering out, it kept growing.

How was this possible? How did I go to a conference focused on the execution of ideas and return with an increasing desire and ability to generate ideas in greater quantity and quality? I didn't attend any sessions emphasizing ideation *directly*. I received no formal idea training nor did I learn any new brainstorming techniques while I was there. How could I explain this increase in the caliber of the ideas I was generating?

After some time away from the experience and some reflection, the answer became clear: *immersion*.

For those four days, I was immersed in an idea culture. I was surrounded by people who were in the habit of generating ideas and seeking new ways to do so. They had their own processes, perspectives, and experiences, and they were there to soak up the processes, perspectives, and experiences of others. The value of the conference had little to do with the subject matter presented from the stage and everything to do with the immersion in a creative culture hell-bent on bettering everything about the process. By immersing myself into this culture, even for a relatively short period of time, I was consciously and subconsciously focusing on my craft one conversation at a time. And that's when I realized that what I love isn't design, *it's ideas*.

WHAT IS CREATIVE IMMERSION?

I could never put my finger on what attracted me to the design industry until I attended the conference. It is the idea—not the execution—that drives my design addiction. I was, and still am, obsessed with finding solutions to problems. So much so that I began to research and explore how others—individuals and

groups—solve problems. I was hooked on exploring the creative process—my own and others’.

I learned that as much as I feared never generating another good idea, I always did. And the more that I studied and practiced the creative process, the better those ideas became. I was generating more ideas faster, and the quality of those ideas was getting better. The more I immersed myself in the act of ideation, the better I became at it.

That is the purpose of this book: immersion. This book is not an in-depth, scientific look at convergent and divergent thinking or an exploration of how the two halves of the brain work. This book isn’t about a magic pill or a revolutionary new creative process. This book is about *creative immersion*. As you’ll see throughout the program, creativity isn’t some mystical, unknowable force. Creativity is a skill. And as with any skill, you can improve your creativity with practice. Throughout this book, I’ll expose you to techniques and processes that encourage you to practice creative thinking. By the end of 30 days, you’ll be able to see a noticeable and measurable increase in your creative output.

But don’t expect boot camp to be easy. It won’t take much time out of your day to immerse yourself in this culture. But the time you spend will not be a cakewalk. It will be fun, of this you can be sure, but it will take dedication and effort. It will require that, like any camp, you abandon your comfort zone. Occasionally, the program will ask you to put aside your pride and your position. It will implore you to be honest and forthright with where you are creatively. It will request that you look beyond your known and mastered fields of interest and execute in mediums you may find foreign.

You won’t be very good at the start, but you’ll get noticeably better if you follow the program with integrity, passion, and drive. As with

many things in life, you will get out of this program what you put into it. If you skate through, take days off, don’t engage in certain exercises, and are distracted, indifferent, or unresponsive, you’ll find little value here. However, if you dedicate yourself to the program, you’ll generate ideas in greater quantity and quality in a short period of time.

WHAT IF I’M NOT A DESIGNER?

This is not solely a designer’s book: Writers, photographers, illustrators, coders, marketers, men, women, aliens, cowboys, and woodland animals with opposable thumbs and a penchant for literature will also benefit. Despite the title of “creative” being held hostage by the design community, we are all creative. We all benefit from novel ideas that solve problems. We all want to solve problems quickly and deftly. The exercises and processes in the program are meant to develop the problem-solving mentality needed for any creative endeavor. This book won’t teach you to be a better designer or writer or photographer, although it may help. This book will teach you to develop stronger ideas faster. Don’t get wrapped up in the quality of the drawing you made or the dangling participle in the story you wrote. Don’t bypass an exercise because you don’t think you can draw or because you believe you are a terrible photographer. Don’t judge the quality of your execution; simply focus on the quality of the idea behind it.

Thomas Edison once said, “We shall have no better conditions in the future if we are satisfied with all those which we have at present.” As part of this program, you will be exposed to techniques that will take you beyond your comfort level. When the program encourages you to find a partner and engage in an improv comedy drill or pushes you to find accountability from another, fear not, for Edison’s better conditions will be the ultimate reward.

HOW DIFFICULT WILL THIS PROGRAM BE?

I am a big believer in making creative training fun. Finding the unexpected solution is addictive because it is an act of joy. Albert Einstein characterized creativity as “intelligence having fun,” and that’s what this book strives to achieve. Don’t take yourself too seriously as you go through the program. As boot camps go, this one won’t ask you to run ten miles before breakfast or crawl in the mud. That is, of course, unless crawling in the mud is your solution to a problem posed in the program; then by all means, feel free.

Fun is the true in-progress measurement to the effectiveness of this program. If you aren’t having fun as you’re doing these exercises, you’re not doing them right. The more fun you have, the easier ideas will come.

Do me a favor: Recall an instance in your life when ideas flowed fast and freely, a specific time when you were throwing out ideas over a conference table, or a bar, or wherever. Maybe you were with a group of people, or maybe you were alone. But something triggered a torrent of ideas. Remember back to that time with as much color and feeling as you can. Can you see it? Is the picture there? Good. Now tell me this: Wasn’t it *fun*?

I’m betting it was. The joy that comes with every new idea is what fuels you to be the best designer, writer, or photographer that you can be. Don’t lose the joy in this process. It is what makes you creative.

Does any of this sound familiar? In 30 days, it will.

THE SHOPPING CART ROLE MODEL

Let me tell you a story about a shopping cart and what it can teach you about the creative process.

In 1999, CBS Nightline aired a report called “The Deep Dive,” which was a segment that explored the product development firm IDEO. In this report, CBS Nightline approached IDEO with a proposition: *We want to give you a problem to solve, set some restrictions, and then film your process as you solve it. The project is to redesign the common shopping cart in five days.*

If you don’t know IDEO, the company doesn’t rely solely on product design experts in any particular field or industry. IDEO has a creative process its employees believe in strongly, and they apply that process to anything from toy dinosaurs to space shuttles. It fills its idea teams with an eclectic mix of people from inside and outside of its corporate structure, and it has no discernible corporate hierarchy during ideation. Everyone is equal because insight, perspective, and experience can come from anyone. IDEO is responsible for some of the most innovative product designs you may or may not have ever recognized. From Apple’s first mouse to the squishy grip on just about every toothbrush manufactured today, IDEO can and has applied its creative process to a myriad of items and found a plethora of useful, beautiful design solutions.

So when CBS Nightline asked IDEO to redesign the common shopping cart, an apparatus that has changed little since its inception in the late 1930s, the company jumped at the opportunity to apply its creative process to “the problem.” IDEO calls this process The Deep Dive, which is defined as a total immersion in the problem at hand. The creatives met as a group and then broke into teams to start researching how shopping carts are used, manufactured, and stored. They observed how people used the carts in stores; talked to experts on materials, storage, and mobility; and returned from their first full day on the project to enlighten the other groups of their findings.

SOLVING THE PROBLEMS

Problem solving began the next day. Each group started sketching, posting, building, prototyping, modeling, and discussing. The groups presented possibilities to the other groups, brainstorming and sharing thoughts on other possible solutions. They built makeshift models to test theories, often failing to satisfy the objective at hand. Failure, however, is looked upon favorably at IDEO. One of its mantras is “Fail often to succeed sooner.” The failures didn’t seem to affect the groups; teams continued to build on the ideas, taking bits and pieces of failures and successes to try something new. Another mantra at IDEO is “One conversation at a time,” but this didn’t stop teams from sketching and drawing as another team presented its findings or offered opinions. The atmosphere was almost chaotic. But when asked if this was the definition of “organized chaos,” CEO David Kelley replied, “Not organized chaos, focused chaos.”

As the groups offered idea after idea, a small group of self-appointed “adults,” consisting of Kelley, project lead Peter Skillman, and a few others, huddled together to create a plan to ensure that the project stayed on track. “Creativity is a messy process,” Kelley explained. “You can’t work without time constraints or else it will just keep going.” They assigned teams to solve the four primary problems that the groups uncovered: shopping, safety, checkout, and finding what you are looking for. (Notice that the problems they were solving weren’t just about the shopping cart; they were also about shopping. The cart was just a tool to solve greater problems.)

The teams began working on solutions, which meant more prototyping, testing, sketching, and discussing. They built models to present the culmination of their best ideas, focusing solely on the problem they were assigned. No one person was given the task of redesigning the entire cart; nor was one person even tasked with

solving one of the four primary problems determined during the exploratory phase. The end result would be a team solution in every facet, and this was by design. “Enlightened trial and error succeeds over the planning of the lone genius,” Skillman said. You would think that the prototyping failures piling up would have a negative effect on the morale of the group, but the mood was much livelier than expected. This, too, was by design. “Being playful is of huge importance to being innovative,” Kelley said. But in this playfulness, this almost childlike exploration of materials and angles, chicken scratch, and sticky notes, shapes began to form, solutions began building, and the teams could finally see where the project was going. Kelley instructed the teams to take the best of each solution and combine them into the finished product. Each team spent all night manufacturing its parts and assembling them with the other teams.

PRESENTING THE RESULT

The next day the teams presented their solution. The resulting shopping cart was remarkable, both aesthetically and functionally. The familiar, large wire-framed basket was replaced with tracks that held small hand baskets. Members of the shopping team found that the original carts were either competing for aisle space or being left at the end of aisles while the shopper traveled down the aisle to retrieve desired items. So they replaced the large basket reservoir with smaller, mobile versions. This would also reduce theft—another problem they found during discovery. It was common for large basket shopping carts to be stolen and used for everything from laundry carriers to wheelbarrows. Smaller hand baskets would virtually eliminate these uses.

The safety team found that a number of children were being injured by carts every year, so it devised a child seat with a hinged safety arm that could be lowered and a work area for the child to engage

THE IDEO SHOPPING CART CONCEPT

The overarching idea behind the redesign concept was not just to rethink the cart, but to rethink how we shop. IDEO's solution was to solve four problems: shopping, safety, checkout, and wayfinding.

BEHAVIOR OBSERVATIONS

Notice how the large reservoir of the previous design was replaced with a series of nestable hand baskets, allowing the shopper to park the cart and retrieve items by hand.

PERIPHERY SOLUTIONS

Two of the most common complaints among shoppers were the need for price checks in the aisle and the wait time at checkout. IDEO installed a personal scanner on every cart to alleviate price confusion at the shelf and speed checkout.

RESEARCH REVELATIONS

IDEO released the typical front-facing back wheels and replaced them with swivel wheels to provide 360-degree movement around corners and into parkable spaces.



Photos Courtesy of IDEO

in activity. The team also replaced the bottom shelf of the cart where people often stand to ride with a zigzagging structure to allow for the storage of flat items but left no place to stand. In addition, the team designed 360 degree wheels so the cart could be moved sideways if needed, eliminating the need to place your foot on that lower shelf and move the basket around tight corners.

The checkout team observed that customers would touch an item at least twice before the clerk scanned the item for checkout: once when they took it off the shelf and once when they put it on the conveyor belt at checkout. The team built a handheld scanner that attached to the cart so when customers took a product off the shelf, they could scan that item as they put it in the cart and simply provide the checkout clerk with a bill at checkout, greatly decreasing checkout times and all but eliminating pricing questions at the shelf. The item-finding team even built a personal intercom into the handheld checkout scanner to allow customers to ask customer service reps where to find a particular item in the store.

In just five days, IDEO redesigned the common shopping cart to not only better perform the function of a shopping cart, but also to solve a variety of shopping problems in the process and all for roughly the same cost as manufacturing a traditional shopping cart. But this exercise also accomplished something far greater than convenient trips to the grocer. IDEO's Deep Dive process and the resulting shopping cart project offered a unique look into creativity and the creative process, providing a killer example of how you can improve your own creative output. It provided an analogy to the framework for understanding creativity and laid the foundation for basic creative training. In the ensuing chapters, you'll explore the creative basics in detail. But for the sake of summary, the following section presents your Creative Boot Camp Field Guide, the basics of creative training.

CREATIVE BOOT CAMP FIELD GUIDE

After you read about these eight Field Guide topics, you'll begin the Creative Boot Camp Training Program. Understanding these basics will ensure that the time you spend in Creative Boot Camp will be time well spent. Once you have a basic understanding of creative training under your belt, the program will test what you've learned, giving you a practical application for each of these eight principles. A summary of each of the Field Guide topics follows.

1 CREATIVITY IS A HABIT

The basic misconception about creativity is that it is an outside force that you don't control, summon, or affect. The truth is that creativity is not a mystical moment that strikes when you are in the shower. (Why is the shower always the special place of enlightenment? What are you DOING in there?!) Creativity is actually a habit. It is a process that you can affect like you would any other skill—with passion, dedication, and practice.

Society has attached two significant meanings to creativity and neither is true. First, you have been led to believe that "creativity equals gifted." A study out of Exeter University found that even the most "gifted" creatives of all time practiced for years to perform their mastered crafts at levels that would qualify them as "gifted." Second, you have somehow come to the conclusion that "creative equals artistic" when in fact creativity is not a child of the arts; it is problem solving. To practice creative thought, you must first define a problem and then solve it with novelty and relevance. Linda Naiman, author of the book *Orchestrating Collaboration at Work* (BookSurge Publishing, 2007) and founder of the creative coaching alliance Creativity at Work, writes, "Creativity involves two processes: thinking, then producing. If you have ideas, but don't act on them, you are imaginative but not creative."

2 PURPOSE AND RESTRICTION = CREATIVE FUEL

If creativity is truly a habit, if it is something that you can affect with practice, what do you practice? Creativity is an innate talent *and* a learned skill. The good news is, according to a rather well-known study performed by NASA in the late 1960s, everyone possesses the innate talent to be creative as a child. The bad news is, as you grew, you were either inadvertently encouraged by figures of authority or trained yourself to be uncreative, but the talent is still there lying dormant, which is where the learned skill comes in. If you give creativity the proper conditions, you can resurrect your creative self and even marry your hibernating creativity with years of perspective and experience to generate ideas you didn't even know you had. What are those conditions? Purpose and restriction.

You cannot be creative without purpose and restriction. They are the only two structural requirements for creative thought. Creativity, at its core, is problem solving. To exercise creativity, you must have a problem to solve. If you paint a beautiful picture but don't solve a problem in doing so, you are being artistic but not creative. A problem must be present for you to apply creative thought; there must be a purpose. Likewise, you must have restrictions in order to be creative. The more restrictive the environment, the greater the opportunity for novelty.

3 BECOMING AN EPIC FAILURE

Isaac Newton once wrote, "An essential aspect of creativity is not being afraid to fail." You have all heard that failure is part of the creative process, but evidently, your bosses and authority figures don't seem to subscribe to the same mentality. Creativity is rarely frowned upon by corporate culture, but failure will lead you to a swift kick in the pants and a lonely seat on the curb. Can one exist without the other? The short and long answer is "not on your life."

In this book, you'll explore how to generate ideas in greater quantity and quality. Quality is measured by two attributes: novelty and relevance. By its very nature, novelty is defined as new or original. For something to be new, it can never have existed in its current form before. There is inherent risk with things that are new in that they have never been presented for acceptance or rejection. To produce creative thought, you have to accept novelty as a primary measurement and therefore must be willing to present your ideas for acceptance or rejection. Failure is a natural part of the creative process, as seminal to creative thought as a problem to solve. I would go so far as to say that you cannot be truly creative without a willingness to fail.

4 PROBLEM SOLVING: BAPTISM BY FIRE

In the IDEO shopping cart example, you saw a total immersion into the problem. The team broke up into smaller groups and headed out into the world to do research. Their job was to redesign the shopping cart, but they knew that by saturating themselves with what the shopping cart served, not just the cart, they could develop a considerably stronger solution. This is problem baptism by fire, dropping yourself into the problem's environment with the determined intention of developing a perspective that you can use to solve creatively.

You often view creativity's role as providing multiple quality solutions to a given problem, but creativity can also play a part in defining the right problem. IDEO investigated how people shop and solved outer-ring problems from an inner-ring perspective.

5 SOLVING THE PIECES

The general perception of problem solving is that there is a simple solution to every problem. Although this may be true for some

problems, others are simply too complex for simple solutions. There is nothing wrong with complex solutions to complex problems if those solutions are broken apart and solved on a molecular level. This is a by-product of problem baptism by fire. Inevitably, you find that simple problems are actually complex problems summarized. To effectively solve the shopping cart problem, IDEO separated the project into four smaller problems. The team solved those smaller problems first and then brought the solutions together to solve the greater problem.

The benefit to the mentality of problem dissection is that the philosophy and process work for almost all problems, simple or complex. Learn to divide and conquer, and the skill will serve you in most problem-solving situations, but the skill is not easily learned. You have become accustomed to providing answers not solutions. Yes, there is a difference. Answers are definite, resolute, and most of the time, singular. Solutions, however, are abstract, fluctuating, and subjective. How did you unlearn creativity? You were trained that there is one right answer for every question, and if you didn't know it, you were wrong. Innovation demands that you put aside the common perception of that one right answer for an infinite supply of possibilities. These possibilities are complex, and to arrive at them, you must learn how to solve the pieces.

6 PLAY IS THE NEW WORK

Kevin Carroll, famed Creative Catalyst and author of *Rules of the Red Rubber Ball* (ESPN, 2005), says that creativity and play share a host of common characteristics: There's an inherent positive mind-set, you're driven toward a purpose, the mind can freely wander, consequences are minimized, and it's fun. Think about playing a game. In the midst of that game, you have a goal (winning), you have restrictions (the rules), there are minimal consequences (no one gets fired or dies, usually), and the intention is entertainment; you're

playing it because it is fun. These are the ideal circumstances for creative thought. Imagine the ideas you would generate if you knew you would never fail. This is the reason play is an essential aspect of creative training and why the exercises you will undertake during the program are meant to be playful.

The common misconception about play is that it is frivolous. Carroll says, “Play is not always frivolous; there is strategic play. In the midst of play there has to be this inventiveness—this problem solver, this abstract thinker—there has to be this amazing ability to take risk, which are all the things we are asked to do in a business setting.” There’s another entity that mirrors these same characteristics: improv. Improvisers must throw aside self-critique, fear, and consequence to take risks, be bold, and think quickly. If you can learn to do the same thing in your creative life, you will see significant creative growth.

7 OVERCOMING THE OBSTACLES

In every pursuit, there are obstacles. Your pursuit is to make creativity a habit. The creating or breaking of any habit is never easy. There are always walls erected in your path. If you’re trying to create the habit of healthy living through diet, the obstacles of chocolate cake in the fridge and a rumbling stomach at 2:30 in the afternoon may keep you from creating that habit. Likewise, if you want to develop the habit of thinking creatively, you must first identify the obstacles that keep you from achieving that habit and then devise your plan to circumvent them.

In football, the defensive linemen are there for one purpose: to stop the offense’s advance. They are a virtual wall of behemoths who are bent on stopping the ball carrier. In goal-line situations, the offense has a couple of options to thwart this formidable obstruction: go around them, go under them, or go over them. Jumping the

linemen is an athletic move best performed by players who are willing to hurl their bodies as human missiles over the contingent of giants trying to stop them. As creatives, you must first identify the various obstacles (the linemen) that will keep you from developing the habit of creative thought and then be willing to jump the line in an impassioned act of determination. And you have to be willing to do it over and over when it inevitably fails.

8 MEASURING CREATIVITY

Because creativity is typically viewed as an apparition, an uncatchable entity that bestows brilliance upon a fortunate few at indiscriminate times, most have never attempted to measure it. But if creativity is a habit and if it is a process you can control, there certainly must be a unit of measurement in which to gauge your progression. For the purposes of this program, yours will be quantity and quality.

The quantity of the ideas you generate are easy enough to determine: Provide the purpose of a problem and the restriction of time, and you have a usable method. Quality, on the other hand, is a human determination. Relevance is difficult to measure resolutely because the quality of an idea is as subjective as the individual judging it. But relevance is only half the equation. Novelty is also in play when you determine the quality of an idea, so you’ll use this attribute to gauge your progress through this journey. If you train to generate more novel ideas and do so over an extended period of time, you will make a habit of creativity.

This is the Creative Boot Camp Field Guide—eight principles that make up the habit of creativity and provide a framework for practicing creative thought. Now let’s set your creative baseline with your first Creative Boot Camp exercise.



PRE-TEST

The *Creative Boot Camp* program features a series of daily creative exercises designed to prepare you to generate ideas in greater quantity and quality. At the conclusion of each week, you will be encouraged to complete a progress exercise to gauge your creative growth through the program. As you complete each progress exercise, you can enter your solutions into your personalized Creative Boot Camp dashboard available at www.creativebootcamp.net. The responses will be measured for quality and quantity, and you will receive an updated Creative Growth Score.

To establish your initial Creative Growth Score and your starting rank of Private, take the following Pre-Test and record your responses in the Pre-Test Exercise section of your Creative Boot Camp dashboard at www.creativebootcamp.net.



MEDIEVAL KID'S MEAL

TIME LIMIT: 3 MINUTES

The kid's meal has become a staple of fast-food chains worldwide. A miniaturized meal for children is accompanied by a cheap, useless toy. What could be better? In 1979, the first kid's meal was offered and parents have been stepping on the equivalent of plastic ninja stars ever since. But what if we moved that date back a few 100 years? Your first *Creative Boot Camp* exercise will invite you to find out.

Using a pen or pencil and paper, or a computer, document as many toys as you can conjure up for a kid's meal. But not just any kid's meal; a kid's meal during medieval times. Yes, I mean that era of knights, horses, and castles, the whole nine yards. And you have only three minutes to do it.