THE ACCIDENTAL CREATIVE

SUMMARY GUIDE

HOW TO BE BRILLIANT AT A MOMENT’S NOTICE

TODD HENRY

“Invaluable for anyone who thinks for a living.”
--Seth Godin, author of Linchpin and Poke The Box
ADVANCE PRAISE FOR THE ACCIDENTAL CREATIVE

"My copy of The Accidental Creative has notes and highlights throughout. Invaluable for anyone who thinks for a living."

- Seth Godin, author of Linchpin and Poke The Box

"Todd Henry has spent years breaking down the secrets of highly effective creatives. Read this book and prepare to ramp up your brilliance!"

- Chris Guillebeau, author of The Art of Nonconformity

"The gift of creative insight is not to be squandered! Todd Henry has assembled a guide that will enrich your creative pursuits. Don’t dream without it."

- Scott Belsky, CEO of Behance, author of Making Ideas Happen

"The Accidental Creative is an inspiring and practical guide for staying fresh and doing brilliant work. If you regularly need great ideas, this book will help you find them."

- Tony Schwartz, author of Be Excellent At Anything

"Mr. Henry’s prescription for maximizing productivity is sagacious, innovative, and sublimely practical. I’ve already incorporated into my own regime three of his notions and they are working like gangbusters. The Accidental Creative is high-octane fuel for creative productivity."

- Steven Pressfield, author of The War of Art

"There are two definitive versions of you with Todd’s book: you before reading it, and you to the 100th power immediately after. Bottom line, The Accidental Creative offers real-world, inspirational insight on how to realize your creative best."

- riCardo Crespo, SVP/Global Creative Chief, 20th Century Fox (FCP)

"This book is a practical awakening to a life of surprise and usefulness, which is why creativity matters. It contains wisdom, practices and guidelines to help calm and focus us in a world vibrating with distraction."

- Peter Block, author of Community

"The Accidental Creative should be required reading whether you are starting out in business or already a CEO. It presents a step-by-step model that will immediately help you generate business-building ideas for your job."

- Bob Gilbreath, Chief Strategy Officer at Possible Worldwide, author of The Next Evolution of Marketing

"I was struck with how relevant and practical this book is for anyone in the creative field at any level. I am a creative professional that has been actively engaged in a design career for over 25 years and I found this book not only insightful but enlightening and challenging to the last phrase. It is full of invaluable life lessons."

- Tim Hale, SVP for Marketing and Communications, Fossil

"The myth of the tortured creative has been shattered! Henry brings accountability and a brilliant method to the mysterious process of creating in a way that feels fresh and inspiring."

- Richard Westendorf, Exec. Creative Director, Landor Associates
Sound familiar? This pretty much sums up what many of us feel each day as we go about our work. There is a constant pressure to excel - to produce *brilliance* - in order to meet expectations.

Unfortunately, the creative process doesn't operate according to our client's or our manager's schedule. It's often difficult to know when creative breakthroughs will happen and it seems impossible to ensure that we'll have the right ideas at the right time.

**There is a way, however, to ensure that you're always poised to experience creative insights when you need them.** You must establish practices that support your creative process and give you the focus, energy and time you need when an opportunity arises. That's what *The Accidental Creative* is all about! It's a step-by-step guide to structuring your life so that you experience creative insights (*creative accidents*) more consistently and when you need them most.

In this guide you'll find a summary of many of the key topics in the book, organized by chapter. It also features some takeaways from the book that are expounded upon in the talks that I do for companies and at conferences.

I hope you'll join me in the effort to be prolific, brilliant and healthy in your life and work and I trust that you'll find *The Accidental Creative* helpful in that effort.

Sincerely,

Todd Henry

*Accidental Creative*
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SPEAKING TOPICS BASED ON THE ACCIDENTAL CREATIVE:

How To Be Brilliant at a Moment’s Notice
Creative insight is an elusive beast. But with a few purposeful practices (and some understanding of why creating can be so challenging) you can set yourself up for brilliance.

Possibility Thinking
Many companies get caught up in the mire of pragmat- ics and neglect the pursuit of the possible. In this talk we explore how to unleash possibility thinking in a practical manner.

Finding Your Unique Voice
If you want to thrive, you need to identify what you do better than anyone else, then do it consistently. In this talk we share key principles for doing both.

A Manifesto For Creatives
An often overlooked aspect of long-term creative brilliance is mindset. The Manifesto contains ten principles that make you prolific, brilliant and healthy.

The 5 Conversations Creative Teams Must Have
Lack of communication kills creative teams. This talk challenges creative teams to do the difficult work of engaging in conversation about process.

Be A Laser, Not A Lighthouse
What makes a creative leader great? This talk discusses 5 things brilliant leaders do consistently to set their teams up for creative success.

To learn more, visit AccidentalCreative.com/speaking
CHAPTER 1:
THE DYNAMICS OF CREATIVE WORK

Creative work (working with your mind) comes with a unique set of pressures, and without tools to deal with these pressures creatives are ultimately destined to drift toward mediocrity. Creatives should aim to be prolific, brilliant and healthy, which means producing great work consistently and in a sustainable way. In order to do this, creatives must establish Creative Rhythm by building practices in five areas: Focus, Relationships, Energy, Stimuli, and Hours (F-R-E-S-H).

"You need to create space for your creative process to thrive rather than expecting it to operate in the cracks of your frenetic schedule."

KEY TOPICS
- The nature of creative work and why it is different from other kinds of work.
- The importance of "rails", or effective boundaries, to the creative process.
- The tension between possibilities and pragmatics and how it affects creatives in the workplace.
- The five elements of Creative Rhythm (F-R-E-S-H) and why are they important to creatives.

CHAPTER 2:
THE DYNAMICS OF TEAM WORK

Any time we attempt to organize the creative process, we must deal with the tension between possibilities and pragmatics. Organizational creatives are simultaneously charged with pursuing innovative and novel ideas while executing them within defined timeframes in a predictable manner. As a result, creatives are constantly wrestling with whether to continue exploring possibilities or to "reel the project in" so it can be delivered on time and on budget. This tension plays out in multiple ways and affects our ability to engage and do our best work.

"Every organization begins as an advance force and ends up as an occupying force."

KEY TOPICS
- The three creative tensions that result from the possibilities vs. pragmatics dynamic.
- How creatives can deal with the sense that their work is never really done.
- How creative teams can relieve tension by better engaging in conversation about process.

"The creative process is a personal assault on the beachhead of apathy and a push to explore and break new ground, even when we are uncertain of a successful result. - p. 62"
CHAPTER 3: THE SIDE EFFECTS: DEALING WITH THE ASSASSINS OF CREATIVITY

There are three distinct side effects of organized creative work, and they can significantly limit our ability to create. Dissonance is when there is a gap between the "why" and the "what" of our work, and it prevents us from gaining creative traction quickly and effectively. Fear prevents us from exploring possibilities, whether because of fear of failure or fear of success. Expectation Escalation occurs when we are constantly comparing our present work with past work or with the work of our peers or heroes. Each of these three "assassins" cause us to perform at less than our creative best. To countermand them, we must implement the practices discussed in chapters four through ten.

KEY TOPICS
- The three assassins of creativity (dissonance, fear, expectation escalation).
- How fear takes root in the creative workplace.
- How dissonance zaps your ability to generate brilliant ideas.
- Practical ways creatives can overcome the pressure of ever-increasing expectations.

CHAPTER 4: FOCUS: ZEROING IN ON WHAT'S IMPORTANT

To be brilliant at a moment's notice requires an incredible degree of focus on what's truly important at any given time. But there are a million factors that can demand our attention and distract us from the very important creative work in front of us. The "Ping" is the sensation we get that something out there might be more important than whatever is in front of us (prompting us to check our e-mail, our Twitter feed, or other updates.) It prevents us from fully engaging in the moment and bringing our best to whatever work we're doing. To mitigate it, we must incorporate three practices: defining (by using Challenges), refining (by using the "Big 3") and clustering (by chunking similar tasks together to avoid the task switching penalty).

KEY TOPICS
- The nature of the "Ping" and how it keeps you from doing your best work.
- How unhealthy assumptions stand in the way of your creative process.
- Three specific and simple practices that creatives can implement to gain focus now.

"When you allow false assumptions to creep into your life, you become inflexible, less capable of focusing on the issues at hand.
- p. 75
Many creatives treat relationships haphazardly, but they can be a significant source of inspiration and accountability in our effort to do brilliant work. In order to leverage the full power of relationships in our life, we need to be purposeful about building into others and allowing others to build into us.

There are three kinds of relationships we need to develop: those that help us stay inspired, those that challenge us and build into us, and those that help us stay on the right course. By building these three kinds of relationships into our life we are much more likely to experience frequent moments of creative insight.

"If we want to thrive over the long-term we must reclaim the power of relationships in our life and establish practices that help us leverage the gifts and accountability that only thriving relationships can provide."

KEY TOPICS
- The importance and grounding effect of relationships in the marketplace.
- How starting a “circle” can help creatives stay inspired and on course.
- Why everyone needs to submit to the wisdom of those farther along the path.
- How competing "head to head" with a peer can help you stay sharp.

Many creatives are great at managing time but in the process they neglect their most important resource: energy. They stack their calendar full of back-to-back meetings and cram activity into every crevice of their life, but in doing so they fail to account for how it affects their ability to operate at their best across every area of their life.

To do brilliant work consistently we must get better at managing our energy. We do this by applying two practices: whole-life planning, and pruning.

KEY TOPICS
- The major signs of poor energy management and how to countermand them.
- How to plan with your whole life in mind rather than compartmentalizing so you maximize creative energy.
- How to identify activities to be pruned so that you can be effective in the most important ones.

"Because the energy we expend shaping ideas is invisible, we fail to realize that there is a very real cost associated with every project we take on and every mental commitment we make."

"Every area of our life is hardwired to every other area. It is impossible to perform a task in one sphere and not have it affect another. - p. 120"
We are inundated with thousands of messages every day, from print to e-mail to TV and the web. However, we often don’t consider how the kinds of information we allow into our head affects our ability to generate creative ideas. Stimuli are anything that stimulates creative thought, and by being more purposeful about the kinds of stimuli we build into our life we can better set ourselves up for breakthroughs.

To effectively leverage the power of good stimuli we must be selective about stimuli, we must learn to record our observations effectively, and we must intentionally challenge ourselves with new experiences.

"Just like good food increases your capacity to be active and healthy, the higher the quality of your stimuli, the better you are setting yourself up for high-level breakthroughs."

KEY TOPICS
- How to curate an effective study plan, and what it should consist of if you want it to facilitate brilliant work.
- What separates good notes from bad ones (it’s not what you think!) and how to set up intervals to review key insights so they’re not lost.
- How to establish a rhythm of purposeful experience so that you are expanding your understanding of the world.

"There is much advice on how to organize your time to conquer your tasks, but it is mostly predicated on the assumption that your goal is simply to get through the work, with little regard to the quality of that work. As a creative, you are held to account for the quality of your work, not just the quantity."

KEY TOPICS
- How you can approach your time with a mindset of effectiveness rather than efficiency.
- The difference between treating time like a portfolio and treating it like a slot machine.
- Practical techniques for generating ideas for your important projects.
- How to cultivate your creativity through unnecessary creating.
CHAPTER 9:
PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER: THE CHECKPOINTS

Building Checkpoints into your life allows you to regularly review your practices and rhythm to ensure that they're still working effectively. The are like road signs that continue to ensure you that you're on the right path; you don't need them every fifty feet, but you need them frequently enough that you don't stray off course.

To effectively implement the practices, creatives need to establish practices at three horizons: weekly, monthly and quarterly. Doing so will allow for flexibility in how the practices are implemented from season to season, but also ensure that there is a consistent infrastructure providing stability in their creative process.

KEY TOPICS
- How to establish Checkpoints at weekly, monthly and quarterly intervals and the right questions to ask at each in order to ensure they are effective.
- Which practices should be emphasized in specific seasons to ensure that they are most effective.
- How to allow space for the unpredictable in your life and work.

CHAPTER 10:
COVER BANDS DON'T CHANGE THE WORLD

The end goal of building practices is not just to have a nice new system to follow, it's to get to a place where you have the capacity to do your best work consistently and are doing more of what really matters to you. To do so, you must identify the core areas where you are most effective and are able to have an impact on the world, then operate in them consistently.

The ultimate goal of establishing Creative Rhythm is to help you be prolific, brilliant and healthy, which means having tremendous and unique impact on the world for a very long period of time. And ultimately, it means ensuring that your best work is being “shipped” consistently because you have the capacity to engage with your full creative potential.

KEY TOPICS
- The role of intentionality, choice and discipline in your effort to change the world.
- The difference between occupation and vocation, and how it can impact your ability to thrive in your career.
- The relationship between your definition of greatness and the outcomes you see in your life and work.
TODD HENRY is the founder of Accidental Creative, a consultancy that helps creative people and teams generate brilliant ideas. He regularly speaks and consults nationally with companies about how to develop practices and systems that lead to everyday brilliance and is a frequent conference speaker on the subjects of creativity and leadership.

In 2006 he launched The Accidental Creative, one of the top business podcasts. He has since shared Accidental Creative's work and philosophies with hundreds of thousands through his podcasts and popular website, AccidentalCreative.com.

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