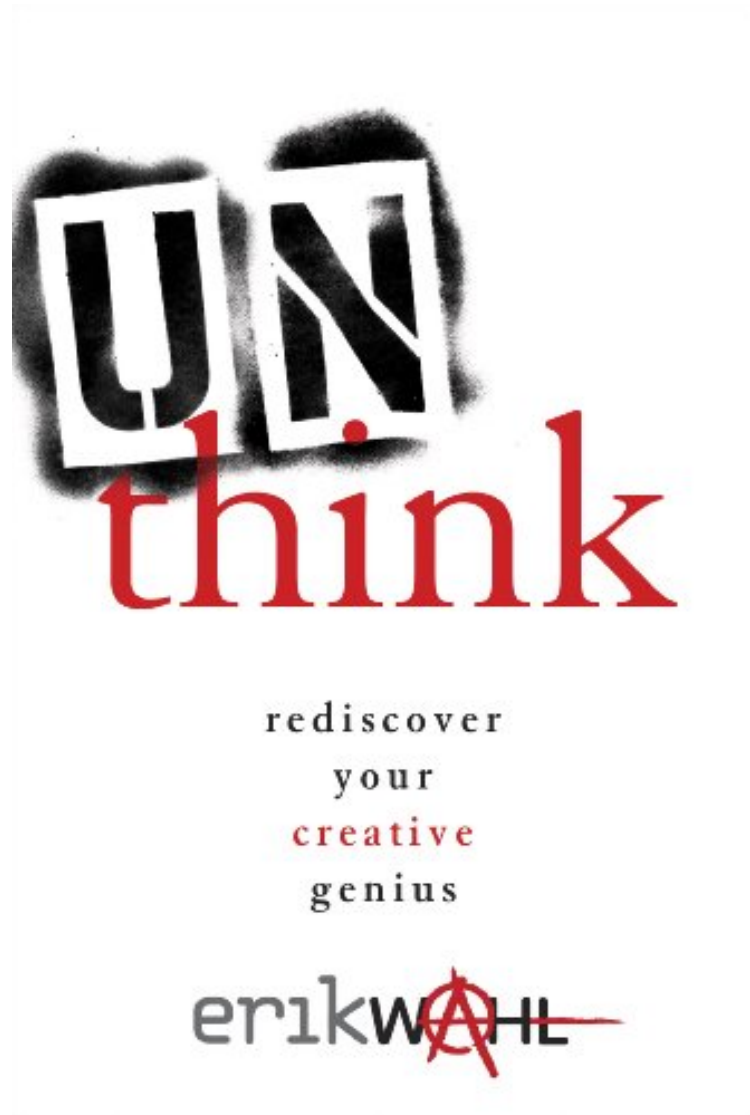


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Unthink: Rediscover Your Creative Genius

Erik Wahl

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Erik Wahl : Unthink: Rediscover Your Creative Genius before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Unthink: Rediscover Your Creative Genius:

4 of 5 people found the following review helpful. Motivates oneself to create once again. By M...DuffI looked forward to purchasing this book when I first learned that Erik was having this published. I knew I would enjoy the read but did not expect it to cause me to make changes in my daily life. I cannot remember any read other than some spiritual books that had me still thinking about the reading hours and days after finishing each chapter. I so enjoyed this book that I'm recommending our management team read the book and then have a series of meetings in a non work setting to discuss how we can implement some of the suggestions written. My mind has not stopped thinking about being

more creative in all that I do. I actually feel energized to break processes that are perceived not broken. I'm confident efficiencies will be gained. Thanks Erik. I'm glad to have had the opportunity to meet Erik and experience his awesome creativity. This book did not disappoint. 1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. UNthink Is The Real Deal By Ken Hlf you are looking for a creative, unconventional way to improve your life, this is the book for you. If you've ever had the privilege of seeing one of Erik's shows then you will be enjoying even that much more because you can read it and see him speaking these words to you. Even if you've never seen Erik in person, this book will touch your soul and encourage you to find that creative inner soul you once had. AAA+!! 6 of 7 people found the following review helpful. 5 Stars All The Way By Customer I can't recommend this book enough. As someone that has followed Erik and his Art Drops, it's amazing to see how he came up with that idea. This book walks you through the process of rediscovering your creativity! Erik doesn't tell you to quit your job in this book, what he does is encourage you to find your passion, then he shows you how to do that! When is the last time you could spend \$15 for a blueprint on how to achieve a better life? If you are stuck in a rut, this book will help you get out of that rut! Don't just buy 1 for yourself, buy at least 1 more to give away to a dear friend, I did, in fact I bought 10 to give to camp counselors!!!!!!!

In the tradition of *A Whole New Mind* and *The War of Art*, graffiti artist and corporate thought leader, Erik Wahl explores the power of creativity to achieve superior performance. Somehow we've come to believe that creativity is reserved for the chosen few: the poets, the painters, the writers. The truth is creativity is in all of us and rediscovering it is the key to unlocking your fullest potential. *Unthink* pushes us beyond our traditional thought patterns. It will inspire everyone to realize that we are capable of so much more than we have pre-conditioned for. Creativity is not in one special place--and it is not in one special person. Creativity is everywhere and in everyone who has the courage to unleash their creative genius.

"Erik Wahl's *UNTHINK* is Creative Detox at the highest level. It's a kick in the pants that will send you sailing out of the box -- back to "beginner's mind," to child-like courage, to that place of play where all wonderful work originates. Erik Wahl is a force of nature. *UNTHINK* is his relentless, playful ethos in a bottle. I love the concept, I love the title. Five Un-Stars!" -Steven Pressfield, bestselling author of *The War of Art* and *Turning Pro* "UNTHINK will catapult you forward to unlock and unleash your creative genius. This thought provoking book is an extension of Erik Wahl's electrifying keynote performance that will inspire you grow your dreams and challenge your traditional thought patterns to achieve excellence in both business and in life." -Ken Blanchard, bestselling co-author of *The One Minute Manager* "Erik Wahl has made creativity his life's study. In the pages of *UNTHINK*, you'll find inspiration for your own creative journey. Even better, you'll discover that you won't have to travel far -- the answers are all around you." -Daniel H. Pink, bestselling author of *Whole New Mind*, *Drive*, and *To Sell Is Human* About the Author Erik Wahl is an artist, author, and entrepreneur who has become a catalyst for inspiring professionals to achieve extraordinary levels of performance. Internationally recognized as a thought provoking graffiti artist and one of the most sought-after speakers on the corporate lecture circuit, Wahl's process of creating "disruptive innovations" in both art and business has led to countless stories of breakthrough success. Wahl's artwork has raised millions of dollars for charities and can be seen hanging prominently in executive offices around the world. Erik, Tasha, and their three sons live in Southern California. Excerpt. copy; Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved. 1 What Was Right About You Every child is an artist. The problem is how to remain an artist once we grow up.--Pablo Picasso Ask a roomful of five-year-olds how many are artists and every hand will shoot up. Ask a roomful of thirty-five-year-olds the same question and you might get one reluctant hand. Why is that? The answer to that question begins by understanding who you and I were as children. For years studies have shown that you were born with an ability to initiate new ideas and solve problems uniquely. "Children have an inbuilt drive for discovery," explains Tim Seldin, president of the International Montessori Council. "This drive for discovery continues to develop as they grow and become more adventurous in the things that they try out, from making mud pies in the garden to starting a worm farm in the living room. Children are born with marvelous imaginations and a keen desire to explore the world." 1 In other words, you were born an artist--an individual with a large capacity to learn, adapt, and develop new ideas and solutions at any moment. As a child, your brain thrived off what neurologists call your "right hemisphere"--the part of your brain that's in charge of intuition and creative, social, and visual skill: the part of your brain that embraces new and unconventional ideas, the part that is fascinated by surprise, the part that doesn't need everything to be neat and tidy and perfectly defined in order to find value. As a result, your mind was an ever-looping reel of whys and, more important, why nots. Curiosity was on overdrive. Imagination was rampant. Inspiration was anywhere and everywhere. The world was your canvas and the rules of creation were few if any. Young boys turn sticks into swords and fight imaginary battles on a daily basis. They turn gutter streams into mighty rivers on which to sail their paper-made ships. Adventure, imagination, risk--these are hardwired into young boys. The type of toys they have or the locale in which they play doesn't matter either. If a journey beckons, they will find what they need or make it out of anything in reach. Boys don't need to be taught to be creative. It pours out of them. And they are not the only

ones. Young girls transform themselves into ballerinas with lip gloss and any dress that fans with a twirl. Their dolls and stuffed animals become companions on a quest to find their prince and attend the great ball. Or they too venture off into the great unknown--to make the next great discovery, or to find the buried treasure, or to simply explore the outer reaches of their imaginary world. For young boys and girls alike, exploration is their daily reality. Do you remember when your days were governed by your imagination? You could be whoever or whatever you wanted. You could travel around the world--even beyond the world--at the drop of a thought. There were no rules that said you couldn't or shouldn't because it wasn't time productive. Pragmatism, logic, and even safety did not stand in the way. You were free to sculpt your days into works of art--tangible representations of your unique creativity--filled with joy, enthusiasm, and fulfillment. We functioned this way as kids because our worldview was incomplete. To learn and grow, we needed to be mass collectors of information through our various senses. We were learning a language. We were figuring out how to relate to others. We were discovering the laws of physics and learning how to run and jump, and to use our muscles and limbs more efficiently. In short, we were cross-training for the many scenarios life would eventually toss at us in rapid succession. Our primary environment needed to be a rich, vibrant, and imagination-fostering one. Many companies around the world have created offices that mirror kindergarten classrooms, hoping to spark that same rich, vibrant environment of childhood. Companies like Google have used unconventional environments to help them create cutting-edge products. The company allows its engineers to spend 20 percent of their work hours exploring anything that triggers their curiosity. The freedom allows employees to work alone and focus on something that tempts their fancy. It also allows employees who wouldn't normally intersect during the workweek to sit down together and let their ideas collide. Some of Google's greatest products grew out of this freedom--Gmail, Google Earth, Google Labs, and its flagship AdSense program. What many don't know is that while Google hasn't admitted its inspiration for its 20 percent perk, it was probably the mining and manufacturing giant 3M, which began allowing its employees to spend 15 percent of their work time exploring the recesses of their imaginations in 1948. The company wanted to stand out in a postwar America, when rigidity defined the corporate landscape. It did so and continues to do so today. Its legendary Post-it notes were birthed by an employee named Art Fry during his 15 percent exploration time; but that is only one of more than twenty-two thousand patents that have created approximately fifty thousand different products that bring in more than \$20 billion annually.² 3M is an innovation volcano. Could we be oversimplifying the reasons for such companies' constant creativity when we link it to their promotion of employee imagination and exploration? While there are certainly other factors that make the Googles and 3Ms of the world so hypercreative, when asked, the employees themselves, from executive to entry level, point to this free time as the major catalyst in shaping the companies' continued success. When Marissa Mayer was Google's VP of search products and user experience (she's now CEO of Yahoo!), she estimated that approximately half of Google's new products were the result of employees' 20 percent time.³ Kurt Beinlich, a technical director for 3M, explained that his company's 15 percent time has "shaped what and who 3M is."⁴ There is something freeing, something magical, something exuberant, about an environment where we are not hemmed in by rules and time lines and are instead opened up to imagination, possibility, and learning. This describes the landscape of early childhood. The idea of returning to childhood for wisdom is nothing new. While the world's greatest teachers and thinkers have for centuries debated every topic and philosophy under the sun, one thing they have agreed on is the need for adults to become like children again in order to not only see our days in their fullest colors but also to pull ourselves out of ruts and push us through life's challenges. Jesus famously scolded his disciples when they kept the children in a crowd from approaching him. "Let the little children come to me," he insisted, "and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these."⁵ Sigmund Freud lamented, "What a distressing contrast there is between the radiant intelligence of the child and the feeble mentality of the average adult." Heraclitus wrote, "Man is most nearly himself when he achieves the seriousness of a child at play." Friedrich Nietzsche asserted, "In every real man a child is hidden that wants to play." And according to Mahatma Gandhi, "The law of love could be best understood and learned through little children." Albert Einstein once wondered how it came to be that he was the one to develop the theory of relativity. He explained, "The reason, I think, is that a normal adult never stops to think about problems of space and time. These are things which he has thought of as a child. But my intellectual development was retarded, as a result of which I began to wonder about space and time only when I had already grown up. Naturally, I could go deeper into the problem than a child with normal capabilities."⁶ In Einstein's opinion, his genius was the result of remaining childlike into his adult life. He would later famously assert that "imagination is more important than knowledge."⁷ It's a surprising assertion from the iconic genius. It is also surprising to learn that Einstein was no child prodigy. He was what we would call today a remedial student and a problem child. "Einstein was slow in learning how to speak . . .," explains Einstein biographer Walter Isaacson. "He also had a cheeky rebelliousness toward authority. . . . But these traits helped make him a genius. His cocky contempt for authority led him to question conventional wisdom. His slow verbal development made him curious about ordinary things . . . that most adults take for granted."⁸ Fortunately for Einstein--and the world--his parents rejected the traditionalist notions that their child was problematic. They continued to support his wild mind and unconventional habits. It paid off when he was old enough to channel his artistry with more developed skill and precision. This childlikeness--or in some respects childishness--was also responsible for the birth

of what we know today as Outward Bound, the world's largest outdoor experiential-education organization with facilities in thirty countries and six continents. Today the organization's original, unorthodox training is offered through courses for corporate team building, inner-city youth, and specific populations like alcoholics and growing families. These courses are based on founder Kurt Hahn's belief that when people are reintroduced to adventure, exploration, and risk they are able to redefine or expand their perceptions of what is possible not only in their own lives but in the lives of those around them. "There is more in us than we know," he wrote. "If we can be made to see it, we will be unwilling to settle for less."⁹ The name "Outward Bound" says it all. It is a nautical term coined by Sir Lawrence Holt, a British shipping baron whose money and resources helped greatly expand the organization. It was used to describe a ship leaving the safety of its harbor and embarking on the mysterious open seas. This outward-bound inclination is something you and I followed instinctively as children. Armed with only our imagination and the basic trappings of our bedrooms, basements, or backyards, we left the safe harbor on a daily basis. We climbed on counters, then climbed trees, then attempted to scale our houses. We leapt off the bottom stairs, then the middle stairs, then the backyard fence. Dangerous, inexplicable worlds called to us. We ran faster. Flew higher. Danced harder. Yelled louder. We exhausted ourselves in exploration and innovation. And we learned more in our first seven years than we learn in any other seven-year span in our lives. We were truly wired to create when we were young. This doesn't mean we should stop exploring, discovering, and innovating once we are older. Today's reasons for creative breakthrough may be even stronger. We should be inspired by the fact that as adults we are far more equipped to do something truly meaningful and lasting with our discoveries. Not only can we make our lives an everyday adventure; we can enlighten the lives of others too. But to achieve our full potential, we have to do away with the notion that curiosity, imagination, and exploration are child's play. What Einstein, Nietzsche, Gandhi, and Jesus understood is that there are unspoken maxims we embrace as children that even the most educated, experienced, advanced adults should never abandon if we want our days to still fascinate and fulfill us.

1. **Mystery Adds Meaning** When Isaac Newton was asked to describe his most productive days as a scientist, he explained, "I was like a boy playing on the sea-shore, and diverting myself now and then finding a smoother pebble or a prettier shell than ordinary, whilst the great ocean of truth lay all undiscovered before me." When mystery leads, curiosity follows. Whys, Why nots, and What ifs. There are few things more constant in a child's life than curiosity. When curiosity is a driving force, a person remains interested, present, in passionate pursuit. Kids are notorious for driving their parents crazy with their incessant questions. But these questions are the reason they learn so much so quickly. They also keep life interesting. Consider the greatest films you've seen or books you've read. It was undoubtedly the mysterious elements of them that kept your interest piqued and senses sharp in order to satisfy your curiosity. Mystery is the reason you watch an intense five-minute sequence in a film and wonder if you took a single breath. It's the reason your limbs can unknowingly fall asleep in the midst of an engaging conversation with someone you love. It's the reason we are still fascinated by other galaxies and outer space and the possibility of life on other planets. Mystery is the reason people like business tycoon Sir Richard Branson, Titanic and Avatar director James Cameron, and CEO Jeff Bezos spend millions of dollars to explore the deepest depths of the world's oceans. There is promise in mystery: the promise of virgin paths and uncharted waters. And, if we keep searching, there is the promise of discovery. Mystery makes everything more interesting, and more interesting means more meaningful. Creativity is born of mystery.
2. **Ignorance Leads to Breakthroughs** "Einstein's vast knowledge of mathematics and science increased steadily throughout his life," explains author Scott Thorpe in his book *How to Think Like Einstein*. "But when we look at Einstein's problem-solving output something seems wrong. . . . The most profound breakthroughs came during a remarkable year during the beginning of his career. But in later years, Einstein's problem solving dropped off." Thorpe goes on to describe a fascinating and revealing trend in the life of the archetypal genius. It was during his first year out of college, while he was working at the Swiss patent office "reviewing improvements to laundry wringers" and doing physics "on the side," that he discovered $E = mc^2$. He was no less brilliant in the subsequent years and in fact knew more about science and math and had more uninterrupted time to focus on his experiments alone and with the greatest fellow minds of the day. And yet, as Thorpe points out, "he didn't solve any more scientific problems." "We would expect Einstein's problem solving to correlate with his intelligence and knowledge," concludes Thorpe. "Instead, his problem-solving ability declined as his knowledge increased. Innovation was highest when knowledge was lowest."¹⁰

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