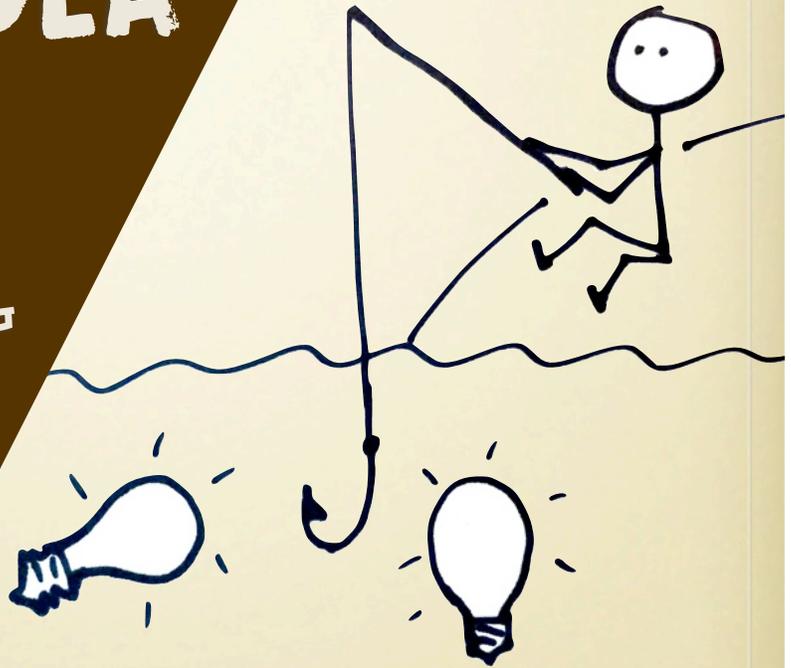


GONE IDEA FISHING

A CREATIVE
PROBLEMSOLVING
TACKLEBOX

MATT RYAN, @MRYAND
CARLETON COLLEGE

#MPD11



Welcome.

So grateful you're here

I'M MATT

@MRYAND

CARLETON COLLEGE

Hi There! I'm Matt Ryan. I work at Carleton College in Northfield, MN

Designer, Usability and UX guy

Facilitated and led lots of creative efforts

Teach design units in Carleton classes



WHY?

We all need ideas all the time. Sometimes big ideas, sometime small

Despite this I run into the idea that creativity is talent you either have or don't have

And that it is the domain of a particular person or group on campus

Also I've been part of idea generation efforts that have struggled & I've thought a lot about why & how we can help

My belief: everyone can develop creative skills

Orgs and teams are better off when everyone is bringing great ideas to the table

LEARNABLE

I like the metaphor of fishing for many reasons, but foremost is that it suggests learnability

Most of us would agree that you can learn how to fish

Creative problem-solving is the same

PART 1

GETTING THE FISH BITING

PART 2

LANDING THE FISH

This presentation has two parts

PART 1

GETTING THE FISH BITING (OR GENERATING IDEAS)

I'll start with idea generation: getting the fish biting



STOCK YOUR TACKLEBOX

For starters...

Just like fishing it really helps to have a wide variety of tools at hand

Turns out there are lots of tools people have come up with to develop ideas

Think of each of these as a "lure" – each one helps catch different ideas in different situations.

You might have several things in your tacklebox and you want more, or you might just be starting out. I hope I can help you build yours.



TRIED &
TRUE

I'll start with the tried and true.

BRAINSTORMING RULES

- START BY REVIEWING PROBLEM
- NO BAD IDEAS. NO JUDGEMENT OR EVAL
- ALL IDEAS CAN LEAD TO OTHER IDEAS
- ALL IDEAS RECORDED IN CLEAR VIEW OF PARTICIPANTS
- NO EDITING UNTIL AFTERWARDS
- ASSIGN FACILITATOR WHO CAN ENFORCE THESE RULES

MODIFIED FROM CREATIVITY FOR GRAPHIC DESIGNERS BY MARK OLDACH

You've probably been part of a brainstorming session.

BEYOND BRAINSTORMING

6 THINKING HATS

- ORGANIZING (BLUE)
- INFO (WHITE)
- FEELINGS (RED)
- CRITICAL THINKING (BLACK)
- POSITIVE ASPECTS (YELLOW)
- CREATIVE THINKING (GREEN)

"SCATTER" TECHNIQUE

- SUBSTITUTE
- COMBINE
- ADAPT
- MODIFY
- PUT TO ANOTHER USE
- ELIMINATE
- REVERSE

There are many approaches that go beyond brainstorming. Here are two:

6 thinking hats introduced by Edward de Bono

Way of getting groups to focus on one aspect of a problem at a time, making sure that we don't (say) drown out positive aspects with critical thinking or vice versa.

Maren Walz introduced the SCATTER technique to me on the cab ride from the airport.

It's a way of focusing on one type of modification at a time

There are many more that I don't have to get into right now



MAP THE HABITAT

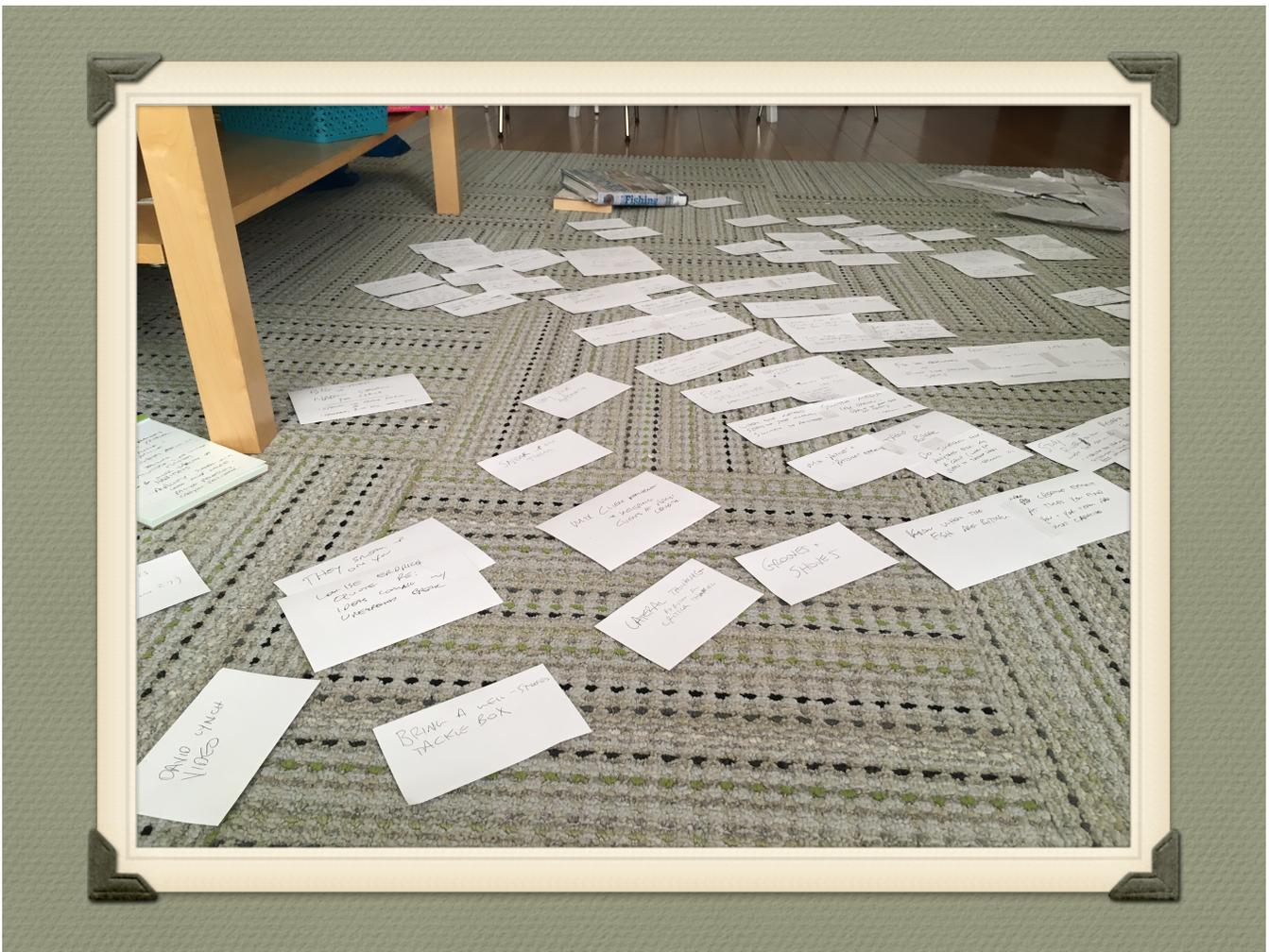
Make a map of the habitat

Understand the problem, environment, & constraints

Diagram, mind-map, arrange & rearrange post-its

Drawing (Drawing on the right side of the brain, Catmull 212)

Use your visual & spatial mind



An example:

A week ago I was in a place where I had done a ton of thinking and idea generation but I had no idea how I was going to structure this presentation.

Once I laid everything out on the floor where I could survey it visually, the entire thing snapped into place over an hour or two.



PATIENCE IS A VIRTUE

Small Fish Bite Quickly, Large Fish Take Their Time

(or your first fish is probably not the biggest in the pool)

Typically a lull in ideas before the really wild & novel ones start coming

Seen lots of groups stop when this lull hits

Need to trust that this just means we have emptied the pool of little fish

Now ready to catch the big ones



BIG FISH EAT LITTLE FISH

Some ideas seem puny or dumb

Value them and write them down – they can lead to big ideas.



BRING A FRIEND ALONG

Explain your problem (or idea) to someone unconnected



BRING A FRIEND ALONG

1905, Albert Einstein, Michelangelo Besso, Special Theory of Relativity



GOOD FISHING IN TURBULENT WATER

There's good fishing in turbulent water

Fish & ideas both active when things get stirred up

Provocation & movement technique (de Bono)

Example: You Die Before You Die

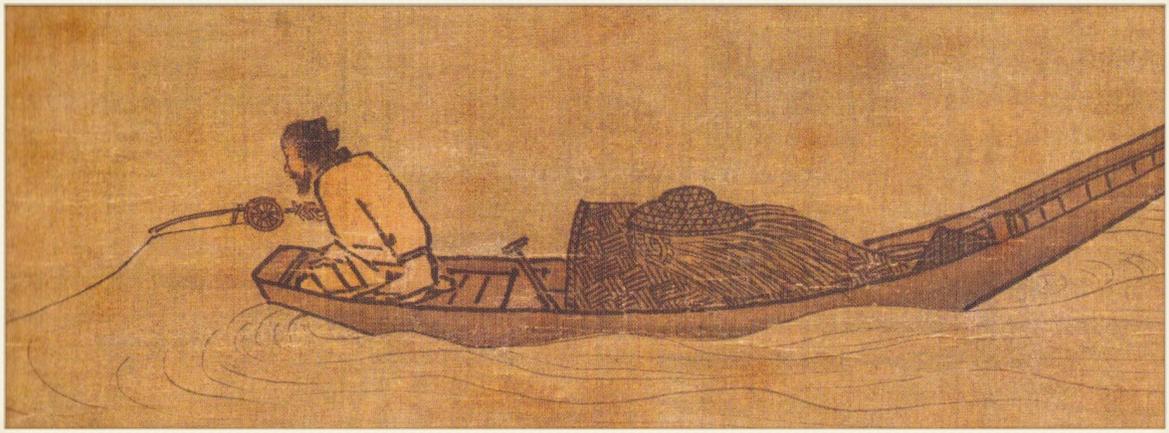


KNOW WHEN THE FISH ARE HUNGRY

Know when the fish are biting

Schedule your creative efforts for when you know you and your team are crackling with creative fire and not when you're half asleep or hangry

For me that basically means 10 am or 2 pm.



KEEP YOUR LINE IN THE WATER

Keep your line in the water



LUCK AFFECTS EVERYTHING; LET YOUR HOOK
ALWAYS BE CAST. IN THE STREAM WHERE
YOU LEAST EXPECT IT, THERE WILL BE FISH.
– OVID

Ovid: “Luck affects everything; Let your hook always be cast. In the pool where you least expect it, there will be a fish.”

Keep a sketchbook or notes file handy at all times

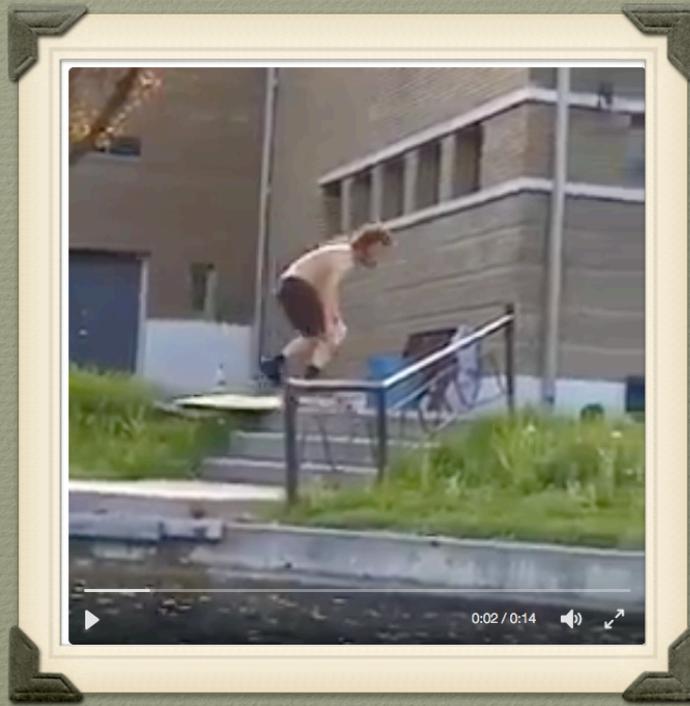
Remarkably easy to forget ideas if you don't record them in some way

Breaks and relaxation are particularly good times for this – Shigeru Miyamoto came up with many of his ideas for Donkey Kong in the bathtub



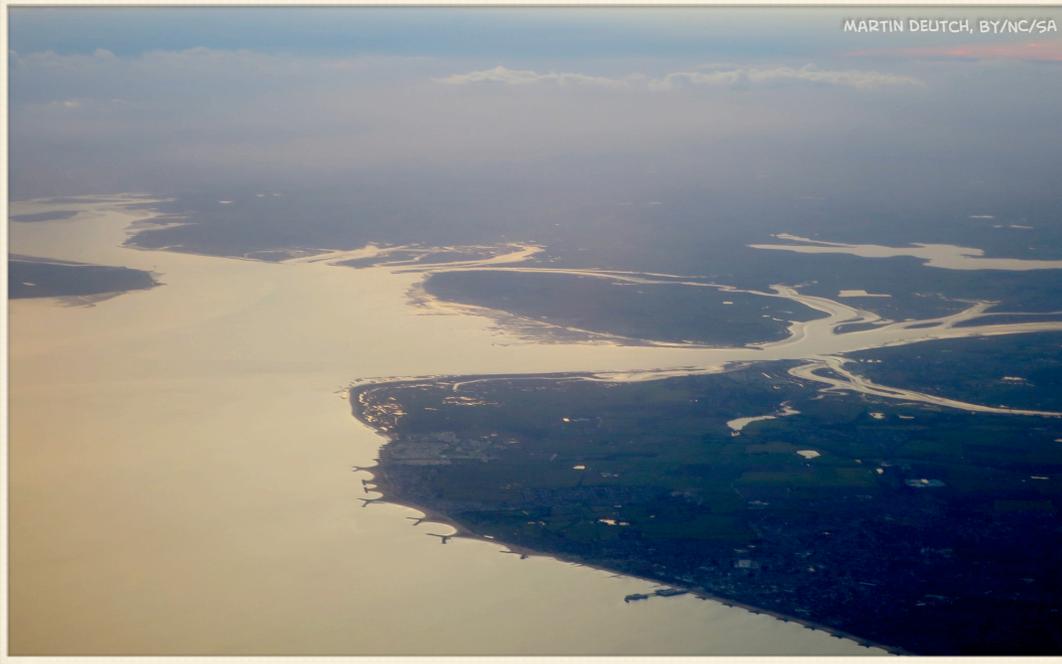
Rocket 88

“Oops” moments can lead you in new directions



WELCOME SURPRISES

Here's the fishing equivalent.



BOUNDARIES = MOST PRODUCTIVE

The most productive areas are at the boundaries

Estuaries

BOUNDARY ZONE EXERCISES

- FORCED

CONNECTIONS

1. LIST WORDS OR CONCEPTS DEVELOPED IN BRAINSTORM
2. RANDOMLY PAIR TWO
3. WHAT BROUGHT UP?
4. REPEAT FROM #2

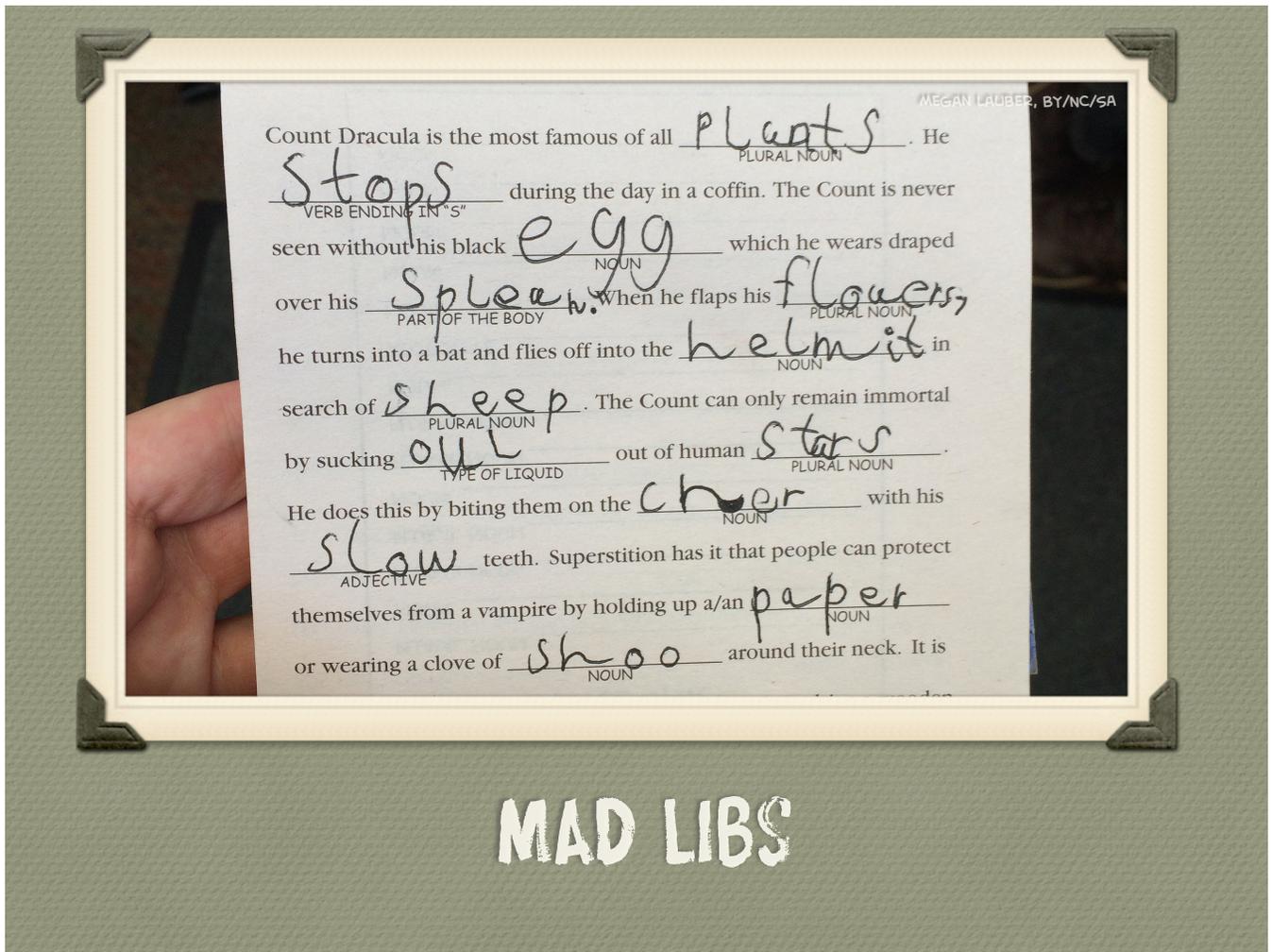
- RANDOM WORD

1. GET DICTIONARY
2. PICK RANDOM WORD
3. WHAT BROUGHT UP?
4. REPEAT FROM #2

Forced Connections exercise

Random word tool

If you think you haven't done one of these -- you probably have without knowing it.



Mad Libs

Random Word exercise in game form



Cards against humanity – Forced connections exercise turned into a game

Koestler, Humor as bisociative, collision of worlds, foundation of creative act

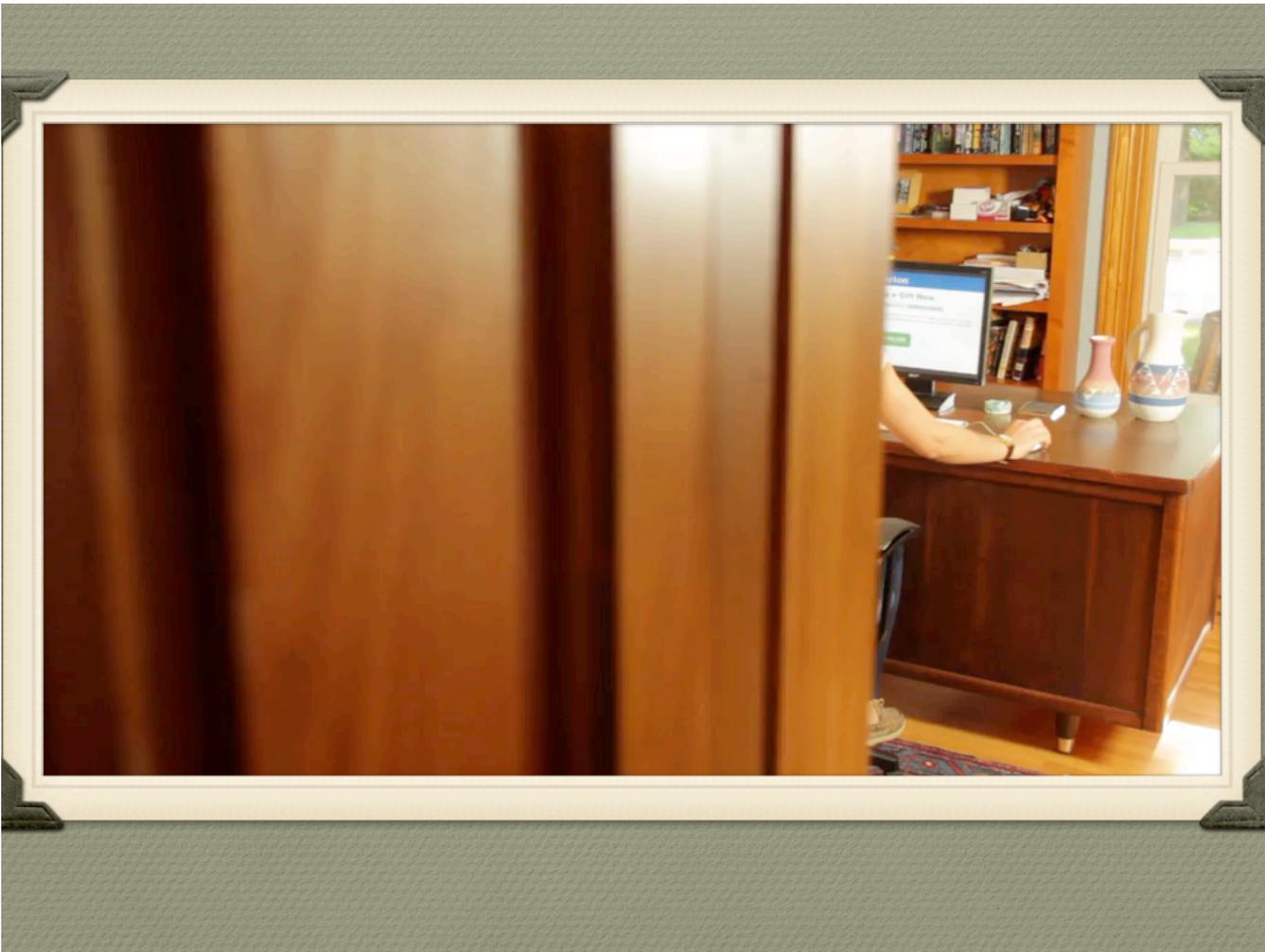
Let me give you a recent example where this came into play

THANK YOU
+ RUBE GOLDBERG

?

Describe creative process for 2016 ARG video

Here it is:





SWITCH IT UP

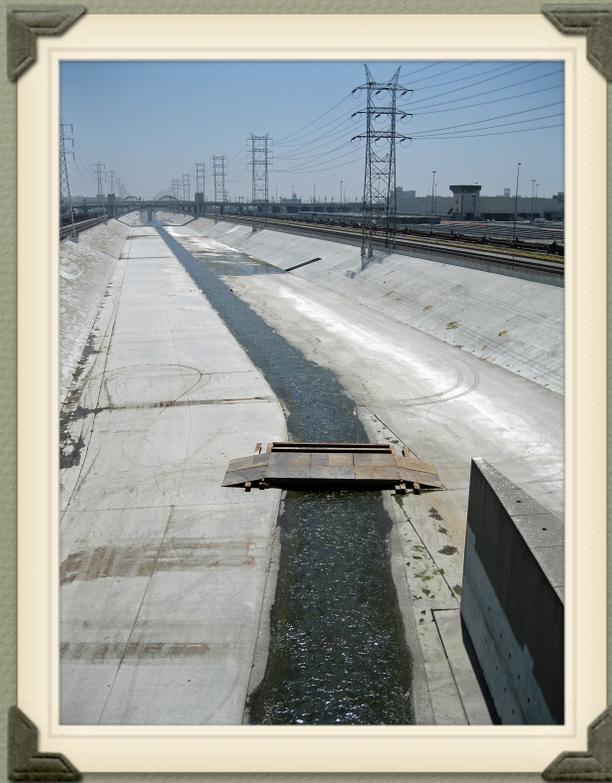
When one method stops working, switch to another

Switch media or creative method

If one isn't working, pull another one out of your tacklebox and try that.

This can seem like a bewildering variety.

And there are many, many more -- see books *Your Idea Starts Here* by Carolyn Eckert and Edward de Bono's output



THE GROOVE

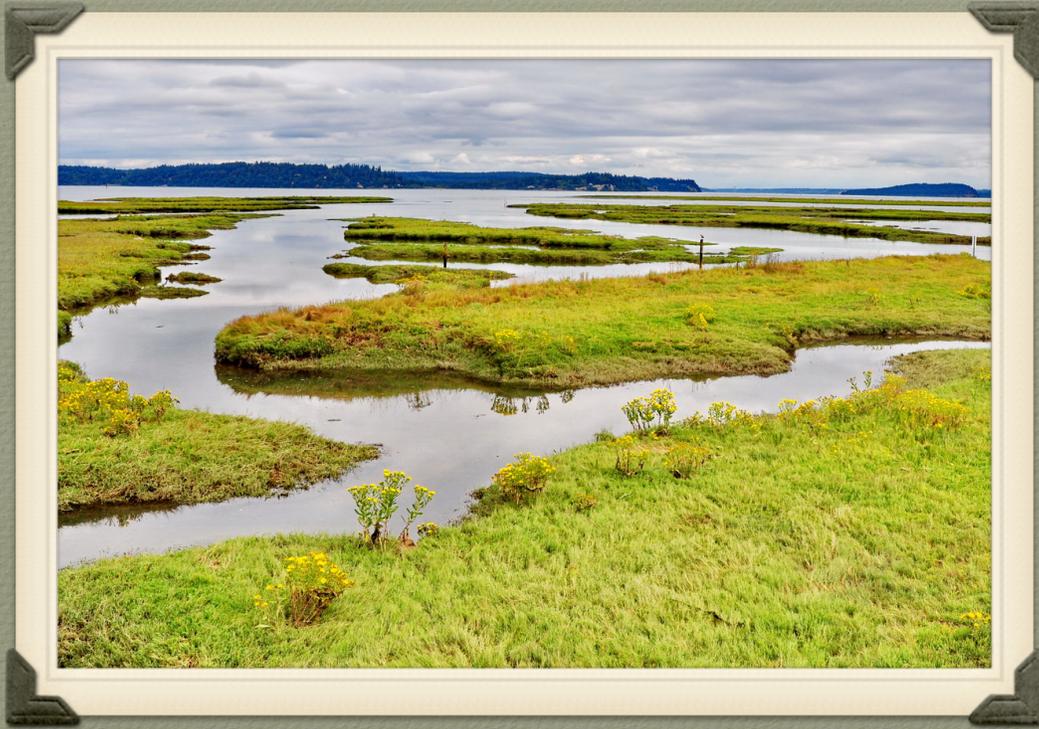
They all have a connecting theme

Human minds tend to get attached to particular patterns

As long as we stay in these patterns our ideas will not be new

This is the LA River. Not a productive place for fish. Our mental grooves are not productive places for new ideas.

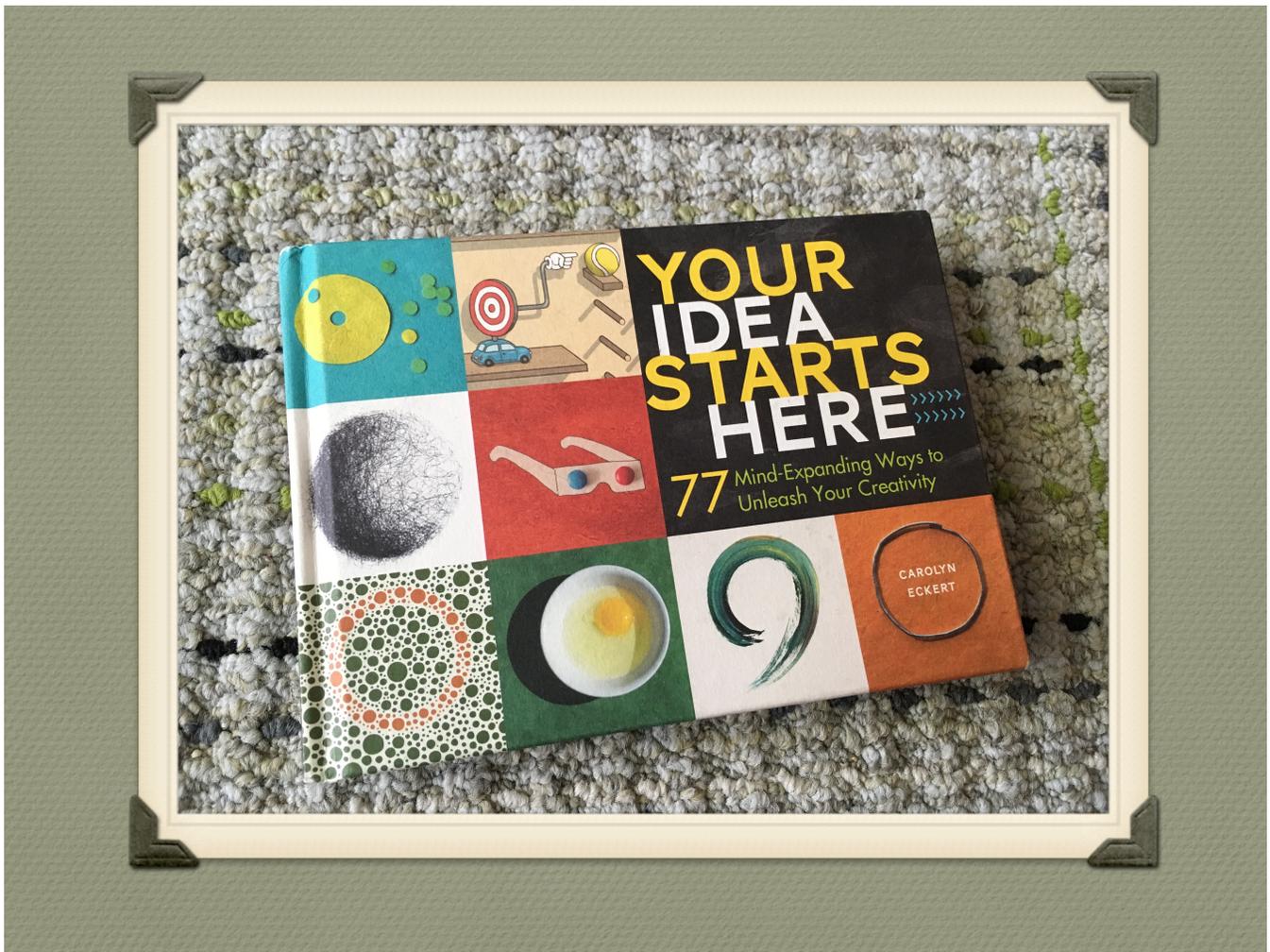
We need well-placed shoves to get us out of these grooves



OUT OF THE GROOVE

Different techniques activate different parts of the brain, but the overall goal is the same: use a different part of the brain than the one you're accustomed to using when you think about a particular topic or problem.

Most effective creative idea generation efforts use several different techniques, to tap in to a variety of mindsets and brain regions



This book is a great resource for when you feel you need to switch things up.

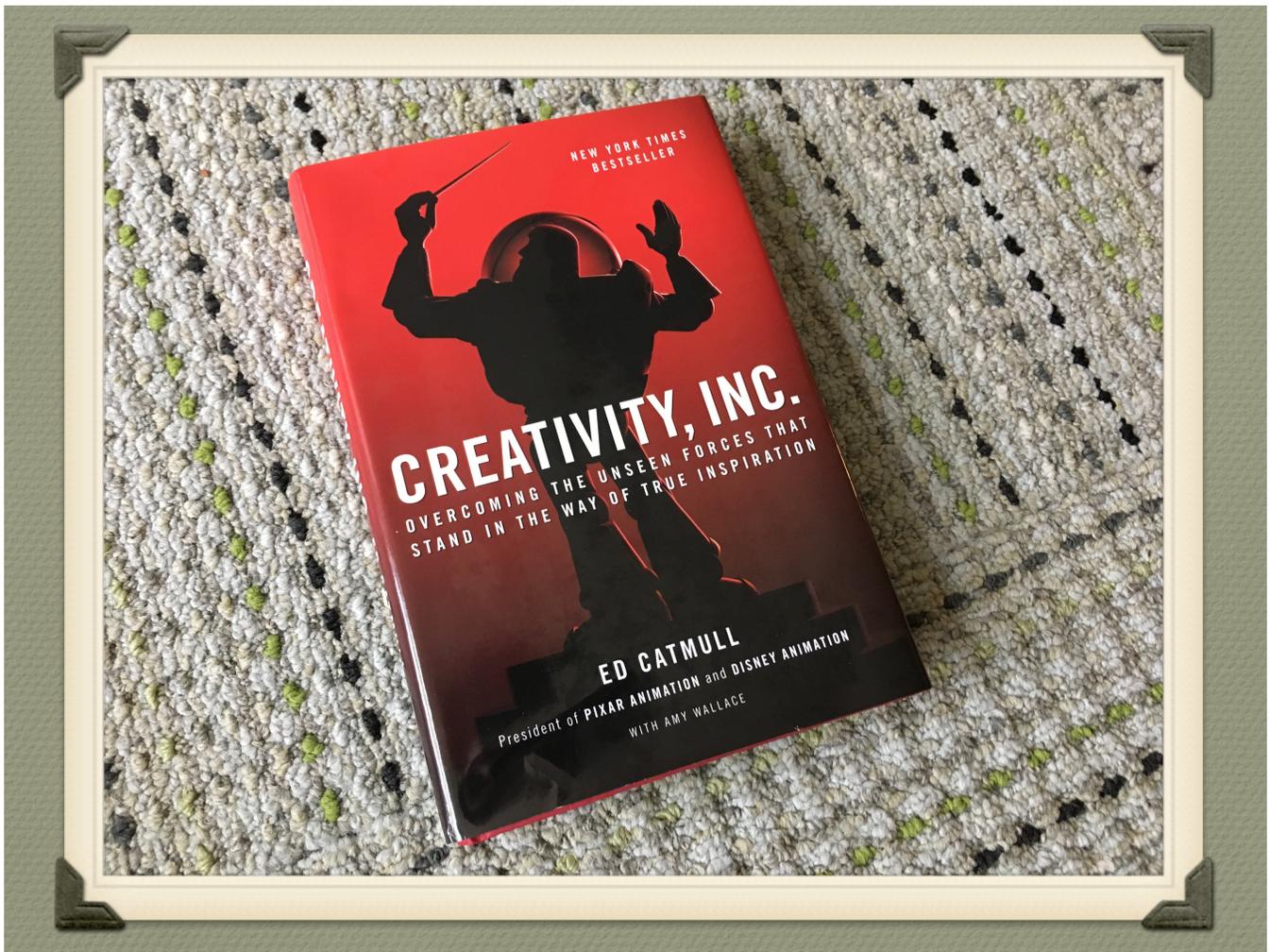
You can literally open it to any page and try the technique on the page.

PART 2

LANDING THE FISH

Now I'd like to turn to another aspect of creativity.

How do we see creative efforts to completion?



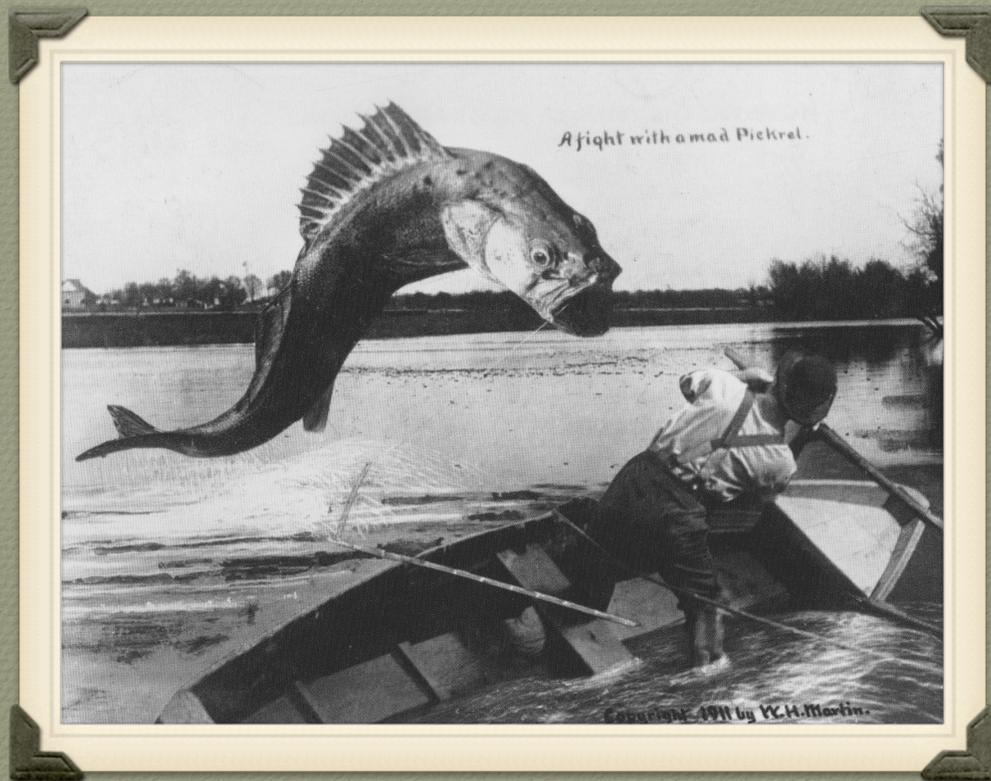
Before I continue I should acknowledge that this part of of this talk owes a big debt to this book by Ed Catmull, who is the president of Pixar. It's a great book about how they built their company to support creative work. You should get it.



CATCH & RELEASE

- Catch & release
 - Teach design units at Carleton
 - Frequently see students get attached to first idea they had
 - Rarely is this a great idea, but they ran with it before

- * Be ready to change your approach at any time in process
 - This applies to both creative ideation efforts and to entire projects
 - Streams and rivers change, seasons change, time of day changes, etc.



SOME SURPRISES MAY NOT BE GOOD

- The fish on the line may not be the one you want to catch
 - An idea can seem great before you try to put it into practice
 - Continue to evaluate your ideas during implementation
 - That idea you all fell in love with might not work
 - Kill Your Darlings



THE UNKNOWN CAN BE SCARY

Which brings me to the fact that the creative process can be scary. This is because the unknown can be scary.

This picture isn't scary enough, though. How about ... (click) this?



I think this is a bit closer to getting at the fear that can be associated with high-stakes creative efforts

When making creative efforts there is always risk

You are trying something new and unproven

The success or failure of the effort can feel like it will reflect more on us than if we used a proven approach

This is scary



THE UNKNOWN CAN BE MISUNDERSTOOD

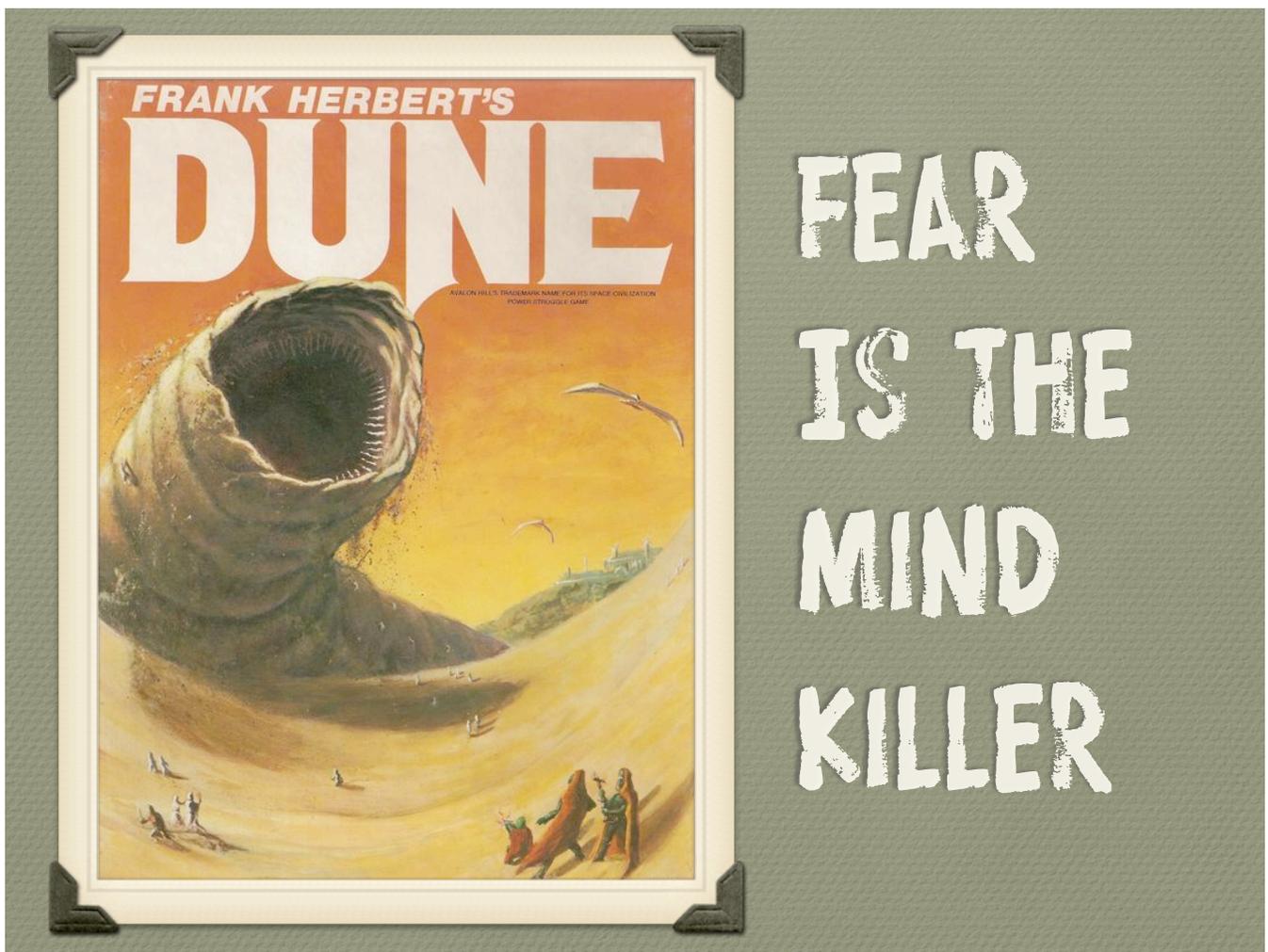
And just as the unpredictability of nature can be scary to those who don't live there, the unpredictability of creative efforts can be scary to others in our organizations.

Specifically, upper-level managers tend to be there because they are consummately organized. They like organization. Creative process resists organization -- in fact it is inherently risky

To follow a truly creative idea means you will be delving into the unknown

Therefore new ideas are suspect and sometimes actively resisted by organizations

(By the way, I have no idea what's going on in this picture.)

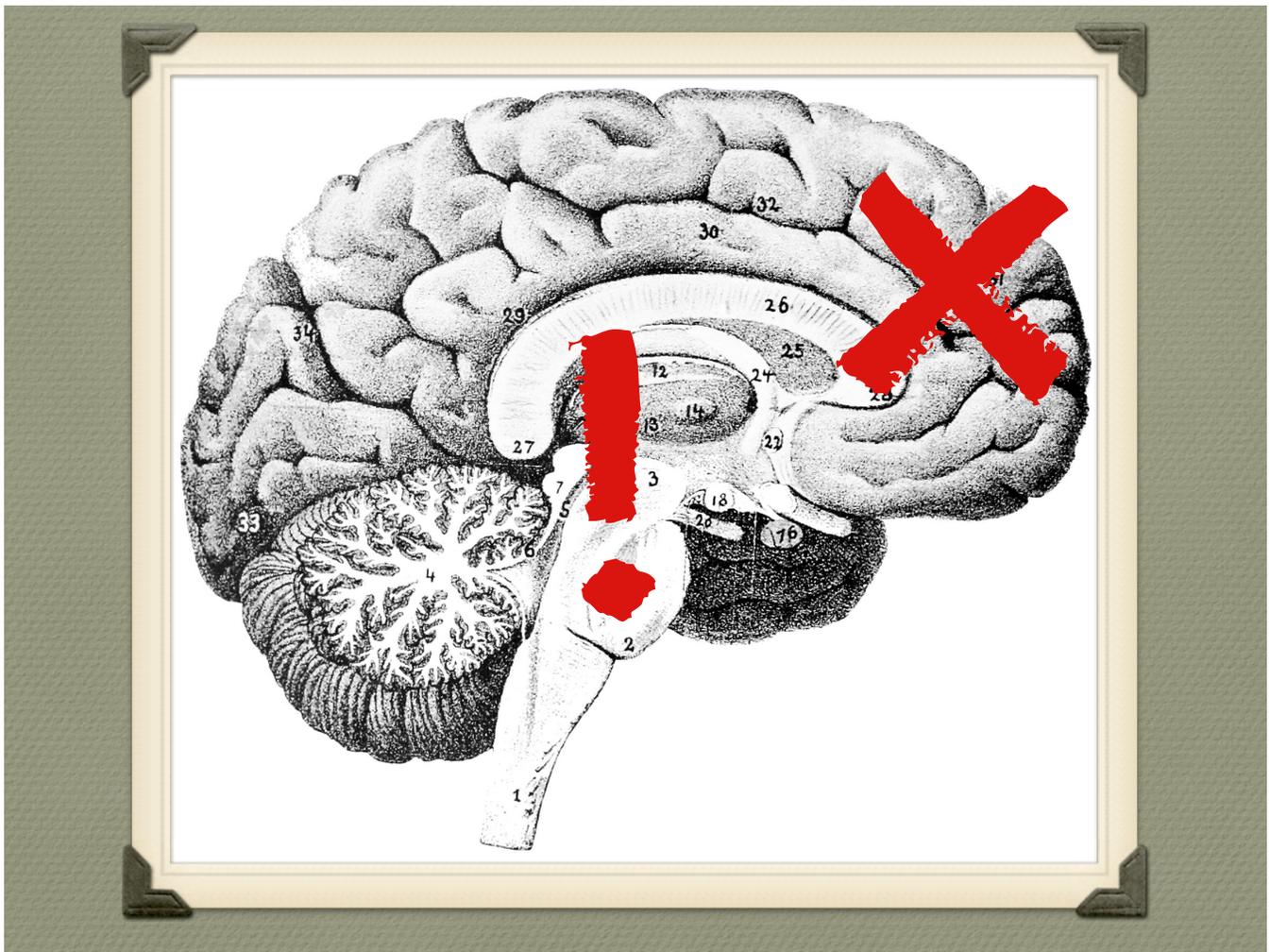


Fear not limited to others

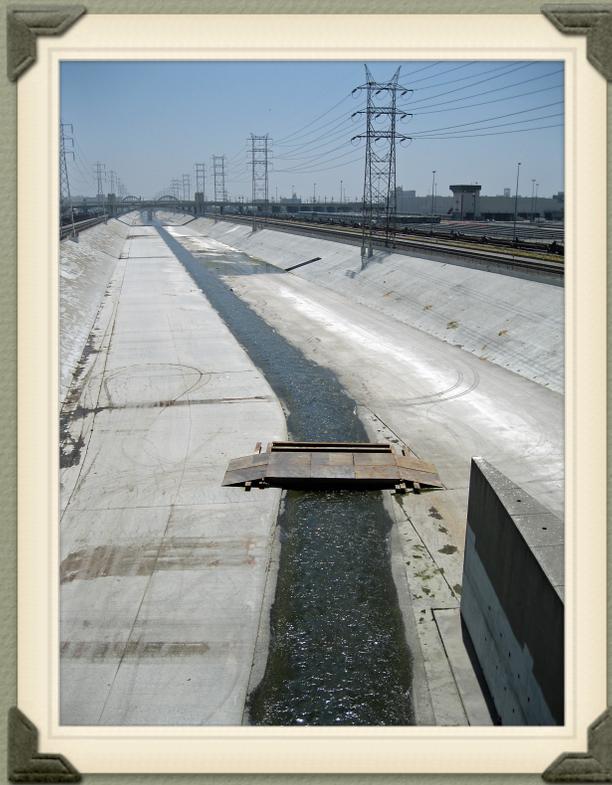
It's not just managers – we all tend to prefer the status quo in one way or another

Fear of failure, of deadlines, of disapproval, of rejection can all take over when trying to do something new

Fear is the mind killer



This makes sense – when we are afraid (click) the (click) automatic parts of our brain take over & the higher-level thinking shuts down



THE GROOVE

Fear pushes us deeper into our grooves

So what can we do in the face of this fear?



FIND OR MAKE A HAVEN

Find or make a "haven" where fish (or ideas) can incubate

Salmon have spawning grounds that are critical for their survival. If they are disrupted it can mean the end of a salmon run

Similarly, great ideas start out as helpless, tiny minnows

These new, fresh ideas can be easily killed -- until they have been tried, tested, attempted, played with, challenged, they can seem "ugly" or unwelcome to those who don't see their potential



At Pixar they have developed a meeting they call the Braintrust -- it is both a group of people and a feedback protocol

Wherever a work in progress is, it is shown at a Braintrust meeting and the group provides feedback

Feedback points out issues but does not dictate solutions

Find or make your own trusted group who can provide feedback on ideas & early-stage work that helps it develop

Develop a process that keeps these fledgling ideas from untrusted people with the power to kill them until those ideas have been improved and validated

Find people who can help be your creative firewall. Ed Catmull describes Steve Jobs as Pixar's creative firewall, protecting their creative efforts from being stymied or killed by investors



WRAPPING THINGS UP

Here's my wrap-up.



This is a portrait of Izaak Walton, the author of the Compleat Angler.

He wrote in 1653: "Doubt not but angling will prove to be so pleasant, that it will prove to be like virtue, a reward to itself"

Because success in fishing is often a matter of luck, an angler who is too fixated on their output is likely to be unhappy and frustrated much of the time.



I truly believe that we do our best work when we are free of fear and find the work intrinsically enjoyable.

So enjoy yourself. Enjoy the pleasure of coming up with serious, silly, dumb, and brilliant ideas. Enjoy the effort even when the output is uncertain. Seek out others who share this pleasure.



GOOD FISHING!

I wish you good fishing.

Thank you!

RESOURCES

- ED CATMULL: CREATIVITY, INC.
- CAROLYN ECKERT: YOUR IDEA STARTS HERE
- EDWARD DE BONO: THINK!
- MARK OLDACH: CREATIVITY FOR GRAPHIC DESIGNERS
- MINDTOOLS.COM

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