

Book Review

How to Fly a Horse.

The Secret History of Creation, Invention and Discovery.

Kevin Ashton, Doubleday Books, 2015.

INR374 (paper), ISBN: 978-0385538596.

Reviewed by:

Nitu Singhi, Great Lakes Institute of Management.

Creativity is assumed in terms redolent of ancient beliefs like unpredictability, divinely inspired and bestowed only on a lucky few. One generally tends to think that there must be some trick behind any writer's/scientist's/inventor's work. Researchers have even pointed out a personality trait 'origence' specifically for creative people. In an era where creativity and innovation have become critical skills for attaining success, the book 'How to Fly a Horse' by Kevin Ashton can be considered as a fresh and relevant perspective on innovation debunking all myths about creativity. Ashton, a professor at MIT and a technology investor and inventor of 'Internet of things', arrives at his theories by dint of his own hard work and states that 'creating is not extraordinary, it is human. To create is to work.'

The author goes on to explain his thoughts through a number of anecdotes about famous writers, painters, scientists, inventors and entrepreneurs. To illustrate that substantial contribution requires tireless revisions, he cites examples from the lives of Albert Einstein, who cracked the theory of relativity while chatting with a friend; Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, who heard full compositions in his head; and Wassily Kandinsky, who created 'Painting with White Border' in one afternoon. Ashton also discusses the work of the Wright Brothers, Stephen Wolfran, Ken Robinson. He shifts from social science to history to debunk the 'aha' stories behind the creation of iPhone, the discovery of a popular cancer cure and the magic of Woody Allen's humor.

It appears that Ashton's mission is to convince us that creativity is not something entrusted only upon great geniuses. Seeds of creativity are present in everyone. Anyone can be creative as long as one is prepared to put in hard work, take a step back ward to scrutinize, analyze and assess his/her work, find fault and flaws, challenge and change the perception of their own work and oneself.

It is worth pointing out that the examples and anecdotes he presents are germane to the theme of this book. They are very gripping —especially when he talks about 'rejection', by citing the work of Ignaz Semmelweis and Franz Reichelt to show that 'rejection has value'. The chapter on 'credit denied female

scientists' is also enthralling, where he talks about women like Rosalind Franklin, Lise Meitner, Harriet Zuckerman, Marietta Blau and even Marie Curie, who were not given any credit individually and some of them were not even acknowledged for their discovery. Through this chapter he tries to unfold the stigma and prejudice of the society and deciphers that creativity is every human's right - "A species that survives by creating must not limit who can create. More creators mean more creations. Equality means justice to some and wealth to all."

The efforts taken by the author to bring out the importance and myths of creativity are very well seen as he cites and analyzes the work of some eminent researchers like Torrence, Terman, and Guildford etc. who worked on creativity and intelligence.

To sum up, this book is a compilation of thorough analysis and research, done by Ashton, on the works of some eminent people from across disciplines. The language is simple and easy to understand. At times it gives a feeling of being another self help guide. Thoughts like "being a genius is hard work. But that spark is in all of us as we are more like Leonardo, Mozart, and Einstein than not" are enough to boost your self-confidence and take you to the ride full of creativity. The book provides hope for anyone to become creators through hard work, which the world considers is proprietary to few talented individuals.