



Innovation —The Myth of Thinking Outside the Box

by Walter Calahan

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Early in my career a magazine known for its innovative photography called with an assignment. I jumped for joy for it meant I had crossed a line within the publishing world. Now I was going to learn the secrets of how a cutting edge magazine created its unique look.

After getting the “Who, What, Where, When and How” of the project, I had one question. Was there any art direction towards an innovative visual solution? The reply was “Make it weird.”

“Make it weird?” I thought. Not wanting to appear wet behind my ears, I said “Okay, will do.”

Hanging up the phone, I thought there’s got to be a better way to being innovative. After completing the assignment, a few weeks passed, and to my delight, the same magazine called with another project.

I smiled to myself thinking “I guess I was successful at making it weird.” After getting the assignment details, the photo editor’s voice changed a bit, more reserved, when I asked if she had any art direction. She said “The art director asked if I could be a little less weird?”

I've never been asked to "Make it weird" again, but countless times I'm simply told "to think outside the box." Every time I hear this phrase I say "There's got to be a better way." Fortunately photography has a great teacher — the camera. A camera is a box that keeps the light out until I open the shutter to make a photograph. The path toward innovative photography begins, and never ends, through a lifetime of mastering the camera.

Innovation —The Myth of Thinking Outside the Box is my decades long journey finding a better way, a way that each and everyone of us can apply to our work, our personal interests, and to life. Welcome to a 55-minute presentation with over 300 photographs that cover these key points towards finding innovative solutions:

1. The first step everyone must take towards innovation is to MASTER the BOX. Mastery comes from being passionate about knowing what interests you. The more one becomes a master, the LARGER our "box" of knowledge becomes, enabling us to solve more problems and to be a more EFFECTIVE LEADER.
2. Mastery is our SAFETY NET, reducing the risk needed to be playful in our inventiveness.
3. Outside-the-box thinking is about changing our PERSPECTIVE on what we know.
4. Innovation is about making the world a better place. There is no better reason to innovate than to HELP OTHERS.
5. IBM asked 1500 CEO what is the number one leadership skill needed to make our future better. Their answer: CREATIVITY. Creativity is the ENGINE of innovation. Everyone has his or her own unique creative spirit.
6. The French author, Marcel Proust, defined creativity as seeing the commonplace with new eyes. These new eyes I called CURIOSITY and WONDER.
7. Creative problem solving is a BALANCE of analytical thinking, and intuitive thinking. We need to NURTURE both forms of thinking to see solutions that are overlooked by others.
8. Innovation does not happen in isolation. TEAMWORK builds empathy for those who are important in our lives. Many problems needing solutions go unnoticed due to the lack of EMPATHY.
9. Take a page from Scouting, BE PREPARED so you can take full advantage of serendipity.

Biography

Walter Calahan's photographic career has taken him under the Atlantic Ocean aboard a US Navy Trident Submarine, down lava tube caves in Idaho, into surgical clinics for Afghan refugees in Pashawar, Pakistan, canoeing the Okefenokee Swamp of Georgia and the great northern woods of Canada, being launched off the deck of a US Navy Aircraft Carrier, as well as the tumult of the Romanian Revolution. Hundreds of magazines have used his work, including the National Geographic Society, *Time*, *Fortune*, *Smithsonian*, *Rolling Stone*, *Vanity Fair*, and *Boys' Life*. General Electric, Yamaha, The Washington Performing Art Society, Hillel Foundation, and Harvard Business School have asked him to illustrate their publications and advertisements.

As an adjunct professor, he teaches photography at Stevenson University and McDaniel College's art departments, insuring a love for photography by the next generation of image makers.

Calahan graduated with honors from Syracuse University S.I. Newhouse School of Public Communications with a Bachelor of Science in Photojournalism, and earned a Master of Liberal Arts degree from McDaniel College specializing in the creative process of innovation.

He lives outside of Westminster, Maryland with his sculptor wife, Donna McCullough, and lots of critters, some with hooves, others with whiskers or wagging tails, and a flock of egg makers.



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