

## BOOK

*Creative Quest*

## AUTHOR

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## SYNOPSIS [From the publisher]

“In *Creative Quest*, Questlove synthesizes all the creative philosophies, lessons, and stories he’s heard from the many creators and collaborators in his life, and reflects on his own experience, to advise readers and fans on how to consider creativity and where to find it. He addresses many topics – what it means to be creative, how to find a mentor and serve as an apprentice, the wisdom of maintaining a creative network, coping with critics and the foibles of success, and the specific pitfalls of contemporary culture – all in the service of guiding admirers who have followed his career and newcomers not yet acquainted with his story.”

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“Creativity is not about letting everything in – it’s about refusing to keep things out.”

“People were more creative when they were less alert. People were less creative when they were more alert. The traditional sense of alertness is the enemy of what we think of as creativity. Remember – cognitive disinhibition.”

“To truly get in touch with your creative side and the ideas it generates, you have to look through the organized and focused thoughts and find out what’s behind them. There might be nothing back there, or there might be something brilliant.”

“The trick is learning how to capture them without being captured by them.”

“How to move forward while remaining unafraid to also move sideways or backwards. Many books about creativity talk mainly about the journey.”

“Carve out the negative space around your idea.”

“It’s sometimes hard to see the heart of an idea, so chip away at all the things that aren’t the heart.”

“Don’t imagine what you will become – imagine what you won’t become.”

“It reminded me of how rarely I hear a full account of what I do from someone who is both paying attention and who knows enough to reflect it back to me.”

“The arrows are aimed differently, but they’re coming from the same bow.”

“Don’t get lost low down on the ladder trying to figure out who is creative and who is not, or why one kind of creativity is superior to another one. Start climbing. This is a guide to altitude adjustment. This is a guide to higher rungs.”

“That’s how I feel when people deny their own creativity. The more they insist that they never have ideas, the more I think that maybe they do, even if up until that very minute I hadn’t thought they were especially creative.”

“Creative things happen to creative people, especially when they let themselves go to the Zen of the moment, when they don’t allow themselves to be paralyzed either by overthinking or by laziness. They have to be in the sweet spot between the two.”

“They engage both parts of my brain, the part that’s right in the moment, pushing against a task, and the part that’s considering the moment from afar. They’re a ground survey and an aerial view.”

“Bring your own best ideas to the surface, to assess them, to discard the ones that aren’t working, to commit to the ones that might work.”

“The importance of being both present and absent, of being both there and not-there . . . You have to be both entirely consumed by the moment and also a million miles away.”

“That’s how I think of those micro-meditations. They’re not necessarily peaceful things. Or rather: they put you in a place of inner-ness, but they can be intense, sometimes violent departures from the task at hand. The little tiny stress point repairs itself, and you have creative muscle.”

“The first step in creating is often re-creating.”

“If something makes you very uneasy, especially if it’s something that’s being done in a creative field where you have experience, pay attention. Your mind is telling you that there’s more to process than just your surface reaction.”

“And yet, despite this all, people think I have a style as a drummer. Part of me thinks that it’s because they don’t know all the influences I’m drawing on at any given moment. But part of me, just as quickly, wonders if there’s any difference.”

“If you have pulled all your influences inside, and you output them appropriately at the right moments or in interesting new permutations, maybe you are engaging in a highly creative act. If a writer knows to really punch an image at the end of a paragraph, and he knows that another writer did that before him, is he just imitating the earlier writer, or is he bringing that writer’s creative choice, studied until understood, across into a new context? Food for thought.”

“In the end, one of the most important things to remember about influence is that it’s never the same. Time changes artists, and time changes the art they make, and time changes the way they look at the forces that shape that art.”

“Attach yourself to people who are doing things you don’t quite understand.”

“I recommend something similar for creativity. It’s no less demanding than an athletic competition. In some ways, you could argue that it’s more demanding. So learn to stretch your brain, too.”

“Creative life sometimes means knowing when deviation from the plan should become the new plan.”

“That’s one model of collaboration: learning how to reach out, how to stretch your arms, how to close your hands around what you find when they’re outstretched, and how to bring it back into your world.”

“Different styles, not just different ideas, can be complementary rather than contradictory, and that creativity is a larger idea than I might have thought.”

“If you think you’re creative, you are. And maybe the more arty you are, the more you need to yin-yang it with an achiever: it produces results and reduces anxiety.”

“Achievers and Creatives can stand in the same place and erase the idea that there is any real distinction between the two.”

“Free play is one of the most important forms of creativity.”

“Is Google Making Us Stupid?” and it came out all the way back in 2008, when the Internet’s hold on us was weaker than it is today. In the piece, Carr says that he noticed that his experiences with the Internet were changing the way his brain felt to him: I can feel it most strongly when I’m reading. Immersing myself in a book or a lengthy article used to be easy. My mind would get caught up in the narrative or the turns of the argument, and I’d spend hours strolling through long stretches of prose. That’s rarely the case anymore. Now my concentration

often starts to drift after two or three pages. I get fidgety, lose the thread, begin looking for something else to do. I feel as if I’m always dragging my wayward brain back to the text. The deep reading that used to come naturally has become a struggle.”

“Reading is a different experience than when we were young – each word offers the possibility for linking out to something else, and the main text just doesn’t have the same gravity it once did.”

“William Klemm, a professor at Texas A&M University, wrote an article where he looked at the creative process from a neurological point of view. Much of the stuff he said is above my pay grade. As I have said, if you want me to be a neurologist, send me to the neurology academy, or whatever it’s called. But one part I understand. He defines creativity as the process of drawing water from a deep well. I’m paraphrasing. He said that “creativity comes from a mind that knows, and remembers, a lot.” We don’t have those brains anymore. Instead, we offload our knowledge to our phones and computers, to Wikipedia, to Shazam. It’s a great convenience, but what’s lost in the process?”

“Dave Chappelle, in one of his two comeback specials on Netflix in the spring of 2017, talked about when he was young, and one of his middle school teachers wheeled a television into class so that the students could watch the launch of the Challenger space shuttle. I’m a little older than Dave, and I remember it, too. It was 1986, and it was a big deal. There was a teacher on board, and every other teacher wanted to share in the glory. Of course, it all went horribly wrong. The launch went fine, but a few minutes later, the shuttle exploded. All the astronauts were killed. Students and teachers across the country watched, stunned. The punch line to Dave’s bit about it is subtle: the teacher, staring at the screen, dismisses the class for the day: “You all can go home.” But after that, Dave makes a point that’s deeper than a punch line”

“When you’ve filled your mind and your heart with the horror (or, in other cases, the joy, or the significance) of an event, another one comes along to wipe it away. How do you grow up in an environment like that?”

“For creativity, things need to settle in. Take root, flower, bloom, grow, tangle. The skim, the superficial, the way things get replaced so quickly, is the enemy not only of deep thoughts, but of creative thoughts.”

“Creativity is a privilege and a blessing, but it’s also at times a burden.”

“If you’re a painter and you can’t think of anything to paint, copy a landscape or a portrait by a painter you like. If you’re a writer and you feel like you’re not capable of writing something new, find a poem you like and type it out again. If you’re a chef and you’re drawing a blank in the kitchen, try to make a classic dish of your mentor’s. People with limited ideas of things call this cheating. It’s not. It’s inspired imitation. Making your own version of existing works keeps you on your toes. It keeps your machinery humming along.”

“So here’s my advice to anyone, in any field: when you feel you can’t make work, make work from work that is already made. Don’t duck and cover. Cover without ducking. Do it proudly. It keeps you active.”

“I think that my creative identity is unquestionably made up of parts of other people’s creativity. I have lived my life being referential and reverential.”

“When you are recycling parts of past works, be smart about it. Recognize that there was a reason an idea didn’t pop the first time around. Maybe the time wasn’t right. Maybe the context for it didn’t yet exist. But also realize that many ideas flower eventually.”

“Generally, be willing to be lighter. The consequential work – the work that eventually ends up weighing something – isn’t always undertaken with such paralyzing seriousness.”

“Change your materials. I know writers who mostly write on their laptops—maybe that’s every writer now—and when they switch to longhand, or an old typewriter, or a tablet with some weird Bluetooth keyboard, they enter a new creative phase.”

“The very same tools that let you work so efficiently—word processing, Wikipedia—are connected to other tools that rob you of efficiency and focus. They don’t destroy your will to live, but they do destroy your ability to live in the moment.”

“There was no such thing as distraction. There was only traction.”

“That’s another thing that creativity is: taking the existing world and making something new from it.”

“In the end everyone looks at essentially the same words, notes, colors, problems, answers, numbers, cities, people—all, or at least meaningful subsets of each, are in some sense available to us all. But creativity has to do with how you arrange and construct what you pull out of those familiars.”

“You lock in to what is there, you see things that others do not, you create, you distract and disrupt yourself with what is not there, and you start the process over again. It’s a cycle: specifically, it’s a life cycle.”

“Because of everything that technology has given us, it prevents us from seeing that nervous sense of creative disengagement, that restlessness where you can’t locate any new ideas within yourself—is still everywhere. But that emptiness is now cluttered and crowded.”

“That’s sometimes the exact effect of darting around the Internet. You are into everything but you are into nothing.”

“Boredom seems like the least creative feeling. It seems like a numbness. But it’s actually a way of clearing space for a new idea to spring back up . . . let yourself go to the sense of being disconnected and meaningless.”

“Let it wash over you and drown you a little bit before you come up gasping for air. Creativity is a fight against that insignificance.”

“You have to remember that you’re insignificant, but also that you are potentially more significant than all the noise that’s being supplied to you at every moment.”

“When you’re having trouble thinking of new ideas, go to one of your old ideas and rework it.”

“Creative life also includes some management of other people’s creativity and the overlap between yours and theirs.”

“When you are playing a DJ set, you are not exactly making anything. You are contending with work that other people have already made, reorganizing it, repurposing it. It’s creation, in the sense that I’m bringing a mood into existence, but it’s curation in the sense that I’m looking through existing songs to see which ones I’m going to select.”

“I’m improvising, but I’m actually curating—I’m using what I know about existing artworks to arrange them in such a way that they affect an audience.”

“When you think like a curator, you’re already thinking about how to take the creative choices that other people made and arrange them to your advantage.”

“Curation can be a way of seeing through to the parts of things that matter to you. It’s like a large-scale, immersive version of cutup writing. You’re collecting things that help to remind you of who you are.”

“You have to throw things away so that there is some value implied by the act of keeping other things.”

“Just right” isn’t necessarily about flawlessness. Sometimes it’s about the flaws. It’s about letting that sound go a little flat or a little wobbly, about letting it carry humanity. The era of curation, which is the era we’re in, the time of picking, which is the time that we’re in, isn’t an excuse to selectively edit our humanity and show the world a happy

face (or a fresh face or a put-together face) that doesn't have much, if anything, to do with our essential real identity."