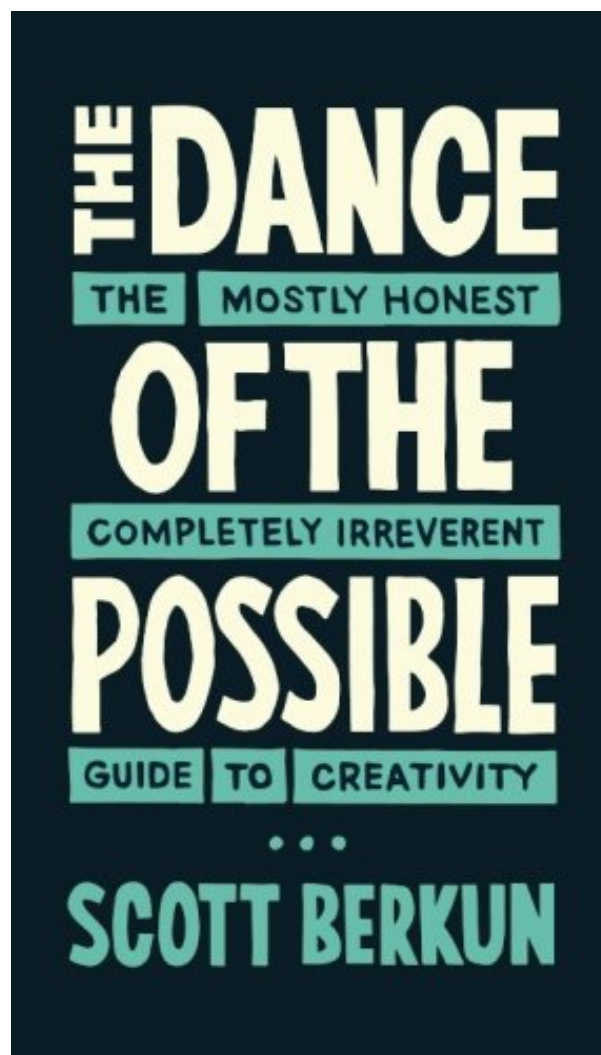


**THE DANCE OF THE POSSIBLE: THE  
MOSTLY HONEST COMPLETELY  
IRREVERENT GUIDE TO CREATIVITY BY  
SCOTT BERKUN**



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# THE DANCE

THE MOSTLY HONEST

# OF THE

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GUIDE TO CREATIVITY

...

SCOTT BERKUN

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## **About the Author**

Scott Berkun (@berkun) is the best selling author of six books, including *Making Things Happen*, *The Myths of Innovation*, *Confessions of a Public Speaker* and *The Year Without Pants*. His work has appeared in the *The Washington Post*, *The New York Times*, *Wired Magazine*, *Fast Company*, *The Economist*, *Forbes*

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This short, fast paced, irreverent guide to creativity is for everyone who wants better ideas and to finish projects they inspire. In 21 short chapters you'll discover a fresh way to understand creative thinking, how ideas work, plus insights from decades of study on both how to be more productive and creative at the same time.

With challenging chapters on topics like creative confidence, making bold decisions, and separating the need for feedback from the desire for encouragement, even if you've read other books on the subject or if this is your first, The Dance of The Possible will surprise you, make you think, laugh and perhaps even dance when you get back to work.

- Sales Rank: #130301 in Books
- Published on: 2017-03-10
- Original language: English
- Dimensions: 7.00" h x .56" w x 4.00" l,
- Binding: Perfect Paperback
- 248 pages

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## Most helpful customer reviews

5 of 5 people found the following review helpful.

Terrific hands-on guide to improve your creativity and to become a world class problem solver!

By Ravindra Gangadat

If you've ever wanted to be more creative or make something for the world then you must read "The Dance of the Possible" by Scott Berkun. Scott made the following promise to us: "If I have written it well, you will soon want to work on something where you can apply your creativity".

The author sent me an early reviewer's copy of the book which only took me 3.5 hours to read. Upon completion of the book, I started working on a small feature for an open source project which I had on the back burner for three months. So, Scott kept his promise to me, he provided sufficient insight and pragmatic techniques that helped me get out of my rut.

My main problem is that I'm obsessed with trying to solve problems by searching for the best technique or approach. I have spent hours searching google to find the best possible answers or solutions. I've read many other books on problem solving and creativity but I haven't been able to change my thought process for long periods of time. I've tried failed fast techniques, brainstorming, A/B testing, etc.... I can add "The Dance of the Possible" to my short list of books that helped put a dent into my thought process and attitude for solving problems.

With enough practice, we can all develop a variety of skills that can help us become better problem solvers. Scott's guide has helped me update my out-dated skill stack for generating ideas and staying committed to my craft. There were many techniques and insights provided by the author but this is what worked for me.

"We get the majority of our creative powers from our subconscious mind." If this is the case, then, how do we nurture a more healthy relationship with our subconscious mind? I use to write my ideas down in a journal but would eventually stop because I would get lazy or distracted. Scott mentioned that one of the most important relationships you can have is between your subconscious and creative instincts. I realized that for me to continue to nurture this relationship I need to slow down and write my ideas down.

"Finding good ideas is one thing. Developing them into finished works is another." I tried two of the eight mentioned techniques for idea exploration: Kill False Constraints and Switch Modes. One of the issues that I continue to face with problem solving is that I am too pessimistic and kill ideas too quickly. When I made a list of practical and psychological constraints, I realized that I was not exploring enough solutions to my problem. The other technique which I found helpful was the switch mode technique: trying another approach to express ideas. Typically, I sketch my ideas or write them down. The tip of trying to explain a project to someone who knows nothing about it worked well.

"No matter how great your idea is, there will be energy you have to spend, often on relatively ordinary work, to deliver it to the world." "To get off the couch and do something interesting requires confidence." I realize that sometimes I lack patience or lose confidence when trying to solve a problem and can be disappointed

when my solution fails. The author provided vivid examples of the discovery of the Post-IT note, Edison, The Wright brothers and how they dealt with setbacks. I found it inspirational and have added several biographies and documentaries to my list for motivation. Also, I've blocked out time in my calendar when I'm "most energetic" to work on my projects.

"The longer you work at creating things the greater the odds you'll eventually have a day where you don't feel like doing it anymore." "It takes effort to keep going when feeling unmotivated, but that's the difference between commitment to a craft and a fantasy." I realized that surrounding yourself with friends and mentors that are nurturing, laughing at yourself, and create more situations that bring me joy can help reduce creative burnout and help me stay motivated. Yes, sometimes I forget to have fun and this advice is common sense. But, sometimes common sense is uncommon.

I highly recommend "The Dance of The Possible" to anyone who wants to follow a pragmatic guide to make something. This is a terrific hands-on guide that will help you stay committed to your craft.

2 of 2 people found the following review helpful.

A Long Overdue Dose of Creativity Expectation Management

By Paul

Scott's irreverent but concise creativity guide wastes no time in puncturing multiple balloons floating around the echo chamber of the "creative thinking" industry. For example, I like the fact that he points out the term "creative thinking" is redundant, because when you reduce the creative process to its essence it's essentially a decision making process aka thinking.

The book is broken into three parts which roughly correlate to Idea creation, Idea development, and Idea deployment.

#### Part 1 Idea Creation

Scott clarifies the fact that nothing really is truly original and all ideas stand on the shoulders of giants, so to speak.

He offers a number of methods for finding ideas, and I agree with his approach of having a small toolbox of solid methods vs an ever expanding universe of pundit solutions. Use his or find your own, but keep it manageable and you'll be more productive.

The motivation for solving a problem is an interesting area in itself (ideas driven vs needs driven approaches) and Scott elaborates on some aspects of this. I felt it could have gone a little deeper using psychological theories such as Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs to more outcome focused innovation processes like Ulwick's Jobs To Be Done, but that's a big topic in itself.

I really like the concept of the "Dance Of The Possible". It's an accurate emotive (visual, physical, emotional, auditory++) metaphor for the thinking process of exploring a solution space to a problem. Scott punctures a few more balloons here by highlighting that "Discovery is never efficient", so you need to get some skin in the game and enjoy the process as much as the outcome.

At the end of Part 1 he goes into the need to learn how to improvise. I fully agree with this, but I would also add (based on my own experience as a technologist and a musician) that improvisation best starts from knowing some kind of framework or reference point first. The old adage about knowing the rule book before you throw it away can pay dividends, especially if your improvisation needs to speak to people familiar with an existing paradigm. That's just makes it easier to market, which leads into elements of Part 2 and 3.

## Part 2 Idea Development

My big takeaway from this section was Scott's eloquent distillation of the idea development process into a gap analysis framework of Effort, Skills, and Quality. Some great anecdotes are used here to zap a few more balloons and bring into focus some aspects of creativity expectation management that are sorely needed. I really liked the point about not being precious with your ideas, and building your ability to absorb feedback and constructive criticism to better hone your idea development process.

## Part 3 Idea Deployment

Scott covers some important points which tie back to the motivation for undertaking a creative task. Whether that task is at the tip of Maslow's pyramid (eg: a creative urge to self actualize through making an emo shoe gaze tune) or more functional like a user needs based Jobs To Be Done approach (eg: developing an incremental or radical technology innovation for your company) at some point you will need to meet the spotlight of user feedback - or if you're really unlucky complete silence! Knowing how to handle this is key to building the confidence to continually develop creative projects, as is the ability to recognize burnout when you're wellspring has run dry and knowing how to refill it.

Lifelong learning is the default mindset we all need to cultivate for a healthy existence, and creativity is a key part of it whether through play, experimentation, or more focused application.

It's a refreshing read on an important topic with lots of immediately actionable advice.

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful.

You'll never look at your socks the same way again

By Ben C

Few categories of book have the potential to be as obnoxious as the "how to be creative" genre. Scott Berkun's *The Dance of the Possible* fails to live up to its potential in that regard. In fact, it's not really obnoxious at all. Instead it's filled with a humorous approach to treating creativity as a skill to be honed instead of a magical epiphany bestowed from some mysterious muse.

Berkun goes out of his way to avoid giving an easy solution to being creative, and he's very dismissive of creativity as an end goal. The point of being creative is to create something, and creativity as a virtue is a relatively recent development. Explore the possibilities of choices in mundane situations, he suggests. Somehow, this ended up with me writing on my sock with a permanent marker at 12:30 AM.

Any sort of creative work, even this very book review, is a delicate dance between two opposing forces: expanding what is possible for the project and contracting the scope so that it actually gets done. I can deconstruct the message of the chapters and reassemble them in any way I want, mixing them into something new. And I can shuffle these ideas around forever, but at some point the review must be published, or else what good has it done you?

One aspect of the book that I particularly liked was Berkun's focus on some of the mental issues involved in trying to develop a creative work. In chapter 12, he talks about "the tightrope of creative confidence": being confident enough to act, but not too confident. I prefer to think of it as "the eternal struggle between the Dunning-Krueger Effect and Impostor Syndrome", but regardless of the name it's a balancing act I know well.

All-in-all, *The Dance of the Possible* was a quick read. Indeed, the very first note I wrote down was "he seems to insist we not read the book." This is not a book designed for Scott Berkun to wax poetic for chapters on end. Instead it shares real, actionable advice for exercising the thinking muscle. I enjoyed this

book and found the framing of the problem and solution to be very helpful in understanding my own thought process. I can't say that I came away with any sudden, brilliant insight, but maybe that's the point.

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