THE NEW ART OF IDEAS
UNLOCK YOUR CREATIVE POTENTIAL
ROBIN LANDA

ILLUSTRATED BY HOLLY TAYLOR
FOREWORD BY LORIN LATARRO
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To Harry, my forever tango partner
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I am no stranger to developing an idea from nothing. As a choreographer for Broadway, operas, and films, I begin with an empty room and create and layer dance upon dance. The beauty of Robin Landa’s book? *The New Art of Ideas* reveals fundamental truths about creation of any sort. Her method works for anyone interested in creating for the betterment of the world.

To have a vision is a uniquely human experience. Many of us have a vision, a eureka moment, an idea—Robin Landa gives the reader a focused way forward to help push the vision toward its finished idea. A goal is a noble pursuit, but it is easy to lose sight of the idea along the way, to give up, to fizzle out. This instructive book provides key navigation tools to get the reader to the finish line.

I especially love the pieces in this creation puzzle about observation and the *gap*. Looking at the world with curiosity is fundamental to creation. Looking and listening closely are hallmarks of success. Landa cites countless examples of how a small, focused observation changed the world.

And then, the *why* of it all. Why is this idea a worthwhile pursuit? What does the world *gain* from this idea? What is the idea’s additive value? All worthy questions for the creator to ponder. As an artist,
I always ask why—and I am always searching for a story to tell that brings something special to an audience: to learn, to receive, to question, to observe. Robin Landa’s method works for ideas, for inventions, for dances, for plays, and more.

I am sure you, the reader, will finish the book with more confidence, clarity, and excitement about whatever you are dreaming up.

What do you wish existed in the world?

Lorin Latarro

Lorin Latarro choreographed Broadway’s Mrs. Doubtfire, Into the Woods, Les Liaisons Dangereuses, The Public Theater’s The Visitor, Broadway-bound The Outsiders, and Like Water for Chocolate. She choreographed Broadway and London productions of Waitress as well as La Traviata at the Metropolitan Opera. Latarro is directing Candace Bushnell’s one-woman show Is There Still Sex in the City?
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INTRODUCTION
INTRODUCTION

UNLOCK YOUR CREATIVE POTENTIAL

Our industry does not respect tradition.
What it respects is innovation.
SATYA NADELLA, CEO, MICROSOFT

It was a scroll through Twitter that started it—the photo of a custom gaming controller adapted for an injured vet. When Matt Hite saw the photo, his keen eye and curiosity urged him to find out more. Hite has that kind of mind, and it was thrown into action by an observant moment on Twitter. Serendipitous, yes. But what Hite did next ignited a goal that would change many lives.

When Hite, a Microsoft engineer, saw that photo, he reached out to Ken Jones, a mechanical engineer and avid gamer who had founded Warfighter Engaged, a nonprofit organization that provides bespoke adapted gaming controllers to wounded veterans. Warfighter’s one engineer designs each gaming controller to meet the needs of a single vet, making it challenging to fulfill the hundreds of requests the organization receives every month.

Jones’s mission is to improve the lives of warfighters living with disabilities—triple amputees, quadriplegics, veterans with traumatic brain injuries, veterans with prosthetics, and other wounded veterans. During his conversation with Jones, Hite learned about the overwhelming challenges injured veterans face when trying to access the world of gaming. These vets, Jones explained, were being left out of the fun and therapeutic experiences gaming has
to offer. There was a gap in the gaming hardware industry for 46 million gamers living with disabilities in the United States alone.¹

For many people, gaming isn’t just a hobby—it’s a passion and a way of connecting. If you’re a gamer, or you know a gamer, you understand what I mean. For people with limited mobility—whether by birth or because of an accident or war injury—the gaming experience is different. For many, the standard configuration—the positioning of the jacks across the back of the device, the shape and edges, and the position of the controls and buttons, among other design issues—makes it difficult to navigate. When Jones saw a gap, he set a goal. Through his organization and humanitarian efforts, he helped deliver gains to wounded veterans. After speaking with Jones, Hite decided that he too was going to do something about that gap.

Every year Microsoft holds an Ability Summit that brings together people who have disabilities, designers, engineers, and marketers. The idea is to identify where Microsoft can speed up innovation to improve accessibility for people living with disabilities—both in the company and outside of the company—on the pathway to a more inclusive society.² Hite put together a hackathon project team at the Ability Summit to tackle the design problem facing Warfighter Engaged. On his LinkedIn bio, Matt Hite writes,

In early 2015, I founded a Microsoft hackathon project at our internal Ability summit. The central piece was what I first dubbed “an Accessibility Breakout box” with the goal of injecting external switch input directly into a regular Xbox controller. . . .

That project blossomed into something I never imagined possible. . . . It became what is now known as the Xbox Adaptive Controller. After years of hard work at Microsoft, my dream finally became a reality. I can’t begin to express how much that means to
me….Because EVERYONE should be able to experience the joy of gaming.³

At that initial hackathon, the team worked with Jones to develop a gaming device. The project won the hackathon’s top prize. During subsequent Microsoft hackathons, other teams further refined the device.

This work coincided with other efforts at Microsoft to improve accessibility. In 2015, Kris Hunter, the director of devices user research and hardware accessibility for Microsoft Experiences and Devices, and Bryce Johnson, a senior Xbox designer, had launched the Gaming for Everyone initiative, housed in Microsoft’s Inclusive Tech Lab.⁴

As Microsoft’s leadership recognized the value of this project, interest grew within the company. Microsoft’s project team partnered with experts, turning to gamers, accessibility advocates, and nonprofits that worked with gamers who have disabilities, such as the AbleGamers Charity, the Cerebral Palsy Foundation, SpecialEffect, Warfighter Engaged, and community members. According to the Xbox website, “Input from these groups has helped shape the design, functionality, and packaging of the Xbox Adaptive Controller.”⁵

An adaptive controller that makes gaming more inclusive is a worthwhile idea. Many gamers have limited mobility, may be missing a limb or hand, or do not have the strength or coordination necessary to use a conventional controller. Yet the development of the Xbox Adaptive Controller took several years and relied on many ardent believers. The Microsoft Xbox project manager had to make a strong case to Microsoft to bring it to market. “Trying to develop a business case for an accessible product can be very, very challenging, because the scale of the products don’t generally make a positive business case for the investment that has to go in,”
said Leo Castillo, who served as the general manager for Xbox hardware when the controller was under development.6

This is a case where the return on corporate investment is not simply financial—it is a gain for a community of people. The Xbox Adaptive Controller is the first one designed and manufactured at a large scale by a leading technology company.

To tell their success story, Microsoft and its advertising agency, McCann New York, gathered a group of young gamers living with disabilities, kids with limited mobility and some who are missing hands, and gave them starring roles in a Super Bowl commercial. McCann’s advertising idea swept up industry awards and people’s hearts.

“My name is Ian.”
“My name is Taylor.”
“My name is Owen, and I am nine-and-a-half years old. I want to show you the Xbox Adaptive Controller.” Owen went on to demonstrate how to set up the one-handed joystick with the Xbox Adaptive Controller.

The young cast taught everyone how to open the package (accessible from the start), set up, and use the new controller. “I can hit the buttons just as fast as they can,” said Taylor while demonstrating.

Owen’s dad said, “One of the biggest fears early on was: How will Owen be viewed by the other kids? He’s not different when he plays.”7 With this accessible tech, Owen can enjoy gaming alongside everyone else.

Further, injured veterans and millions of others in the accessibility community can also gain by using the Adaptive Controller and can be included in any game. Time magazine considered the Xbox Adaptive Controller among the best inventions of 2018.

This book is about precisely that—how to get great ideas. Not just lots of ideas, but ideas worth pursuing.
There are, of course, other approaches to generating ideas, like brainstorming. *The New Art of Ideas* doesn’t replace brainstorming. If brainstorming works for you, by all means keep using it. Or use question-storming: instead of generating as many solutions as possible, as in brainstorming, you generate as many questions as possible, which might point you in a better direction.

You can follow a conventional process of combining two existing ideas into a single new idea. That certainly works, but it’s only one way to generate an idea. If that’s the only method you use, you’re limiting your thinking and not necessarily generating worthwhile ideas.

Another go-to method is a five-stage process: (1) preparation: conduct research and brainstorm to spark an idea; (2) incubation: allow the information and thoughts you’ve generated to incubate; (3) illumination: in an “aha” moment, bring everything together into an idea; (4) evaluation: check the validity of your idea; and (5) verification: bring the idea to life. But this process doesn’t explain how everything comes together in that “aha” moment or how to evaluate the validity of the idea. That is where *The New Art of Ideas* comes in.

Unlike the conventional books about brainstorming or generating as many ideas as possible no matter how good they are, this book focuses on generating good ideas that have value, ideas that can make a difference to individuals’ lives, to society, and to our planet. You’ll learn how to separate the wheat from the chaff.

The value of *The New Art of Ideas* is this: When you identify a goal, a gap, and a gain, then you know your consequent idea will have value.

A goal alone is not enough. Having a goal doesn’t make it worthwhile—it might be a ridiculous goal or a goal that will cause harm to individuals, society, business, creatures, or the environment. Recently, we’ve seen too many examples of people who “lure in-
vestors to bankroll ideas that turn out to be stupid, evil, or fraudulent.” When you determine that your goal fills a gap and produces a gain, you’ll know it’s not ridiculous, will not cause harm, and will be needed or wanted.

No other framework points you in this direction—that is, on the path to ideas worth pursuing.

The Three Gs is a new way of thinking, a new framework for ideation. Anyone can use it effectively. As a consultant and professor, I have witnessed people from diverse backgrounds, disciplines, and careers—everyone from engineers in their innovation labs to brand managers at major corporations to creative professionals who must generate dozens of ideas daily—start to approach idea generation differently, with better outcomes and far less frustration. In fact, thousands of creative professionals whose careers demand the generation of many ideas on a daily basis can do so because they studied with me.

**The New Art of Ideas**

When you read about a worthwhile idea, such as Microsoft’s Xbox Adaptive Controller, it’s useful to deconstruct the underlying thinking.

The model framework I’m proposing is brand new. After examining lots of great ideas and teaching people how to generate ideas for many years, I formulated this framework. In each of the examples I discuss in the book, you can identify a goal, a gap, and a gain.

**Goal + Gap + Gain ➞ Worthwhile Idea**

The Microsoft engineer had a goal—to create accessible gaming technology for people living with disabilities. He and his colleagues
at Microsoft filled a gap in product design. It was a huge gain for gamers living with disabilities, who benefited greatly from the idea and design of an accessible device.

The Three Gs—goal, gap, and gain—unlock an idea. The Three Gs can help you understand what a worthwhile idea is, how it works, and how to generate one. Furthermore, the Three Gs yield ideas that move the needle, ideas that are not inconsequential but worthwhile, ideas that will make a difference because you are seeking an outcome with a benefit for individuals, society, or our planet.

**Audiences and Uses**

This book is a step-by-step guide to generating, crystallizing, or amplifying worthwhile ideas. Although appropriate for almost anyone, it will be especially helpful to five types of audiences:

1. Individuals in a professional, technical, creative, or support role who want to make a difference in what they do and in the world will find this book valuable in helping them generate worthwhile ideas based on their own aspirations or to make progress in an organization.

2. Independent consultants, whether external or internal, will find this book valuable for their growth and success because we are living in an idea economy. This audience includes consultants, coaches, contractors, counselors, mentors, and advisors who need to demonstrate their ability to innovate, think creatively, and contribute to the growth and progress of a business, organization, or community. This book provides the keys to unlocking worthwhile ideas and creative potential.