

On Disney

By Blas Moros

Intro

The hope is that this “teacher’s reference guide” helps describe Walt Disney the man and highlight the incredible company he founded. Walt consistently pushed the boundaries of what was possible both technologically and artistically – never accepting anything less than his and other’s best. Shortly after Mickey Mouse’s debut in 1928, Disney the man and the company became globally recognized and this trend has only continued. Today, Disney is the largest media conglomerate in the world and has some of the most prized possessions in entertainment – the Disney classics library, its theme parks, Pixar, Marvel, Lucasfilm, ESPN and more. It has been fascinating learning about this influential and visionary man and the inspirational company he built and I hope this comes across.

Please note that this guide is something I plan to update, iterate, improve and expand upon over time. There are surely flaws throughout and parts which true experts would disagree with. I welcome any questions, comments and corrections in this quest to better understand Disney!

Walt Disney, The Man

Walt Disney's influence is hard to overstate. He helped change American culture and its consciousness by bringing in a lighter, more fun world during tough times such as the Great Depression and World War II. Walt taught adults that it was alright to have fun – to be child-like without being childish. This message was cherished all over the world which is part of the reason he gained such a loyal following and was even loved in communist countries during the Red Scare.

Many of Walt's colleagues believe that he achieved extraordinary success because his focus was never on money, but on providing the best product to his customers and always doing something he could have fun with and be proud of for all time. Walt had blind faith that quality, tempered with good judgment and showmanship will win against all odds. More than anyone else, Walt was able to bond a group, get the most out of them and always think in "we" terms. Over time, he was also able to develop one of the most valuable traits of a leader – the ability to recognize talent and forcing them to reach their potential. He made everyone feel great pride in their work and made them truly believe that what they were doing was important. His vision, perfectionism and competitiveness often left Disney restless – feeling like he could never rest because he was always working to "stay 25 years ahead of the competition."

Walt's vision and determination forced the Disney company to be the most technologically advanced in the industry and invent tools to make his vision come to fruition. Along with high quality animation, the success of Walt's cartoons came from his ability to tap into the essence of what people really wanted and make it resonate with them in a timeless way. His vision helped him see around the proverbial corner and gain confidence in some big decisions when it was unpopular and risky to the company's financial well-being. Walt and his stellar team developed: syncing sound with movement; giving personality, emotions, gravity and life to cartoons; the first full-length feature animation; the wildlife documentary genre; the first clean theme park which was fun for both kids and parents; and recognizing the power of television to promote their brand, cartoons, movies and theme parks. Above all his accomplishments however, his greatest achievement may have been instilling a belief of wish fulfillment in people – fantasy can be empowering and sometimes even transform the world.

Walt said that he can attribute some of his work ethic and determination to the newspaper route his father forced him to be responsible for at a young age. He would have to bike for hours every day before and after school, even through freezing weather. He hardly had any free time and this made him very careful with his time as he grew older. Walt was always stingy with praise, very exacting and demanding but paid his people extremely well, gave them great benefits and created an exciting and innovative atmosphere people loved. Again, money was always secondary to talent, customer experience and quality.

The massive success of *Snow White* transformed the company and really put them on the map. Disney reinvested all the proceeds from the movie into a new studio and pushing the envelope in new endeavors. However, some of the releases post *Snow White* were disappointing in the box office and put the company in a tough position financially. Disney was so focused on pushing the boundaries creatively that he refused to do sequels even though they were likely to be commercial successes.

The union strike made Walt lose some of his passion for the studio and he turned his vision and passion onto miniature cities and trains. These hobbies influenced him greatly in building a theme park where the whole family could have fun together – eventually coalescing into the vision of Disneyland. He wanted a clean, wholesome experience the whole family could enjoy together. This was a world where he could exert absolute control and transport people to a different, better time. The park was a combination of experience, amusement and Walt's own values.

Before the launch of Disneyland, Walt was one of the few to recognize the power of the television. It was not the enemy of the motion picture like many of his peers thought, but it's ally. They could recycle old movies, make TV shows out of movies, get new customers and fans, and launch their own channel using past Disney shorts. He also recognized that this was an incredible tool to promote awareness and interest in Disneyland. Disney partnered with ABC who needed awareness with the growing young family population and Disney needed money to make Disneyland happen. Television made Walt and his company more famous than ever before. It was his animation and movies which were popular before but now it was the man, the man who embodied wholesomeness and decency. He often felt imprisoned by this new persona although it helped him realize one of his grandest visions in Disneyland.

Walt bucked the trend in how things were done by only hiring people with no amusement park experience because he wanted fresh eyes and no preconceived notions or biases. He wanted every detail thought through and every employee well trained, eventually establishing Disney University to train all employees in order to give a great, consistent experience. Employee's dress, facial hair, manners and more were all strictly dictated in order to provide the best experience. Cleanliness was an obsession with Walt and his parks were always meticulous – one of the small ways Disney conceived of to make his parks an escape from reality.

Walt started slowing down in the 1960s and took more time to spend with family. Eventually his health was poor enough for him to visit the hospital for what he thought was a minor surgery until they found lung cancer. Walt was very weak but spent his remaining time on his new vision, the planned community Orlando, EPCOT. He died about a year later in 1966, never getting to realize his city of the future.

Critics of Walt's believed he was racist and anti-Semitic but author Neal Gabler, who is considered to have done one of the most in depth studies on Walt, disagrees and says he was simply a product of his time. Many also criticized Walt for how he handled the union strike by hiring a lawyer with known connections to the mob. He was bad at sharing credit and a very demanding boss. His artistic reputation was also somewhat damaged towards the end of his career because many thought he had sold out and become too corporate. The global nature of Mickey Mouse and the Disney brand also led to criticism as many thought he was supplanting other country's cultures with America's.

Walt Disney, the Company

Walt founded Disney Brothers Cartoon Studio with his older brother Roy on October 16, 1923. Their first project was a series of *Alice Comedies* which brought Alice in contact with an animated world. From the beginning, Walt had a deep need for artistic and creative control over the whole process in order to precisely execute his vision. He was tough on head animator Ub Iwerks and the rest of his employees and often made others miserable until they either improved or left the studio. After the Alice series, *Oswald the Lucky Rabbit* became a big hit but soon lost the rights to Charles Mintz. To make up for the loss of Oswald, Walt and Ub came up with a mouse named Mortimer but Walt's wife, Lillian, convinced Walt to change the name to Mickey.

Mickey Mouse was released in 1928 as a short reel before movies and quickly gained a cult-like following. *Steamboat Willie* really put Disney on the map for its sync of music and action and later the use of color. Donald Duck was soon after conceived to be Mickey's foil, to be rude, offensive, hot tempered and this is exactly what the world wanted at this time. Once Disney and his cartoons started getting a foothold in California, they began expanding nationally with the Mickey Mouse club which eventually reached over 800 chapters and over 1 million members. Mickey and Walt soon became worldwide phenomena and two of the most recognized figures in the whole world. Mickey had mass appeal due to his ability to allow people to escape the Great Depression and tyrannical leaders, his simplicity and people's desire to root for the underdog.

Alongside Mickey, Disney released shorts known as *Silly Symphonies* which were also great hits and won them many awards. This was an outlet for the company's creativity and innovation. Shorts such as *The Skeleton Dance*, *Three Little Pigs* and *Flowers and Trees* were massive hits and the song of *Three Little Pigs* even became a national anthem during the Great Depression.

Although Disney had some big successes, Walt reinvested everything into R&D and their expensive animation process and were soon back to tough times. Walt pretty much bet the future of the company on the first full-length animation, *Snow White*. At this time, it was unknown whether people would be interested or willing to sit through a full-length cartoon. Walt and his team managed to overcome creative and technological limits and write an engaging story with deep characters. *Snow White* was a hit like the world had never seen before and became one of the highest grossing movies of all time. Walt later remarked that although it was a cartoon he, "made it for adults. For the child that exists in all adults."

Disney Studios hit another inflection point once they began licensing Mickey to distributors to put on lunch boxes, watches, clothing, toys, and anything else you can imagine. This eventually

became a larger source of profits than the cartoons themselves. In 1940, after investing heavily in their new Hyperion Studio and a couple of disappointing movies, Disney decided to issue shares to raise some much needed money.

In many great companies and endeavors, there seems to be a sort of yin/yang at the top. This is certainly true at Disney – Walt’s incredible vision, tenacity and perseverance would never have survived without Roy's organizational and financial skills. Another key member to Disney’s success was Ub Iwerks, the head animator. Ub's technical fluency in animation is legendary. He was able to bring cartoons to life through proper perspective, personality and by adding dimensionality. He invented many of the tools and technology needed while animating movies

Disney had a great run in the 1930s but the 1940s was a tough period due to WWII. For some time, the studio served as barracks for soldiers and Disney was contracted by the government to make education and propaganda films to show American citizens what the war is about and to engender patriotism and morale.

The 1950s held the grand opening of Disneyland. This was a risky move for the company due to its cost and the fact that nobody had done anything like it before. Walt was careful to distinguish between other amusement parks and his theme park. Amusement parks were often dirty places with suspicious characters and he wanted to distance himself from that image. His theme parks would be spotless and fun for the whole family. Walt pushed his team to the brink in order to open on time on July 17, 1955. Although opening day was a disaster in many ways, the employees were so polite and courteous that most guests overlooked the failings.

Walt’s next project was the experimental prototype community of tomorrow, EPCOT. He envisioned this planned community as a utopia of sorts where every detail was thought through. Unfortunately, Walt passed away before he could fulfill his vision but his brother Roy came out of retirement in order to finish it. Roy moved away from Walt’s original vision and instead created The Walt Disney World we know today.

The 1970s and early 1980s were difficult periods as Disney was mired in what people would call the "what would Walt do syndrome." In 1984, Walt Disney's nephew, Roy E. Disney, lead a coup to oust Ron Miller as CEO. This is when Michael Eisner took over as chairman and CEO. Eisner had a little knowledge of Disney but the company was under threat of take over from Comcast and its creative output was so low that his skills were needed quickly. Eisner was responsible for an incredible string of successes at Paramount and brought with him some of the senior executives,

including Jeffrey Katzenberg. It was thought that Eisner's creativity and charisma would be perfect to help turn Disney around.

The Eisner and Katzenberg era oversaw some of Disney's greatest hits such as *The Lion King*, *The Little Mermaid*, *Beauty and the Beast* and *Aladdin*. A very lucrative decision was to start selling and mass marketing home videos. This was a controversial idea at the time as they thought it might cheapen the experience of going to the theater and they were also counting on showing the movies on their television programs to attract viewers. The first release was priced at \$80 so that only rental companies could afford to buy a lot. This experiment was a tremendous success and the next release was priced at \$30 but also included network advertising within the home video with the hopes of changing consumer habits. Home-video soon became Disney's biggest profit center apart from theme parks.

With record profits, Disney had to decide what to do with all this money and they felt that they need a distribution arm so they started looking at networks. They eventually settled on a merger with Cap Cities / ABC in 1995 for \$20b. Among other things, this brought A&E as well as ESPN into the Disney fold.

After an incredible run of successes in the 1990s, Disney fell into a common trap of the successful as its costs ballooned and complacency set in. A big hit for the company was the death of Frank Wells in a helicopter accident in 1994. Wells was the only one who could let Eisner's talent free while still managing his ego and eccentricities. The tensions between Eisner and Katzenberg eventually forced Katzenberg to leave and found his own studio, DreamWorks SKG, alongside Steven Spielberg and David Geffen.

Internal and external pressures eventually mounted to the point that people were clamoring for Eisner's removal. He had made several billion dollar mistakes such as Euro Disney, forays into the Internet and the acquisition of the Fox Family cable network. Stanley Gold, a member of the board, and Roy began a "Save Disney" campaign and called for Eisner's removal. They eventually garnered enough votes of no confidence from shareholders that Eisner stepped down. He was responsible for one of the greatest media turnarounds in history, bringing in an era of creativity and growth few expected but his egomaniacal, dishonest, micromangement style lead to insider unhappiness and revolt.

Bob Iger stepped in as CEO, a title he still holds today. He has turned the company around and lead the company to incredible growth. One of Iger's first big decisions was to purchase of Pixar

for \$7.4b. Many believed this to be too high a premium but in hindsight this decision is legendary – the Disney brand was falling in customer’s eyes and its creative output was struggling.

The culture at Pixar is unlike any this is truly what Iger wanted to buy. They have a number of beliefs and processes which they stick to dearly such as: story is king, displayed thinking techniques (storyboarding), improvise, "plus-ing" (as long as you keep pleasantly surprising the customer, the more they'll keep coming back), internal collaboration, external collaboration, prototype / try / learn / try again., extensive training, fun and play, transparency from every level, celebrate (reward excellent failure and punish mediocre successes), establish a brain trust, the most successful are dreamers with deadlines, enact postmortems, quality is the best business plan.

Quotes

“If they [the guests] ever stop caring, it'll cost 10x to get the guests back.”

"I have a theory that if it's good enough, the public will pay you back for it."

"We can lick them all with quality"

"When I see things I don't like, I ask myself, why do they have to be like this and how can I improve them?"

“Pay fantastic attention to detail.”

“The real key is turning common sense into common practice.”

"I feel that people must earn it. You can't give people anything."

"I don't care about critics. It's the public I'm making pictures for."

"I am not a literary person. As far as realism is concerned, you can find dirt any place you look for it. I'm one of those optimists. There's always a rainbow. The great masses like happy endings. If you can pull a tear out of them, they'll remember your picture."

"Styles may change on the surface, but at bottom the big audience taste doesn't change. They like sympathetic characters and life-like action. And that's what I like, too, whether it's cartoons, live action or all those creatures at Disneyland."

"Look – Disney is a thing, an image in the public mind. Disney is something they think of as a kind of entertainment, a kind of family thing, and it's all wrapped up in the name Disney... You see, I'm not Disney anymore. I used to be Disney, but now Disney is something we've built up in the public mind over the years. It stands for something, and you don't have to explain what it is to the public. They know they're gonna get a certain quality, a certain kind of entertainment. And that's what Disney is."

Take advantage of difficult times - "The Great Depression was my greatest ally in assembling top flight talent."

Walt's role in the studio – "I am the bee that carries the pollen to spread ideas."

Always had faith in people – "We can run Disneyland as well as anyone. All you need are people who are eager, energetic, friendly and willing to learn. They'll make mistakes, but we can learn from their mistakes."

On music – "I just want you to remember one thing: if the people can't go away whistling it, don't play it."

TV vision – "We're not going to talk down to the kids. Let's aim for 12 year olds. The younger ones will watch because they'll want to see what their older brothers and sisters are looking at. And if the show is good enough, the teenagers will be interested, and adults too."

On money – "I've always been bored making money. I've wanted to do things, I wanted to build things. Get something going. People look at me in different ways. Some of them say, "the guy has no regard for money." That is not true. I have had regard for money. But I'm not like some people who worship money as something you've got to have piled up in a big pile somewhere. I've only thought of money in one way, and that is to do something with it, you see? I don't think there is a thing that I own that I will ever get the benefit of, except through doing things with it."

On art – "I was a corny kind of guy, so I went for corn...be commercial. What is art, anyway? It is what people like. So give them what they like. There's nothing wrong with being commercial."

On leadership - "The ability to establish and manage a creative climate in which individuals and teams are self-motivated to the successful achievement of long-term goals in an environment of mutual respect and trust."

"When Disney gets behind something, look out." – Steve Jobs

"Quality is the best business plan of all." – Ed Catmull

"Technology inspires art and art challenges technology." – John Lasseter

"We bet on people, not ideas." – John Lasseter

Teacher's Reference Guides

My “teacher’s reference guides” are deep dives into a subject, theme, person, or idea which are then distilled into (hopefully) clear, concise, and helpful resources. My goal is to effectively share what I think are the most actionable, impactful, and noteworthy takeaways of the topic at hand.

There isn’t much rhyme or reason to how I choose these teacher’s reference guides. Sometimes I want to dive deep on a specific concept such as complexity and spend months reading about that and sometimes I simply stumble across a person or topic randomly which captures my attention – trying to balance serendipity and chaos with routine and order.

You can find a full sampling of my [teacher’s reference guides](https://blas.com/teachers-reference-guides/) (blas.com/teachers-reference-guides/) on my blog, blas.com.

If any of this is of interest, you can subscribe to the [monthly newsletter](https://blas.com/newsletter/) ([http://blas.com/newsletter/](https://blas.com/newsletter/)) and you can always reach out to me directly at rabbithole@blas.us

Amor Fati.

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Appendix

1. Books

- [*Walt Disney: The Triumph of the American Imagination*](#) by Neal Gabler
- [*The Animated Man: A Life of Walt Disney*](#) by Michael Barrier
- [*An American Original*](#) by Bob Thomas
- [*DisneyWar*](#) by James Stewart
- [*Inside the Magic Kingdom*](#) by Tom Connellan
- [*Creativity, Inc.*](#) by Ed Catmull
- [*The Pixar Touch*](#) by David Price
- [*Innovate the Pixar Way*](#) by Bill Capodagli, Lynn Jackson
- [*Pixar Storytelling*](#) by Dean Movshovitz

2. Documentaries and Interviews

- [List of top Disney documentaries](#)
- [An American Experience](#)
- [A Dream Come True](#)
- [The Walt Disney Story](#)
- [The Sweatbox](#)
- [The Hand Behind the Mouse](#)
- [Secret Lives](#)
- [Building the Disney House](#)
- [Vanity Fair - Bob Iger and Marc Andreessen](#)
- [Vanity Fair - Bob Iger and Jack Dorsey](#)
- [Disney's Original EPCOT Film \(1966\)](#)
- [Disneyland Documentary: Stories](#)

- [Modern Marvels: Walt Disney World](#)
- [Interview with Roy Disney](#)
- [Interview with Michael Eisner](#)
- [The Pixar Story](#)
- [John Lasseter: A Day in the Life](#)
- [25 Years of Pixar Animation](#)
- [Pixar: 25 Magic Moments](#)
- [Pixar Theatrical Shorts](#)
- [Inside: Pixar](#)

3. Classics

- [Steamboat Willie](#)
- [Plane Crazy](#)
- [Trolley Troubles](#)
- [Three Little Pigs](#)
- [Pixar Shorts](#)

Walt Disney: The Triumph of the American Imagination by Neal Gabler

Summary

1. Disney's influence is hard to overstate. He completely changed American culture and its consciousness by bringing in a lighter, more fun world during tough times. He revolutionized animation and helped invent graphic design. His concept of a theme park was completely novel too as it was a totally immersive, imaginative experience

Key Takeaways

1. Isn't actually frozen after passing away as many believe but shows how much Disney was associated with futuristic technology
2. Disney reinvented the American past by adding nostalgia and patriotism to rural movies. He also garnered enthusiasm for technological advancement through his own films and it even helped NASA gain support
3. He was able to blend paradoxes such as being a classicist and a futurist through his animation and family values and then through projects like tomorrow world which helped spur American interest in space exploration
4. He invented the wildlife documentary and helped spread conservationist movements
5. He created the first modern media corporation by blending TV, movies, action heroes, theme parks and more
6. Above all his accomplishments however, his greatest achievement may have been instilling a belief of wish fulfillment in people - fantasy can be empowering and sometimes even transform the world
7. He was able to tap into the essence, the fundamental, the genetic code to truly bring alive any project and make it resonate with people in a timeless way. He had platonic templates in his head for everything and was able to act on it, forming the archetype of anything he took on. This desire for an idyllic world lead him to create his various animations as well as Disney World. He wanted total control and since this isn't possible in real life, he made a fictional world where he could
8. Artistic reputation was hurt towards the end of his career and many considered him an uber capitalist which supplanted other countries cultures with Americas. He was also considered an anti-Semite and a racist. Many also thought he had sold out and become to corporate and therefore lost his artistic and creative power

9. Even for those closest to Walt he was difficult to know intimately and was often moody and tough to work with
10. Walt's grandparents were from Ireland and his dad after moving around a bit decided to settle in Kansas which was a rough life at that time. They later moved to Marcellene, Missouri which Walt considered his home and the nature and serenity had a big influence on his creativity and his later animation's focus on animals, farms and trains
11. A local doctor named Dr. Sherwood encouraged Walt early on to not be nervous about admitting ignorant and annoying her edging him that he was a good artist
12. His father was a very hard working, frugal, strict and religious man. Elias had Walt deliver papers early in the morning for nearly no pay and he worked so hard he hardly had any free time as a boy. This made him very careful with his time as he grew older. Walt grew up to become extremely different from his father - light hearted, enthusiastic, charming, personable. Walt's older brother of 8 years, Roy, was more of a surrogate father than brother and they became very close
13. Walt quickly found that he was attracted to performing, drawing and show business and meticulously studied his idols such as Charlie Chaplin
14. Walt entered into service for WWI but got influenza and ended up not heading to Europe to fight but was soon sent over to help with the occupation in France. His time in France helped him mature and solidify his desire to be an artist or actor
15. Walt always had great confidence in his abilities even before he had achieved anything or had any experience. When Disney became fascinated with something, he could spend days focusing only on that
16. Animation was completely new at this time so Walt was not behind anyone although he was young. Him and a couple others would pioneer this field and make huge leaps in the following decades
17. Even at 20, with little to no experience, Walt was too hard headed to be comfortable with being anyone's employee and started a company called Laugh-O-Gram and was an incredible salesman getting employees and investors interested in working for him. The company struggled although Walt and his employees loved it and it soon went bankrupt. He then decided to leave Kansas City and went to Hollywood
18. Walt almost always exaggerated the truth to make himself or his story more dramatic. He was absolutely a happy and extremely determined man with a lot of confidence but he, like everyone, had times of doubt
19. Walt started up Disney Bros. with his older brother Roy in the early 1920s and began work on the Alice cartoons. From the beginning Walt had a deep need for artistic and creative control over the whole process in order to precisely execute his vision. He was tough

on Ub Iwerks and the rest of his employees and often made others miserable and cause resentment until they either improved or left the studio. He soon lost his distribution partner in Winkler and many of his own employees even tried sabotaging him. It was at this point he decided he would never work for anybody ever again

20. Mickey Mouse was first named Mortimer and the first idea was for Mickey to fly a plane in order to impress a lady mouse which was inspired by Lindbergh's solo flight across the Atlantic in 1927. Mickey was designed for maximum ease as circles were easier to animate and by subtly changing some features, Mickey could easily become a cat, rabbit, dog, etc.
21. Mickey struggled to gain a foothold until Roy and Walt brainstormed and determined to add sound to the animation. It was shown as a short reel before movies and became a nationwide hit. Mickey eventually evolved and became more real and proper and he lost popularity because of it. Donald Duck was soon after conceived to be Mickey's foil, to be rude, offensive, hot tempered and this is exactly what the world wanted at this time
22. Walt understood early on how important it was to make himself a brand as a producer that the country would recognize. He opened up a sound recording studio in California to gain a foothold in this up and coming area of animation. After the initial trouble with Laugh-O-Gram, Disney wanted a dominant, unassailable position in the animation market and determined to replace Felix the Cat with his own Mickey as world's most popular cartoon
23. Although the culture at Disney was casual, work was done with the utmost care and planning and the biggest difference from other animation studios was expectations. Walt would not settle for anything less than the best. He was always this way with all his early cartoons - Alice, Oswald, Mickey, Skeleton Dance and other silly shorts. Disney always took great pride in his informality, he always considered him equal to his employees
24. Powers, who ran Cinephone Studios, was the man Walt relied on for sound recording and producing. Powers wasn't a very trustworthy man and took advantage of Walt's enthusiasm by promising to fulfill his vision as well as Walt's lack of business acumen by crafting very unfavorable terms. Tensions eventually split the relationship after costly legal action but Powers managed to get Iwerks and Stalling to leave Disney studios
25. Once Disney and his cartoons started getting a foothold in California, they began expanding nationally with the Mickey Mouse club which eventually reached over 800 chapters and 1m members. Mickey soon became a worldwide phenomenon and one of the most recognized figures in the whole world. Mickey had mass appeal due to his ability to allow people to escape the Great Depression and tyrannical leaders, his simplicity and people's desire to root for the underdog - ultimate wish fulfillment. Mickey was also modeled after two of that generations most popular actors - Fairbanks and Chaplain.

However, Mickey would ultimately evolve and could be considered simply an extension of Walt himself

26. Walt only hired the best and created a very hard working but fraternal culture. The ethos was that all work had to be better than what was previously made and much better than any competitor
27. Many of Walt's colleagues believes that he achieved extraordinary success because his focus was never on money, but on providing the best product to his customers, something he could have fun with and be proud of
28. His relationship with his wife became strained as he ended up in the office pretty much every night working late which eventually led to an emotional breakdown
29. Disney avoided much of the pain of the Great Depression by plowing every dollar earned back into his company rather than the stock market. His cartoons were some of the best escapes for people going through tough times. Disney studios thrived during these tough times as they were able to hire some of the best animators in the business from studios that had gone out of business. The Disney short of "Three Little Pigs" was a sensation and delivered one of the era's anthems with the song, "Big Bad Wolf"
30. One of biggest contributions to animation was that he gave the cartoons a storyline and the character's life, a personality, embodied emotions, adding color, even taking gravity into consideration
31. Disney studios entered another inflection point once they began licensing Mickey to distributors to put on lunch boxes, watches, clothing, toys, etc. This eventually became a larger source of profits than the cartoons themselves
32. Walt played the bashful tycoon in public but this was part of his carefully crafted image which was influenced by Will Rogers. In private, Walt was often moody and sometimes blunt and egomaniacal. Walt stopped drawing and even procuring most of the cartoons but his influence and approval was still felt throughout. He was very instinctive, he a great mind for gags and had a great sense for what the public wanted and needed
33. One of Walt's main talents was his ability to bond a group, get the most out of them and always think in "we" terms. He made everyone feel great pride in the work they did and made them truly believe that it was important
34. Walt took great pride in keeping ahead of the pack and his next step was a full length film, Snow White
35. After a trip to Europe Walt decided to try to make his cartoons more universal by keeping dialogue to a minimum so that translation errors wouldn't affect enjoyment
36. Believed it was easier to train young people with no experience and bad habits that to hire people who did have some experience

37. Walt was very exacting and demanding of his employees but he paid them extremely well, gave them great benefits and created an exciting and innovative atmosphere people loved. Again, money was always secondary to talent, customer experience and quality
38. Snow White was an undertaking unlike any other. He got the most out of his people by aligning incentives - their bonuses were tied to the success of the movie. After toiling away for years, Snow White was released and became a huge success - the highest grossing movie ever in the US
39. Walt was a self-absorbed workaholic who had no close friends. He devoted himself entirely to his vision
40. After Snow White, Disney and his crew began work on Bambi but put it on hold to start work on Pinocchio
41. The move from the studio in Hyperion to Burbank was necessary but it also removed some of the informality, morale and drastically increased bureaucracy
42. In 1940, Disney decided to issue shares to the public to raise money for Bambi, Disney shorts and other projects. He never wanted to do this but the company was spending money like crazy
43. Disney - "Every mistake I made was because I didn't truly feel it."
44. Disney was very loyal to those who stuck with him during the early stages but he later was very callous and cold hearted with firings of newer employees. A union workers strike soon ensued and killed much of the esprit de courts of the studio
45. Walt got to making educational films for the navy and government during WWII. He often lost money on these and they distracted him from other endeavors. He was totally absorbed with these features for the four years of the war. Competition increased a lot after the war as the other major studios started expanding and focusing on animation - Tom & Jerry and Looney Tunes
46. Bambi was finally released to mixed reviews. The seriousness of the movie was a little too much for many people in a time which had already seen such devastation. This was a difficult time for the studio as Bambi wasn't a hit and they were spending most of their time now on war and educational films
47. Disney was so focused on pushing the boundaries creatively and in other ways that he refused to do sequels even though they were likely to be commercial successes
48. Disney had a strong aversion to organization and bureaucracy even as the studio grew. If he did decide to manage, he would micromanage everything and everyone. He would never delegate creative decisions

49. Disney's competitive advantages came from the sheer talent of its animators, their dedication, Walt's vision and fire, their focus on quality and customer experience over profit and always looking to push boundaries
50. The author does not believe Disney was racist or anti-Semitic but like most white Americans of his generation, he was insensitive
51. Disney pioneers the nature documentary as we know it today through Seal Island
52. Disney was apolitical except for his strong aversion to Communism
53. Disney didn't spend much time with his family as he was so busy but he spoiled his daughters. They described him as sympathetic but firm
54. Disney seemed to focus less on his studio and more on miniature cities and trains. These hobbies influenced him greatly in building an amusement park where the whole family could have fun together. Disneyland was Walt's dream - he was able to exert absolute control and make his vision real. He was able to transport people to a different, better time. The park was a combination of experience, amusement and Disney's own values
55. Disney was one of the few to recognize the power of the television. It was not the enemy of the motion picture but it's ally. They could recycle old movies, make TV shows out of movies, get new customers and fans, and would launch its own channel using past Disney shorts. He also recognized that this was an incredible tool to promote awareness and interest in Disneyland. Disney partnered with ABC who needed awareness with the growing young family population and Disney needed money to make Disneyland happen. Television made Disney more famous than ever before. It was his animation and movies which were popular before but now it was the man, the man who embodied wholesomeness and decency. He often felt imprisoned by this new persona
 1. "In retrospect, Disney's greatest creation was Walt Disney."
 2. Davy Crockett became an immediate, nationwide sensation. He embodied American ideals at a time when tensions with the Soviet Union were growing. Crockett was never profitable for Disney but it did accomplish its goal - publicize Disneyland. The Mickey Mouse Club was another phenomenon which also bolstered Disneyland's image and its awareness
 3. Imagineers were tasked with designing the parks and every single detail - subliminally making guests feel powerful, calm and have the best experience possible
 4. Disney had a constant focus on creating eternal products
 5. He constantly said that Disneyland would never be finished - there is always some way to improve and expand

56. Another major milestone in Disney's history was the formation of its own distribution arm - it now controlled the process end to end
57. Walt didn't want anybody with amusement park experience working on Disneyland because he wanted fresh eyes and no preconceived notions or biases. Established Disney university to train all employees in order to give a great, consistent experience. Dress, facial hair, and more were all strictly dictated. Cleanliness was an obsession with Walt and his parks were always meticulous - one of the small ways Disney conceived of to make his parks an escape from reality
58. Several years later Walt secretly scouted out locations on the East coast and decided to build Disney World in Orlando, Florida. His vision was to build not only a world class amusement park, but a Utopian city - EPCOT
59. Disney never felt he could rest - he was always working to "stay 25 years ahead of the competition" and was worried he'd die before he'd have time to accomplish everything
60. Walt went to the hospital for what he thought was a minor surgery when they found lung cancer, he was 64. He was clearly very weak but defiant until his last breath. His focus went almost solely to Disney World and EPCOT at this point. He died about a year later in 1966
61. One of Disney's main contributions was a living example of how one could successfully impose their will on the world. Above being a master of fun, animation, reverence or anything else, he was a master of order

What I got out of it

1. Endless enthusiasm, optimism and confidence, the highest standards of quality in the business, fanatical about his work and in pushing the limits to give customers the best experience possible, sole focus on customer experience and not money.

The Animated Man: A Life of Walt Disney by Michael Barrier

Summary

1. Michael Barrier gives a detailed account of Walt Disney's background, personality, accomplishments, flaws and impact on the world

Key Takeaways

1. Sound animation and later Snow White was what truly set Disney Studio apart
2. Walt started in animation as a businessman and ended as an artist
3. Healthy bonuses kept employees happy but a deeply held cherished and shared mission was the true driver which united everyone
 1. People from other studios took large pay cuts to join as they came to learn and be part of something great
 2. Semiannual bonuses based on profits and on a rating determined by five factors, including importance to the organization and production department ratings as to footage and quality of work
 3. Disney was the first to relax the grim grind on animators and as a result got more work out of them because they worked out of love for what they were doing and also because they thought they were doing something they thought would be imperishable
 4. Instituted a "trial without pay" for first time animators
 5. Like any large company, Disney placed some people in jobs they were not capable of filling (Peter Principle)
 6. "You always knew you had a little raise ahead - about \$2 more per week every 2-3 months (Goal Gradient Effect)
4. Walt had blind faith that quality, tempered with good judgment and showmanship will win against all odds
5. Was extremely jealous and controlling with all artistic decisions - wanted complete control
Disney had changed America's perception of leisure and entertainment
6. Elias, Walt's father, was a very hard working, tough father
 1. Walt would always remember the struggle with delivering newspapers as a boy, having to weather freezing cold and sleeping through class
 2. Freeing self of father's rigid, debilitating beliefs was central to Walt's success

7. Never was a great businessman as focus was never on money
8. Walt's first successful business venture was Laugh-O-Gram but it would eventually go out of business
9. Walt was always determined to be his own boss and be the sole man in charge
10. Tended to recall memories with rose-colored glasses and always exaggerated things
11. Important to deal with hard failure when young
12. Walt would never have survived without Roy's organizational and financial skills
13. Walt had always worried, always enthusiastic, no inhibitions, a talker
14. First to add a coherent story into the cartoons and if the cartoons acted as if they were real, the audience would buy it too
 1. Syncing sound a breakthrough too and was first exhibited in Steamboat Willie
15. Life in Marcellene, Missouri imprinted a nostalgia of small town, farm life on Walt that would be with him forever and would later be idealized in Disneyland
16. Was a tough, demanding boss and early on many decided to leave to try to start their own studios
17. Formed Disney Studios on October 16, 1923
 1. The Alice Cartoons were his first success followed by Mickey Mouse in 1927
18. Focus was never money - "we can lick them all with quality"
19. Early on, Disney's vision and ambition was rather modest - "he was not some visionary leader...he was notoriously inarticulate...difficult for him to translate his ideas into guidance for his animators."
 1. Disney himself did not introduce stunning advances but he recognized, accepted and often encouraged the improvements that his people were coming up with on their own
20. Wrote with a lot of "... " in order to promote free association
21. Early cartoons were a little risqué - all animators were young, untrained men with no college educations
22. After Ub Iwerks and Stalling left, Disney would have no other partners besides Roy, Roy's wife and his wife Lilian until the company went public
23. Disney focused intently on laughs and personality - Chaplin was part of the inspiration for Mickey's character
24. Licensing began in 1930 but wouldn't have a massive impact on the company's profitability until later
25. Only tolerated those who were all in - once fired a man for looking for another job
26. Three Little Pigs became an instant national sensation - quality, music, timing, personality in characters, "real" feeling

27. As Disney's processes advanced and improved, they started closing doors to outside artists and instead promoted from within and encouraged their animators to take art classes
28. "Once a formula has been established, it exerts a powerful gravitational pull on artists who have used it. Resisting it, and observing life directly with the idea of reproducing it more accurately, is hard work, as the Disney animators found."
29. Did not revisit even recent mistakes - "best we can do is to profit from mistakes by improving future pictures"
30. Vacation to Europe inspired his movies and eventually Disneyland
31. Best cartoons appeal to masses as well as those with specialized tastes
 1. Animators had to know idea and feeling behind a cartoon before pitching an idea - had to study psychology and deeply embody their characters
 1. "Our most important aim is to develop definite personalities in our cartoon characters."
 2. When Walt had an idea, he visualized it 100% and often acted it out, totally embodying the different characters - the legend behind Snow White is that Walt called in the main animators and acted out the entire movie, every character
 3. Very detailed to make sure characters were consistent and conformed to image
32. Snow White was a massive hit - had to overcome technical limits, cartoons at that time only funny, nobody knew if people would have patience for a full-length cartoon
 1. "I made it for adults. For the child that exists in all adults."
 2. Most important aim is to create definitely personalities in the cartoon characters
 3. Plowed money from Snow White into new movies, a new studio and bonuses - total reinvestment
33. Walt saw Disney Studios as an extension of himself - he was terrible at delegating and demanded his approval on every major decision
34. More important to draw what people expect rather than be 100% accurate
35. Pinocchio was a flop and forced Disney to issue shares in 1940 - Walt maintained a huge controlling stake and this element of control was central to his personality and vision
36. Every animator who entered Disney was expected to make animation his life work - "animation to us was a religion. That's all we talked...talent was taken for granted, no one thought much about it one way or the other."
 1. "Every day was an excitement. Whatever we were doing had never been done before. It was such a great thrill to go in there. There was excitement and competition; everyone was young and everyone was doing something..."
37. Disney was often very encouraging and always stressed quality, personality and feeling but was also often irascible, impatient and demanding

38. Had a very rural sense of humor which allowed him to sense what the average person would like
39. Built studio for animator's - relaxed, air conditioning, best equipment but the size and complexity took some of the familial, start-up feel away from the Studio which eventually lead to some union issues in the 1940s
 1. "I feel that people must earn it. You can't give people anything."
40. "Time clocks place a premium on deception and it is no bar to dishonesty"
41. Goodwill tour of South America lead to a couple cartoons and exhibited Disney's flawless worldwide persona as he was cheered everywhere he went
42. Role in studio - "I am the bee that carries the pollen" to spread ideas
43. Shackles of success - "the public demands repetition, not change"
44. Incredible understanding of psychology and human nature / emotion were deeply embedded into his cartoons
45. Helped WWII efforts through his "Why We Fight" Series - financial struggles led to layoffs, fraying loyalty which led to many employees seeing Disney as a job and not a calling like it used to be
46. He didn't ever want anything to look like a repeat of what he had done before
47. "Dad thought we ought to have our own church. He didn't want anything to influence us."
- Diane Disney on Walt letting his kids form their own opinions
48. His husbanding of authority was an expensive bottleneck but was the only way Walt would have it - he was the critical path
 1. Created much jealousy, frustration and politicking within the studio
49. Didn't have very many friends - he didn't have time and "had to have a clear mind for work the next day"
50. Invented the nature documentary category through "Seal Island"
51. Developed an obsession with trains and miniatures which would persist throughout his life and play a prominent role in Disneyland and Disney World
52. Ford's Greenfield Village in Detroit inspired Walt to brainstorm a "Mickey Mouse Park"
53. Tremendous memory and capacity for learning - often impatient with others - "He understood the mechanics of everything. Everything was a new toy."
54. Disney was not so much hostile to TV as unsure of how to best make use of the median but by 1950 had a TV show to promote the studio and recognized TV's importance to get new audience and further engage them
55. For his cartoons and eventually theme parks, Walt had a very vivid mental image of it all
56. Roy was skeptical of Disneyland so Walt formed a separate private company - Walt Disney Enterprises, later renamed as WED Enterprises

57. No rigid decision process - things just seemed to happen recalled on employee
 1. Later on learned that he needed a solid footing of some kind before he made a speculative leap
58. Walt's major investment in Disneyland would be committed to creating a storytelling environment, rides would be subordinate to story and setting
59. Struck a massive TV programming deal with ABC for 1 hour weekly episodes intended in part to promote Disneyland. This deal provided the necessary funds to move forward with constructing Disneyland
60. Disneyland was extremely rushed and massively over budget and opening day was a disaster - brutally hot, many rides broke down
61. Took inspiration from Denmark's Tivoli
62. Disney succeeded in making Disneyland fun for all - families would stay 3x longer and spend nearly 3x as much
63. Outside contractors failed miserably and soon Disney replaced them with Disney employees who had been trained to be customer-friendly. No matter how good the park looked, surly employees could spoil the Utopian effect
 1. "It is easier to maintain control over customers if they think they are doing what they want to do, as opposed to what someone else wants them to do. To preserve that illusion of autonomy, Disney was more than willing to make countless small adjustments, like paving a shortcut that visitors were taking through a flower bed, rather than putting up a fence to keep them out."
 2. Designers had to study customers up close, wait in line with them, go on rides with them, eat with them in order to get an idea of what was going on in their minds
64. Disney is a model entrepreneur, acutely sensitive to how customers respond to his business
65. Reduced role of animation with rise of TV, live-action films and theme parks
66. "It truly was a one-man studio. Everything had Walt's touch"
67. "I am not a literary person. As far as realism is concerned, you can find dirt any place you look for it. I'm one of those optimists. There's always a rainbow. The great masses like happy endings. If you can pull a tear out of them, they'll remember your picture."
68. "Styles may change on the surface, but at bottom the big audience taste doesn't change" They like sympathetic characters and life-like action. And that's what I like, too, whether it's cartoons, live action or all those creatures at Disneyland."
69. Had a persona as a simple, rural man but many who knew him well considered him one of the most widely read, most widely traveled, most artistic men in Hollywood
70. Finger tapping typically a warning sign, as was his loud cough
71. "I don't care about critics. It's the public I'm making pictures for."

72. Criteria for a good movie was impact on the public and Snow White was the gold standard
73. Essentially subsidized Chouinard music school to create a "multi-disciplined" school of the arts (later became CalArts)
74. Disney often dressed down in order to not intimidate people - he knew he scared the daylights out of people and didn't want to let that get in the way of being able to work with him. Otherwise all he'd have is a bunch of people agreeing with him and their expertise wouldn't show
75. Disney's death led to some paralysis within the company and movies went downhill though Disney World was a smash. Disney struggled for some time and replaced Ron Miller, Disney's son-in-law, with Michael Eisner in 1984. Eisner did some great things for the studio - helping oversee a string of hits and acquiring ABC but was eventually replaced by Bob Iger in 2005
76. "It was this combination, his powerful entrepreneurial drive combined with his new artist's sensibility, that made Disney so inspiring a figure to many of the people who worked for him. Somehow, Walt always made it seem to that the most important thing in the world was to help him make a picture look the way he wanted it to look. It was a lot of fun to feel I was doing the most important thing in the world, every day."

What I got out of it

1. A really good read with some fascinating details about Walt's life, personality, vision, quirks, etc.

An American Original: Walt Disney by Bob Thomas

Summary

1. Disney was able to entertain billions of people the world over. His background doesn't point the way to how he achieved this, His parents were plain people, young Walt showed no brilliance as a student, and his drawings were often uninspired but in the end he is one of the most successful entertainers in businessmen in history

Key Takeaways

1. Didn't want to be devious unless constructive in some fashion
2. Disney put his name on everything so that people knew that when they saw 'Walt Disney' on a picture, they would know that meant good, family entertainment
3. Walt was his own best publicist
4. Very little retrospection, his visionary eye was always set on the future
5. Mickey and Walt were inextricable - Walt's personality was completely reflected in Mickey's
6. Fair man but little patience for anything bad or weak
7. "I want Disneyland to be a place where parents can bring their children - or come by themselves and have a good time"
8. He seemed to consider his time limited, and his impatience to get things done sometimes made him hard to work for. Little patience for those whose thinking was earthbound. When he dropped an idea, he didn't expect you to pick it up where he left it, you were supposed to move a couple of steps beyond
9. Disney possessed a remarkable skill for drawing the best from those who worked with him and had an uncanny capacity for reaching the human heart
10. Had a natural progression, moving the audience from spectators to participants
11. Ancestors were from France and last name was Isigny
12. Father Elias had many misadventures in business and was a stern man
13. Older brothers Herb and Ray left family due to Elias' tyrannical nature and soon after Roy left too
14. Customer service instilled during his time as a newspaper boy - father forced him to place the newspaper on people's porches, even in the middle of freezing winter

15. Only paid attention to what interested him - animation, magic, trains
16. He stepped on a nail and this injury gave him time to think of the future and it was then he determined he wanted to go into cartooning
17. Walt welcomed criticism from a young age
18. Laugh-O-Gram went bankrupt and Walt left for Hollywood to get out of cartooning and into directing
 1. Felt he was too late to cartooning now and couldn't catch up to those in New York but soon his deal with Winkler on Alice got him back into it
19. Had rare powers of persuasion - shown when he convinced Ub to move to Hollywood to join him in the Disney Bros. Studio
20. "It wasn't enough to be an original and creative artist, Disney learned; survival in the film business required a jungle toughness
21. Grew his mustache as a bet and left it because it made him look older
22. Almost messianic in the leadership of his staff
 1. Got incredible devotion and long hours but encouraged periods of refresh (played baseball during lunch)
23. Strong, attractive central character is essential and a good storyline is always needed but too much plot can destroy laughter
24. Loss of Oswald to Mintz solidified view of never working for anyone
25. Realized quickly the importance of sound and action being in sync and eventually also added color. Those who got in first lead to big advantage if you can work for quality, rather than quantity and quick money
26. Walt did not believe in holding grudges
27. Silly Symphonies began to allow Walt to expand creative outlet
28. Was swindled by Pat Powers of Cinephone of \$100,000+
29. Two years after the creation of Mickey Mouse, the Mickey Mouse Club had more than 1 million members and was known in every civilized country
 1. Licensing revenues were enormous - Ingersoll sold 2.5 million watches in two years
30. Walt had developed one of the most valuable traits of a leader - the ability to recognize talent and forcing them to reach their potential
31. Long-term and second order thinking - "Maybe United Artists won't give us any more dough [to produce color pictures], but the pictures will create so much excitement that we'll get longer playdates and bigger rentals. That'll bring the money back eventually."
32. Feed during difficult times - "Depression my greatest ally in assembling top flight talent"
33. Created systematic training courses for young animators in order to develop:

1. Good draftsmanship
 2. Knowledge of caricature, of action as well as features
 3. Knowledge and appreciation of acting
 4. Ability to think up gags and put over gags
 5. Knowledge of story construction and audience values
 6. Knowledge and understanding of all the mechanical and detailed routine involved in his work, in order that he may be able to apply his other abilities without becoming tied in a knot by lack of technique along these lines
34. Always challenged himself - "As he discovered each new, unexplored medium, his interested dwindled in the one that he had previously conquered."
35. New office predecessor to Disneyland - Walt involved and thoughtful of every detail
36. Issued stock due to debt
37. On Unions - "It's the law of the universe that the strong shall survive and the weak must fall by the way, and I don't care what idealistic plan is cooked up, nothing can change that."
1. Strike had taken away some of Disney's idealism - creatives at the studio would never again have the same, intimate relationship with Walt
38. Disney production was pretty much put on hold during WWII and they produced many educational and propaganda films for the government
39. Walt was at times gruff, not given to intimacy and self-revelation. Rarely issued direct praise for work that had been done well and seemed to expect excellence and did not express gratitude when he received it. Commendation usually came in the form of a bonus check or a remark to a third person, with the realization that the praise would be handed on. He commanded attention - he wouldn't let go of our eyes, people couldn't stand up to him if they weren't pretty confident
40. Disney soon became synonymous with quality entertainment for the entire family. "Look - Disney is a thing, an image in the public mind. Disney is something they think of as a kind of entertainment, a kind of family thing, and it's all wrapped up in the name Disney...You see, I'm not Disney anymore. I used to be Disney, but now Disney is something we've built up in the public mind over the years. It stands for something, and you don't have to explain what it is to the public. They know they're gonna get a certain quality, a certain kind of entertainment. And that's what Disney is."
41. Lillian was no 'yes-wife' - she stood up to Walt and would honestly share her opinion on films and other topics Walt asked her about
42. Considered himself religious but no church and respected every religion
43. Had no Disney items in his own home
44. "We can lick 'em with product"

45. Was a tough boss but in times of crisis was especially gentle
46. Assigned all top talent to Cinderella when success was paramount
47. Struggle with Alice led to Walt to never mess with a tamper-proof classic again
48. Race against time - a fortune teller told Walt at a young age that he would die by the age of 35. He was not superstitious but this prediction had a profound effect on him and continued to brood about it long after it had been proven false - instilled a sense of urgency in him
49. Understood the value of publicity and always made himself available
50. How Walt thought of himself in some regards - "The last of the benevolent monarchs"
51. 2 dislikes at work - being interrupted while interpreting a scene and someone arguing a point he had already rejected
52. Studied amusement parks, fairs, zoos, etc. the world over in order to get inspired for Disneyland. His metric for gaging the success of the park was whether people felt entertained or cheated
53. TV allowed public to get to know original plots and characters rather than this simply happening through theater productions
54. With Disneyland, quickly gained deep fluency in architecture and engineering. Was always extremely adept at mastering new things quickly
55. Faith in people - "We can run Disneyland as well as anyone. All you need are people who are eager, energetic, friendly and willing to learn. They'll make mistakes, but we can learn from their mistakes."
56. **From the beginning, he insisted on utter cleanliness at Disneyland. "Remembering the tawdry carnivals he had visited with his daughters, he told the staff that if you keep a place clean, people will respect it; if you let it get dirty, they'll make it worse. He didn't want peanut shells strewn on the sidewalks; only shelled nuts were sold. No gum could be purchased inside the park. Young men strolled through the crowds, retrieving trash as soon as it was discarded**
57. On music - "I just want you to remember one thing: if the people can't go away whistling it, don't play it."
58. Desire for utmost control - studio was almost self-sufficient from the beginning
59. Opening day of Disneyland was a debacle but, as always, Walt never dwelled on disappointment
60. TV vision - "we're not going to talk down to the kids. Let's aim for 12 year olds. The younger ones will watch because they'll want to see what their older brothers and sisters are looking at. And if the show is good enough, the teenagers will be interested, and adults too."

1. Mouseketeers were normal kids, not Hollywood personalities - produced an audience response that TV had never seen before. With this incredible response and fan devotion, Mickey's status as a folk hero was guaranteed for another generation
61. On money - "I've always been bored making money. I've wanted to do things, I wanted to build things. Get something going. people look at me in different ways. Some of them say, "the guy has no regard for money." That is not true. I have had regard for money. But I'm not like some people who worship money as something you've got to have piled up in a big pile somewhere. I've only thought of money in one way, and that is to do something with it, you see? I don't think there is a thing that I own that I will ever get the benefit of, except through doing things with it."
62. On art - "I was a corny kind of guy, so I went for corn...Be commercial. What is art, anyway? It's what people like. So give them what they like. There's nothing wrong with being commercial."
63. Walt and Ray fought - Walt often cause but also first to apologize
 1. Most empires have a yin/yang leadership situation
64. Always succeeded with quality and uniqueness, not in following trends
65. Bought out ABC in 1960 so that they owned Disneyland outright
 1. Moved TV to NBC because they could pursue color with them and Walt determined that was the future
66. **Guests, not customers - we're selling happiness**
 1. **If they ever stop caring, it'll cost 10x to get the guests back**
67. **Cartoons designed to be timeless - re-releases were essentially pure profit**
68. Walt did not like to be oversold on anything
69. Always put self in the position of the public - "At Disneyland, queues were doubled back, so that those in line would have a sense of advancing toward their goal and would see a constantly changing human vista
70. On time and urgency - "Time is getting on, and I still have things left to do. I don't want to go back and cover the same ground."
71. **"I have a theory that if it's good enough, the public will pay you back for it."**
72. On Chouinard - students must learn a variety of skills, be multi-disciplinary and have a place where cross-pollination is possible. "Imagination is an intuitive thing; I think it's something you're born with. But it has to be developed."
73. Disney World started out with the vision of being the utopian city of tomorrow - EPCOT, "an experimental monarchy"

1. **"When I see things I don't like, I ask myself, why do they have to be like this and how can I improve them?"**
74. Roy, who is typically the profit-focused financier - "Wait a minute, let's give them a better deal. They've been good to us, and we may have to go back to the well again. Besides, the offering will be oversubscribed. His staff felt that they had lost their negotiating power, but Roy's strategy proved correct. He had made friends, as well as lenders, of the Eastern banks." - Understood the power of thinking ahead, of reciprocation and of placing the cue ball for future shots and not just the first shot

What I got out of it

1. Fascinating biography which had a lot of detail about Walt's childhood and his personality - quirks and strengths alike. Vision was extraordinary and we can learn a lot from how he thought, dealt with people, issues and decision making

DisneyWar by James Stewart

Summary

1. The incredible story of the Eisner era - it's successes and debacles

Key Takeaways

1. Walt Disney's nephew Roy Disney and the CEO at the time, Michael Eisner, did not get along. Eisner was a very controlling and difficult CEO to get along with and he eventually decided to get Roy off the Board. Ironically, Roy was the one who removed the CEO before Eisner in order to bring Eisner on board
2. In 1984, Walt Disney's nephew Roy lead a coup to oust Ron Miller who was Walt Disney's son-in-law. This is when Michael Eisner took over as chairman and CEO. Eisner had a little knowledge of Disney but since the company was under threat of take over and its creative output was so low his skills were necessary. He was responsible for an incredible string of successes at Paramount and brought with him some of the senior executives such as Jeffrey Katzenberg. It was thought that Eisner's creativity and charisma would be perfect to help turn Disney around. He was very charismatic man and a great storyteller
3. Disney operates differently than other studios in that they have their own in-house team to make all the movies instead of hiring and firing people once a movie is done
4. Disney's incredible attention to detail and quality live on today even going so far as having exacting standards and extensive training for the costume characters at Disney World
5. Walt can be characterized as resilient, restless optimistic, creative and a visionary
6. Eisner had a very different upbringing from Walt - he was Jewish, raised in a wealthy family in the heart of NYC where Walt was in a very typical Midwestern family who struggled with money at times and he of course idealized the countryside. Eisner was a literature major and playwright in college and this helped him oversee the production of some major cultural hits during his time at Paramount such as Footloose and Saturday Night Fever
7. Eisner was a very frugal CEO who fired a lot of old Disney employees and established a culture of survival of the fittest. His replacement of fired Disney employees with Paramount employees was also somewhat controversial
8. Eisner saw himself as Walt Disney's heir apparent and made that very clear when he became the face of the TV show *The Wonderful World of Disney*

9. Eisner had a great vision and a sense for what would be culturally popular and important and wasn't afraid to pay up when he saw these rare opportunities such as with Indiana Jones
10. Euro Land Disney was a major effort for Eisner and the Imagineers but ended up being a humongous flop. Although the park opened on time, it was billions of dollars over budget and they had misunderstood the difference between American and European spending habits and customs. Since Europeans have more vacation, they spend less per trip than Americans which hurt Euro Land Disney
11. For a long time and maybe even a little bit today, Disney was mired in what people would call the "what would Walt do syndrome"
12. Eisner lead the development of Disney-run retail stores across the most prominent shopping areas in the country and immediately began setting records for sales per square foot
13. Selling and mass marketing home videos was a controversial idea as they thought it might cheapen the experience of going to the theater and they were also counting on showing the movies on their television programs to attract viewers. The first release was priced at \$80 so that only rental companies could afford to buy a lot. This experiment was a tremendous success and the next release was priced at \$30 but also included network advertising within the home video with the hopes of changing consumer habits. Home-video soon became Disney's biggest profit center apart from theme parks
14. Eisner, Wells and Katzenberg were responsible for the most impressive corporate media turn around in history. The three main areas that helped balloon Disney's profits were raising the prices for tickets to the theme parks, increasing the number of hotel rooms worldwide and the burgeoning home video Market.
 1. Besides the obvious dollar profit, the way Disney handled the situations added a luster and prestige which allowed them to sell and license their products at incredible rates
15. Katzenberg was responsible for coming up with the idea for the Lion King. He immediately saw the appeal of a coming of age story but this was a big risk for Disney as it would be the first time that the main character was an animal instead of a human and it wasn't based on a classic fairytale
16. After an incredible run of successes in the 1990s, Disney fell into a common trap of the successful and lost some of the essence which was responsible for its success as its costs ballooned. The incredible success at Disney led to a feeling of complacency, even boredom with many senior executives

17. Eisner told people he wanted to hear bad news early but the way he reacted dis-incentivized it. He hated it and frankly was not used to it and this kept others from being forthright, as witnessed by the Euro Disney debacle
18. Tensions started mounting between Eisner and Wells/Katzenberg. They were driving each other crazy, especially as Eisner began getting a bloated ego
19. Disney moved into the Broadway arena and decided to buy their own theater in New York City
20. Frank Wells was killed in a helicopter accident in 1994. During contract negotiations, Eisner promised Katzenberg that if anything ever happened to Wells, he would become Disney's #2. However, this didn't happen and Katzenberg knew from then on that their relationship was over as Eisner wasn't being honest or owning up to his word. Katzenberg threatened to leave and Eisner spoke with close confidants, many of whom which hated Katzenberg
21. After the movie *The Mighty Ducks* became a sensational hit, Disney franchised the Mighty Ducks into an NHL team. Disney took control of the Anaheim Angels in 1997 after their movie *Angels in the Outfield* became a hit - both teams were sold in 1999/2000
22. Eisner had emergency heart surgery and felt like he lost some of his competitiveness and drive after that - younger in body but older in spirit. He no longer felt immortal but he had now made his peace with death and was happier.
23. Succession was up in the air but Eisner sensed that the company was undergoing an internal corporate restructuring of sorts and knew from firsthand experience how vital it is to keep employees happy and challenged in the midst of great past successes
24. The tensions between Katzenberg and Eisner eventually became too much and Jeffrey left. He founded, alongside Spielberg and good friend David Geffen, DreamWorks SKG
25. Disney attempted to build a historic park in Virginia but certain groups thought it was too close to important Civil War grounds and attempted to block it - Disney held off as they had lost the "perception game"
26. With record profits, Disney had to decide what to do with all this money and they felt that they need a distribution arm so they started looking at networks. The initial thoughts of buying NBC from GE fizzled and it then came down to CBS, Time Warner and Capital Cities / ABC. The merger with Cap Cities happened in 1995 for \$20b and was the second largest merger of all time. This brought A&E Networks as well as ESPN into the Disney fold
27. After much deliberation, Eisner's good friend Michael Ovitz was hired but Eisner immediately regretted it. Ovitz founded Creative Artists Agency, one of the world's largest

- talent agencies and his style of business was much different - lavish parties bringing talent together and expensive presents are norms as an agent but Eisner disapproved
28. The tension between "Eisner and the rest of the company consumed so much of everyone's efforts but Disney had such a deep bench that they were still able to come out with successful movies, TV shows and theme park rides. Ovitz was eventually fired at the end of 1996.
 29. Eisner may have gotten some bad reputation because in the months before Ovitz's firing he told the media that there were no issues and everything was great. Shortly after Eisner signed a new 10-year contract with Disney which was valued at close to \$200 million with options and many other perks. Eisner's ownership eventually became the second largest in the world only behind Sid Bass and this would lead to terrible incentives and non-independent board behavior
 30. After the enormous success of The Lion King, Disney began to struggle with their animation unit. They were having some success in their partnerships with Pixar and even though many inside Disney had suggested buying Pixar in 1997, nothing came of it. The relationship with Pixar experienced tension when negotiations between Jobs and Eisner went south. Jobs said he would never sell to Disney as long as Eisner was there
 31. The Lion King Broadway show was released in 1997 and in many ways this can be seen as the pinnacle of the Eisner era for its originality and creativity
 32. One fatal flaw of both Eisner and Katzenberg is that they never knew how to encourage celebrating small wins
 33. Eisner's management style lead to a very political, backstabbing, insecure environment where people were always looking behind their back and unsure of their place in the company
 34. Eisner's style forced many executives to start making decisions without any help or input from the people below them
 35. The merging of AOL and Time Warner was difficult and dangerous for Disney but they eventually reached a favorable settlement in which Iger proved himself that content and is king over distribution
 36. Eisner's major mistakes included his massive spending on Euro Disney, forays into the Internet and the acquisition of the Fox Family cable network - each of which is a mistake of more than \$1b. This does not even include the firing of Katzenberg and Ovitz - both mistakes of hundreds of millions of dollars
 37. As Eisner called for Roy's removal from the Board due to his age, Stanley Gold and Roy began a "Save Disney" campaign and called for Eisner's removal due to terrible results the previous five years. They eventually garnered enough votes of no confidence from

shareholders that Eisner stepped down. He was responsible for one of the greatest media turnarounds in history, bringing in an era of creativity and growth few expected but his egomaniacal, dishonest, micromanagement style lead to insider unhappiness and revolt. During his tenure, there was also widespread shareholder revolt for corporate governance abuses and Disney was at fault in a major way too. Many were insiders and not truly independent, getting huge paychecks from Eisner personally

38. The catalyst for the wheels falling off during Eisner's reign was Frank Wells' death in 1994 - Wells was Eisner's check and balance, rudder and sounding board. He made executives feel appreciated where Eisner was often stingy with praise. However, not even Wells could save the Euroland Disney debacle or the firing of Katzenberg
39. Eisner was extremely creative and had massive energy. This was the shot of the arm Disney needed in 1984 when he was brought in but with success, Eisner's ego started getting in the way and his image even fused with that of the Disney company itself. Eisner's downfall also came from his dishonesty and "bending of the truth" to fit his needs

What I got out of it

1. A really good background and overview of the Eisner era - the incredible growth and creativity followed by bad management style which lead to insider revolt, poor results and his eventual ousting

Inside the Magic Kingdom by Tom Connellan

Summary

1. Through a fictional narrative, Connellan describes what makes Disney great and how some of those learnings can be implemented into a variety of different businesses

Key Takeaways

1. Disney, above all else, is centered around customer satisfaction
2. Disney is tough business-wise but warm and welcoming with customers
3. For software, a 1% rise in customer retention leads to 7%+ rise in profits
4. 7 key lessons
 1. The competition is anyone the customer compares you with - Competition is anyone who raises customer expectations - if they satisfy customers better than you, you suffer by comparison
 2. Pay fantastic attention to detail
 3. Everyone walks the talk
 4. Everything walks the talk
 5. Customers are best heard through many ears
 6. Reward, recognize and celebrate
 7. Xvxryonx makxs a diffxrnxcx - the idea that if just one employee, or one key on a keyboard, stops working, it can make all the difference
5. Disney considers customer's guests, employees cast members and orientation as passing down traditions
6. Real key is turning common sense to common practice
7. 5 standards of service - always make eye contact and smile, exceed guest expectations and seek out guest contacts, always give outstanding quality service, greet and welcome each and every guest, maintain a personal standard of quality in your work
8. 4 guidelines for teamwork - go beyond the call of duty, demonstrate strong team initiative, communicate aggressively with guests and fellow cast members, preserve the magical guest experience
9. There are definite correlations between employee satisfaction and customer satisfaction
10. Two most common byproducts of great success are arrogance and complacency
11. Strong correlation between employee training spend and corporate profits

12. Must consider both share of customer and share of market - more important to acquire customers who count than it is to count the customers you acquire
13. Quality is not about limited possibilities. Quality is about unlimited possibilities. If you start thinking about quality in terms of unlimited possibilities, it changes the way you think

What I got out of it

1. A quick read on Disney's key differentiators put into an engaging narrative

Creativity, Inc. by Ed Catmull

Summary

1. One of the founders of Pixar, Ed Catmull, describes Pixar's history and their creative process. Amazing to hear how difficult of a battle it is to have a great company that lasts.

Key Takeaways

1. The culture at Pixar is unlike any other but what really sets it apart is its willing to acknowledge that it will face many problems and be blind to them
2. Released Toy Story to huge acclaim and had to battle Disney to do it their way. Catmull lost his way a bit after this as one of his life goals had been achieved
3. Wanted to understand why fantastic leaders of great companies often make very obvious, stupid mistakes. What was blinding them? - found that often so preoccupied with competition that they ignored other destructive forces
4. Founders of Pixar (Jobs, Lasseter and Catmull) goal was to create a company and culture that far outlived them. This book is about how that culture was built
5. Best managers make room for things that cannot see, must loosen the control (not tighten it), and encourage candor
6. In this period when computers and graphic design were improving by leaps and bounds, Catmull (now at Lucasfilm) experienced tremendous push back from people who were afraid of change that would slow them down short term but improve their productivity 1,000-fold long term. Must have buy in from the community you are trying to serve!
7. Visual polish matters much less if you get the story right
8. John Lasseter got fired from Disney and then joined Lucasfilm. Steve came in a couple year later when he bought the department from Lucasfilm and the three of them founded Pixar
9. When good situations coexist with bad, people are unlikely to complain as they'll be labeled complainers. Watch out for these situations and be proactive in getting a constructive feedback from people
10. Pixar mantras - story is king, trust the process
11. Pixar managed to do the impossible - revamp Toy Story 2 in record time and make it better than the original

12. Getting the team right is more important than getting the idea right. They can either fix a mediocre idea or throw it out
13. Merely saying something or repeating a mantra means nothing without action and dedication to that mantra
14. Hallmark of a great organization is people feeling the freedom to be honest and candid. Lack of candor, over time, will degrade team dynamics and quality of work
15. Candor only works if the person on the receiving end of the feedback is open to change
16. People want honesty and direction from their leaders but also to let them know when they messed up and to be included in the correcting of course decisions
17. Best leaders are able to understand and communicate to people's different points of view (condominium metaphor where every person lives on a different floor and has a different view - point of view)
18. Catmull goes on a meditation retreat every year in order to become more mindful
19. Very difficult but important to determine what is impossible and what is simply a humongous reach
20. Can't let past success make you afraid of taking risks and perhaps failing
21. It is vital not to become attached to your idea. Jobs and the leaders at Pixar were able to let go of ideas if proved wrong and not take criticism personally
22. **Principles for creativity:**
 1. Give a good idea to a mediocre team and they'll screw it up, give a mediocre idea to a good team and they'll work wonders (get the team right)
 2. When looking to hire, give potential to grow more weight than current skill level
 3. Always hire people smarter than you; do not discount ideas from unexpected sources
 4. Must coax ideas out of your staff; managers job is to address reasons people aren't candid
 5. Never be convinced you are right - always be open
 6. Do not measure outcome independent of process
 7. Must be willing to fix things as they pop up and understand their nature if they were unseen
 8. Not manager's job to prevent risks but to make it safe to take them
 9. Trust means you trust them even when they screw up
 10. Finding and fixing problems is everybody's job
 11. Show early and show often (iterate)
 12. People should be able to talk to anybody
 13. Do not create too many rules as it belittles people

14. Impose strategic limits to force people to think differently
15. It takes substantial energy to move a group
16. Don't confuse the process with the goal

What I got out of it

1. Really interesting overview from Catmull on Pixar's process. Inspiring to hear how much he and the whole team at Pixar cares

The Pixar Touch by David Price

Summary

1. A comprehensive overview of Pixar's history, its storytelling process, its relationship with Disney and more

Key Takeaways

1. Lasseter was at Disney sweeping streets as a teenager and later as a guide on Jungle Cruise
2. Pixar began as a hardware company but struggled and eventually started selling animation software
3. Bob Iger's purchase of Pixar is legendary - Disney brand failing as indicated by mothers trusting Pixar brand more than Disney. Pixar movies also made up 45% of Disney's operating revenues before being bought
4. Selling Pixar gave Lasseter freedom to make movies he wanted to make
5. Ed Catmull helped launch and revolutionize the computer animation industry - first through his work at New York Institute of Technology, then while at Lucasfilm and of course through his time and research at Pixar
 1. Alex Schure was a visionary millionaire who sponsored and brought together one of the finest computer animation teams in the world at NYIT
6. Jobs bought Pixar from Lucasfilm in 1986 for \$5m and put over \$50m into it over the next 10+ years but bought into the mission wholly (although he did lose some confidence at points as indicated by his desire to try to sell Pixar to Microsoft and other companies).
7. Alvy Ray Smith, along with Catmull and Lasseter, is the third founder of Pixar and worked with Catmull while at NYIT
8. Regardless of how advanced the technology is, story is always the most important.
9. Fostering a cool place to work always attracts top talent more than money alone
10. Catmull - animation has to meet people's experience from everyday life. Sometimes more important to not be 100% realistic if it makes the shot more believable for whatever reason
11. Lasseter started at Disney during its dormancy phase when the most favored expression of Disney executives was, "As Walt used to say..."

1. While Lasseter was at Disney, Tron convinced him that computer animation was the next revolution in animation and tried to convince Disney to invest more. Disney was not so sure, promptly fired him and was then hired to Pixar at Lucasfilm
2. Lasseter's greatest gift is his ability to give inanimate objects life and personality
3. George Lucas was skeptical of computer animation at first, as was Frank Thomas at Disney. Lucas eventually spun off Pixar which was a hardware group at that time (although Catmull and Smith always had the vision of creating movies)
 1. Jobs' vision with Apple was always to bring high-end computing to the masses - "Our computers were born not out of greed or ego but in the revolutionary spirit of helping common people rise above the most powerful institutions."
12. People will always use tools in ways the toolmaker never thought possible
13. Luxo, Jr. a hit for the actual and emotional realism it was able to portray through an inanimate object. Tin Toy was the first animation to win an Oscar
14. Jobs and Smith clashed to the point that Smith eventually left to found Altamira. Jobs went overboard and at one point rescinded all employee's stock options which obviously angered many people
15. Lasseter has an uncanny ability to shift between the macro level of the entire film and the micro level of whatever detail he was dealing with at the moment. He would always be aware of a frame's role in the larger context of storytelling
16. Pixar's massively successful first release, Toy Story, convinced Jobs and others that there was true potential in computer animation. Jobs decided to give himself and the company some liquidity and soon after Toy Story's release, Pixar went public
17. "When Disney gets behind something, look out." - Steve Jobs
18. Employee loyalty and bucking normal trends - "Catmull had rejected Hollywood-style run-of-style employment, believing that steady employment relationships would help the company hold on to its invaluable talent."

What I got out of it

1. It requires doing something different in order to get results different than the average. Pixar's leaders, their process, their focus, ability and willingness to be different all help them achieve creative and financial results which have never before been seen in entertainment.

Innovate The Pixar Way by Bill Capodagli and Lynn Jackson

Summary

1. Quick book describing some of the attitudes, beliefs, practices and more that set Pixar apart and give it the best shot to keep innovating and producing the highest quality movies

Key Takeaways

1. Ed Catmull's own hero is Disney himself - collective creativity within a corporate culture is never an accident. It begins with creative leadership that is trustworthy and in turn trusts others to accomplish big dreams. They refuse to take shortcuts and truly embody and live by the ideal that **"quality is the best business plan of all"**
2. One of Pixar's greatest attributes is their **ability to view the world through the eyes of a child**
 1. Helps create culture which rewards and cherishes imagination. Try new things and don't fear results that are different from what you expected them to be
 2. Dream. Believe. Dare. Do
 3. Innovate. Don't imitate!
3. Childlike dreamers, producers of "good show", champions of artists and protectors of an innovative culture are characteristics that Walt embedded in Disney and that Pixar also exhibits more than any other studio
4. Instead of "meeting customer expectations," start fulfilling their dreams
5. **"Give us the black sheep"** - Brad Bird on who he wanted to work with on *The Incredibles* because they would most likely be the most frustrated and most passionate to make something great
6. Short-term mindset and need for instant gratification stifles innovation
7. Ultimate test of success is prosperity in long-term after original leader or founder is gone
8. Dreams really can come true if you keep a long-term focus
9. **On Leadership - "The ability to establish and manage a creative climate in which individuals and teams are self-motivated to the successful achievement of long-term goals in an environment of mutual respect and trust." - Walt Disney**

10. Creatives flourish when they unite to forge new frontiers and when they refuse to compromise their values - even if it means pushing back on unyielding, high-ranking bullies
11. Encourage culture of failure to team
 1. Celebrate failure with the same intensity that you celebrate success
 2. Become a prototype junky
 3. Develop your own "skunk works"
 4. Dream BIG
 5. Don't cry poor - find ways to be innovative even without a big budget
 6. Planning is OK but don't be a slave to the plan
 7. Visually track and display progress
 8. Forget about long planning meetings and reports
 9. Easier to ask for forgiveness than permission
 10. You need a soul mate - find customer or supplier who is willing to refine prototypes and ideas
12. Important of play - can't get the most out of people long-term without burning out if don't give enough breaks and have fun DURING the process
13. **Muhammad Ali and the "lonely hours"** - the hours put in before sunrise, when no one is around, when you don't have to train, are the hours that separate you and make you great
14. Must have dignity and mutual respect from all sides in order to prosper as a firm
15. **Technology inspires art and art challenges technology**
16. **Keys to innovation** - story is king, displayed thinking techniques (storyboarding), improvise, "plus-ing" (as long as you keep pleasantly surprising the customer, the more they'll keep coming back. If they ever stop coming, it'll cost 10x as much to get them back), internal collaboration, external collaboration, prototype. try. learn. try again., work on cool projects (all about selling the dream), extensive training, fun and play, transparency from every level, celebrate (reward excellent failure and punish mediocre successes), establish a brain trust, the most successful are dreamers with deadlines, enact postmortems, quality is the best business plan
17. Other innovative companies - Google, Griffin Hospital, Nike, Target, Zappos

What I got out of it

1. Good, short, fun book on what it takes to be innovative

Pixar Storytelling: Rules for Effective Storytelling Based on Pixar's Greatest Films by
Dean Movshovitz

Summary

1. Examines Pixar's storytelling techniques to uncover the techniques and mechanisms which make them so successful

Key Takeaways

1. Emotionally committed when characters get out of their comfort zone which forces them to grow and change. Best do this by exploiting existing flaw or problem
2. Great characters deeply care about something, anything. We care because they care. Strong opinions about things and past experiences amplify the drama
3. 3 liking levels - external / superficial, deeper, empathy (where their wins equal your wins and the character serves as your proxy for success and emotions)
 1. Put the character in harm's way and let them fight their way out of it and never give up (unless they have tried absolutely everything!)
4. Conflict evolves out of something the character stands to lose
5. 'Construction' necessary - character changes some deep part of themselves which helps them achieve their goal
 1. Change is the measuring unit of conflict
6. No such thing as small characters
7. Never choose anything over honesty
8. All villains have a value system that makes them believe their actions are right
9. Avoid consequences when storytelling

What I got out of it

1. Quick read with good examples from actual Pixar movies to bring it to life

[An American Experience](#) (PBS Documentary)

1. Warning cough to employees whenever he entered a room - incredible personal presence
2. Determined to be antithesis of his father
3. Roy and Walt very different - Roy got release from Walt's enthusiasm and Walt got protection
4. From the beginning Walt only wants to work with the very best, those who are much better than him in many things
5. Had an instinctive feel for the problems and hopes of ordinary people but was not a psychologist or as deeply thoughtful as his cartoons might make him out to be in hindsight
6. Tight reign of licensing agreements and massive percentage of profits was next big leg in Disney's growth
7. Disney recognized animation as a legitimate industry and profession and paid well - the place to be to create great art
8. Was very tough and demanding but created an environment where it was safe and encouraged to fail without worrying about getting fired
9. Disney did a one-man show, acting out every character, the entire story of Snow White to his employees
10. One of the great salesman of our generation - never sold anything he didn't wholeheartedly believe in
11. Always spoke to children as peers, never condescendingly
12. Was the man who was able to bring together and create things which were better than reality
13. Was stingy with praise - extreme pleasure resulted in "that'll work"

[A Dream Come True](#)

1. "You can't beat pigs with pigs" - tried to make other pig related cartoons after success of Three Little Pigs but none of them lived up to the hype. May have cemented his reluctance for sequels and desire to always do something new
2. Nothing was ever right - need for continuous improvement and always striving for better
3. Have a simple formula - if have quality in employee experience and quality guest experience, the financial results will come; critical to treat employees the way they want the employees to treat their guests

The Walt Disney Story

1. It's important to have a good, hard failure when you're young
2. For every laugh, there must be a tear
3. Was always jealous of one of his brothers who was a mailman because he was happy and had no payroll or story stress

The Sweatbox

1. Very difficult to find something universally appealing and authentic
2. Screening process agonizing but by figuring out what doesn't work you get closer to what does
3. Be really honest and clear as early as possible - delayed pain is exacerbated pain

The Hand Behind the Mouse

1. Story of Ub Iwerks, Disney's chief animator and the man who first drew Mickey
2. Started studio with Disney "Iwerks - Disney" which only survived for about a month
3. Inverted an idea - there was already cartoons who had been displayed acting in the real world but Walt and Ub reversed it and put real people into cartoons - Alice
4. After Mickey gained worldwide fame and notoriety, the maintenance of success was proving to be the biggest challenge of all
5. Ub eventually left Disney to form his own studio and brought with him many of the best animators
6. Ub's technical fluency in animation (and even mechanical ability to take apart cars and other skill sports) was legendary. Was able to bring cartoons through life through proper perspective, personality and adding dimensionality. Great Depression and his former creation, Mickey, brought tough times and he eventually closed the studio and rejoined Disney after 10 years
7. Helped invent many different cameras to help advance the animation field

Secret Lives

1. Women were segregated into the inking department, none in animation whatsoever
2. For Disney's birthday, some animators made a gag of Mickey and Minnie fornicating and immediately fired them
3. A more negative take on Disney - emphasize some racism, was bad at sharing credit, was a tough boss, got pictures of everyone who took part in the union and would eventually fire them (hired a man with mob connections to try to deal with the strikers which was a very low blow), thought the strikers were all communists, the strike caused phobias and strange behaviors (obsessive hand washing) in Walt, goodwill trip to South America was to get Walt out of the picture and let him relax, Roy solved the strike in a couple days with Walt gone and basically all of the striker's concessions were met
4. Bambi was Disney's last great animation - lost his passion for it after the strike
5. Disney was a type of informant for the FBI who would give inside info on Hollywood and any communistic rumors - 20-year relationship

[Building the Disney House](#)

1. 29 movies made since acquiring Pixar, Marvel and Lucasfilm - \$800m average box office
2. Buying brands on the surface but really buying talent, it's that simple
3. How have been so successful? - "relentless pursuit of perfection"
4. Marvel, Pixar and Lucasfilm have greatly benefited from Disney's best marketing and distribution system
5. Lasseter on greatness - "have faith in ourselves, have faith in our process, have faith in our ideas/values"
6. Lasseter and Catmull oversee all studio's operations but Pixar is totally separate from Disney's animation - truly brought over animation philosophy and belief in themselves
7. The most important variable to everything is passion - everybody at Pixar share the same passion for animation in that it is the only thing they have ever wanted to do
8. Great brands that comply with their promise will stand tall in an era of infinite choice
9. Value proposition was keeping their great and separate cultures
10. Bob Iger vision of the future was all about content - why acquiring these studios so relevant
 - a. None of the films being produced is a one off
11. What drives Lasseter is trying to entertain people like Walt did - nobody in history has ever done that

- a. Wants to create characters that come to life beyond the movie, outside the film who live in people's hearts and homes and nobody can keep characters' alive forever like Disney - parks, products, music. None of this stuff will sell though unless the movie is great
12. Bob's message to studios - be ambitious, don't be afraid -
- a. Plus-ing being used all over, no leadership through fear
13. Lasseter - "we bet on people, not ideas"
- a. Great people can take a mediocre idea and make it great, mediocre people can make a great idea mediocre
 - b. Always ask their teams to pitch 3 ideas and not one
 - i. Looks for 3 things in the ideas
 - 1. Where is the heart of the film going to come from (pathos is the heart)
 - 2. Where are we going to take the audience? How does it lend to computer animation?
 - 3. What are we saying? We like to make people think, what is the message?
 - c. Attempt to make movies as much for adults as for kids
14. Succession planning - Most important quality for next Disney CEO is having ability to appreciate value of great creators and the creative process

[Vanity Fair - Bob Iger and Marc Andreessen](#)

- 1. Technology is the storyteller's (content distributor, Disney) best friend as it helps tell a better, more engaging story, reach more people, make business more efficient
- 2. 2 truths - Whenever there is a new distribution channel there is mass panic within content distributors and it never does hurt them but helps and expands the market and industry
 - a. BuzzFeed has incredible content and a great distribution in one company
- 3. Analysts are absurd - can't manage a company just because analysts expect a certain future to play out
 - a. Iger tries to be extremely candid and consistent in his message
 - b. A lot of CEOs don't have the guts to be ambitious - quarterly earnings, business press
 - c. Can't possibly manage a company correctly if think about quarterly earnings

4. Not worried about TV business - will be fine as long as have great content, great user interface and is findable and mobile
5. Future lies in what Disney is doing with Netflix - long form shows and movies with instant demand

[Vanity Fair - Bob Iger and Jack Dorsey](#)

1. Disney was THE original technology company - every animation they made they invented the technology to make it along the way
2. Disney offers something for everyone regardless of age, race, religion, etc.
3. "I see a future where the consumer decides what gets bundled and what they can buy individually" - Iger
 - a. Agnostic about how they get their franchises to the consumer - let's focus on making great things and the rest will take care of itself
 - b. Disney, ESPN, Marvel, Pixar, Lucasfilm can all stand by themselves due to their brand strength
 - i. Investing in these great brands and improving value to consumers - ability to sell directly to consumers is very exciting for Disney as only place they are currently able to interact directly with consumers is theme parks
 - ii. Disruption can actually help Disney - antifragile!
4. Developed wristbands for everybody entering Disney theme parks but investing in and believes that it will one day be totally automatic - saves information, can make reservation where that info is on the wrist, frictionless transaction experience, it is your wallet. One day can all be through cell phone, Apple Watch, etc.
 - a. Wristbands akin to chips in Las Vegas! Customers spend a lot more money than they would otherwise
5. Next generation theme park - continuously think about how to make the theme park experience even better for the customer

[Disney's Original EPCOT Film \(1966\)](#)

1. Describes the vision behind EPCOT - the utopian planned, future city

2. There were no standards - whatever worked became the code, whatever failed to meet the public need was replaced by a better idea
3. Disneyland was the standard of performance for public planning and development

[Disneyland Documentary: Stories](#)

1. Walt was a genius at surrounding himself with people who could stimulate him
2. One of the best things we had going for us was ignorance because you didn't know better
3. Opening day was a disaster in many ways but the employees were so polite and so courteous that most guests overlooked everything else
4. Wrote "It's a Small World" so it could be translated into as many languages as possible and have a universal idea and appeal
5. Walt's secret was that he touched everybody with everything that he did
6. Taught adults that it was alright to have fun - to be child-like without being childish
7. Walt's passing was a loss of a father-figure, a leader to the entire Disney company
8. Every employee, even sweepers like John Lasseter was, are cast members and not employees as cast members are part of a show

[Modern Marvels: Walt Disney World](#)

[Interview with Roy Disney](#)

[Interview with Michael Eisner](#)

1. Was willing to do things nobody else did and was very enthusiastic - take a job where you can't fall off the floor (uncontested areas that are performing poorly are often the best opportunities)

[The Pixar Story](#)

1. The nine old men (from Disney lore) taught at CalArts where John Lasseter went - they were masters but all had the attitudes of students
2. John joined Disney during a dysfunctional phase and although he was extremely talented, his passion was above and beyond what the studio's at that time and was let go
3. Great fear amongst animators that computer graphics would replace them
4. Art pushes technology, technology inspires art
5. Pixar computer - most advanced graphics computer of its day built by Catmull and his team while at Lucasfilm. George Lucas couldn't invest the amount needed to pursue a full-length animation so Pixar was spun out. Catmull and Lasseter founded it and received seed money from Jobs
6. Collaboration with Disney allowed Toy Story to be the first full-length computer animated film. Disney initially took too heavy a hand in it and it ruined the film early on because it was no longer Lasseter's vision. Disney wanted to lay people off and stop but Pixar refused. They rewrote much of it, came back to Disney and then got the green light
7. Toy Story was extremely successful but due to unfavorable terms with Disney, if Pixar's next movie wasn't a huge success, they'd go bankrupt. So, they soon after went public - "it tastes even sweeter when it takes 10 years." - Steve Jobs
8. Many companies who release an uber successful first product go onto release a not so successful second product because didn't truly understand why first was successful, get over ambitious. Getting through second film was Pixar's tipping point
9. The important thing is not the idea, it is the people behind it and how they work together

[John Lasseter: A Day in the Life](#)

[25 Years of Pixar Animation](#)

[Pixar: 25 Magic Moments](#)

1. Don't start with a story in mind, it's more of a discovery process

2. Never think "villain" - always think, "what is this guy's thinking?"

[Pixar Theatrical Shorts](#)

[Inside: Pixar](#)