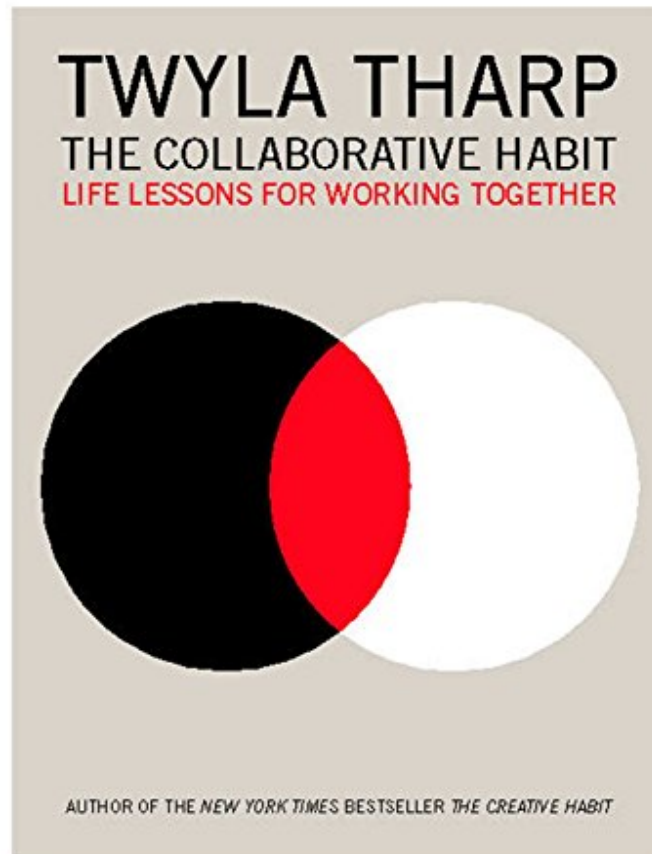


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The Collaborative Habit: Life Lessons for Working Together

Twyla Tharp

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Twyla Tharp : The Collaborative Habit: Life Lessons for Working Together before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Collaborative Habit: Life Lessons for Working Together:

2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. "In the end, all collaborations are love stories"...at least the best of them are, and they must be By Robert Morris As is my custom when a new year begins, I recently re-read this book and The Creative Habit while preparing questions for interviews of thought leaders. The insights that Twyla Tharp shares in them are, if anything, more valuable now than when the books were first published. It would be a mistake to ignore the reference to "habit" in their titles because almost three decades of research conducted by K. Anders Ericsson and his associates at Florida State University clearly indicate that, on average, at least 10,000 hours of must be invested in "deliberate," iterative practice under strict and expert supervision to achieve peak performance, be it playing a game such as chess or a musical instrument such as the violin. Natural talent is important, of course, as is luck. However, with rare exception, it takes about ten years of sustained, focused, supervised, and (yes) habitual practice to master the

skills that peak performance requires. Tharp is both a dancer and a choreographer and thus brings two authoritative, indeed enlightened perspectives to her discussion of the life lessons for working together. Many of the same requirements for effective collaboration on classic Disney animated films such as Snow White and Pinocchio must also be accommodated when members of an orchestra and of a ballet company collaborate on a performance of Stravinsky's *The Firebird*. Tharp characterizes herself as a "career collaborator" who identifies problems, organizes them, and solves them by working with others. Many of the stories she shares in this book "involve the world of dance, but you don't have to know anything about dance to get the pint. Work is work." Her book, she suggests, "is a field guide to a lit of issues that surface when you are working in a collaborative environment." She proceeds to explain why collaboration is important to her - "and, I'll bet, to you." Her narrative is enriched by dozens of memorable anecdotes from her career as dancer/choreographer but almost any reader can identify with her experiences, especially with her struggles. She addresses subjects and related issues that include What collaboration is and why it matters (also what it isn't) How and why collaborations challenge and change us (for better or worse) How to work effectively with a "remote" collaborator Note: Given the latest communication technologies (e.g. Cisco's TelePresence), "remote" does not mean "distant" but physical separation makes mutual respect and trust even more important to those involved. How to collaborate with an institution by overcoming problems with infrastructure, intermediaries, and a "deeply engrained" culture How to collaborate with a community (e.g. an audience) How to collaborate with friends (there's both "good news" and "bad news") In the final chapter, "Flight School: Before Your Next Collaboration," Tharp stresses the importance of involving others in our efforts. "By standing in our way and confronting us, talking with us as friends [who care enough to tell us what we may not want to hear] or by collaborating with us, other people can help us grind our flaws to more manageable size. For example, my lifelong collaboration with Frank Sinatra." I'll say no more about that. Read the book to learn more. As is also true of *The Creative Habit*, this is a book to re-read at least once a year, if not more frequently. Beyond its immense entertainment value, it offers rock-solid advice on collaboration, a human relationship that is more important now than ever before in every area of our society. Thank you, Twyla Tharp, for so much...including the fact that you are Twyla Tharp and share so much of yourself in your books and even more in the art you continue to create. Bravo! * * * Twyla Tharp, one of America's greatest choreographers, began her career in 1965, and has created more than 130 dances for her company as well as for the Joffrey Ballet, The New York City Ballet, Paris Opera Ballet, London's Royal Ballet, and American Ballet Theatre. She has won two Emmy awards for television's *Baryshnikov* by Tharp program, and a Tony Award for the Broadway musical *Movin' Out*. The recipient of a MacArthur Fellowship, she was inducted into the American Academy of Arts Sciences in 1993 and was made an honorary member of the American Academy of Arts and Letters in 1997. She lives and works in New York City. Her books include *Push Comes to Shove: An Autobiography* (1992) as well as *The Creative Habit* and, more recently, *The Collaborative Habit: Life Lessons for Working Together*, also published by Simon Schuster (2009). The last two are available in a paperbound edition. 0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Life is filled with failed collaborations - read and find splendid remedies By Suzanne Hogan Almost as fantastic as the author - Twyla Tharp is an American icon with a sharp eye and ability to articulate the unspoken realities of what it takes to create and maintain productive collaborations. Everyone can learn vital life, work, relationship lessons from this book. 2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. Helpful Nuggets By S. Houg While much of the content consists of anecdotes from Tharp's career, helpful nuggets are there for the attentive reader. It's not a how-to manual, rather a collection of personal learnings which can be transferred to many settings.

In a career that has spanned four decades, choreographer Twyla Tharp has collaborated with great musicians, designers, thousands of dancers, and almost a hundred companies. She's experienced the thrill of shared achievement and has seen what happens when group efforts fizzle. Her professional life has been -- and continues to be -- one collaboration after another. In this practical sequel to her national bestseller *The Creative Habit*, Tharp explains why collaboration is important to her -- and can be for you. She shows how to recognize good candidates for partnership and how to build one successfully, and analyzes dysfunctional collaborations. And although this isn't a book that promises to help you deepen your romantic life, she suggests that the lessons you learn by working together professionally can help you in your personal relationships. These lessons about planning, listening, organizing, troubleshooting, and using your talents and those of your coworkers to the fullest are not limited to the arts; they are the building blocks of working with others, like if you're stuck in a 9-to-5 job and have an unhelpful boss. Tharp sees collaboration as a daily practice, and her book is rich in examples from her career. Starting as a twelve-year-old teaching dance to her brothers in a small town in California and moving through her work as a fledgling choreographer in New York, she learns lessons that have enriched her collaborations with Billy Joel, Jerome Robbins, Mikhail Baryshnikov, Bob Dylan, Elvis Costello, David Byrne, Richard Avedon, Milos Forman, Norma Kamali, and Frank Sinatra. Among the surprising and inspiring points Tharp makes in *The Collaborative Habit*: -Nothing forces change more dramatically than a new partnership. -In a good collaboration, differences between partners mean that one plus one will always equal more than two. A good collaborator is easier to find than a good friend. If you've got a true friendship, you want to protect that. To work together is to risk it. -Everyone who uses e-mail is a virtual collaborator. -

Getting involved with your collaborator's problems may distract you from your own, but it usually leads to disaster. - When you have history, you have ghosts. If you're returning to an old collaboration, begin at the beginning. No evocation of old problems and old solutions. -Tharp's conclusion: What we can learn about working creatively and in harmony can transform our lives, and our world.

From BooklistFace it, "teamwork" has become an overused, overdone, even overwhelming business word—formalized in sports and extended to the predominantly male corporate world. Yet running as undertones throughout this latest contribution from world-famed choreographer and author Tharp (*Push Comes to Shove* 1993 and *The Creative Habit* 2006), is the sense that it's more than time for a kinder, gentler, and wiser take on working together. In 2009 and beyond, that word is "collaboration"; writing primarily from the arts perspective, she weaves stories in and out of her points, as in collaboration should be a challenge and change, vis-à-vis her partnership with Mikhail Baryshnikov; or underscoring how to collaborate with a community is her tale of creating two ballets for the Pacific. Every chapter also features a collaborator or two, highlighting lessons to learn and listen to, from Dukers' longtime basketball coach Mike Kryzyzewski to scientists Marie and Pierre Curie. If collaboration, as Tharp claims, is truly the buzzword of the millennium, then consider her as standard-bearer, motivator, and philosopher. --Barbara Jacobs

About the Author Twyla Tharp, one of America's greatest choreographers, began her career in 1965, and has created more than 130 dances for her company as well as for the Joffrey Ballet, The New York City Ballet, Paris Opera Ballet, London's Royal Ballet, and American Ballet Theatre. She has won two Emmy awards for television's Baryshnikov by Tharp, and a Tony Award for the Broadway musical *Movin' Out*. The recipient of a MacArthur Fellowship, she was inducted into the American Academy of Arts Sciences in 1993 and was made an honorary member of the American Academy of Arts and Letters in 1997. She lives and works in New York City.

Excerpt. copy; Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved. Chapter 1 What It Is, Why It Matters, Why It's the Future I'm a choreographer who makes dances that are performed on stages around the world. It's just as accurate to say I'm a career collaborator. That is, I identify problems, organize them, and solve them by working with others. Many of the stories I'll be telling involve the world of dance, but you don't have to know anything about dance to get the point. Work is work. I define collaboration as people working together -- sometimes by choice, sometimes not. Sometimes we collaborate to jump-start creativity; other times the focus is simply on getting things done. In each case, people in a good collaboration accomplish more than the group's most talented members could achieve on their own. Here's a classic example of someone who identified a problem and worked with others to solve it. The year was 1962. The problem was a new play, *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum*. The collaborator was Jerome Robbins, the choreographer and director who later became my good friend and coworker. As *A Funny Thing* was completing its pre-Broadway tour, no one was laughing. Not Stephen Sondheim, who wrote the music and lyrics. Not veteran director George Abbott. Certainly not producer Hal Prince and the play's backers. And, most important of all, not the audience. At the Washington previews, just three weeks before the New York opening, audiences were fleeing the theater. By the time the curtain came down, the theater was often only half full. And yet, on paper, *A Funny Thing* should have been a huge hit -- the creative team couldn't have been more distinguished. What was wrong? No one knew. What to do? That they knew. When a show has script trouble, it's common for the producers to bring in a "play doctor." In business, he'd be called a consultant. I'd call him a collaborator -- someone who works with others to solve a problem. The doctor they called in was Jerome Robbins, who came to Washington from Los Angeles, where he had just collected an Academy Award for *West Side Story*. He watched a performance -- and by intermission, not only had he analyzed the problem, he had a solution. *A Funny Thing*, Robbins said, was a farce inspired by the comedies of Plautus, a Roman playwright. But Plautus lived from 254 to 184...before Christ. How many theatergoers knew who he was? Or what kind of plays he wrote? And, most of all, who knew what kind of play *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum* was supposed to be? Jerome Robbins offered simple, commonsense advice: It's a comedy. Tell them that. Sondheim quickly wrote an opening number called "Comedy Tonight" -- "Something convulsive / Something repulsive / Something for everyone: a comedy tonight!" -- and once ticket buyers knew what they were supposed to do, they laughed. The New York reviews were cheers for an "uninhibited romp," and *A Funny Thing* played 964 performances on Broadway before going off to Hollywood and becoming a hit movie. Clearly, it's a good idea to tell people what to expect. Here's what you can expect from this book: a field guide to a lot of the issues that surface when you are working in a collaborative environment. I'll explain why collaboration is important to me -- and, I'll bet, to you. I'll show you how to recognize good candidates to work with and how you build a successful collaboration -- and I'll share what it feels like to be trapped in a dysfunctional one. And, finally, although this isn't a book that promises to help you find love or deepen your romantic life, I suspect that some of what you may learn from these pages can help you in your personal relationships. In each case, because collaboration isn't an airy concept but a practice that's found in our daily reality, I'll be light on ideas and heavy on stories. Collaboration is how most of our ancestors used to work and live, before machines came along and fragmented society. Time to plant the fields? Everybody pitched in and got it done. Harvesttime? The community raced to get the crops in before the rains came. Where were those crops stored? In barns built by teams of neighbors. In the cities, the same spirit applied. Anonymous

craftsmen spent their lives building cathedrals that wouldn't be completed for generations. Michelangelo is celebrated for the Sistine Chapel; in fact, he supervised a dozen unacknowledged assistants. Even one of the greatest composers, Johann Sebastian Bach, chose to deflect credit for his compositions, writing at the bottom of each of his pieces "SDG," for Soli Deo Gloria -- to God alone the glory. By the twentieth century, only a few self-isolated sects practiced the collaborative tradition. Blame it on wars that killed millions, the atomic bomb, Freud, or any combination of factors you choose -- there's no shortage of reasons. The result is that most of us grew up in a culture that applauded only individual achievement. We are, each of us, generals in an ego-driven "army of one," each the center of an absurd cosmos, taking such happiness as we can find. Collaboration? Why bother? You only live once; grab whatever you can. But now more and more of us are realizing that the brilliant CEO, the politician who keeps his own counsel, and the lone hero are yesterday's role models. The media may still love them, but our new heroes are men and women who know how to gather allies, build teams, and work together toward shared goals. Name an enterprise, and you'll find levels of collaboration that were unthinkable just a few years ago. The real success stories of our time are about joint efforts: sports teams, political campaigns, businesses, causes. Collaboration is the buzzword of the new millennium. Like many of you, I went to school when victory meant raising your hand first and shouting out the answer -- school was a war zone that rewarded only the brightest and most aggressive. But now learning is collaborative; children work together in groups to solve problems. They solve them faster this way, and without winners or losers. And in doing so, they gain valuable life skills. Consider the Internet, which has dramatically increased our ability to communicate with friends and associates -- and millions of strangers around the world. Now we can form networks and create collaborations without start-up money, an infrastructure, or even an office. Result? Our basic urge to work in groups can be realized more easily now than at any time in modern history. Thanks to the Internet, a battered economy, and a profound shift in personal values, a notion that was once heresy -- that the wisdom of a smart group is greater than the brainpower of its smartest member -- is increasingly accepted in every discipline and every profession and at every age and stage of life. On the Internet, someone posts an article, then others comment. With the addition of new facts and points of view, readers benefit -- and by contributing to the conversation, they become part of a smart community. In business, "crowdsourcing" -- assigning a task that used to be done by a single worker to whole communities -- has become a powerful tool in the product-development process. Dell Computers, for example, created an outreach called IdeaStorm to get ideas and feedback from customers. So far, the company has used almost three hundred of their suggestions -- keyboards that light up in the dark, more color choices, longer battery life -- in its new products. Starbucks has launched a Web site called My Starbucks Idea to gather consumer brainstorming, filter them through management, and then have the coffee company's customers vote on the best ones. The site has collected seventy thousand suggestions. In politics, the 2008 presidential campaign of Barack Obama proved that the most powerful word in his slogan, "Yes we can," was we. Until 2008, most politicians used the Internet only for fund-raising. Barack Obama, a former community organizer, saw that "social networking" could mean more than the exchange of trivial blasts of personal information by virtual "friends." And he used the Web to build a movement that transformed interest into participation. Obama's site had double the traffic of opponent John McCain's. Four times as many visitors to YouTube watched Obama's videos. He had five times as many Facebook "friends." Three million people signed up for his text messages -- and he sent them fifteen to twenty a month. And in the last four days of the campaign, Obama campaign volunteers made three million personal phone calls. Experts say that no political campaign, no matter how well funded, could generate that much content on its own. Obama's core Internet team consisted of just eleven people. The rest of the work was done by highly committed supporters who took the communication devices they used every day and repurposed them to rally their personal networks for a common cause. In sports it has always been about the team. Michael Jordan started winning scoring titles in 1986. But the Chicago Bulls were not winning championships. Bulls Coach Phil Jackson knew why: "Scoring champions don't win championships." The team brought in some stronger players. And although Michael Jordan was already recognized as the greatest player in the history of basketball, he started moving the ball around. In 1991, the Bulls won their first championship in franchise history. That year, Jordan was voted the most valuable player in the finals in part because he scored thirty points in the deciding game -- but also because, in the same game, he passed the ball to teammates for ten assists. You are probably not a professional basketball player or a politician or the proprietor of an Internet news site. You probably don't run a high-tech company or make educational policy for a school district. But in the last few years, you've certainly been exposed to the noti...