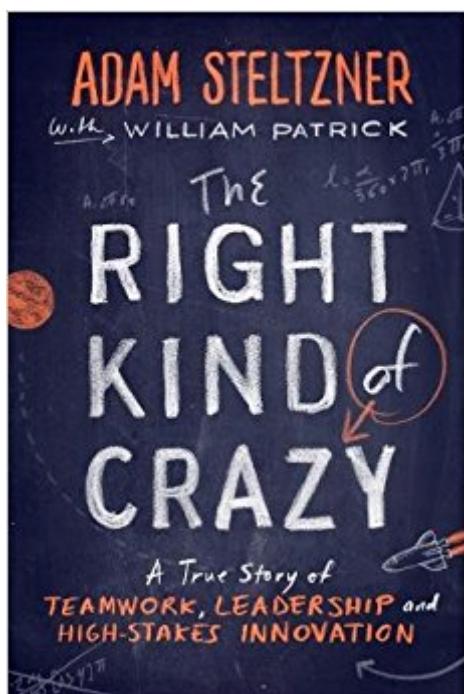


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The Right Kind Of Crazy: A True Story Of Teamwork, Leadership, And High-Stakes Innovation



Synopsis

From Adam Steltzner, who led the Entry, Descent, and Landing team in landing the Curiosity rover on the surface of Mars, comes a profound book about breakthrough innovation in the face of the impossible. The Jet Propulsion Laboratory (JPL) is home to some of history's most jaw-dropping feats of engineering. When NASA needed to land Curiosity, a 2,000-pound, \$2.5 billion rover, on the surface of Mars, 140 million miles away, they turned to JPL. Steltzner's team couldn't test their kooky solution, the Sky Crane. They were on an unmissable deadline, and the world would be watching when they succeeded or failed. At the helm of this effort was an unlikely rocket scientist and accidental leader, Adam Steltzner. After barely graduating from high school, he followed his curiosity to the local community college to find out why the stars moved. Soon he discovered an astonishing gift for math and physics. After getting his Ph.D. he ensconced himself within JPL, NASA's decidedly unbureaucratic cousin, where success in a mission is the only metric that matters. The Right Kind of Crazy is a first-person account of innovation that is relevant to any-one working in science, art, or technology. For instance, Steltzner describes: How his team learned to switch from fear-based to curiosity-based decision making; How to escape the Dark Room, the creative block caused by fear, uncertainty, and the lack of a clear path forward; How to tell when we're too in love with our own ideas to be objective about them; and, conversely, when to fight for them. How to foster mutual respect within teams while still bashing bad ideas. The Right Kind of Crazy is a book for anyone who wants to channel their craziness into creativity, balance discord and harmony, and find a signal in a flood of noise.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

"Steltzner's enthusiastic, passionately written memoir is an insider's guide to engineering wizardry and a testament to the effectiveness of team-minded engagement, rational problem-solving, and the concept of 'making ideas reality.' A motivational journey for armchair astronauts and readers fascinated by the unlimited wingspan of human potential." - **KIRKUS** REVIEWS

Steltzner is a genetic cross between Einstein and Elvis Costello who has mastered the art of managing complex tribes of humans. The Right Kind of Crazy is a fabulous "and ongoing" story.

JUAN ENRIQUEZ, coauthor of *Evolving Ourselves*

Crazy ideas stay crazy until they become reality. The problem is, it takes a lot of people working together to turn crazy into amazing. Adam Steltzner should know "he did it. In this book he shows us that doing what others think is impossible takes more than grit and courage. It takes the ability to inspire people . . . It takes leadership."

SIMON SINEK, optimist and author of *Start with Why* and *Leaders Eat Last*

Adam Steltzner not only does great engineering, he also teaches it and he can lead a great engineering team such as the one that landed Curiosity on Mars. All that embedded in a gaudy personality and astute observer makes for a book that is as delightful as it is instructive.

STEWART BRAND, president, The Long Now Foundation

How does a band of engineers get a 2,000 -pound robot to the surface of Mars? The Right Kind of Crazy is proof that with the right kind of leader, a team of determined dreamers can accomplish just about anything.

BEN SILBERMANN, cofounder, Pinterest

This book shares Adam's journey from juvenile delinquent to landing on Mars. In its pages you will enter the mind of a fearless genius rocket scientist and discover the power of intuition, and how creativity and courage are as important as math. It is a must-read for scientists and artists alike.

TOM SACHS, artist

A gripping account of the Curiosity mission, and some fascinating insights into the engineering principles and analytics involved.

MICHIKO KAKUTANI, The New York Times

ADAM STELTZNER is an engineer at the Jet Propulsion Laboratory. He worked on several flight missions, including Galileo, Cassini, and Mars Pathfinder, and the Mars Exploration Rover project. He was the phase lead and development manager for the Mars Science Laboratory and the Curiosity rover's Entry, Descent, and Landing phase; he also helped design, build, and test the Sky Crane landing system. He lives in Pasadena, California.

WILLIAM PATRICK has cowritten

memoirs by Sidney Poitier, Larry Flynt, Tamara Mellon, Robert Schuller, and Amy Robach

I have read many management books in my time, but this comes across as both one of the most honest and down to earth treatments I have seen. Instead of dispensing general bromides about managing groups, Adam Steltzner gives us an intimate inside look at the team who put together the Entry Descent and Landing systems for the Curiosity Rover. In addition to the technical details, he aptly describes the very human side of having the right people, the right goals, and the right determination to do something that is incredibly hard. His own personal story of how he ended up doing amazing things is itself a compelling example of overcoming a late start, setting goals, and perseverance. I had the opportunity to hear Adam speak when he visited Harvard Medical School, and his unique brand of charismatic leadership was evident. Reading this book, you will learn quite a bit about an amazing technical achievement and at the same time, how to bring out the best in the diverse and talented people dedicated to a mission.

It is a very interesting story about working in teams to accomplish engineering tasks where the unknowns can be large and the cost of an error can be complete failure of the task. Mix in that people (not a person) are the source of the solution. Lots of insights on one way to work through these issues. I am part of the team that teaches our capstone design experience to students and find there are lots of supporting stories that can be used for motivation from this book. Kind of a modern day version of **Soul of a New Machine**.

I heard the author on a radio talk show and was immediately interested in his day job... building spacecraft to land on Mars. But after starting to read the book, I realized there were so many parallels to my day job...leading smart creative engineers in a team environment to accomplish great things. This book is as much a leadership book as it is a first-person account of an amazing series of NASA JPL mars landings! I can only hope there is a sequel one day...I felt like I was inside the JPL and I want more!

I was familiar with Adam Steltzner from the Curiosity program, and was hoping to get some good tech about that lander. But this book is mainly about Adam, his life and career and his take on JPL and NASA. He really gets into team building and how to approach projects and problems that seem darn near impossible. So the book is "good of a kind." If you are a technical manager, I would highly recommend this book. But there are no pictures and not much high tech detail.

I have read numerous books on leadership but this one was particularly enjoyable for me as an Engineer because it is set in an engineering context. As such, I can relate particularly well to the leadership challenges Adam faced. There is a lot of focus on getting the environment/culture right to make good decisions. While most of us won't have such an extreme work environment where failure is a) so expensive and b) very public I think we can all learn from what has worked for Adam and JPL.

Good book, easy read. Talks about the development of the skycrane landing system for Curiosity from the view point of the lead engineer who was also around for the earlier missions. This is nice as it helps you see the bigger picture of how the skycrane was selected and some earlier lessons learned/problems solved that allowed the skycrane to happen.

This a great book that gives you background on Adam as well as Curiosity, Spirt and Opportunity which is what I was expecting. What I was not expecting was the lessons on managing teams and people. Great book that is very technical and detailed but not in a way that loses the lay man. Adam is actually humble and funny in his writing and I highly recommend this book to any space nerd.

Really well written. A very insightful look into the unorthodox path of the career of a super smart tinkerer. This book gives amazing details into the inner workings of JPL and it's role into Mars missions. I love the practical advice about managing people as well as into the process for solving very difficult problems. Highly recommend this book.

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