

Praise for  
***The Language of Man. Learning to Speak Creativity***

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“Within the first few pages of his fascinating new book, *The Language of Man*, Larry Robertson shatters deeply-held myths that creativity and genius are the birthright of a mere handful of elites, bringing the vaunted notion of genius out of the clouds and into our everyday lives. In a carefully constructed argument, backed by wide-ranging research from neuroscience to philosophy and the engaging stories of some of the most creative people on the planet, Robertson instead shows how creativity, more than anything, is a mindset, a habit, a choice, and the limitless and necessary birthright of us all. The accessibility of creativity this book reveals and the possibility it opens our eyes to are utterly captivating.”

**Brigid Schulte**

*New York Times* bestselling author, *Overwhelmed: Work, Love, and Play When No One has the Time*  
Director, Better Life Lab, New America

“*The Language of Man* is founded on a powerful idea: that creativity is not the privilege of a few exceptional minds, but a language that is our natural birthright. Want to become more fluent in the language of creativity? This hopeful, insightful book will show you how.”

**Daniel H. Pink**

*New York Times* bestselling author, *A Whole New Mind* and *DRIVE*

“Author Larry Robertson attests to the creative capacity of every person while also probing what we can learn from the most recognized and successful creators in a wide variety of fields. He draws out strategies, habits, and practices that we can all use. This fresh and surprising approach makes his book both wide-ranging and bracingly concrete.”

**Liz Lerman**

Author of *Hiking the Horizontal*  
choreographer, educator, MacArthur Fellow

“Great books should push the reader to rethink their identity and modify daily practices. This is the province of *The Language of Man*. The reason this is a necessary book for anyone interested in cultivating their own creativity or leading others, is that the author synthesizes ideas from different fields to distill where breakthroughs come from, how to become more open-minded, and what it requires to sit at the edges of knowns and unknowns. To be honest,

the majority of books on creativity rehash the same research and trite, contrived, and appalling obvious suggestions. Then there is this—mental ambrosia.”

**Dr. Todd B. Kashdan**

Author, *Curious?* and *The Upside of Your Dark Side*  
Professor of Psychology, George Mason University

“People are hungry for a connection, for meaning, for a way—their own way—to explore “what could be.” In a word, they want to learn to create. And they don't want a primer on what's already out there, something others too often fail to recognize. Once again, Larry Robertson digs deeper, almost to the core of what it means to be human, and delivers what we really want.”

**Robert Egger**

Author, *Begging for Change*  
Founder, DC Central Kitchen and LA Kitchen

“As a book about creativity should be, Larry Robertson’s *The Language of Man* is innovative and unique. Wide-ranging and compelling research is just the beginning. It’s the author’s focus on what creativity is like in actual practice, not just in theory, that makes this book stand out. Robertson does more than help us understand, he helps each of us create. Throughout the book we’re introduced to a wide range of truly creative individuals who quickly become personal guides and mentors. Quilting it all together are Robertson’s rare abilities to see patterns, discern simple truths, and tell entertaining and compelling stories, all of which make this book necessary and truly enjoyable. *The Language of Man* is a highly recommended, essential read if what you want is to create something valuable and original. And deep inside, you know that’s exactly what you want.”

**JJ Ramberg**

Host, MSNBC Your Business  
Co-founder, GoodShop

“Fantastic and extraordinarily valuable. By 'reimagining creativity' as something fundamental to the human endeavor and an innate ability triggered by openness to the beauty and wonder of this world, Larry Robertson elegantly reframes the entire debate about how to foster innovation and genius in us all. *The Language of Man* turns the discussion of creative and innovative capacity inside-out, arguing that these are not rarified talents of an elite cadre of geniuses, but within reach if not intrinsic to every human. While he interviews many of the most prominent “cultural creatives” of our era, Robertson’s own insights are among the most valuable and far reaching, and his rare gift for asking questions and pursuing the unexplored is bound to release the entrepreneurial and exploratory spirit within us all.”

**Gary Nabhan**

Author, *Cross-pollinations: The Marriage of Science and Poetry*  
Co-founder, Native Seed/SEARCH and MacArthur Fellow

“This deeply original work will probably shatter your most familiar assumptions about creativity—what it is, where it exists, and who is capable of putting it to innovative use. But then again, that’s exactly what breakthrough ideas and empowering innovations do. In that sense and in every sense, *The Language of Man* is a book about discovery, not just what the author discovered, but what each of us can discover. Importantly, it’s a book about value too, how to use our creative capacity to see value in all its many forms and more important still, how to use our creativity to seize it. Rather than discover some trite or stagnant “formula” for creativity, in *The Language of Man* Larry Robertson opens us up to the mindset and the habit of seeing the possible—something every one of us needs to embrace now more than ever.”

**Gene Kahn**

Founder, Cascadian Farms and Small Planet Foods

“Far too often we take our own creative sense for granted or just ignore it. Knowing how to recognize and verbalize to yourself that you in fact are creative is the first step in bringing it to your world. *The Language of Man* is a roadmap we all would do well to follow.”

**Darden Smith**

Singer, Songwriter

Co-founder, Songwriting With: Soldiers

“Robertson argues that creativity is not magical pixie dust that touches the chosen few, but an innate human trait that, like a muscle, either becomes enfeebled from disuse or strengthened and toned if deliberately exercised. This is decidedly a good thing, as, in the current environment, where change is accelerating at an unprecedented pace, the demand for creativity as a survival skill is critical. Robertson’s insightful book meets an urgent need to better understand the nature of creativity, how we can all expand our creative capacity, and how this powerful force can be harnessed for good.”

**Diana Wells**

President, Ashoka

“For too long we have been led to believe that people are either creative or they are not—that it is an innate talent that exists in rare people and can only be minimally improved. That never seemed right to me. Throughout a career in technology, retail, and consumer products I have constantly asked myself and my teams: “Can creativity be taught? Can it be greatly improved? And if so, how and what can we do as leaders to enable this in our organizations?”

“Larry Robertson answers the first two questions with a resounding yes, explodes the myth of the creative hero, and provides the process to recognize, unlock, and improve the creativity in all of us. He also delivers great insights on what we can do as leaders to enable this not just in ourselves, but also in our teams. His book will make you reconsider what you are doing and

why—and actually enable the innovation that so many organizations seek but so poorly understand.”

**John Hamlin**

Chair, Board of Directors, REI

“Larry Robertson has written a timely and important book. We are beset with too much frozen thinking with local, regional, and global crises all around us. We are not taught the creativity open to “everyman”. Robertson’s book seeks to teach us how to be far more open, creative, and empowered. *The Language of Man* makes a critical contribution we all need.”

**Stuart Kauffman**

Author, *Humanity in a Creative Universe*

Complex Systems Researcher, MacArthur Fellow

“Creativity isn't just in the realm of a Picasso or a Hemingway or a Steve Jobs, Larry Robertson tells us in his thoughtful book. It's in all of us, as long as we're open to asking questions and thinking outside the box. Broadening our intellectual borders like a cunning fox and putting these ideas into practice like a focused hedgehog is what we're each built for and must do if what we want is our continued human progress.”

**Tom Bowman**

NPR Pentagon Reporter

Edward R. Murrow Award Winner

“I have always been moved by “the power of the story.” *The Language of Man* reminds us of the power in each of us to tell our own story and to create. The insights shared brought to mind a still vivid memory: As my grandmother was dying, she pulled me close to her, and in her thick Cajun accent, recited who she was: Hattie, the mother of Elaine, Raymond, and Margie—her story of her greatest creations. Rather than simply explain creativity or tell you how to create, this book offers reasons to feel inspired and the simple power of discovering what creativity means to you.”

**Lorna Elaine Bourg**

Co-founder, President, CEO, Southern Mutual Help Association

MacArthur Fellow

“In this remarkable book, Robertson explores the nuances of creative thought and action, arguing that creativity is not the exclusive province of the “genius” or the “hero”, but rather, accessible to all of us. He urges the reader to be open to creativity, to have the courage to “come to the edge” and take the leap. He reminds us that we are all born with the capacity to be creative, although many of us have forgotten how. In a joyous celebration of inquiry and co-creation, he weaves insights and practices developed by creative “guides” into a beautiful paean to creative inquiry, inviting us all to dip our toes into the ocean of the creative process.

Ultimately, (Larry Robertson) has given us all a gift: a guide to finding the ways in which we can develop our own expression of what it means to be human . . .”

**Ellen Barry**

Founder, Legal Services for Prisoners with Children  
MacArthur Fellow

“*The Language of Man* is fascinating and so smart. It's about creativity in PRACTICE. Robertson uses neuroscience, philosophy, and the experiences of MacArthur Fellows (the "genius grant" awardees) to make a compelling case that we are wired to be creative. He doesn't just tell you that creativity is not the sole purview of a few fortunate people – he shows you.”

**Virginia Hume Onufer**

Contributor Huffington Post and the Weekly Standard

“The research behind *The Language of Man* and what Larry Robertson conveys live as well, is so rich with insight, so profound but at the same time so very practical. There's something about it that takes the greatness of outsized minds and makes it accessible for us mere mortals. I truly enjoyed this experience and can only imagine how much work it was to bring it to this digestible form. Thank you, Larry Robertson, for undertaking it so we can all benefit.”

**Lorig Armenian**

Sr. Director of Communication & Creative Services

“Creativity is a powerful and necessary force, something perhaps nowhere more important and true than when it comes to leadership – yes, leadership. While we may not naturally connect the two, at both the individual and organizational level leadership is about imagining and realizing the possible – two actions that quite literally define creativity. In his new book, Larry Robertson helps us see these things as never before, but more importantly, he empowers us to realize creativity's potential within each of us.

“From its eye-opening beginning story to the valuable insights it offers chapter after chapter to the very end, *The Language of Man: Learning to Speak Creativity* takes an unprecedented look at this topic. Rather than glorify isolated stories of the creative acts of others, the book reveals the shared elements across creativity, regardless of who applies them or where. Refreshingly, the book focuses on what creativity looks like in actual practice, thereby taking us beyond theory and into action. All of this and more make this exceptional book a necessary asset in any leader's arsenal.

“But it's seeing the lessons of the book play out live with actual leaders – as I have witnessed – that demonstrates just how spot on Robertson's wisdom is. Watching leaders across a broad spectrum work with these insights and be genuinely touched and transformed, further

amplifies the praise this book and this author deserve. Indeed, Robertson is a leader in his own right and, more importantly, a leader of leaders.”

**Betsy Frantz**  
President & CEO  
Leadership Center for Excellence

“In his exciting new book, thought leader and entrepreneur, Larry Robertson explores the myths and the truths about creativity. It’s not rare. It is available to us all. It is about the possible. It is a mindset. A habit. A choice.

“Chapter 7 alone, on asking questions, makes Larry’s book a “must-read.” I loved Larry's stories about The MacArthur Fellows - those anecdotes added so much depth and as I read, I found myself saying to my business colleagues, "Hey, listen to THIS!"

“As a person who's built her business around teaching networking skills to professionals, so much of what Larry writes about reinforces and further informs what I can give to my clients. For instance, Larry says: "We can adopt a mindset that, 'good things come to those who wait,' but invariably, time proves they do not . . ." (page 267) Larry goes on to point out that "like all creative practitioners, we must act in the direction of our dreams."

“No matter what your profession, what you're trying to create, this book will give the grounding and the tools to make it happen.”

**Lynne Waymon**  
Founder, Contacts Count

“As an executive coach for CEO's, senior leaders and individuals on their own leadership journey, Larry Robertson's powerful and insightful work is now a "must read" in my own leadership library and one that I will not only recommend but will give to others.

“First and most importantly, his work and interviews with the MacArthur fellows shatter the long held myth that people are either creative or they are not. Through frameworks and concrete examples, he clearly articulates how creativity is a choice that each of us can and are able to make. His guidance through this book supports our ability to make it our own mindset in any field or endeavor we choose to reconnect with a passion and what is right in each one of us.

“This book has come at the most opportune moment in this time of change, transition, and

cognitive dissonance to inspire and sustain each of us to make the impact we desire.”

**Jan Gravel**  
Founder, President  
Janus Development

“While *The Language of Man* offers an extensive study of creativity, it is not a book that you want to skim through lightly. It's one you want to savor.

“As I closed the book, I realized there was a much larger purpose: That each of us, with the capability to be creative, can create the world we want. That now more than ever, the world needs the creative thinker.

“An incredibly thorough, informative and inspiring book! As a podcast host, I read 2-3 books a week and this is now amongst my favorites.”

**Jeffrey Shaw**  
Host, Creative Warriors Podcast

“As leaders, we are keenly aware of our environment – always dynamic and sometimes disruptive. Even with the ever-increasing pace, stress, and complexity of the world today, it's easy to get stuck in status quo rather than pursue a new direction that may initially challenge but ultimately allow us to thrive. So what will facilitate the transition between where we are and where we can make the biggest impact as leaders? How do we access our greatest creativity even at times where change is the new norm? This is what Larry Robertson answers in his new book.

“*The Language of Man* examines creativity across fields, skill sets, and individual creators. Larry reveals patterns and insights applicable to anyone, creating anywhere, anytime.

“It's a book meant not only to help you truly understand creativity, but to help you assess and increase your creative capacity.

“To this end, Larry interviewed nearly 70 MacArthur Fellows, recipients of the creative ‘genius’ award. They came from every field imaginable, and in the book you meet choreographers and corporate leaders, chemists and civil rights lawyers, conservationists and critical care physicians (just to list the C-level leadership roles!).

“Most importantly, strategies offered in this book are super practical and useful!

“If you're looking for a smart, engaging, practical guide to creativity I really encourage you to read *The Language of Man*.”

**Margarita Rozenfeld**  
Founder, Incite International

"Larry's work provides the best kind of inspiration, which is the matter-of-fact reminder that each of us has exactly what we need in order to manifest the very things we were meant to put into the world. He breaks it down and proves by notable example the value of pausing long enough to see what is possible and then to practice what is necessary to make it a reality."

**Annie Moyer**  
Sun and Moon Yoga Studio

"Larry Robertson's new book, *The Language of Man* is like fine chocolate - it deserves the time to be intentionally savored, rather than trying to swallow it in one big gulp!

"This book is a fascinating study of creativity. Robertson has done extensive research to reframe the conversation and give us access to the stories of "guides" who help us rethink the creative process and ignite our own creativity as a result. I LOVED the insights it provides and greatly appreciated the introduction to a multitude of additional resources and reading materials. Bravo!"

**Delia Sava**  
Founder, ArtBience

"This is a thought-provoking and inspiring book. Importantly, it also provides an actionable framework for "everyman" to tap into their potential to create, and reminds us that this potential resides in each of us. While creativity may be more dormant in some of us than others, Robertson exposes as "false" the notion that it is only for the select few.

"His examination of what it means to be human, and his emphasis that we all have the chance to pursue a "hero's journey" provided a needed kick in the pants for me to not waste time in getting after mine.

"I really enjoyed this book and highly recommend it."

**Blayne Smith**  
Operations Manager, Proctor & Gamble

"I recommend this book because it is substantive and real. Author Larry Robertson read the works and interviewed many MacArthur Fellows (recipients of the "genius award") to find out how they went about being creative. As in his first book, *A Deliberate Pause: Entrepreneurship and Its Moment in Human Progress*, Robertson realizes that the way we tell the story of



creative people (or entrepreneurs) leaves out how they really work. The stories are too trimmed down, too formulaic, too, well, not real.

“This book is a deep treatment of creativity and the book’s design mirrors the creative process that the MacArthur Fellows tend to use in their creative pursuits. The book appears not as “Five Steps to Creativity” or the “One Minute Creative”, but instead unfolds as a series of revelations. The Fellows are not the center piece, creativity as it happens is. Don’t expect to learn much about the lives of the Fellows and what makes them so genius. The premise of this book is: creativity is immanent, like our ability for language, in all of us, all the time. How do they access their creativity: that is the focus of this book.

“In telling the story of how the Fellows tap their (our) innate creativity, Robertson has written a very creative book, mirroring the creative processes he detected from his time and attention to the Fellows. A set of Simple Truths underpins the specific and liberal quotations from his interviews with the Fellows, with subtexts and subtleties embedded along the way.

“The book unfolds but not in a linear, stepwise fashion. It has layers and depth, more like how creativity happens, in small leaps, brief pauses, forward rushes, short retreats. This book reminds me a bit of Douglas Hofstadter’s *Godel, Escher, Bach: An Eternal Golden Braid*, or *Infinite Jest* by David Foster Wallace--recursive turns embedded in the curving path lead toward a deeper understanding. How do these famously creative people go about their creative lives? Much the way this book tells the story of what they do and how they are.

“If you want a superficial understanding of creativity, this is not your book. If you are curious about the essence of creativity from the lessons you could glean from spending time with the MacArthur Fellows, a deeper understanding, then buy this book. I say buy and not read, because you will want to come back to it time and again, as the deeper wisdom settles in and you feel ready for more.”

**Will Murray**  
Founder, Will Murray Company

“Of the many books I’ve read on creativity, *The Language of Man* is likely the most insightful, thorough, and imminently useful. On the one hand, it quilts together disparate insights and ideas like few other books does; on the other hand, it introduces new ideas and syntheses. The seventh chapter, “The Pattern and Power of Questions,” contains frameworks you’ll use daily to create breakthroughs and have more powerful conversations with yourself and others. It’s a slow read in the best of ways: the insights and simple truths revealed within catalyze reflection, wondering, and application.”

**Charlie Gilkey**  
Founder, Productive Flourishing  
Host, Creative Giants podcast

"Larry's writing is amazing. I love this book and find myself cheering on the ideas that come from it. I cringe when I hear someone say, 'I can't do it because I am not creative.' Larry gives me the language to connect with people and help them explore what is creativity and what is possible. Every part of this book can be savored and used to bring elements of creativity into the work that we do."

**Monica Phillips**

Founder, Spark Plug Lab  
Host, Powerful Conversations podcast

"As a senior citizen, I am empowered by this book to explore the "what's next" for my own creativity. The world has opened up around me as I am becoming a conscious noticer. This book is about me as you will find it about you. MacArthur Fellows who span the generations even beyond mine guide you through how they reached their breakthroughs.

"But more important and powerful, the Author offers "simple truths" as a foundation for the creativity within each of us. He has a unique gift for seeing patterns we too often miss. And, he sees the "human question" as the driving force for delving deeper into your creative potential.

"*The Language of Man* belongs to ALL of us, not just a chosen few. Read it as your guide in finding more creativity and potential than you ever thought you had! Thank you, Larry Robertson!"

**Judith Davis**

President, CEO Judith Robertson Enterprises

"If you are passionate about increasing your impact in the world then definitely read *The Language of Man. Learning to Speak Creativity*.

"There really is something special about this book, especially in the way it extends beyond delivering information to creating an experiential journey for the reader. In the process of reading I really came to both think and feel differently about my own creative activity and work in the world, as a strategic advisor, program leader, administrator, i/entrepreneur, and educator.

"*The Language of Man* provides a master class in creative practice. It builds a broad and deep foundation, and pulls together the insights of contemporary creatives from an incredibly broad range of disciplines and fields. The author provides very useable frameworks for increasing your creative output whatever domain you work in.

"As with all great writing, the book comes across as honest (in addition to be and extremely well written stylistically), and this frank quality (read no hype) is one of it's finest qualities. Some of the most profound moments I had reading in came in understanding related to practicing creativity as a habit and how in those practices I could address some of the major

roadblocks in my current work environments. These insights emerge from the trenches of the many guides that fill the book from end to end, most especially the author himself who creates a dialogue with the reader throughout that rings with authenticity. The book debunks myths, contains a lot of actionable wisdom, and provides multiple forms of evidence for its arguments and conclusions. The insights of the MacArthur fellows who provide primary source material for the book pour out like a waterfall: there is more here than you could possibly absorb in a single reading. It's a reference work (something you will want to refer to often), a guidebook (think trail guide), and a how-to book (i.e., a how-to actually increase your own creativity).

"Note: Chapter Seven: "The Power and Pattern of Questions" by "If you want to understand creativity, Larry Robertson's *The Language of Man. Learning to Speak Creativity*, is the foundational book that puts the broad subject in perspective.

"Until now, my recommended books on creativity were the late Gordon MacKenzie's *Orbiting the Giant Hairball* and *Creativity, Inc.* *Orbiting* is about breaking rules and cutting through bureaucracy. *Creativity, Inc.*, is about leading people to new heights. Both books are exceptional and enjoyable.

"But, to truly understand creativity, its role in our lives and what it takes to be more creative, I recommend you read Robertson's book first. *The Language of Man* is thoughtful and insightful. We are meant to be creative. We can be more creative and based on interviews with 66 MacArthur Fellows, Robertson shares how creativity played a role in the lives of each of these exceptionally talented people who pursued different fields of endeavor. Their stories gave me a smorgasbord of options that I can draw upon to become even more creative."

**Jim Shaffer**

Author, *The Leadership Solution*

"As a podcast host I have a chance to interview a lot of very smart, well respected authors (at this point over 200) and read their books. I have to say this is perhaps the best take on creativity I've ever read. It makes you look at the subject in a new way, while also keeping your attention throughout by using great examples and captivating stories. Highly recommend!"

**Chris Stemp**

Co-founder, Host Smart People Podcast

"Robertson does as brilliant job of creating a common language for creativity and everything it involves. He talks about the critical role of openness (something of a societal deficit today), the power of good questions (which given Robertson's penchant for precision in defining terms is very enlightening), and best of all, rather than provide a specific formula for creativity, he offers a practical framework that anyone can apply. In short, Robertson helps you re-imagine creativity. Enjoy!"

**Leo Bottary**

Co-author, *The Power of Peers*

“This is one of those books that you'll have to read more than once because of its depth. As someone who spends a lot of time research and writing about creativity, I was really blown away by the ideas in the book and how poetically the sentences are crafted. If you're a creative person or want to be one, read this book.”

**Srinivas Rao**

Host, Unmistakable Creative podcast

Author, *Unmistakable: Why Only Is Better Than Best*

“First what this wonderful book is not: it is not a top ten theoretical list overlaid with useless ten-dollar words like others I have read on this topic. Instead, it is a thoughtful work that takes an experience-based approach to understanding the creative process. So smart to use MacArthur Fellows to mine for real-world perspectives on this fascinating subject. I was captivated by the story-telling as much as by the lessons learned, and frankly couldn't wait to get to each successive section...much like reading a compelling novel.

“Robertson helps the reader to see that creativity is not limited to the mythical “lucky ones” who just get it, or to those geniuses who have been given the secret code to the innovation room. Creativity is not just a part of the human condition, but rather an inherently defining characteristic. Perhaps more importantly, Robertson contextualizes creativity within our present-day lives, taking into account the values we hold dear, both individually and as a collective. And I so enjoyed the discussion of the importance of beauty. Not something I'd really focused on before.

“If you're interested in creativity, you will truly enjoy *The Language of Man*. It's a great read.”

**Mark Garay**

Chief of Staff, US Mergers & Acquisitions Services

Deloitte

“Having interviewed 66 MacArthur Fellows (aka “genius” award winners), Larry Robertson comes to a remarkably gratifying conclusion – creativity is not an innate talent only granted to a few fortunate recipients but instead is a skill set most of us simply forget how to access.

“The news gets better as you get deeper into Robertson's book, *“The Language of Man. Learning to Speak Creativity”* as he offers up specific suggestions that will increase your creativity regardless of your age or professional inclinations. Part of the trick is asking better questions and really truly listening to the answers. Another part is allowing time for play and what Robertson describes as the “purposeful accident,” the creative discoveries that are enabled by playing games and other seemingly circuitous activities.

“Even for those of us in so-called creative professions, Robertson’s book offers a refreshing set of tools along with the reminder that creativity is less of a process and more of a framework to free your mind to solve otherwise vexing challenges. [Note: I had the pleasure of interviewing Larry for my podcast series Renegade Thinkers Unite -- he was both an inspiring and instructive guest which made me want to read his book that much more.]

**Drew Neisser**

Host, Renegade Thinkers Unite podcast

“This is, hands down, one of the best and most powerful books I've ever read. Very seldom do books really make me get involved when I read them, but this book has had me break out the highlighter and notepad to journal some thoughts and build on them on my own because this book has a way to bring it to your life perspective. There is an extraordinary amount of information that is so intriguing and captivating. I highly recommend this book, and will without a doubt talk about it throughout my personal life on a daily basis! I truly hope you enjoy this book just as much as I have!”

**Christina Chamra**

Project Manager, IQVIA

“As this book wonderfully illustrates, creative is not a muse whispering in your ear. It's a habit. Effort. And connecting the dots in what we perceive and experience to create a third more powerful construct. Can you amp up your creative output by 10 fold? Read Larry's book and learn how. I bet you can.”

**Park Howell**

Host, Business of Story podcast