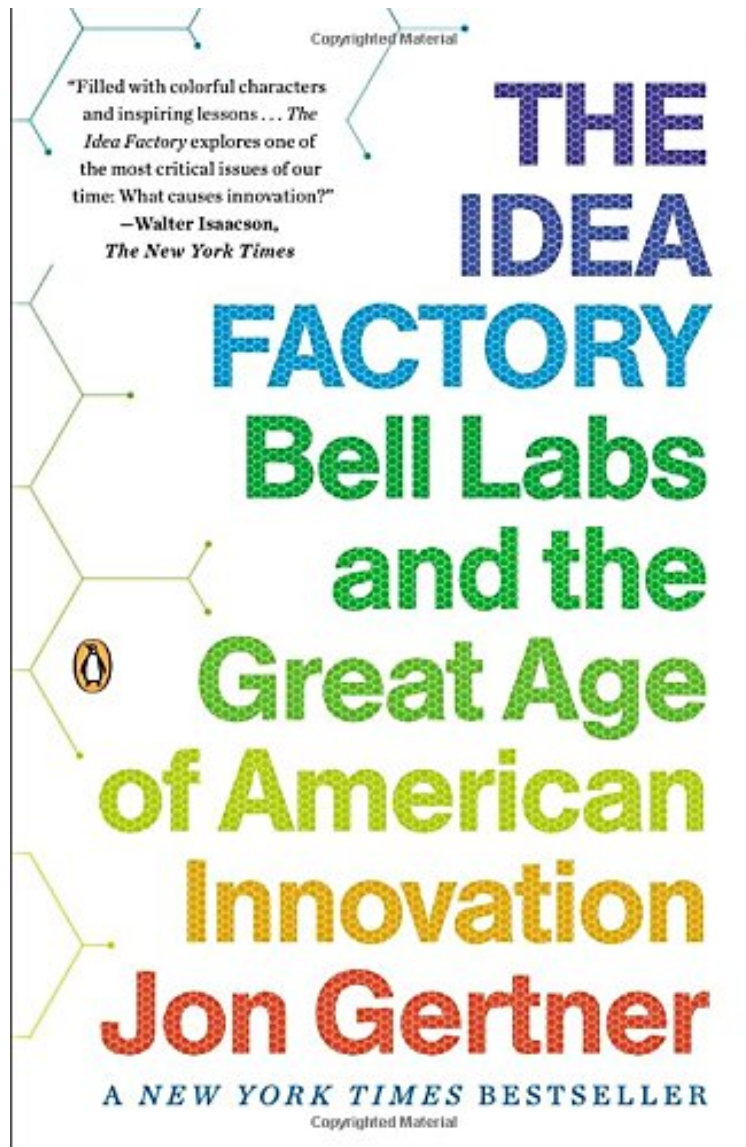


The Idea Factory: Bell Labs and the Great Age of American Innovation

Jon Gertner

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#31360 in Books Jon Gertner 2013-02-26 2013-02-26 Original language: English PDF # 1 8.40 x .90 x 5.40l, .84 #File Name: 0143122797432 pages The Idea Factory Bell Labs and the Great Age of American Innovation | File size: 18.Mb

Jon Gertner : The Idea Factory: Bell Labs and the Great Age of American Innovation before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Idea Factory: Bell Labs and the Great Age of American Innovation:

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Brought back memories!By James WilsonI absolutely loved this book. I was in telecommunications for over 10 years contacting for GTE at Sandia Laboratories - (once managed by an arm of Western Electric and Bell Labs) and I managed a Lucent / ATT 5ESS. Reading about all of this made me feel nostalgic and a little sad. Technology has moved so fast, that it seems the old equipment, technicians and Switch engineers have been replaced by machines and forgotten. My company, GTE merged with a baby bell, Bell Atlantic and became Verizon. I just somehow feel connected to all of these great inventors who started my career path right out of high school. My first training was at a lab in Atlanta, GA called Lucent technologies and I learned how fiber was made, and was certified to pull, splice and install fiber. I eventually worked my way up from the manholes into the switch, then accepted a job running networks for Kirkland AFB. The progression in communications is always spiraling upward and gave a person like myself a career with no ceiling. I am grateful for their tireless efforts and labors and feel indebted to their genius. I am in awe of the brilliance of these men and women and I absolutely loved the book. A trip down memory lane for me!! Thank you!0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Loved itBy Michael H.I am going to give this one 5 stars .. There's an element of genius in taking such a fertile story and stuffing it between the pages of a book, and the story is told pretty well. I found myself caring about the various players. There was enough technical detail to warm my little geek heart, and the story managed to elicit the sort of guileless hero worship that is a) no longer in fashion and b) not age appropriate for this reader. It even has drama, in the form of William Shockley, whose life story was a somewhat checkered mix of the inspirational and the cautionary.My only beef is that I'm a little spoiled now. I haven't come across a book in the last few weeks that compares. I'm sure I will, eventually, but when a book leaves you dissatisfied with most of the books that follow, then you know it was a pretty good book.5 of 5 people found the following review helpful. A Great Slice of Scientific HistoryBy Timothy HaughAnyone interested in science and technology can hardly be ignorant of Bell Labs. Discoveries like the structure of the transistor and the presence of universal background radiation are key moments in 20th century progress. Still, the stories behind these leaps forward are often less well-known than they deserve to be. Fortunately, Mr. Gertner has written an excellent book to fill in the gaps and tell so much more.Born in the 1920's to solve specific problems for the phone company, it is easy to forget how important an aspect that was to most of the scientists at Bell Labs. In its early years these men developed solutions for sending long distance phone calls across the country and, eventually, around the world. The cables, amplifiers, and vacuum tubes they developed were meant not only to improve phone service but also last for decades without breaking down. Their incredible push for quality control would influence corporations around the world.Ultimately more important, however, was the processes put in place to allow the best scientists freedom to discover. Everything from trolling colleges for the best graduates to designing laboratory spaces to encourage collaboration to giving opportunities for scientists to follow their own interests would lead an incredible series of steps forward: the aforementioned transistor and radio telescope as well as solar panels, satellites, lasers, cellular phone structure, computer technology and more. (There were failures as well, of course; notably, the Picturephone, where the marketing failures would presage ATT's struggles when it was no longer a monopoly.)The story is inherently fascinating, but Mr. Gertner deserves a lot of credit for making a very readable book. The best aspect is how he tells the story through its people and places. A number of small-town boys like Mervin Kelly and the great minds to follow--Bill Shockley, Walter Brattain, Claude Shannon, for example--get plenty of attention from Gertner. Their interactions and personalities are the driving force behind the discoveries. He also describes the legendary sites like the West Street building, Murray Hill, and Holmdel and how they contributed to the success of those who worked there.Somewhat, the work done at Bell Labs is simultaneously among the best/worst known pieces of scientific history. Perhaps because their work was done under the auspices of a corporation it has been somewhat passed over. Mr. Gertner has done a real service by bringing this important slice of history to public attention.

From its beginnings in the 1920s until its demise in the 1980s, Bell Labs--officially, the research and development wing of ATT--was the biggest, and arguably the best, laboratory for new ideas in the world. From the transistor to the laser, from digital communications to cellular telephony, it's hard to find an aspect of modern life that hasn't been touched by Bell Labs. In *The Idea Factory*, Jon Gertner traces the origins of some of the twentieth century's most important inventions and delivers a riveting and heretofore untold chapter of American history. At its heart this is a story about the life and work of a small group of brilliant and eccentric men--Mervin Kelly, Bill Shockley, Claude Shannon, John Pierce, and Bill Baker--who spent their careers at Bell Labs. Today, when the drive to invent has become a mantra, Bell Labs offers us a way to enrich our understanding of the challenges and solutions to technological innovation. Here, after all, was where the foundational ideas on the management of innovation were born.

Filled with colorful characters and inspiring lessons . . . *The Idea Factory* explores one of the most critical issues of our time: What causes innovation? Walter Isaacson, *The New York Times* Book Review . . . Mr. Gertner's portraits of Kelly and the cadre of talented scientists who worked at Bell Labs are animated by a journalistic ability to make their discoveries and inventions utterly comprehensible--indeed, thrilling to the lay reader. And they showcase, too, his novelistic sense of character and intuitive understanding of the odd ways in which clashing or compatible personalities

can combine to foster intensely creative collaborations. Michiko Kakutani, *The New York Times* One of the best innovation-focused books I've read: It's a wide-ranging, detailed, and deeply fascinating look at the New Jersey lab which has been churning out useful discoveries since the early 1900s. *The Boston Globe* Fascinating history . . . the research behind *The Idea Factory* is astonishing. *Slate Book* Compelling . . . Gertner's book offers fascinating evidence for those seeking to understand how a society should best invest its research resources. *The Wall Street Journal* An expansive new history . . . does an impressive job of illuminating many of Bell Labs key technological triumphs. *Wired.com* About the Author Jon Gertner grew up in Berkeley Heights, New Jersey, just a few hundred yards away from Bell Labs. He has been a writer for the *New York Times Magazine* since 2004 and is an editor at *Fast Company* magazine. He lives in Maplewood, New Jersey, with his wife and two children.