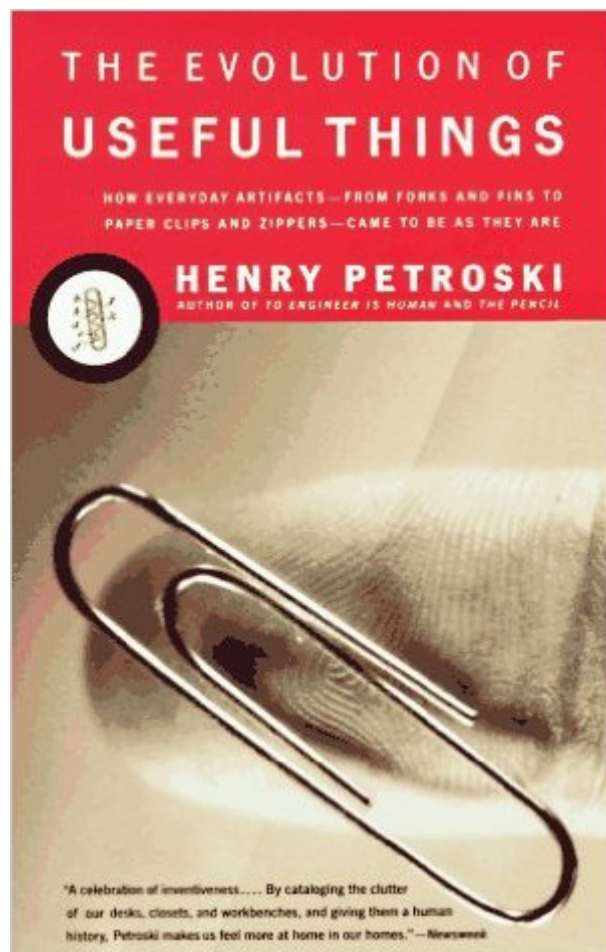


The book was found

The Evolution Of Useful Things: How Everyday Artifacts-From Forks And Pins To Paper Clips And Zippers-Came To Be As They Are



Synopsis

How did the table fork acquire a fourth tine? What advantage does the Phillips-head screw have over its single-grooved predecessor? Why does the paper clip look the way it does? What makes Scotch tape Scotch? In this delightful book Henry, Petroski takes a microscopic look at artifacts that most of us count on but rarely contemplate, including such icons of the everyday as pins, Post-its, and fast-food "clamshell" containers. At the same time, he offers a convincing new theory of technological innovation as a response to the perceived failures of existing products—suggesting that irritation, and not necessity, is the mother of invention.

Book Information

Paperback: 304 pages

Publisher: Vintage; Reprint edition (February 1, 1994)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0679740392

ISBN-13: 978-0679740391

Product Dimensions: 5.2 x 0.6 x 8 inches

Shipping Weight: 8 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 3.5 out of 5 stars See all reviews (40 customer reviews)

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Customer Reviews

This book is an extended essay about the process of invention. In it, Petroski takes the viewpoint that the form of manufactured items is the result of an evolutionary-like process. He stresses that for any specific item, the form it has is only an arbitrary choice from many possible solutions that the inventor could have come up with. And the driving force behind invention, according to Petroski is failure—each change in form that an invention takes is the result of trying to address some failure in what was done previously. Petroski introduces the book with an item that very aptly demonstrates his thesis: the fork. He details the history of the development of the fork, starting with the table manners of the Middle Ages, when people were in the habit of using knives to both spear bits of food and convey them to their mouths. But in order to chop off bits of food from larger pieces, it was handy to have a second knife to hold the larger piece steady. Of course, the second knife was also

like to put a hole in the larger piece, and wasn't well adapted to holding things, not until someone had the brilliant idea of making a stabilizing knife with two prongs instead of one. Eventually, this stabilizing knife began to be used for conveying food to the mouth instead of just holding food steady while cutting, and it was found that four prongs were much better suited for this task than two. Each step of the way through the history of the fork, Petroski points out how when the implement of the time failed to accomplish its intended task satisfactorily, its form was modified, until the fork took its present customary form. At the same time, however, Petroski also stresses that the current form of the fork is only one possible solution to the food conveyance problem.

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