

HELLO, MY NAME IS SCOTT'S...

WHEN IN DOUBT, COMMIT

MORE DAILY STRATEGIES FOR BECOMING PROLIFIC

BY  GINSBERG

AUTHOR. SPEAKER. STRATEGIST.
FILMMAKER. PUBLISHER. SONGWRITER.
WORLD RECORD HOLDER OF WEARING NAMETAGS.



BOOK THREE OF *THE PROLIFIC SERIES*

INTRODUCTION

All creativity begins with the moment of conception.

That little piece of kindling that gets the fire going. That initial source of inspiration that takes on a life of its own. That single note from which the entire symphony grows. That single spark of life that signals an idea's movement value, almost screaming to us, something wants to be built here.

After I finished building *Prolific*, my intellectual property development system, I decided to create a series of case studies on my blog, deconstructing my favorite moments of conception from popular movies. Each post contained a video clip from a different film, along with a series of lessons we can learn from the characters.

This book is the second volume of those case studies. Each chapter contains a link to the video clip, which I suggest you watch before reading each chapter, to better understand the context of the lessons.

Now go be prolific!

-- **Scott Ginsberg, Brooklyn, NY**
January 2015

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



What happens when you wear a nametag twenty-four seven? Even to bed? Just ask Scott Ginsberg. In the beginning, it was just a gimmick to make friends. But soon, his crazy idea didn't seem so crazy. In the past fifteen years, Scott's social experiment has evolved into an urban legend, world record, cultural phenomenon and a profitable enterprise. Simply google the word nametag, and you'll see his work benchmarked as a case study on human interaction, revolutionizing the way people look at approachability, identity and creativity.

Since 1999, Scott has authored 30 books, released six albums on his own record label, published an award winning blog, created NametagTV.com, given a TEDx talk and delivered

presentations and corporate training programs worldwide. He also wrote, produced, directed and scored an independent concert documentary, *Tunnel of Love*. Scott is the only person in the world who wears a nametag 24-7. Even to bed. He was also inducted into Ripley's Believe It Or Not as the world record holder of wearing nametags.

To see why his work sticks, go to www.nametagscott.com.

Or just google the word "nametag."

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109 -- THE TYPEWRITER SCENE FROM MISERY

If you do it right, you never start with nothing. Everyone has the equivalent to a blank page in their lives. It's that intimidating, torturous, paralyzing and dreadful part of the work that requires you to confront an empty canvas and create something from whole cloth. Cartoonists even have a name for it. They call it the blazing island of white. But while many artists romanticize the notion of the blank page, it's actually a profoundly unhealthy and inefficient way to work. What's smarter is to dig your well before you're thirsty. To accumulate an ongoing reference file for your brain to work on through a passive, unconscious process. Think of it as forced savings account for your ideas that always has a high enough balance to make withdrawals. And that way, when you sit down to create, the blank page is no longer ground zero, your life is. Because your intellectual reservoir is constantly replenished, the blank page has become a moot point instead of a massive pain. Paul, on the other hand, doesn't have a choice. Instead of completing the first draft of his novel in his usual historical, elegant hotel room, now his most loyal, but most psychotic fan is holding him captive. And when he fails to populate that blazing island of white, she smashes his ankles with a sledgehammer. A good reminder that our creative blocks could always be worse. *Are you fortifying your intellectual inventory with an organized, trusted and robust system?*

Pave the way for prolificacy. Paul's writing process may be interesting for the screen, but it's impractical for the career. No wonder he has writer's block. Sitting down at a blank page is a cold start. It's too overwhelming to the brain, which pushes a person to do too much work inside their head. And it creates too many outstanding thoughts that plague the consciousness, which makes it harder for a person to think creatively. It's like walking into a factory and forcing the machine to run before it's been brought up to operating temperature. Talk about misery. And so, the smarter approach to creating is much more gradualistic. Digging your well before you're thirsty. Living your life in a way that your art gets done over and over. Making sure that the heavy lifting is everything that comes *before* your eyeballs stare at the blank canvas. That way, as soon as your butt hits the chair, you can hit the ground running instead of killing yourself trying to will ideas into existence. It's the difference between sitting down because you have something to say, and sitting down because you just have to say something. *Are you making it too hard on yourself to allow for psychic fuel to show up?*

Be interesting before you open your mouth. I wrote my first book during my senior year of college. Not bad for my literary maiden voyage, but overall, it was a paragon of imperfection. It had design flaws, grammatical inconsistencies, even a couple of printing errors. But it didn't matter. It was done and it was mine. I could touch it and smell it and hold it. And nobody could take that away from me. The best part was, because of the book, I now had something to do the talking for me. It was a hundred page calling card. A proxy that could do a lot of the heavy lifting before I opened my mouth. And that was something my mentor always stressed. He said that the greatest competitive advantage is, they've heard of you before. Meaning, your strategy as a creator isn't to build a hype engine around your idea, but to physically make that idea. To build a prototype people can smell and touch. That way, when the time comes, you can slap it down on the table and let it do the talking for you. That's not high concept, that's high context. And it's what makes your work stick. *What could I you do to establish instant credibility in this moment?*

110 -- THE BUDGET SCENE FROM DAVE

Susceptible to executional inertia. The creator is in the business of giving shape and forward motion to his ideas. Turning the obsession that fascinates him into something real in the world. However, while this work is intellectually and existentially rewarding, it's not cheap. The purchase price of creativity is uncertainty. Not knowing always accompanies the artist as an unwanted lifelong companion. And unless we learn how to circumvent it, the process will continue to feel like walking backwards into a dark tunnel. Dave is a celebrity impersonator, not the leader of the free world. He smiles like a schmuck. He doesn't know the first thing about being president, much less balancing the federal budget. And now certainly isn't the time to learn. But this is a national emergency. If he doesn't cut a half a billion dollars, he'll never be able to restore the children's homeless shelter. And so, he enlists his accountant friend to help him rewrite the budget. Together, the two of them discover myriad ways in which the government can tighten its belt, reprioritize their spending and focus on the issues that matter most. I've always loved this scene. It reminds me that what we lack in knowledge we can make up in resourcefulness, courage, passion and commitment. Because if we always waited until we knew what we were doing, we'd never do anything. *What is waiting getting in the way of?*

There is nothing to do but begin. Moliere famously said that theater was just two planks and a passion. Notice he didn't say anything about writing scripts, securing royalties, casting actors, designing costumes, building sets, booking space, acquiring financing, hiring staff, booking security, choreographing dances, scoring music, selling tickets and contacting promoters. Because none of that matters. If you really wanted to put on a show, you would have done it by now. You're the only thing in the way. Knowledge isn't the thing that sets your dream free, you are. Dave, then, is a master of *negative capability*. He's honed the skill of being in uncertainties, living with mysteries and dwelling in doubts. And if he knows anything, it's that *not* knowing has zero bearing on whether or not his dream becomes a reality. It's simply a matter of will. Ultimately, each creator owes it to themselves to hone this capability. Because while we can't control life's waves of uncertainty, at least we can improve our surfing skills so we're ready when the big one comes crashing in. *How could you lower the threshold for getting started?*

A little ignorance goes a long way. Dave brings perspective from an unbiased source. He's just a regular guy whose intellectual limitations free him to consider the winning solutions our government has long since taken

for granted. Someone who knows there is no prerequisite to giving good ideas a future. I'm reminded of a client meeting from several years ago. The president of the company said they needed someone who could come in and ask the dumb questions that they stopped asking long ago, because they just know. And I told him, *that's why I'm here, because I know nothing*. And they hired me. Why? Because a little ignorance goes a long. Because objectivity is equity. And because sometimes it takes a person who knows nothing to change everything. Consider that as a permission slip for your own creative process. Focus on moving forward without moving flawlessly, focus on occupying your imperfection and adding energy to the system, and you'll have no trouble making your dreams a reality. *What if you don't need to know as much as you think you do?*

111 -- THE HAIRCUT SCENE FROM EDWARD SCISSORHANDS

Mixing up your vehicles helps you stay innovative. Edward begins by trimming the hedges. Then he starts grooming the neighborhood dogs. Soon he's cutting the hair of the housewives. And by the end of the movie, he's creating ice sculptures that create an effect of falling snow. It's not just a reminder to create art, but also to explore new ways of being an artist. To search for new methods to circulate our views and extend our sentiments. The hard part is, we have to trust our audience, believing that if people really do value our work and appreciate us as creators, they will follow us down whatever new corridor we travel. Dylan, for example, recorded over forty studio albums, but he also published six books of painting and drawing. According to his biography, visual arts always played a significant role in his worldview. Drawing and painting served as an outlet for his huge creative energy. And once he finally began to use those mediums to reveal yet another dimension of his poetic vision, his audience responded to his extraordinary talent and treasured the work. Dylan's paintings were shown in dozens of galleries and exhibitions around the world. And visual arts became one more shelf in his creative room. *How can you avoid limiting yourself to one vision of your creative capabilities?*

Going into the world. Edward's inventor suffered a heart attack and died in his process of creation, leaving him unfinished forever. That's why he's spent most his life as a recluse, living in his hilltop mansion. But once he comes down that hill and meets the world, everything changes. He finds family, finds love and finds a home for all of his talents. Yet another example of what's possible when we participate in the we. Humans, after all, understand the self in the context of other people. And if we truly want the highest understanding of who we are, eventually, we have to reach for the other. We have to cocreate with people. This movie always struck a social cord with me. Because for the first twenty years of my songwriting life, I treated music as an escape. As a way to hide from the world. Until one day, I read an interview with one of my songwriting heroes, who famously said, you have to get out of the basement and go out and play for people. That sentence changed my inner geography. Something very real inside of me shifted that day, and I haven't been the same since. And so, now I perform every week. I've come out of music hibernation, hungry and active for nourishment. Because I don't need to hide from the world anymore. Music let me share another part of my heart. Playing and singing songs in real time, in front of real people, about real emotions, is fulfilling on a level that is hard to express. *Will you let the craving for togetherness trump the seductiveness of isolation?*

Leaving no creative asset unharvested. Edward is putting himself on the line in front of an audience. First, by trimming shrubs and dogs, and later by sculpting real human hair. That's what I love most about his creativity. People keep laying down track in front of his train. They use him like every part of the buffalo, tapping into his natural genius and talents. And for the first time in his life, Edward has purpose. He can finally use his gifts to contribute something of value to the world. The danger, however, is that he has no conception of boundaries. No moral code. Since he's been living without a sense of reality and common sense for his whole life, he doesn't realize he's being taken advantage of. And so, housewives attempt to seduce him, kids take advantage of him, even bullies exploit his ability to pick locks and break into people's homes. Because they know he'll say yes. It's a devastating reminder that if we don't set boundaries for ourselves, other people will set them for us. And then they will violate them. And they will tell all their little friends to violate them too. All because we failed to set a precedent. *Is this an opportunity, or an opportunity to be used?*

112 -- THE BEAST SCENE FROM THE SANDLOT

Up your creative ante. When I first started my career, publishing hadn't been fully democratized yet. The process was still somewhat difficult, expensive and extensive. The powers that be actually had power. Meaning, without some knowledge, resources and wherewithal, anybody couldn't just become an author overnight. It took significant time and money and labor to put art into the world. But then the revolution came. And now that creators are wired directly into the ecosystem, now that the need for the middlemen of the world has vanished, and now that there are nonexistent barriers to entry in all forms of the publishing world, it's anybody's game. And that's precisely the problem. When anyone can do anything, they will. When scarcity goes the way of the dodo, value plummets. Which means, being an author of something doesn't carry as much weight as it used to. Because anybody can do it. And so, if we want to rise to the fore, we have to raise the stakes. We have to raise our voice, be on our toes, working smarter and faster than the pack, always showing them why we're out in front. We have to raise our artistic level to where we're never lost in the dust. Benny is an amazing ball player, but if he truly wants to author a mythology around his work, he needs to do something bigger than just stealing bases and hitting homeruns. *Are you the hero people remember or the legend that will never dies?*

Throw your heart over the fence. Benny's hero visits him in a dream and offers a simple solution to his pickle. *Just hop over the fence and get it.* Easier said than done, of course. The last kid who attempted to defeat the beast was eaten. Of course, that's the whole point. When the voice behind the curtain doesn't scare us, when the reputation of the beast doesn't intimidate us, and when the folklore around the enemy doesn't dissuade us, throwing our hearts over the fence isn't as hard as it looks. Benny doesn't realize it, but, the fence is there for a reason. It's there to test his commitment. To show him how badly he wants something. To give him a surface to push off and move toward his dream. And even if he rips his shirt, scratches his chest and bruises his butt on the way down, his commitment will become the reservoir of momentum that will move his story. The point is, we all have a fence in our lives. We all have a beast to face. And we all have a group of devoted followers just aching for us to defeat them both so we can play for-e-ver. But not everyone wants to leave behind a legacy of taking action. Not everybody is prepared to throw their heart over the threshold. *Are you willing to hop over the fence that's only there to stop people who don't want it badly enough?*

A friendship is an exchange of care. Babe was right. Everybody gets one chance to do something great. But not everyone takes that chance, either because they're too scared, or because they don't recognize it when it spits on their shoes. Benny is lucky enough to see the signs. Too know that someone's telling him something. And that's why he ultimately decides to make the move, grab the ball, outrun the dog, befriend the owner and cement his legacy. This movie fired inspiration into my heart when I was a kid. In fact, over twenty years later, my friends and I still reference *The Sandlot* to this day. This movie stands the test of time and never loses its touch. Why? Because it reminds us of a time in our lives when a friend was a friend was a friend. Because when we were twelve, a friend was the person we grew up with, played football with, ate chicken wings with, chased girls with, got wasted with, shared heartbreak with and had inside jokes with. And despite geography, despite life situation, despite success or failure, despite whatever type of future we may have together, we can't help but always be friends with those. We are inextricably bound by the chains of our shared past. We will always have the one thing nobody can take away from us. Our history. *Who can you call from jail at two in the morning?*

113 -- THE PERFECTION SCENE FROM BLACK SWAN

Beyond the calculated sterility of perfection. This movie explores the quixotic quest for perfection. Nina's obsession with being a perfect dancer, a perfect daughter, and a perfect swan, leads her down an increasingly dark path in which her sanity is threatened. I remember watching this movie at the theater. *Loved it.* But when the credits rolled, I slumped back in my chair and exhaled a deep sign of relief. And I thought to myself, wow, perfection must be exhausting. Thank god I don't have that gene. Although, I have found myself on that treadmill before. For years, I used to labor over the precision of every sentence until my books were flawless. Until I realized that nobody noticed. That the extra effort and stress and time and energy and money invested in pushing a project to one hundred percent wasn't worth the cost. And so, I started aiming for eighty percent. Cutting corners wherever I could. Treating sufficiency as policy. Reducing redundancies at every phase of the process. And believing that enough was as good as a feast. That way, once I hit my mark of eighty percent, I could roll over that final twenty percent into starting the next project. The point is, the artist's obligation is to progress, not perfection. It's about moving forward, not moving flawlessly. *Are you letting the curse of perfection trump the commitment to progress?*

Perfect is the enemy of fast. Leroy explains that perfection is not just about control, but also about letting go. Surprising yourself so you can surprise the audience. It's not about obsessing over getting each move exactly right, it's about losing yourself. Shedding all sense of self and allowing yourself to just be. As one of my songwriting heroes famously said, forming a bond with fans in the future will come in the form of constantly providing them with the element of surprise. What's crazy is, there are tons of artists who'd rather prefer perfecting what they do, and doing it over and over for years until they get it right. I'm sorry, but that's madness. Literally insane behavior. Can you imagine anything less efficient than that? There is simply not enough time in life to quest for perfection. As a creator and communicator of ideas, you want a wake of work following you wherever you go. Momentum and speed and volume. And unfortunately, that's impossible to accomplish if you're paralyzed in the pursuit of perfect. Reminds me of a perfectionist friend of mine. She would rather show nothing than show work that's less than her best. And I tell her all the time, look, I understand you want to put your best foot forward, but you'll never impress anyone by putting no foot forward. *Have you learned to use imperfection as your advantage?*

Keeping all your doors to crazy cracked. Another one of my songwriting heroes recently said that if you think you know what your audience wants, and you're going to cater to them, you're just going to start making worse versions of what you did before. He makes a good point. Why spend the rest of your creative life merely improving what you've already achieved? It's the different between making chocolate and carob. Between creating from whole cloth and going in a time machine to recycle yourself. And so, the more interesting and daring and rewarding path would be to play *with* boundaries, not just within them. To embody the opposite of perfection, aka, playfulness. Making room for possibility, whatever the cost to yourself. That's precisely what audiences want. Interesting people who create art that they could not think of themselves. Leroy says it best. The only person standing in your way is you. *Are you undercutting your unique essence by listening to other too loudly?*

114 -- THE ROBBERY SCENE FROM COMING TO AMERICA

The nature of my ambition took shape. Akeem was hired to mop the floors, not work security. But when he saw that the entire restaurant was in danger, he took initiative and hired himself. He used his extensive skills combat training and conflict resolution to disarm the robber and save the day. Proving, that hiring yourself has nothing to do with employment and everything to do with resourcefulness, enterprise, autonomy and agency. It's about accepting that you have to make work for yourself, work that nobody ask you to make. It's about building enough capital so you can subsidize your own initiatives, both emotionally and financially. And it's about busting through the walls of *permission*, meaning, the mental constructs of notenoughness, and acting on your dreams with open eyes. The hard part is, ambition grosses some people out. When you hire yourself, others might feel disenfranchised by your desire. Because they have no incentive to see you change. They would rather you remain frozen in the position they met you in. It's the strangest thing. Not everybody wants you to be successful. In fact, some people are just waiting around, excitedly, for you to fail. And so, it's your responsibility to keep moving the story forward. *Are you giving people ammunition to shoot down your ambitions?*

Ambition can be expensive. Miller **writes** that the reason people avoid having a clear ambition is because the second they stand up and point toward a horizon, they realize how much there is to lose. *Good point.* Then again, that's the fine print of life. The disclosure statement of transformation. You will lose more than you ever signed up for, but you will gain more than you ever hoped for. Akeem's ambition is to find a wife. Someone who arouses his intellect as well as his loins. Someone who loves him for who he is, not just what he is. And he knows that means surrendering his pampered life and throne to the king, maybe for a month, maybe for a lifetime. But he doesn't care. Finding love is the first ambition that's truly his, that belongs to him. It galvanizes him and makes him feel alive and complete. We should all be so lucky. Not only to have the opportunity to dream our dream, but to actually live it. To wake up everyday with the excitement at having discovered something worth doing, something we can call our own. That's the stuff a good life is made of. Not *the* good life, but *a* good life. A life where we actually have something to point to. *What is essential to your sense of being on purpose?*

Your niche is you. McDowell's restaurant didn't run a classified ad seeking a brilliant, peaceful, energetic, hard working, lovable man with a regal disposition. They just needed a warm body to fill the slot in their corporate

machine so they could keep up production. Akeem, however, showed up and created his own niche. Through his unique combination of capabilities and attitudes, he became the go to guy. He positioned his talents to create an entirely new product category. But as a window washer, but as a resource for the entire organization. Someone you could use every part of, like a buffalo. Proving, that the best way to beat the competition is to not have any. That the best way to bring home the bacon is to raise your own pigs. Akeem reminds me a lot of my mentor, a preacher and educator who used to say, *my niche is me*. Because it is our work that creates the market, not the other way around. We are the ones signing the paychecks, not the ones waiting around to see if we'll get one. Yes, it takes confidence and courage and perseverance to open a boutique, but if we can do it successful, people won't just buy from us, they'll congratulate us for cracking the code and getting into the club. *How can you change the rules so you can win at your own game?*

115 -- THE WONDERBOY SCENE FROM THE NATURAL

Create an unfair advantage for yourself. Roy's bat is magical. It's his foolproof lance. From a mythological perspective, it possesses the same invincible properties as the legendary sword *excalibur*, giving its owner remarkable performance abilities. But the secret is, he didn't win this bat in some contest. Nobody handed it down to him as a family heirloom. He didn't steal it from the neighbor's garage. Roy hand crafted his instrument from the tree near his boyhood home that was struck by lightning. Meaning, its magic was a product of its source materials, its innovative creator and its preservation over the course of time. Wonderboy was specially made with love, care, and devotion, all characteristics that make a baseball player better than the rest. Hobbs created a new context for himself. Instead of bulking up on steroids, he built up a proprietary asset that made his work completely immune from imitation. Instead of complaining that he was past his prime, he built his own equipment and created his own leverage. Like the marathoner who trains at higher altitudes to earn an unfair advantage over the runners who train at sea level, he uniquely position himself for success with an asset and a context that was his and his alone. *How could you join forces with the unreasonableness of life and create an unfair advantage for yourself?*

Don't cling to your gift too tightly. Roy's has a gift, but his father reminds him that it's not enough. That he has to develop himself. Because if he relies too much on his own gift, he'll fail. *Now that's good advice.* It's like the most beautiful girl in high school. Her childhood is filled with praises. Everything is handed to her. Everyone tells her she's interesting and special. But as a result, she never has to work at making something of herself. She never has to put in the elbow grease to develop character. And by the time her beauty fades, her remaining foundation lacks any real substance. It's the stuff identity crisis is made of. We throw our heart into something, but we let it become all that we stand for. We find meaningful home for our gift, but we allow it to become our sole place of identification. Roy realizes that the enemy of progress is refusing to embrace the new. That if he clings so doggedly to his gift, he'll never evolve into the person he was meant to become. That's what I love about this movie. It's a genuine meditation on identity. A reminder that we're all bigger than our past, we all outgrow yesterday's definition of ourselves, and we all have the ability to live larger than our labels. Let the past die and the future will take care of itself. *What will happen when you become more than what you're known for?*

Stand out in the rain. Lightning plays major a role in many mythologies, but also emerges in mass communications as prominent symbol of power, speed, electricity, and most notably, creativity. What's interesting is, if you study the most prolific creators in history, none of them hang their hats on the almighty thunderbolt. They're more likely to practice **gradualistic creativity**, which rejects the notion of the elusive eureka moment and instead promotes an existential and holistic approach to a creative life. Instead of puttering around in the dirt, hoping lightning will strike, they actually start pulling the plow and cultivating fertile ground so the spark of conception keeps firing every time we go to work. That's the unsexy reality of the creative process. It's just as clerical as it is cosmic. It's just as mechanical as it is magical. It's more than just making art, it's also generating our own demand, building our own leverage, establishing our own momentum and manufacturing our own opportunities. *How could live your life in a way that your art gets done over and over?*

116 -- THE INPUT SCENE FROM SHORT CIRCUIT

Inspiration is incidental, not intentional. Artists make things because they want to move people. To inspire them to become better. But the creator can't jumpstart other people unless her battery is charged first. There has to be a source current. A substratum of energy from which to supply power. Johnny has his own version of this. He's an experimental military robot that was struck by lightning and is beginning to gain a more humanlike intelligence. But since he's barely able to communicate and uncertain of his directive, he requires constant access to books, television and other stimuli to satisfy his demand for input. That's how he develops his whimsical and curious personality, befriends the characters, captures the bad guy and deprograms his dangerous warlike applications. All he needed was, as he called it, *major input*. Johnny reminds us, albeit in a mechanical way, that we have to repower our own source current. We have to inspire ourselves, first and foremost. Because our job as creators isn't to inspire people, but to keep doing what we love, that way people can discover the same about themselves through that work. If we want to move people, we have to remember that inspiration isn't the target, inspiration is the reward our audience receives when we hit the target. *When was the last time you made the choice to be inspired?*

Healthy eyes see whatever is visible. Johnny may be powered by electricity, but his primary source of energy, meaning and nourishment is input. That's why watching him motor into the world's biggest bookstore is akin to a heroin addict stumbling into an opium factory. Johnny is a mental omnivore, eating or at least chewing on almost anything, taking in whatever is available to build his bottomless reservoir of diverse ideas. Everything in the bookstore is fair game. What's more, his real power isn't just collecting information, but conceptually integrating it. His robot brain has an advanced ability to make original associations, to blend information from various scenarios and experiences, and to understand complex metaphors and comparisons. That's the mark of a true creator. Someone who can dive into his intellectual reservoir on a moment's notice, swim to the bottom, and return to the surface with a new and interesting combination that the world has never seen before. Johnny is a role model for artists. He is alive, as he likes to proclaim, thanks to his constant stream of input. We should all be so fortunate. *What's your framework for inspiration?*

Develop an allergy to dogma. Johnny maintains a high openness to experience. Cognitive psychologists have found trait be common among creative thinkers. It's a personality that involves active imagination, aesthetic sensitivity,

attentiveness to inner feelings, preference for variety, and intellectual curiosity. In fact, the **psychological personality inventory** measures specific subsets of this openness to experience, including the tendency to appreciate art, music, and poetry, the inclination to try new activities and the readiness to reexamine traditional social, religious and political values. That's what I love about this robot. He demands they drop everything and go into the store. Hold his meeting. City traffic be damned. Customers move to the side. Security guards go to hell. This machine has located a source of major input, and nobody is going to stop him from getting it. Reminds me a lot of myself. *What are the specific traits, habits, and tendencies that comprise your creative personality?*

117 -- THE HOUSE SCENE FROM HONEY I BLEW UP THE KID

The prolific power of emergence. Szalinski might be an eccentric nutjob, but the man is a prolific inventor. He's completely optimized their household, automating everything from shaving to dusting to cooking breakfast to getting the mail. This scene captured my imagination as a kid. Szalinski made me want to become an inventor. But as adult, watching this movie is a charming reminder to practice *polyamorous creation*, or the pursuit of relationships with multiple projects. Keeping lots of interesting balls in the air. Maintaining diversity among creative endeavors. Sound like an attention deficit disaster? It's not. In fact, the act of dividing your attention among several projects doesn't automatically lessen it. In fact, it's quite the opposite. Polyamorous creation actually makes the creative process faster and better. By giving yourself permission to spin a multitude of creative plates, you produce positive interactions between endeavors. By allowing different works to bump into each other, you gain more perspective than if you were only engaged in a single project. And so, the result is a whole that's greater than the sum of its parts. That's how creativity works. Every act regenerates the system. The more of it you use, the more of it you have. Physicists call it **emergence**, and their research has found it to be the originator of novelty, creativity and authorship. In short, if one and one makes two, you failed. *Are you helping your ideas talk to each other?*

Everyone is somebody else's weirdo. Wayne is one of the definitive movie geniuses of our time. He's smart and creative and well meaning and enthusiastic. But he's still weird. He doesn't do anything normal. Playing baseball? Out of the question. Baseball is for mortals, he says. And yet, that's what endears us to his character. I remember watching this movie as a teenager, standing in awe of his faithfulness to his own eccentric nature. Hoping that one day, my weirdness would be just as valuable to the world. Fast forward to twenty years later, weird has now gone mainstream. Now it's cool to be weird. Now the world acknowledges, respects and caters to the weird. Now we don't have to worry about being weird alone, because whatever obscure thing we're into, there's a thousand other people just waiting to connect around it. Nietzsche famously said that those who were seen dancing were thought to be insane by those who couldn't hear the music. But little did he know, technology would make it instantaneous to find the weird people who *do* hear the music. If they remade this movie, adjusted for cultural inflation, our protagonist wouldn't be the punch line of the joke, he'd be the belle of the ball. *What group of weird people could you cleanse yourself with?*

Use every part of yourself like a buffalo. Wayne has clearly created a life that makes use of all of his gifts. He's found a home for all of his talents, feels fully expressed and is constantly firing on all cylinders. None of his assets have gone unharvested. What more could an inventor ask for? That's the definition of intellectual freedom. Pure, unadulterated creation. And yet, he's not inventing machines for the sake of inventing. Every part has its place. Each contraption solves a real, urgent and pervasive problem in their lives. Wayne is a master of using his creativity to scratch his family's itches. Then again, he *does* accidentally expose the toddler to his industrial sized growth machine, which gradually grows the child to over one hundred feet tall and destroys the downtown area. *Woops*. And so, it's a subtle lesson about becoming a victim of your own efficiency. Not letting the creativity of our minds supersede the practicality of real life. Because ambition can get very expensive. *Who is the primary beneficiary of your creative talents and abilities?*

118 -- THE JOHNNY B. GOODE SCENE FROM BACK TO THE FUTURE

Develop deeper trust in your own instincts. Marty initially auditions this song at the battle of the bands. But when he gets kicked off stage by the conservative judges, he starts to lose faith in his own abilities. He locks into the pessimistic narrative that he's no good, that he's got no future, and that he's not cut out for music. Which is totally normal. Because in the early stages of the creative process, there's a very real hunger for feedback on our art. It's human nature. We're pining for validation and encouragement to help move the work forward. But something we learn after shipping a few dozen projects is, most feedback is overrated. It rarely reflects who we are as an artist. And more often than not, feedback is just projection of the insecure concerns and character flaws of the individual providing it. In fact, if we're not careful, an overabundance of feedback can start to bounce us around like a pinball. And we can get so overwhelmed by everyone else's opinion of our work that the creative momentum fizzles. Marty, had he continued listening to wrong voices, might have given up on music for good. But traveling back in time gave him one final opportunity trust his instincts and play the music he wanted to play. So he did. And he blew people away. Even if they weren't ready for it yet. *Are you giving people's opinions more weight than they deserve?*

Never underestimate the audience of one. I've been listening to this fascinating [podcast](#) about the business of show business. During one particular episode, the guest was an accomplished writer, producer and network sitcom runner. When the host asked what his advice to young creators was, he said, just do the show you want to do, because they're going to cancel it anyway. *Wow.* There isn't an artist alive who can't understand that. Even outside of show business, it's still applicable. Consider the book industry. Over a million new titles are published every year. Which means, mathematically, most books will be ignored. Most books will fail. So why not write the one you want to write? May as well make art you want to see in the world, since most of the world isn't going to see it anyway. Marty, then, represents the power of the tiny audience. Because his sole purpose in playing this song is to get two people together. *That's it.* Even if the band thinks he's on drugs, even if the rest of the audience think he's crazy, as long as his parents are slow dancing the night away, the song has done its job. *What hidden audience are you playing for?*

If size mattered, dinosaurs would still be around. Marty is convinced that he's never going to get the chance to play in front of anybody. Like so many young musicians, he struggles with the universal artistic quandary, the longing to be heard. What he doesn't realize, though, is that life is only limited by

our own prejudices. Once we destroy them and cease to be at the mercy of ourselves, it's amazing how many creative doors fly open. What's interesting is, had this movie been made more recently, his posture and context and strategy would be completely inverted. Marty wouldn't be give record labels a second thought. He wouldn't waste his time competing in battle of the bands. And he certainly wouldn't struggle to find an audience for his work. He would have created his own leverage and built his own stage and manufactured his own opportunities. Because the modern creator doesn't need tickets for the starving artist lottery. They no longer have to wait for some invisible jury to stamp heir creative passport and tell them their art is okay. They go out and create a market for what they love. Not matter how small that market is. Because if size mattered, the dinosaurs would still be around. *When will you voluntarily opt out of the mainstream?*

119 -- THE ROOSTER SCENE FROM MILTON GLASER

Make whatever you feel like you're missing. Treat others as you'd want to be treated. Be the change you want to see in the world. Two sides of the same philosophical coin. Interestingly, artists have their own version of these maxims. They *create* what they want to see in the world. They write the book they'd want to write. They make the movie they'd want to watch. They paint the murals they'd want to see. I'm reminded of a podcast with the principal songwriter of a multiplatinum rock band. Fascinating origin story. Back in the late nineties, Mike finally got fed up of flipping through the radio dial and never hearing the hard, aggressive rap music he so badly craved. And so, he started a band and created just that. He made exactly what he felt he was missing in the world. Because he knew that he wasn't alone. Sixty million albums later, his audience proved him right. Glaser, similarly, isn't just an illustrator, he's a reminder. That if we're not happy with the posters and billboards and public signage we see around us, it's our responsibility to try and do better. To let our work do the talking, not our words. Because the best way to complain is to make things. To invent the world we want to live in. *How could you leverage your frustration in the world as motivation to grow into the artist you've always wanted to be?*

All art is selfish art. When it comes to writing, I've always been as selfish as possible. I write about myself, to myself and for myself. I don't care about being right. I don't care about being the best. And I'm not trying to deliver some systemic worldview for people to follow. I'm just trying to explain my own life to myself. I'm trying to metabolize my experiences, organize my thoughts and process my feelings. That's why I make art. It's completely selfish. Because it's not about the product, it's about the transformation inside of me that happens during the process of making it. Like my mentor used to say, first you write the book, then the book writes you. That's what I always loved about this movie. Glaser never cared about the label society assigned to him. To him, the core value was always the act of making things. The transformation of the idea that he held in his mind that became real or material. In fact, his most well known design, perhaps one of the most iconic slogans on the planet, earned him nothing. Glaser claims there were no cash rewards as a consequence of drawing it. On the other hand, he says, it makes him feel very, very proud to have taken part in that shift in the city's consciousness from being indifferent to itself, to realizing, wow, we love this place. Proving my theory, that we should be selfish when we create art, but generous when we share it. *What are the barriers to getting your work in people's hands?*

Focus is a function of identity, not activity. Milton is one of my heroes because of his deeply diverse portfolio. He's produced work in a wide range of design disciplines, including logos, stationery, brochures, signage, website design, annual reports, exhibitions, interiors and exteriors of restaurants, shopping malls, supermarkets, hotels, product packaging and product design. That's inspiring. And to think, it all started from drawing sketches of naked ladies for the kids in the neighborhood. I'm reminded of another one my artistic heroes, who famously said that diversity is not a business decision, it's a way of staying interested. We should all be so lucky to venture into various creative territories and mediums and platforms and avenues. It doesn't mean we've spread ourselves too thin. It doesn't make us a jack of all trades. In fact, diversity is the highest creative form of focus there is. Because art isn't about hammering one nail all our lives, it's about hammering lots of nails—one way—all our lives. *Are you focusing on what you need to do or what you need to be?*

120 -- THE VIBRANIUM SCENE FROM IRONMAN 2

Work is a gateway to the timeless. Howard was disenchanted by a postwar society that wasn't ready for his inventions. The man was simply too far ahead of his time. He wasn't interested in playing a game to wait out the world. And so, realizing that his son was actually his greatest creation, he built a diagram that represented the chemical structure of a new element that was the key to the future. Tony then synthesizes the formula into vibranium, places it in his arc reactor to end his palladium dependency and changes the world. And that's the beauty of creation. Its seemingly miraculous power to transcend time. I'm reminded of an interview with a veteran actress, whose first television series only lasted for one season. **Claire** said, though, that in the twenty years that followed, the show had an amazing afterlife. It gained a cult following, made millions in home videos and merchandising and went down in history as one of the best single season dramas in television history. And so, it doesn't matter if we're making a chemical reactor or a television drama. Each of us can create work that lives on long after its moment of conception. Each of us can produce art that remains vital after the culture in which it was conceived passes into history. *Does the theme behind what you do speak louder than the era in which you do it?*

Nothing comes from out of nowhere. In a fascinating article about how to nurture a creative climate, **Brooks** explains that creativity hardly flows out of an act of complete originality. It's rarely a virgin birth, he says, but rather of clash of two value systems or traditions, which, in collision, create a transcendent third thing. Moments of conception, after all, come from combining diverse references. Letting various ideas reflect heat onto one another like logs in a fireplace. Tony, then, is a master of the creative climate. Watching him restructure his father's chaotic and fragmentary pieces of information into an orderly, understandable and conclusive insight is like watching a maestro conduct a symphony. That's what makes him a superhero. Not physical domination, but mental combination. This is my favorite scene of the movie and one of the best uses of advanced digital technology in film. And what's crazy to think about is, his operating isn't as futuristic as it used to be. Jarvis is a form of artificial intelligence that already exists. It's only a matter of time before each of us has one for ourselves. *Assuming that technology posed no constraints, what would you change right now about your business processes and operations?*

Your body will never lie to you. Tony's suffered a severe chest injury during a kidnapping and was forced to wear an armored chestplate beneath his clothes to act as a regulator for his heart. Now he must recharge that chestplate every day, or else risk the shrapnel killing him. But because of this condition, he's developed an exquisite understanding of what his own inner ecology has to be. Ecology, after all, is the study of the relationships and interactions between organisms and their environment. Stark is a master of that. Just look at his workshop, garage, man cave, creative control center and laboratory. It's the one place in life where he is most himself. It's the sacrosanct space where he's completely free to direct the traffic flow of his own overcrowded mind. Where he can focus on transcribing his visions, subduing his thoughts and corralling them onto a canvas. Where he can manage his internal ecosystem and personal habitat. And the good news is, not everyone needs a billion dollars to reach that level of understanding about themselves. As much as we'd all love to have our creativity boosted by a billion dollar corporate machine working every angle, all we really need to do is pay closer attention to our physical sense experience. To increase our feelings of connection and aliveness whenever possible. If we can achieve that, there's no telling what kind of new elements we might discover. *What does your inner ecology have to be?*

121 -- THE RECORD BREAKING SCENE FROM THE LAST STARFIGHTER

The byproduct of creating value. Raising your fee is moot point. A more strategic approach is to wonder, what could I *create*, that would enhance my offering and diversify my identity and upgrade my context and grow my skillset and raise my credibility and strengthen my leverage, that would earn me the *right* to command a higher fee for my work? That's how value is created. You keep adding to the collection. You continually engage in new projects worth pointing to. You seek opportunities that make yourself more attractive, regardless of the outcome. And your fee changes as a natural byproduct. Alex is doing just that. He's an ordinary teenager living in a trailer park, cherishing the arcade game as his sole leisure activity. And he knows that if he wants to get the heck out of this town, he's going to have to raise his value. Little does he know, becoming the highest scoring player of all time is exactly what summons the game's inventor. Centauri shows up to offer an opportunity to travel to a faraway planet and defend a small planet from alien invasion. Alex, of course, jumps at the chance, using the tactics he mastered playing the video game to defeat the armada and become the savior of the galaxy. Proving, that if you want to get to the next level, you have to raise your game. Literally. *If you were arrested and charged with creating value for people, would there be enough evidence to convict you?*

Success never comes unassisted. Every creator needs a secure base. A reliable source of emotional renewal, nourishment, safety and security in the face of everyday challenges. People who can serve as the stabilizing influence in your life. Individuals who can help take up the cross you thought you were going to have to bear alone. That's why this scene always touched me. Alex didn't have any money. No career prospects. He was just a kid from a some flea speck trailer park in the middle of tumbleweeds and tarantulas. But what he *did* have was a community. Family and friends and a girlfriend and a mentor. His support flowed from many fountains. What more can you ask for you? And so, when he finally gets the chance to do something meaningful with his life, and he grabs with both hands and holds on tight, his secure base was there to lift him up. Yes, they were sad to see him go off into outer space as a permanent star fighter and flight instructor. But they knew his time had come. And they were proud to have had a hand in his virtuosity. Alex's story reminds us that if we're going to follow our dreams, we have to surround them with support structures. That way, we can to live our dreams as a thank you in perpetuity to those who shaped us. *If your family supported anything you chose to do, what would you do?*

The fertile soil where instinct and intuition flourish. Alex is not a creator in the traditional artistic sense. He doesn't design video games, he just plays them. But consider how many thousands of hours he's logged at that arcade console. That's the kind of hardcore formative time that fosters dreams, informs what he does and lays groundwork for the years to follow. Alex's art, then, is his useful combination of focus, patience, strategy, resilience, pattern recognition and problem solving. And nobody can do it better. That's why he gets recruited into the fighter training program, so he can finally take the training he already has and apply it for the greater good. It's *accidental preparation* at its finest. The experience of invest thousands of hours and gallons of sweat doing something small, that later proves to be the training ground for something big. *What have you been accidentally preparing for?*

122 -- THE FINAL SCENE FROM LE BALLON ROUGE

Be there before the lightning arrives. Pascal's balloon is the perfect emblem of inspiration. It has a mind and will of its own. It's colorful and unpredictable and sprightly and graceful. Sometimes it follows the boy wherever he goes, sometimes the boy follows it wherever it floats. But he stays with it. And that's the lesson. Because inspiration is the fundamental human survival mechanism. It's the only way we can cut loose from the dead hand of the past, ratchet up our species and let the best have a real chance at us. But inspiration can be fickle like a balloon in the wind. The moment we try to catch it, we miss it. Because any over determined action produces its exact opposite. On the other hand, if we're always with it, moving at its speed, as much a part of it as its own shadow, then it becomes easier to seize. Wherever it goes, we go. And so, our job as creators is to stay with it. To never to allow ourselves to rely on inspiration alone. To build a routine and ride it. To be there before the lightning arrives. And to approach our work with the right lens, posture and filter, that way inspiration can seek us out. Sure beats chasing inspiration around town, waiting for it to settle. *Are you placing yourself at the mercy of inspiration or teaming up with it?*

Where my dreams begin to turn outward. This movie won tons of awards and received overwhelming praise from the critics. Not just for its simplicity and humor and color symbolism, but for its poignant message about dreams and the cruelty of those who puncture them. Pascal's dream is the balloon. It's the one thing he longs and aches for. So strong is his devotion, that there is nothing that is not part of it. But his dream draws inquisitive looks from adults and becomes the envy of the other children. At one point in the film, we see it floating outside his bedroom window, but his mother will not allow it in their apartment. And by the end, the balloon is actually hunted down and killed by slingshots by a mob of cruel boys on a barren hilltop. *If that's not a metaphor for dreaming, I don't know what is.* Because just like the boy, we become devastated when things pop. When our one and only dream in the world gets punctured and deflated by those who feel disenfranchised by its power, it makes us want to drop down to the dirt and cry our eyes out. But that's precisely when the magic happens. That's when we look into the sky and watch as all the other balloons come to our aid and take us on a ride over the city. Dreams are like that. Once we commit to them, the world reverberates with the sound of our purpose. *Where will your dream carry you?*

Dreaming isn't dead. I hated this movie when I was a kid. Our elementary school teachers played it for us every single year. And it always took me on an emotional roller coaster. First, I was frustrated that the balloon was just barely out of the boy's reach. Then, I was angered when the bullies tried to pop it. Next, I was sad when the balloon eventually popped. Then, then I was inspired when the other balloons formed a colorful cloud around the boy. And then I was jealous when they carried him over the city. But I'm sure that's exactly what the director had in mind. *Delightful manipulation.* Rewatching this movie as an adult, however, is a different story. Because now I understand it. Now I appreciate watching the boy's imagination literally taking flight, floating him off into a feeling of escape and peace. Perhaps that was also the director's intent. To remind us that there's nothing wrong with trading in our smallest dreams for better, bigger, more colorful and more voluptuous ones. *If you dreamed in terms of your potential and not your limitations, how would that change the dream?*

123 -- THE BREAKFAST SCENE FROM WALLACE AND GROMIT

Eliminate the roadblocks before the event exist. Wallace may be an absent minded inventor whose elaborate contraptions rarely work as intended, but the man understands the value of routine. After all, he makes a living by his wits. The quality and frequency of his thoughts determines his livelihood. He can't afford *not* to create. And so, he's built for himself a framework of discipline, in which enthusiasm grows on its own and builds on itself. And yet, as ridiculous as his morning routine seems to the outside observer, it's exactly what he needs to cultivate the optimal conditions to make his work happen. In fact, every creator has their own version of this. Even if it's something as simple as wearing the same pair of boots or waking up the same song. Ritual isn't about size and duration, it's about thoughtfulness and regularity. It's about creating a foundation of security and a ongoing sense of safety. A bliss station where inspiration can flow as a natural consequence of your surroundings. Because you can't invent your sock off until you invent a contraption for putting your socks on. *What structure might provide you with a prepared environment for inspiration?*

Free to be mentally active. *Wallace and Gromit* has been translated into over twenty languages and has a massive global following. They've won dozens of awards. And due to their widespread popularity, the characters have been described as positive international icons that have inspired a whole new generation of innovative minds. As a kid, I never watched this show. I don't even remember it. But looking back, the theme is right up my alley. Because I came from a family of artists and thinkers and entrepreneurs. In our house, encouraging creativity was always regarded as a worthwhile endeavor. We were free to be mentally active. We had physical space to engage in the life of the mind. And people were constantly pushing each other to see how far they could go with their ideas. As a result, each of us developed the empowering habit of exercising the part of our brain that was most original. Each of us learned how to grow up, but more importantly, how to grow into ourselves. As a creative kid, you can't ask for much more than that. Except maybe some cheese. *Who was the first person that gave you permission to take steps toward your own creative health?*

Corral your duties into daily routines. Wallace's morning routine is a finely calibrated mechanism. It's his personal on ramp. A consistent, repeated sequence of thoughts and actions that activates the creative subroutine in his head and snaps him into the appropriate state of mind to start his day. The secret, of course, is that he doesn't have to think. Not about his clothes, not

about his food, not about anything. Gromit and his various contraptions do that work for him. And that's the whole point. Because nobody wants to have to wake up and look for options of what to do first. The mind is a terrible office. Allowing unnecessary thoughts to take up residence in your psyche, especially right as you're getting out of bed, is an unhealthy habit. And trying to engage your brain at six in the morning around menial mundane decisions an exhaustive process that wastes valuable energy that should be dedicating to making things. The goal, then, is to relieve your brain of the necessity of remembering. To hold onto the deep grooves of holy habit. To minimize thinking wherever possible. Even if you have to invent your own dopey contraption for doing so. *What morning routine helps you unlocks the door to creativity?*

124 -- THE DRAWING SCENE FROM THE PEANUTS DOCUMENTARY

Volume to the power of consistency. The greatest force in the artist's career is compound interest. Building our capacity to generate more and more value over time through the slow, unsexy, but consistent creative increments. It's a long term, disciplined strategy, but if we stick to it, the compound interest does most of the heavy lifting for us. And the result will be more than worth the slog. Schultz was a master of compound interest. He famously said that the secret of his success was focusing on drawing one good comic strip every day. Not making millions. Not achieving fame. Not changing the world. Not advancing his personal agenda. Not making publishers and newspapers happy. *Just the art.* Just the work. Just one good strip, every day. That single goal governed his work for more than fifty years, and it made him one of the most influential, popular and profitable cartoonist in the history of the medium. The strip was his mission piece. That one chunk of art he committed to, focused on and obsessed over, each day, until it was done, no exceptions; trusting that everything else, including the television specials, the merchandising, the licensing and the books, would flow from that. Proof positive, that the best way to beat the odds is with massive output. That compound interest is what keeps the value growing. *How are you incrementally approaching your creative breakthroughs?*

Small times long equals big. Schultz started drawing cartoons when he was a young boy. But he didn't go full time as comic creator until he was in his mid twenties. Meaning, he must have logged tens of thousands of hours putting pen to paper before he earned a dime. And that's the part nobody likes to talk about. Because it represents the pure, unromantic slog of sitting down and doing the work, every single day. That's what it all boils down to. Not unlike the recovering alcoholic who asks himself if he took a drink today, the successful artist asks himself if he created today. If the answer is yes, and continues to *be* yes, then there will be a bright, green light at the end of that sweaty tunnel. Schultz saw that light. He knew that his art would take a long time to pay for itself. But he kept cranking out that strip. And its peak, his comic was syndicated to nearly three thousands newspapers in seventy counties and twenty languages. He was earning forty million dollars a year. Even after his death, his brand now generates an estimate two billion dollars in revenue every year. All because he did the work. The work that nobody asked him to make. Paid today for the free work he did yesterday. *Are you willing to give your work away for free until the market is willing to pay for it?*

You give me the seed, I'll cultivate it. Schultz started out in the fifties with a comic strip. He had no intention of branching out into other media. But when he started created the animated television programs in the sixties, that new channel gave him the opportunity to add new dimensions to his work. Additional characters, personality elements, interesting actions, diverse voice talent, and of course, the distinctive jazz music. Schultz even said it himself, his animators could do things with characters that he couldn't do in the comic strip. And that's precisely why the brand became such a colossal success. Schultz was humble enough to ask for help. To raise his hand when he surpassed the perimeter of his competence and enlist other people to fill in the gaps. That's a hard thing to do. Especially for creators, people who are notoriously independent. People who hesitate to bring others into their dream, because it represents a loss of control. But the reality is, we can't do everything ourselves forever. What we *can* do, though, is build a vision that infects people and transfer enthusiasm and inspires them with the purpose behind our work so they can cultivate the seed we give them. *When you're ready to start stretching other muscles, whom will you enlist?*

125 -- THE OMNIDROID SCENE FROM THE INCREDIBLES

Once you have some, you can get some. Omnidroid is an advanced self learning robot. It's an artificial intelligence machine that corrects its own mistakes by collecting information on the opponents it encounters. That way, every subsequent model improves upon the previous one by correcting flaws found during fights. The creative process works in the same way. *Once you have some, you can get some.* Take filmmaking. I'm currently in postproduction of my first documentary. But since I've never made a movie before, it's all new territory for me. I have no frame of reference for this kind of project. My editor, on the other hand, is a veteran videographer. And he explained that in the filmmaking process, the more things we do, the more we understand what doing means, and that knowledge informs all of our subsequent decisions. Like the robot, with every modification, our creative mechanism becomes more capable against its opponents, solving more problems and fending off potential threats to its plans. And so, each day when we sit down in the edit bay, we learn something new. We discover an angle or a cut or a transition or a color correction that we've never tried before. That experience affords us context and understanding and a sense of what's possible for the scene, which in turn populates our frame of reference and expands the palette from which we create. And this process ultimately allows us to go back and retouch the previous day's footage with our new found knowledge. *Are you flooding your creative process with intense learning experiences?*

Be worthy of your advantages. This movie is a brilliant meditation on identity and mediocrity. Syndrome, the super villain responsible for creating the robot, is conniving, manipulative man who seeks personal gain without honest work or achievement. He doesn't actually possess any special powers, he just has a ton of money. And so, instead of trying to raise the bar, he builds inventions so that everyone can have special powers. Because when everyone's super, no one will be. *Yikes.* What a powerful reminder that if want to be special, we have to earn and deserve it. That operating from a mindset of intrinsic remarkability is misguided and even dangerous. Because contrary to what reality television might suggest, true and meaningful achievement isn't something that just falls in our lap. It's the result of creating real value for real people. It's the byproduct of having the guts to risk and the willingness to fail and the desire to change the world for the better. It's the consequence of doing things for the love and the journey and because we believe in their importance, not because of where they might get us. Syndrome's goal isn't to develop and protect his

moral sensibility, it's to pursue things with which to leverage his brand onto the superhero totem pole. And that's why he ultimately loses. *Are you climbing the mountain to see the world or so the world can see you?*

The pile never gets smaller. Bob says that no matter how many times you save the world, it always manages to get back in jeopardy again. Interesting, considering the same thing could be said about the creative process. Because often times, it feels like a tail that grows back everyday. Just one goddamn thing after another. It's the pile that never gets to zero, no matter how hard we try. There will always be more to do, all the time, forever, until we die. It's an infinite regression. Like two opposing mirrors. But over time, we learn to honor the pile. We make peace with it. We even joust with it. And we give thanks to the creative gods that we have because it certainly beats the alternative. Better to constantly have a world to save than to live in one that doesn't need us. The point is, we all grow tired of cleaning up the mess. Bob doesn't feel like fighting crime every day, but it's who he is. The mess is what he lives for. The mess is what brings out the best in him. The mess is why he got into this business in the first place. And when it comes to the creative process—the pure, unromantic slog of sitting down and doing the work, every single day—we don't have a choice. The world will always be in jeopardy. That's why we signed up. Creators like their beauty strange, their plots unruly and their duty untamed. *Which world is waiting for you to save it?*

126 -- THE MORNING ROUTINE SCENE FROM PEE WEE'S BIG ADVENTURE

You need a better routine, not more time. Pee wee was an inspiration to me. He was a guy who laughed all the time, wore the same clothes every day, decorated his home with outlandish decorations and obscure furniture and he surrounded himself with strange contraptions and inventions that were deliberately over engineered to perform simple tasks in a complicated fashion. To call his home a playhouse was the understatement of the decade. *God bless him.* However, as an adult, I've come to appreciate his character on a more intellectual level. Pee wee's house, for example, is much more than just a Rube Goldberg machine. It's a commitment to a routine. It's a lifestyle. It's a user interface for his brain. He knows that something is lost when he fails to start his day consciously. That's why he executes a perfectly calibrated sequence for the first hour of his morning. It ensures that his day has a cadence and a rhythm. It creates ideal conditions to elicit his best work, although I'm pretty sure he doesn't actually have a job. The point is, a creator's morning rituals and routines and disciplines and habits are the very things that allow their creativity to blossom. It's simply a matter of sticking with that routine no matter what. *How predictable is your daily routine?*

Reduce daily decisions to routine. There's something special about diving into your art before the sun comes up. The world doesn't make many demands on a creator at five in the morning. It's calm, dark and quiet. It's just you and your ideas. No distractions. No excuses. Complete control. You almost feel like you're getting away with something. Playing with house money. Contributing to a surplus of imagination. Getting a head start over the rest of the world. *It's empowering as hell.* Pee wee represents the power of giving your creativity the first energy of the day. Just imagine if we could all wake up that excited every morning. What's more, working first thing in the morning is also a way to safeguard yourself for the rest of the day. That hour or two of creating can prevent an entire day of guilty feelings. Because no matter what life throws at us, we'll already have that chunk of creative work banked. Almost like emotional insurance, early morning creating is tool for orienting you in the direction of daily meaning making. *Are you still wasting brain cells in the morning trying to figure out what to do, or does your daily routine relieve your mind the necessity of remembering?*

Create a framework for inspiration. Pee wee's debut movie was written on the back of his wildly successful television show, *Pee wee's Playhouse*. We never missed an episode. Saturday mornings, my brother and I would race into the family room and fawn over his fantastic house filled with toys, gadgets,

talking appliances, puppet characters and a disembodied genie's head who lives in a jeweled box. The show used live action comedy, running gags, viewer interaction, video animation, green screen effects, claymation, famous guest stars, and of course, awesome eighties music. It was everything a burgeoning creative mind required. When the show went off the air, I was devastated. Saturday mornings would never be the same. What's sad is, years later, Pee-wee was arrested for indecent exposure in an adult theater. And it set off a chain reaction of national media attention that changed the general public's view of his work. But I never cared. Still don't. The character that lived in my head and lived in my television was all that mattered. Pee-wee's playhouse was the definitive environment for creativity, imagination and whimsy. His world was the first place that gave me permission to surround myself with inspiration at all times. *Do new ideas flow as a natural consequence of your personalized workspace?*

127 -- THE DREAM SCENE FROM INCEPTION

There are no rules if something is great. Ariadne is an architecture student recruited to construct the various dreamscapes. With her help, the team will be able to infiltrate the target's subconscious and extract the necessary information. Naturally, she can't resist. There's nothing quite like it. It's pure creation. In the dream state, reality is negotiable. All rules can be bent or broken. She can even cheat architecture into impossible shapes. But this is a movie. Real people can't access that kind of creative power in their own lives. *Until we can.* It's simply a matter of giving ourselves permission. Realizing that, in art, we can do whatever we want. The only thing that stops us is our stubborn need to categorize. Our habit of addictively defining ourselves in narrow ways. But if we truly our creativity to expand into unexpected territory, we have to engage in possibility for its own sake. If a blues singer, for example, wants to cross genres and record a country album, she absolutely can. Nobody is going to stop her. But until she sheds the outdated way of speaking about her identity, until she accepts the story that it's okay for someone like her to cross musical boundaries, then her music will never see the light of day. A useful mantra to remember is, *no labels, no limits*. If we decide exactly what we're doing, then we can only be as good as that. But if we remake ourselves as we grow and as the world changes, keeping our creative process in permanent beta, anything is possible. Just like the dreamscape, there's nothing between us and raw, direct, pure creation. *What kinds of permissions do you give yourself?*

First you write the book, then the book writes you. Ariadne has been to the top of the mountain. She seen the promised land, and knows she will forever be changed. Einstein was right. A mind once stretched by new thoughts can never regain its original shape. That's the great transformation of art. How your life changes once the work is done. Because once you've shipped, once something is yours, once you have your own art in your own hands, you're never the same again. I remember receiving the very first copy of my very first book. That moment is permanently seared into my memory. Something about the act of tearing open the box, inhaling the acidic scent of victory and beholding my own creation in my hands, changed me forever. I slept with the book that night. Because I knew my life would regain its original shape. And I was right. First the you write the book, then the book writes you. And so, there is no failure in art. Simply by virtue of engaging in the creative process, we gain something that nobody can take away from us—the person we become by creating it, and the life we're able to lead by having created it. *How do you let experiences change you?*

A skewed relationship to reality. We're all searching for some dream to pour ourselves into. Our one big idea that's as large and as great as we are. A productive obsession that we can nurture and see to fruition. Of course, every creation has a cost. Not a price, necessarily, but a cost. To us and the people around us. Cobb warns his young apprentice never to recreate from her own memory, but to always create new places. Otherwise she'll lose grasp on what's real and what's a dream. That's why she needs a totem. Some kind of personal icon. A small object that you can always have with you, the weight and movement of which nobody else knows, to convince you beyond a doubt that you're not in someone else's dream. What's interesting is, the term *totem* actually derives from the word for "sibling kin, group or family." Meaning, your totem doesn't necessarily have to be an object. It can be a person, too. Someone who refuses to bullshit you. Someone who sees what you can't see for yourself. Someone who has the courage to tell you that you've been following your obsession for too long, and you've become a slave to it. *Who in your life is willing to say when you've gone too far?*

128 -- THE PILL SCENE FROM LIMITLESS

Accumulating firepower into your creative arsenal. Eddie's new drug allows him to unlock one hundred percent of his brainpower. He finds himself able to learn much faster and recall memories from his distant past. It's almost like his brain has its own sort of cloud, which stores data, memories and even the most menial of details. At a moment's notice, a surge of brilliance comes up to meet him, and he's able to achieve amazing feats. The question is, does this drug exist in real life? Adderall and psychostimulant users might say yes. Dimethyltryptamine and psychedelic users might say yes too. Those substances have been clinically proven to enhance brainpower and performance, controversies notwithstanding. On the other hand, there are tons of people who have never popped a pill in their lives, and they're profoundly and perpetually lucid and focused and productive and energized. They access flow like it's going out of style. They achieve cognitive ecstasy on a daily basis. And so, whether limitlessness is chemically induced or naturally accessed isn't the point. What matters is that *integration*, meaning, employing the whole of our personality, talents, gifts, memories and experiences, is a possibility for everyone. Because each of us walks around with an incredible tool kit. And every day, we build and build upon it, trusting that it will eventually be recognized and put to use. The difference maker is, instead of letting the tools rust, some of us keep employing them any way that we can, until our time comes. *How do you embroider the accumulated threads of daily observation into a striking tapestry of innovative thinking?*

Hedging your creative bets. Patience can be an invaluable asset for the artist. The capacity to delay gratification, the willingness stay in game long enough to still be around when the world is ready for us, cannot be stressed enough. Then again, there's a fine line between fertile idleness and waiting in vain. And so, we're obliged to ask ourselves what waiting is getting in the way of it. Because sometimes patience degrades into myopia. Sometimes we become so patient, waiting so long for the big things, that we let the small things slip right by us. And we inadvertently create a limited field a vision that shields us from exciting new opportunities. Eddie's drug allows him see everything from every perspective. There isn't anything he doesn't interact with. The pill offers him the ultimate awareness plan. A new lens for interacting with the world. That's something each of us can take away from this movie. That whatever comes to us, good or bad, we still have a responsibility to engage with it somehow. Even if all we do is notice it, we stand in the grace of nonaction. Because

it's still another chance to dance with the universe. To fully participate in the world around us. *Are you so busy waiting that you're unable to notice the opportunities that lead to success?*

Ride the energetic wave. The visual effects in this movie are stunning. According to an interview with the director, he wanted the audience to always feel what the character was feeling, zooming along with him. And since the character felt like he was in complete control, the technical aspects of the movie corresponded. The visuals were much more polished, the lighting was softer and they used wider lenses, so it's all very precise, like you're actually inside his head. In fact, if you read the comments under the video, people attest to the realism of these visuals. They recall memorable moments of high performance and flow in their own lives, saying that the movie perfectly illustrates how it feels to feel limitless. Eddie's right. He's not high. He's not wired. Just clear. And so, the true moment of conception isn't when he pops the pill, but when starts channeling the newfound focus that his pill provided. That's the whole point. Not spending time in our brains as if it were the destination, but using our brains in the service of the work we intend to accomplish. It's a tool, not a hangout. *What kind of relationship do you have with your own mind?*

129 -- THE MEXICO SCENE FROM SHAWSHANK REDEMPTION

Stop waiting to be who you are. Writers love to pontificate about how many editors, publishers and agents rejected their work. They tell harrowing tales about how they were turned down a hundred and thirty times before finally being plucked from obscurity. *Excuse me while I grab a tissue.* I've written thirty books and not a single one was rejected. You know why? Because I published every one of them myself. Instead of waiting for the invisible jury to stamp my creative passport and tell me that my art was okay, I hired myself. Instead of investing my blood and sweat and time and tears into something only to have it shit on, I chose to become the sole shot caller of my own work. And the irony is, after a few years of doing this, publishers started coming to *me*. They started hearing good things about my platform and track record and body of work, and wanted to be associated with my brand. But it was too late. I already proved to myself and to my audience that the middleman wasn't necessary. So I wrote rejection letters to them. And it felt glorious. Andy was right. Get busy living or get busy dying. Every creator should live by these words. No more waiting to be creative, no more waiting for permission to be who you are. *How could you remove the threat of rejection?*

Optimism is an elected attitude. Andy tells his friend that he underestimates himself. That he *could* make it on the outside, if he really wanted to. I think we're all a little guilty of that. We're all a little late to recognize our own value. I was listening to a fascinating [interview](#) with a screenwriter who gave a great piece of advice on this subject. He said that we have to entertain the notion that we're good. Maybe not as good as we need to be, not as good as we ever will be, and not so good that we won't still have to work hard. But it costs us nothing to tell ourselves that we can do this. That we can at least give it a shot. Optimism is an elected attitude. And even if it feels like we're tricking ourselves into taking action, the reality is, we all have to be a little deluded to stay motivated. That's the tax we pay for doing this kind of work. It demands that we become masters of activating our own internal generators. Red, as we see at the end of the movie, actually *does* make it on the outside. Andy's ingenious escape through the tunnel inspires his momentum and kickstarts his ambition. That's the other thing about optimism. It's highly contagious. Sometimes all it takes is one person with unwavering belief in themselves to positively infect our mindset. *What are the giants you need to slay to make your attitude what it needs to be?*

Hope found its way back. The purpose of the primary creative environment is to build a physical space that reflects who we are and what's important to us, so that the ideas flow as a natural consequence. But we also have to build a psychological space. A mental architecture that allows our creativity to roam free. As a writer, for example, I know that the preconditions for my finest moments of expression are flexibility and focus and persistence and intention. Those are the psychological requirements that provide me with an ongoing sense of structure and safety. And what I find is, the more that I put my energy toward making those preconditions happen, the better my work ultimately is. Andy knows he'll become an institutionalized man if he chooses the wrong mindset. But he believes in hope. He believes that there are places in the world that aren't made of stone. That there's something inside all of us that they can't get to, that they can't touch, that's ours. And that hope, that psychological precondition, is what channels his creativity into the most ingenious escape plan anybody had ever seen. *What mental muscles have you neglected to exercise?*

130 -- THE WRITING SCENE FROM A RIVER RUNS THROUGH IT

Habits are more important than incidents. There's no such thing as farmer's block. If ranchers don't tend to their crops and animals and land every day, there is no harvest. Unlike artists, they don't have the luxury of even thinking about creative blocks. When the sun comes up, they go to work. And while their progress may range from dull to spectacular, they still accept both as part of the process. The goal, then, is to build a daily architecture for maximizing the creative process. Because in our daily practice, success is not measured by the distance covered, but by the marks and angles that are formed. On the work, on ourselves and on the world. Norman is deeply frustrated with his father's teaching style. As a young boy, it's hard for him to appreciate the value of such discipline. But he learns to love what's good for him. And in the end, his father's foundation of habit and consistency is exactly what enables him to become an award winning author and renowned professor of literature. Graeber was right when he said, anyone not willing to submit themselves to some kind of intense work discipline for most of their waking hours deserves nothing. *What do you consider a successful creative outing?*

Love the labor, let go of the fruit. Norman finally gets the writing correct, at which point his father he tells him, *good, now throw it away*. The look on the kid's face is priceless. Five more seconds, and he would have wadded up that paper and hurled it at his dad's face. But I understand his anger. Detachment is a painful lesson for any young artist to learn. To see each day's work as the death of what came before. To free yourself of any sense of attachment. To accept that nothing you created in the past matters anymore, other than it brought you here. Who has the patience for that? I'm reminded of the first time I tried forced vomiting, which is the daily ritual of emotional release through three pages of free writing. What's hard about the process is, you never save the pages. Everything you write is off the record. It's a never before, never again moment. And since the impulse to make things on the record is a primary characteristic of human beings, it's liberating as hell to fight it every once in a while. But after sticking with ritual for over a decade, I've finally come to realize something. Art doesn't have to hang in a museum every time. What matters is staying focused on the creative process, not what the creating produces. *What are you unattached to?*

Stick your fingers in your ears. When you're starting out as a young artist, you hang your sense of success, the fullness of your heart and the stability of your soul on the constant reinforcement and external validation from others. But at a certain point, you learn to sing in your own voice. You become your

own authority figure. You stop demanding excessive reassurance from others and answer only to yourself. Years ago when I launched my corporate identity training program, everyone had an opinion. Everyone had criticism as to what was wrong with the project. And I became so frustrated, so disenchanted by people's feedback, that eventually I just stopped talking about it. Because I was tired of allowing everyone else's opinions bounce me around like a pinball. Ultimately, I learned to develop deeper trust in my own instincts. I stopped spending time time living in other people's worlds. And I eventually hit my stride with the project, leveraging it into one of my most profitable services yet. Sometimes you just have to stick your fingers in your ears, drown out the rest of the world and do what you want to do. *How will you protect yourself from being swallowed by everybody else's vision?*

131 -- THE BOAT SCENE FROM MY BEST FRIEND'S WEDDING

Nothing comes from out of nowhere. One of the mantras I've lived by for many years is, the door must be opened from the inside. Meaning, we have to go happen to things. We have to put ourselves in the way of success. Otherwise we'll never hear the sound of opportunity knocking. This is a movie about the special someone who gets away. When it first went to video, my high school sweetheart forced me to watch it at least twenty times. *I hated it.* This scene, in particular, infuriated me. Michael gives his best friend a clear opening. A blatant invitation to confess her true feelings for him. But she just stands there like a dolt, letting the moment pass her by. *You magnificent putz.* What are you thinking? Regret is the price you pay for not having any balls. Whether it's with your relationships or with you work, the antidote to a lifetime of misery is decisiveness. Commitment. Taking action to move the story forward. Even if that means the painful death of other choices. Even if that means rejection. At least you tried. At least you answered the call to opportunity. All love, after all, is saying yes to something. *How could you live your life in a way that eliminates the need to regret things?*

The universe will not deliver itself to us. When I relocated across the country in search of new creative opportunities, my mentor said something I'll never forget. His advice was, you have to find the people who have what you want, grab them by the lapel and tell them who you are and why they should give it to you. *That terrified me.* As a passive person by nature, I wasn't accustomed to that level of assertiveness and directness. But I knew that in a big city, nobody was going to give me an outlet to prove how talented I was. So I manufactured my own opportunities. I created my own leverage. Instead of sitting back and waiting for the world to fall in love with me, I set myself on fire and gave people front row seats to watch me burn. And it worked. Julianne, on the other hand, didn't take that step. She stood shoulder to shoulder with the only man who ever felt like home to her, looked him in the eye, and said nothing. Nothing. And the opportunity vanished like a vapor trail. A powerful reminder to lovers and artists alike, we can't wait around to be saved. We have to believe the world is now ready for the love we are here to deliver, and we have to go out there and ask the world for our proper place in it. It's a daunting experience, but it's also one of those moments that make us happy to be human. *How will you overcome your fear of asking?*

Buttress passion with pragmatism. This movie is a love story, but it's also a parable about business and creativity and ambition. I'm reminded of a famous [research study](#) about how passion blinds entrepreneurs, leading them to get

overconfident and make bad choices at the worst times, potentially dooming even the most promising startups. Turns out, the very thing it takes to start a business often ends up destroying it. *Who knew?* And so, passion alone doesn't pay the mortgage. What matters is production, proactivity and performance. If we want to turn our personal obsession into profitable enterprise, we have to buttress passion with pragmatism. However, I still believe that passion helps. It may not be a panacea, but it's certainly useful when times are tough. I'm reminded of another **case study** about a lawyer mom who managed to find the time to author her first novel with two toddlers and a booming mediation practice. She said she made it all work because she was running on passion, writing in the cracks of time, viewing every hour as a commodity that had to be budgeted like it was money. Perhaps passion is more productive than we realize. *Are there at least ten other people out there who are successfully making money from a passion similar to yours?*

132 -- THE APARTMENT SCENE FROM DUMB AND DUMBER

Let me give that no thought. Growing up, I was the kid who always raised his hand. Didn't matter what the teacher or the coach or the parent was asking us to do. My hand just shot up. Usually before the question was done being asked. What can I say? I wanted to participate. To be part of the experience. Everything was just another chance to dance with the universe. And what's interesting is, as an adult, that inclination hasn't waned. Especially when it comes to work. Because I'm so profoundly grateful and enthusiastic and enriched by even the tiniest opportunity to contribute and create value, that anytime someone is willing to pay me money to do it, I raise my hand. I pull the trigger, ride the bullet and call whatever I hit the target. Lloyd finally has the same revelation. He knows that the only ticket out of his crappy apartment, dead end job, lonely existence and unfulfilling life is to track down the owner of that briefcase. That's the experience he needs to say yes to. Because if he doesn't do it now, he may not get the chance again. So he raises his hand. He answers the call to adventure. And what awaits him on the other side is life changing. Reminding us, that we shouldn't have to talk ourselves into opportunities. Feeling fully alive is always on the other side of saying yes. *What is the opportunity that's going to pass you buy if you don't act on it?*

Efficiency is eloquence. Harry and Lloyd set out on a cross country road trip to return a briefcase to a woman they hardly know. That's not exactly efficient thinking. In fact, it's quite the opposite. Stepping over dollars to pick up dimes, using time to save money instead of using money to save time, that's a poverty mentality. And it's no way to live your life. Abundance, on the other hand, comes from practicing the economy of effort. Creating systems to do the heavy lifting for you. Spending as little energy as possible to get things done. It's simply a matter of finding the catchall in each situation. A comedian, for example, knows that if he just keeps getting better on stage, everything else will take care of itself. A cartoonist knows that if he just keeps publishing his drawings with his fans, everything else will take care of itself. And a writer knows that if he just keeps blogging every single day, everything else will take care of itself. And so, the catchall is the central lever that galvanizes the whole machine. The crucial stone that kills all of the birds. The single activity that can be trusted to take care of everything else. All progress flows from that. *What's the one activity, if practiced consistently, would make the biggest impact on your creative life?*

Remove what robs you, embrace what excites you. Lloyd asks a crucial question. One that most of us don't realize is actually a stepping stone to transformation. *What the hell am I doing here?* Next time you find yourself wondering that same thing, don't run away from it. Dig down through the many levels of why. Figure out what life is asking of you. Because it's not just a question, it's an invitation to live a better story. When I was a senior in college, standing in the doorway of the career fair with a stack of resumes in my hand, I remember thinking to myself, *what the hell am I doing here?* When I was writing on my first book, working full time selling couches at a discount furniture warehouse, I remember thinking to myself, *what the hell am I doing here?* When I was writing my second book, working nights and weekends parking cars at a luxury hotel, I remember thinking to myself, *what the hell am I doing here?* When I was dating the wrong girl, stuck in a relationship that made me hate who I was, I remember thinking to myself, *what the hell am I doing here?* And when my creativity crashed straight into a brick wall, trapped in an environment that was limiting my growth, I remember thinking to myself, *what the hell am I doing here?* The point is, each time I threw my hands up to the sky in frustration and asked that crucial question, it disturbed me enough to take massive action. To remove what robbed me and embrace what excited me. *How can you take a bad situation and turn it into a new direction?*

133 -- THE MEDITATION SCENE FROM EAT, PRAY, LOVE

Build a bias for action. Creativity is a chicken egg conundrum. Do you get ideas so you can create something, or do you create something so you can get ideas? Many writers and thinkers would attest to the latter. Personally, I don't know how I feel until I write what I think. Only through the generative power of movement and motion does my creativity ignite. It's similar to the argument over sitting meditation versus moving meditation. The first approach uses *being*, i.e., stillness and concentration and contemplation, as the path to relaxation and enlightenment. Practices might include guided imagery, hypnosis, creative visualization, progressive muscle relaxation and mindfulness breathing. The challenge is, for people who have racing brains and hyperactive imaginations, that approach becomes frustrating and impractical. They'd prefer to create something so they can get ideas, not the other way around. And so, moving meditation uses *doing*, i.e., activity and flow and momentum, as the path to relaxation and enlightenment. Practices might include yoga, walking or any other form of rhythmic, repetitive action. And it's ideal for people who need physical movement helps to anchor themselves against the tumultuous waves of thought. Liz doesn't know if she's one of those people. She made the difficult choice to leave behind all the trappings of modern success and instead find what she truly wanted from life. So when her meditation teacher tells her to go out into the garden and just sit there, part of me wonders if her journey would be better served by going out into the garden just getting to work. *How are you developing your kinesthetic intelligence?*

There's more to life than simple euphoria. Psychlinks published a fascinating study on happiness. Turns out, there are two main theoretical perspectives which address the question of what makes people feel happy. Hedonic happiness comes from gratifying and fleeting woohoo experience of pleasure. We know it as euphoria. But there's also eudaimonic happiness, which comes from the satisfying and nourishing things that build something inside of us that accumulate and have sustenance. We know it as meaning. In fact, the word *happy* has the same root as the word happenstance. Proving, that it's incidental, not intentional. Proving, that there is no human happiness that is not earned. Proving, that happiness isn't the target, it's the reward we get for hitting the target. Gilbert puts it best when she says that happiness is the result of personal effort, and that we only find it by relentlessly participating. *Agreed.* The goal is engagement and connection. In fact, looking back at the ups and down of my adult life, the happiest I've ever felt is when I wasn't trying to become happy, but when I was trying to create meaning. *When was the last time you rewrote your personal equation for happiness?*

Get control of your psychic environment. Liz's meditation teacher makes a powerful point about mental discernment. He says that we should learn to select our thoughts like we learn to select our clothes every day. *That's* a power we can cultivate. If we want to control things in our life so bad, we should work on the mind. Because if we can't learn to master our thinking, we're in deep trouble forever. And she's right. His insight may very well be bumper sticker wisdom, but that doesn't make it any less true. I'm reminded of technique my meditation teacher taught me years ago. *Observe, then release.* During our hypnosis sessions, I learned to simply notice my negative, stressful and unhealthy thoughts, and then to *imagine* them floating up and out of my head like a vapor into the air above. The first few times I tried it were deeply frustrating. But once got my mental footing, the technique would take less than a minute to do each time. And it became a useful and portable tool whenever a current of anxiety shot through my brain. *How could you change the sensation of anxiety into a feeling that is not necessarily negative?*

134 -- THE SCHOOL SCENE FROM SEARCHING FOR BOBBY FISHER

Generosity is the tax you pay for talent. Happiness comes from freedom, and freedom comes from finding a home for all of your talents. Josh had that kind of freedom. He was better at chess than anyone has ever been at anything in their lives. That's not a game, that's a gift. That's art. And so, imagine a world where you were firing on all cylinders. Keeping all of your passions in play. Drawing out your full ingenuity. Making use of everything you are. Leaving no faculty untapped, and leaving no asset unharvested. That's happiness. Because with every new talent you give yourself permission to exploit, you open a new vein of freedom that didn't exist previously. It's simply a matter of permission. Allowing yourself to give your hidden gifts a more prominent place in your life. I spent twenty years writing and singing music before I had the guts to share my songs with the public. The material was just too personal. Too bloody. Too precious to be subjected to the cruel ear of the world. But then I had an epiphany. *Generosity is the tax you pay for talent.* If you've been given a gift, something special that allows you deliver value that nobody has ever delivered before, you have an obligation to share it. To regift it so it brings joy to others. Anything less is an act of ingratitude. And so, I finally gave myself permission to share my songs publicly. And when I did, everything shifted. My relationship to the music, my context in the world, my identity as an artist, my leverage in the marketplace and my connection with the audience. *What strength, skill or gift do you wish to use more fully?*

Apply the training you already have. Josh first learned how to play chess from watching street virtuosos in the park. And with their guidance and encouragement, he quickly became one of the greatest champions in the history of the game. Then, after fifteen years of mastering chess, he moved away from the board and transitioned into the study of martial arts. He became a beginner again, but by taking the training he already had and applied it, he became a champion at yet another game. Next, he started deconstructing what he'd been doing rather intuitively and abstractly so it could be replicated more exactly and practically. And the result was a best selling book about the art of learning. But what's most interesting about his career trajectory is where he landed. Josh now runs an educational foundation dedicated to an individualized approach to learning, where he consults internationally on the subjects of performance psychology, the learning process and creativity. That's perhaps his greatest art of all. Josh created something new out of intermingling his interests. He used the hard core formative time to lay groundwork for the years to follow. And that foundation now enables him to make a massive, meaningful contribution

to people's lives—not because of chess and martial arts, but because of the person he *became* while mastering chess and martial arts. *In which discipline have you already built a lifetime of foundational development?*

The shortcut to motivation. The chief struggle for any creator is that of motivation. Physically dragging their bones out of bed and making new things, every day. And while there are countless tools and tactics and tricks for disciplining yourself and overcoming procrastination, frankly, it's just too much work. And too much time. In fact, some of those strategies can actually become counterproductive. Because we spend too much of our psychic energy trying to overcome procrastination that we don't have any juice left for the actual creation. Then challenge, then, is finding the central lever that galvanizes the whole creative machine. The catchall that can be trusted to obfuscate procrastination. What is it? *Passion*. Enthusiasm. Irrational exuberance. To quote my favorite **song** of all time, it was a love so big that it filled his heart, and when it swelled and finally burst apart, the love spilled out they call it art. That's passion. That's motivation. And if you ask any artist who's deeply passionate about a particular creative project, motivation isn't an issue. Ever. Because it's a million times easier to focus on the path when passion is embedded into the pavement. When what you do is a vehicle for living what is important to you. *How can you unify your work with our sense of life?*

135 -- THE VOICEMAIL SCENE FROM SWINGERS

In that kiss I saw a vision of my future. A prospective client reaches out, shows an interest in your work, asks tons of questions, requests a price quote, emails you back immediately, gets your hopes up about working together, and then, they just magically disappear. No explanation. No apology. No nothing. They just go away. And despite your follow up efforts, courteous and professional and persistent as they may be, still nothing. This phenomenon infuriates me. And each time it happens, I can't help but think to myself, *what the hell? You're the ones who came to me.* But then I remember something I learned in high school. Just because we kissed once doesn't mean we're in love forever. That's the thing about opportunity. It's a fickle mistress. It comes and goes like the changing weather, swearing allegiance to no one, rarely with explanation or apology. And so, instead of twisting myself into a psychological pretzel trying to figure out what went wrong, maybe it was me, maybe it was them, maybe my email account wasn't working, I've learned to just let it go. I accept the fact that so many things in life just go away. And I try not to take it personally. Then again, I also feel a puff of hope when I remember, the fact that it happened at all means that it's possible. *What can you let go of right now so that you can regain your balance?*

I'd rather hear no than nothing. This scene makes my stomach turn. It's quite possibly the most awkward three minutes in the history of modern film. Mike reeks of desperation, longing to connect, aching to engage, begging to be heard. But he keeps getting the damn machine. It's interesting, no matter how many times I watch this scene, I always catch myself silently screaming to the screen, *no, please, don't do it again.* But he always does. Every time. Because that's the natural human response. People would rather hear no than nothing. I'm reminded of the old saying, absence makes the heart grow fonder. Completely bullshit. In my experience, absence makes the mind start to wander. And that's when the waves of anxiety come crashing in. Because whether it's a friend or a date or a colleague or a client, when someone leaves you in the dark, you engage in worse case thinking. You assume that no news is bad news. Psychologists call this **negative bias**, whereby the brain is built with a greater sensitivity to unpleasant new. According to their research, the human capacity to weigh negative input keeps us out of harm's way. That's why our brains have evolved to developed systems that make it unavoidable for us not to notice danger and, hopefully, respond to it. The question, though, is how can we accumulate enough positive experiences to override the tilt to negativity? I suggest using a victory log. It's a small weekly calendar that you populate

with any and all victories, large or small, that you achieve each day. Think of it as a visual record of progress that surrounds you with concrete evidence of positive improvement. *How will you tip the scales toward happiness?*

Go work on something else. Despite your most strategic efforts, you can't wait somebody to call you back. You can't use the law of attraction to make the phone ring. What you *can* do, however, is turn waiting into working. You can give yourself permission to work on something else. I prefer the term *polyamorous creation*, which is the practice of pursuing relationships with multiple creative projects. It's way to hedge your creative bets. To insure yourself against the daily discouragements, delays, distractions, depressions, derailments and disappointments of the process. Consider these common examples. New project receive an unflattering review? Go work on something else. Editor not calling you back with her notes? Go work on something else. Computer freeze at an inopportune time? Go work on something else. Client go on vacation and forget about your website? Go work on something else. Receive a rejection letter from a publisher? Go work on something else. Spirit won't move the way you want it to? Go work on something else. Mike blew it. He put all his eggs into one basket. And as a result, he e lost the girl. A smarter, healthier approach would be to always have something waiting in the wings, ready to be worked on. To differentiate and diversify between a number of main lines of activity. That way, when one enterprise grinds to a halt, productive work does not cease. *How will you build enough momentum to keep the story moving forward?*

136 -- THE GUITAR SCENE FROM IT MIGHT GET LOUD

It's impossible to fail at self expression. I was recently listening to a interview with one of my favorite songwriters. He said he'd rather be on stage in front of thousands of people than in conversation with a few. And his reasoning was, on stage, there is no wrong. Maybe better or worse, but never wrong. Conversation, on the other hand, has rules and standards and boundaries. But in art, you can do whatever you want. It's not about being right, it's about being yourself. Jack is an eccentric guy, there's no doubt. He got his start as a furniture upholster, where he used to submit invoices in crayon and write poetry inside the furniture. He convinced the world that his wife was his sister. He frequently color codes his creative endeavors, like his recording studio which is completely outfitted in yellow, black, red, and blue. And in the opening scene of this movie, he makes a crude guitar out of a two pieces of wood, a few nails, an old wire, a soda bottle and a cheap preamp. Is it an act? Is it a persona? Is it just a clever way to sell records? Doesn't matter. White's relentless individualism is what matters. He refuses to be anyone other than himself. And it's enabled him to enjoy both critical and popular success, winning piles of awards and being dubbed as one of the greatest guitarists of all time. And he doesn't even need a guitar. *If you're just being yourself, how can anybody tell you that you're doing it wrong?*

The freedom to pursue what's inside. The only artistic goal worth pursuing is freedom. Freedom over what I create, freedom over why and how I create it, freedom over whom I create it with and freedom over what I do with it once it's created, that's all I care about. Everything else flows from there. **Macleod** famously said tat the sovereignty we have over our work will inspire far more people than the actual content ever will. Jack is inspiring to me for that very reason. He's free. Not just in the way he creates music, but in the way he creates the opportunity to make music. His songs rock, but what I admire most is that he started his own independent record label, even established its first physical location, which is a combination record store, performance venue, and headquarters for the company. That's freedom. Jack literally and figurative built the house where his freedom resides. He has complete sovereignty over his work, supreme, independent authority over his creativity. And so, watching this documentary as a guitarist inspires me to find new ways to express myself through the instrument. But watching this movie as an artist inspires me to find new ways to be free and to own my world. To own my media, own my platform, own my career and ultimately own my life. Tastes like freedom to me. *Are you conquering your work, or is your work conquering you?*

Constraints are catapults. White's musical philosophy is to limit himself in various ways to force creative approaches to recording and playing. Whether he writes only three chords for his song, has only two members in his band, or plays only one string on his guitar, the constraint is what sets him free. I'm reminded of my favorite art book, *The Art of Looking Sideways*. Famed visual designer Alan Fletcher wrote that the first move in any creative process is to introduce constraints. It's enormously effective. In fact, it's one of the reasons I'm jealous of traditional journalists. They have deadlines. They execute against temporal constraints. They don't have the luxury of even thinking about writer's block, because if they don't hit their word count by the end of the week, they're fired. The same goes for farmers. If don't tend to their crops and animals and land every day, there is no harvest. That's a constraint too. The point is, all creators and communicators of ideas need to introduce constraints *somewhere* in their process. Whether it's an output quota, daily deadline or accountability email at the end of each week, constraints are catapults. In the production management world, factories and organizations do the same thing. They identify their limitation, decide how to exploit it, and then restructure everything in the system around it. *Are you running from your limitations or leveraging them?*

137 -- THE DREAM TEAM SCENE FROM ARMAGEDDON

Hire people to amplify what you do. When it comes to creative work, there's nothing wrong with being a control freak. The fiercely independent artist deserves sovereignty over their work. But you can't do everything yourself forever. There comes a point in every creator's life when you have to defer. You have to hire people to amplify what you do. Otherwise you impose a ceiling on the level of impact you can have. Over the years, I've contracted dozens of designers, illustrators, developers, coders, editors, researchers, programmers, virtual assistants, audio engineers and public relations specialists. Each one of these people filled in the skills gap when I surpassed the perimeter of my competence. And with their support, all of my projects grew light years beyond what could have been possible on my own. That's a form of creativity too. The resourcefulness to find the people who can help you become what you need to be. Because if you pick the right people, all you have to do as the artist is cast a vision, sit back and watch them do their magic. It's actually quite liberating. Once you let go of trying to do everything, it feels like you can do anything. *Who was the last person you paid real money to amplify what you do?*

The direct relationship between passion and ownership. I love a good recruiting montage. Any movie where the main character has to assemble his dream team for the final showdown at the end of the third act is entertaining and interesting to me. Then again, it's also a warning. Because it's hard to be passionate about somebody else's dream. No matter how much you pay, how exciting the project or how inspiring the vision, other people will always have a limited capacity to come aboard your ship. There's only a finite amount of fire available. And so, when you're sitting across the table from somebody you've enlisted, wondering why they aren't as excited as you are, try not to get too frustrated. Because it's not their dream. And nobody will ever care as much as you will. But don't let that scare you away from breathing in help. Success never comes unassisted. Besides, asking for help doesn't make you bad, incompetent or in the debt of the helper. It makes you a leader. It makes you resourceful. So let it be okay that you need other people. Admit that you need their help, ask them to give it to you, accept it, and then appreciate it when they're done. And don't be afraid to give them enough rope to find something better than what you came up with. *Are you afraid to bring people into your dream?*

The wall of how is crumbling. My mentor once told me, do everything yourself until you don't have to. That's good advice. But what's interesting is, that timeline is longer than it used to be. Fifty, twenty, even ten years ago,

artists had no choice but to find people to fill in the gaps of their capabilities. Of course, that before the sum of all human knowledge was free and available to all. Now, thanks to the magic of web, the wall of how is crumbling. Now, not knowing how to do something has zero bearing on whether or not your creative dreams become realities. Because nothing is a closed silo anymore. If you need to learn a new skill, and you're lucky enough to have the access to information about it and the diligence to work at, nothing is off limits. When I launched my own online television network, I didn't know the first thing about lighting, keying, cutting, editing or any of the other skills required to produce a show. But I *did* know that there were thousands of online tutorials for each of those individual tasks. And they were available for free. So I started teaching myself. Every single day. Within a few months, I had learned the bare minimum I needed to get by. And within a few years, I had become proficient. Interestingly enough, I never ended up hiring anybody else to help with the show. The workflow was so simple and so doable, it just made more economic sense for me to do it all myself. Proving, that before asking for help, you might ask yourself if it's worthwhile to learn how to do it yourself. *Are you depleting yourself learning how to do all fifty steps right away?*

138 -- THE COURTROOM SCENE FROM ACCEPTED

Don't spend too much time crossing your fingers. I believe in building a brand from the inside out. Creating a high enough volume of daily output so that the market targets you. Allowing new opportunities find you through the attraction of working, not the agony of waiting. That's how I've successfully run my business for the past fifteen years. But as an experiment, as a way of testing my own system, I recently spent a summer doing the exact opposite. Filling out job applications, responding to proposals, going on interviews, meeting with recruiters, submitting my portfolio for freelance gigs and seeking out new work opportunities. By the end of the summer, I had been rejected over twelve hundred times. *Twelve hundred times.* And despite my best efforts, not a single one of those opportunities came to fruition. And I thought to myself, wow, playing the starving artist's lottery is a fucking joke. Waiting around for some invisible jury to stamp your creative passport and tell you that your work is okay is no way to live your life. Because it creates negative momentum. Each one of those twelve hundred rejections, while only marginally painful in isolation, adds up pretty quickly. And by the end of the summer, I was starting to get disillusioned. Because I knew that the hour I spent each day looking for work would have been better invested creating, instead of waiting around for people to give me the opportunity to show them how creative I was. So I stopped. I ended the experiment and went back to doing what I do best. *Making things.* And literally within a week, I booked two new clients and a major network television interview. *Are you crossing your fingers or using them to create art?*

Instigation capital is cheap. Gaines creates his own fake college after being receiving rejection letters from all of the colleges to which he applies. He literally accepts himself. And disenchanted with traditional college life, he then has the students create their own curricula, ranging from the culinary arts to skateboarding to meditation to psychokinesis. What's fascinating about this plotline is, it's not as fictitious and whimsical as the movie might suggest. In fact, it's quite prophetic. Nearly a decade after this movie came out, their crazy idea of creating your own college is actually possible. Because the center of gravity has shifted. The gatekeepers have left their gates. The boundaries between consumer, producer, investor, supplier, buyer and end user have faded. Everybody is everything. The world has officially shifted from a gated community to a permissionless platform. *Hallelujah.* Welcome to the direct to consumer era. Where the need for the middlemen of the world

is quickly vanishing. No wonder critics hated this movie. They represent the very gatekeepers the film proves to be irrelevant. *Are you still waiting to be accepted by the powers that be?*

When you find your people, you belong everywhere. There was a point in time when weird people not only couldn't do whatever they wanted, but were brutalized for doing it. But that was before weird became the new normal. Now we're all weird. Now all the things people used to get made fun of for, they get paid for. Or at least appreciated for. And so, we're seeing people slowing making peace with their own weirdness, gently making their rough edges known, one creative act at a time. It's magnificent. And the best part is, we seem to be radically accepting of this mutual weirdness. Seuss famously said that when we find someone whose weirdness is compatible with ours, we join up with them and fall in mutual weirdness, and call it love. This movie is paints a picture of possibility for that kind of belonging. Of course, it's still a movie. Life doesn't always wrap up in a nice little package at the end of ninety minutes. And that's the tricky part about weirdness. There's a certain acceptance, pardon the pun, that it might be a long time before your weirdness catches on. The question is how long you're willing to do it before the right people notice. *Will you still be around when the world is finally ready for you?*

139 -- THE CLOCK SCENE FROM HUGO

Begin with a single moment of commitment. Commitment is the most misunderstood strategy on the planet. It's the simplest tool for increasing productivity and fastest way to open the door to creativity. The problem is, committing to something, choosing to go all in on your dream, provokes anxiety. As my creativity coach explains, if we're not aware of this dynamic, we will avoid our work or leave it too soon so as to avoid the anxiety brought on by choosing. Making the right choice, he says, doesn't matter as much as making the commitment to choosing. That's the skill. That's the muscle we have to strengthen. I'm reminded of a thrilling novel I read about a gifted surgeon. The doctor could look at a situation and see the end points of a dozen possible choices in the blink of an eye, and then from instinct, choose rightly. He said he couldn't always explain his choices, but they were almost inevitably correct, even if not in the objective sense. He said that simply making a choice, any choice, and following through with absolute commitment, is what *made* it the right choice. And what's interesting is, once you commit yourself, the world reverberates with the sound of your purpose. Proving, that the commitment with the greatest consequence is the one you fail to make. *Where are you talking yourself out of commitment?*

Waiver not in your purpose. Hugo loves how machines do what they're meant to do. That's why broken machines make him so sad. Because they can't do what they're meant to do. People are the same way, he says. When they lose their purpose, it's like they're broken. And the only way to get fixed is to realize that they're an essential part of a finely tuned machine. That's what touched me most about this movie. It explores the existential longing for purpose through the simple metaphor of a clock. It shows us that a deep source of energy and motivation comes from passion and purpose. And it reminds us what's possible once we discover our rightful work in the human family. But it also warns us that, unlike a clock, purpose isn't necessarily a task. It's the way we live our life. It's what our existence is committed to. It's the result of uniting all of our inner elements. Because each of our daily acts make statement to our purpose. Everything we are and everything we do helps make the big machine run. *What is essential to your sense of being on purpose?*

Purpose shouldn't be a positioning strategy. Few things are more meaningful in life than the fulfillment of human purpose. But once it gets bastardized into strategy, once institutions start piggybacking their products on top of some invented purpose as their competitive advantage, the work starts to smell foul. That's the problem. Everyone seems to be jumping onto the purpose

bandwagon to peddle their wares. And the general public is starting to become skeptical. When the reality is, not everyone has to start a movement. Not every work of art has to effect social change. Sometimes a clock is just a clock, and sometimes a cigar is just a cigar. If anything, this movie reminds us that purpose doesn't have to be complicated, it just has to be meaningful. In fact, consider the various parts of the clock. It's made of wheels, drums, pendulums, levers, sprockets, screws, ratchets, hooks and pins. There's nothing contrived about that. It didn't come from a committee in a boardroom. It's just nature. Simple functionality. Utility. That's more purposeful than any of the slick advertisements you see on television. *Are you starting a movement, or just giving your work a that title to sound like one?*

140 -- THE VADER SCENE FROM REVENGE OF THE SITH

There are no cover bands in the rock and roll hall of fame. Early on in my career, I had the opportunity to work under one of the most successful writers in my industry. He offered me a substantial pay increase, access to a massive audience and unlimited use of his company's resources. *Quite the offer.* I was flattered to be asked. In fact, the personal development opportunities alone would have been worth the job. But there was only one problem. A big part of my work would be delivering his material. Writing in his voice. Taking his truth to market. And that bothered me. As I read over the job application, I remember feeling a cold blade of premonition slicing through my body. Because as attractive as the offer was, I knew that if I took it, I wouldn't be one hundred percent okay with myself. It's just the way I'm wired. It's that stubborn artist inside of me who demands relentless originality. Vader, on the other hand, was seduced by the dark side. After the light saber duel with his nemesis, his ruined body could only be repaired with cybernetic limbs and a respiratory suit. And by the time he took his first breath, the emperor knew he had successfully turned the young apprentice into a dangerous weapon for ruling the empire. It was official. Vader had come over to the dark side forever. And we all know how that turned out. It's a powerful reminder that each of us needs to be courageous enough to pursue our own goals. To sing in our own voice. Otherwise we become vulnerable for other people to recruit us to pursue theirs. *Are you play cover songs or making your own music?*

Lost in someone else's dream. One of our goals in life is to make ourselves proud. To decide to bite into something, do it really well, and then stand back and nod our head at the finished product. There's nothing quite like it. Finally, we say, something lasting and uniquely ours. Something we have complete control over. Something nobody can take away from us. Can anything beat that dancing smile of satisfaction? Meanwhile, there's an opposing force. The dark side. The archenemy of our magical moment. The one that pins us down with other people's obligations and expectations and chores and work that stands in the way of the pride we deserve to take. And if we're not careful, we can end up spending our life lost in someone else's dream. Vader comes from a bloodline with strong inherent capabilities related to the force. And he became a gifted pilot and engineer who had the ability to see things before they happened. Palpatine, on the other hand, was evil incarnate. A diabolical genius. The supreme ruler of the most powerful tyrannical regime the galaxy had ever witnessed who used his authority to manipulate the young Jedi away from the light. That was his downfall. Vader bowed to the wrong master. He

never stopped to wonder if working for the dark side was an opportunity, or an opportunity to be used. *Are you sacrificing your work by spending too much time being somebody else's dream machine?*

Darkness may find me, but I shall never choose it. At the heart of what it means to be a person is the act of dreaming, doing and finishing. Coming alive through the pursuit of your ideas. And the good news is, there has never been a better time to go all in. The digital revolution has made that process more accessible than ever before. But every great moment in human history has an opposition that is proportional to its greatness. And that's the downside of dreaming. Spend five minutes online, and you'll discover a universal voice of anonymity waiting to shit on your dream. A chorus of haters, frustrated that their dreams have not come true, whose sole purpose in life is to make yours feel like a nightmare. *Yechh*. But we can't let those uncompromising forces of reality scare us into working small. Otherwise the dream devolves into something worse. **Pressfield** explains that our dreams don't dissipate if we turn our backs on them, they invert. They go underground. They turn negative and act out. They surface as shadow forms of our heart's desire. And those shadow versions are never pretty. And so, as dreamers, we are obliged to at least try. To at least believe that our sweetest dreams will not be stolen from us. Because who knows? As my mentor once said, some of us are lucky enough to experience the euphoria that comes with the knowledge that life has granted us the grace of a dream realized. And even for those of us who come to the end of our dream and, sadly, have nothing to show for it, at least we can be grateful to have lived in place where dreams were had and followed. *Did you work on your dream today?*

141-- THE RADIO SCENE FROM AIRHEADS

Distribution is the new marketing. When I was in college, I took a logistics course. We studied the business discipline of distribution, which included topics like supply chain management, warehousing, inventory, shipping and trucking. *Riveting stuff.* But that was long before the digital revolution and the direct to consumer era and the infinite shelf space of the internet changed everything. Especially for artists. Now, creators can take their truth to market faster and freer than ever before. Now, an artist's work isn't limited to living in one place. Now, creators have multiple entry points into the marketplace. Because technology has allowed them evolve their definition of *distribution* to include anybody or anything who has influence on someone who can access their work. Sadly, this group of misfits never got that memo. Chas and his loser band mates are forced to break into the building and take the radio station hostage with water pistols, just to get their song played on the air. Which works, even though it results in the band going to prison for six months. Either way, these rockers remind us that how we go to market is just as important as who we are when we get there. *How could you make distribution your competitive advantage?*

Failure is massively overrated. I'm not against it, but we need to stop fetishizing failure as the panacea to all growth. Because in many situations, failure is a function of expectation. It's about the mindset which we enter the creative process. If our goal is to win a dance competition, for example, and we come in sixth place, we failed. But if our goal is to enjoy the opportunity to dance, and we come in sixth place, we succeeded. And nobody can take that away from us. Because in our infinite game, we weren't playing to win, we were playing to play. That was the expectation. I wrestled with this recently, as I put the finishing touches on my first documentary. A colleague of mine asked if I feared the film might fail. And I realized something. My goal in making the movie wasn't to make money or make history or make a name for myself. The goal of making the movie was to make the movie. Period. It's a dream I've had since childhood. Not just making a movie, but composing the score for the movie. That's way cool. And so, the moment we wrap the film, failure is off the table. Because the expectation will have been fulfilled. Anything else that happens is icing on the cake. *Airheads* was a movie that lost money at the box office, earned negative reviews from critics and received weak reviews from audience nationwide. That's a failure by industries standards. But the movie still made people laugh, made people wonder and made me proud to be musicians. And nobody can take that away from them. *If your perception of failure were changed, what would you attempt to achieve?*

Open a new vein of freedom. Henri famously said not to bother about your originality, but to set yourself as free as you possibly can, and your originality would take care of itself. One of the ways to we accomplish that is by putting whimsy on wheels. By giving ourselves permission to follow seemingly ridiculous ideas to fruition. Even if they don't work out. Because the point is in the trying. The purpose is in the practice. The goal is to strengthen our freedom muscle until it's quivering and veiny and oiled up, poised to step across the lines of artistic safety and create something people don't even have a name for. When I first conceived the idea for a concert documentary, what most excited me about the project was the freedom use the talents I might never exercise anywhere else. Singing, strumming, songwriting, storytelling, these were the musical gifts I'd been honing for so many years, but had never found a home for. Until now. And the more footage we edited, the prouder I felt about the movie's originality. Not because I was trying to be unique, but because I was trying to be free. Henri was right. Freedom is what creates the most hospitable environment for your greatest talents to do their most original work. *Are you building the house where your freedom resides?*

142 -- THE FINAL SCENE FROM THE PRESTIGE

Use your voodoo at the speed of light. Great magicians don't deceive people, they distract them. They don't dupe the audience, they simply misdirect them. And so, it's not dishonesty, it's about capturing people's imagination through selective perception. It's about the power of the unexpected and the advantage of being underestimated. Master that, and you can get away with anything. A few years ago, a picture of me was featured on a popular list of the worst tattoo designs of all time. Thousands of people shared it and hundreds of people left snide comments. And I remember thinking to myself, *who's the joke really on here?* Because last time I checked, my nametag gave me everything. I built a brand, a career and a life from a sticker I saw in a trashcan. There is no logical reason that any of that should be happening to me. That's the real joke. And it gets funnier with every passing day. And nobody is laughing harder than me. Proof positive, that there's nothing better than feeling like you're getting away with something. That's what inspires people. It's the simple fact that you cracked the code, got into the club, pulled one over on the world and had the last laugh. That's the real art. *What is the crucial magic you're creating?*

Awe equals wow plus how. I absolutely believe in magic. Not supernatural enthusiasms, ancient mythologies or occult practices. But real magic. The art of influencing others and producing marvels using natural forces. Creating moments of awe and transcendence and enchantment that transform people and reorient their lives, goals and values in profound and permanent ways. In fact, magic is the reason I decided to make a documentary. Since day one, busking in the tunnel has literally been magical. Both for me and the audience. There's just something sacred about the architecture and the aesthetics of that natural phenomena. The musical experience is sizable and powerful and vast. Every weekend, as people walk past me playing and singing, I can literally watch their faces and bodies changing. They dance and hum and smile and wave and sometimes even come barreling into the tunnel at full speed, just to investigate this curious, magical machine. And all I can do is smile. Because you can't get that from singing into a hairbrush. That's our job as artists. To create awe. To give people a window into a world of wonder. To do things that make people say, *holy crap, this is amazing. But how the hell did they do that? I need my camera.* That's awe. Wow plus how. It's not a proven formula. It's not a predictable construct. But it's the best shot we have at making a difference. *How does your art enter the conversation with curiosity?*

Guard your curiosity against exhaustion. Borden explains that if you can fool people, even for a second, then you can make them wonder. This might be the most important line of the entire movie. It teaches us that the penalty of technology is its tendency to eliminate wonder. Take search engines and smart phones, for example. I'm grateful for their existence. I use them daily because they make my life easier and more connected. But thanks to their invention, now everybody knows everything. Freely and instantly. Which means there's no need to wonder anymore. There's no way to get lost anymore. There's no reason to turn to the stranger next to you and ask for directions, creating a moment of pure human connection and curiosity. Boredom, it seems, has become a quaint relic of the past. And we've decided that a life without wonder is good. But it's not. In fact, it's quite dangerous. Because all innovation and art and progress and growth begin with that first crucial step of wonderment. That first tilted head glance at something that doesn't make sense. This movie reminds us that our curiosity must never wane. That we should always want to know more and want to go further. Because when we stop wanting to find out, we're done. *How is your work a source of wonderment for people?*

143 -- THE COFFIN SCENE FROM KILL BILL

Bring all of yourself to everything you do. Recently I've been studying a textbook called *Explaining Creativity*. It's the most comprehensive single volume presentation of what we know about the creative process. And it not only considers the arts, but also science, stage performance, the workplace, and creativity in everyday life. Sawyer delves into the strategy of *crystallized intelligence*, which he defines as the breadth and depth of a person's accumulated knowledge and the ability to use that knowledge to solve problems. Beatrix is a master of this strategy, although it's uncomfortable to watch. In fact, every time I watch this scene, I feel claustrophobic and sweaty and restless and my knuckles start to hurt. That's how realistic it is. But the moment that wood first starts to crack, you can't help but silently cheer. *Get out! Get out! Get out!* Beatrix shows us what's possible when we remain calm and trust our resources. Because her life is her preparation. She trusts that everything she's experienced in her life, up until this very moment, will sufficiently support whatever she does in the next moment. And that's what allows her to save herself. *How are integrating every ripple of life into your creative moment?*

Tap into your wellspring of inner strength. Every day when we sit down to write or paint or compose or cook, we have to believe there is something waiting for us. We have to trust our ability to sit down and respond to something. And we have to develop unshakeable faith that no matter how many times we open the box, there will always be something inside of it. *The forest will provide*, as the aborigines might say. But this mindset is a muscle. It requires daily work. And so, if we have any intention of breaking out of the coffin and clawing our way to the surface, we literally have to announce to ourselves, only a daily basis, that we are well equipped with sufficient internal assets to be successful. I've used mantras, meditations, affirmations, journaling, even morning pep talks in the bathroom mirrors, and they all work. They guarantee nothing, but they do allow for the possibility that I can perform in a creative, centered way. The point is, our inclination is to rely on an external force to get our creative work moving in the right direction. But most of the time, we're reaching for something that's already inside of ourselves. It's simply a matter of mindset. *Do you believe that who you already are is enough to get what you want?*

You will use everything you've ever learned. Beatrix apprentices under a legendary martial arts master who humiliates, beats, starves, insults and tortures her, day in and day out, for months. But as excruciating as the process is, she knows it's the only way to equip herself with the proper tools to defeat her enemy. That's what I love most about this scene. Beatrix closes the trust

loop. All her hard work finally pays off. Even though her enemy is only three inches away, she's able to snap back into her training and set herself free. Because she had faith in the process all along. Even in the darkest days of her past, she chose to love whatever happened, stayed with her training and trusted that it would lead her to where she ultimately wanted to go. That's exactly how the creative process works. Nothing is wasted. Every idea eventually finds a home. And so, each day we sit down to create, we ought to practice that same level of trust. To realize that something is happening to us, that life has not forgotten us, and that it holds us in its hands and will not let us fall. *What will your training today accidentally prepare you for tomorrow?*

144 -- THE PHONE SCENE FROM HURRICANE

Be a dispensary of encouragement. The encouraging thing about encouragement is, you don't need that many people to believe in you. Just a small army of support. Even if it's just one person who takes a real interest in your aspirations and encourages your goals and dreams, that's often enough to fuel your creative endeavors. Because like epoxy glue, a little encouragement goes a long way. Especially during your formative years, when all you really need is that first person to take you seriously. Growing up in a family of artists and entrepreneurs, I was blessed to have been provided with all the necessary support to nurture my creative talent. But as I've gotten older, I've started to learn just how rare that really was. Because most kids aren't raised on a tsunami of acceptance. Their ambitions are scared into hibernation. There's a dangling sword of disapproval over everything they do. It breaks my heart. And it's not okay with me. That's why I've always gone out of my way to pay the encouragement forward. To support and believe in people, even when they don't. Because it costs nothing to encourage. There's no upside to not believing in people. It's gift we can give to anyone, anytime, anywhere, and could change them forever. *Who was the first person that took your ambitions seriously?*

Be stand for somebody's greatness. Rubin already spent over sixteen years in prison for a triple homicide. But just when his case seems hopeless, he gets a phone call from supporters, who are now devoted full time to his cause. And that gives him the hope of freedom. More importantly, it gives him the burst of momentum he needs to convince the court to reinvestigate, rescutinize and reverse his conviction. Sometimes that's all you need. People to stand on their toes and hold up a light to show you what you can't see for yourself. People to remind you to keep swinging, every day, forever, until it's all over. Because without that brand of encouragement, some people may never realize just how bloody brilliant they really are. The first time I did an interview on national television, I received a phone call from a complete stranger who said five words I'll never forget. *Way to fucking go, kid.* Little did I know, that man would eventually become a dear friend and mentor, from whom I learned more about creativity, business and mindset than all of the books in the prison library combined. *What kind of support structure is most helpful to your dreams?*

Resistance wants to rattle your faith. It's existentially dangerous to feel that we're not making meaning. That's why following our ambitions and starting new ventures and biting into interesting projects are so galvanizing to the spirit. These endeavors save us from ourselves. They ward off feelings

of insignificance, depression and inertia. But only if we have people to nudge us along. Because when you're just starting out, searching for something to pour yourself into, battling a tide of nonbelievers can make you want to go hide in your room and hug the covers. Fifteen years ago, I had this crazy idea that I was going to wear a nametag, all day, every day, for the rest of my life. Most people thought I was insane. Some even *told* me I was insane. It felt like the chorus of nonbelievers was growing louder every day. But a few select people saw the start of something great. They saw the seed of an idea, sorting itself from others, that would no doubt take years to germinate and come to the surface, and would ultimately be worth the wait. So they encouraged me. They cheered for the parts of themselves they saw in me. And ultimately, with people power as wind at my back, I was able to persevere. The point is, we all need somebody who says this is just the beginning. That our story is headed somewhere. That the horizon we're pointing to is worth the slog. *Who does that for you?*

145 -- THE MONETIZATION SCENE FROM THE SOCIAL NETWORK

Romanticize first, monetize second. Money is the great legitimizer. When your enterprise starts turning a profit, the world starts taking your work seriously. But be careful not to be tempted to monetize too early. Seeking money from the wrong part of the value chain can thwart you early on. If you clutter your blog with advertising in its first year of publication, for example, you risk turning your website an eyesore that alienates users. What's more, having an immediate focus on monetization can distract you from more important goals like growth and attention and trust and connection. Those are the currencies that matter most. Because this is a long arc game. Winners get rich slowly. Building an online legacy that increases in value daily is more important than earning fifty dollars a month from the first advertiser that says yes to you. Becoming the best in the world at something that people value is a far better use of your time than knocking on doors trying to find sponsors. And creating a durable community and defining a new set of meaningful behaviors in the world is more important than turning a profit in the first six months. I reminded of an [interview](#) with the president of a large software company, who said the easiest way to get a million people to pay for non scarcity product may be to make a hundred million people fall in love with it. That's not monetizing, that's romanticizing. *What if you deferred monetization until you were truly ready?*

Possessed by a prosperous heart. Allowing the grip of scarcity to squeeze your heart is not good for business. If you want to open up a parachute of prosperity, you have to be ready for the money that is waiting for you. Years ago, I made a crucial shift in my financial mindset. I began to look at what I wanted rather than what I didn't have or why I thought I couldn't have it. I even practiced an assortment of affirmations, incantations, mantras and cognitive reframing tools to shift my mental perspective about money. And what I noticed was, the common denominator among these strategies was trust. Trusting that there's tons of money if you're good and want to take it. Trusting that money finds a home only in places where it's appreciated. Trusting that if your creative project has real substance, ultimately the money will follow you. And trusting that you can find a niche where money flows as a regular consequence of the success of your idea. Because you become what you expect. When you trust yourself, you prove yourself right. When you believe in the availability of your own earning potential, it shows up. It's not magic, it's expectation. It's a psychological primer for future performance. You announce to yourself

that you are well equipped with sufficient internal assets to earn money from your work. *How much longer can you wait for overwhelming evidence to trust yourself?*

Money forgets but god remembers. Eduardo said it was time to start making money. Zuckerberg said he was against selling advertising. Parker, however, knew best. He said that selling advertising too early was like throwing the greatest party on campus, but telling people it had to be over by eleven. And that's the lesson. Facebook's creators didn't know what the product was, what it could be, or what it would be, but they did know one thing. *It was cool.* And that was a priceless asset they weren't giving up. I'm reminded of another great [interview](#) with the president of a renowned venture capital firm. The question he encourages entrepreneurs to ask is, is there a new behavior here that you can see one hundred million people doing? If so, and if people are growing more and more engaged and committed over time, can you monetize their behaviors in a meaningful way later. Because the best growth of a product, he says, happens when someone is using a product so actively, they tell all their friends about it and try to drag them into it. And so, money is more incidental as it is intentional. Money isn't the target, money is the reward you get for hitting it. *What can you build to deserve money from other people?*

146 -- THE BUSKING SCENE FROM AUGUST RUSH

Try giving yourself away. My career has flourished on the power of giving myself away. Through reckless generosity and a promiscuous heart, I've always treated the bulk of my work as a gift. As an offering to the marketplace. As a loving impulse of emotional labor that signals to the world, *there's plenty more where that came from*. This strategy, if you can even call it a strategy, hasn't failed me yet. Because it comes from a place of abundance and love and connection. In fact, the concept of giving yourself away began as an anonymously written article in a business magazine nearly a hundred years ago. And due to its popularity and volume of reprint requests, the piece was later expanded into a bestselling book, which became an inspiration to millions. Myself included. And so, when it came time to decide on a distribution strategy for my documentary, there was never really any question. Of *course* I'm going to give the entire movie away. Of *course* I'm going to stream the whole thing on my [website](#) for free. Of *course* I'm going to adopt the direct to consumer channel. Because anything that's a barrier to getting my work in people's hands is a problem. And since most of the independent documentaries that premiere each year never even see the light of day anyway, much less secure theatrical distribution or achieve commercial success, I see no reason to exhaust and expense myself in the process. Middleman, schmiddleman. *Are you keeping your giving away machinery in good working order?*

Money is flowing into my life from all directions. When I first started busking, I refused to open up my guitar case for donations. My foolish pride and suburban ego simply wouldn't allow me to accept tips from strangers. But after a few weeks of playing, I realized a few things. First of all, it's not about making money, it's about making a connection. Because every interaction is a relationship. Regardless of how long it lasts, I'm still relating to the other person. And so, every time a stranger drops change into my case, it's like they're saying, *I like you*. That makes me feel seen. And whether people give a dollar or a dime, no amount of money is insignificant. I'm learning to find joy from whatever people have to offer. The other thing is, tips are totems of an abundance mentality. They're reminders that money matters to me, that money is always flowing into my life from all directions and that I should train myself to spot money whenever it presents itself. In fact, since I'm streaming my documentary for free on my website, I decided to recreate the open guitar case online. I created a [donation](#) page, almost like a digital tip jar. And if people find joy and value and inspiration in the movie, they can show their appreciation by dropping a dollar. Ultimately, it's been a transformative

experience. A reminder that there is no prosperity without the willingness to receive. Because the answer to every question you don't ask is no. *What is blocking your ability to receive?*

Your gift is not fully yours until it is given away. Nietzsche once said those who were seen dancing were thought to be insane by those who could not hear the music. What a perfect sentiment to summarize the experience of busking. Because when you perform in public, you learn that not everybody will like your art. In fact, not everybody will even acknowledge the fact that you're there. Most will just walk by as if you weren't standing there naked, breaking yourself open and pouring yourself out. And it's painful. It makes you feel invisible. It insults your soul. But you can't let it phase you. You can't allow the uncompromising forces of reality to crush your dream. Because job number one is not to please everybody who walks by, job number one is to create an exhibition of love through your art. To find the best that is within you and let her rip. The ones who don't get joke and can't hear the music, they're not your people. So just keep playing. Whether you're performing on the streets for change or producing on the internet to create change, just keep playing. Stick around long enough and continue to be yourself until the right people find you. And when the world is finally ready for you, all you have to do is say yes. *What's the one thing, if practiced consistently, would make the biggest impact on your life?*

147 -- THE JACKET SCENE FROM RUDY

Living like you used to dream. Pete says having dreams is what makes life tolerable. *Beautiful*. What he didn't mention, however, is that most people only get to **dream** their dream. Few people are lucky enough to actually *live* their dream. And so, there's a certain amount of empathy required. Because when people start warning you to test your dreams in the crucible of reality, imploring you to step out of wonderland and expose your dream to the light, begging you to submit yourself to the occasional beating by the practicality stick, it's not necessarily malicious. And a little resistance doesn't mean the world is conspiring to keep you from your dreams. They're projecting their own shit onto you. That's the power dynamic. People are invested in keeping you where you are. At some level, they don't like to see you pursuing their dreams. It's disenfranchising. It reminds them how far they are from living their own. I'm reminded of an [article](#) I read about one man's disenchanting experience of trying to make it as an artist in a major metropolitan area. The author said the city was like a giant meat grinder extruding tons of chewed up dreams. And that made me sad. Because the goal is to live like you used to dream, not the other way around. *Have you let go of the dream you killed yourself for?*

Dream with a pen in your hand. Every dream that anyone has ever achieved came true because they were dedicated to a process. Not because they dreamed and believed it so much that eventually the dream had no choice but to become a reality. But because they had a plan. They took steps, every day, that added energy to the system and moved the story forward. Even if that step was stupid. Because what mattered was that the step was one more tool to get them closer to their dream. What mattered was that they never allowed their commitment to be outweighed by their fear of looking like an idiot. What mattered was that at the end of the day, they put their head on the pillow and experienced the glorious satisfaction of creative overextension, the divine feeling of being flattened tired from working on their wildest dreams. And that they woke up in the morning energized by their work, dreaming of how to take it to the next level. That's something I never understood. Pursuing your dreams doesn't equal financial irresponsibility. Not if you have a system. Not if you use creativity to help you overcome new barriers to your dream. Not if you act on your dreams with open eyes. Over the years as a writer, I've worked jobs selling furniture, parking cars, even a full time job developing strategy at a marketing agency. Because I never wanted a reason to believe that I couldn't afford to follow my dreams anymore. *Are you blocking your dreams with the excuse that you can't afford to accomplish them?*

Reality may be hazardous to your health. The beauty of dreaming is, it delivers us from the rational surface of life. It floods our consciousness with wonder and mystery and possibility and whimsy. And that's an experience that no human should be deprived of. Because there's no upside to not dreaming. Even if the world looks at us like we're mental. Even if our dream has no intention of coming true. We can't let society's security blanket of practicality squelch our most imaginative yearnings. Because what happens to people is, once their first dreams get killed off, nothing takes their place. And that's no way to live. Einstein famously said a mind that opens itself to a new idea never returns to its original size. Dreams work in a similar way. Simply by engaging in the process of dreaming, the experience of envisioning a world even more beautiful than the one we've come to know, our imaginations expand. They never return to their original size. And that trains our brains to spot the beginnings of different and more courageous dreams. Rudy harbored dreams of playing college football, despite lacking the grades, finances, athletic talent and physical stature required. But although he only logged three actual plays on the field, that wasn't the end of his dream. Ruettiger also went on to create a myriad of charitable ventures, authored several books and became a sought after corporate trainer and motivational speaker. Football was just the gateway dream. Now he breathes life and hope into the dreams of others. *What dream in you that serves or helps other would cause you deep regret if you never took the risk to go for it?*

148 -- THE KITCHEN SCENE FROM VARSITY BLUES

Dream big and dream early. People love being around dreamers. They're invigorating as hell. Like oxygen to the soul. Dreamers lovingly hold up a mirror that demands we look at ourselves and honor our own desires. They inspire us to expand to our full capacity as human beings. That's why I married one. A soul on fire with sparkles in her eyes. And the reason is simple. Do you know how good it feels to wake up next to someone who has dreams to chase? And do you know how easy it is to get out of bed when the person you love has a horizon to point to? You'll never need another alarm clock again. And, you'll never treat others the same way again. That's the transformative power of imagination. Once you become a dreamer, it changes what you see when you see people. You start to believe that everyone's dreams are worth chasing. You start to support them every step of the way. And what happens is, people almost don't even know how to react when they are treated as human beings with ideas, feelings and dreams. All they can do is thank you for believing in them. And so, dreaming doesn't just change you, it changes everyone who comes into contact with you. It changes how they experience themselves in relation to you.. *Does your dream benefit others?*

I had enough dreams to keep god busy. But the reality is, most people's dreams stay in that form forever. No matter how many times they encounter that thing that sticks inside of them and says *now*, they still don't give themselves permission to let it out. And so, whatever expression is crawling around inside of their brains, stays there. Because some parent or coach or teacher or authority figure superimposed their own dreams onto them. Mox's father claims to be looking out for his son, but he's really just building his own dream and using his son to do it. He's neatly convinced the boy to dream the same dream as him. But instead of stuffing his dream in the closet like a prom dress, this quarterback stands up against the tide of nonbelievers. *I don't want your life*, he yells, hoping to communicate his desire to pursue academics over athletics. And yet, as overdramatic and cheesy as that line is, just imagine how many teenagers with they could say that to their parents. Imagine how many young people aren't creating their own dream, and instead are pressured to fulfill the one they've been sold. The one that was programmed into them. And they're clinging to that inherited dream as a fixture of absolute truth. It's sad. Because the only thing more painful than being patient with your dream is realizing that it's someone else's dream for you. *Who's trying to weld you into their dream machine?*

What starts as a dream finishes as a nightmare. Covey famously said that if our ladder is leaning against the wrong wall, every step we take just gets us to the wrong place faster. Dreams can be like that sometimes. They fall into our lap on a moment's notice, and we're so flattered and stunned and excited, that we instinctively raise our hand without considering the cost. Over the years, I've taken jobs, made investments, launched projects, even started new relationships because I thought they were in line with my dream. But then the world changed. Or my world changed. And something I once pursued so passionately started to feel like a monkey on my back. So I cursed and kicked and berated myself for being so naïve. *What the hell was I thinking? How could I have been so incredibly blind?* But looking back, what I should have done was pause. I should have stopped being so hard on myself. And I should have recognized that there's no such thing as a wrong decision. In fact, there's no such thing as a right decision either. Stupid, yes. Wrong or right, no. It's just a decision. We make millions of them in our lifetime. And all of them matter. They're not wrong. They're not right. They just are. And so, every endeavor—dream, nightmare or otherwise—is a crucial part of the life experience. Just because something ends poorly doesn't mean we shouldn't have started in the first place. Nothing is ever wasted. Even if it makes us bleed, it still makes us who we are. *When was the last time one of your dreams changed shape mid stream?*

149 -- THE POISON DART FROG SCENE FROM APOCALYPTO

The forest will provide. Einstein was a naturalist. He believed that every occurrence, including the affairs of human beings, was due to the laws of nature. That the imagination of nature was far, far greater than the imagination of man, and that if we kept looking deep into nature, we would understand everything better. And so, as we learn to take our cues from nature, aligning ourselves with the creative seasons, adhering our work with the geometric order and rhythm of life, we have to deepen our belief that the forest will provide. That the land we live off of will never dry up. This belief originates in the creative order, insofar as inspiration and energy and imagination are concerned. We trust in the availability of our own answers and ideas. And we have faith in our ability to sit down and respond to something. Still, believing the forest will provide also delves into the economic order, insofar as opportunity and doing business and receiving remuneration for our efforts. We trust that we alone control the amount of work we do and determine how busy we are. And we have faith that the art we create is necessary, relevant and valuable to the marketplace. The trick, then, in allowing the forest to provide, is our mentality. Because the forest's abundance is a consequence of our treating its wealth as a gift. And the way we treat something can sometimes alter its makeup. Jaguar has the advantage for this very reason. He may be badly injured, but in his native jungle, his mastery of the creatures and their landscapes allows him to use the forest to gradually whittle down his pursuers. *What's your poison frog dart?*

Figure out life through the filter of nature. I made the decision to reinvent my career almost exactly ten years after I started my company. Literally, down to the exact week. And I wondered if there was any significance to such fortuitous timing. So I went for a long walk in the park and ran the following thought experiment. How would this problem be solved in nature? After a few hours, something occurred to me. The number ten is by far the most significant labeling system in nature. Ten is the major organizing principle of the universe. It's the mathematical base for everything. That's why decades are such important life markers. There truly is something special about what transpires during a ten year period. That information activated a professional transformation for me. I began to reinvent myself. To enlarge my concept of work. To expand the constellation of my identity as a creator. To keep more of my passions in play. And to mold my definition of a career to fit anything that excited and fed my soul. What's more, I memorialized my journey to finding the next stone on the path through a collection of songs, which ultimately

became the centerpiece of a new concert documentary. That's what's possible when we tune into nature's agenda. *How are you remaking yourself as you grow and as the world changes?*

Inviting nature as your creative collaborator. Hyde explains that we should look at ourselves as part of nature and not its lord. That we should respond to nature as part of our identities, not as a stranger or alien available for exploitation. This mindset serves us well creatively. It reminds to enable a more visceral and spontaneous contact with our work. Jaguar, a true warrior of the jungle, keeps a sharp eye on the clues for ways to defeat his enemies. Because time is not his ally. If he doesn't fashion a weapon soon, he'll never make it out alive. But thanks to his keen powers of observation, he notices the brightly colored poison dart frog. And in that moment, he envisions a solution. He grabs the amphibian, finds a portable creative environment to set up shop, and the two beings cocreate. It's beautiful. The look on the man's face is that of focus and creativity and strategy, and the look on the frog's face is that of service and flexibility and peace. Both understand their role in the jungle. Both contribute to each other. And nobody gets hurt. Proving, that creativity isn't just knowing a good idea when you see it, it's executing that idea before anyone else sees it. Because just like in nature, timing isn't everything, it's the only thing. *How are you inviting nature as your creative collaborator?*

150 -- THE KARAOKE SCENE FROM DUETS

The crucible of the stage. *Duets* is perhaps one of the most underrated movies of all time. Critics skewered it in the papers and audiences rolled their eyes when it came out. And yet, we can't deny the inspiring themes about music as a healer, performance as a catharsis and singing as a binding agent between friends. After watching this movie, I got on stage and sang karaoke for the first time in my life. That night, I came out of my shell. A creative tap opened up in me that I didn't know was closed. And I haven't been the same since. This movie is more than a slice of the competitive karaoke world and the wayward characters who inhabit it, it's also a testament to the transformative power of performance. Any kind of performance. Because whether you play music in the park, stand as a painted statue on the corner or get up on stage at the comedy club, performance changes you. Having an audience changes you. Physicists call this the *observer effect* whereby the act of observation has an effect on the phenomenon being observed. That's why people modify aspects of their behavior in response to being watched. And that's why public speaking is our number one fear. But the value is beyond anything we can get by simply standing in front of a mirror. Because the best work can only come to its power in the world when it moves beyond the self, as a gift from artist to audience. *When was the last time you got up on stage in front of people?*

Keep your gift in motion. Reggie may be charming and sings like an angel, but he's also a dangerous fugitive convict. The guy wouldn't twice about entering some silly karaoke contest. But with the encouragement of a new friend, he grabs the mic and blows the audience away. And by virtue of winning the competition in this small town, he wins the right to compete in the finals. This movie reminds me that one of the chief reasons we make art in the first place is to earn the opportunity to do the work again. To keep the gift in motion. Yes, the prize money is helpful and important and validating, and any artist is grateful to get paid what they're worth. But the real currency, the motivation for returning to the studio, is the next performance. The chance to do what you do again. It's the distinction between the market economy and the gift economy. Hyde's groundbreaking research on this subject found that giving the first creation away is what makes the second one possible. Bestowal creates that energy place into which new energy may flow. And as long as the gift is not withheld, the creative spirit will remain a stranger to the economics of scarcity. Every creator experiences that transaction. That moment on stage when they realize, okay, if I don't keep doing what I do really well, someday I may not get to do it anymore. Talk about motivation. *What birthright gifts have you been dragged away from?*

Err on the side of openness. Creativity is partly about making art, partly about creating the opportunity to make art, and partly about uncovering the resources needed to help you make art. But creativity is also about opening yourself to what you are closed to. It's a crucial element to the **creativity aptitude test**. A person with high openness, says the research, has an active imagination, aesthetic sensitivity, attentiveness to inner feelings, preference for variety and intellectual curiosity. Reggie, not unlike a lot of people, doesn't want to get up on that stage. Not even to lip sync. But as much as he'd prefer to retreat to his own dark corner, hiding out from the world, his friend promises him that there's something existentially useful waiting on the other side of the stage. So he takes the plunge. Reggie sings with his whole heart, purging all the fear and pain and rage insight of him. That physical experience pulls him back into his body and out of the visceral experience of threat. And something lets go in him. He disappears from the world, loses all sense of self and spellbinds everyone in the room, especially himself. He tried a little tenderness, and it worked. Reggie's moment of conception reminds you that you have to believe the truth about yourself, no matter how beautiful it is. Because you never know. That truth might flip on a switch that you don't even want to turn off. *What awaits you in the refining fire of discomfort?*

151 -- THE FINAL SCENE FROM SHAWSHANK REDEMPTION

Some birds aren't meant to be caged. I've spent most of my adult life hiring myself. As a freelancer, I've created a variety of projects including musical albums, concerts, books, articles, manifestos, speeches, corporate training materials, consulting programs, public seminars, web applications, video projects, murals, course curriculums and now a documentary. But a handful of times over the years, I've also sought out traditional employment opportunities. As in, working for somebody else. Either to supplement my income, experiment with different career combinations or open myself to the possibility that I was missing out on something. And so, I would submit job applications and go on interviews and wear a suit and tell my fascinating story about making a career out of wearing a nametag, and people would look at me like I was crazy. Like there must have been some kind of mistake. I remember one human resources manager in particular. After presenting a few of my books and past client projects, she looked up from her desk and said, *I want to work for your company.* That should have been my first indicator. Another time I received an email response from the hiring director at a large advertising agency. She asked why on earth I was looking to go internal for a permanent position. Looks like you already have a great thing going for you, she said. And that was the last I ever heard from her. Red was right. Some birds aren't meant to be caged. Their feathers are just too bright. As romantic as it is to believe that everybody would love you if they only knew the true richness of your offering, some people just aren't ready to see that yet. *What is preventing you from living out your full self in the world?*

What you're good at, you're bad at. Being unemployable isn't always a function of your weakness. Sometimes it's your strengths that kill you. I always thought it would be my obsessive compulsive, anal retentive, conflict avoidant, control freak tendencies that would keep me from getting landing a gig. Not always the case. In fact, what worked to my disadvantage was the very asset I worked so hard to build. *My brand.* Apparently what intimidated people was my inspiring history. My optimistic vision. Because I would show up explaining that I'd come to positively infect everyone around me. That I was here fashion new arrows, raise the target, change entire field upon which the target rests and redefine what it means to hit it. And deep down, that scared people. Because most companies don't need a creative visionary. They need somebody to fill a hole. To check a box. To follow a map. I remember one rejection letter that said bringing in someone with a personality and a platform as big as mine didn't make sense for a company like theirs. According to the talent manager, it was good for their clients to see that their firm had interesting

people doing interesting things—but not *that* interesting. Because the more interesting you are, the more complicated you are; and the more complicated you are, the more expensive you are. That's just more hassle for the boss. And so, your strengths are frequently your weaknesses. What you're good at, you're bad at. *What superpower is affecting your ability to be taken seriously?*

A confused mind never buys. It's never been easier or more popular—to be yourself. The challenge is, uniqueness is a binary construct. The idiosyncratic part of us wants to be different and stand out and let the colors of our craziness bubble to the surface so our freak flag can fly high. And if people don't get the joke, they're dead to us. But the pragmatic part of us needs to be mindful. Because if our goal is to get through to people, we don't want them to see us as terminally unique. Different is good, but we don't want to be so impossible to classify that people drop the mental ball. I've been guilty of that many times. I'll be at a meeting or on a conference call or job interview, and I'll work so hard to make a meaningful impression on others, that I wind up crafting a personality that's intellectually overwhelming for people. *Woops.* The point is, it's never easy to let our edges show. We all want to belong. We're all searching for people and places that embrace the weirdness we have to offer. But when it comes down to our individual interactions, high stakes moments when we're sitting across the table from a person we're trying to influence, we can't neglect their cognitive wiring. Because a confused mind never buys. There's a fine line between purpose driven human uniqueness and a patchwork of weirdness. We need to be weird, but not so weird that nobody knows what to do with us. *Are you unconventional in the right direction, or are you so far out of the box that there's nothing left for people to lean against?*

152 -- THE BREAKDOWN SCENE FROM PUNCH DRUNK LOVE

There are many secrets left to be unlocked. Sandler's box office films have grossed over two billion dollars worldwide. And most of them were low budget, goofball comedies. Anderson, however, wrote this role for him specifically. One that liberated him from the constraints of a mainstream formula. And that permission revealed the actor's unexpected depth, darkness and power, enabling him to turn in one of the best performance of his career. Critics and audiences even admitted, *wow*, this goofball is actually a great actor. Who knew? And so, it's a testament to what's possible when we stop chasing the same seductive nightmare and start living larger than our labels. **Waits** famously said that about his evolution as a songwriter. He found new instruments to play, using the bagpipes, the marimba, and strange percussion devices, saying that your hands are like dogs, going to the same places they've been. That you have to be careful when art is no longer in the mind but in the fingers, going to happy places. Sandler broke his fingers of his their habits. He played an instrument he'd never played before, exploring something completely perpendicular to his ordinary way of working. And the result was spellbinding. *Are you continuing to expand your sense of aesthetic possibility?*

The invitation to a much wider horizon. **Whyte** famously wrote that work must be a marriage. That we must have a relationship with our work that is larger than any individual job description we are given. And that a real work, like a real person, grows and changes and surprises us, asking us constantly for recommitment. And so, it's no surprise that the *seven year itch*, a psychological term that suggests that happiness in a relationship declines after around year seven of a marriage, applies to the world of work. It's the natural cycle of dissatisfaction. The inevitable decrease in happiness over long periods of time. About seven years into my own career, that itch came on full force. Because I had reached a point of diminishing returns. I was living a full life that didn't feed me anymore. And I was operating in an ecosystem that had limited resources offer to someone of my creative caliber. My mentor even told me over coffee one morning, *this life has served its purpose, but now it's time to create voids in it*. And so, I accepted the invitation to a much wider horizon, and decided to move to a city that was big enough for me. Big enough in size, big enough in opportunity, big enough in potential, big enough in belonging, and big enough in access. And that changed everything. And I know it was the right decision because I feel like a completely different person, and yet, more like myself than ever. *What unbalancing must take place in order to push you into a new and larger set of circumstances?*

Living in a strangled state. Maisel's research was transformative in helping me understand the difference between authentic calm and forced calm. Because for many years, despite the relaxed image I projected to the world, I didn't really feel calm. Not unlike the character in the movie, I was just really good at doing everything in my power to act and be calm. From meditation to massage to medication to mindfulness, that's a lot of work just to relax. In fact, it was actually exhausting work defending myself against letting my mind roar away. And although it was an honorable effort to keep my racing brain under control, I could only hold onto the reins of that wild stallion for so long. Forced calm may have stopped the bleeding, but it was starting to strangle me. Because it's really just an artificial way of dealing with incipient mania. And so, I wrote a letter of resignation to myself. *Literally*. I opened up a blank document and began writing out every single way of being from which I needed to retire. All the stressing and achieving and proving and fearing, it purged from my system. The anxious part of me was finally resting. And I realized that I had done enough to be okay with myself. Ten pages and four hours later, I experienced a euphoric lightness of being that I'll never forget. Like my personal status with myself had gone up a hundred percent. Ever since then, I've never felt calmer. *Are you truly relaxed, or just living in a strangled calm state?*

153 -- THE LOSING SCENE FROM CASINO

If we can't get in trouble, it's not an adventure. Ace says that in the casino, the cardinal rule is to keep them playing and to keep them coming back. Because the longer they play, the more they lose. And in the end, the casino gets it all. That's why I never play the casinos. The deck is literally stacked against me. But that doesn't mean I'm not a gambling man. In fact, I bet on myself all the time. Because when you bet on yourself, it's an asset you understand. And that's the kind of risk I can get behind. Interestingly, according to modern portfolio management research, gambling actually becomes an *investment* once it meets the three specific criteria. First, the bet has to provide economic utility, because the good or service meets the demands of a consumer. Second, the bet has to yield positive expected returns in the long term, because the incrementalism pays off in the end. And third, the bet has to have underlying value independent of the risk being undertaken, because the experience of betting on yourself is meaningful in its own right. I like those odds. Because unlike the casino, as we continue along our creative journey, our steps become more certain. The more shots we take, the more precise and dangerous we become. The more we play, the more we win. *How much of your income have you invested in yourself to further your vocation and passion?*

Show people that you are a viable force. *Casino* is a movie about gatekeepers. Dealers and box men and pit bosses and floor managers and security guards and mob bosses. And these people, these authority figures, will happily punish the rule breakers by smashing their fingers with a ball peen hammer. But we don't live in a casino. Not anymore. The world of gatekeepers where you have to wait for someone to say yes for you to practice your art is long gone. Now you can create a vehicle for yourself. Now you can open your own casino. Now you can become you're the craps player, card dealer, pit boss and security guard, all at the same time. But you have to move fast. Creativity is more than just knowing a good idea when you see it, it's executing that idea before anyone else sees it. Like knowing when the deck of cards is due for an ace. Because odds are, somebody else is having a brilliant idea the same moment as you are. And so, the most responsible thing you can do as an artist is never wait. Like my mentor likes to say, just go be the first at something. Because there's nothing more valuable than unclaimed real estate. *Will you give yourself permission to go through a door nobody's ever gone through before?*

You don't need money, you need permission. The costume budget for this film was one million dollars. One. Million. Dollars. Deniro had seventy different outfits throughout the film, and was allowed to keep every one of them. That's obscene. You could make forty movies on that amount alone. Of course, when you're the most brilliant director in the history of film, you can ring the register as loud as you want. What's interesting is, this movie was filmed twenty years ago. Back then, a naïve, inexperienced, underfunded artist wouldn't dare such an ambitious project. But today's filmmaker lives in a completely different world. Now that the resources are free and accessible to everybody, anybody can do anything for nothing. Which means the only thing stopping them is permission. Eighty percent of the distance between idea and execution is the mental construct of notenoughness. And so, if you're forty years old and you still haven't written that script or made that movie or produced that album, it's not because of procrastination, it's because you haven't given yourself permission. Period. *If you found yourself and your thoughts interesting, what might you try?*

154 -- THE PREGAME SCENE FROM LITTLE GIANTS

Create an abundance of confidence capital. Modern psychology research warns us about the dangers of the digital dopamine loop. How getting sucked into the online ego vortex of monitoring the world's reaction to our work can stifle productivity and deteriorate mental health. Then again, we're all adults. We're all old enough to make our own decisions about which drugs, if any, we choose to use. Even dopamine. Because when it comes to that particular neurotransmitter, there's something to be said about judicious use. Because that hit dopamine *can be* a confidence building action. Especially in the early stages of a project or even a career, when we take our confidence wherever we can get it. Those little spikes in self assurance go a long way. Carlin used to say that although he stopped smoking pot, he always had a joint nearby. Because when he was writing and really pouring it out, one hit was all he needed. One hit, and it was punch up time. With that judicious use, there was some value. Dopamine works the same way. When we discover that somebody commented on or spread the word about our work, that experience ignites a chain of confidence. The world's affirmation of our work changes our frame of reference in how we think about our own abilities. And it's just enough of a boost to keep the story moving forward. *What confidence building action could you taken this week?*

Small victories first. Mastery is highly overrated. Life isn't always about being the best at what you do, it's about being the best of who you are. That's enough. And once you become okay with that being enough, life is a lot more satisfying and lot less stressful. Of course, you still have to believe. You still have to own your value. Because when you get out on the field, and your confidence in your competence is not in tact, you'll get murdered out there. This team of underdogs has zero confidence. Rashid, for example, couldn't catch a football if he had glue on his hands. And he's supposedly the team's star receiver. So during practice, the coach teaches him to run passing routes with rolls of toilet paper, which he snags every time. Coach found a way to lower the threat level of the task of catching to build his player's confidence. *Score.* This movie reminds us to learn to love the drudgery of small, simple tasks that push us in the right direction. Because each of us gains confidence in ourselves once we've proved to ourselves that we can be successful. And so, every victory counts. There's no such thing as small win. A win is a win is a win. *What micro accomplishes would help build your confidence?"*

Expand your energetic relationship with the world. Pregame rituals are essentials. Whether you're playing football, performing comedy or painting murals, everybody needs a good on ramp. A routine that gets them in the mood, in the flow and in the zone, so that by the time they actually hit the highway of life, they're traveling at the same speed as traffic, and can navigate the road effectively. I've heard urban legends about athletes who sleep in the opposing team's uniforms the night before the game, perform aboriginal dances on the field, obsessively line up all the water bottles on the sidelines, eating fistfuls of grass before walking on the field, even urinating on their own equipment in the locker room. Whatever works. The weirder the better. If a ritual helps you communicate with yourself and expand your energetic relationship to the world, it's worthwhile. In fact, it's less important what we do, and more important *that* we do it. Because rituals matter. It's the conscious practice of mindfulness, the ceremonial acknowledgment of importance, and the intentional celebration of meaning, which keeps us focused and grounded and fueled and connected. Something that's especially useful when the enemy aims to annihilate us. *What rituals are you known for?*

155 -- THE PUDDING SCENE FROM PUNCH DRUNK LOVE

Most people don't look. Barry has finally duped the system. The frequent flyer mile promotion *seems* too good to be true, but it's not. The exploitation of the fine print sounds like an insane premise, but it's not. The company simply made a labeling error. They didn't realize the monetary value of the prize was worth significantly than the pudding itself. And so, he took advantage of the loophole. He jumped on the idea before anybody else had a chance, and it changed his life forever. Barry may have serious anger and anxiety issues, but he's also one hell of an opportunist. I'm reminded of an interview with a veteran actress, who told the story of how she got her start. Back in the early eighties, she joined the local theater company as an entry level player. But since that position didn't afford her a lot stage time, she was forced to get creative. So she started researching the theater bylaws. And she discovered a loophole. Turns out, *any* player in that particular company, rookie or veteran alike, could perform for free on any night that didn't have a regular show. Wednesday, as it turns out, was that night. And since nobody else was claiming that spot, she took it. Within a week, she had put together an act. Within a few months, there was a line around the block. And within a few years, she became a fixture in the community. The rest of her career flowed from there. Yet another reminder, most people don't look. Most people don't read the fine print. *What is the opportunity that's going to pass you by if you don't act on it?*

The greatest force in the universe. This movie is based on a true story of a civil engineer who took advantage of a promotion to earn over a million frequent flier miles. And what's really amazing is, fifteen years later, the guy is still taking advantage this promotion. Phillips has been flying free with his family and friends to more than twenty countries and loving every minute of it. And, he's racking up new points five times faster than he's spending them, earning him lifetime status on the airline. That's a lesson about the power of compound interest. Building the capacity to generate more and more value over time through consistent increments. Which is something mathematicians and engineers and accountants think about constantly, but we right brained, artsy fartsy folks rarely ever consider. And so, it's worth asking ourselves. What could be the central lever that galvanizes the whole machine? What could be the crucial stone that kills all of the birds? What could be the single activity that can be trusted to take care of everything else? That's called a catchall. My musician **friend**, who plays in several bands, teaches guitar lessons, licenses his music, sells his own records, makes music videos and writes articles for industry publications, challenges himself to compose one new piece, every day. That's his catchall. After ten years in the business, he

knows the accumulation of that work generates the compound interest to support his career. *What systems might you create to do the heavy lifting for you?*

Meaning is made, not found. Barry is a lonely, frustrated, angry man. He doesn't like himself. He cries a lot for no reason. And he doesn't have anybody he can talk to about these things. But then something snaps. Barry accepts that he has to make work for himself, work that nobody asked him to make. First, he turns his brain over to this magnificent obsession around the pudding promotion, which allows him to channel his thinking in new ways. Then he pursues an exciting new romance with a beautiful woman, which gives him relief from the emotional isolation he has endured. And both of these new endeavors become far more interesting and galvanizing than sitting in a warehouse trying to market themed toilet plungers. It's the ultimate existential victory. Proving, that when we make the crucial shift from seeking meaning to making it, life is a lot less lonely. That when we really bite into a mental task, we not only generate an internal demand for ourselves, but our chewing drowns out the external chatter. Because meaning is made, not found. *Are you spending time in the brain as if the brain were a destination, or using your brain in the service of the work you intend to accomplish?*

156 -- THE KITCHEN SCENE FROM CHEF

Stick around, outlive the critics. Casper struggles with the classic artist's dilemma: Cook for the customers or cook for the critics? On one hand, there's something powerful about creating things worth being criticized. Because most art is ignored. And if you're making people react, you're making a difference. On the other hand, there's something wildly satisfying about creating art for yourself. Because we can't guarantee that anyone else will give a shit. And it's nothing person, it's just that most people are too busy, too inundated with information and too focused on their own work to even notice. I'm reminded of an [interview](#) with another famous director, whose third film was considered to be a box office flop. When asked what went wrong, he said the movie didn't do well because it wasn't a *wish fulfillment* idea. It didn't represent the audience's dream. And I thought to myself, okay, but what about the director's dream? What about fulfilling the wishes of the creator? That seems more important. I understand everybody wants to see a little bit of themselves on stage, but making art isn't about everyone else relating to it, it's about *me* relating to it. Creating is about acquiescing to the ambitions of the world, it's about sharing a vision of life and the nature of the people who inhabit *my* world. *Are you willing to please yourself and let others follow?*

Have faith in yourself to make it all back. What I love most about this movie is its origin story. Favreau wrote the script after directing several big budget films, wanting to create a small scale, independent movie about cooking. And so, he willingly stepped down from the billion dollar world of superhero films, returned to his indie roots, and made the movie he wanted to see in the world. *That takes guts.* Favreau burned everything down and salted the earth, just to see if he could do it again. He threw himself curveball, just to test how much faith he had in his own work. Perhaps that's the real art. The willingness to start from scratch, let go of everything you've tried and built and accomplished, except for the person you've become, and reinvest that into something brand new. Favreau talks about this publicly, too. In a recent [interview](#), he revealed own his moment of conception, how the script for this movie just hit him, and he wrote all day every day until it all came out. Just like he did twenty years ago with his first movie. The point is, inspiration comes unannounced. If you're lucky enough to be inspired to do something, you have to follow that vibe and see where it takes you before it's too late. *What's your framework for converting inspiration into something real in the world?*

If they love you, they'll buy everything you have. Chefs have a lot in common with writers because they get on thematic kicks. They investigate the fabric of myths in their lives, following conceptual pathways for as long as they bear fruit. And they cook and cook and cook until the vein is out. But once they reach the point of diminishing returns, they pivot. They update the menu, allowing each theme to show them the way down the road to the next one, trusting that new meaning will arise in unexpected places, and trusting that their audience will follow them as they blaze this new trail. Carlin epitomized this phenomenon. In the early seventies, he completely reinvented himself, both through his personal appearance, and also through his style of radical social commentary. He began tackling issues about drugs, birth control, dirty language and other dangerous topics, earning him equal amounts of controversy and fame. But he knew exactly what he was doing. In a fascinating retrospective about his comedy career, George said that although his audience didn't always want to go to those thematic places initially, once they arrived, not only did they laugh when they got there, but they were glad he took them there. Proving, that if the audience truly loves you, they'll follow you down whatever path you take. *What would make you an outstanding leader a year from now?*

157 -- THE DROWN TANK SCENE FROM DIVERGENT

If one and one makes two, you failed. Wherever we land, whether it's a new job or a new city or a new industry, we're greeted with a list of rules. And there's this myth that if we check all those boxes, we will get ahead. Of course, that's just the story perpetuated by the institutional agenda to keep us small, scared, stupid and dreamless. Those who seek to keep our thinking as small as possible. The reality is, the future belongs to the destroyers of all that has gone before. And so, once we spot the ideas that are too convenient to be killed, once we let the curious part of ourselves take a risk and pay attention to the man behind the curtain, *we* become the great and powerful ones. Divergents possess that ability. They're aware of when they're in a simulation. They're conscious that what they're experiencing is not real. And so, they can manipulate or even shut down the system by exercising their independent will. Because it's all in their head. That's why the government is trying to wipe them out. Divergents threaten the social order. If that's not a metaphor for modern society, I don't know what is. Critics can call this movie another clone of the post apocalyptic teenage dystopian fiction factory, but I experienced it as mythic, archetypal and allegorical. *What would you do if you saw yourself as being in control instead of controlled?*

No great band ever wasted any time complaining. Divergent is a story about stoic characters. People who don't do a lot of complaining. People who aren't dependent on externals for equilibrium. People focused on strengthening the mind, body and soul so it can flourish in any environment. Because they recognize that all situations unfold regardless of how they feel about them. And so, nothing can shut them off from action. Tris is just now starting to internalize this philosophy. First, she tries yelling. Next, she tries banging against the wall. But then, as the water engulfs her body, she has a realization. The only way out is through. The only way to face her fear of drowning is to swim deeper. So she relaxes into the moment, confronts herself in the reflection, and gives the pain of glass the tiniest tap. And that creates the crack that sets her free. If that's not a public service announcement for stoicism, I don't know what is. **Pausch**, in fact, wrote that complaining doesn't work as a strategy. That we all have finite time and energy, and any time we spend whining is unlikely to help us achieve our goals or make us happier. Tris reminds us, then, not to complain, because complaining sucks the air out of any new possibilities that may appear in the present moment. Instead, we learn to take the energy we would have used complaining and filter it into action. *What are your three biggest time wasters?*

Sometimes all we need is an ounce of not alone. This particular tank is merely a simulation. Later in the movie, when the characters are captured and sentenced to death, Tris wakes up sealed inside a real life glass tank that fills up with water. And she knows she can't tap her way out. But at the last moment, her mother appears, breaks the tank and rescues her. Because she, too, is divergent, and understands the pain of being alienated. I'm reminded of a powerful passage in the book around this very theme. Tris says that to live factionless is not just to live in poverty and discomfort, it is to live divorced from society, separated from the most important thing in life. *Community*. Because we can't survive alone, and even if we could, we wouldn't want to. A touching reminder that life without witness, isn't. That we're not built to be singular units. And that we're never alone in this world unless we want to be. In fact, the things that make us feel most alone have the biggest potential to connect us. It's simply a matter of finding the right faction. *How many centers of belonging do you have in your life?*

158 -- THE LATTIMER SCENE FROM THE PROGRAM

Allow yourself to get carried away by your enthusiasm. Everyone is the same everywhere. We're all just stumbling through the dark, searching for something to pour ourselves into. And so, when that thing we find provides us with the existential spark, there's no stopping us. Because meaning and significance are a unique source of energy. Forget about getting enough sleep and eating enough carbs. Once we find something to meet our meaning needs, we're off and running. Rooted in the things that move us, ready to take on the world. Lattimer played on the punt return team for the first three years of his college career, but this year, he intended to start. And so, he spent his summer in the gym. And after gaining thirty five pounds since last fall and shining during in tryouts, he has finally earned himself a place at the table. It's such a perfect moment. This movie came out when we were playing high school football, and my friends and I would watch it after long, hot days of practice. And although we never smashed our heads through car windows, we still allowed ourselves to get carried away by our enthusiasm. When the weekly depth charts were posted on the locker room doors, we weren't afraid to hoot and holler and run down the hall and jump for joy. Because that was the type of enthusiasm we needed on the field. I may not have been fast or strong, but I certainly knew how to celebrate, and how to infect the people around me with that same energy. Whatever it took to feel that our story was headed somewhere. *Do passion and enthusiasm characterize all of your encounters?*

Not everything is its own reward. Rewarding yourself is an essential celebratory experience that increases motivation and builds momentum. It can actually become a form of loving yourself, when done in a healthy, legal manner that doesn't involve other people's car windows. But it won't make the journey any less challenging. Laying a reward system over an existing experience doesn't make us like it any better, but certainly encourages us to tolerate it. Because we see the light at the end of the tunnel. [Adams](#) explains that by putting the pleasure of reward at the immediate end of a task, we develop a strong association between the task and the good feelings, and that forms a habit. The goal is to get creative with our rewards. To make them personal and meaningful and pleasant. For example, whenever I finish playing a concert, I reward myself with a long, hot shower and lunch at my favorite restaurant. Whenever I make a sale, I reward myself by ringing the hotel call bell on my desk and cheering aloud. Whenever I book a new client, I reward myself by booking a full body massage. Whenever I come home from a productive business trip, I reward myself by sleeping late the next day. And whenever I hit my daily writing quota, I reward myself by checking email

without feeling guilty. The point is, not everything is its own reward. If we're going slog through the reality, we deserve something a little extra at the end. *What reward system do you have for yourself?*

Become fully aware of your entire horizon. Lattimer's downfall, besides illegal doping, was his expectation. He surrendered all his power to one person—to make or break his life. He relied on the coach's whims to choose the success or failure of his athletic endeavor. A smarter move would have been to empty himself of expectation. To diversify his portfolio of happiness. To expand his repertoire of meaning. That way, if the coach *did* decide to make an omelet out of all the eggs in his football basket, his path wouldn't be completely derailed. He'd still have other pursuits and endeavors and activities to engage with. Unfortunately, he never built that existential muscle. He never developed a shield against meaninglessness. And so, when he fails the drug test and gets kicked off the team, he's completely devastated. Life, as he knows it, is over. Because he clung to his gift too tightly. He threw his heart into something, but let that one thing become all that he stood for. It's a reminder to us all to maintain a diverse portfolio of happiness. One that builds emotional stability in any situation, helps manage risks we can't control and weathers droughts through the many seasons of life. *Are you giving one person, place or thing the power to make or break your life?*

159 -- THE POEM SCENE FROM BEFORE SUNRISE

Cross my palm with silver. Art and commerce have never been easy bedfellows. Most creatives would rather be heard than paid. But commerce is a fact of human existence. Without a value exchange, there's no economy, and without an economy, society crumbles. And so, whether it's a gift exchange, a bartering system, or a simple agreement between writer and reader, it all boils down to creating value. In this case, the poet assures the couple that if they like the poem and they feel it adds something to their life in any way, then they can pay whatever they feel like. *Wow.* That's the most trusting, honest, fair and human approach to commerce that I've ever witnessed. If more artists and businesspeople adopted this approach, life would become a lot less stressful. And so, the beggar's interaction paints a picture of what's possible for the modern artist. He shows us that as long as we are willing to add our own unique value to society—often on a moment's notice—we will get rewarded for it. We just have to be ready for the money that is waiting for us. Even if it's only a few bucks in pocket change. Because amount of income is insignificant. *How much money will you be earning five years from now?*

Throw your weight behind other kinds of possibilities There's a direct correlation between identity and profitability. Everything new we become can lead to something new we can do. It's simply a matter of leverage. Because when we expand our sense of who we are, we also expand the universe of decision makers who can engage our services. When we widen out the boundaries of our being, adding more ways in we can deliver our unique value to society, we widen the menu of yesses for prospects to peruse. And when we keep one eye cocked to the infinite commercial possibilities of our work, people will come out of the woodwork to lay down the track in front of our train. This very philosophy was the impetus for creating a discussion guide for my documentary. The intention was, I wanted the movie to be more than just a film, but also a platform for education and connection. And so, I offered resources to educators, learning institutions, companies, congregations and other organizations to help spread the messages of identity, belonging and creativity. Free of charge, of course, and with the confidence that new and exciting opportunities would open up as a result. *Are you open to pursuing any financial avenues that are available to you?*

You must be out of your damn mindset. Jesse says that if he could just accept the fact that his life was supposed to be difficult, that conflict and struggle were what's to be expected, then he might not get so pissed off about it, and just be glad when something nice happens. *Interesting theory.* I actually read a book

about this very concept many years after this movie came out. Gelb's research on the world's greatest innovators showed that optimists expect success and consider happiness to be their normal state. That way, when something goes wrong, they view negative events as temporary glitches, as isolated incidents insulated from other aspects of their lives. It's simply a matter of mindset. Assuming you just got lucky, versus believing that you create your own luck. Waiting for fortune's loving countenance to look upon you, versus building systems designed to make it easier for luck to find me. I did an segment for 20/20 many years ago on the topic of luck, testifying that it was more than just chance. And the irony is, instead of filling out the online submission form to be a featured expert on the show, the producers actually found *me* because they googled around for articles on the topic of luck, and guess who had written the most on the topic? That's not luck, that's math. That's not chance, that's volume. *After you earned luck for the first time, how did you go about getting it back?*

160 -- THE TRAINING SCENE FROM HURRICANE

Go where the door is already open. Focus is the ultimate power source. And it's available to all of us, regardless of personality type, work environment or creative tenor. It's simply a matter of plugging into the right outlet. Finding the channel that activates our internal generator. My wife, for example, has always been obsessed with nutrition, cooking, photography, sustainability and healthy living. And she longed for a way to turn all of those obsessions into something real in the world. But there were too many projects to choose from. And the pressure of having to decide which mole to whack made it hard to focus. So she created a clearinghouse. A destination where she could unite all of her interesting elements. A productive obsession that intermingled her interests and themes into a meaningful, cohesive **whole**. A project that not only made productive use of the currency she'd been building up all these years, and also brought joy and inspiration and value to other people's lives. And all of the sudden, focus wasn't an issue anymore. Because she went where the door was already open. Brittany knew that her obsessions were proof that she already knew how to focus. So she took the training she already had and applied it. That's what's possible when we choose an idea as large and as great as we are. Our sheer excitement at having discovered something worth doing makes the inability to focus vanish like a vapor trail. *Are you running around the forest putting a few chops in each tree, or creating an big enough axe to demolish them all?*

Run toward freedom. Every training montage follows the same formula. Intense physical regiments shown through a series of short cut sequences, a dramatic song playing the background, a build up where the potential sports hero confronts his failure to train adequately and an inspiring voice over monologue by the character or his mentor. Once a long stretch of time has elapsed in the course of just a few minutes, the hero is now prepared for his greatest battle yet. That's a montage. And it's guaranteed to be the most inspiring and memorable part of any film. In fact, I would pay real money to sit in a movie theater and watch three hours of *just* training montages. That's how motivated I get. Scenes like these remind me that when I lose momentum, self propulsion is the only thing that will move me forward. Rubin, in this case, took control of his life. He made up his mind to turn his body into a weapon that would eventually set him free, or kill anyone who sought to keep him in prison. Each of us can make this same decision. To break free from whatever prison is holding us back. To finding new ways to own our own world. **Altucher** tackles this topic quite a bit. He defines it as the freedom to pursue what's inside us, the freedom to explore the blessings that surround us,

the freedom to break down the brainwashing that chains us, the freedom to help ourselves so that we can help others, and the freedom to live the life we choose to lead instead of having to live the life that has been chosen for us. Sign me up. *Who is enslaving you that you can get away from?*

Impose a discipline upon yourself. The first lesson I learned as a guitarist was, it's better to play five minutes a day every day of the week, than to play five hours a day one day a week. Because mastery is about commitment and consistency. It's the daily discipline of returning to the instrument. And what's interesting is, within the framework of daily discipline, enthusiasm starts to grow on its own and builds on itself. When I wrote my first book in college, I started with fifteen minutes a day. *Fifteen minutes.* That's nothing. That's literally one thousandth of my entire day. And so, after a few weeks, those small victories began to bolster my confidence. So I tried stretching my capacity. Twenty minutes a day. Then thirty minutes a day. Then sixty minutes a day. And so on. Fifteen years later, I write for five hundred minutes a day. But only because I started small. Discipline, after all, is a gradual process. We can't jump into the deep end on day one, nor should we. Besides, what's the rush? Life is long. Become prolific is about *compound interest*, the capacity to generate more and more value over time through slow, unsexy, but consistent creative increments. Rubin may have been building his physical body, but we're building our creative body, our body of work, based on a practice of patience, delayed gratification and continuity. *Are you willing to make gradual progress with your discipline?*

161 -- THE OPENING SCENE FROM MR. SATURDAY NIGHT

Identity is a chicken egg conundrum. Carlin used to say you can't do comedy without an audience, and that if comedians don't get up in front of people every day of their lives, they'll never learn who they are. They'll never uncover their comic identity. The irony is, artists assume the reason they can't get started is because they don't know who they are. But that's putting the cart before the horse. Truth is, the reason they don't know who they are is because they haven't gotten started. They haven't created enough to know what kind of creator we are. Buddy inherited his sense of humor from his father, which he absorbed sitting around the dinner table as young boy. And so, the venue where he first cut his teeth as a comic was after dinner, performing for relatives in the living room. That's why he became such a success. By the time he was a teenager, he was ready to perform in public. Those hard core formative years fostered his dream and laid groundwork for the years to follow. And so, that same principal applies to anyone with a creative voice. Whether you're performing on stage, presenting to a group or pitching to a client, identity is byproduct of volume. Only through consistent execution do you gain an understanding of whom what, why and how you are. So you have to get started. Any way you can. Because if you don't start somewhere, you ain't gonna get nowhere. *What is your legacy of taking action?*

Do things just to do things. Billy spent sixteen months working on this film. And during the production, he did everything. He wrote, directed and starred in the film, and says he had the greatest time of his life making it. Meanwhile, the movie was considered a box office failure, when compared to his past successes. And according to his [autobiography](#), that negative reception made him feel sad, angry, scared and, worst of all, second guess his creative decisions. Billy even said he developed a severe bout of pneumonia as soon as they wrapped the shoot. In retrospect, though, he also said this movie was one of the most cherished projects of his career. That the film was a love letter to the old school comics that influenced him as a young man. And nobody can take that away from him. Nobody. That's the ideal place to be as an artist. Doing things because you'd be doing them with or without success. Hanging your sense of accomplishment, the fullness of your heart, and the stability of your soul on an internal sense of validation. Pressfield calls this *territorial* activity, in which the sustenance comes from the act itself, not from the impression it makes on others. *Are you still digging for treasure, or have you realized that digging is the treasure?*

All revolutions begin with language. Language is the only leverage for changing the context of the world around us. Once our language changes, our outlook, behaviors and priorities will follow. That's the magic of words and manifestos and crystalline expressions of human thought. They illuminate what's possible. They inspire us to expand to our full capacity. And the encouraging part is, revolution doesn't always have to come in the form of political upheaval, cultural rebellion or economic shift. Sometimes it's a simple change in the way we talk about ourselves. When I started writing my first movie, I was afraid to call myself a filmmaker. It felt pretentious and dishonest. But then my mentor convinced me to act as if. To make sure that every thought I had, I thought it as a filmmaker. Even though I hadn't finished the film yet. And so, I started believing that I was what I said I was. I allowed the constellation of my identity as a writer to expand. And every time I told someone that I was a filmmaker, I loved the way it made me feel. *Artistic. Creative. Ambition.* Which makes sense, considering the word derives from the root *revolvere*, which means to roll back. Maybe that's all a revolution is. The rolling back of old skin. The shedding of an outdated way of speaking about ourselves. Using new language to describe who and how and what we are. *Are you focusing your attention on the way you'd like to see yourself?*

162 -- THE MILES FINCH SCENE FROM ELF

Established parcels of structured curiosity. Clancy famously said that if we don't write it down, it never happened. That mantra has governed my creative work for more than a decade. Thanks to his warning, everything I know is written down somewhere. Of course, that's only half the work. Because if you don't *organize* what you write down, it never happened either. That's why I'm ruthless when it comes to my content management system. I treat my notes and files and ideas as a literal inventory. The lifeblood of my production facility. The chief asset of my creative factory. And as such, that inventory requires dedicated, daily management. One of the practices I've found to be most useful is called *walking the factory floor*. It's a casual and thoughtful perusing of every idea I've recently accumulated. An established parcel of structured curiosity. A ritual keeps me in tune and in touch with all of the raw materials coming into my production process. Because frankly, I take so many goddamn notes on a weekly basis, there's no way my brain could cope with that much inventory on its own. That's why I created a system for extending the mind. A trusted process that does the heavy lifting for me. One that allows me to inspect my ideas alphabetically, chronologically and thematically. And a result, I gain an objective view of what my mind really wants to produce. *Are you the foreman of your idea factory?*

No tomatoes, too vulnerable. Finch has written more classic children's book than any other author. He may be four feet tall, but in the children's literature business, he is a monster. And so, for the right price, he's willing facilitate a five hour brainstorming session with the editorial team to help them concept their next bestseller. The only problem is, he's temperamental. He demands first class treatment. And when he doesn't get it, he storms out of the meeting, telling the team to kiss his vertically challenged ass, unintentionally leaving behind his notebook of genius ideas. *Bad move, angry elf*. That's your creative inventory. Your incubator of brilliant book ideas waiting to mature. And because you couldn't manage your emotions, you made you intellectual property as vulnerable as a tomato. That can be a scary thing for a creator, not having access to your own ideas. That's why I back up my inventory on the cloud, on my website and on an external hard drive. It's too important. I've worked too hard organizing my thoughts to make them vulnerable to loss, theft, damage or mysterious disappearances. And so, this scene is a reminder to all creative professionals. Be vigilant about your intellectual property. Because when you make a living by your wits, you have to guard your mind like the asset it is. *How could you turn your intellectual capital into a software program or web app?*

Piracy is a gift. When someone plagiarizes us, we shouldn't send a subpoena, we should send a fruit basket. Piracy is a compliment. It's a reminder that what we've done is worth copying. And it's validation that we're good enough to be a target. Because nobody steals crappy art. Statistically, work that is successful will always have a higher piracy rate. Not a bad goal to shoot for. Besides, being stolen from is inevitable. Piracy is just one of the many punches you have to learn to roll with. It's part of the job description. Hendrix even said that he'd been imitated so well that he heard people copy his mistakes. How cool is that? Green Day made music history by becoming the first band to sell blank albums. Since millions of their fans were illegally downloading their music anyway, the band released a five pack of blank compact discs with original album cover art printed on the top and sides of the box. And on the side of the case, they reminded their fans, *burn responsibly*. Armstrong just figured, hey, kids are going to copy, burn, download and rip our music anyway, may as well make the records look cool and make some money in the process. Years later, their band was voted as one of the top one hundred greatest bands of all time, and will soon be inducted into the rock and roll hall of fame. I'd say piracy was the best thing that ever happened to their art. *Would you rather have a piracy problem or an obscurity problem?*

163 -- THE HARMONY SCENE FROM BEN FOLDS LIVE

You were not the same after that. When I was twenty six, my left lung collapsed. I spent a week in the hospital with a tube in my chest, pickled out of my mind on pain medication, trying to breathe with a machine. It was the single most painful, disturbing and surreal experience of my life. Something very real inside of me shifted that day, and I haven't been the same since. It's like something froze there, and part of me will always be looking back on that moment. But in a good way. Sitting in that hospital bed for a week forced me to slow down my life, reconnect with my breath and develop a healthier relationship with my stress. Best thing that could have happened to me. And that's the benefit of trauma, I suppose. When we're exposed to a stressful event or situation, something exceptionally threatening or catastrophic or out of the ordinary, we can't help but be altered. That moment becomes a long lived, deeply embedded memory that affects daily decision making in the future. Ben's song is about a similar moment. It's based on a true story of a person he knew who, under the influence of acid, climbed a tree at a party, stayed up in the tree overnight, and when he came down the next morning, was a born again Christian. And he was not the same after that. His inner geography had changed forever. The point is, we all have trauma. We all get stuck up in a tree eventually. But as painful as those moments are at the time, they are still what make our life a book of stories. And we ought to give thanks for them. *What's on your gratitude list?*

Emphasize the social function. Ben is famous for crowd sing alongs. I've seen him in concert multiple times, and participating in a three part harmony with thousands of people is one of the most magical and electric things a human being can experience. This song in particular. Every time I hear it, I get chills and start crying. That's how goddamn moving it is. Especially with the symphony orchestra. And the best part is, whenever he introduces it, Ben stands up from his piano and teaches the audience the root, major third and perfect fifth notes of the song. That way, everybody can sing the chorus together. That's the way live performance should be. Not just one guy on stage, but everybody in the room coming together to embrace each other and share the joyful experience of music and singing and celebration. Ben's albums certainly sell a lot copies, but his concerts are what connect the disconnected. They let people share moments with each other so they can experience things together. And they produce memorable, cocreative, breathing the same air experiences that fans cherish forever. That's the challenge for any creator. Not

just to sell the art, but to create something of social meaning above and beyond the art. Because live is how life happens. *Why would anyone want to come see your art live?*

My only vice is advice. Ben recently wrote an insightful [letter](#) to aspiring musical artists. The entire article is worth reading, but here are a few of my favorite themes and passages. First, on music. Folds wrote that while it's important to be savvy about distribution and promotion, it won't do you any good if you're not making music first. Because if you're not ready musically, the best opportunity in the world isn't even an opportunity. Second, on identity. Ben said that it takes no effort to just be yourself, but the road to that place can be long and rough. So stick it out anyway. Because you may soon find you'll be praised for being you. And third, on uniqueness. Ben also wrote that you can't make people who won't understand your music, understand your music. And so, don't try to sway people's musical taste, or alter your music to fit a theoretical audience. Just take the music you naturally make and finding it's home. That why this man is a genius. His insight about music is equally as inspiring as the music itself. *How does the way you use your intelligence come across to the people who work with you?*

164 -- THE WRITING SCENE FROM STAND BY ME

We are the model for what we create. When I started wearing my nametag fifteen years ago, I immediately saw how effective it was in earning people's attention and giving them permission to approach me. But that was interpersonally. And so, when I started my publishing company, I began wondering if the same strategy might work economically. Was there a business model that could make my brand sticky enough to make the market target me? Was there a value strategy that could attract new clients, engagements and opportunities? Absolutely. *Continuous creation*. That was the solution. And so, writing became the linchpin that activated the value attraction process. I began spending all of my time creating things that brought value and joy and insight and inspiration to people. From articles to blogs to books to videos to music to workshops to mentoring programs, if writing wasn't the answer, I rephrased the question. Within a few years, I had written so much, created so much good in the marketplace, that I became the bullseye instead of the arrow. The market started targeting me. The equation was simple. The volume of daily output, multiplied by originality of my brand voice, divided by time, raised to the power of consistency. That's what kicked open the doors of opportunity. New business found me through the attraction of working. Meaning, I now had two nametags. The label on my shirt, and the labor in the marketplace. Both stuck. *What's your nametag?*

Generosity is the tax you pay for talent. I've been writing music for more than twenty years. But many of my friends and colleagues had no idea I that was a singer and songwriter. Because music was always something I saved for myself. It was an escape. A way to hide from the world. Besides, the material was just too personal. Too bloody. Too precious to be subjected to the cruel ear of the world. But as I got older, I started to understand how gifts work. Hyde's research showed that gifts, not unlike particles in physics, need to stay in motion. Passing the gift along is the act of gratitude that finishes the labor. It's an essential part of the creative process. Giving the first creation away makes the second possible. Meaning, your gift is not fully yours until it is given away. That philosophy lit a fire under my musical butt. Hyde's work forced me to stop and say, *wait a minute*. I've been given this gift, something special that allows me deliver value that nobody has ever delivered before, and I'm not sharing it? How selfish. Because the highest form of gratitude for the gift we've been given is to regift it in the service of the world. To keep it in motion. Chris knows this intuitively. Gordie, on the other hand, doesn't have

the eyes to see his own talent. He doesn't realize that writing is the one gift he's been given, and he an obligation not to waste it. *Who helped you assess the gifts you have to offer?*

Jealousy is the ember of initiative. When I was in high school, a musician friend of mine got a regular gig at the local coffee shop. I was insanely jealous. I went to watch him play one night, and I remember thinking to myself, *you bastard, that should be me up there*. And so, between sets I went up to him and asked how he got the spot. Adam said he just walked up to the owner, handed him his demo tape and flat out asked for the gig. Wow. Who knew it was that easy? The only problem was, I didn't have a demo tape. But what I did have was a lot of friends. That's a different kind of demo. So I approached the owner and told him that if he gave me a spot for one night, I would guarantee twenty customers. He couldn't resist. Two weeks later, after plastering the hallways of my high school with bright yellow posters, every one of my friends showed up to watch me play. And they all bought coffee and snacks. The owners were ecstatic. After the show, they pulled me aside and hired me on the spot. Wednesday night was now officially *mine*. I felt like a rockstar. Like a grown up. Like a real businessperson who just cut a deal. And the best is, I wasn't even that good. I'd only been playing guitar for about five years. And I'm sure my singing voice wasn't exactly angelic. But nobody seemed to care. I played every week for six months, and had the time of my life. And I'm there were people in the audience every week who heard me play and thought to themselves, wow, this guy sucks. But I was the one on stage, and they weren't. I was the one who took the initiative, and they didn't. Proving, that ideas are free, but only execution is priceless. *What's your legacy of taking action?*

165 -- THE SHOWER CURTAIN RING SCENE FROM PLANES, TRAINS & AUTOMOBILES

No labels, no limits. My favorite basketball player once said, if you don't know where you're going, nobody can stop you. I've always appreciated the playfulness and flexibility of that mindset. It's not a bad way to play the game. In fact, it's not a bad strategy for approaching the creative process. Life is boring when we know all the answers anyway. Because when we've already decided exactly what we're making or where we're going, our work can only be as good as that. On the other hand, when we objectify the creative process and suspend our need to categorize, we invite projects to expand into unexpected territory. We allow the work to adapt and evolve. When I started working on my my first documentary, I didn't know I was making a movie until a year into the project. One day, I just stepped back from the project and thought, I think this thing wants to be a film. So I listened. But had I decided that at the onset of the process, it wouldn't have organically blossomed into the work of art it is today. In this example, I was creating *medium agnostic*. Instead of locking the work into a single form, I kept the idea in permanent beta. Instead of forcing my own expectations on the work, I allowed patterns to emerge. And when the time came for the documentary to announce itself, all I had to do was listen and say yes. *Are your expectations serving or frustrating you?*

Your credentials are your attitude. When I started my business, it was barely a business. No plan. No market strategy. No creative vision for turning a profit. I just wanted to write. I just wanted to make things. And so, when I launched my publishing company, it was a *business* insofar as I believed it existed. My enterprise was real because I said it was. And that was enough. Nobody could take that away from me. There was no belief police who was going to put up a barricade in my mind and say, now just a minute there young man, we're going to need to see some credentials. *Bullshit*. I can do whatever I want. I hired myself, and I answer to myself. Turns out, that's all you need. Enough proof to convince yourself, and enough passion to convince others. And yet, most people won't do it. We're so afraid to raise our hand a take a chance and stick ourselves out there because we're scared that people will laugh and stare and roll their eyes and call on us the carpet. Del, on the other hand, raised his hand. He hired himself. Converting his shower curtain inventory into sellable jewelry was genius. Proving, that people are impressed by people who take initiative. They're inspired by the fact that they have the audacity to step into the spotlight and own it. And that's why nobody ever says anything. Because deep down, there's a part of them that wishes they had the guts do the same. So

try raising your hand. Hire yourself. You'll be amazed how few people will try to stop you. Once you realize that, once you start living life without waiting for permission, you'll experience a level of abundance you never thought possible. *Are you asking who's going to let you, or wondering who's going to stop you?*

Definition is an intellectual enterprise, the soul prefers to imagine. During a recent creativity workshop, many of the high school students asked questions about career paths. If, at a young age, they were supposed to know what they wanted to do with their life. And I told them, don't put so much pressure on yourself. Very few people know who they are and what they want when they're eighteen. That's the cognitive dissonance of adolescence. Human beings have to satisfy their basic human need for unity, order and completeness. And so, they demand that everything follows a logical path. That everything has a beginning, middle and end. Human life, after all, is punctuated by a definite beginning, middle and end. And so, it's no surprise that teenagers require everything they deal with in life to follow the same path. Their rational capacities crave a certain amount of story. They depend on dramatic structure. It's hardwired into them. But the reality is, I told the students, not everything has to be a thing. Life can't always be compartmentalized. Not every idea can be fully fleshed out and explainable. And it shouldn't be. That robs us of joy of the limitless everyday mystery that is life. *When did you become okay with that?*

166 -- THE GOZER SCENE FROM GHOSTBUSTERS

A little confidence goes a long way. About twelve years ago, the largest news outlet in the country interviewed me. Their article dubbed me as the world record holder of wearing nametags. I laughed out loud. Forget about running the four minute mile, this was a *real* accomplishment. I had officially arrived. And even though the world record holder of wearing nametags wasn't *exactly* what I was going for, it sounded credible and interesting and memorable. And since I was just starting my career, I took my credibility where I could get it. So I embraced it. I began including that moniker in my marketing materials and bio. And it just stuck. That's what I became known for. And the strange part is, people never tired to prove me wrong. Because when you focus on something nobody else has bothered to think about, there's no competition. It's virgin territory. When you create a category where you define the rules and set all the standards, you catch a foothold and slide into pole position. And so, I ultimately became the world record of wearing nametags, not because there was a sanctioning body to legitimize my achievement, but because I told people that I was. Confidently. Over and over. And they believed me. It's funny how that works. When somebody asks you if you're a god, and you say yes, nobody questions you. But when you buckle under the pressure, fumbling to articulate your answer, everybody smells the fear. *How might you persevere and extend your confidence?*

I had a big imagination, and wanted to put it to work. Vonnegut once said that the triumph of most things is a matter of organization. I agree. But I also think that the failure of most things is a matter of imagination. It's our lack of creativity that hinders success. And unless we began taking charge of how we use our brains, we'll never achieve it. Maisel's **work** on brainstorming has been transformative for me. He taught me not to spend time in my brain as if the brain were a destination, but to use my brain in the service of the work I intend to accomplish. For example, when I'm practicing yoga, I have a tendency to put the pedal to the metal inside my head. Every thought and idea plan and problem comes thrashing to the surface at once. In fact, I'm almost shocked at just how many thoughts can run through my head at any given moment. Now, most yoga instructors would tell me to focus on the breath, stay in the present and let my thoughts come and go like passing clouds in the sky. But as an experiment, I recently tried a the reverse approach. Instead of attempting to force calm my mind, I started wondering to myself, how could I channel my thoughts into something more meaningful? And so, I started running creative visualizations. During class, I would use my imagination to build a story in my head. A mental movie with pictures and sounds and smells

and other sensations associated with reaching a particular goal. And I would hold that fantasy until class was over. The experience was blissful. As a result of biting into the visualization, I was able to drown out the chatter of my mind. By tuning into the exciting movie I'd created for myself, I experienced a completely different kind of relaxation. *To what extent could you let your brain race, but still be in control of it?*

Terrified beyond the capacity for rational thought. Gozer initially appears as a woman, but her voice echoes that the destructor will follow, taking a form chosen by the team. So that's their challenge. *Don't think of anything yet. Clear your mind.* Because they only get one crack at this. But it's too late. The choice has been made. The traveler has come. Ray couldn't help himself. It just popped in there. He tried to think. He inadvertently recalled a beloved corporate mascot from his childhood. Something that could never, ever possibly destroy them. And the hundred foot marshmallow man begins attacking the city. It's a classic case of ironic process theory. Harvard cognitive scientists defined this as the psychological process whereby deliberate attempts to suppress certain thoughts make them more likely to surface in one's thoughts. For example, don't think of a white bear. Now, what are you thinking about? Of course. A white bear. That's ironic process theory. But the good news is, the researchers found that individuals *do* have a capacity to successfully suppress thoughts. Not by trying not to think, but by focusing on a specifically prepared distraction or object. It's a process in thought suppression experiments referred to as focused distraction. **Wegner** explains that picking and focusing on an absorbing distractor, like a car from your childhood, helps avoid unwanted thoughts. And if you allow yourself to think in controlled ways on and around the thing that you want to avoid, he says, then it will be less likely to pop back into your thoughts at other times. *Which thought might release the peddle on your racing brain?*

167 -- THE IDEA MAN SCENE FROM NIGHT SHIFT

Keep your eye on the ball and let your mind go. If you don't write it down, it never happened. That's a mantra I've lived and worked by for many years. But writing down your ideas the moment you have them isn't necessarily about quality, it's about continuity. It's not about the material, it's about the muscle. Training your brain to become proficient at collecting and creating and communicating ideas. Creativity, after all, is cumulative. The more you use it, the more you have. If we're sitting around the dinner table, for example, and somebody accidentally spits out a great band name, I write it down. Every time. Not because I'm actually going to start a band with that name, but because I want to practice recognizing interesting ideas. Carlin explained it best in his posthumous biography. He said he wanted his brain to get used to the fact that collecting and capturing ideas made it feel good. That it liked finding those things. That way, every time his brain found another one, it would say, *oh boy oh boy, there's another one! This is going to feel good. Let's go back to work and find more of these for him.* It's positive addiction. Creating optimal conditions for the brain to grow. Blaze is over exuberant, irrational, hyperactive idea man who never stops talking. He had attention deficit disorder a decade before the disease was even discovered. And yet, he knew how to channel it. The tape recorder was his ground zero. His entry point into the creative processing workflow. The primary location for offloading raw materials into his idea factory. *Is everything you know written down somewhere?*

Creativity is an act of trust. Planners and control freaks often struggle with the creative process. To them, creating something out of nothing can feel like banging their head against a brick wall. Embracing uncertainty just isn't in their nature. They prefer to compartmentalize the world around them. And I understand. Ambiguity is hard. Blank canvases can be overwhelming and paralyzing. The secret, then, is building your muscle of trust. Assuming the power is there for you to use. Developing faith in your own creative mechanism. And that can only come through practice. For example, every day when I sit down to write, I have no idea what I'm going to say. But after years and years and pages and pages of practice, I've developed deep faith in my ability to sit down and respond to the world. And so, I always end up saying something. Because I trust that the forest will provide. The writing isn't always guaranteed to be good, but that's not the point. Overcoming resistance is the victory. The point is, you can't micromanage every outburst of emotion. You just have let the performance happen by itself. It takes massive amounts

of trust, both in yourself and in the process, but it's a lot less stressful and a lot more productive than the alternative. *When was the last time you were stronger than you gave yourself credit for?*

The perfection bug sinks its teeth into my skin. When my director and I wrapped post production on our documentary, I rang the concierge bell on my desk, gave him a high five and pumped my fist towards the sky. *What a moment.* Two and a half years of work, finally coming to fruition. Hallelujah. Beautiful feelings of satisfaction and relief and pride washed over me like a tidal wave. Five minutes later, I felt a twitch in my left eye. And I realized, wow, I could easily spend three more months making this movie fifteen percent better. Think of all of those scenes and sounds that would benefit from a quick once over. Maybe we could push the deadline back till next year? *No. Don't you dare,* I reminded myself. Stay away from that goddamn treadmill. Don't even think about scratching unless there's really an itch. Finished is the new perfect. And so, I snapped out of it. I sidestepped the seductive trap of perpetual improvement. And we began distributing the documentary two weeks later. *Phew.* Close call, though. Turns out, I'm just as susceptible to resistance's trickery as the next guy. *Have you ever asked yourself why you procrastinate?*

168 -- THE OCTOPUS SCENE FROM JIRO DREAMS OF SUSHI

Focus on building a life that you wouldn't trade. Confucius said that if you find a job you love, you'd never work a day in your life. But I'm not sure that's true. In fact, I think it's reversed. Because in my experience, when you find a job you love, you'll work *every day* of your life. Maybe not the full eight hours. Maybe not as much on weekends and holidays and vacations. And not to the point where you neglect your health and your relationships. But passion and meaning and productive obsession have a funny way of creating amnesia. When you're fully engaged, it doesn't matter what day it is. You just want to get up and get to work. Because you've built a life you don't need to escape from. I'm reminded of a great novel I read about a **photographer**. Jordan says that you could put her on a beach, and she is framing shots in her mind, probing the eyes of waiters or passersby, looking for the life behind life. She says sometimes she thinks she's actually become a camera, an instrument for recording reality, and that the exquisite machines she carries when she works are but extensions of her mind and eye. For her, there is no vacation. If her eyes are open, she's working. Now, this lifestyle might sound exhausting to some people, but that's just the nature of passion. You do what you because you can't afford not to. Because that thing makes life possible for you. You do what you do because you're ugly when you don't. *What's your definition of a job worth loving?*

I want somebody who says this is just the beginning. Jiro has been making sushi for nearly a century. The sheer amount of hours he's logged can make a beginner feel like they're ten inches tall. But we can't allow that reality to discourage our efforts. We can't allow another person's success to be a detractor from achieving our own. Otherwise bitter jealousy becomes yet another mask for procrastination. Instead, we need to surround ourselves with people who have good long term vision. People who can see what we're too close to ourselves to see. Even if it's just one person, that's usually a strong enough spark to initiate our momentum. When my first book went viral, I received a call out of the blue from a guy who had seen one of my television interviews. As I picked up the phone, first five words out of his mouth were, *way to fucking go, kid!* Turns out, he was a bestselling author. A veteran writer who had been in the publishing game longer than I'd been alive. And he was just calling to say congratulations, introduce himself, and most importantly, remind me that this is just the beginning. That phone call initiated my momentum. Jeffrey's encouragement helped me move the story forward and execute on my vision.

And we remain friends and colleagues to this day. Proving, that you don't need that many people to believe in you. *What was it about you that will allow great mentoring to happen?*

Love is the master power of the world. Jiro never once hated this job. He found something he loved and it loved him right back. That's why he never plans to retire. And so, his journey to mastery not only inspires us to eat sushi, but also motivates us to treat our creative work as a delivery mechanism for our love. Because deep down, that's what customers come to the counter for. It's no secret that love is what everybody secretly wants. The question we have to ask ourselves is, what's the packaging? What is the wrapper for our love? My grandfather has worked in the closeout business for more than fifty years. His products mainly consisted of liquidated inventories, discount merchandise and discontinued items. But because the closeout industry was traditionally viewed as cheap goods, his company became known for its classy service, positive attitude, transactional integrity and loyal relationships. That was the packaging for his love. And it's what kept his brand alive for more than a half a century. A powerful reminder that business is best when it's about the service above what you really sell. The product is only the beginning. Focus on the loving service ecosystem around it, and customers will come from around the world to sit at your counter. *How will you create an exhibition of love through your art?*

169 -- THE CONCERT SCENE FROM GREETINGS FROM TIM BUCKLEY

To love at all is to be vulnerable. Buckley possessed a tenor vocal range that ranged between three and a half to four octaves. And those natural endowments, mingled with massive amounts of courage and pain and tenderness, allowed him to sing with a soulful vulnerability that could make even the toughest man tremble. Few people could stand within his radius without being burned to a cinder. In fact, when I was in high school, I remember reading a review of his debut album. The critic wrote that the singer's voice was the single most moving goddamn instrument he'd ever heard. What a compliment. What a way to be remembered. And, what a great reminder that when we're courageously vulnerable, showing the more tender aspects of who we are through our work, we offer a gift to others. We deliver value that has never been delivered before. The scary part is wondering if our gift will be returned to sender, or, worse yet, not even opened in the first place. *Yikes*. Because this isn't a blender, this is our soul. Poured out and served up on a silver platter. And the existential rejection of our gift being met with crickets is the most terrifying thing in the world. Powell, whose groundbreaking books on identity had a profound influence on me, wrote that I am afraid to tell you who I am because if I tell you who I am, you may not like who I am, and that's all I have. No wonder disclosure is so difficult. *Have you reclaimed your right to be vulnerable?*

A place where your voice can take flight and travel. Jeff had the most ethereal falsetto voice in the history of rock and roll. Listening to his music as a teenager was a religious experience. And so, in the mid nineties, directly against the cultural backdrop of apathetic, angry grunge music and narcissistic, violent rap songs, his gentle, gender neutral stylings earned the world's attention. Because nobody saw him coming. Buckley's father may have been mainstream folk icon, but his son came through the side door and delivered catharsis. And he influenced an entire generation of singers. I was reading one his old concert review, in which the critics says he sings like a man with more than a few exposed nerves, given to wild shifts in volume and hysteria, delivering messages of isolation, romance and other urban ailments to uncomfortable extremes. No wonder his debut album became the definite album of the decade. Because twenty years ago, nobody was singing like that. Nobody even had the guts to *try* and sing like that. Popular culture put too much of a premium on cool. Proving two things. First, that timing isn't everything, it's the only thing. And second, if you want to get to the next level, you have to break the rules. *What alienates you from your true voice?*

Study the anatomy of other people's talent. Buckley transformed the way I sang. Listening to his records gave me permission to hit falsetto notes whenever possible. And not because it was popular, and not because girls liked it, but because it made me feel free. Like something was escaping. Like my soul was purging. Interestingly, I heard in an interview that he was emulating the vocals of another singer. Buckley credits his performance style to Nusrat. He said that that the first time he heard the man's voice, he felt a rush of adrenaline in his chest, like he was on the edge of a cliff, wondering when he would jump and how well the ocean would catch him. *Wow*. So I started listening to that guy too. And the first time I heard the voice that influenced the voice that influenced *my* voice, my jaw dropped to the floor. It's a surreal experience. Almost like you're traveling back in time. Or trying on the head of your hero. Wild stuff. But it's something every artist has a responsibility to do. To go to the source. To listen to the people who influenced the people who influenced them. *What do you and your role models have in common?*

170 -- THE PLANNING SCENE FROM UP IN THE AIR

Stare into the mouth of panic and see possibility. The hard part about dreaming is, once your dream comes true, you have to learn to live with it. You have to exist in the world that you created. You actually have to *do* something with the idea that you killed yourself for. And it's kind of a bittersweet symphony. Because the pride and joy and satisfaction of achievement is quickly replaced by the fear and vulnerability and pressure of reality. Just ask anyone who creates for a living. The moment you wrap on a new project, kick out the press release and announce to the world that your new brainchild has finally arrived, you're immediately gripped with quiet panic. And you start asking yourself these strange new questions. Are you sure you're ready for the world to see you as you really are? What if you can't afford to follow this dream anymore? What if you're not the same person as you when the dream started? And if so, does that mean you have to readjust your dream so it reflects something that satisfies you when you step away from it? Campbell explained that the final stage of the hero's journey was bringing the elixir back to the ordinary world. Turning back to help humanity along the difficult path that you yourself have just walked and conquered. But what if that's not enough for you? What if you sense the beginning of a different and more courageous dream? It's highly neurotic, but it's also human nature. And nobody seems to want to talk about it. So we have to confront this reality. Because not facing the fire doesn't put it out. *Can you answer all the questions about your dream?*

Create positive tension for yourself. When my wife and I decided to relocate across the country, I wrote a press release. Mainly because it was funny, but also because I didn't want to lose momentum. I didn't want another reason to back peddle on our dream. What's interesting is, the moment we shared that press release with the world, plans started to align. Not because we earned a ton of headline impressions, but because we had created positive tension for ourselves. The press release painted us into an accountable corner. Not through distress, but *eustress*. Constructive conflict. Intensity through total involvement. That was our strategy to increase motivation, adaptation and reaction to the environment. And it worked. Within four short months, we had downsized, combined, relocating and restarted our lives. Best hundred bucks I ever spent. Proving, that when you lose momentum, self propulsion is the only thing that will move you forward. It's like printing business cards for a company you haven't started yet. That commitment device creates social pressure and positive tension. By virtue of physically handing them out to people, you're forced to reckon with the infallible judgment of reality. A place

with enough social pressure to make sure failure isn't interpreted away. *How could you increase your commitment by creating unacceptable consequences of failing?*

Shake off the shackles of expectations. Natalie is overflowing with plans and ambitions and deadlines for her perfect life, complete with a perfect career, perfect community, perfect husband, perfect car and even a perfect dog. But she's discovering that life can be wildly underwhelming. And that people will thwart your expectations every way you can imagine, and in many ways you can't. This movie reminds me of my twenties, when I had enough goals to keep god busy. And I accomplished every one of them. But the strange part is, I wasn't any happier. I just had a thicker resume. And so, I started to realize that I didn't need a goal, I needed a process. A system. A set of practices I executed on a regular basis to increase my odds of happiness in the long run. As my favorite **book** states, only reasonable goal in life is maximizing your total lifetime experience of something called happiness. So I focused on that. And life got a lot happier. Because when you prioritize achievement over contentment, burdened by the belief that you haven't done enough to be okay with yourself, happiness has a hard time bubbling to the surface. You have to roll an awful lot of rocks up an awful lot of hills, just to get a taste of that sweet air. But when the anxious part of you is finally resting, no longer suffocating under an avalanche of expectation, it's amazing how freely the vomit of happiness spews out. Lesson learned, goals are overrated, deadlines are jokes and plans are procrastination in disguise. *What if you allowed themes to emerge in your life, rather than force your own expectations upon it?*

171 -- THE GUITAR DUEL SCENE FROM CROSSROADS

Playing a game to wait out the world. I've never been a competitive person. It's simply not in my blood. I don't play to win, I play to keep the game going. And yet, I believe competition is human and healthy and necessary for the advancement of our society. Hell, without competition, we'd still be using car phones. In fact, when it comes to the world of business, it's economically healthy to assume that every brand has competition. Even if it's theoretical. Because despite the originality of any given product—and despite its creator's myopic quest to become a category of one—there's still the *topography* in which that business operates. The economy and the culture and the marketplace and the industry surrounding the product. That's a form of competition too. Because each of those factors affect a brand's ability to win new business. The frustrating part is, it's mostly a matter of timing. It's what the market will bear. A company might have the most interesting and memorable and valuable product in the world, but if that world isn't ready for it, they're toast. Amazon has been around for twenty years, but didn't turn a profit for the first six. And only recently have they truly hit a stride technologically. Because in the mid nineties, the world wasn't ready for them. Bezos, however, wasn't in a rush. He learned that the internet was growing at two thousand percent a year, and decided to be the one to make a fortune from that phenomenon. And all he had to do was stick it out. *Will you still be around when the world is finally ready for you?*

They never aim some creativity at understanding yourself. Eugene has one chance to show up at the concert and win the guitar duel. If he achieves victory against the ringer, then his mentor gets his soul back. But if he loses, both he and his friend forfeit their souls to the devil. *Well then.* That's one way to motivate yourself. And yet, it works. Eugene wins the battle by falling back on his classical training, performance a style that his rockstar opponent can't match. And that's the key. He returns to his roots. He identifies what's already true for him, which makes it easy to tap into his native endowments of creativity, motivation and inspiration. And he blows the crowd away. Totally underrated strategy. One that many artists overlook. Because we forget to reserve a portion of our creativity to understand our own process. We forget that our identity is a real project with real needs. And as a result, the more mysterious our creative process becomes for us, the greater our fear is that the well will run dry. It's like sexual impotence. The more pressure we put on ourselves around the anxiety to perform, the less likely we are to score. But the reality is, it's not as mysterious as make it out to be. Despite our most romantic proclamations, the creative process is more mechanical than it is magical. It's

more clerical than it is cosmic. Which isn't to say higher forces can't come to our aid. They can and they will. But they're notoriously unreliable. And if we have any intention of becoming prolific in our art, we have to confront the realities of our creative inclinations and work from there. *What would it take for you to move from being in a struggle to being easy and natural?*

Soul is more important than talent. Taylor wrote a fascinating [article](#) about the future of music. How the value of an album is, and will continue to be, based on the amount of soul an artist has bled into a body of work. And how people are only buying the albums that hit them like an arrow through the heart. *Couldn't agree more.* That's why I believe soul is more important than talent. Julliard is a fine institution, but the only art lesson worth taking is learning how to hang your balls out there. That's why the audience shows up. That's why people pay the price of admission. To get their faces melted off. To watch someone walk on stage and eat the scenery alive. Nothing against taking lessons, but why waste time on precision and ability and accuracy when we could deliver honesty and soulfulness and grit? People forgive a few off key notes if they see your heart in your mouth. Henry Rollins proudly admits he has no talent whatsoever, but he *does* have enthusiasm, tenacity, desperation and a real desire to not let people down. And that guy has millions of dollars, millions of fans and one hell of an interesting life. Perhaps instead of learning scales and mastering strokes, art students should learn how get up in front of people and crack themselves open. *Are you creating from the soul, or from what the marketplace wants?*

172 -- THE FLOW SCENE FROM THE HUSTLER

You have to lose yourself to find yourself. Since I was a kid, music was always my gateway into flow. The inner sanctuary. The one thing that made every other thing fall away. I may not have used the word *flow* when I was twelve years old, but all I knew was, playing and singing songs was my optimal state of consciousness. The bliss station in which action and awareness merged, my perception of time disappeared, the inner critic went quiet, neurochemicals flooded my system and I transcended the inner division between self and ego. Complete engagement, total immersion and pure freedom. Music was what made me feel like the best, highest, truest version of myself. And that was the irony. Only by losing myself did I find myself. Only by letting go did I unlock the real me. But music isn't everybody's drug of choice. Eddie's gateway is playing pool. Long before researchers identified the scientific principles behind flow, he understood it intuitively. Some things in life are like that. Easier to experience before they have been explained. And so, when he saw that everything was working for him, and all of the sudden, he got oil in his arm, he didn't have to look, he just knew. That's what made it great. But his girlfriend shared perhaps the greatest insight of all. She reminded him that some men never get to feel that way about anything. And so, any time we experience flow, even if only for a moment, we should be grateful. It's the optimal state of being for our species, and should not be treated lightly. *What experience allows you both lose and find yourself?*

You're better because it took longer. There's nothing more painful than being patient with a dream. When you have this thing that sticks inside of you and says now, this idea that you want to fly so badly that you would gladly tape wings on it, any impediment to progress feels like a shot to the heart. You're just so eager in those early stages. You almost say to your dream, *why can't you come true faster?* But nine women can't make a baby in one month. Which is usually a metaphor for the software development process, but it's equally applicable to the dream management process. I remember listening to a fascinating [interview](#) with a successful comedian, who revealed that she didn't become successful until her early thirties. The host, however, told her that she was better because it took longer. Had she found her comedic voice too early in the process, she would have bypassed the necessary existential, emotional and psychological work required to get there. Had her dream been handed to her right away, she never would have logged the thousands of hours it took to make something of herself. And so, it's the foundational development that becomes long term benefit of delayed gratification. Which

might be difficult to see with stars in your eyes, but if it's worth dreaming about, it's worth waiting for. Don't worry. You're better because it took longer. *Are you willing to keep your hand raised until it's your turn?*

The best technique is commitment. The *Hustler* was published in the late fifties. Tevis's book was the first and best novel written about billiards in the four hundred year history of the game, and it quickly won a respected readership and later an audience for this movie. More importantly, the book and the film brought the excitement of pool to a new generation, activating a revival around the country in the early sixties. And so, we have to consider the story with a healthy dose of context. Because back then, billiards wasn't a mainstream dream. And that changes everything. For example, when I started my career in the publishing industry, not everybody was doing it. Because not everybody *could* do it. The digital revolution hadn't happened yet. But thanks to deflated industry ecosystems, massive advances in technology, cultural shifts in taste, evolutions in genre and nonexistent barriers to entry, now anybody can make anything for nothing and win everything. Let me say that again. Anybody can make anything for nothing and win everything. It's both beautiful and terrifying at the same time. Because when anyone can do anything, they will. And when that happens, the marketplace will saturate. Making it harder and harder to stand out. Yet another reminder of the power of delayed gratification. Because talent isn't enough. When the pieces of the pie keep getting smaller as more people throng to it, the best technique is commitment. *What inspires your persistence and determination?*

173 -- THE KITCHEN SCENE FROM THANK YOU FOR SMOKING

The barometer of value. According to a research report from the three largest media distribution services in the country, nearly two thousand press releases are sent out each day. That's north of a half a million each year. Now, some people argue that this marketing approach is a form of spam. Just another impersonal, insulting, shotgun strategy for getting somebody's attention. And perhaps that's true. But the press release process is still an inherently worthwhile experience. Not only because it challenges you tell your own story, but because it requires you to create value. Otherwise you wouldn't be writing it. Lefsetz famously wrote that having a new album is not a story. That with a twenty four seven news cycle online, he says, what happens in your life is *not* a story. The hard core already knows what's you're up to and the rest don't care. And so, perhaps the press release isn't the point. Perhaps the point is having interesting experiences and creating meaningful things in the world, all of which earn you the right to write a press release in the first place. After all, before you write things worth talking about, you have to do things worth writing about. Life is subordinate to art, not the other way around. The press release for my documentary certainly didn't go viral, but it still earned tens of thousands of headline impressions and hundreds of online pickups. And to me, that was a victory. Because it showed that I did something worth releasing. *If you were arrested and charged with creating value for people, would there be enough evidence to convict you?*

Buried under layers of defensiveness. Joey is accurate when he says people make things more complicated so they can feel sorry for themselves. It's what our species does. Human beings are amazingly adept at being defensive creatures who can deny almost anything. And so, overcomplicating is just another arrow in our rationalization quiver. It makes sense. Complexity feels like progress. However, thinking in absolutes can actually be quite useful. Even if it's just a thought experiment, the simple and finite world of black and white has its merits. It knocks out excuses, reduces our experience of anxiety, prevents our rationalization of poor choices and enables daily decision making to be significantly easier and faster. As a textbook right brainer, I can attest to the power of this mindset. Thinking absolutes has always been difficult for me, but what I've come to understand is, abstinence is cheaper than moderation. The best way to block a punch is to not be there. Once we become okay with that, once we stop creating a labyrinth of bullshit around problems and start filtering the world's noise to make the purest signal we can, clarity and liberation ensue. *Are you introduce complexity for the wrong reason?*

Build your story where you are. Nick has fallen into depression after the public relations nightmare exposed his lobbying practices. But thanks to his son, he recalls the integrity in his job. He realizes that his gift is defending the defenseless and protecting the disenfranchise. And so, he reclaims his message about consumer choice and responsibility, reminding the courts that liberty includes the freedom to make unhealthy decisions. And he's inspired to open a private lobbying firm, continuing to do what he does best. *Talk.* Meanwhile, his son wins a school debate using lessons his father taught him. Yet another reminder, dark and satirical as it may be, that we are the authors of our own narratives. We are the public relations agents of our own careers. I'm reminded of my favorite filmmaker, Kevin Smith. He said people had been telling him that he was a failure and that he was doing it all wrong for twenty years. But he reminds us to never trust anybody when they tell us how our story goes. We know our story. We write our own story. That's what being an artist is all about. Not just creating the work, but creating the mythology that surrounds it. *Which story in your life do you want to feel on a new level?*

174 -- THE VOICE SCENE FROM IN A WORLD

Bring all of yourself to everything you do. All I ever wanted was to find my thing. My trademark. The one activity that would define my time on this earth. And so, I spent young adult life running scared through a maze of false starts, failed identity experiments and oddball pursuits, reaching for anything that would fit, turning what I found into what I wanted. Until I had an epiphany. It's not about activity, it's about identity. It's not about hammering one nail all your life, it's about hammering lots of nails, one way, all your life. So instead of trying set up something I was going to do, I started cultivating and fulfilling someone I already was. That became my thing. My purpose. My trademark. And making peace with that changed everything for me. My attitude, my posture, my relationship to the world, I felt whole and complete and together. More like a new man, and yet, more like myself than ever. If you're on a similar journey, struggling to find your thing, here's the surprise. You *are* the thing. You are exactly what you've been looking for. Meaning is made, not found. No need to reach for something that's already inside yourself. It's right there waiting for you. You just have to own it. *What vital clues to your identity are you still missing?*

You can go back to liking me now that I'm a failure again. Chris Rock famously said that some people have jobs, and some people have careers. And the people with careers need to learn to shut the hell up when they're around people with jobs. Because they don't want to hear your career bullshit. Your happiness makes them sad. Funny how ambition grosses people out. How success pisses people off. Because you assume everybody will be happy for you. But the reality is, a certain population of the world is just waiting around, excitedly, for you to fail. And until you do, they will always feel disenfranchised by your success. In fact, there's a fascinating [study](#) from the *Journal of Applied Psychology* about the causes and consequences of ambition. According to the researchers, more ambitious people appeared to be happier, but their happiness came at the expense of social bonds. Ambition may drive people forward, but it also holds their relationships back. That's the cost of success. Which doesn't suggest we should lower our ambitions, but perhaps raise our empathy. Practice a little emotional intelligence in the presence of people who haven't achieved our same level of success. We have to remind ourselves that we live in a world with other people, most of whom don't love their jobs and don't follow their passion and can't afford to become who they really are. And every time we brag about our eight second commute or lack

of coworkers or the fact that we don't have to wear pants to work if we don't want to do, makes us look like insensitive prick. *Does your success make you inconsiderate of other people's life situation?*

Learn how to compress yourself. The advantage of living in vibrant, bustling city is, you can instantly plug yourself into the creative undercurrent. Commune with the sensibility of culture that's in the air. And it's an endless supply that's completely free of charge, and the only condition is, you have to pay it back with your originality. That's the social contract. You're obligated to contribute to the intellectual and artistic commons of the community as long as you're there. Anything less is an act of ingratitude. But the good news is, your work doesn't have to be good, it just has to be yours. Ownership is more important than quality. Quality is an objective measure. It's a judgment of the matching of expectations with experience. Ownership, on the other hand, is completely subjective. It's something nobody can take away or criticize. Because it belongs to you. This movie was an inspiration to me because of its originality. Bell didn't just star in a another movie, she created a unique vehicle for her writing, acting, producing and directing skills that put her full range of abilities on display. She compressed herself. She concentrated her portfolio of talents into a tight little package that demonstrated the full firepower of her creative arsenal. *What talents do you have that few, if any, see?*

175 -- THE PLASTICS SCENE FROM THE GRADUATE

What do you want to do with your life? There are a dozen problems with this question. First, it's focused on wanting, not needing. And life doesn't always give us luxury to prioritize in that order. Second, this question is purely focused on the future, as opposed to right now. And we forget that this very moment is life too. In fact, it's all we have. But if we're so busy trying to figure out what to do with our life, we'll forget to actually live it. Third, this question is a moving target. People evolve. The world in which we live evolves. And so, we remake ourselves as we grow and as the world changes. We give ourselves the freedom to change as we discover, reinventing ourselves many times in an interesting life, ultimately letting these multiple reinventions mold our life into book of stories worth telling. Fourth, this question is outdated. Our generation is seeing the slow death of traditional career paths. People are keeping their professional lives in permanent beta. We're adapting and evolving and pivoting and changing directions. And like a human startup, we're evaluating new opportunities as they present themselves, taking into consideration our ever growing set of intellectual and experiential assets. *Are you tying yourself to one concept as being your legacy for your entire life?*

What do you want to do with your life? Another problem with this question is, it's inhuman. Because although people have the impulse to satisfy their basic need for unity, order and completeness; and although our rational capacities crave a certain amount of story and dramatic structure to make sense of life, the reality is, tidy narratives tend to be misleading. Life is confusing and nonlinear and nobody gets exactly what they thought they were going to get. That's why this question is so burdensome. Deciding what we want is the most important work we will ever do. And so, we keep grilling each other, pressuring people to articulate their human purpose into a perfectly compartmentalized little package. And life isn't like that. This isn't a twenty two minute sitcom. And so, we can't allow our biological craving for resolution to stand in the way allowing life to actually happen. Humanity comes first. And here's the other thing. This question misrepresents focus. Turns out, it's not about hammering one nail, all of our lives, it's about hammering lot of nails, one way, all our lives. In fact, most people need multiple life purposes. And so, instead of killing ourselves trying to find the meaning of life, we're creatively making life's many meanings. It may not be easy, inventing our own life's meaning, but it's still allowed. *What gives purpose driven human uniqueness to your existence?*

What do you want to do with your life? Ultimately, this question is a moot point. As my mentor once told me, life isn't a question to be answered, it's a project to be lived. There's no deadline. There's no wrap party. There's no gold medal waiting for at the finish line. Our number one job as humans isn't playing to win, it's playing to keep the game going. When I graduated from school, I had no idea what I wanted to do with my life. In fact, I rarely gave that idea a second thought. When I was in my twenties, on the other hand, I thought I knew exactly what I wanted to do with my life. And that was *all* I thought about. But now that I'm in my thirties, I'm back to not knowing again. The only difference is, this time, I'm giving that idea a second, third, fourth and fifth thought. Because what the hell do I know? Binary constructs like *always* and *never* no longer exist in my vocabulary. Anything can happen. Anything can be a meaning opportunity. That's my answer. That's what I want to do with my life. That's the organizing principle of my daily existence. I want to make meaning in accordance with my deepest values. *For your life to be perfect, what would have to change?*

176 -- THE YOGA SCENE FROM FORGETTING SARAH MARSHALL

Buried under layers of defensiveness. What bothers me is when people come through the door fists and hearts first, armed to the teeth with an arsenal of excuses, ready to shoot down every opportunity that comes their way. At the yoga studio where I work, new students drop in every day with stars in their eyes, claiming that they *really do* want to try it, but it's just that they have sciatica and they don't like the heat and it's really expensive and their asthma might flare up and it's such a big time commitment and work is crazy right now and if only they could convince their husband to come with them, then *maybe* they would commit to thinking about possibly considering the slim chance of potentially never going. Drives me crazy. Not to be insensitive about people's life situations, but if they really wanted to do it, they would have done it by now. That's how motivation works. There's no preheat setting. You either do something, or you do not. But the liberating part is, I'm no longer in the business of convincing people. It's not my job to overcome people's objections about why they can't do things. Because the minute you say yes to someone, suddenly, you just inherited all their problems. It's a boundary thing. If you don't set them for yourself, other people will set them for you. *Who is currently violating your boundaries?*

Treat yourself as you wish to be treated. The problem with working alone is, there's nobody around to beat you up, so you end up beating yourself up. Being way too hard on yourself. Even telling yourself things that you would never allow somebody else say to you. It's tricky. Because on one hand, you need to be tough on yourself for the sake of motivation and accountability and productivity. Nobody else is going to hold your feet to the fire. On the other hand, you don't want to criticize your work to the point that you scare yourself out of creating it. You want to love yourself. Yoga is actually the perfect arena to practice this balance. Because every time you execute a posture, you reckon with reality. You align yourself with things that will never lie to you, like gravity and biology. And some days, you can barely lift your knee to your chest, feeling like an inflexible failure. But other days, you can twist your legs into a pretzel like a olympic competitor. And you feel like a champion. Either way, you always love yourself. You treat yourself as you wish to be treated. And you confront yourself without condemning what you see. Because you're just going to be back on the mat tomorrow, doing the work again. No need to beat yourself up when you make a mistake. Life will do that for you. *How do you try to get beyond your judgmental attitudes?*

The power of reverse providence. Learning to live with uncertainty is part of becoming a complete artist. That's all creativity is anyway, one neverending act of trust. And no matter how successful you get, it never goes away. Kind of like that dream I always have. The one where I'm trying to do something incredibly simple, like cross the street or drive to the store or get to my next class on time, and the entire world stands in my way. It's this sick form of *reverse providence*, where the world seems to be orchestrating the ideal conditions to prevent me from reaching my goal, creating a web of incidents and meetings and material assistance whose sole purpose in life is hold me back. I hate this dream. It makes me feel helpless and incompetent. And every time it recurs, I wake up short of breath and frustrated. But what's strange is when the dream manifests in real life. Like when I wake up refreshed and energized and ready to take on the world and the stupid internet doesn't work and I have to walk down the street to a coffee shop but then their internet doesn't work and it feels like I'm trapped in my own time loop nightmare. God damn it. I suppose, however, that this is one of those moments where I have to own the process as life. Where I have to accept the fact that waiting in line to get into the stadium is just as important as the game itself. Life is the line. There's nowhere to get to. There's no future. All we have is right now. *Are you still hoping for a certainty or clarity that is simply never going to exist?*

177 -- THE TAXI SCENE FROM SLACKER

Create a new realm of possibility. Linklater explains that every thought we have has its own reality. Every choice we make, even the thing we choose not to do, fractions off and becomes its own reality. It just goes on from there, forever. What's interesting is, his monologue is more than just slacker conjecture. Thoughts actually cause an electrical change in the environment outside of our heads. Adams once reported that scientists can put sensors on your scalp and detect slight changes in electrical impulses that correspond to your thoughts. And this tiny change in electricity can cause larger changes in the world. Thoughts truly can influence the environment. And so, if it's possible that our thoughts define reality in a more direct way than we ever imagined possible, then everything that happens today forms the basis for what can happen tomorrow. Even the most infinitesimally small changes from our day today can magnify into huge transformations over time. That's why affirmations work. They force us to steer our perceptions to directly influence our environment. I started practicing affirmations many years ago, and now that I look back on the things that I affirmed to myself a decade ago, it's almost spooky to see how many of them have come to fruition. And I realize that my personal anecdotes are not statistically valid. I get that data is not the plural of experience. But in my alternative view of reality, statistics are meaningless. *What will free you from the optical illusions that restrict your view of reality?*

Art is the great permission slip. *Slacker* was a series of personal experiences of unconnected characters whose lives randomly meet on the streets. The movie was literally made up as it went along, as the actors often designed the next day's shootings the evening before. Linklater created a vehicle way to illustrate the incoherence and randomness of life. More importantly, he created something uncategorizable. A work of art with an appeal almost impossible to describe. And as a result, the film is often dubbed as the starting point for the independent film movement of the nineties. In fact, many independent filmmakers credit this movie as the wedge that opened the doors for their own creative work. That's the real art. Not the movie, but the gift of permission it gives to people. Because any time your work becomes an invitation for people reach deep down inside themselves and express what is there, without reserve and without regret, you win. And nobody can take that love away from you. What we need as artists, then, is audacity. The willingness to try some radical shit at every turn. Because we inspire people to believe in themselves when we first throw *ourselves* boldly and joyfully into the life adventure, never looking over our shoulder to see who's laughing. In fact, I didn't watch this movie

until twenty years after its initial release. But it still inspired me to create my own movie as a result. Proving, that permission is timeless. *What is your art going to be the first at?*

When resources are free, it's all permission. This seemingly plotless film portrays a generation of young people characterized by aimlessness, apathy and lack of ambition. In short, slackers. But what's interesting is, the director says that the modern meaning of the word slacker doesn't necessarily have to be pejorative. It could simply mean being responsible to yourself. Not wasting your time in a realm of activity that has nothing to do with who you are or what you want. It's like my mentor to say, *remove what robs you*. In fact, I remember my own slacker moment. I went to the career fair my senior year of college. And when I walked in that gym and witnessed sea of stale corporate exhibits handing free mouse pads to herd of starry eyed students hopping from booth to booth trying to prove themselves to people they didn't even like so they could land boring, soul sucking jobs that preserved the status quo, only one question entered my mind. What the hell am I doing here? So I went home and finished my first book. And nine months later, I published it. Because I never waited to be picked, I just hired myself and got to work. If being a slacker is wrong, I don't want to be right. *What permissions are you afraid to give yourself?*

178 -- THE BAR SCENE FROM THIRTEEN CONVERSATIONS ABOUT ONE THING

Find any scrap of serendipity. Hugh aid that when we try to reverse engineer the universe from our own ego, hilarity ensues, and that a winning approach is to just do our work to the best of our ability, and think of every **project** not so much in terms of the result we want to have, but as an experiment of, *let's see if this works*. That's about all we can do. We can try stuff. I once wrote a dopey little article about sugar packets, and it was republished by the biggest business blog in the world. Another time I wrote a series of blog posts about luck, and they were discovered by the largest television news magazine in the country. Amazing. And yet, despite my best efforts to identify projects that turned out to be wildly popular and pretend that such serendipity could be reverse engineered, I admit that it was luck. Pure luck. Yes, people who expect good luck constantly seem to experience it. Yes, once we start earning luck, we think we know how to get it back. And yes, we can build systems designed to make it easier for luck to find us. But we have to remember, human beings are superstitious natives who have to chalk everything up to something. It satisfies the human impulse for order. In fact, that's why narrative was born. Stories shield humanity from the true randomness of the world, the chaos of the human experience and the unnerving element of luck. *In what ways can you prepare for the serendipitous?*

The best way to beat the odds is with massive output. Regardless of the blood, sweat and tears I invest in my work, I still know that every project is just another public bet with my imagination. There's no way to predict which idea will stick, there's no formula to recreate lightning in a bottle, and there's no telling which product might to strike a chord people. So I just keep on creating. I keep on showing up every day, even if most people are ignoring me, even if I'm starting to think I don't understand the world anymore. Because that's what professionals do. They play the long arc game. They trust the process. And they eventually beat the odds through massive output. Kind of like taking a cross country road trip. When you miss an exit on the highway, you don't cross the median and bust a uie, you don't pull off on the shoulder and put the car in reverse, you just keep driving. Because in a few miles, you'll come across another exit and try again. And who knows? Maybe *that* turn will be the path to glory. The one that sticks. Or, maybe it will be another dead end. Doesn't matter. Winning, losing, it's all the same after a while. It's the risk that keeps you going. *When will your accumulation of small breaks finally catapult you to the next level?*

Pessimism blunts your healthy appetites. This movie is a meditation on the things that prevent people from reaching happiness. It's a dramatic reminder that optimism doesn't increase your success, but it does increase your field of perception, which allows you to better notice the opportunities that lead to success. That's why optimists tend to try lots of new things. They know that mindset helps luck find them. Troy even says it himself. He believes there is such thing as luck, but he also believe he's lucky enough to notice it when it comes his way. People with bad attitudes, on the other hand, never seem to get better because they never seem to look for ways to make themselves better. Pessimism blunts their healthy appetites. And so, the negativity becomes an infinite regression. The more pessimism they have, the more opportunity they have to be right about it. But they delude themselves into believing they're successful, when they're really just successful at being right about being a pessimist. The point is, optimism isn't just a clever technique to win friends and influence people at cocktail parties, it's a practical, intelligent and proven system for increasing your odds of happiness in the long run. It's a legitimate strategy for letting the best have a real chance at you. *Are you willing to practice eternal optimism, no matter what the present tense may be telling you?*

179 -- THE RITALIN SCENE FROM CHARLIE BARTLETT

You don't need a prescription, just permission. Charlie is a secure, confident, wealthy, hyperarticulate kid. And so, it's no surprise that he has trouble fitting in with the public school environment. It's no surprise that the bullies give him swirlies. And yet, instead of sheeping it up and marching in lockstep with the mainstream culture, he embraces the entirety of his personality. Charlie realizes that his intelligence, charm and confidence can actually be of value to his fellow students. And so, he hires himself as the school's resident therapist, offering advice within the confines of the bathroom. He converts the very liabilities that first alienated him from the masses into the assets with which he makes a meaningful contribution to people's lives. And before long, his social life noticeably improves and he gains the confidence and admiration of the student body. *Wow.* Few people have the courage to take that kind of initiative. To creatively channel their abilities and play the ball where it lies. But that's what separates the remarkable from the forgettable. Smashing through the mental constructs of notenoughness that prevent, delay or derail the progress of their creative work. And the best part is, that doesn't require a prescription, merely permission. *When was a time you felt that your actions spoke for the best in who you are?*

Opportunity doesn't knock, it whispers. Charlie builds an inventory of prescription drugs by feigning physical and emotional symptoms during sessions with different psychiatrists. That's illegal, immoral and potentially lethal. Then again, it's also savvy, creative and incredibly entrepreneurial. And it's worth unpacking from a strategic standpoint. Charlie demonstrates a strong opportunity agenda. He practices second order imagination, meaning, the inherent enterprise to notice creative opportunities, apply force and propel them into interesting directions. In fact, he famously tells his doctor that bringing psychiatric drugs and teenagers together is like opening a lemonade stand in the desert. Now that's what I call opportunistic. The best part is, he forms an unlikely alliance with the school bully, to whom he offers half the proceeds from the sale of a variety of drugs. They're a bit of an odd couple, but they're also mature enough not to let personality stand in the way of profit. A sobering reminder that when you don't act how you feel, it doesn't make you inauthentic, it makes you an adult. *Are you closing the door of opportunity on yourself?*

Trust the availability of your own answers. Charlie makes an impassioned speech at the end of the movie. Stop listening to me, he pleads. Stop listening to people telling you who you should be. Stop listening to the people who

are telling you that you're not good enough to do the things you want to do. You guys have all the answers. Charlie helps the students realize that the real prescription isn't a pill, it's a mirror. Because in most cases, the answer lies within. Our life is our preparation. Something we already know is precisely what we need to find the solution. And who we already are is enough to get what we want. Like my grandfather used to tell me, the door must be opened from the insight. It's such a painful lesson to learn. Especially when you're young. Especially when you're used to reaching for something outside yourself. Fortunately, there are many tools available to train this psychological muscle. One that I've found particularly useful is a daily centering sequence, which is a series of affirmations and short cognitions that help you take charge of your internal monologue. Ritalin's got nothing on that. *Are you enrolling yourself in a system bent to the desires of others?*

180 -- THE GYMNASTICS SCENE FROM PEACEFUL WARRIOR

People never forget the prize they couldn't get. I was reading the obituary of a legendary comedian, a woman who famously worked until the day she died. The article explained that until her death, she looked as if she couldn't stop herself, as if, if she stopped telling jokes, the well would dry up and the lights would go out. How's that for a punch line? And yet, every artist can relate to that experience. It's the fear of falling off the radar. The belief that if we don't keep doing what we do, someday, people will stop asking us to do it. The fear that if we don't keep interest up on a mass scale, it's a one way ticket to irrelevance. Which is a completely valid concern. In fact, our shark mentality—keep swimming or die—can be a powerful motivator for prolificacy and a profitable motivator for sales. On the other hand, if you're always there, nobody will have a chance to miss you. And you're not sought after if nobody has to look for you. Perhaps a little scarcity is in order. Greene famously wrote that what withdraws, what becomes scarce, suddenly seems to deserve our respect and honor. But what stays too long, inundating us with its presence, makes us disdain it. By completely withdrawing for a while, he says, you create a kind of death before death. And when you come back, it will be as if you had come back from the dead. The goal is to create a pattern of absence and presence. That way, when we do show up on people's radars, they're delighted to see the light. *Is your primary goal to create a recognizable, reproducible presence, or to create value through scarcity?*

Getting the beast out of your system. As a growing artist, you're constantly fighting the battle for enoughness. Taking baby steps toward security of self. Pursuing the elusive completeness of being. And it's a struggle. We're all broken vessels aspiring to a lost wholeness, and each of us makes that journey at our own pace. But the empowering part is, once you finally get the beast out of your system, filling all the ego holes, checking all the approval boxes and kicking all the selfish addictions, you can start operating from a posture of contentment, honesty, gratitude and freedom. And then the real work begin. As my songwriting hero famously said, once you liberate yourself, anything you lay your hand on can sparkle. That's what's waiting on the other side of wholeness. The question, is how do you know when you've done enough to be okay with yourself? *Simple.* When you have an overwhelming feeling of joyful lucidity, a sublime and quiet and simple and weightless sensation, where the part of you that was perpetually gripped with quiet panic and anxious hands is finally resting, you're there. When you feel like there's nothing to fear, nothing to lose, nothing to hide and nothing to prove, you're there. You're winning in the battle for enoughness. *How will you get the beast out of your system?*

When you expect nothing, failure is impossible. Danny has finally achieved enlightenment. He shattered his femur bone, got abandoned by the gymnastic coach, lost his friends and spent an entire year recovering from his injury, training to restoring himself to full health. But under his mentor's tutelage, he eventually regained his strength, coordination and mindset, and is now ready to compete from a place of enoughness. Tommy, on the other hand, is still trapped on the treadmill of expectation, battling the mental construct of notenoughness. And so, when his enlightened teammate attempts to teach him what he's learned, his guidance falls on deaf ears. Tommy's emotional insecurity is simply too strong. After all, this is for the gold. Who has the time to worry about the present moment? Tommy's whole life was about getting those twenty seconds in front of those judges so they could give him that gold. If that happened, his whole life would change. Everything that was a problem right now wouldn't matter anymore. He'd finally get to be happy. Little does he know, when dwelling on yesterday and dreaming about tomorrow takes up too much of today, we loses the ability to be present. When we're always focused on becoming and achieving and attaining, trying to get somewhere other than where we already are, we experience unhappiness. And when we're so busy getting to the future that the present is reduced to a means of getting there, we miss out on life. *Are you expectations serving you or suffocating you?*

181 -- THE ORIGINAL MOMENT SCENE FROM GARDEN STATE

I champion any transformation of the self. Every time I watch this movie, I cry my eyes out. The soundtrack is perfect. The acting is amazing. The humor is clever. And the love story is touching. Not to mention, the movie premiered when I was in my mid twenties. Everything the characters were going through, I was going through too. Braff put it best when he said, your body goes through puberty in its teens, and the mind goes through puberty in your twenties. Proving, that people love to witness transformation. Nobody likes a story about continuity, about how someone has always been the same. In fact, that narrative is biologically impossible. Human cells regenerate every seven years. We literally can't be the same as we used to be. **McKee** famously said that if the value charged condition of the character's life stays unchanged from one end of a scene to the other, nothing meaningful happens. There needs to be an arc to the story. The great sweep of change that takes life from one condition at the opening to a changed condition at the end. That's what I love most about coming of age film. They explore the transition from youth to adulthood. The hard core formative years of spiritual exploration, psychological realization and moral growth that foster dreams and lay the groundwork for years to come. *What is still lethal inside of you that wants to be transformed?*

Guardians of the infinite abyss. This movie is about reinvention and spontaneity and discovery. Trying to steal life whenever and wherever you can. And it's reminiscent of the **futurist's manifesto**, which reminds us to elevate all attempts at originality, however daring, however violent, bear bravely and proudly the smear of madness with which they try to gag all innovators, and sweep the whole field of art clean of all themes and subjects which have been used in the past. What's crazy is, that manifesto was written over one hundred years ago. And yet, the painters of the day still knew that an artist's greatest currency in this world was their originality. Samantha knows this, intuitively. That the experience of discovering something new, doing something that's completely unique that's never been done before, is the stuff that life is made of. And so, as dopey as her little exercise is, it still helps her develop the empowering habit of exercising the part of her brain that is most original. It still keeps her focused on the present moment, even if that means bearing bravely and proudly the smear of madness. Even if that giving herself utterly to the unknown. Whatever it takes replenish the deep wells of the absurd. *Where are you currently compromising your originality?*

Cynicism is easier than actually making something. The world doesn't need another cynic. Our planet has enough pessimism to last a lifetime. That's why it's so important to be fundamentally affirmative, relentlessly encouraging and radically supportive towards one other. Because most people have already been discouraged, disenchanted and degraded enough. And the last thing they need is another scoffer to pour salt on their wounds. On the other hand, believing in people costs nothing. And it has the power to change everything. I remember when one of my musician friends went in the studio for the first time. After years of writing songs, she finally summoned the courage to put them on wax. *Hallelujah!* But once the album was done, she began to encounter resistance. Record producers, club owners, music critics and other industry professionals immediately shot her work down. Saying that the songs were uninspired, grating karaoke tunes at best. She was devastated. To the point that she went into music hibernation for almost a year. And so, when I ran into her at my songwriting circle, I asked her to share. And when she played the song, I remember thinking to myself, *wow, this song is awesome.* Not because it's perfect, not because it's catchy, and not because it's radio friendly. But because it's hers. Because it's finished. Because she had the guts to sit down, slice open a vein, bleed her truth onto the page and share it with the world. That's enough. That's a win. And nobody can take that away from her. *Are you trying to become best at what you do, or the best of who you are?*

182 -- THE DREAMERS SCENE FROM WAKING LIFE

We are the stuff dreams are made of. Dreaming isn't a learned skill, it's the natural state of the human brain. In fact, at the heart of what it means to be a person is the act of dreaming. Exploring the frontiers of possibility and coming alive through the pursuit of our ideas, that's what separates us from the animal kingdom. We are the portals through which dreams are had, followed and realized. The problem, as the narrator says, is that dreaming isn't dead, it's simply been forgotten. Removed from our language. Sentenced to obscurity. And so, the educational need isn't schooling, it's shedding. The work isn't teaching people how to dream, but teaching people how to unlock the portals through which dreams can enter. Rumi made this point a few thousand years ago. He said our task is not to seek love, but to find all the barriers within ourselves that we have built against it. Dreaming works in a same way. Because we all know how to do it. It's an intuitive process. It's like oxygen for our species. It's just that we've accumulated so many cultural defenses and invisible scripts and bullshit excuses around our dreams, that they never get a fighting chance to float to the surface. If we could simply convince ourselves that we are the stuff dreams are made of, that our dreams are waiting for us to come true, those dreams would almost effortlessly come to pass. Otherwise we'll continue to block our dreams with the excuse that we can't afford to accomplish them. *Are you putting a bullet in your dream before telling yourself that you're worthy of having it?*

The ride does not require a destination, only occupants. Linklater never fails to rev up my creative engine. Every time I watch one of his movies, I'm always inspired to go make art of my own. Because in his films, he makes the mundane magical. He turns natural human conversation into a work of art itself. He messes with structure and reminds us that everything doesn't always have to be a thing. Almost as if to say, hey, when you watch my movies, not much happens except for life itself, and you need to be okay with that. That's courage. Just like the character in the film says, there's no story, it's just people. Gestures. Moments. Bits of rapture. Fleeting emotions. In short, the greatest stories ever told. Rollins actually made this point his [new book](#), saying that he loves art that doesn't immediately win him over. How certain pieces end up becoming some of his favorites because he has to put more of himself into the interaction to get something out of it. I feel the same way about this movie. *Waking Life* is not trying too hard to be your friend. It's not striving for your approval. It has little interest in what your opinion is of it. It's just doing its thing, existing in the world, regardless of your criticism. Reviewers may

have called that an insensitivity to the audience, but I call it a reminder that artists can do whatever the hell they want, and nobody can stop them. *Are you creating art that makes your audience have to evolve somehow?*

Go all in on your dreams. When I graduated college, moved across the country and started my own business, my parents gave me the greatest gift of all. *They never tried to stop me.* All they could do was trust that they did their job. That they did everything in their power to ensure that I was well equipped to live my dream. And that two decades of parental labor laid the proper foundation for whatever dream possessed me. It worked. Thanks to their support, meaning, their radical acceptance, reckless generosity and relentless participation, I have been able to live out my dreams almost perfectly. That's good parenting. The point is, if you want to reduce the distance between your dream and its reality, you have to surround your dream with support structures. Otherwise the mechanism by which you realize your dreams will never get up to operating temperature. But don't let genetics be a limiting factor. Anybody can be your mentor. It doesn't have to be a sanctioned relationship. It doesn't even have to be a living person. Mentors are simply people who take a real interest in your aspirations and encourage your goals and dreams. Engage heart and imagination actively in whoever instructs, inspires and supports your dream. The only catch is, once it comes true, you're obligated to live your life as a thank you in perpetuity to the voices that shaped you. *Who are the essential supporting characters of the world you want to live in so you can realize your dreams?*

183 -- THE DONUT SCENE FROM DODGEBALL

A forbearance in indulgence of the appetite. Willpower is interesting to me. The habit of saying no, exerting restraint, controlling impulses and delaying gratification is something I've always found to be meaningful. At the risk of sounding completely square, there's just something empowering about resisting temptation. Willpower makes me feel proud to be at full choice. It makes me feel safe for staying in control. It makes me feel special for standing out from the crowd. And it makes me feel virtuous because I'm upholding my values. Who knew restraint could be so beautiful? Who knew the experience of saying no could feel better than whatever awaited on the other side of yes? Cognitive scientists did, that's who. Stanford did a popular [study](#) on willpower, finding that similar to stress, willpower was not just a psychological experience, but a full blown mind body response. It's called the *pause and plan response*, which drives people in the opposite direction of the more common fight or flight response. For example, when you exert willpower, instead of your heart speeding up, it slows down. Your blood pressure stabilizes. Instead of tensing muscles to prime them for action, your body relaxes a little. That's willpower's biological signature. The act sets into motion a coordinated set of changes in the brain and body. That's interesting to me. *What if you were the one who redefined toughness as restraint?*

Patience is a shining artifact of the past. Willpower is difficult for both internal and external reasons. First of all, humans are primed for instant gratification. And so, when we say no, we're battling millions of year's worth of physiological impulses. Our hormones are firing, and we want what we want, when we want. But we also live in society that celebrates impulse. Everybody wants everything, for nothing, yesterday. And so, when we say no, we're also battling millions of people's worth of sociological impulses. Our social mechanism is engaged, and we want to fit in. As a result, patience has become another shining artifact of the past. And it really bothers me. I'm reminded of a fascinating interview with a famously dry comedian. [Sparks](#) explained the story behind his lifelong sobriety in an industry flooded with alcoholism, saying that at a very young age, he saw what seemed like an experiment that everybody seemed to be conducting on themselves, but with no control. Normally, he thought, when you test a drug on a lab rat you, have one rat that isn't taking the drug. And it seemed like everyone he knew took the drug without ever seeing if their life would be better or different or the same, normal or abnormal, if they abstained. Hal figured he'd just be the control.

I wonder what would happen if more people understood the experiment of which they were a part. *When was the last time you were rewarded for putting a moral chain on your own appetites?*

Wrestle in secret with my wicked self. Saying no to things was always easy for me. But what I lacked was the emotional intelligence component of abstinence. The ability to stand my ground without stepping on people's toes. Because there's a fine line between boundary management and righteous entitlement. There's a fine line between committing to a decision and committing to telling that story at every opportunity. Truth is, despite a person's admirable willpower, most people don't want to hear the entire philosophy behind each of their life choices. They louder they say no, the more judgmental they sound. I'm reminded of the best book I ever read on evangelism. **Bell** explained that you don't defend a trampoline, you invite people to jump on it with you. Jumping is more important than arguing about whose trampoline is better. You rarely defend the things you love. You enjoy them and tell others about them and invite others to enjoy them with you. And so, when it comes to willpower and abstinence and restraint, we can't allow the volume of our commitment to disturb the peace. We have to be empathetic towards other people's life situations, otherwise they get this look in their eyes as if to say, excuse me, but I have a broken way of going through life and you're not going to take that away from me. *Does your commitment threaten the mythology other people have been living by?*

184 -- THE ADVERTISING SCENE FROM MINORITY REPORT

There's no plasticity of the self. I have zero sense of direction. Even with the assistance of the satellite navigation system in my phone, it's still hard for me to find my way around sometimes. And I'm okay with that. I've long since made peace with my directional incompetence. Besides, what's so bad about getting lost? Is there any shame in having no sense of direction? I love getting lost. It's essential part of the human experience. It's how we learn to trust ourselves. It's how we make room for chance encounters. And it's how we expose ourselves to things outside of our interest. What's sad is, technology is slowly obfuscating that experience. Now that every aspect of our world is hyperpersonalized, ubertargeted and supernichefied, getting lost is quietly becoming a thing of the past. Pariser named this phenomenon the filter bubble, whereby web algorithms selectively guess what information a user would like to see based on information about them. Like my friend who does a lot of online dating on her cell phone. It's amazing. She can adjust her algorithms to only seek out divorced dark skinned men over forty who love riding motorcycles and eating organic grass fed beef who live within a fifteen mile radius of her home. Which sounds ideal, and it is. But the problem with idealism is, we don't experience the virtue of being exposed to things outside of our interest. There's no plasticity of the self. Pariser's research actually showed that without practicing that kind of categorical openness, it's harder for luck and ingenuity to find us. Wow. I can't imagine living in a world where we only got what we wanted. *Are you isolating yourself into your own cultural and ideological bubbles?*

True life takes place in opening. Pariser's book explained that personalization filters serve up a kind of invisible autopropaganda, indoctrinating us with our own ideas, amplifying our desire for things that are familiar and leaving us oblivious to the dangers lurking in the dark territory of the unknown. *Yikes.* That reads like a dystopian fiction novel. Like the internet has some hidden agenda to keep humanity small, scared, stupid and dreamless, incapable of critical thinking. Then again, are we really that far away from such a reality? Not anymore. And that's what makes this scene so prophetic. Spielberg's movie predicted the implementation of biometric recognition in customized advertising. That's completely terrifying. I know it sounds paranoid, but what's worse, thinking you're being paranoid, or knowing that you should be? The point is, we have an obligation, as citizens, to maintain and develop our capacity for openness. To keep ourselves from becoming like the characters in this movie. In fact, the prevailing theories on personality found that openness to experience was by far the most salient characteristic of high creativity and

intelligence. People with high openness were more likely to have high active imaginations, aesthetic sensitivity, attentiveness to inner feelings, preference for variety and intellectual curiosity. Sounds better than having a hologram ask me how those new boot cut jeans are fitting. Remember, true life takes place in opening, not closing. *Are you still protecting yourself from information that disagrees from your viewpoints?*

Your memories aren't invited. Rehashing the same old stories with the same old people is an enjoyable and comforting and nostalgic activity. And why shouldn't it? Roles are clearly defined and the status quo is easily preserved. Everyone is happy, and nobody has to change. However, recycling old memories and pretending that they're fresh gets very old, very quickly. It feels like you're trapped in an infinite regression. A dull blanket of sameness. A snake eating its own tail. And before you know it, every interaction becomes a cannibalistic photocopy of the one before. Every person remains frozen in the position they met each other in. And nobody grows. *Blech.* But it doesn't have to be this way. It is possible to evolve the conversation. All it takes is one courageous person who dares to raise the needle on the record and say, guys, all we ever do is talk about old stories. Let's go create new stories. The point is, building momentum doesn't require anything complex, simply a moment that adds energy to the system. *When was the last time you did something for the first time?*

185 -- THE MANHATTAN SCENE FROM ELF

What to do when nobody cares about you. Pressfield differentiates between two artistic orientations, hierarchy and territory. In hierarchy, the artist looks up and looks down. He does the work for the attention and the applause, not for its own sake. And he lets others define his reality, instead of looking within to validate his work. The problem with this orientation, he says, is that when the numbers get too big, the hierarchy breaks down. A pecking order can hold only so many chickens. Manhattan, for example, is a city where hierarchy no longer works. The place is simply too big to function from that orientation. And so, working territorially is the only path. Working where the sustenance comes from the act itself, not from the impression it makes on others, is all that's available to you. It's an interesting experience. Because on one hand, living among eight million centers of the universe can make you feel rejected and anonymous and meaningless. On the other hand, living in a big city can also make you feel liberated and rested and relieved. Because nobody's paying attention to you anyway. It's like my favorite sitcom writer once said, do the show you want to do, because the network is going to cancel it anyway. That's territory, not hierarchy. It's the habit of asking what's in your heart instead of catering to what the marketplace is looking for. Creating art, knowing that you very well may be winking in the dark, and being okay with that. *Which orientation rules your creative process?*

This city will wipe its ass with you. Buddy is naïve and innocent and sweet and happy. Manhattan is cold and rude and impatient and unforgiving. Tension is created. Hilarity ensues. It's the classic fish out water story. The question is, will the hero adapt like a fish taking to water? Will he crack the code before the code cracks him? It all depends on that person's expectations. Having moved to a big city before, I've seen both sides of that coin. Because on one hand, if you get attached to what the city means for you, you get stars in your eyes. You let people feed you with things that make you feel bigger than you really are. You see the potential, not what is. And once your fantasy of moving to the city differs from your reality of living there, you start to grow cynical. On the other hand, if you move to the big city empty of expectation, knowing that nothing will ever go for you exactly as it went for someone else, you can keep disappointment at bay. And if you remember that you can't predict your direction, you can only take your opportunities as they come, you start to grow beyond the boundaries of what you thought possible. Any person could go either way. And so, if you're thinking about accept the invitation to a much wider horizon, if you're dreaming about pushing yourself into a new and larger set of geographical circumstances, leave your expectations behind.

Because, as I once heard a homeless man tell a tourist on the subway, this city will wipe its ass with you. *What would happen if you moved to a place that was big enough for you?*

Music loosens the lid on the jar. Buddy believes that the best way to spread the holiday cheer is to sing loud for everyone to hear. Jovie takes his advice literally, manages to overcome her shyness and gets the sleigh back in the air by leading the crowd of people in singing on live television. What I love about this scene is, she's willing to stand alone and look ridiculous, in order to be the spark that starts the fire. Despite her shyness and refusal to sing anywhere but the shower, she gets out of her own head and into the true spirit of the holiday. And she creates a city wide contagion of otherliness and service and community and joyfulness. This scene is a reminder that energy is interactional currency. And that if we want to lead the people around us, it's not enough to pay attention to what we do that gives us energy, but what we do that gives others energy. Singing has a tendency to do this. When I busk in the park on weekends, watching people dance and hum and smile and wave makes me feel warm inside for having participated in the energy exchange. But just like the character in the movie, it took a lot of courage to actually play here. I always treated music as an escape. As a way to hide from the world. But now that I'm performing in public on a regular basis, it's the complete opposite. Total vulnerability. Absolute nakedness. Talk about holiday cheer. *When was the last time you sang at the top of your lungs, in public, with others?*

186 -- THE FORGING SCENE FROM INCOGNITO

Ideas are free, execution is priceless. I'm a big believer in small victories. Getting your brain wired into little goals and achieving them. Even if it's as simple as writing an action item on a sticky note, doing it, and crossing it off. The point is getting into the habit of continually setting goals that have to be met. The point is surrounding yourself with concrete evidence of execution on a small scale, which inspires you to achieve bigger things down the road. This past year, for example, I stopped make to do lists. Because they were just scraps of paper filled with ideas. But I don't need ideas, I need *I did*s. And so, instead, I started keeping a victory log. A real time register of my executions. I bought a five dollar day planner from the office supply store, and instead of writing wishes for what I wanted to happen at the start of the day, I started writing achievements for what I made happen as the day progressed. Such a simple change, and yet, it was life changing. Emotionally invigorating. Completely shifted my philosophy about productivity. Because with each entry into the victory log, I felt more confident and more momentous and more satisfied. The ledger almost became a game to see how many things I could accomplish in one day, or if I could beat my record from the previous day. Never underestimate the power of small victories. *Where do you keep your visual record of progress?*

Internal creation of inspiring conditions. Waitzkin's book about peak performance talks about creating ripples in your consciousness, little jolts to spur you along, so you are constantly inspired whether or not external conditions are inspiring. It's the smartest way to stay productive. Digging your well before you're thirsty, as it were. One technique for doing so is with *associative triggers*. These are the tools that echo your habits of action and allow you to enter into your creative zone. When I'm composing a new song, for example, I always spend a few minutes listening to my songwriting playlist first. This curated collection of inspiring music, to which I add new tracks every week, is my equivalent of lighting candles or smoking pot or doing shots. Because it's the routine that's linked to the inspiring state of mind required for peak creative performance. It's not guaranteed to produce a hit single every time, but the associative trigger of the playlist never fails to create the fertile ground where the moments of conception are more apt to occur. And so, the trick to being prolific is to ensure that there's something going on all the time, not just the moment you sit down and decide to start working. In the absence of external stimulation, we must be our own monitor, creating our own internal mechanism for inspiration. *What are the associative triggers that allow your art to get done over and over again?*

Make your own music. Harry is an expert forger of famous paintings. People pay him big money to travel around the world and play cover songs, so to speak. But his family urges him to use his talent on his own original work. Not just because it's, ahem, *legal*, but because it's an opportunity to become a legitimate creator in his own right. A true artist, not just a painter. Huge difference. Artists follow the muse, painters follow the numbers. They don't play cover songs, they make their own music. When I used to perform music in bars and coffee shops, people would yell out names of songs or artists they wanted to hear. And that infuriated me. Because I didn't come here to swim in the shallow end. I have an agenda, and people's crappy childhood songs aren't part of it. Eventually, though, I became so frustrated with people's disinterest in hearing original music, that I stopped performing in public and went into music hibernation for nearly a decade. Which I completely regret. I allowed the voices of mediocrity to get the best of me. I allowed public taste to overwhelm personal expression. Fortunately, though, hope found its own way back. I started performing in public again. But this time, I brought the fire. *My* fire. I created my own venue, my own permissionless platform, where I could do whatever I wanted. The music was all expression and zero apology. And nobody seemed to mind. In fact, they quite liked it. Funny what happens when we give ourselves permission to make our own music. *When did you start singing in your own voice?*

187 -- THE CONFERENCE SCENE FROM YES MAN

A little willingness goes a long way. Karl vows to say yes to every offer, invitation, challenge and chance that comes his way. And his commitment to complete openness send him on a trajectory of adventure, abundance and yes, even *amore*. Karl discovers that the more he says yes to life, the more life gives back to him. Which may be a story we've seen million times before, but frankly, our cynical world could use a refresher. Because negativity is the easy way out. It's a luxury item. Any asshole can be unhappy. It requires exactly zero calories. Optimism, on the other hand, actually requires work. It forces us to cultivate the art of observation. But the dividends are worthwhile. Saying yes and raising your hand and trying lots of new things is precisely what helps success find you. Because the process increases your field of vision, which allows you to better notice the opportunities that lead to success. Mindset may not affect the outcome, but it does affect the experience. Philippe, the greatest tightrope walker in history, wrote a daring book about this very philosophy. He said our job as artists is to explore mysterious desert islands of wonder. Because in chaos, all is possible. Every incoming idea is welcome, with no regard to reality. Forget time, money or reason, he says, embrace the brimming universe that sets your artistic crimes in motion. *Are you living by the improvisational decree of saying yes to everything?*

People love people who give permission. Terrence may be a browbeating bullshit artist, but you have to appreciate the guru's ability to give people permission. That, in my opinion, is the greatest gift we can offer. Permission, that invitation to reach deep down inside and express what is there, without reserve and without regret, is something every one of us craves. We just need someone to go first. The trick is, then, is that giving people permission isn't some parlor trick we learn at public speaking school. It's not a manipulative sales tactic we read in a book about persuasion. Permission is an act of embodiment. It's not about the adjectives of our language, but the audacity of our lives. We inspire people to believe in themselves when we first throw ourselves boldly and joyfully into the life adventure, never looking over our shoulder to see who's laughing. Velvet, for example, only sold ten thousand copies of their debut album, but everyone who bought it went out and formed their own band. That's permission. I remember when first sent out the press release about my concert documentary, an artist friend of mine told me that each time she saw something of mine, she put more things on her creative bucket list. *Mission accomplished*. That's impact. That's exactly the kind of response I want. And it can't be accomplished by playing covers. Because that

wouldn't be creating something personal. Forging other people's art doesn't involve undergoing the emotional labor of taking a risk and extending yourself. *Whom are you giving permission?*

No is the gateway to yes. Realistically, we can't say yes to everything. Boundaries have to be drawn. The guru even admits that the goal isn't to say yes to everything, but to open our minds to other possibilities without permanently taking away our ability to say no if we needed to. Life isn't a romantic comedy. We *are* entitled to have our own best interests at heart. And so, there could just as easily be a sequel to this movie about the opposite of yes. About the power of saying no to the stories that do not serve our own evolution. That's what reinvention is all about. Saying no to an outdated version of ourselves. Saying no to the labels and histories and stories we thought made up who we are. Saying no to stupid behaviors we continue to do because we think they're somehow associated with the good things that have happened to us. Altucher wrote a powerful book on this very topic, saying that every time you hurt yourself, there was a no you did not respect. That's the nature of boundaries. If we don't set them for ourselves, other people will set them for us, and then they will violate them. And it will be our fault because we didn't set a precedent. Ultimately, saying yes is still the path to abundance and adventure. It's still the optimal response to life. But we can never forget, we are defined by what we declined. Only by saying no to the good can we make room to say yes to the best. *Are you able to hold a courageous conversation to reinforce your boundaries?*

188 -- THE THIRD CLASS SCENE FROM TITANIC

Communicate value in three dimensions. Titanic was a vessel that ran on coal energy. Crew members shoveled more than eight hundred tons of coal every day. That's over a million and a half pounds. Every day. And so, it's no surprise that the memorial of the crewmembers that perished in the crash had an inspiring epitaph. *The work is vital, the labor is invisible and the work is an endless cycle.* What's interesting is, that sentiment could describe almost anyone's job. Because most of the world only sees ten percent of the work we do. The final product. The big pay off. The photo finish. The other ninety percent of the work, the sweat and the time and the care and the generosity we invest, remains forever undetected. Unless we visually substantiate it. Unless we find a way to amplify the intangible effort behind the work, making the process as interesting as the product. I always struggled with this disconnect as a writer. The fact that nobody knew what the hell I did all day was not okay with me. And so, I started publishing a series of time lapse videos of my daily writing process. With the help of a simple screen capture application, I was able to compress my typical seven hour blocks of writing into seven minute clips. The result was a highly personal, wildly compelling window into the way I worked. The videos memorialized my creative process, branded my service and helped people understand how my brain worked. That way, I was no longer just shoveling coal in the dark. *How could you facilitate a visual understanding of what you do all day?*

The work a man does, forms him. I'm a big believer in a bullshit free, blue collar approach to the creative process. Treating artmaking as more clerical than cosmic, more mechanical than magical. And not because that posture makes us feel noble and humble and working class, but because it emphasizes the unspectacular reality of the process. It reminds us that bringing new ideas into the world is, at its fundamental core, labor. Which is nowhere near as difficult as shoveling coal, but the repetition and dedication and sweat equity is what separates professionals from amateurs. I volunteer at my local food coop. Once a month, I spend a few hours unloading trucks and stocking shelves and stacking boxes and unpacking cases of produce. It's glorious work. It makes me feel strong and alive and connected. What's more, since I spend most of my days putting words on a screen, this monthly exertion of manual labor becomes a kind of communion, with others and with the future. Because it's a shift. You punch the clock and do your job. And that reminds you that you're a real person living in the real world. In an increasingly automated and outsourced world, that's a priceless experience. Reckoning with the infallible

judgment of reality, where your failures or shortcomings can't be interpreted away, that's the stuff civilization is built on. *What type of work helps you discover the objective reality of your humanity?*

And the humbling has begun. Rose dares to break rank, venture out of her luxurious first class quarters and press the flesh with the crew. The peons. The lowly third class. And yet, she drinks and dances and smokes and screams, the kind of behavior her upper crust cronies would never approve of. But that's just it. Rose doesn't belong in first class anyway. She and her mother have been lying about their wealth the whole time. And so, showing up to the party is not only an act of humility, but an expression of identity. That's what makes this scene so pivotal. It's the beginning of her unmasking. The shedding of a misplaced self. This moment of conception sends her on the trajectory that ultimately transforms her life for the better. It's a titanic reminder that we all have to give in to the humbling to find where we're going to go next. That's the nature of humility. It's a release valve. It helps create space for something new to enter. A humble heart is a teachable heart. And a teachable heart can change the world. *Are you confident enough to be humble?*

189 -- THE DANCING SCENE FROM IN AND OUT

Closets are for shelves, not selves. Howard has been outed by one of his former students, and now he's forced to angrily reassure those who know him that he is actually straight. But the man doth protest too much. Howard isn't fooling anybody. He's as gay as lemonade sandwich. So after weeks of frustration and confusion, he ultimately resorts to a self help audio cassette as a final measure to restore his heterosexuality. And this result is one of the great all time iconic dance scenes in modern cinema. This movie is an honest reminder that, gay or straight, we're all coming out of the closet about something. We're all trying to uncover facets of our identities that have been obscured by external and internal forces. Because we can only closet off the unholy parts of ourselves for so long. No matter how many audio tapes we listen to, we can't run from what we are. We all end up dancing around the living room eventually. And so, whatever darkness is inside of us, eventually, somewhere, is going to come out. But the good news is, once we give people a profile of our soul, once we start talking about what we're afraid for them to know about us, our world changes. We experience the freedom that comes from refusing to hide. What's more, their world changes too. Because those brave enough to listen will use our stories as mirrors that reflect their truest selves. *At a certain point, when will your life do the math and out you?*

A needle in a stack of needles. It's one thing to take pride in your identity. But it's another thing to turn personal narrative into a religion and disappear down the rabbit hole of your own mythology. The reality is, nobody is paying as much attention to you as you are. It's nothing personal, people simply don't have the bandwidth anymore. Millions of people are trying to make their ideas more popular than yours. Tens of thousands of bits of data and stimuli and noise are coming at them faster than their constitutions can handle. And so, the assumption that they're going to take the time to find a needle in a stack of needles is ludicrous. This was a grim reality for me to accept. After all, attention of other people is the most irresistible of drugs. When I started my career, it was still possible to cut through the clutter. Getting noticed wasn't yet an exercise in futility. If you delivered the right message at the right time to the right person through the right channel, you might actually engage the world with a narrative that won them over. But not anymore. Now, most people are just not paying attention. I'm reminded of an [interview](#) with a filmmaker who said he purposely started making his films twenty minutes too long. When asked what his reasoning was, he said people's attention spans were getting shorter, and he wanted them to suffer. *Yikes.* The point is, we have

to empty ourselves of expectation. We can't be attached to any outcome. If our remarkable identity is met with crickets, we can't take it personally. *Are you exerting your identity for its sake, or for the attention and applause?*

It doesn't matter how many people don't love you. I've received a lot of hate mail over the years. Apparently wearing a nametag everyday bothers people. So much so, that they feel the need to call me names and ridicule my brand and tell me how worthless my existence is. I remember one letter that said, *you're nuttier than a bag of trail mix!* How sweet. And admittedly, the first few hundred letters hurt my feelings. But eventually, the hate mail just became a source of entertainment for me. Proving, that identity is a journey of acceptance. Not only the accepting yourself, but the accepting other people's experience of your self. Positive or negative. Especially negative. After all, your being is not something everybody is going to be on board with. I once read inspiring book about **real love** that addressed this very topic. The author suggested we tell our truth, even when we're not certain we're being accepted. To be honest with ourselves long enough to see the positive effect that always follows. Because although some people will attack us when we tell the truth about ourselves, the bottom line is, it doesn't matter how many people don't love us. Besides, people's power over us is inversely related to our need for their approval. Once we accept that there's nothing we could say that would make us good enough in their eyes, liberation ensues. *In what situations do you have difficulty accepting yourself?*

190 -- THE BASEBALL SCENE FROM SPACE JAM

A whiff of meaninglessness creeps in. There's a very real withdrawal process after you finish a creative project. It's like coming down after a six month high, and the gravity of the experience is commensurate with the level of ambition you put in the work. And so, the more time and energy and money you invested, the weightier that withdrawal becomes. It's a psychological fallout. You stand in the void between projects, feeling anxious and empty and idle and a little paranoid, wondering what the heck you're going to create next. You realize, oh crap, now that you've shipped, there's a huge hole in your creative life, and you don't know how to fill it. And if you don't plug up that hole soon, it's bad times for all. Blech. I've gone through that withdrawal dozens of times over the years, and it never gets an easier. That space in between obsessions, where the smell of meaninglessness quietly creeps in like a slow gas leak, sometimes I feel like I want to jump out of my skin. But I don't. Because I remember that things don't need to be fixed, they need to be understood. So I sit with the feelings. As long as I have to. Sometimes I even start a conversation with them in my mind, asking what brings them to town. It's all part of accepting and appreciating the turmoil of genuine process. *What's your early warning system for impending inner turmoil and anxiety?*

Get good enough, and you can do anything you want. Jordan was the greatest basketball player who ever lived. But as a child, he dreamed of doing more than just shooting hoops. And so, after retiring from basketball upon the tragic death of his father, he surprised the entire world by signing a major league baseball contract. Nobody could believe it. Jordan swinging a bat? Say it ain't so. And even though his talent for baseball was nowhere near his talent for basketball, at least he tried. Even though he had a subpar batting average and dozens of scuffling attempts in the outfield, at least he gave his dream a shot. And that's the story worth remembering. That if you get good enough, and you can do anything you want. Don't limit himself just because people can't accept the fact that you can do something else. Keep exploring new ways of being an artist. Keep evolving into the next form for yourself. Even if the world conspires to make you less than you are. Even if people are invested in keeping you where you are. As my **mentor** once said, your option for how to create fulfilling work is only limited by your imagination's ability to create scenarios that excite you. The definition of work, of career, of what is and is not a business, are forever altered and can be molded to fit anything that excites and feeds your soul if you choose to explore it intentionally. *What could you do today that would be a complete step forward in your professional evolution?*

Decisiveness is the antidote to regret. Michael didn't regret his brief baseball career. How could he? It was his childhood dream and he finally accomplished it. Period. Nobody could take that away from him. And even though he only played for one year, he still got his allotment. That's a big word for me, *allotment*. It stems from the biblical term for the parcel of land assigned to someone for some purpose, but also has numerous applications in gardening, traveling, stock trading and state lotteries. But each of us has our own allotments in life. And it's always our choice about how we choose to expend them. As an example, I've been sober my entire life, save for my twenty first birthday. That night I managed to get good and pissed and had the time of my life. The next day, of course, I was so hung over that I didn't get out of bed until dinner. But that was my allotment. I got the beast out of my system and got on with my life. The point is, if you don't act while a door is open, it can shut forever. And before you know it, regret piles up around you like books you never read. Decisiveness, on the other hand, is the antidote to regret. Because when you make a choice, follow through with absolute commitment and bravely deal with the consequences of that choice, regret cowers into the corner in the fetal position. That's the big win. Doing things because you don't want to regret not doing them. Doing things because you don't want to die wondering. As my mentor once said, if you want to be unhappy, just find the thing you love and don't let yourself have it. *What's your allotment?*

191 -- THE JUDGES SCENE FROM ROUNDERS

Score when it matters. Mike knows the summer internship for a second year law student is crucial. Landing that clerkship could result in a job offer after graduation and help him hone the relevant skills to be successful in the long term. And so, he creates a *stiletto moment*. He takes advantage of an opportunity to concentrate his portfolio of talents into a tight little package that demonstrates the full firepower of his creative arsenal. Mike's performance showcases his ability to negotiate a deal, take calculated risks, make a case for himself, monitor and leverage emotional information, entertain an audience, influence behavior and communicate clearly. All in less than five minutes. And as a result, he ingratiates himself to the judges, making himself a more attractive, likeable and memorable candidate for the internship. *Jackpot*. I'm reminded of a conversation I had with my mentor. We were watching a playoff hockey game, when the defenseman from our team scored a goal with thirty seconds left on the clock. Which was an exhilarating moment, but the only problem was, our team was already down by five goals. Winning was statistically impossible at that point. That's when my mentor looked over at me and said, you have to score when it matters. In sports, in business, in life, timing isn't everything, it's the only thing. If you want the world to say yes to you, you have to sing the song that is natural for you to sing, in the way that is natural for you to sing it, in front of the fans who most naturally need to hear it. *How will you bridge the gap that exists between you and your potential audience?*

Up the emotional and psychological ante. From a physical standpoint, I'm not interested in risk. I have zero need for speed. I don't play extreme sports. I've never been in a fight. And I walk away from even the slightest hint of violence. But when it comes to emotional, psychological risk, I'm quite the daredevil. Relocating to a city with no job and no friends? Starting a business with no money and experience? Delivering a speech in front of four thousand foreigners? Walking into an office building and straight up asking the president for a job? Sign me up. That's the kind of risk I can get behind. If betting on yourself is wrong, I don't want to be right. As my favorite **gambler** once said, winning, losing, it's all the same after a while, it's the risk that keeps you going. Mike lives by this principle. As a lawyer, he's constantly trusting his spontaneous instinctual abilities. And as a rounder, he's constantly honing his emotional willingness to open himself to new possibilities. Even if that means looking ridiculous in front of his elders. And so, he bets on himself. Even in this casual, consequence free setting. Because he knows it keeps his risk

muscle sharp. And because the minute he stops taking the creative risks that made him successful in the first place, he's finished. *How often are you tearing yourself away from the safe harbor of certainty?*

Side window, not front door. When I relocated to a new city without a single business contact, the first thing I did was google around to find the coolest companies in the area. I spent a few hours each morning researching and locating a target list of companies that I felt represented the culture and energy I wanted to align myself with. Next, I emailed every single employee of these organizations and requested an interview with the president. But not as a potential employee, rather, as a professional journalist. After all, I had authored a dozen books, published a popular blog and wrote regular columns for dozens of publications. Why not leverage those assets to position myself in a completely different way? What's amazing is, almost every company wrote back to me. More than seventy percent of them agreed to the interview. And half of them extended an open invitation to stop by their office anytime. This approach completely changed the dynamic of my introduction to the organization. It shifted my context from a needy job seeker into a friendly resource. And that presale position allowed me to connect with and engage the organization in a unique, personal and memorable way. Proving, that you can't demand someone's attention, you can only attract it by breaking their patterns. Carlin was right. When you enter through the side window instead of the front door, coming from direction they're not expecting, you engage their imagination. *Why do your competitors get more attention than you?*

192 -- THE OREO SCENE FROM ROUNDERS

Develop a hypersensitive relationship to the world. Prolific people can metabolize even the smallest events or situations into breakthroughs in thinking and action. To them, everything is a prototype. Any moment can be a moment of conception. Any interaction can contain that tiny, seemingly innocuous detail that triggers a whole new world. And every person they come across has the potential to send them in a new direction. But only because those people are curious and open and present and fully engaged with their surroundings. In poker, for example, this hypersensitive relationship to the world is worth real money. Discovering your opponent's tell, that is, the subtle change in their behavior or demeanor that assesses their hand—, helps you gain an advantage. Teddy's tell was that when he had nothing and was bluffing, he would break open his cookies. But when he had winning hand, he would not only break open the cookies, but also eat them. If you watch closely, right as Teddy eats the cookie, Mike's right eye twitches. That's my favorite moment in the entire movie. Because every day of my life, that same thing happens to me. But instead of cards, it's words. Phrases and sentences and ideas and words. These are the tells I'm on the lookout for. These are the moments that trigger new worlds for me. The point is, you'll never find the unexpected unless you're looking for it. Beginnings of ideas are everywhere, waiting for the eager mind and eye to seize. All we have to do is get good at noticing them. *How do you make sense of the world in ways others cannot?*

Participate fully in the other person's experience. I wear a nametag all day, every day of my life. Going on fifteen years now. And so, considering I've been conducting the same social experiment, tens of thousands of times, twenty four hours a day, for nearly half my life, it's safe to say I've noticed a few patterns. For example, every time I meet somebody new, I quickly learn everything I need to know about them, solely based on the way they respond to my nametags. It's like an inkblot test. Their physical and emotional reaction within the first ten seconds of introducing the nametag indicates whether they're playful or inflexible, curious or judgmental, sophisticated or simplistic, and so on. The list of personality traits never ends. But what's rewarding is, I can use this emotional information to help guide my thinking and behavior, empathize deeper, connect faster and accelerate intimacy. For example, if I notice someone's rising or lowering levels of enthusiasm when I tell the story about my nametag, that information is like a traffic sign. It tells me where I should and should not go, and how fast I should approach. Of course, this all happens in an instant. There's no time for conscious processing. Because after fifteen years, I'm just pattern matching. Maybe I should take up poker.

The point is, emotional intelligence isn't about manipulation, it's about participating fully in the other person's experience. Remembering that it's not just about how they experience you, but how they experience themselves in relation to you. *What's your filter for regulating social behavior?*

Life rewards action, not intention. We all need a healthy dose of humility, but we also need to believe that we deserve to be in the room. Because if we're too awshucksy about our value, we'll never inspire the appropriate level of confidence. The people across the table won't take us seriously. I'm reminded of a powerful piece of advice from Paul Arden, who wrote that we have to find the people who have what we want, grab them by the lapel and tell them who we are and why they should give it to us. That sentence literally changed my life. It inspired me to walk into my business meetings with an assertive, intentional and economical posture. In fact, as an experiment, I once showed up unannounced in the lobby of a company I wanted to work for, asked to speak with the president, waited on the couch for more than an hour, and then flat out asked him for a job. He said I had five minutes to make my case. So we went into his office, and forty minutes later, I walked out with my first assignment. And frankly, I couldn't believe. Who still does that? What is this, the fifties? But that's precisely the point. Showing up in person works because it's bold, unexpected, personable, simple, and best of all, nobody does it anymore. Nobody. People always write in their letters that they would be a perfect fit for the organization. But if that was the case, if they truly had no doubt, they would have just showed up. It's one thing to brag about being the missing piece of the puzzle, it's another thing to physically snap that piece into place. *When was the last time you just showed up?*

193 -- THE LOCKER ROOM SCENE FROM CINDARELA MAN

Learning how to be a stagehand. As someone who loves being in the spotlight, I've always been fortunate to have amazing backstage workers. People who took a real interest in my aspirations, supported my wildest ambitions and encouraged my goals and dreams every step of the way. And what I've discovered is, the best way to thank those people is to pay the support forward. To do unto others what has been done to me. To become a person who responds to people with relentless affirmation, reckless generosity, instant encouragement and radical acceptance. That's the thank you in perpetuity. To my surprise, however, backstage work is actually quite rewarding. Working in the wings is a refreshing change of pace. There's less pressure to perform and impress. There are more opportunities to support and encourage. And the experience of stepping back from center stage and lifting others up is gratifying in a way that getting a standing ovation isn't. Ah, the role of the stagehand. Highly underrated. What a meaningful way to belong to the world. Emboldening people, backing them up at all cost, assisting their efforts in affirmative and useful ways, and never doing so begrudgingly. It's actually a deeply nourishing process. Because you know how good it feels to have a number one fan in your corner, and so, you gladly strap on that foam finger and cheer your face off for another. *Who knew the crew could love the work as much as the talent?*

Doubt is a sign that our faith has a pulse. French philosophers have a famous proverb, *le premier pas engage au second*, which means the first step binds one to the second. That's exactly how momentum works. Once we finally stop dragging our feet and dive into our dream, the crucial first step creates a gravitational field that draws good things into it. By moving our feet, we activate providence. A whole stream of events ripple out from that one decision and the world conspires to help us realize that dream. It's like rock climbing. Footholds only appear when we move our foot. The question is, what happens when the doubt comes crashing in? What happens when we struggle to trust ourselves? Do we sweep and wash and clean our brains clean of it, or do we dare indulge the voice? My mentor says it is as cruel to deprive ourselves of doubt as it is to deprive ourselves of hope. And I think that's an honest way of approaching the process. Doubt is healthy. Doubt reinforces humility. Doubt is a sign that our faith has a pulse. Our job isn't to scrub our lives clean of it, rather, to greet it with a welcoming heart. To attend to it as a natural part of the life experience. And to be thankful for the wisdom it brings. Because if there were never any doubt at all, that might be cause for concern. Certainty about the future is a sign of mental illness. Doubt, on the other hand, is the feeling

that makes us realize, okay, I have to own this, and so that may mean I have to set it down for a while. *How do you deal with the inevitable doubting that accompanies dreaming?*

Cleaning up after your dream. One of the great struggles in relationships is navigating times of differently paced growth. Understanding that sometimes you're the one starved for inspiration, and sometimes you're the one dishing it out. Sometimes you're the one singing for supper, and sometimes you're the one eating it. Sometimes you're the one chasing down the dream, and sometimes you're the one cleaning up after it. But whichever side you find yourself on, there's always a need for proactive, prolific communication. Meaning, you can't sit back and wait for your partner to make the first move. That's something I've always struggled with in my relationships. *Initiation.* It's my biggest liability. But although I've managed to sneak by without it for a long time, that window is rapidly closing. Now we're playing for keeps. What got us here won't get us to where we need to be. And so, it's kind of like flossing. I can keep going to the dentist and lying about it, but eventually, it's just one of those things I have to suck up and start doing everyday. No matter how badly I want that chunk of bacon to stay lodged in my molar. As my ballroom dance instructor once told me, step up when you need to lead, step aside when you need to listen, and step back when I need to follow. *What do you need to leave behind to cross the threshold and fully embrace your partnership?*

194 -- THE VOICE SCENE IN FIELD OF DREAMS

When you make anything, you compete with everything. It used to be so simple. Create something worth talking about, and people will talk about it. If you build it, they will come. Piece of cake. I almost laugh at the number of times the story about my nametag went viral. I barely had to lift a finger. Because in the beginning of the digital revolution, news outlets and publications and other media properties didn't perceive an interesting story as something that competed with their own content. I was never a threat to their business model. So they gave me tons of ink. Fast forward to today, now everyone runs their own media company. Everyone is an artist, everyone is publisher, and everyone is in the ears and eyeballs business. Everyone. Attention has become the most scarce commodity on the planet, and we're all vying for it. And the scary part is, since anybody can create anything for nothing, everybody is competing with everyone, from everywhere, for everything. The age of compartmentalized competition is over. The primary currency is keeping the audience's eyes glued to the screen. Anything that diverts that precious attention is the enemy. This bothers me. Every time I launch a new project, I can't help but think I'm just throwing another frisbee out the window. Because most people are just not paying attention. I suppose, then, the answer is to go where the door is already open. To feed those who are already paying attention so that they will spread the word for me. It's horizontal marketing. Side to side, person to person, not top down. *Do you have a tribe or a group you think you're marketing to?*

Nobody wants hear stories about trouble in paradise. My favorite author has a great passage about dreams. He writes about blinking in disbelief, feeling the first rush of euphoria that comes with the knowledge that life is granting you the grace of a dream realized. It's divine experience. Unfortunately, life has a way of taking those fleeting moments of excitement, those ephemeral senses of wonder, those brilliant flashes of satisfaction, and replacing them with something called reality. Ugh. Because once your dream comes true, not only do you have to learn to live with it, you also have to learn to deal with people who resent you for having and following it. I have a friend whose lifelong ambition was to relocate to the city of love and light. *Paris*. But when she finally stepped into her dream, she quickly learned that the fantasy of moving there was vastly different than the reality of living there. Turns out, as romantic and artistic and beautiful as the city was, it could also be lonely and isolating and hard to meet people. And to make matters more difficult, she couldn't complain about that struggle with anybody. Because her friends and family weren't interested hearing the downside of her dream. What the hell.

Why is it that the moment life exceeds your wildest dreams, a knife appears at your back? Sounds like a country song to me. Dolly Parton said it best herself. Don't ask me how I feel about dreaming unless you really have time to listen. *Who feels disenfranchised by your dream?*

Make use of everything you are. In order to feel fully expressed, to feel that I'm creating the most value in the world, I constantly ask myself a few questions. Are there are hidden gifts and talents that deserve a more prominent place in my life? What personal skills have I not yet tapped into to improve people's lives? And might there be unique strategies for contributing to the world that I have not yet taken advantage of? The answer is always yes. Because on the mixing console of life, there are always more tracks available than we realize. But it's up to us to plug them in. It's up to us to listen for the whitespace, consider our ever growing set of assets and imagine what else is there for us to bring. I once came across a job application for a consulting company. The agency evaluated candidates on something called a skills maturity matrix. Pretty inspiring stuff. But when I read their framework, a switch turned on inside my head. *Oh my god.* Somebody else actually has a name for what I've been trying to explain. Are these people psychic? Because under the category called *counsel*, the framework literally listed every skill I was good at, but wasn't currently taking advantage of. Providing feedback that inspires action. Contributing to the growth of every person connected to you. Offering meaningful, off the cuff advisement to people. Unearthing valuable new opportunities in the midst of a conversation. Providing counsel that has an impact. *Wow.* It's like they printed my resume for me. That matrix described my skills perfectly. It gave me clarity and encouragement around my value as a professional. It helped me understood which tracks on my mixing console needed to have their levels raised. And it inspired me to relaunch my mentoring program. *Are you making use of everything you are?*

195 -- THE BUSINESS CARD SCENE FROM AMERICAN PSYCHO

One good idea does not a career make. Patrick is a textbook perfectionist. In fact, after becoming embarrassed by the superiority of his coworker's business card, he runs out murders a homeless man and his dog in an alleyway in a fit of frustrated rage. *Perfectly normal, perfectly healthy.* Proving, that perfectionists believe, whether they admit it or not, that there is no level at which they will feel safe putting things into the world, because there's always something that's not right about it. And so, they end up spending a ton of time perfecting what they do, and doing it over and over for years until they get it right. I have colleagues who write second, third, fourth and even fifth editions of their first books. And it drives me crazy. Because they're just tilling the same earth. They're not creating anything out of whole cloth, they're just building a time machine and recycling themselves. That way, their idea never has to come to an end. But the reality is, you have to end something to get to the next level. As my mentor used to say, when you let go of what you are, you become what you might be. Perfectionism, then, isn't a fear of failure or mistakes or criticism or rejection, it's a fear of death. Because everything has a lifecycle. Everything dies. Even a good idea. And so, our job as creators is to land a good idea, follow it to success, celebrate the victory, then go back to the workbench and find another one to land us at an even higher level. Otherwise we're just another one hit wonder. *Are you working on one piece, or contributing to an ongoing body of work?*

Too busy feeding the monster. Keep your overhead low, and you'll never have to compromise. Because the risk is minimal. You'll free up enough financial space to bankroll your capacity to experiment. And you'll have the surplus energy to awaken alternative ways of thinking. Maybe even say no to the work that doesn't serve your creative evolution. But live above your means, and you'll price yourself out of doing interesting things. Because the risk is too high. You'll be too busy feeding the monster. And you'll expend all your energy keeping the furnace up to operating temperature. Making it harder and harder to do what you believe in. When I was just getting started as an entrepreneur, I lived with my parents for two years, eight months and twenty nine days. Which made it difficult to get dates, but it certainly kept my overhead insanely low. And so, this afforded me the opportunity to save money be brave and take chances and hone my craft and most importantly, fail quickly and quietly. All of which cemented the foundation from which I was able to acquire, perpetuate and expand new business. Had I maintained overhead costs of administrative items, office expenses and other indirect

responsibilities, I never would have had the personal or financial resources available for the direct actions that led to business growth. *What is the cost of the way you're working?*

Talent is not the measure of man. This movie perfectly epitomizes the sheer materialism, narcissism and greed of the eighties culture. But it also fetishizes success. To the point of pathological obsession. And it's a reminder that, no matter what decade it is, we're all still parishioners at the church of continuous improvement, worshipping at the altar of better, feeding our addiction to the pursuit of excellence. And it breaks my heart. Spend five minutes perusing the bestseller list, and it appears we've turned mastery into some kind of fetish. As if the sole purpose of existence was to become the best at things. I'm sorry, but there's more to life than achieving supremacy. What good is putting in your ten thousand hours if it robs you of the very capacity for joy and wonder that makes life worth living? What good is barreling down the road to greatness if you don't even look around to take in scenery? Talent is not the measure of man. Enough with all the goddamn pressure and rhetoric on becoming a world class expert. Just express yourself. Honestly and prolifically. Forget about being good, forget about being number one, and just focus on creating an exhibition of love. That's enough. You're enough. All yardsticks are illusions. *Would you rather be the best at what you do or the best of who you are?*

196 -- THE VERUCA SCENE FROM WILLY WONKA & THE CHOCOLATE FACTORY

Sick with sweet gratitude. Veruca's character infuriated me as child. She was a selfish, rotten, spoiled brat who showed her family no mercy and had absolutely no regard for other people's property. And yet, she was never satisfied. Nothing was ever enough. Pink macaroons and a million balloons and performing baboons, she wanted the whole world, she didn't care how, she wanted it all now. *Gahhh!* I can't watch this scene without feeling sad for her father. Kids who bully their parents should be dropped kicked into wood chippers. We should have zero patience for ingratitude. We should make no time for people who are constitutionally ungrateful. Because gratitude is not a chore. Giving thanks is not an annual activity. We survive because of the energy we decide to devote to being grateful for living. In fact, gratitude is the great gravitator. Veruca may have won the contest, but she didn't take home the prize. She was a bad egg that went down the garbage chute and into the furnace where she was sizzled like a sausage. Charlie was the one entrusted to run the chocolate factory. Because he was the honest child. The grateful, loving soul to whom Wonka could bestow all of his most precious candy making secrets. Apparently gratitude pays dividends. Delicious ones. *How can you organize your days around activities that you feel grateful to perform?*

We don't deal in certainty, we deal in probability. Salt is the president of a large legume conglomerate. But he loves his daughter so much, that he's suspending business to have all of his employees unwrap furiously until the golden ticket is found. For the past five days, the entire flipping factory has been on the job. The girls have been shelling nineteen thousand bars an hour, adding up to seven hundred thousand bars thus far. And so, it's no surprise that they finally uncover the second golden ticket. Because the best way to beat the odds is with massive output. The best way to be in the right place at the right time is to be in a lot of places. That's just good science. Veruca may be a little nitwit who needs to be disemboweled with a wooden cooking spoon, but you have to admit, her father understands business strategy. He knows that volume is the great catchall. He knows that saving souls is a numbers game. That's why he leverages everything he has in the house to create an unfair advantage for himself. The peanut factory uniquely positions his family for success with an asset and a context that is theirs and theirs alone. The lesson is, whether you're trying to win a contest, trying to build a business or trying to follow your dreams of any kind, find a way to exponentially increase your activity level. Get your units up, tap into the power of volume and take advantage of

your advantage without remorse. That's not luck, that's math. *How could you join forces with the unreasonableness of life and create an unfair advantage for yourself?*

Reinvention is the engine of longevity. Dahl's original novel has been adapted for numerous media, including games, radio, the big screen and stage musicals. But although nothing will ever compare to the original, it's still a powerful lesson about the importance of reinvention. Because many people refuse to reinvent. For a variety of reasons. Maybe because they're lazy. Maybe because they're scared of change. Or maybe because they don't think they need to renew to be great. And that's fine with me. Because personally, I'm interested in continual reinvention. I want everything I do to lead to something else I do. My goal is broaden my appeal, not just get better at what I'm already good at. My goal is to diversify my offerings to all types of clients and audiences, not just keep tilling the same earth. And my goal is to leave no barriers for people to become involved with my work in inexpensive and accessible ways, not be another one hit wonder. Because diversity is equity. Reinvention is the engine of longevity. The challenge is, not everybody in your life is okay with that. That's the hard part about reinvention, it has a funny way of activating feelings of disenfranchisement. You find that not everyone is comfortable with the fact that you are now expecting more from yourself. You learn that people would rather keep you in your lane, still frozen in the position they met you in. But you can't let them. You can't let the world govern your growth by insisting you never diversify. Because we're not supposed to be one thing in life. *Are you limiting yourself just because people won't accept the fact that you can do something else?*

197 -- THE REGRET SCENE FROM GOOD WILL HUNTING

Decisiveness is the antidote to regret. I've done plenty of things for the wrong reasons. For the money, for the resume, for the attention, for the approval, for the applause, for the story, for the achievements, and of course, for the need to prove myself. But looking back, the experiences I'm most proud of, the projects that were the most rewarding and the investments that yielded the greatest dividends, were the things I did because I didn't want to regret not doing them. Because I didn't want to die wondering. *That's enough for me.* And I understand that some people get grossed out by ambition. But there's no shame in going for it. There's nothing uncool about caring. Everything I've gone for has given me something. It's the alternative to going for it, the downside of not trying, the naked terror of regret, that really scares me. Having to live with the question, I wonder if I could I have done that, is what puts enough of a roar in my ears to keep trying new things. Sean's story is perhaps the most romantic moment of the entire movie. Who needs baseball when you have true love? Even if it made no sense to give away his ticket for the biggest game in the team's history just to have a drink with a woman he'd never met, what calls out is the state of the heart. And if we don't heed that call, we'll never get the chance to discover what's waiting on the other side. **Cohen** once said that the heart is a complex shish kebab in everybody's breast and nobody can tame or discipline it. Sean was making the same point. It's not our job to explain the heart. It's our job to listen to it. *What could you do to force yourself to you listen to yourself?*

You believe in me, and I trust your judgment. When people start questioning their own value and beating themselves up for not being useful to the world, the best gift we can give them is encouragement. And not just inspiring them to become more of what they are, but empowering them to become more of what they never thought they could be. Anytime we help another human being believe that something bigger is possible for them, that's magic. And those people never forget. I have a close friend who's always been a beacon of encouragement for me.. And I'll never forget the text message he sent me on the biggest night of my life. It was the rehearsal dinner for my wedding. I was scheduled to perform two original songs in front of two hundred of my closest friends and family. And I was terrified. It's one thing to busk for strangers, but the sheer vulnerability of performing my own songs in front of everyone I love, yikes. But I powered through. I sang my heart out. And the crowd went nuts. More importantly, my best friend sent me a private message that said, essentially, *where the hell did that come from? I had no idea you that in you. Why are you not playing music in public more often?* That was enough for

me. That was the encouragement I needed to come out of music hibernation and give my musical gifts a more prominent place in my life. I even made a concert documentary about it. The point is, if you're lucky enough to have someone go out of their way to tap you on the shoulder and say, hey, you should do something with this; if you're fortunate enough to have someone stand beside you as you stare into the abyss and whisper into your ear, come on man, just keep going, don't keep it a secret. Never be bashful about making your believer aware of their impact. *Who are your beacons of encouragement?*

Anchor meaning onto every experience. Frankl had it all wrong. There is no search for meaning. Meaning is made, not found. Anything can be a meaning making opportunity because anything can provoke the psychological experience of meaning, as I learned from my favorite existentialist. It's simply a matter of intention. Thoughtfulness. Cognitive positioning. Going out of your way to frame your experiences as meaningful. Creating a sense of eventfulness in everything you do. That's what makes regret an impossibility. This daily practice is my literally my religion. The word religion, after all, derives from the word meaning *to link back*. Therefore, my religion is the one thing in my life that all the other things in my life link back to. And so, my meaning making mission is the primary organizing principle of my life. It's even fleshed out on a physical list that I keep in front of me at all times. This a helpful framework that reminds me how I've established a level of order for everything that's meaningful to me. That way, anytime I'm feeling angry or empty or said, instead monitoring my mood, I make my meaning. It's as simple as picking a line item from the list. Because I know that how I construe meaning dictates how I will live my life. As my mentor advised, we need to embrace the idea of meaning as a renewable resource and, as a consequence of that, look forward to each new day as an opportunity to make meaning. Not to search for it. Not to seek it out. To create it. *What might become available when you shift from seeking meaning to making it?*

198 -- THE FISH TANK SCENE FROM JERRY MAGUIRE

I can't dance to your fidgety tune. Saying goodbye to people is hard. Not having anybody to say goodbye to is harder. But having people to say goodbye to, and none of them caring that you're leaving, that's the hardest. Because human beings need to believe that they belong. That their contribution matters. That their voice is heard and that they would be missed when they're gone. I once worked for a company who, initially, was nothing but completely supportive and encouraging and appreciative of my value. They made me part of the team. They made my thinking a key part of their organizational process. And I felt validated and believed in on a level that I'd never felt before. But after about a year, the veil slowly lifted. I started to see the relationship for what it really was. And I realized that the company didn't need me, they just need someone. They weren't looking for a creative visionary, they just needed another warm body to fill their hole of mediocrity. And so, despite my efforts to create what I thought belonged there, despite my earnest attempts to infect the team with some much needed enthusiasm, I finally understood that I was working in the wrong environment. I didn't belong there. I never did. I just made the mistake of turning what I found into what I want. And the saddest part is, when I announced to the team that I was moving on to other opportunities, nobody cared. Nobody came running up to me with tears in their eyes. Nobody even said goodbye or wished me good luck. I just walked out the door in silence, feeling betrayed, sad and invisible. A sobering reminder of just how cold the world can be sometimes. *When was the last time you felt like an outsider?*

Fleas swatted off the carcass of an immense beast. Jerry's state of advancing melancholy is sad, but seeing him slowly come unhinged as the other agents try not to watch him leaving, that's simply devastating. It's a human train wreck. Another cruel hoax dangled before the hungry hearts of the naïve. And yet, staring into the eyes of that goldfish, he finds power. Jerry promises that this moment will be the ground floor of something real and fun and inspiring and true in this godforsaken business, and they will do it together. Then he asks the legendary question, *who's coming with me?* Initially, he's met with crickets. Nothing but the dull buzz of phones and copy machines. In fact, there's a powerful passage in the original [script](#) that says, after a beat of silence, the noise then returns to its normal commercial roar as a couple of fleas have been swatted off the carcass of an immense beast. Wow. You can't invent that kind of cruelty. In fact, awkward office moments just like this probably happen around the world every day. Employees make their exits, only to discover that their coworkers aren't genuinely interested in their future plans, they're just

being polite. Coworkers make nice, but secretly hate each other. It breaks my heart. Because I really do believe there are organizations out there that serve as oases in the desert of corporate mediocrity. It's just a matter of finding them. Or them finding you. *Where is the place that, when you walk through the door, your soul just opens up?*

A little belief goes a long way. Jerry's mission statement is the reason he got fired. Dorothy, on the other hand, locked in to his philosophy. Earlier in the movie, she tells him that optimism like that is a revolutionary act. That we should embrace what it is still virginal about our enthusiasm and force open the tightly clenched fist of commerce to give a little back for the greater good. That's why she raises her hand and follows him into the entrepreneurial sunset. Because his art helped her find something worth believing in. That's fundamental existential need art can satisfy for people. The craving for a horizon to chase. The ability have something to get out of bed and point to. It's the perfect illustration of how we all need that first person to take us seriously. We all need that number one fan, that person who has our back no matter what, and when there's no one beside us when our soul embarks, they will follow us into the dark. To quote the greatest love **song** of all time. But what I love most is the last scene of the movie. Jerry not only *has* a number one fan, but he *becomes* a number one fan for someone else. He pays the love forward. And a result, his client secures an eleven million dollar deal to finish out his professional career. Proving, that the chain of support flows both ways. And a little belief can go a long way. *Who was the first person to believe in you?*

199 -- THE SEMINAR SCENE FROM UP IN THE AIR

Only a peptic ulcer to keep you warm at night. Ryan lives out of a suitcase. His life is empty, literally and figuratively. It's no surprise, then, that he maintains a bleak perspective on relationships. He preaches that the people we love are the heaviest components of our lives, always weighing our shoulders down, always keeping us from advancing. And since we're sharks, not swans, we have to empty out our backpacks to stay in motion. We have to keep swimming, or we die. Awfully cynical, but this perspective *does* make perfect sense from a productivity standpoint. However, as the movie progresses, Ryan starts to reflect upon the life he has chosen to live. And he realizes, there is more to life than getting things done. That there are more important things that achieving lifetime executive status and having your name printed on the side of a jet. I'm reminded of an interesting [study](#) in a psychology journal that sheds light on the connection between ambition and relationships. Scientists tracked the lives and career outcomes of a group of gifted children born in the early twenties, analyzing the characteristics of the most ambitious among them. Turns out, while the more ambitious appeared to be happier, their happiness came at the expense of personal relationships. Their pursuit of career success cost them meaningful social bonds. Ryan's life is the exact same situation. And by the end of the movie, despite his motivational seminars about lightening the load of our backpacks, life truly is better with company. *How much does your life weigh?*

Create a context of sufficiency. Loneliness is the most common ailment of the modern world. But it's also the most curable. Because although a lack of social connection has been clinically proven to shorten our lifespans, we're only alone in this world if we want to be. I was reading a fascinating [study](#) on the perils and privileges of loneliness, and the scientist discovered that loneliness was not simply a response to isolation or lack of companionship, but a response to a *perceived* lack. It wasn't an objective state of affairs, but a subjective state of mind. And so, anytime the waves of loneliness come crashing in, we have a choice in the story we tell ourselves. We can rebuke ourselves for being disconnected, lonesome wretches without a friend in the world, or we can remind ourselves just how fortunate we are to have real human connection in our lives. We can give in to our antisocial tendencies and spend another night tranquilized by our screen, or we can start becoming active participants in multiple communities of interest. Or, my personal favorite, instead of dwelling on our own identities to the point that we disappear down the narcissistic rabbit hole, we just pick up the phone and call people we love and tell them that we miss them and ask if there's anything they need from us.

Remember, loneliness is a subjective response to perceived lack. Confidence comes from evidence. *Which person in your life brightens up your darkest nights when you close your eyes and think of them?*

Build a positive reality base. Unless our experiences are extraordinary moments, they rarely come with a heightened emotional state, which means they're never properly imprinted onto our memories. And so, if we want to keep our spirits up, we have to build a positive reality base. We have to design a system for giving ourselves a psychological pat on the back. Seneca famously suggested evoking the memory of a positive event. He said for us to call to mind things that we have done that have been upright or courageous, to run over in our minds the finest parts that we have played. Which sounds so trivial, but evoking that type of memory creates a heightened emotional state. And that builds a positive reality base. It's the same reason people make gratitude lists. They're visual records of progress. They create a context of sufficiency. Regardless of life's inevitable melancholies, physically writing out a sheet of paper with dozens or hundreds of reasons to be grateful helps us realize that things are going better than we thought. It may be a form of creative manipulation, but we have to be a little deluded to stay motivated. If it's true that each of us has an infinite capacity for self deception, we may as well put it to good use. *What do you say when you talk to yourself?*

200 -- THE SOCK SCENE FROM JUST ONE OF THE GUYS

Make the choice to lean into a different future. Reinventing yourself isn't about changing your clothes and the way that you walk. It's about springing yourself past a frontier and letting the constellation of your identity expand so you can see the beginning of a different and more courageous dream. It's about letting go of everything you've tried and built and accomplished and accumulated so far, except for the person you've become, and using that as the raw material for whatever comes next. I once wrote a letter of resignation to myself. It was a transformative experience. And not because I was retiring in the traditional sense. I had no intention of separating myself from society and giving up my business and withdrawing into seclusion. Rather, what I was retiring from was a particular way of being. What I was letting go of was a posture and a process that had been good to me. Dylan famously said that before you can reinvent yourself, you have to believe you have nothing left to say. That's exactly how I felt. That I had nothing left to say. That I had done enough to be okay with myself. And I felt complete about that part of my journey. At that very moment, something inside of me shifted. A threshold was crossed. A graduation was had. And with one eye on the receding horizon of my past, a portal opened up, inviting me to cross a new frontier. Since then, I've been upgrading my operating system. Making deep changes in my life. And I've never been happier. I feel like a whole new person, and yet, more like myself than ever. *What habits do you need to jump out of to reinvent yourself?*

Pursue wholeness, not perfection. Terry isn't taken seriously because of her good looks. And when she fails to get dream job as a newspaper intern, she remedies the situation by enrolling at a rival high school and disguising herself as a boy. Over the next year, she is heartbroken and humiliated multiple times over. But by the time the semester is over, she has enough experience to write a long article detailing her cross dressing and romantic experiences, both good and bad. When her article is printed in the newspaper, she receives high praise from her teachers and friends and finally earns her dream job at the newspaper office. It's a beautiful story about identity and creativity, but it's also a powerful narrative about the journey towards wholeness. Because we're all searching for completeness. We're all trying to trust the soul to know its own shape. Terry ultimately achieves this goal, but she does it on her own steam. And she does it by embroiling herself in the confusion and struggle of being one of the guys. But by plunging into the humbling fire of heartbreak and humiliation and hardship, she rises from the ashes with an upgraded version of

her authentic identity. Proving, that wholeness comes when we're willing to admit that we've reached the end of ourselves. *Where in your life are you not choosing wholeness?*

Burn yourself down and salt the earth. Net worth is defined as the total assets minus total liabilities. The term is traditionally used when talking about the value of a company or an individual's economic position. But here's an interesting experiment. Try approaching the word metaphorically, not just monetarily. That's what truly wealthy people will tell you. That net worth has nothing to do with money. Rather, your net worth is what you have when everything is taken away. Your net worth is what's left when after the fire department clears out all the ashes. And so, the better questions to ask are, what are the things that nobody can take away from you? What are the assets that truly belong to you and only you? And what have you earned the right to own that the world can never repossess? The answer is, *the person you've become*. That's your birthright. The perspective you've gained and the wisdom you've earned and the humanity you've deepened. Nobody can take that away from you. When I initiated my own process of reinvention, one of my friends said something I'll never forget. He told me that I wasn't starting from scratch, but letting go of everything I'd tried and built and accomplished, except for the person I'd become. You are the only thing you have to offer, he said, and that will be enough to reinvest into something new. *When was the last time you reinvented yourself?*

201-- THE BAR SCENE FROM PEACEFUL WARRIOR

Mentoring isn't a relationship, it's an inheritance. The experience of mentorship is anything that engages the heart and inspires the imagination. It comes from every direction. It's simply a matter of expectation. Sinetar was right when she said the mentor's spirit permeates all of life. And so, we can have casual mentors, people who take a real interest in our aspirations and encourage our goals and dreams. We can have formal mentors, sanctioned professionals who generously take us under their wing and shape us into better people. And we can have indirect mentors, people with whom we don't have a formal relationship or even a personal connection, but people whose works still motivate, guide and inform our growth. The abundant part is, we can seek out the mentor spirit in everyone and everything. We can search each current and particle of existence for truth. The universe is always offering us mentorship, we just need the eyes to recognize it, the heart to accept it and the initiative to act upon it. There has to be something about us that allows great mentoring to happen. We have to be mentorable. Eager to connect, without crowding those we admire in a star struck or exploitative manner. Quick to respect, without putting our mentors on pedestals as idols of perfection. Grateful to receive, without taking advisement lightly or unappreciatively. Willing to experiment, without hardening our hearts to new experiences. And anxious to report back, without being afraid to admit that we failed. With a posture like that, the mentoring inheritance is ours for the asking. *Who is your ideal mentor?*

The byproduct of authentic living. Buddha said that when the student is ready, the teacher will appear. But the inverse might be true too. When the teacher is ready, the student will appear. Then again, perhaps the teacher has been there all along, helping move things along when things need moving along, and staying out of the way the rest of the time. *Wow.* Zen is such an absurd philosophy. But that's the whole point. We can't experience the true rewards of mentorship if we're killing ourselves trying to find it. Mentoring isn't intentional, it's incidental. It's not the target, it's the reward we get for hitting it. It's the byproduct of authentic living. I once did an interview on national television to promote my first book. Two days later, I received an email from a bestselling author I'd never heard of before. He wanted to extend his congratulations and offer himself as a friend, resource and mentor, anytime, anywhere, forever. I thought he was just being nice. But nearly a decade later, our mentoring relationship still lives on. And not because I was a fanboy who kissed his ass and sent him brownies and ran up the score just to guilt him into mentoring me. It's because he saw something in me that somebody once saw in them. It's because the audacity of my life inspired him to reach out and

become part of it. That's being mentorable. Instead of trying to make a sale, we earn the right to a relationship. Instead of creating a sense of indebtedness and social pressure to reciprocate, we keep putting our work into the world until the right people find us. *How mentorable are you?*

Let their guidance play a small part. I don't have one mentor, I have a galaxy of them. And I'm eternally grateful for their guidance. With their support, I've been able to grow my business and execute my creative vision in ways I never could have dreamed. What's more, I've been able to pay it forward. Now I've become a mentor to other artists, entrepreneurs and businesspeople around the world. Sometimes in person, sometimes over the phone, sometimes via email, or sometimes through another digital channel, people literally rent my brain. I help them *strategically*, i.e., how to position their brand, how to generate their own demand and how to leverage business opportunities; and also *tactically*, i.e., how to eliminate creative blocks, how to calibrate their daily routine and how to obfuscate procrastination. It's incredible rewarding. I've helped my mentees build brands from scratch, like Chrissy. I've helped my mentees publish bestselling books, like William. And that's all your mentors want from you. To see that you're making something happen, and to know that their guidance played a small part in the process. *When was the last time you rented somebody's brain?*

202 -- THE PLANNING SCENE FROM OCEAN'S ELEVEN

Give yourself an executional runway. One of my favorite mantras is, ideas are free, only execution is priceless. It's an inspiring concept. The fact that we don't need an idea, but an *I did*, is desperately needed in our procrastinatory society. The challenge of execution, though, is that it feels overwhelming. Because we still have stars in our eyes. We're still operating in blue sky mode. Making the transition from impulse to initiative, however, requires us to engage our left brains. We have to send our inner artist out for coffee and enlist his scientist buddy to get down to brass tacks. In this space, it's useful to give ourselves a *executional runway*. A defined area to prepare for takeoff. When I first conceptualized the idea for my online **video training** portal, I built an episode template. A production workflow diagram into which I could plug each piece of content. That way, every time I went into the studio to tape a new episode, I could just show up and say the words. I could just do my work. Without that runway, I would have locked myself into a sequence of last minute decision making processes that were exhaustive and stressful and wasted valuable energy that should have been dedicating to the primary action. That's the secret to execution. The economy of effort. Building a template inventory for every action so your brain is free to direct its creative energies exclusively into making each piece of work as great as possible.

Plan your escape. The best part of every heist film isn't the final crime scene, but the planning of how to commit it. There's just something about a bunch of crooks sitting around a smoky table filled with scale models and architectural schematics, hashing out technical specs, visualizing every mundane detail of the robbery, and of course, fantasizing about how to spend their cut once the job is finished. In this scene, the camera will pan around the table while every crew member speaks to his role, pausing at the one character who doesn't understand his role and will likely compromise the entire operation. Interestingly enough, this tradition of the planning scene in heist films was actually invented by a famous criminal named **Baron Lamm**. An immigrant discharged from the military for cheating at cards, he made a living in early twentieth century robbing banks. Once he was finally apprehended, he was sent to a state prison where he had time to reflect and adopt what he knew of military tactics and organization to the business of armed robbery. The result became known as the Baron Lamm Technique. It's simple. Scout the location, draw floor plans, locate the guards, decode the safe, establish the schedule, calculate the hard out exit time, station the getaway vehicle and map the escape route. Sound familiar? Remind you of every heist film every made?

You're right. Lamm's life sentence was spent teaching every famous criminal in the country how to master the steps of technique. *What kind of plan do you need to create?*

I never had a plan, but I always had a process. I'm not a planner. Not by default, and not by design. I believe planning has its merits, but in my experience, if I carefully architect exactly what I'm doing, I can only be as good as that. It's a classic case of *premature cognitive commitment*. This is a term social psychologists use for people become emotionally or intellectually bound to a course of action. It's the mindlessness that results after a single exposure. And so, anytime we assign labels to our ideas too early, it's a prejudgment of that idea's quality and value. If want our creativity to expand into unexpected territory, we have to keep the process objective for as long as possible. My favorite basketball player once said, if he didn't know where he was going, nobody could stop him. That's good advice for artists. Because so many of us spend half our time planning for things we could create if we didn't spend half our time planning. In fact, we're not planning at all, we're hiding. Planning is procrastination in disguise. And so, we don't need a plan, we need a process. Big difference. A plan is trapped in the what, but a process is anchored in the how. A plan focused on specialized knowledge, but a process on a personalized posture. *Which one do you use?*

203 -- THE ENERGY SCENE FROM THE CELESTINE PROPHECY

Nobody wants to be friends with a taker. Some people are exhausting to be around. To them, everything is an emergency, every experience is a trigger for outrage, and every piece of information is a crisis. They're poor victims of the passive injustice around them. And their incessant drama baits you into a life of worry, and their vortex of chaos devours and swallows your energy every time you interact with them. They're like an emotional black hole whose gravitational pull is futile to resist. *Blech.* And yet, there's no hope trying to scrub our lives clean of energy drainers. Instead, we ought to focus on improving our own ability to do the opposite. To be someone who lifts others up. To become known as the one who contributes meaningfully to everyone they encounter. Energy, after all, is interactional currency. It's a social gift. And giving it to people is one of the highest forms of human generosity. But it's not a technique. There's no seven step process for giving energy. It's simply a matter of intention and attention. Caring enough about people to observe how they experience themselves in relation to you. And believing that the world is ready for the energy you are here to deliver. A friend of mine who runs a career counseling agency used to say her goal was to add wood to people's internal fire, not sprinkle water on it. I always thought that was a perfect way to look at the energy exchange. Allowing both people to reflect heat onto one another like logs in a fireplace. *Does interacting with you add to people's life force, or devour and swallow their energy?*

Get the idea to ground zero. Holacracy literature suggests that for an organization, any tension sensed by anyone anywhere should have a place to go to get rapidly and reliably processed into some kind of meaningful change. The theory is, if the company can do something with people's tension, it becomes energy, not frustration. Interesting way to manage an organization. In fact, it's also a useful strategy for managing the creative process. Because the job of the artist is to manage our tensions. To metabolize our thoughts and feelings and emotions into meaningful expressions. That's the stuff great art is made of. And so, we need a process for moving those tensions downstream so they can be processed and entrusted into a concrete system. It all starts with *ground zero*, which is entry point into the creative processing workflow. Think of it as the loading dock where raw materials enter the idea factory. It could be a folder or a database or a document or a whiteboard covered with sticky notes. Whichever tool we choose, the point is to master the habit of getting our ideas to ground zero. Immediately. Without even thinking. Because the mind is a terrible office. And we do our brains a disservice anytime we fail to offload our feelings into the system. That would be like an organization full

of employees with unrealized, unprocessed tensions. The point is, ideas were never meant to stay that way. It's not about the seed, it's about the tree it grows into, the forest it becomes a part of, the landscape it belongs to and the new life that flourishes within it. *What are your ideas becoming?*

Make paying attention to your intuition a priority. Synchronicity is a very real thing. The experience of two or more events that are meaningfully related is an occurrence that happens all day, every day, all around the world. But only to people who are looking for it. Only to people who expect their intuition to be there for them. Because the reality is, synchronicity it not magic. Mysterious coincidences are not the work of relativity theory or quantum mechanics or extrasensory perception or god's way of being anonymous. Jung himself even said that synchronicity could not be understood as anything except a phenomenon of energy. And so, what people are likely experiencing in these glorious moments of rare and perfect harmony is elevated awareness. Focused intention. Hyperactive listening. Cognitive bias. Show me someone who makes paying attention to their intuition a priority, and I'll show you someone with multiple moments of synchronicity in their daily life. But show me a person who's afraid to use their intuition because they don't want to have to defend it without logical explanation, and I'll show you a person whose life is in disharmony. I experiences synchronous moments on a daily basis. But only because I expect to. *Do you notice extraordinary beauty all around you?*

204 -- THE GIVE UP SCENE FROM SCHOOL OF ROCK

The futility of everything is fertile ground. The most devious culprit of creative demoralization is futility. That hopeless feeling that you're just winking in the dark, throwing petal after petal down the canyon, waiting to hear the echo. Good god, it just makes you not even want to try. Because there's too much noise, too many channels, too much competition and too little bandwidth for the rest of the world to consume yet another work of art. Why even waste your time? *Ughh*. Fortunately, these feelings are perfectly normal. In fact, it's our responsibility as artists to identify emotions like these. To observe them without being overwhelmed by them. And to figure out how to domesticate them, as opposed to pretending they don't exist. I read a great [article](#) written by an addiction psychotherapist, who said that emotions come and go like guests who come to visit. Some are welcome and we're delighted to see them, others, not so much. Sometimes they leave sooner than we would like, other times they stay way past the point when we want them to leave. But eventually they all leave. *Love that*. And so, anytime you notice these feelings of futility starting to course through your artistic veins, empty yourself of expectation. Zero out your emotional board. Choose to make art for yourself, knowing that you can't guarantee that anybody else will give a shit. Choose to make art to make yourself proud, knowing the everybody else is too busy getting ahead to care about you. Choose to make to make meaning, since most people probably aren't even thinking about you enough to judge you anyway. And remember to keep passion in play. Because when you're sitting alone in a room throwing frisbees out the window all day, passion might be the only fuel you have to keep going. *Do you complain about the wind, hope the wind will stop or adjust your sails?*

You have ruined my sense of reality. I just finished reading a novel about a husband who kidnaps his wife for ransom. In the final chapter, there's a powerful passage, in which the woman comes to terms with her new reality. "It's a big blow, finding out a person isn't who you thought they were, that the world isn't the way you thought it was. You're living your life under certain assumptions, and then you find out they're all wrong. You thought you were walking on firm ground, but you're really walking through a swamp of shit." I know that moment. It's sad and jarring you feel betrayed and you start to think you don't understand the world anymore. I'm reminded of when I quit my first job. I spent an hour writing an earnest, thoughtful letter of resignation to my bosses, thanking them for believing in me, even requesting a face to face meeting so I could share my appreciation in person. Pretty professional, don't you think? The bosses ignored me for two weeks. Literally, not a word.

No acknowledgement. No exit interview. Just silence. Unbelievable. It really bothered me. I felt empty and invisible. Not because I was expecting balloons and cake, but a simple goodbye would have been enough. Jesus. Grant me that much. The point is, life is full of disappointment. As much as we'd like to remove the teeth from the cruel bite of reality, we can't pretend that the world is different than it is. But that shouldn't keep us from doing our best to make sense of it all. Because odds are, in the end, the majority of the tally marks will be in the win column. *Are you shielding yourself from the sharp edges of reality?*

Buffer yourself against disillusionment. There's a clear relationship between creativity and addiction. In fact, there are many ways to approach recovery much like art. I was reading the memoir of a recovering junkie who explained that addicts often struggle to cope with an external world that will not submit to their imagined demands. As the old saying goes, an addict is a piece of shit around which the whole world revolves. *Interesting.* Sounds like the creative process to me. That's why this movie is a perfect illustration of the gap between our beloved expectations and life's actual intentions. Dewey was a natural born rock star who got kicked out of his band because his onstage antics unnerve his band mates and the crowd. And now he's been reduced to a washed up, bitter, angry substitute teacher. But what he didn't realize is that in the same way that the solar system is not obligated to provide us with the sun, the marketplace is under no such obligation to embrace our next creation. And so, if we are to buffer ourselves against disillusionment, we have to empty ourselves of expectation. We literally have to expect nothing except the satisfaction of doing something awesome. It takes a lot of time and practice and patience get to a point where that's enough for us. But once we do, it's a lot less likely that our dreams will be shattered on the rocks of disappointment. *Are your expectations serving or frustrating you?*

205 -- THE ESCAPE SCENE FROM SHAWSHANK REDEMPTION

Fortune favors the bold, but it frequents the consistent. Andy toted his jail cell wall out into the exercise yard a handful at a time. Which wasn't much initially, but you have to remember, he was a banker. An incrementalist. A man who understood the power of *compound interest*, the capacity to generate more and more value over time through slow, unsexy, but consistent increments. In a way, he was building his own body of work. Based on his daily practice of patience, delayed gratification and continuity, his art was cutting enough rock to crawl his way to redemption. Proving, that whatever tunnel to freedom you're digging, the smartest way to do it is one spoonful at a time. Think of it as inconspicuous production. You distribute your effort into small, consistent, doable chunks. And after many, many, many hours of incremental work, you find yourself on the other side of the wall. It's certainly not the sexiest or easiest path to success. Especially in a society that promotes and rewards indulgence and convenience. But one thing's for sure. There is no skill more underrated than the capacity for delayed gratification. That's what sets people free. That's what makes it possible for them to aspire to goals that others would disregard. Besides, patience is a litmus test for vision. If it's truly your dream, you're willing to wait for it. *When was the last time you contributed to your reserve of patience?*

Paint yourself into an accountable corner. Red explains that geology is the study of pressure and time. In prison, that's all it takes really. Pressure and time. That, and a big goddamn poster. The question, then, is how can you create similar elements of pressure in your own work? *Simple.* Paint yourself into an accountable corner. Find a way to increase your commitment by creating unacceptable consequences of failing. At my yoga studio, we offer students a monthly direct debit program. Meaning, regardless of how many times a week they practice, the same amount is withdrawn from their account each month. That's pressure. The payment plan paints students into an accountable corner. Because when they're sitting at home, debating whether or not they should schlep their lazy bones over to the studio, they remember that they're paying for the yoga no matter what. May as well get their money's worth and get their bodies into shape at the same time. The point is, sometimes you have to trick your own brain. Damocles used a dangling sword of obligation to demonstrate the precariousness of a king's fortunes, and there's no reason our work should be any different. Whatever it takes to create ambient pressure. *Why is failing not an option for you?*

There are no locks on the prison doors. I once read an [article](#) about a real life prison break in which two inmates used photos of bikini clad women to conceal their escape tunnels. Similar to the film, they used scrap metal tools to remove cinderblocks from the wall and crushed them so the rocks could be hidden in the cells. And as they worked, they strategically laid out pillows and sheets to make it look like the men were asleep in their beds. Of course, once the men escaped, the prison officially barred inmates from pinning up pictures from magazines on their cell walls. This story inspires me. It restores my faith in the ingenuity of the modern man. And it proves that everyone, even convicted felons, can tap into their wells of creativity and resourcefulness to achieve great things. Pharrell, the ultimate polymath, made a great observation about this subject. In a compelling [interview](#) about his creative process, he said that there's a key for every door, and if you can't find it, you can make one. That's the beauty of prison. It's the ultimate constraint. Inmates have no choice but to find their own doors and make their own keys. Maybe we all need to be locked up for a little while. *What creative resources are right in front of you?*

206 -- THE RAYON SCENE FROM DALLAS BUYERS CLUB

Learn to let the world in. Woodroof is initially hostile towards the terminally ill transvestite. But in this moment, it occurs to him that he might be able to help an entirely new population of patients by creating an alliance. Rayon, he realizes, is the linchpin that can open up an entirely new marketplace of customers who need his help. Reluctantly, he partners up and with the streetwalker and forms a profitable membership club that they operate out of a motel room. But over time, not only do they begin to turn a profit, they also begin to respect each other. Despite being shunned and ostracized by many of his old friends, Ron treats Rayon as a friend, confidant and colleague. The two rebels, unwilling to wait for the government's medical establishment to save them, don't wait for permission, they just hire themselves and get to work. It's a beautiful lesson in learning to let the world in. Even if that means supporting the very people that you once despised. This movie is a gritty example of pure enterprise. A story about two people whose immune systems are failing, but whose opportunity agendas are thriving. And let us not forget the story behind the story, the one about two artists whose careers were resurrected by their embrace of their difficult choices. Both actors transformed their bodies to play their respective characters, both demonstrated magical cinematic prowess in their performances, and both were bestowed with the highest awards actors can receive. *What do you see when you see people?*

Everything you do should lead to something else you do. This movie is about an entrepreneur who diversifies and expands his offerings. Business schools should show it in their marketing classes. Because it teaches us to constantly reexamine the smallest revenue centers of our enterprise. To pose the crucial leverage question, now that I have this, what else does this make possible? Years ago when people started asking to work with me one on one, I created a service called **Rent Scott's Brain**. The program was unsystematic and unpolished, but it still created value for people. And it became a solid revenue stream for my company, despite its imperfections. *Awesome*. What's interesting is, after several dozen coaching engagements over the years, I started to experience dimensional shifts as a service provider, as we all do. Since there were personal skills and wisdom I wasn't tapping into to create value and build my business, I decided to diversify. To expand on my current offering with better and more sophisticated variation of my one on one service. Now the program is much more comprehensive. A unique combination of coaching, mentoring, consulting and strategizing. That's what's possible when we put our diversification caps on. With some reinvention, each of our revenue centers can become a entirely new business unit. Each of our offerings can give

our artistic voice another outlet and therefore activate a new market segment. And each of our services can become another option for our clients to become involved with us in an inexpensive and accessible way. That's how businesses evolve. We build organically, but we leverage strategically. *What could we do today that would be a complete step forward in your brand's evolution?*

Turn your creativity loose. For the true artist, there is no vacation. If their eyes are open, they're working. Always scanning the horizon, always panning for gold, and always ready to build a home for the next great idea that appears somewhere in the world. But they also understand that observation alone can't always single handedly operate the machinery of creativity. And so, they reserve a portion of their minds for inspiring themselves. They build an environment around themselves that allows their creativity to erupt. Joni Mitchell comes to mind. What I loved about her was, she invented everything about her music. From performance style to lyrics to genre to guitar tunings to chord progressions, there wasn't an element of her art that wasn't original. That's why she became her own adjective. And so, if we want to follow her lead and turn our own creativity loose, we ought to think about building a system of our own. Making things that help us make things. This past year, I spent six months developing a **framework for being prolific**. It's an entire curriculum. A master class on creativity. A robust intellectual property development system that demystifies my own creative process. Interestingly, since I started to put more rigor around my own systems, it has released new levels of output and expression in my work. Funny what happens when we embrace the privilege of having ourselves as a client. *Where will your creativity find access to you?*

207 -- THE COMPUTER SCENE FROM WILLY WONKA

Ideas evaporate unless they are massaged into reality. We can brainstorm ideas until we're blue in the face. But eventually, it comes time to stop creating and start judging. That's what separates the prolific innovator from the professional researcher. Their ability to stop gathering data and think about what has been gathered. Their capacity to shift neural gears in a hurry and click into a different zone at a moment's notice. Computers, unfortunately, cannot do this. They can't tell you where the next golden ticket can be found. Because what a computer does doesn't depend on how it's built, but on the program fed into it. The good news, however, is that human being *can* hone this skill. It's simply a matter of punctuation. Establishing a line of demarcation. A microstructure that sets a boundary between gathering data and thinking about what's been gathered. Recently I was writing my course curriculum on being prolific. I reached the point where I had to transition from conceptual, freestyle brainstorming to more technical, structured outlining. And so, I used a centering sequence, which is a combination of deep breathing and incantation. I recited specific language that supported my intention to move in a certain direction, i.e., *I am completely stopping, I am ready to start judging*. I've used this tool multiple times each day for many years, and I find it's a way of making a full body announcement that I'm entering into a different relationship with my mind. The ritual creates the necessary space to find the organizing principle of an idea, which moves the idea from word to flesh, from concept to reality. *How do you transition from creating mode to judging mode?*

You have ruined my sense of reality. I just finished reading a novel about a husband who kidnaps his wife for ransom. In the final chapter, there's a powerful passage, in which the woman comes to terms with her new reality. "It's a big blow, finding out a person isn't who you thought they were, that the world isn't the way you thought it was. You're living your life under certain assumptions, and then you find out they're all wrong. You thought you were walking on firm ground, but you're really walking through a swamp of shit." I know that moment. It's sad and jarring you feel betrayed and you start to think you don't understand the world anymore. I'm reminded of when I quit my first job. I spent an hour writing an earnest, thoughtful letter of resignation to my bosses, thanking them for believing in me, even requesting a face-to-face meeting so I could share my appreciation in person. Pretty professional, don't you think? The bosses ignored me for two weeks. Literally, not a word. No acknowledgement. No exit interview. Just silence. Unbelievable. It really bothered me. I felt empty and invisible. Not because I was expecting balloons and cake, but a simple goodbye would have been enough. Jesus. Grant me

that much. The point is, life is full of disappointment. As much as we'd like to remove the teeth from the cruel bite of reality, we can't pretend that the world is different than it is. But that shouldn't keep us from doing our best to make sense of it all. Because odds are, in the end, the majority of the tally marks will be in the win column. *Are you shielding yourself from the sharp edges of reality?*

Deep in the throes of delusion. Most artists and creators and inventors spend their days alone in a room with nothing but their minds to rely on. In fact, most of them will attest, you have to be a little deluded to stay motivated. Because if you cannot delude yourself into thinking your work is significant, you should probably find another career. And if you don't think what you're creating is the greatest thing that ever was, if you haven't convinced yourself that your ideas are legitimately going to change people's lives forever, you're finished. It's grandiose, but it's also part of the job description. Nobody stands at foot of an unblazed trail without a few mental abnormalities. A certain level of healthy narcissism and productive arrogance are required to thrive. And so the question is, how do you know when your inventory of deceptions is dangerously imprisoning your creative potential, or when it's actually buttressing your ideas for the better? Sadly, *you don't*. Uncertainty is part and parcel of the creative process. Every new idea is just another public bet with your imagination. Consider history's greatest innovators. Bell didn't do market research before he invented the telephone. Jobs didn't hold focus groups before he changed the music industry forever. Ford didn't give his customers the faster horse that they asked for. And yet, each of their creations changed everything. Because these innovators operated from received wisdom, not perceived expertise. They knew that nobody knows what nobody wants until they actually see it. Proving, that all we can do as creators is trust our instincts. We can have faith that with every new idea we have, with every new project we execute, and with every new dimension we add to our being, our powers of perspective and judgment and contextual understanding will deepen. And we can hope that when our delusions take us too far, the people we love will help bring us back to earth. *How do you know when you're being delusional, and when everyone else is wrong and they just can't see it yet?*

208 -- THE FERRET SCENE FROM KINDERGARTEN COP

Take the training you already have and apply it. Kimble has zero teaching experience. But although the principal is uneasy with the idea of an undercover police officer posing as a teacher, he's able to put his experience to use. Kimble begins to apply his police training to deal with the kids. He uses his voice, his strength, his confidence and even his pet ferret to whip the students into shape. It's perfect case study of the power of *accidental preparation*, which is something each of us can tap into. Truth is, everyone has some reservoir of hardcore formative time that acts as creative training and lays groundwork for the years to follow. That of fertile soil where instinct and intuition flourishes. My father has been the chief executive officer of his company since I was a kid. He's very good at his job. What's interesting is, after forty years in the business, he's become one of the few elder statesmen in the industry. And to his surprise and delight, he's become an inspiring mentor to many young leaders in the industry. People from around the world seek out his counsel, insight and perspective on the closeout world. And he's delighted to share it with them. Considering the thousands of hours of training he's already put in, it's a joy to pay that wisdom forward to future generations. The point is, we're all accidentally preparing for something. We're all choosing our own path to success, even if we don't yet know the outcome. *What form of accidental preparation might become the appendix to your foundational development?*

In search of exquisite ordinariness. The child actors *made* this movie. Their innocence and imagination always made me smile. But as I watch it as an adult, I have a different perspective. When I look at these kids now, I'm reminded of how we're all born with a strong desire to assert our individuality. Especially artist types. We love to cultivate our personal mythology of ordained separateness. And we experience persistent pressure to meet our expectations for ourselves about what it means to be creative. But sometimes we go too far. Sometimes we get overly focused on being different and embodying our uniqueness and living an interesting, textured life worth talking about, that we forget to be real people living in the real world. This gap often manifests itself interpersonally. We bring too much outsider energy to our social interactions. Halfway through a conversation with someone, for example, we suddenly realize that we've crafted a personality that's intellectually overwhelming for people. We've become so weird that nobody knows what to do with us. The secret, then, is to ground ourselves in the exquisite ordinariness of life. To surrender to conventionality, even if only for a moment. It's actually quite liberating. And humbling. And healthy. And it makes us more complete as people. Best of all, it informs our art. Without the exquisite ordinariness of

conventional experiences, we may never bring our crazy ideas into the world. Ultimately, if we are to relate to and connect with each other as human beings, we have to manage our relationship to the world. We have to make efforts to feel less estranged, to become less of an outsider. *Are you unconventional in the right direction, or are you so far out of the box that there's nothing left for people to lean against?*

Reverse engineer your daily decisions. Once you identify the small collection of intrinsic triggers that stoke your creative fire, nothing can stop you. Once you learn how to activate your own internal generators, there's no reason you can't become prolific. It's simply a matter of fleshing out the drivers that motivate you on an hourly basis. One exercise for doing so is to sit down and physically map out every single decision you made on a given day. Phone calls you made, conversations you had, food you consumed, activities you did, people you saw, ask yourself, *literally*, why did you do what you did? You likely discover that most of your behaviors can be traced back to a handful of primary motivations. Several years ago I was **mentoring** an entrepreneur who couldn't stay motivated. With nobody outside of himself to be accountable to, trying focus felt like an exercise in futility. I told him he wasn't alone. Every entrepreneur gets distracted. It's almost impossible not to. With nobody to hold our feet to the fire, it's not always easy to get warm. And what's really tempting is to rationalize our way out of feeling guilty for poor work ethic, since there's nobody around to keep us in check. But together, we built out a system of collegial accountability. Kevin was an extrovert by nature, so we figured out that the secret to his motivation was regular meshing with the energies of other entrepreneurs. And so, by combining regular attendance at coworking spaces, peer networks, trade associations, artist collectives, mastermind groups and online programs, he slowly began to mitigate his motivation and accountability issues. And in time, his productivity got back on track. Even when he was working alone. *Are you a master of activating your own internal generators?*

209 -- THE PROCRASTINATION SCENE FROM SPONGEBOB SQUAREPANTS

Hard work pays off later, but procrastination pays off right now.

Spongebob has an assignment for boating school. He must write an eight hundred word essay before the next morning. The topic? What *not* to do at a spotlight. Riveting material. But like any good writer the day before a deadline, he's completely blocked. Absolute compositional paralysis. And so, instead of bearing down and facing the page, he starts doing household chores to distract himself. He even invents tasks for himself, just to keep the procrastination wheel turning. Eventually, though, after hallucinating that his house sets on fire because he can't write anymore, he finally completes the essay in the last five minutes right before school starts. This scene is a perfect example of misdirected creativity. Because his actions, while highly inventive and ambitious, are aimed in a useless direction. He's climbing to the top of the productivity ladder, only to realize it's leaning against the wrong wall. I'm reminded of a fascinating [article](#) I read about intellectual property law for magicians. Turns out, you can't copyright a magic trick. You can only copyright the pantomimes surrounding the trick. And yet, magicians will burn thousands of dollars and hours and calories trying to achieve justice in the court system. Another example of misdirected creativity. Copperfield, whose innovative illusions have been stolen countless times, made a great point. He said it's not always worth focusing important bandwidth on legal action when you can apply the same time and energy to creating something new and different. *Does your drive to excel exceed your capacity to procrastinate?*

Resistance comes in alluring packaging. I once coached a writer whose biggest challenge was creative procrastination. She was a master of artfully creating constant distractions instead of working. During our [brain rental session](#), she showed me the list of her peer review team for her upcoming book. It was massive. At least twenty different editors intended to comment on her manuscript. Which seemed a bit excessive, considering for the scope of the book. So I probed deeper. And the irony was, she wasn't even planning to listen to their feedback. Rebecca actually completely trusted her own voice as a writer. In fact, without her peer review team, she told me, her readers wouldn't have noticed the difference anyway. However, by sending the manuscript out for three months of editing gave her another reason to procrastinate. Isn't it astonishing the calories we are willing to burn in order to avoid the real work? We seem to spend half our time planning for things we *could* create if we didn't spend half our time planning. And it's not just planning, it everything on the day's long list of distractions. It breaks my heart. I'm reminded of an interview I read with a startup founder, who said that releasing people from

their dependency on email will free up the time and mental space needed to move the species forward. Amen to that. Every time I hear someone talking about getting their inbox to zero, I just want to scream at them and say, all the time you spent answering email, you could have been doing the one thing people really love about you. *What excuses do you make to justify your procrastination?*

Fill the deep wells of the absurd to the very brim. Bob's hallucination is the classic academic anxiety nightmare. I have this dream all the time. I show up on the first day of school, clueless about which classes I'm registered for. Or I show up halfway through the semester for a class I *am* registered for, but I haven't been attending all year. Or I show up on final exam day without studying, confronted with a test I'm not prepared to take. It's the worst. I always wake up with a racing heart and a head full of worry. Perhaps the test I face inside the classroom is a lesson I need to learn from my past? *Who knows.* But what's interesting about this scene is, the teacher ultimately decides to cancel the assignment and take the class on a field trip to a stoplight instead. She even tried to call him that night to give him advanced notice about the essay, but he was too busy not writing it. And that's the big question. Did his actions somehow influence the teacher's decision? Would the story have ended the same way if he'd been more conscientious with his work? Maybe it wasn't a writing exercise at all. Perhaps whole point of this experience was for him to learn a real life lesson about the ineffectiveness of procrastination. Considering all of his anxiety and energy went to waste and he spent the entire night doing tasks that ultimately meant nothing, I'd say he learned his lesson. *What lies are your excuses guarding?*

210 -- THE REINFORCEMENT SCENE FROM DANGEROUS MINDS

Log success into your long term memory. Louanne is confronted with a classroom of tough, sullen teenagers from underprivileged backgrounds who refuse to engage with any of the material. And so, she uses tangible reinforcement like free candy bars and field trips to the amusement park to engage the students. Which is basically bribery, but every leader has to crack open the door somehow. The point is, we all need concrete evidence of progress. Positive reinforcement that makes us more inclined to take further action. I once consulted with the president of a boutique web development firm. They rented my brain to help develop a culture of innovation. Not just people generating ideas, but also rapidly executing on those ideas. My recommendation was to create a company wide victory log. A real time register of individual executions to emotionally invigorate the team and keep momentum alive. They dusted off an old computer screen that wasn't being used, mounted it on the wall and kept a visual record of daily progress. A real time, digital log that posted concrete evidence of people's victories, big and small. The firm's president said the screen completely shifted the mindset of the office. It helped tip the scales toward happiness, boosted people's confidence and encouraged employees to celebrate all of their executions. That's the power of the victory log. It's designed to empower you with the daily successes you create. It trains your brain to recall your achievements, plants the positive in your mind and reminds you just how successful you really are. Even when times are tough. *Does focusing on the negative prevent you from taking the risks you need to be successful?*

Where your creativity feels most at home. If we are to greenlight our own creative desires, we have to completely trust our ability to create. We have to trust that our most imaginative impulses won't be hijacked by the primitive part of our brains. An essential building block of that trust is our *primary creative environment*. This is the collection of spatial assets that reflects who we are and what's important to us, so that our ideas flow as a natural consequence. It's the environment around you that allows for the best of you to emerge with the least amount of resistance. And while no two creative spaces are the same, the one commonality they all share is that they're generative. Any idea put into it the space multiplies exponentially. Systems theorists would call this emergence. Things come alive when their elements are integrated into one another. I find this to be true when I'm writing songs. Especially when I'm pacing back and forth between my digital and analog workspaces. Often times, in the middle of composing a chorus for one song, I'll accidentally write the bridge for another. The next thing I know, I'm borrowing energy from the

ideas themselves. And by the time the session is completely, I look down at a songbook full of ideas that exponentially. That's emergence. And it's only possible when you treat your physical environment as the user interface for your brain. *What if you built a three dimensional augmentation for your own imagination?*

The excitement at having discovered something worth doing. The word *project* comes from the word *proiectum*, or, something thrown forth. This is the core of what it means to be prolific. Throwing things forth. Melting the glaciers within you. Finding a productive obsession that galvanizes you and serves your meaning making efforts. Brainstorming and creating and organizing and executing ideas and enlisting smart people to help you fulfill your vision. Not to mention, discovering the ecstasy within the process of the work itself and experiencing sublime joy of seeing things come together to produce an artistic whole. That's a project. And the best part is, we respect ourselves when we do something we said we wanted to do. After all, one of our goals in life is to make ourselves proud. And we do that through endeavors that define our time on earth. For example, every time I stand in the void between creative projects, I catch a whiff of meaninglessness. Because I think to myself, *crap*, there's a huge hole in my life now, and I don't know how to fill it. To combat this anxiety, I consult my project list. It's a simple, one page document that stays open on my computer screen at all time. It lists every iron in my current creative fire, accompanied by several action items that need to be taken for each project. That way, every time I'm tempted to monitor moods, I'm reminded to make meaning. *Are you still hanging the fullness of your heart constant positive reinforcement and external validation, or are you able to make yourself proud?*

211 -- THE BROWNIE SCENE FROM NOTTING HILL

Good brands are bought, great brands are joined. This scene is about owning our weaknesses. Taking pride in the fact that we're all broken vessels aspiring to a lost wholeness, and using that vulnerability as the glue that binds us together. In fact, as dark and cynical and sad as the scene is, you have to appreciate the honesty shared around the table. No wonder it's the funniest scene in the whole movie. Too bad more organizations and teams don't apply this same candor to their own collective brands. As I often ask my clients, what happens when we know who we are? Everything. That's the upside of identity. Knowledge isn't just power, it's the engine of profit. That's why I'm so adamant about branding. Because it's not about what you sell, it's about the story you tell. It's about knowing who you are, who you aren't, and making sure that you're giving those values a voice through every touchpoint. I recently consulted with a small marketing team at a large consumer products company. They hired me to help their employees become more intentional about their personal brands. And so, I facilitated a strategic planning crusade to help them make their mission more than a statement. Together we created a rubric for operable behaviors at all levels of the organization. A collection of mantras against which they could execute their interactions. By the end of the workshop, the team had completely inspired themselves with their own ideas. They used the company culture artifact we developed together as springboard for putting behaviors behind values. What's more, the rubric became an organizing principle for their recruiting, onboarding and training efforts with new team members. And from that day forward, each employee was able to live the brand called me, while still remaining grounded in the brand called we. *What makes your mission more than a statement?*

The space between us. Ritual is the conscious practice of ceremonial acknowledgement. It's the layering of an intentional experience on top of an activity that makes it more purposeful. It's the medium through which we find our center of gravity, create meaning, affirm belonging and turn disconnected events into an ongoing story. In short, ritual is what gets us through the day. Whether it's a peer group, a work team, a sports squad or just two people who care about each other, without ritual, life will just happen to us. And so, if we truly want to protect, nourish and strengthen the sacred space between us, we have to develop *communication rituals*. Personalized norms of interaction. Unique language and habits and practices that allow us to identify what's happening in the space between us. Branded moments and environments and devices that allow us to process the things we sense into meaningful dialogue. This particular group's communication ritual is centered around dessert. Each

dinner guest attempts to win the last brownie by telling a sob story about their life. It's funny and honest and just competitive enough to keep things interesting. Misery truly does love comedy. But it's also proof that ritual isn't about size and time, it's about attention and intention. The generosity of giving yourself away to others, the thoughtfulness of expending intellectual energy for others, the physicality of burning real calories on others, and the creativity of expressing yourself to others. These things experiences are at the heart of what it means to be human. That's what I love most about this scene. It reminds that the grass is not always greener on the other side. That we rarely know what people have truly been through in their lives. And that sometimes, once we've watched everyone else lay down their cross, we take ours up again and think, wow, maybe it's not so bloody after all. *Under what conditions do you shut down communication?*

The hand draws lines, the eye judges proportion. Art books teach us how to draw, but they also teach us how to develop our sense of proportion. In figuring drawing, for example, they suggest drawing the entire figure from head to toe within a specified amount of time. Say, seven minutes. This constraint forces the artist to judge the accuracy of their lines, the alignment of the letters and the proper spacing between them, in relation to the whole. This lesson is priceless in the art world. But it's also necessary in the interpersonal world. Our job as human beings, after all, is to develop our sense of proportion. To be able to place people's behaviors in a context. And to judge the relative importance of things in comparative relation to the whole. I'm reminded of a useful practice my mentor taught me. It's a simple question we ask ourselves order to gain a sense of proportion with others. How is it possible that this person could think or behave in this way, and under what circumstances would it make perfect sense to do so? This question is a bell of awareness. A reminder that we're all trying to make sense of what it means to be us. The secret is to be curious, not judgmental. To be fascinated, not frustrated. And to remember that the greatest tool we can use when talking to people about their behavior is wonderment. Curiosity, after all, is the doorway to humanity. Through curiosity, we stop labeling and experience empathy. We view situations with an open lens and allow ourselves to see the world through other people's points of view. That's proportion. If its purpose in drawing is to make us better, more thoughtful navigators and judger of objects, let us apply that same principle to our relationships. *What are you seeing, that I'm not seeing, that I need you to help me see?*

212 -- THE STAPLER SCENE FROM OFFICE SPACE

Don't allow others to determine your priorities. One of our goals in life is to make ourselves proud. To decide to bite into something, do it really well, and then stand back and nod our head at the finished product. There's nothing quite like it. Finally, something lasting and uniquely ours. Something we have complete control over. Something nobody can take away from us. *Ahhhhh*. You can't beat that dancing smile of satisfaction. Meanwhile, there's an opposing force. The archenemy of our magical moment. *Opportunity*. That's the word that pins us down with other people's obligations and expectations and chores and work that stands in the way of the pride we long to take. And if we're not careful, we end up spending our life being everybody else's dream machine. I have a friend who always says that email is everyone else's agenda for your time. What a great concept. It doesn't mean we shouldn't be responsive and prolific in our communication, simply that we should set healthy boundaries with our attention. There's only so much bandwidth available. There's only so much altruism we can eat for dinner. And none of us are interested in becoming unpaid, part time career counselors for complete strangers. Look, we're all entitled to have our best interests at heart. We should all ask ourselves, is this an opportunity, or an opportunity to be used? If we truly want to make ourselves proud, we have to get good at rejecting new opportunities. If we truly crave the satisfaction of engaging in meaningful pursuits and projects, we have give ourselves permission to turn down requests from people who clearly don't demonstrate a deep respect for our precious time. *When someone is trying to steal your energy, what's your way of speaking up and stopping it?*

Bulldozing their way through the brick wall. This scene shows how certain people have a hard time saying no, but also how certain people have a hard time *hearing* no. When they find themselves on the receiving end of a rejection, insecurity and entitlement overrides their system, and they're unable to accept it graciously. No? Nobody tells me no? Nobody makes me bleed my own blood. Of course not. Because the word no doesn't give them the kind of closure they want. In fact, some people are highly skilled at pretending the word no doesn't exist. The minute somebody rejects anything they say or do, they instinctively pull down a curtain of denial in their mind and start bulldozing their way through the brick wall until they get to a yes. *It's admirable*. In fact, I secretly admire people with the bravado not to take no for an answer. Churchill, as you could have guessed, coined this famous phrase in his autobiography. He famously said to raise the glorious flags again, advance them upon the enemies who constantly gather upon the front of the human army, never submit to failure and don't take no for an answer. As a writer and

a romantic, I can certainly appreciate the poetry and grandiosity behind those words. Even as an entrepreneur, I can certainly attest to the usefulness of that mindset in the sales process. But there's a fine line between persistence and pathology. And so, we can't allow our narcissistic compulsion to make the sale and get our own way trump the human need for empathy. We're not toddlers. This isn't the playground. We're no longer entitled to everything we ask for. There is a reality beyond our own skin. And the tax we pay for living in that reality is the ability to accept the word no. To receive people's rejections as loving expressions of their boundaries.

I look forward to looking back on this. I've had periods in my life where my heart was a stranger to me. Where my work wasn't something I could put my best self into. But no matter how bad it got, I always believed that the skills I was building there contributed to my story as an individual. That the person I was becoming from that experience was more valuable than the experience itself. And that the work I did may not have become part of the organization's legacy, but it certainly became part of mind. I was recently mentoring a young entrepreneur on career transition and reinvention. One of the mantras I encouraged her to recite is, **I look forward to looking back on this.** It's especially useful when working a job that's wrong for you. Because nobody wants to feel like they're wasting their life on bullshit, so it's up to them to create meaning where none exists. The good news about bad jobs is, once you finally feel complete about that part of your journey, once you believe that you've done everything you were meant to do there, something inside of you shifts. A graduation is had. A milestone is passed. You feel like you have permission to land elsewhere. And so, with one eye on the receding horizon of your past, the future invites you to cross a new frontier, and you start making deep changes in your life. It's both terrifying and exhilarating. But you trust the process. You trust the soul to know its own shape. And you look forward to looking back. *Is this a hopeless endeavor, or the moment right before success?*

213 -- THE FRIENDS SCENE FROM I LOVE YOU MAN

Start from a place of constitutional commonality. According to leading sociology research, the three conditions crucial to making close friends are proximity, repeated, unplanned interactions, and a setting that encourages people to let their guard down and confide in each other. *Great.* That comes naturally when you're in college, but when you're working sixty hours a week, friendship is a different story. After a certain age, making new friends is hard. Because the working world isn't like college. We don't have the luxury of proximity, where there's a thousand people around every corner. And we don't have the benefit of the calendar, where there's a hundred organized activities every day. People get busy with adult pursuits like career and community and marriage, kids and the like. But while making friends as an adult is difficult, it's not impossible. The secret is finding centers of belonging to do the heavy lifting for you. Whether it's a work team, faith community, yoga studio, food coop, civic group, recreational club, meetup group, professional association, the goal is to find a sanctioned organization of which you can become an engaged member. Because relationships flourish when they start from a place of constitutional commonality. When people's brains make sense to each other. Which doesn't mean you should only befriend mirror images of yourself. But when you seek out people who have overlapping value systems, when you repeatedly connect with individuals who choose to make meaning in similar ways, most of the heavy lifting is already done for you. Now all you have to do is go deeper. One of the micro practices I find to be useful is reciprocal disclosure. I try to learn one new fact about each person, each time I see them, while also revealing one new fact about myself. This expedites intimacy, uncovers new points of connection and deepens the relationship. Even if only an inch at a time. *What are your centers of belonging?*

Kindred spirits will find each other. And when they do, they will recognize one another through an insider signal. A decoded moment. Some tiny detail that triggers a whole world, acts as shorthand for a shared culture, captures where the people have landed and encapsulates their edges. To me, this moment is sacred. Probably because it doesn't happen that often. So when it does, it's all hearts on deck. When I smell out someone's identity, one that resonates with my own, I start missing them in my past. I curse the world for not connecting us earlier in life. I see them as the friend I always wanted to have, and hope that they feel the same way. *I'm not a stalker, I swear.* The beautiful part is, all of this happens in an instant. Even if it feels like a lifetime. It's relativity at its finest. The dangerous part is, sometimes it happens so fast that we fail to recognize it. And we miss an opportunity to connect with

someone special. We have to keep our specs peeled. We literally have to date our friends. And if that means making mix tapes for each other, sending goofy emails to each other, bringing gifts for each other, writing handwritten thank you notes to each other, texting late at night to each other and being proactive about securing time slots for hanging out with each other, so be it. I'd rather flirt with another man than have nobody to go to lunch with. The point is, we can't be a bystander in our friendships. We have to break the box we've put around ourselves, battle our antisocial tendencies and trust that the world will be responsive. *When will you stop waiting for people to be friends with you and start sticking yourself out there?*

Triggering the friend mechanism in my brain. The hardest time to make friends is when we feel bad about ourselves. Whether we're experiencing pain, sadness, depression, loneliness, insignificance or a full blown existential crisis, nobody wants to start a new relationship with a train wreck. It's simply not an attractive feature. People want to make friends with happy people. Which is ironic, because that's precisely when we need friends the most. When things work the least. Most of us would agree that the biggest withdrawals from our human capital accounts seemed to occur when our life was at its lowest. *Funny how that works.* All the more reason to dig our wells before we're thirsty. To make friends before we need them. Because the only thing worse than feeling like shit is feeling like shit in a corner. That's why I'm hypersensitive to anything word that triggers kindred spirit mechanism in my brain. When I'm engaging with someone and we start peeling the onion, I never miss the opportunity to look them in the eye and literally say, *I like you*. Those exact three words. It's one of life's most satisfying, simple pleasures. And without fail, every time I do it, people light up. They smile with their heart's best face. Sometimes they don't even know how to respond. And this not some technique to win friends and influence people. There's just a certain honesty and innocence and nostalgia attached to those three words that's impossible to resist. Besides, after the age of thirteen, nobody really says *I like you* anymore. Maybe it's time we brought that phrase back.

214 -- THE CLASSROOM SCENE FROM PARENTHOOD

Good stories don't happen by accident. Our ability to create joy and delight and awe, to make the mundane memorable, that's a muscle we can train. It's the intentional and attention intersection of generosity, humanity and surprise. I'm reminded of this amazing bed and breakfast, whose guest service philosophy is, you can take a minute, but you can make a moment. You mustn't over look anything, for the only element left to chance is the degree of delight the moment brings. Brilliant. That's the mindset with which each of us should approach our interactions. To constantly ask ourselves, what could I do or say that would cause this person to look up in disbelief and wonder, *wow, did you do this just for me?* That's eventfulness. It's an awareness plan. It's a lens for interacting with the world. A metacognitive procedure or mental recipe for perceiving and thinking about the environment around us. When I used to park cars at a luxury hotel, my team was literally trained to think this way. We were taught to search for what might make a moment special for someone. To create interactions that guests never expect, but always remember. I remember one particular wedding in which the keepsake was a small, glittered high heel shoe. The bride was a fashion designer, and she wanted to thank her guests with a small token of her creativity. And so, instead of setting the shoes on the tables, we individually placed them on the dashboards of six hundred cars. It took a few hours, but you should have seen the looks on people's faces. Unforgettable. A sparkly reminder that if life is a story, we may as well put something good in it. The only caveat is, eventfulness without purpose and consistency is just a stunt. There's a fine line between creating a moment and making a spectacle. Remember, it's the intentional and attention intersection of generosity, humanity and surprise. *What might make this moment special for someone?*

Identity is the doorway to initiation. Once we know who we are, anything is possible. With a mastery of our own motivators, triggers and meaning making mechanisms, we can override almost any excuse. Allow me to use myself as a case study. I *know* the constructs that motivate me the most are a blank canvas, a personal ritual, a captive audience and a strategic challenge. Those are the frameworks within which I can execute and stick with almost any new behavior. As long as whatever I'm engaged in checks one of those boxes, fulfillment is never far away. Years ago when I finally became fed up with my own aversion to initiating conversations with loved ones, I decided to create a new ritual. Every week, I would write them letters. Nothing formal, just simple expressions of my thoughts and emotions. Whatever feelings were on my mind at the time. And what I found was, the letters lowered the threat

level of initiating. They got the communication ball rolling. Almost like a runway. The jumping off point for further conversation. And looking back, I realize why this strategy worked. It combined two of my deepest motivators, *writing and ritual*. Because as a consummate creator, it's easier for me to communicate with my mouth once I've already done so with my fingers. And as a consummate ritualizer, it's easy for me to do something if I can superimpose a layer of meaning over the experience. That's how I tricked myself into taking action. I found my trigger and milked it. Proving, that identity is the doorway to execution. If we want to remain prolific, we must become masters of activating own internal generators. *What is the meaning making mechanism that motivates you?*

Simple hospitality is worth its weight in gold. In a world that seems to have forgotten how to be warm, forgotten how to build social capital one interaction at a time, taking twenty seconds to extend a welcoming gesture of thoughtfulness has never been more important. Because we all know what it's like to be the new guy. We all battle with the tension between alienation and assimilation. And so, while we don't have to be somebody's best friend, it wouldn't hurt to be their *first* friend. That's all they're looking for. A social on ramp. Someone to help them get started on their journey of belonging. The secret is tapping into our love language as we extend our arm. For example, gift giving is my love language. And so, if making a new friend takes less than fifteen minutes or cost less than fifteen dollars, to me, it's worth it. There's just something about that small, thoughtful, creative, unexpected gift that lights people up, makes them feel seen and lives in their memories forever. When I started working with a new designer who moved to the city from Florida, I picked up a bottle of fresh squeezed orange juice and left it on his desk. That's how easy generosity is. Take a moment, make a memory. Just a few minutes, just a few bucks. The resulting gift is the single drop of epoxy that keeps our relationships glued over time. Proving, that generosity does not have to be financial to be memorable and important. Also proving, that hospitality is so rare, it's become remarkable. Human beings are a species whose prime feature is its social nature, which means we have a moral obligation to be welcoming to each other. *Whom are you making a new memory with?*

215 -- THE BAR SCENE FROM HITCH

No labels, no limits. When I first ventured into the online dating world, I didn't have a type. There was no vision of perfection I was specifically looking for. I just wanted to find someone special. So I cast my value into marketplace and opened myself to whatever the world had to offer. And to my delight, I found exactly what I never knew I always wanted. But only because I gave up putting labels on what type of person that was. Business works the same way. Before you first open your doors, you're relentlessly instructed to imagine your perfect customer. Your ideal buyer. Then again, who are you to say who that person is? For all you know, your perfect customer could be somebody you've never even heard of before. Better to position yourself generally and invite clients to say you're perfect for *them*. To be the bullseye, not the arrow. Weiss makes a brilliant point in his latest **book** about this very distinction. A generalist versus a specialist, he writes, is the difference between fishing with a huge net or a sing rod and reel. You can always throw fish you don't want or can't handle out of the net while you retain the ideal fish. But whatever you get on that rod, you have to pull in one at a time and, even if you win the battle, it could be the wrong fish. Ultimately, if we want get clients to want us to come do things for them, we have to release our expectations and labels about customer perfection. Our goal, after all, is to broaden our appeal, so that we might become a partner and resource for the customer's holistic improvement. Once we starting narrowing it, we become so focused on catching the big fish, that we let the small fish swim right by. *Are you locking yourself into a title or a label or a filter that diminishes your applicability to potential clients?*

Enjoy an adventure in restraint. Hitch is a professional date doctor who coaches other men in the art of wooing women. Even though he doesn't really do anything significant besides giving his clients confidence and allowing them to get the attention of the women by simply being themselves. What I love about this scene is, he practices tremendous restraint. Which is exceptionally hard when you're interacting with a person in need. It's so tempting to try to solve people's problems too quickly. But you can't help yourself. When somebody flatters you with their need for guidance and insight and counsel, something about their words activates the problem solving impetus of your brain. And you immediately go to work trying to finding solutions for them. Unfortunately, this can backfire. You can become oppressively helpful. You can add too much value, amp ourselves up into a intellectual fervor, wondering why they're not as excited about this idea as we are. And as a result, your relentless generosity actually deflates their enthusiasm and dampers their commitment to finding answers on their own. *Woops*. When I first started

coaching artists and entrepreneurs on how to become more prolific, I quickly learned how to keep my problem solving mechanism in check. Yes, there were clients with whom I needed to be firm and direct. Yes, there were times when I need to disturb people into take action. But in many cases, what people needed was someone to grant them the space to solve their own problems. Because in the end, you can't convince people to change, you can only give them more information. Next time you're given the opportunity to advise and mentor others, enjoy an adventure in restraint. Whitman knew what he was talking about when he said, now I, not anyone else, can travel that road for you, you must travel it for yourself. *What happened to the last person you tried to fix?*

Grow an ongoing, market wide hunger. I was reading an **article** written by an entertainment business attorney, who said that love is frequently at first sight, but not always. In order for love to grow, he explained, we have to be in someone's field of vision on a regular basis. It's powerful advice in the dating world, but perhaps even more powerful in the world of business. Because our goal as professionals is to grow an ongoing, market wide hunger for the value we create. I receive emails every week, seemingly out of the blue, from prospective clients who want to hire me. And it's always the same conversation. When I ask what prompted this particular request for my services, they explain that they've been reading my blog for a decade. Or they subscribed to my newsletter five years ago. Or they've been following my career for a while, but only recently got into a position where they had the budget to hire me. Either way, this conversation always reminds me just how important it is to stay in people's field of vision. Even if it's been ten years. Even if I don't understand the conditions under which my work blipped on their radars. Carlin said it best. *Keep putting things up on the shelf, keep interest up on a mass scale.* Longevity, therefore, is the ultimate leverage. Once you've been around long enough, talent and success take a back seat to history and persistence. Yes, you still have to be good. And yes, you still have to deliver. But a big chunk of your credibility is, they've heard of you. You never went away. That way, when it comes time to make a decision, it's that level of continuity that gave you the right to pull your chair up to the table. That's the ultimate sales closer. Earning your way into people's memories by remaining in their field of vision consistently. *Whose radar have you fallen off of?*

216 -- THE FINAL SCENE FROM LIMITLESS

Internalize the foundation. Information is only the beginning. How we *encode* that information is what truly influences our ability to be creative with that knowledge in the future. It's what moves us from raw data to crystalized intelligence. It's what allows us to bring intellectual capital to the table. And so, if we want surges of brilliance to come up to meet us at the perfect creative moment, we have to do more than just learn things. We have to metabolize them. Because the human brain, according to the latest neuroscience research, forgets information at a rate of one bit per second per active neuron. Which doesn't sound like much initially, until we remember that that the brain has approximately one hundred billion neurons. No wonder we can't remember anything. But that's something I've discovered as a writer. Anyone can design a better system for encoding information. It's just a matter of routine. Anytime I learn something new, I don't just capture it. I also concentrate on it, comprehend it, categorize it, comment on it, compose around it, converse about it, collect around it and continue to cognize about it. This encoding process, which could take anywhere from days to weeks to years, integrates and synthesizes the original piece of information into my system, making it part of my being. Like an enzyme. That way, when I sit down to write a book or strategize with a client or compose song or facilitate a workshop, I can trust that my own creative mechanism will be there for me. *How do you encode information that you learn?*

The drugs we use don't let us leave them alone. Eddie says that once you know what's in a drug, you can tweak it, reengineer it, get the bugs out and taper off. It's a perfect metaphor for the creative process. Take writer's block, for example. Compositional constipation, if you will. We *could* drink milk of magnesia, but the problem with laxatives is that we never learn how to push on our own. It feels good and it cleanses the system and it gets the gastrointestinal job done. But as my mentor used to say, when we give ourselves a crutch we don't need, we develop a limp we shouldn't have. As creators, our job is to be able to get things moving without outside assistance. To be able to gain perspective and control anytime you feel that we've lost it. And to fire inspiration into ourselves, instead of waiting for lightning to strike and then chasing the flame. I had my own version of this when I first started my career as a writer. I would wake up early every morning, get dressed as if I were going to a real job at a real office with real people, and be out of the house by seven. I did this every day for three years. It built my foundation for discipline, commitment and professionalism. And eventually, I reached a point where I didn't need the drug anymore. I could do the work without the crutch.

Because my synapses changed. They settled into a productive groove. The daily practice triggered the work subroutine in my head, created a long term muscle memory for the task of writing and ultimately allowed me to perform it without conscious effort. *What's your creative crutch?*

Output is limited only by the amount of input. If you're wondering why somebody ships more great work than you do, it's probably because they read more than you do, listen to more music than you do, subscribe to more podcasts than you do, take more notes than you do, write down more ideas than you do and go out into the world more than you do. Output is limited only by the amount of input. We are only as inspiring as we are inspired. Show me a blocked artist, and I'll show you a person afraid to inhale the beauty and joy and pain and love the world has to offer. The secret, then, is creating a system where ideas flow as a natural consequence of the way you live your life. A framework for inspiration that's as unique as the art you create. And not just a haphazard mental recipe for getting ideas, but a literal visualization of your own creative process that shows how your brain gets those ideas. Consider making a drawing, matrix, mindmap, chart, infographic, or some other kind of design that shows the world how your mind works, what special language you use to describe your creative process, and how that allows you to be prolific in your daily life. As an example, take a look at **The Prolific Framework**, which is my personal intellectual property development system. This curriculum literally unpacks the process I've been using for the past twenty years to collect, create and communicate my ideas. *Are you knowledgeable about where and how your new ideas sneak up on you most easily?*

THE PROLIFIC GLOSSARY

A LEXICON FOR REWRITING YOUR CREATIVE VOCABULARY

When In Doubt, Commit is a follow up and companion book to my previous book, *Prolific*, which is an intellectual property development system. It's a course curriculum that guides people through the art and science of collecting, creating and communicating their ideas.

A key component to that system is learning and employing a robust vocabulary of creativity. It's a language that permits you to communicate with yourself and others about the creative process, helps you make sense of the otherwise ambiguous world of creativity, empowers you to speak a language that supports your intentions, and allows you to conceptualize and describe your experience of creating.

And so, my hope for you is to build a lexicon of words and phrases that allow you to converse about creativity. You'll find that building a working vocabulary of what it means to be prolific, you'll significantly better your chances of managing the creative process.

Each of the following phrases is indexed with multiple reference points including articles and other external resources from this book, allowing you to integrate as many or as few of them as you wish.

1. **Active listening.** Tuning into the muse and the situation and the gleams of light that flash across your mind, **trusting** what the world is trying to tell you.
2. **Accidental preparation.** The hardcore formative time that fosters dreams, acts as creative training and lays groundwork for the years to follow.
3. **Aggressive pondering.** Deliberately creating a situation or framed experience in order to have an arena in which to work out an unresolved issue.
4. **Arbitrary sorting mechanism.** An organizing **principal**, free of judgment and expectation, which allows you to notice patterns in your ideas and inspiration.
5. **Artist debt.** Periods when we become disconnected from our primary creative joy and fail to achieve our quota of artistic usefulness

6. **Artistic withdrawal.** The physiological readjustment required after we've been addictively working on a creative project for a while.
7. **Associative trigger.** Personal patterns and physical objects, from music to visual stimulation to desk style, that echoes the habits of action and allow you to enter into your creative zone.
8. **Awareness plan.** A metacognitive procedure or mental recipe for perceiving and thinking about the environment around you, a lens for interacting with the world.
9. **Bacon.** A motivational currency that overrides your excuses, activates your natural inclinations and moves you to execution.
10. **Boundary moments.** Existential distresses or identity crises in which our motivation for doing something is just to feel normal again.
11. **Bridging.** The art of making connections and noticing natural relationships between seemingly unrelated ideas.
12. **Centering sequence.** A daily ritual that brings your brain up to operating temperature in order to run properly.
13. **Centerprise.** A tool that enlists unique aspects of your authentic personality to enhance your ability to sell, making the commerce component of art easier to swallow.
14. **Cognitive richness.** The sense of agency and competence you experience during the process of manual or analog work.
15. **Compound interest.** The capacity to generate more and more value over time through slow, unsexy, but consistent creative increments.
16. **Catchall.** The central lever that galvanizes the whole machine, the crucial stone that kills all of the birds and the single activity that can be trusted to take care of everything else.
17. **Clearinghouse.** A destination where you can unite all of her interesting elements, intermingling your interests and themes into a meaningful, cohesive whole.

18. **Commitment device.** A physical object or prototype that makes the effects of your work real and visible for all to see, even in the early stages of production.
19. **Constant.** Muscles to count on, places to return to, rituals to abide by, people to confide in, rocks to anchor to, practices to rely on, structures to lean against, that keep your creative life stable and fruitful.
20. **Containment.** The balance between safeguarding your artistic vision to protect intellectual property and passionately sharing your ideas with the world.
21. **Content detachment.** The creator's obligation to empty himself of any expectations, perceptions, hierarchies and value chains attached to his ideas.
22. **Creation selling.** When the artist, whose inventory is as vast and varied as their imagination allows it to be, leverages the process of creation to expedite the practice of selling.
23. **Creative commitment.** A theoretical constraint of treating your art as a daily practice, professionalizing your art and using daily momentum to keep yourself from feeling detached from the process.
24. **Creative expectation.** An attitude that improves an artist's ability to spot their next opportunities when it materializes.
25. **Creative kindling.** A source of inspiration that reignites your original enthusiasm and the impulse that initially fueled your artistic energy reserve.
26. **Creative limbo.** A lack of excitement around not having discovering something worth doing, an inability to turn yourself over to a new creative project.
27. **Creative on ramp.** A ritual that prompts a work mindset, a moment that merges you into the creative process, an environment that sets a tone that says *work happens here*.
28. **Creative subroutine.** Using a ritual that brings up your energy and snaps you into the appropriate state of mind to do your work.
29. **Creative uniform.** A wearable identity totem that prompts a work mindset and sets a tone that says to your brain, work happens now.

30. **Deep democracy.** Treat everything we encounter with fundamental affirmation and radical acceptance.
31. **Digging your creative well.** Accumulating ongoing reference files for your brain to work on through a passive, unconscious process.
32. **Discipline transplant.** Doable, less threatening strategies to enable your ideal mental, emotional and existential space from which to create.
33. **Distributed cognition.** New ideas that arise from combining many disparate pieces of information or concepts over an extended period of time.
34. **Distribution.** Anybody or anything who has influence on someone who can buy your work.
35. **Domain transferring.** Bringing ideas from one field of knowledge into another by asking, *what else is like this?*
36. **Early warning system.** A personal seismograph that helps us take preemptive action against impending inner turmoil and anxiety.
37. **Ember of initiative.** Instead of taking things personally, you channel them productively, using emotion as oxygen for your creative fire.
38. **Exhaling.** The creative season of expression, or output, meaning shipping work out of the factory.
39. **Existential anchor.** Portable, purposeful and private sanctuary that brings you back to center to reconnect with the self, the body, the spirit and the heart.
40. **Faithful forces.** Routines that keep your creative life stable and fruitful when circumstances get a little too overwhelming.
41. **Fertile idleness.** Hustling while you wait and leveraging downtime into something creative, productive and meaningful.
42. **Firing blanks.** A period of work in which you're running on fumes, soaring past point of diminishing returns and need to reload the creative chamber.

43. **Fragmentary associative process.** Creating ideas in a piecemeal, nonlinear fashion, without the constraints of chronology, sequence, rational order and narrative.
44. **Going perpendicular.** Intentionally walking away from your current work to engage in something unrelated to the flow of activity.
45. **Good low.** When life hands us a pile of shit, we strategically convert that experience into creative resources of energy, fertility and happiness.
46. **Gradualistic creativity.** Rejecting the notion of the elusive eureka moment and practicing an existential and holistic approach to a creative life, living your life in a way that your art gets done over and over.
47. **Gravitational order.** Using motion to create equilibrium so your work finds its place in the universe, thus conspiring towards some unifying geometrical situation.
48. **Ground zero.** The entry point into the creative processing workflow, the primary location for offloading raw materials into your idea factory, the central cockpit of creative control.
49. **Homebase.** A place or community where you can commune your fellow artists and lock into the historical, societal and institutional frameworks of your creative world.
50. **Hyperfocused expression.** The little world you investigate to a great, high level, something that fascinates and ignites you.
51. **Identity based creation.** Tapping into your native endowments and limitations of creativity, motivation, inspiration and intelligence and channeling them in the service of making your ideas happen.
52. **Incrementalism.** Building a body of work based on a practice of patience, delayed gratification and continuity.
53. **Industrious revolution.** The initial calorie burning experience of unpleasant and inconspicuous production that fortifies an artist's appreciation delayed gratification.

54. **Inhaling.** The creative season of inspiration, or input, meaning listening for what wants to be written.
55. **Inspiration framework.** Metacognitive, ritualistic or recreational tactics for finding inspiration where no one else is looking.
56. **Integration.** Employing the whole of your personality, talents, gifts and experiences to contribute the highest amount of value and firepower those around you.
57. **Internal revolution.** Updating the identity story you tell yourself after spontaneously doing something you didn't realize you could do.
58. **Intrinsic triggers.** A unique set of inputs that stoke your creative fire. Little moments that let you clothespin a piece of stimuli onto your psyche for further evaluation.
59. **Limitation leverage.** Identifying your deficiency, deciding how to exploit it and then restructuring everything in the creative process around it.
60. **Making room.** Relieving your brain the necessity of remembering, freeing up your working memory to opens your mind to receive new ideas.
61. **Meaning context.** Making motivation significantly easier by reframing an activity as being existentially painful not to do.
62. **Medium agnostic.** Instead of forcing our own expectations upon the work, you allow patterns to emerge and open our work to becoming more dimensionalized, in whatever form it needs to live.
63. **Mini sabbatical.** The opposite of ambition, the antitheses of labor, in which you leave the creative land alone for a given period of time.
64. **Moment of conception.** The single spark of life that signals an idea's movement value, almost screaming to you, something wants to be built here.
65. **Momentum device.** An elegant excuse just to have ideas and validate the process with a sophisticated piece of office technology, building your confidence, commitment and competence.

66. **Movement value.** The discipline of recognizing conceptual beginnings, witnessing ideas in their nascent state and fully fleshing out your work.
67. **Natural collaboration.** Creating a more visceral and spontaneous contact with your work by designing systems and structures that invite nature as your collaborator.
68. **Neighbor.** Something that already exists the audience's head that becomes a mental hook upon which you can hang future ideas.
69. **Operational farsightedness.** Due to our utter dedication to wider market demands, we fail to note the needs of our intimate ecosystem.
70. **Opportunity agenda.** A form of second order imagination, it's the inherent enterprise to notice creative opportunities, apply force and propel them into interesting directions.
71. **Organizing principle.** The core assumption, central reference point or guiding pole, which governs action and allows everything else in its proximity to derive value.
72. **Paper thinking.** Experiencing your ideas kinesthetically by writing down whatever is rising up from within your depths, saving judgment for later.
73. **Pause buttons.** A personal, portable toolbox of strategies for reducing the experience of anxiety on a moment's notice.
74. **Pausing.** The creative season of intermission, or throughput, meaning managing your ideas as an inventory system.
75. **Peripheral creation.** The secondary activities of your creative process that involve more speed and less skill, i.e., editing and formatting or networking and billing.
76. **Permission.** The mental construct of notenoughness that prevents, delays or derails the progress of your creative work.
77. **Permissionless platform.** An honest canvas where you can be completely free, expressing whatever you want, as loud you want, as much as you want, in the way that you want.

78. **Physical displacement.** A problem solving technique whereby working in unusual settings helps you see patterns you wouldn't have noticed otherwise.
79. **Placeholder.** A surrogate piece of content that helps budget time and keep production going until a better idea comes along.
80. **Polyamorous creation.** Pursuing relationships with multiple creative projects, with a full knowledge and consent of all partners involved.
81. **Portable creative environments.** Any alternative workspace that functions as a transportable lightning rod, tailor made to your artistic tendencies, which enables you to snap into work mode and make the word flesh.
82. **Proxy.** A contextual prototype that does a lot of the strategic heavy lifting before you open your mouth.
83. **Positive tension.** Painting yourself into an accountable corner through eustress, which forces you to reckon with the infallible judgment of reality.
84. **Preliminary trigger.** A simple, easy and incremental tool that activates the creative process and grows your executorial victory bank.
85. **Premature cognitive commitment.** When people become emotionally or intellectually bound to a course of action, a form of mindlessness that results after a single exposure to an idea.
86. **Primary creative environments.** The essential environment asset that reflects who you are and what's important to you, so that the ideas flow as a natural consequence of that workspace.
87. **Principal creation.** The primary work unit of your creative process that requires focus and craft, i.e., putting words on paper or clicking the shutter.
88. **Proactive unconscious.** Viewing your mind as idea processor, waiting at your beck and call, begging you to assign it a problem so it can immediately go to work for you.
89. **Productive selfishness.** Scratching your own itches, making the art you want to see in the world and channeling creative selfishness in a direction that benefits civilization.

90. **Progress rich environment.** Surrounding yourself with concrete evidence of progress to emotionally invigorate yourself and make you more inclined to take further action.
91. **Prolificacy equation.** An incrementalist, easy does it approach to creating a body of work, which is everything you create and contribute and affect and impact.
92. **Promiscuity.** Providing multiple entry points for your audience through a continuous, voluminous level of output.
93. **Prototype.** Something that gives your mental obsession a physical expression, a physical thing that adds energy to the system, moves the creative ball forward and gives the creator the psychological pat on the back.
94. **Reverse providence.** Helpless situations where the world seems to be orchestrating the ideal conditions to prevent you from reaching your goal, creating a web of incidents and meetings and material assistance whose sole purpose in life is hold you back.
95. **Ritual of leave taking.** Microstructures that celebrate the completion of a period of work, slow down the creative process and set healthy boundaries to demarcate the line between work and nonwork.
96. **Ritualized vomiting.** A daily ritual of emotional release where you metabolize your experiences, make serious mental headway into your ideas and get the creative faucet flowing.
97. **Runway.** Your first creative output that builds momentum, paves the way for prolificacy and does the talking for you.
98. **Safety container.** A space without circumference where judgment can't enter, a free venue where ideas can run free without the scrutiny of readers, critics, editors and yourself.
99. **Selective indifference.** Being discerning enough not to dwell on meaningless matters, conserving your best energies for your creative efforts.
100. **Self organization.** Some form of global order or coordination arises out of the local interactions between the components of an initially disordered system.

101. **Side door.** Increasing output by expanding the definition, changing the context and lowering the threat level of your work.
102. **Solvas perambulator.** Using rhythmic, repetitive exercise or action to clear your mind, stabilize your emotions and increase the production and release of endorphins to pump the well of creativity.
103. **Stalling maneuver.** Buying yourself time in group meetings, interviews and presentations, so that you can collect your thoughts and build anticipation around your message.
104. **Stiletto moment.** Concentrating our portfolio of talents into a tight little package that demonstrates the full firepower of our creative arsenal.
105. **The shove.** The decisive interaction in which a trusted friend eventually compels and artist to make a key change or take a massive risk in their creative life.
106. **Thievery muscles.** Respectfully and ethically other people's ideas as sparks to superimpose your own meaning and take the idea somewhere else, somewhere different, somewhere better, until the original idea can no longer be identified.
107. **Tourniquet.** Creating a healthy sense of distance from your work by damming up the creative flow, compressing the circulation and applying enough pressure so there's an explosion waiting for you when you're ready to return.
108. **Unconscious rumination.** Allowing your inner mind to get to work mulling over, sorting out, organizing and categorizing material that has been previously absorbed, ultimately generating an idea at a time when the mental spotlight isn't on it.
109. **Unfinishing.** Approaching the creative process as a fluid experience, viewing each piece of output as a constantly evolving organism, within the ecosystem of my larger body of work.
110. **Uptime.** The period of time when our creative machine is functioning and available for use.
111. **Victory dance.** A small, customized reward that commemorates the fruits of your motivation and equips you to be what the moment requires.

112. **Walking the factory floor.** Creating the ritual of an established parcel of structured curiosity, whereby you casually and thoughtfully peruse every idea you've recently accumulated.
113. **Wherewithal.** Everything creator need to buttress the opportunity to make art, including knowledge, resources and courage.
114. **Whitespace.** Defining yourself by the work you decline, so as to avoid the erosion of your time, the decay of your focus and the meaninglessness of your work.
115. **Working modular.** Treating each thought as an uncategorized chunk of creative material, an objective, portable piece content that accumulates and categorizes into its own structure.