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Scott

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Hire Yourself

How to Burn Your Resume and Build a Career That Counts

By Scott Ginsberg

I never went to the career fair.

I just hired myself and got to work.

And after ten years, I still haven't been fired. Which is surprising, as I'm the most unemployable person on the planet.

The cool part is, taking the road less traveled doesn't just make the biggest difference in your life – it also enables you to make the biggest difference in other people's lives. And there has never been a better time to be an entrepreneur.

There are forty-two million independent workers in this country.

Why aren't you part of that number?

Instead of waiting to be plucked from obscurity, this book will help you stick your fingers in your ears and create your dream job. It will challenge you to stop asking, "Who's going to let me?" And start wondering, "Who's going to stop me?"

Ready to burn your resume?

With this 366-day digital devotional, grab your lighter and come with me.

1. **A diploma isn't the end of education.** A good boss wouldn't let you get away with that kind of thinking. Instead, she'd challenge you create a learning plan. To expand your expertise. To form opinions on relevant issues. And to build a school of thought around your unique philosophy. Besides: When you stop learning – you stop earning. You stop living. And you stop growing. Not exactly the best employee, huh? Consider asking yourself: What's your personal development gameplan? What's your method to sustain lifelong education? And what's your system for retaining relevance in the eyes of the people who matter most? These are the questions that will help you create an environment where learning is stressed and build a space where you can assimilate, internalize, master and move on. *What are the obstacles you create that hinder a full engagement with your learning?*

2. **Absurdities become antidotes.** Every day when I slap a new nametag on my shirt, I remind myself of what Einstein once said: “If at first your idea is not absurd, there is no hope for it.” Interestingly, Einstein’s greatest scientific discovery sparked from a mental picture he had when he was sixteen years old. One day, while taking a walk, Albert envisioned himself riding atop of beam of light into outer space, traveling at 299,792,458 meters per second. That ridiculous image helped him better understand accelerated motion. Which helped him create the Theory of Relativity. Which changed the world of science forever. Which earned him the Noble Prize. Which secured his spot in history as the greatest genius of all time. Why? Because of a totally ridiculous, totally humorous image. In the book *How to Think Like Einstein*, author Scott Thorpe explains how this principle of melon motivating works: “Brains have a mechanism that is the mental equivalent of an immune system – it rejects ideas that are foreign to it. But humor suppresses your mental immune system. So, if you treat a new idea humorously, you will be able to explore it more thoroughly because you want immediately reject it. And your mind will be free to make other absurd connections with the seed idea, generating more concepts for solutions.” Remember: Revolutionary ideas come from ridiculous questions. *What are you converting your absurdities into?*

3. **Accept fear as an inevitable part of the equation.** Taking the road less traveled is simultaneously invigorating and intimidating: On one hand, you're thrilled by the prospect of adventure; on the other, there's a stream of urine running down your leg. And that's the question I'm consistently asked by fellow road-less-travelers is, "Do you ever get scared doing your own thing?" And my response is a resounding, "Are you kidding me?" Dude, I'm a human being – *I'm scared every day of my life*. In fact, if I wasn't scared – then I'd really be scared. Because if you're not scared, you're not stretching. And if you're not stretching, you're not mattering. The difference maker is, winners know how to convert their fear into fuel. They know how to displace the impact. Personally, whenever my body notices a fear response, I write it out. Not just because I'm a writer – but because writing is one of the few places in my life where fear doesn't exist. It can't. I refuse to give it oxygen. Writing is where I call fear out on its face, watch it suffocate and then use its ashes to color my canvas. The cool part is: These fear moments tend to produce the strongest, truest material. Kind of makes peeing your pants worth it. *What successes are you missing out on because you're not accepting, loving and leveraging your fear into fuel?*

4. **Accept that the planets will never be aligned.** Don't wait until everything's perfect. Don't wait until you know what you're doing. Don't wait until you're experienced enough. Don't wait for overwhelming evidence to trust yourself. Heighten your impatience. Plunge into the vortex of action. And jump off the high board hoping there's water below. Otherwise procrastination – the redneck second cousin of procrastination – will rob you of the motivation you need to carry in the cavalry charge. *How will you leverage impatience as fuel for your motivation?*

5. **Accept that you'll never be ready.** Admit it: The reason you're still dragging your feet is because you've still convinced that having a plan is necessary. It's not. Failure isn't the product of poor planning – it's the product of timidity to proceed. You can't allow yourself to be stopped by not knowing how. Try this: Lower the threat level of your jump by pulling a partial. Ask yourself: *What is an easy, inconsequential version of this scary action I could take right now?* Challenge yourself to execute three of those a day. Repeat that enough, and you'll either get the whole thing done incrementally, or sustain enough small victories to pull the trigger when the time is right. *Not perfect, but right.* Look: I know you're scared. I also know that constant, determined action cures fear, builds confidence, develops courage, generates inspiration and vaporizes stress. *What other risky (but reasonably) jumps can you make today to move forward?*

6. **Accept the existence of your shadow.** Sometimes we're too close to ourselves to see the truth about ourselves. And if we don't customize a system for exposing our blind spots, the chance we take on ourselves becomes too risky. As Rob Bell explained in *Love Wins*, "When sameness takes over, when everyone shares the same story and when there is no listening to other perspectives – there is no stretching and expanding and opening up." That's why I'm eternally thankful for my girlfriend: Her thinking is often perpendicular to my own. And as my partner, she's in a unique position to give me an invitation into myself, lead me into my blind spots and remind me of just how moronic I can truly be. Who's your partner? Who could you admit into your life as a teacher? Whether it's your spouse, significant other or business partner, ask them to reveal to you what you're too in love, too proud or too close to yourself to see. It might hurt your ego, but it definitely helps your chances. Remember: Anytime you can invite intellectual diversity into your life, it makes it easier to expose your unperceivables. *What are you afraid to know about yourself?*

7. **Accept the uncertainty of the journey.** Personally, I love not knowing. It inspires the hell out of me. In fact, I think intelligence can be impediment. Because if you think about it: If you knew what you know now, you probably never would have started. Instead, try this mantra: “Don’t be stopped by not knowing how.” That’s what I live my life by. After all, life is boring when you know all the answers. And sometimes what you know limits what you can imagine. In my experience going my own way, you have to leave room for the unexpected. To attend to life wherever it moves. And to get lost regularly and excitedly. Otherwise you end up giving up on the moment before the miracle shows up. Look: Hugging uncertainty is an act that entails commitment of the heart. And it will take all of you. But without it, your addiction to knowing how will make the journey a lot rockier. Remember: Uncertainty is an exhilarating dance. Take its hand and spin it for the world to see. *Have you accepted fear as an inevitable part of the equation?*

8. **Access trumps ownership.** Google eliminates the need to buy and own books. Pandora eliminates the need to buy and own music. YouTube eliminates the need to buy and own a television. Online storage removes the need to buy and own external hard drives. That's been the biggest cultural shift over the past five years: Nobody owns anything anymore. Everything you need is either available for free or shared for cheap. Like landlines and online privacy, owning things is a thing of the past. "Consumers have more choices, more tools, more information, and more peer-to-peer power," says Lisa Gansky, author of *The Mesh*. "Smart companies create, share and use social media, wireless networks, and data crunched from every available source to provide people with goods and services at the exact moment they need them, without the burden and expense of owning them outright. And there is real money to be made and trusted brands and strong communities to be built in helping your customers buy less but use more." Take Zipcar, for example. They changed the game of personal transportation by making it easy and affordable to have a car whenever you need one, without actually owning one. Brilliant. Therefore, because access trumps ownership, your challenge is twofold. First, to make friends with free. Identify which of the many models of free your organization is going to leverage. Otherwise The Rapture will leave you behind with the rest of the dinosaurs. Second, deploy assets your customers don't have to buy, but can easily access. By reducing the burden of ownership and offering wider access to your value, you can change the game forever. *Are you still trying to charge customers for a cow they're already milking electronically for free?*

9. **Acquaint yourself with delayed gratification.** The fewer footprints on your path, the more patience will be required to travel it. Fortunately, while hard work pays off – hard waiting pays millions. And besides, it's not like you're idle. There's a difference between sitting on your ass, playing video games, hoping your ship will come in – and hustling while you wait to extend the reach of your dock. The first secret is to be patient with your mistakes. And you have to remember that a mistake ceases to be a mistake the moment you choose to learn from it. As Joseph Campbell reminds us, "Our treasures lie where we stumble." The second secret is to be patient with your profits. Personally, my company didn't make money for the first three years. Knowing this would be the case; I worked nights and weekends parking cars at a local hotel to make ends meet. Hey: You do what you have to do. The final secret is to be patient with your progress. Look: I know you're worried that you won't be able to build on your current situation. But be careful not to get addicted to the sweet nectar of progress. You can't start on next if you suck at now. The good news is: While going where there is no path takes longer, at least the scenery is better. Remember to enjoy it. *How patient are you willing to be, and how productively are you willing to work in the meantime?*

10. **Act from embodiment.** Eventually, you start to become the thing you've been teaching. That's what my mentor tells me. That after a certain number of years, every leader wakes up one morning, looks in the mirror and thinks to himself: "Wow. I am the message. I am my own best case study. The word has become flesh." Are you there yet? If not, be patient in learning to live physically what you know intellectually. It takes time to become the physical embodiment of your understanding. Meanwhile, my suggestion is to smoke what you're selling. Audit your own consistency by asking tough questions like: *Is the message you're preaching the dominant truth of your life? How well do you resemble what you worship? And are you living your faith out in the world or lip servicing your beliefs from behind a desk?* Remember: When you align your onstage performance and backstage reality, it's easy to act from embodiment because your life becomes your preparation. As I remind my clients, "It took my entire life to write that sentence!" *Does your life enshrine what your lips proclaim?*

11. **Activate gravitational order.** In Ed Sylvia's metaphysical masterpiece, *Proving God*, he writes that motion organizes and creates order. And through motion, all things tend to their equilibrium and find their place in the universe, thus conspiring towards some unifying geometrical situation. That's the next secret to throwing your heart over the fence: *Don't be stopped by not knowing how.* How is overrated. How is a dream destroyer? And how is the excuse you use to talk yourself out of committing with both feet. Instead, give uncertainty a hug. Trust the process. And believe that throwing your heart over the fence doesn't require an intimate knowledge of how the fence was built. All that matters is motion. All that matters is initiative. Even if you're clueless, terrified and broke – it's amazing what happens when you just start moving. The universe applauds your faith and bravery and, as Paulo Coelho says, conspires to help you follow your dream. Look: You don't need to take the tour and stall for another month. Stop dragging your feet. Just get a guess pass and plunge immediately into action. And let the world say yes to you. Remember: You don't have to get good to get going; but you do need to get going to get good. *When was the last time you did something for the first time?*

12. **Adjust your measurement horizon.** I think competition is overrated. *There. I said it.* Competition is overrated. And there's no way I'm the only person who feels this way. Ever meet someone who converted every interaction into a contest? Doesn't it just make you want to crawl into a downtown dumpster with an open sore on your big toe? I say: Relax your posture. Life's too short to morph every element of your existence into a competition. Sure, the competitive spirit is healthy and natural and has historically motivated many great things. But it's a beautiful moment when you realize that you're no longer anxious to prove your value. And the best part is, the less you have to prove, the less other people feel threatened around you. So, the secret to self-esteem isn't removing competition, but redefining the subject with whom you're competing. My theory: The only person worth competing with is the earlier version of yourself. Because it's not about being better than anyone – it's about being better than you used to be. *Are you competing with unbeatable opponents?*

13. **Administer a heroic dose of reflection.** One of the ways my clients use me is as a small group facilitator. It's a nice break from being the guest speaker, as I don't have prep as much. Instead, my life is my preparation. All I have to do is show up and make sure people feel heard. During a recent retreat with forty company leaders, we ran an exercise called "Lifelines." It required participants to divide their lives into thirds and extract powerful lessons from pivotal moments along the way. Unexpectedly, what amazed me about this process was how uncomfortable it made certain people. Turns out: Not everybody reflects. For any number of reasons: Some people don't value reflection. Some prefer not to dwell on the past. Or, some people simply aren't as introspective as others. On the other hand, some people choose not to reflect – probably subconsciously, I imagine – because they're scared of what they might learn about themselves. It's the same reason people refuse to journal daily. It's the same reason people in my yoga class refuse to meet their own eyes in the mirror. And it's the same reason I have stacks of footage from past speeches that I will absolutely never, ever watch. But maybe that's the solution. Maybe administering a heroic dose of self-reflection is the only way to scare yourself into the next version of yourself. *When was the last time you watched yourself on video?*

14. **Admit that you're never really ready.** Shoot for eighty percent – then jump. Declare it done. Proclaim, “The hay is the in barn.” Because eventually, you’re just going to have to jump into the water with your clothes on and trust that you’ll figure out how to swim before the water fills your lungs. Even if you don’t think you’re old enough, smart enough or experienced enough. Here’s a newsflash: Nobody is. Nobody ever was. If they were, they would have done something else sooner. This reminds me of my friend Perry. He’s a marriage counselor who reminds his fearful couples: “You will never have enough money to have a baby.” Same thing for you: If this career, this art, this calling is your baby; you’re not going to be fully ready to have it. May as well get pregnant anyway. *What is waiting getting in the way of?*

15. **Align individual dreams with mutual values.** Enrolling your loved ones into your dream is a continual process of constitutional alignment. That's the secret to bringing people on board: Helping them understand that *the thing you do* is in direct connection with *the person they are*. Otherwise they'll never cross that threshold. My friends Kim and Jason Kotecki come to mind. Their company, *Escaping Adulthood*, educates people worldwide on how to add fun to and subtract stress from their lives. But it didn't start out that way. Originally, it was just Jason's comic strip. Ten years later, their characters (both in person and in print) took on a life of their own. Now, Kim and Jason deliver strategies to their audience via multiple channels: They write books. Deliver workshops. Create artwork. Conduct interviews. Produce videos. And build learning systems to cure people of *Adultitis*. The cool part is, Jason and Kim personify a healthy alignment between their dreams and values. "Although we hold very different roles in our enterprise," Kim told me, "both Jason and I share the core mission of wanting to serve children. That way, whether we work with parents, educators – or the kids themselves – we're able to combine our vision with our values." Lesson learned: If you want to make something more meaningful to people, align individual plans with shared purposes. As best-selling author Tom Winninger once told me, "The finish magnifies the quality of the wood. And when people see themselves in the reflection, they will buy your furniture." *Do your loved ones see their values reflected in your vision?*

16. **An occasional undercurrent of self-doubt is healthy.** While some people maintain more self-efficacy than others, everyone has their doubts. And this is a good thing: Doubt protects you. Doubt is a warning system. Doubt keeps you humble. Doubt inspires you to become better. Doubt motivates you to achieve great things. Doubt gives you permission to explore alternatives. Doubt helps you keep checks and balances on yourself. And doubt forces you to examine what you think and why you think it. Be careful not to underrate it. Think of it as useful timidity. Accept it as a symbol of success and leverage it to your advantage. *What are you questioning?*

17. Answer the invitation to evolve. Early in my career, my mentor gave me a warning: “If you’re giving the same speech you gave six months ago, you’re doing something wrong.” Ever since that conversation, I’ve vowed never to give the same speech twice. Partly because I’d get bored, but mostly because I believe in evolution. Not just with the planet – but with the person. And that’s the reality every leader has to confront: If you refuse to make upgrades, there will be a self-imposed ceiling on what you can accomplish. If you insist on keeping yourself encapsulated in a cocoon with people who are just like you, you’ll never take your gifts to their highest potential. Here’s my warning: Give yourself permission to explore options for your future. Otherwise you’ll deadlock yourself on a path that might not lead where you belong. The point is: Your followers want nothing more than to watch you evolve into something much greater than anyone could expect. May as well give them a show to remember. *In the last six months, how have you upgraded yourself?*

18. **Anticipate the bumps.** After four years of taking the road less traveled, my body finally started to pump the breaks. Hard. From stomach cramps to chest pains to irritable bowels, the road sign was clear: *Slow the hell down, Scott*. Too bad it took three hospital visits for my ears to get the memo. Woops. Either way, I'll never forget what my surgeon told me the recovery room: "You've chosen an unusual career path, and your body needs to learn how to adjust to it." And it did – eventually. But only because I learned how to relax. Literally, those were my doctor's orders: *Do something deliberately relaxing, every single day*. Have you incorporated that practice into your daily schedule yet? If not, start today. It doesn't matter how you do it – only that you do it. Humans might be hardwired to withstand struggle; but without this ritual, you're likely to crash and burn. Look: It's called the road less traveled for a reason. If you don't expect the pavement to be poor, that's exactly how you will end up – poor. Because it's not that this can't happen to you; it's that this is happening to you – and just doesn't make sense. Not yet, at least. *What foundations are you building today to handle the speed bumps of tomorrow?*

19. **Applicability is the bridge between information and insight.** Anyone can be a vending machine of good information. Only a true thought leader could bridge the gap. The difference is: Information is just content; insight is a penetrating mental vision. *Which one do you deliver?*

20. **Ask hater questions.** If your competitors don't currently hate you, what could you execute in the next week that would get them to want to strangle you with an orange extension cord? Ask this question to yourself and to your team every Monday morning, you'll have more haters than you'll know what to do with. Then again, you'll also have more customers than you know what to do with. It's like my mentor Jeffrey Gitomer says, "When my competitors come to my website, I want them to hate my friggin guts because they know their website is a piece of junk!" *Does your competition hate you?*

21. **Ask people you trust.** Find ten people you trust – whose opinions matter – and ask them to reflect your value back to you. Specifically ask them, “What do you think I’m the answer to?” The cool part about running this exercise is, their impressions might not be what you think. That’s the tricky thing about self-awareness: It’s rare that you define your own value. You’re simply too close to the subject to make an objective assessment. Your mission is to “sit in the assembly of the honest,” as The Bhagavad-Gita instructs. Then, ask people to reveal what you’re too close, too in love, too blind or too proud to see. *Are you standing on a whale fishing for minnows?*

22. **Assertively choose not to take action.** As much as I advocate execution, sometimes the best way to break the mold is to do nothing while the rest of the world scrambles in fear. I've actually tried this before, and the results are stunning. Silence truly is eloquent testimony. And the world almost always pays attention, too. Try this: Next time chaos erupts, choose not to mindlessly follow the masses with the standard-issue fight or flight response. Instead, try the third option. The one nobody tells you about: Freeze. Become the calmest person in the room. The strength of your stillness will shatter the mold into a million pieces. Remember: Courage comes from the paths you choose not to pursue. *What action can you avoid this week?*

23. **Audit the company you keep.** Life's too short to surround yourself with people who don't challenge and inspire you. If you want to compress time, play with people who are better than you. That way you can absorb their experiences, sponge from their knowledge and grow from their mistakes. As Pink Floyd's David Gilmour once said, "You have to put yourself in an environment where you get your ass kicked." That's why I don't have a mentor – I have a galaxy of mentors. And the accumulated insight from each of their life experiences compresses my time beyond belief. Just make sure you're not bypassing real experience. Becoming a clone of people you admire gets you nowhere. The point is: If you can't whistle while you work, you may as well hustle while you wait. *As every unforgiving minute passes by, will you be disciplined enough to practice fertile idleness?*

24. **Audit your process.** Write a step-by-step guide on something you take for granted. “If there’s a process you take for granted that you don’t often see other companies writing about, break it down into a step-by-step guide,” says Amy Harrison of Copywriting That Counts, “What seems normal to you might just elevate you to expert status in someone else’s eyes.” *Which of your “duh!” moments will become other people’s “omg!” moments?*

25. Baseline remarkability isn't enough. Crystal Pepsi was remarkable, but irrelevant. It was nice, but not necessary. That's the trap many organizations fall victim to: *Being remarkable for the sake of being remarkable*. Most of the time, this is the result of falling in love with your own marketing. And the problem is: If there's no sustainability and substance beyond baseline remarkability, you never transcend nice. The goal is to seek enduring remarkability. My suggestion: Listen to people tell you what's not working for them. Hell, you can even ask them: "What urgent, expensive, important problem do you have – that nobody else is attending to?" When you become known as someone who acknowledges what's been tragically neglected, someone who overcomes the poisonous accumulation of unsatisfied customer wishes, necessary will be an understatement. Remember: People can tell their friends all they want about you. But if there's no substance to anchor your shtick, if there's no pervasive problem-solving to support your product, you won't last. Any number multiplied by zero is still zero. *Do you truly offer meaningful uniqueness?*

26. **Be a virtual extrovert.** In the pivotal book *Jim and Casper Go to Church*, I learned the difference between “outreaching,” which is inviting people to join your group, and “inbreaking,” which is joining an existing community action. According to my friend and occasional mentor Jim Henderson, “We can find out what groups in our community are already doing to make life better for people and join them. Rather than start groups, we could join their groups. Rather than join groups to convert people, we could join them to connect with and serve people.” Next time you go online, try this: Consider the types of members you hope to attract. What groups are they already a part of? What role in the community do they currently occupy? Create a gameplan to take a more active role in those spaces. People will notice. Remember: People shouldn’t have to adjust to you. You need to adapt for them. Less outreach, more inbreak. *Who life are you willing to become a part of?*

27. Be a vital component, not just a helpful addition. A few years ago, my friend John Janstch told me the secret of his blog commenting strategy: *Don't just comment – contribute.* Now, although we're not talking about blogging today, the same general principal applies. You have to transform yourself into a value-adding machine. That's how you move from nice to necessary: By not being selfish with your knowledge. By positioning yourself as the only path to fulfillment. By positioning your expertise in such a way that people wouldn't dare go into the marketplace without your opinion first. And by sharing your expertise generously so people recognize it, embrace it and eventually depend on you for it. Soon, people in your office, people in your network and people in your marketplace will start coming to you for your time. Because they won't want to make a move without consulting you first. Remember: If your absence doesn't make a noticeable difference, why would people bother inviting you back? You want to become so imminently significant, that your client's world crumbles when you're not around. *When you walk out of a room, how does it change?*

28. **Be an obstructionist.** Nothing illegal, Tex. Just the willingness to raise your hand and say, “Wait a sec – that’s not right.” This is the baseline posture where all mold breaking begins. When you let the world know that you’re not content to be a cog. When you refuse to let the illusion play. Instead, as an obstructionist, you stand up when everyone else stands mute. Then, inflamed with ardent desire, you verbalize your frustration and raise a howl of protest. That’s the only way anything will ever get broken around here. E.E. Cummings was right: “To be nobody but yourself in a world that’s doing its best to make you somebody else, is to fight the hardest battle you are ever going to fight.” Remember: Breaking the mold means breaking the silence. Make your voice heard by the people who matter. *Have you raised your hand today?*

29. **Be aware of the wake you're leaving.** When you dare to descend down the unknown path, certain reverberations will always ring elsewhere in your life. For example: Have you considered the repercussions your unconventional journey will have on the people closest to you? Definitely something to think about. After all, your relational support structure is your pillar. And while you don't need their permission to take the road less traveled, you still need to put yourself in their shoes. In Leslie Parrott's inspiring book, *You Matter More Than You Think*, she offers solid insight on the relational response to the people who take the road less traveled: "When you choose to be true to yourself, the people around you will struggle to make sense of how and why you are changing. Some will find inspiration in your new commitment. Some may perceive that you're changing too much. And some may feel you're abandoning them or holding up an uncomfortable mirror." Whatever happens, be more patient with them than they are with you. I know it's not easy soliciting the support of the people who love you the most. But success never comes unassisted. Without buy-in from (most of) your loved ones, the road less traveled becomes very windy. *How much longer can you pretend that what you do doesn't have an effect on people?*

30. **Be careful what you build.** I had an idea for a treehouse and ended up building a skyscraper. Never saw it coming. Never saw myself as much of an architect. But as I lean over the ledge and let my eyes tumble down the side of the glass, all the pieces fit. This edifice, this thing that I have built with gallons of blood and sweat and whatever bodily fluid was required at the time, isn't just some project, some arbitrary eruption. It's a public index of my values. It's a tree on which the fruit of my bravery hangs. What's strange is – and I never thought I'd say this, but – ten years later, I think I would be okay letting it all fall to the ground. *Are you willing to let the city crumble?*

31. **Be exceptionally educated.** My other mentor, Bill Jenkins, once wrote a sermon called, “The Cost of God’s Gifts.” Oxymoronic as it sounded, his theory was right: Knowledge creates its own enemies. Not that you should memorize the encyclopedia, get a bunch of degrees and introduce yourself with four acronyms after your last name. Education comes from experience, intelligent reflection upon that experience and disciplining yourself to catalogue what you learned from that experience. If you do that every day of your life, you’ll become a fountain of wisdom and insight. That people will want to pee in. *What did you write yesterday?*

32. **Be gloriously explicit.** What do all coaches and consultants have in common? *Nobody knows what the hell they really do.* Because of low barriers to entry, minimal training requirements and mass-market saturation, coaching and consulting are poorly defined service offerings. Which makes most coaches and consultants nice – but not necessary. For that reason, five years ago I introduced a first-of-its-kind service called, “Rent Scott’s Brain.” People bonded with it instantly. More importantly, people bought it instantly. That moved the service from nice to necessary, because it offered people (who valued my thinking) access to a one of a kind product. That’s your mission: To show people exactly what you do so they can decide whether or not they need it. I’m not just talking about honesty – this radical transparency. Making no qualms about what you do, what you don’t do and what happens when you do it. *How explicitly are your service offerings defined?*

33. **Be less intentional.** Most of the crazy ideas that changed the world started out as mistakes, accidents, coincidences, serendipity, jokes or experiments. For that reason, my first suggestion is simple: Don't try so hard. As the *Tao De Ching* reminds us, "Any over-determined action produces its exact opposite." Learn to relax your ears, soften your gaze and poke about the world in a playful, relaxed and curious way. By virtue of your receptive, open and flexible posture, you'll be able to snag crazy ideas as they cross your path. Otherwise, your overly goal-oriented attitude will scare them into hiding. It's like Thoreau said: "Happiness is like a butterfly – the more you chase it, the more it will elude you. But if you turn your attention to other things, it will come and sit softly on your shoulder." *Will you apply that same principle to your creative search?*

34. **Be memorable for the right reasons.** What are you known for? What are you known as? And what are you known for knowing? Those are the keys to memorability. However, if your intention to become memorable is misguided, malicious or so focused on profitability that you disrespect people, you lose. Being memorable for the wrong reasons is worse than being forgotten. Remember the 2006 World Cup? When the captain of France head butted a player from Italy? That was the last thing he was remembered for prior to his retirement. Not smart marketing. *Why do you want to become memorable?*

35. Be not obliged to the mirage of limitation. Don't brainwash yourself into believing that you're a one-trick pony. Employ a little artistic diversity. Integrate everything in your life into your expressions. And taste the full scope of your creative power. I started practicing this heavily a few years ago. I was curious about myself, so I decided to explore new ways to make use everything I was. From shooting educational videos to writing poetry to creating innovating new media through which to deliver value to my clients, expressive limits became a thing of the past. Here are a few questions to ask yourself: *Which of your skills do you rarely get the opportunity to use at work? What personal skills have you not tapped into yet to add value to your customers? What personal skills have you not tapped into yet to build your business?* You might be pleasantly surprised at the firepower of your creative arsenal. *Where do you limit yourself?*

36. **Be not overwhelmed by circumstances.** Be not imprisoned by the moment. Struggle not against the inevitable. As my friend Neen James says, “Assess whether whatever is happening is in your control or not. If it is, decide whether you want to change it. Then, if so, ponder if it would even be worthwhile to expend the energy doing so.” By exercising this type of internal communication, you cease to be imprisoned by external conditions. *How could you hold your own feet to the fire?*

37. **Be patient with parade rainers.** As you passionately tell people about your work, some will attempt to steal the wind from your creative sails. They'll ask you questions like: "So, is this all you do?" "What's your real job?" "And does that actually pay the bills?" I know. It's frustrating, rude, assumptive and negatively propagates the starving artist script. But don't get upset. Remember: When people ask questions like that, it's a projection of their artistic frustration and insecurity. And they're not "just looking out for you," even if they defensively claim that right after spending ten minutes shooting down your dream like mallard on the first day of duck season. The reality is, when they see or hear about your full time career, their defense mechanism silently screams, "But I couldn't make it an artist or entrepreneur, so why should you?" They see something in you they either wish they had, or did have at one point, but lost. As Steven Pressfield also reminds us from *The War of Art*, "When we see people living their authentic lives, it drives us crazy because we know we're not living our own." My advice: Don't take it personally. It's got nothing to do with you. *When people rain on your artistic parade, how do you respond?*

38. **Be the exception.** Nothing pisses people off more than when you refuse to imprison yourself by adopting the illusions they blindly accepted as rules. If only they had your persistent sense of self-protection. If only. Sadly, most people are other people. They allow the world to dictate what they want and what's important to them. You, on the other hand, are the exception to every rule. Or, you change the rules so you can win at your own game. Or, you change the game completely so there are no rules. Either way, people hate you for that. Well done. *What rules don't you subscribe to?*

39. **Be the origin, not the echo.** A few weeks ago I heard a fascinating interview on my community radio station. The lead singer of a local rock band shared his contempt for the abundance of average found in popular music. He suggested an idea for anyone trying to make it as an artist: “Stop playing what other people are already copying.” If you want to embed this idea into your own work, my suggestion is to create a mediocrity filter. A customized, self-accountability audit that keeps the average out. You might try posting a list of questions above your computer to remind you to be the origin, not the echo. For example: *What makes this distinct from the masses? Would boring befriend this? How am I putting my personal stamp on this? What mediocrities do I need to set fire to?* Whatever it takes to prevent you from becoming a copy of a copy. Remember: There are no cover bands in the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame. Don’t let your potential for awesome become blocked by the interference of average. *Are you allowing your own visions to propel you on a quest for originality?*

40. Be unwaveringly vigilant about the company you keep.

And, keep away from. Who you choose not to hang with defines you just as powerfully. Plus, self-esteem is a function of respectfully and resiliently silencing the negative voices that attempt to infiltrate your positive reality. Don't get sucked into the vortex of petty mindsets. Become a public spokesperson for your values by personally amputating anyone who doesn't believe in or support you. Life's also too short to hang around people who don't challenge and inspire you. *Are you still wasting time on relationships you've outgrown?*

41. **Bear the responsibility for what you've become.** There's nothing more existentially agonizing than noticing a part of yourself that you don't like; and then realizing that you're the primary reason it's there. Cognitive dissonance doesn't just hurt the heart; it scares the soul. But then again, this might be the best thing that ever happens to you. Maybe reaching the point where you can't stand yourself anymore is the only way to upgrade. After all, from great suffering comes great awakening. That's what happened to me: I reached a point where the distaste for who I'd become (finally) scared me enough to change everything. And I crawled out of the minefield alive. Stumbling but surviving. My suggestion: Stop hypnotizing yourself. Don't allow yourself to jump back into the dark hole you've made to hide in. Grab your liabilities by the lapel and drag them out into the daylight. As I learned from *Mirror of Truth*, "When you eventually take responsibility for what you've become, you stop pulling punches, making up mitigating circumstances, and start to understand a little more about yourself. And you realize that you're not that different from everyone else. You've just admitted to yourself that you have a lot of work to do before you're ready to look at yourself in the mirror again." Remember: You are the result of yourself. If you don't like the final product, go back and run a quality control check on the production process. Even if you pee your pants on the factory floor. *Do you have the courage to take full responsibility for everything you think, feel and do, without blaming yourself?*

42. **Become a student of crazy.** First, read these books: *Ideas That Became Big Business*, *Inventors At Work*, *Accidents May Happen* and *Selling The Scream*. Next, visit my friend Andy Sernovitz's blog, *Damn I Wish I Thought of That!* He'll keep you up to speed on unusually useful ideas for smart marketers. Finally, think of five people you know who had a crazy idea, saw it through, and used it to change the world. Buy them lunch. Probe their brains. And keep your eyes open for the commonalities in their thinking. These resources combined will increase the probability of replicating the same attributes with your own idea. *Are you willing to dedicate yourself to studying the anatomy of crazy?*

43. **Become fans of your fans.** Take Pearl Jam, for example. After twenty years of rocking, they no longer care about the labels. Or the radio stations. Or the record stores. All that matters is the music. Giving the fans that love it something to believe in, according to Eddie Vedder's 2007 *Rolling Stone* interview. And not surprisingly, Pearl Jam has outlasted most of its grunge rock counterparts. They've sold sixty million records worldwide, many of which were bootleg recordings of live shows to give people a chance to relive their concert experience. All because Pearl Jam was a fans of their fans. What about you? Are you giving your people a reason to ditch the mainstream and follow you into the sunset? After all, love is a circular transaction, says the aforementioned Robbin Phillips. And if you want to change the game, you stop making war on the competition and start making love to your customers. *Whose jersey are you willing to wear in public?*

44. **Become the guardian of your mind.** It's one of the few things you have control over. May as well get good at it. Here's how: First, learn to spot toxicity. Declare: "You will not infect me with your misery." Especially to negative people whose orbit of hot trash attempts to infiltrate your reality. Next, decide to withdraw support from destructive people. Affirm: "I'm tired of being edited by you." Especially to insecure tossers who insist you squeeze yourself into their nice little mold of a perfect person. And third, promote yourself to general manager of your mindspace. Avow: "I choose not to participate in the fear of the world." Especially to poisonous mass media banditos whose sole purpose in life is to scare you into buying whatever unnecessary pseudo-luxury their advertisers vomit all over airwaves. *What are you finished listening to?*

45. **Become your own source of worthiness.** The term “esteem” comes from the Latin *aestimare*, or “to estimate.” Therefore: Self-esteem is how you estimate yourself. It’s the overall appraisal of your personal value. And if you want to make sure permission doesn’t eclipse your dream, here’s my suggestion: *Stop competing with people other than yourself.* Life’s too short to morph every element of your existence into a competition. Sure, the competitive spirit is healthy and natural and has historically motivated many great things. But it’s a beautiful moment when you realize that you’re no longer anxious to prove your value. And the best part is, the less you have to prove, the less other people feel threatened around you. Which means the secret to self-esteem isn’t removing competition, but redefining the subject with whom you’re competing. My theory: The only person worth competing with is the earlier version of yourself. Because it’s not about being better than anyone – it’s about being better than you used to be. That’s how inner permission grows. *How do you supercharge your own self-esteem – even when the world thinks you’re nuttier than a bag of trail mix?*

46. Being picked keeps you passive. You don't need a resume. You don't need an internship. You don't need another degree. You don't need more credentials. And you don't need to attend another industry convention just to kiss the collective ass of a bunch of crusty veterans who still put the word "the" in front of Google. What you need is initiative. What you need is an enterprise mentality. What you need is stand on the edge of the abyss and choose to fly. What you need is the desire to take massive action combined with an abundance of chutzpah. That's how you say yes to your own value. That's how you reject the tyranny of being picked, says Seth Godin. Because if you're just waiting to be discovered, you're just going to end up waiting tables. Make yourself the default. Change the rules so you can win at your own game, change the game so there are no rules, or become the exception to every rule. Because you can't hire yourself if you're not interactive, reactive and proactive. *Are you waiting for your big break, or manufacturing your own big breaks by making yourself more breakable?*

47. Believe in the availability of your own answers. If you want to follow your heart, the first step is to establish an internal dialogue with yourself. That means you have to dive in and see what unfolds. Only then can you create the necessary space to hear what your heart is whispering to you. My suggestion: Repetitively ask the following question right as you drift off to sleep: *What am I afraid to know about myself?* In my experience, it's not a question – it's a catapult. And that's the cool part is: By the time you wake up, the answers are waiting for you. Even the ones that sting. And when they present themselves, your only job is to stand steadfast in that knowledge, and then execute from that place of true knowing. The rest is just gravity. Remember: You know you're free when you don't have to bury things anymore. *If overnight, a miracle occurred, and you woke up tomorrow morning and your problem was solved, what would be the first thing you would notice?*

48. **Believe in the dividends.** Every time I start working on a new idea, I constantly remind myself: “There will be more.” More details. More resources. More answers. More everything. And this affirmation builds my confidence, relaxes my brain and alerts the Muse that she can move at her own pace. And even if I only make minimal progress today, I believe in my heart that more art is on the way. That’s the posture to practice when you trust the process: *Easy does it. Keep it casual. Establish gentle flow.* Soon enough, your rhythm will develop. And the dividends will come. The cool part is, once you achieve a few victories with this strategy, your experience bank fills with success stories to dwell upon. That’s when trusting the process gets fun. All you have to do is roll the mental footage of the last time it paid off. *How strong is your belief in the dividends of your process?*

49. **Bend your boundaries.** Sometimes the best way to trust yourself is to test yourself. After all: If you never test your limits, you never transcend them. The challenge is, testing means surrendering. And surrendering means being vulnerable. This is a terrifying prospect for many people. Especially if you're one of those neurotic control freaks who shits a brick anytime someone tries to make you abandon your pace. To help preserve your sense of control, consider these three words: *Bend, don't violate*. That's the key to effective boundary management: Being flexible enough to bend when needed, while still honoring your constitution and without compromising foundation. I'm reminded of what Alan Watts wrote in, "You don't grab a hold of the water when you swim." That's how you trust yourself: You let the water swim you. Even if it's lightyears out of your comfort zone. *Where are you willing to bend?*

50. **Beware of editors.** When I was a kid, my older brother used to make fun of me for thinking. Not for thinking a certain way. Or for thinking about certain things. *Just for thinking.* Like, it wasn't cool to just sit in your room and dream. But I didn't care. I was going to think no matter what. That's just who I am. The cool part is, now people actually pay a lot of money to rent my brain. Sounds like all that thinking paid off – literally. What's more, sounds like choosing (not) to listen to every negative comment that came my way paid off. What about you? Who's trying to edit you? Who, in your life, is actively attempting to discourage you from being your truest self? Your challenge is to assess if their comments are constructive criticism or destructive projections. That's all self-esteem is anyway: Deciding whom to listen to. It's how you estimate yourself. The overall appraisal of your personal value. And if you want to make use of everything you are, you have to begin by fundamentally, positive self-regard. *Who are you allowing to edit you?*

51. **Beware of excessive restraint.** Commitment changes everything. I believe this down to my bones. At the same time, there's a paradox you'd be silly to ignore: The deeper you commit to something, the more likely you are to become so wrapped up with that something, that your desire becomes bigger than what you're committed to. And that's when people start to get hurt. That's when commitment becomes a detriment. Take it from someone who's been guilty of commitment to the point of detriment: *Overcommitting can be dangerous.* Consider these cautions: Don't disrespect others because you're too fixated on getting your own way. Don't allow healthy boundary management to morph into self-righteous entitlement. And don't blindly follow outdated plans that have no relationship with reality just to avoid looking inconsistent with your commitment. Stick to your guns, but don't shoot yourself in the foot. Stand your ground, but don't step on people's toes. And if you realize that you threw your heart over the wrong fence, that's cool too. Own it, clean up the blood and go find another fence. *Are you a victim of your own conviction?*

52. **Block out why time.** First of all, if you haven't paused to honestly ask yourself why you're starting over, you'll never learn what life expects from you. Asking why ensures the pieces fit from the start. Asking why enables long-term survivability. Asking why assures you're not dying for something you're not willing to die for. And asking why prevents a flawed assumption from sending the entire process of transition into misguided motion. The cool part is: Once the muscle of why is bulging and throbbing, everything else from that point on becomes easier. As Nietzsche observed, "He who has a why to live can bear *almost any how*." *What's scary is the confrontation. The reflection. Looking yourself in the eye and saying, "Alright. No bullshit: Why am I really starting over?" Because if you don't anchor yourself in that sense of purpose, the waves of change will toss you around like a tugboat boat in the tempest. Are you at war with how when you should be in love with why?*

53. **Blow the barriers to powder.** Jason Fried is the cofounder and president of Chicago-based collaborative Web-application company, 37signals. He's also the author of my favorite book of the year, *Rework*. "Getting real is less," he writes. "Less mass, less software, less features, less paperwork, less of everything that's not essential. And most of what you think is essential actually isn't." Love it. Love it. Love it. Now, the reason Jason's a game changer is because his software company sells a suite of web tools architected around open-source programming frameworks. According to his interview with *Timeout*: "When you lower the barriers of entry, powerful applications (that formerly might have taken months) are executed in a matter of days." Lesson learned: To change the game, first pave the way for a new era of players. What about you? How will your organization make it easier for people to participate in your process? After all, it's not about technology – it's about extending usability to new industries. And you don't need to write software – you just need to surrender a little control. *How are you enabling people to take your idea into their own hands?*

54. **Boundaries are the bodyguards of commitment.** I create and publish a staggering volume of material each year. And my readers, audience members and clients assume that I'm incredibly disciplined. *Which I am.* But the bigger picture is: I'm not just disciplined – I'm obsessively committed to what's really important. I've developed massive intolerance for the inconsequential. And my focus filter doesn't allow bullshit to enter without a few alarms going off. Here's one of the questions I ask myself every day: *Is this an opportunity, or an opportunity to be used?* That's the ultimate commitment question. You might want to write it on a sticky note and keep it above your desk. Because if you don't set healthy boundaries for yourself, people will set them for you. And then they will violate them. And out of guilt, you will overcommit to them and undercommit to yourself. This is not fair to your dream. You need to learn how to say no. You need to practice putting a stake in the ground. And you need to be unwaveringly vigilant about the company you keep. After all: It's impossible to throw your heart over the fence if your feet are firmly planted in the ground of other people's obligations. *What people in your life don't respect your commitments?*

55. **Bow to the door of next.** Next is my favorite word in the dictionary. For many reasons: Next fortifies action. Next symbolizes progress. Next means complacency prevention. Next means continuous improvement. Next is the monetizer of momentum. Next is the fervent architect of creative reinvention. Next is the critical trigger of entrepreneurial advancement. Next is the rocket fuel of your career. Ultimately, the secret is not just to use the word next – but also to bow to the door of it. Bow meaning honor. Bow meaning respect. Bow meaning recognize. Remember: Without incremental progress, there is no incidental profit. *Are you standing on a springboard or struggling in a straightjacket?*

56. **Bring flowers – show up naked.** My favorite piece of writing advice comes from Kurt Vonnegut: *“If you want to be a great writer, be a great date for your reader.”* This makes total sense. Think about the characteristics of an ideal date: *Fun. Funny. Engaging. Emotional. Interesting. Stimulating. Memorable.* Does that describe the written messages you send to people each day? From emails to texts to tweets to memos, your goal is to be a better date. Ultimately, the question you have to ask yourself is: *Are you writing to sound like a writer, or to sound like you?* Hopefully the latter. Otherwise you’ll never be a great date for your reader. Remember: Writers that sound like writers are annoying; writers that sound like human beings are applauded. *Are your readers hoping for a good night kiss or hailing a goodbye taxi?*

57. Bring your cause to life. According to Gallup's thirty-year employee engagement study, disengaged employees cost companies three hundred billion dollars every year. The question is: How much of that money was lost by your team? And what are you going to do about it? For example: Employee's inboxes don't need another boring, overextended piece of corporate communication that they delete immediately or, at best, peruse passively. If your words don't speak directly to what's important to them, you're nothing but spam. That's why Brandtag works: It's custom designed to stop the financial bleeding caused by disengaged employees. By displaying the art within your company walls, your team, and the people they serve, are ultra aware of your commitment to them. And that's how approachability converts into profitability. *Are you delivering your story in a lifeless way?*

58. **Build a permission-free vocabulary.** The first kill phrase that should never come out of your mouth is, “Yeah, but I can’t just.” Really? Why not? Says who? Can you Google that rule? Because if you can’t – it’s not a rule. Just a self-imposed limitation that’s squelching the life out of your dream. The second kill phrase to avoid is, “Yeah, but who am I to?” This tsunami of self-doubt stems from a lack of confidence in your own abilities. Cancel that thought from your mind. Begin writing the following sentence fifteen times a day: “I am the person who can do this ... I am the person who can do this.” You’ll believe in yourself down to your toes before you know it. Ultimately, deleting self-limiting language from your vocabulary turns doing what you really want to do into something you don’t need permission to do. *Do you listen closely to the way you talk to yourself?*

59. Build a physical space to explore your imagination. *Time Magazine* recently ran a fascinating profile on Thomas Edison's workspace. They explored the physical components to his laboratory, from lighting to furniture to architecture to staffing policies. According to the story, Edison's workspace was among his greatest assets. That's one of the reasons he was able to pound out 1,093 patents in his lifetime, many of which marked the world in ways he never could have imagined. Lesson learned: Structureless environments paralyze. Structure allows growth. And the impact of your ideas is directly proportionate to how organized the space is that surrounds it. If you want to make your mark, begin by preserving the sanctity of your workspace. Not an office – a workspace. Call it an office and slice your creativity in half. Call it a workspace – a factory of creativity – and you execute ideas that matter. *Is your content as brilliant as the system that manages it?*

60. Build commitment into your constitution. When you bring commitment to the forefront of your value system, throwing your heart over the fence becomes easier and easier. My suggestion is to write a personal constitution. If you've never done that before, here's an overview of this crucial life document: Your constitution is the composition and condition of your character. It's the established arrangement of your non-negotiables and the description of your decision-making mechanisms. It's the collection of personal characteristics comprising your foundation. And it's the system of fundamental values governing your behavior. The best part is: It's a living document. It's amenable. And as you grow and develop personally and professionally, various elements of your constitution reserve the right to modify. For now, your challenge is threefold: Find a place in this document for commitment, read it to yourself every morning, and share it with at least one person every day. This fixes commitment into your unconscious and makes a public declaration of your intentions. Then, when the time comes to throw your heart over the fence, you'll have the foundation to execute. *Will you name commitment as one of your core values?*

61. **Build online knowability.** Since day one, you've been beaten over the head with three words: "Know your customer." Actually, there's a bigger question at stake: *How well do your customers know you?* And this question matters because trust is a function of self-disclosure. It's a basic tenant of human communication. And when trust is the only currency that counts – which it is – if your customers don't know you, you lose. The secret to making your online identity more knowable is a combination of several elements. First, photography. Images showing you doing what you do in front of the people who matter most. Second, role definition. Mapping out the various ways customers can use you. Third, memorializing your values. After all, people don't just buy what you sell – they buy what you stand for and why you stand for it. Remember: Hiding the true picture of who you are is a form of reputational risk you can't afford to take. Share yourself. That's all branding is anyway: Committing to and acting from the best, highest version of yourself – every day. *How well do your customers know you?*

62. Build recovery into your schedule. Music is my religion.

There are very things in my life that don't involve it. But since I started my company, music has actually taken on an expanded role. In addition to being soundtrack of my life, it's also become the place I go to disappear. Whether I'm playing it, singing it or watching it, music isn't just my off button – it's my escape button. It's where I shed all sense of self and just be. And that's the secret: We all need a way to disappear. From ourselves, from our work and from the world. Otherwise we never recover. Otherwise we never gain any perspective. Novelist Joseph Campbell describes it beautifully: "You must have a place you can go in your heart, your mind, or your house, almost every day, where you do not know what you owe anyone or what anyone owes you. A place you can go to where you do not know what your work is or whom you work for." Make no mistake: You are the boss of your own energy. Manage it well. *When was the last time you spent fifteen minutes doing nothing?*

63. Burn the beauty of your beginnings into your memory.

Never let go to the original idea that made you successful. Especially in those moments when fear lies an inch beneath the surface, coming at you with everything it's got – you've got to keep that part of yourself alive. Otherwise the gnawing fear of failure will disturb your sense of stability like an early morning fire alarm. Try this: Constantly replay mental reruns of past victories. Revisit key moments when the best, highest version of yourself burned like a gas lamp. Ask yourself, "When did I feel most accomplished this year?" Doing so will be akin to watching your own highlight reel. And it's the idea reminder of your own ability to be great. Remember: Everything is fuel. Examine the fruit of your own life, find a safe place in your mind and belt out that cheer like it's the homecoming parade. *What qualities do you have that accounted for your greatest victories in life so far?*

64. **Burn your return policy.** Yes, it takes lot of guts to really say yes all the way. And yes, life often asks more of you than you're willing to give. But maintaining anything less than total commitment is a recipe for disaster. And if you think it about, throwing yourself under the bus is actually more efficient, too. Consider the alternatives: You could rationalize your way out of risk. That's too much work. You could waste energy trying to find reasons not to take action. What a nightmare. Or you could procrastinate your way to mediocrity. That just plain sucks. May as well purposely and publicly choose to play big. May as well show the world that your work isn't just another expensive hobby. If your emotional commitment has the depth of a thimble, you'll never get around to mattering. *Are you letting yourself stay where you are?*

65. **But you didn't.** If your crazy idea is really that good, odds are, you won't be the first person who's ever thought of it before. So, I beg you: Don't let that discourage you from seeing it to fruition. Most ideas have already been thought of before. The difference maker is: With enormous amounts of discipline, patience, stick-to-it-ive-ness – and the courage to hang your balls out there – you could be the first person in history to (actually) execute that crazy, world-changing idea. And then, ten years later, when bitter, jealous onlookers start whining, “I could have thought of that!” your only response will be, “Yeah, but you didn't.” As Nietzsche once remarked, “And those who were seen dancing were thought to be insane by those who couldn't hear the music.” *Are you an idea person or an execution person?*

66. **Calculate your own currency.** Every endeavor needs cash to thrive. Even charities. Make no mistake: Non-profit is a tax code, not a goal. However, while profit is a healthy form of applause, money isn't the only thing that matters. Your challenge is to figure out what your currency is. Here's a counterintuitive way of doing so: Honestly admit what has never been part of the equation for you. As an author, for example, people frequently ask me how many books I've sold. And I have no idea. *Nor do I care.* Number of copies sold is a currency that's not important to me. The cool part is, by owning that, I've learned what is important to me: *Contribution, legacy and reader engagement.* And I have a boatload of that. Your challenge is to decide what you want via the process of elimination. It's less threatening and intimidating. Otherwise you'll be so focused on making money that you'll forget to make a difference. *What's your personal definition of wealth?*

67. Change the basic metabolism. That's how YouTube trumped television: It was no longer just about watching the videos. Now it was about uploading, sharing, rating, tagging and cataloguing the videos. As a result, they transformed the entire medium. They changed the basic metabolism. And if you want to execute the same for your organization, I challenge is to rethink the way people consume. Take mobile content, for example. Remember when cell phones were used to make phone calls? Pshht. Thing of the past. Now, because of hyper-connectivity and built-in payment options, the game has changed. Cell phones are no longer cell phones – they're pocket portals into people's lives. Not to mention, their wallets. And if you're not befriending that current, the crumbled remains of your message will wash up along the mobile shore. *Are you trying to put books on people's shelves or people value in people's pockets?*

68. **Change the interaction model.** I contribute to around fifty different publications, both online and offline. And as a writer and speaker, doing so is essential element of my visibility plan and a crucial component to my listening platform. What's more, the reader interaction model I've created makes my editors love me. Here's how: Each of my modules concludes with a unique response mechanism, or call to action. It's become a trademark of my writing style and a calling card of my brand. And it's helped me change the writer/reader game, albeit on a small scale. Inspired by Scott Adams' idea to include his email address on every Dilbert cartoon, my daily posts take it one step further. Not only do I give people my email – I offer them an additional resource to supplement the piece of content they just read, watched or listened to. The cool part is, the bonus resource changes every time. There must be hundreds of lists. All of which are free for anybody. And every day, I receive thirty to fifty emails from readers worldwide who not only want the list – but also want to offer feedback on the piece of content they just read. Which, I later feed back to my editor. Which, they love. Result: The readers win. The writer wins. The publisher wins. *How are you interacting with your people in a way nobody else is?*

69. **Check the company you keep.** There's great scene in *The Pursuit of Happiness*, when Will Smith's character offers the following advice to his son: "Don't ever let somebody tell you that you can't do something. You have to dream, and you have to protect it. Because when people can't do something themselves, they'll want to tell you that you can't do it. If you want something, go get it. Period." That's the dreamer's reality: When other people see you pursuing it, it scares them. Probably because it reminds them how far away they are from their own dreams. And what sucks is: They try to talk you out of it. *I don't know, I guess it makes them feel better about themselves.* My suggestion is: Walk away from people who see nothing but impossibility. Instead of trying to respond to their fear-based reaction, don't even tell them. Keep your plans to yourself. Not everyone deserves a backstage pass to your dream. Tell the few people who matter most and then get back to work. *Are you gushing to people who are going to belittle your ambitions?*

70. **Cliffs are overrated.** When you jump, when you stop dragging your feet and dive into what matters, you have to trust yourself, your resources, your abilities, the process, the people – along with the universe that contains them all. Otherwise you'll find a millions reasons not to take action. You rationalize your way out of risk. Like the people who make lists of all the reasons to avoid committing with both feet. *Sure. That's the perfect way to procrastinate my way to mediocrity. Well done.* On the other hand, you could jump. You could start taking massive, relevant action – today – to minimize or eliminate barriers to your boldness. *Enough dabbling.* Amateur hour is over.

71. **Commitment buys yessability.** Once you choose to commit with both feet, world says yes to you. Providence moves to orchestrate the ideal conditions for you to make a name for yourself. William Hutchison Murray, mountaineer and writer, said it perfectly: “Until one is committed, there is hesitancy, the chance to draw back, always ineffectiveness. Concerning all acts of initiative and creation, there is one elementary truth, the ignorance of which kills countless ideas and splendid plans; that the moment one definitely commits oneself, then providence moves too. All sorts of things occur to help one that would never otherwise have occurred. A whole stream of events issues from the decision, raising in one’s favor all manner of unforeseen incidents and meetings and material assistance which no man or woman could have dreamt have come his way.” It’s time. No more dabbling. No more screwing around. No more sliding your butt down the side of the mountain. Jump. Go full time. Take a risk and watch what the universe does. I promise: You’ll never look back. Either that, or, you’ll fall flat on your face, lose all of your money and your family will leave you for someone else who has a real job. *Do you have the courage to bet on your artistic vision?*

72. Connect your dreams to their values. Enrolling your loved ones into your dream is not tent revival moment of conversion – it’s a continual process of constitutional alignment. That’s the next secret to selling your dream: Helping people understand that your dream directly connects to three things. First, with the person they are. Second, with the narrative they hold. And third, with the vision they maintain. Without that trifecta, when faced with the opportunity to buy into your dream, people will yawn, offer their best golf clap and mutter, “Yes, that’s nice.” The thing is: You don’t want to be nice – you want to be necessary. Here’s the difference. Nice gets commended; necessary gets compensated. Nice leads to sticky; necessary leads to spreadable. Nice achieves mindshare; necessary captures heartshare. Nice is a helpful addition; necessary is a vital component. And nice is the vitamin that convinces you you’re getting better; while necessary is the aspirin that actually kills your pain. Get the point? See the pattern? Align your dream with their reality. Otherwise, if people can’t see their own reflection in the finish of your wood, they’ll never buy your furniture. *How are you create a message to resonate with what’s already there?*

73. **Conserve your oxygen.** Don't waste your breath on useless chatter. Next time you find yourself surrounded by people consumed with small thoughts, walk away. Set that boundary. Otherwise their mental shallowness will infiltrate your world. My suggestion is to work exclusively in environments that allow you to escape the crutch of small-mindedness and think more importantly. That means hanging with people who ask big, dangerous questions that catapult your thinking. That means talking about big, relevant issues that challenge your thinking. And that means learning about big, new concepts that stretch your imagination. The hard part is keeping yourself accountable. Try this: Be unwaveringly vigilant about the company you keep by asking the question, "Does this person add gasoline to or sprinkle water on my internal fire?" Also, be persistently discerning about the media you consume and the ideas you focus on by asking, "Will I definitely use this information for something immediate and important?" In the end, life's too short for television. Life's too short to surround yourself with people who don't challenge and inspire you. And life it's too short not to do something that matters. *What do you need to delete from your life?*

74. Consistency is far *bête* than rare moments of greatness.

Did you know that eighty percent of divorce lawyer have reported a spike in the number of cases that use social media for evidence of cheating? Apparently, Facebook is by far the number of cases that use social media for evidence of cheating. According to the study by the American Association of Matrimonial Lawyers, “Flirty messages and photographs are increasingly being cited as proof of unreasonable behavior or irreconcilable difference.” Here’s the reality: It’s not a computer problem – it’s a character problem. The longer you keep lying to the person you’re supposed to be committed to, the more it’s going to show – not just on your Facebook page – but on your face. And if you’re a cheat, your body will always tell the truth. Especially to the people who matter most. If you plan to live a dishonest life offline, there’s going to be a huge echo online. And your digital footprint will slip on the technological banana peel to destroy the most important thing in your life. Don’t scapegoat your dishonesty on social media – blame it on social stupidity. *Is your online performance equal to your offline reality?*

75. Conversations change everything. Our priorities are way out of wack. The assumption is that we need to make something better, sell something cheaper or ship something faster. *No, what we need is to have smarter conversations.* We might change the interaction model, by being unreasonably accessible where the rest of the world is hard to reach. That's a smarter conversation. We might build our listening platform, by turning social media into a hearing aid while the rest of the world uses it as a sales tool. That's a smarter conversation. We might position ourselves as teachers who solve expensive problems while the rest of the world is selfish with their knowledge. That's a smarter conversation. We might create acts that make emotional connections while the rest of the world is bothering and interrupting people with advertisement. That's a smarter conversation. Point being, customers already have everything they need. Except us. In the flesh. Ready to listen to them. *Why don't we sell that?*

76. **Convert ambiguity into ammo.** The scary part about taking the road less traveled is – after a while – the world you know, disappears. Yikes. And when you look back, you suddenly discover that there’s nothing left but a big, steaming pile of ambiguity. Double yikes. Next time this happens to you, befriend the fog. Take what’s ambiguous about your situation and listen for how you might convert that into something useful. Because there comes a point when you have to stop trying to do – and start listening for what wants to be done. Here’s a helpful approach: Pick a simple question, i.e., “What’s next?” or “What should I do?” and ask it to yourself while exercising. I’ve been practicing this strategy for years, and have found the combination of motion, endorphins, self-inquiry and repetition to be the perfect recipe for clarity. And more often than not, by the time I’m done working out, I’m significantly closer to my answer than I was before. Either that, or I fall off the treadmill right in front of the cutest girl in the gym. The point is: Just when you think you’re screwed, you often find providence riding shotgun, ready to help you navigate through the uncertainty. You just have to be willing to trust the process. *What are you doing with your ambiguity?*

77. Convince people that you're doing something important.

It's not enough to help people dream the same dream as you – you also have to educate them on why they should sell it for you. The secret, writes Guy Kawasaki in *Selling the Dream*, is to enable as many people as possible to touch, feel and experience your cause. Literally. If you have to physically run a live demo in public, do it. If you have to build a prototype that paints a detailed picture of the dream's desired future, do it. And if you have to hire a camera crew to follow you around for a week so you can produce a sixty-second promo video to publish on your social platform, do it. That's how you go beyond radical honesty and enter into the territory of ridiculous transparency: By being gloriously explicit. By punching people in the face your dream and making no qualms about how the world will be a better place once it comes to fruition. *How are you making it easy for people to go with your flow?*

78. **Crazy ideas require crazy faith.** Consider one final quotation from Post Secret's Frank Warren: "Trust your crazy idea – it might be your destiny." That's where faith comes in. That's when crunch time ensues. When it's 3 AM and the rest of the world is cold and tired and quiet; and there's nobody around but you and your crazy idea. Will you choose to believe? Will you continue plugging away? And will you willingly dissolve your sanity and be considered crazy too? Or, will you cave into an uncourageous corner like another one of the millions of would-be world-changers whose crazy ideas never saw the light of day? If you picked the former, you're on the right track. It's like Einstein once said, "I'm not smarter than anybody else – I just stick with it longer." *How will you strengthen your self-belief to support your crazy idea?* Here's why:

79. Create a juxtaposition that creates a reaction. While sitting outside of a local coffee shop yesterday, I watched two canvassers struggle to engage passersby. During their break, I approached them and asked, “Have you guys ever thought about buying hot chocolate and handing out drinks to people instead of annoying them?” The two girls laughed. I guess they thought I was kidding. “Seriously, that would work,” I explained more passionately than necessary. “Think about it: It’s cold, it’s rainy and nobody wants to talk to you. But by unexpectedly offering hot chocolate, you’d break the pattern of predictability. And by delivering value first, you’d earn conversational permission. Ultimately, you’d engage people in a non-threatening way instead of verbally spamming them with unwanted noise about your cause. Just a thought.” They stared at me like I was a homeless meth addict convinced he was Jesus. Oh well. I shrugged and walked away. Guess breaking the mold isn’t part of the Greenpeace Outreach Training Program. Too bad for those whales. *What type of reaction are you creating through juxtaposition?*

80. **Create a network of human healing.** In the book *Who Gets Sick*, Blair Justice revealed how beliefs, moods and thoughts affected health. In one particular study, his research found that “social support protected your health by reducing the intensity with which you looked at and reacted to stressful events.” What they failed to mention, however, was that that you never realize how strong your support system is until the world on top of it collapses. And trust me: You don’t want to wait for that to happen. That’s the final component to starting over: Creating a network of healing to keep you alive in the process. Because without support from your loved ones, the road less traveled will become very windy. That’s what I’ve learned time and time again since starting my publishing company nine years ago: Success never comes unassisted. And as independent as you are, your personal brand can’t be an island. Be smart: Ask for help early and often. Believe that the people who love you most want nothing more than the opportunity to come through and show you so. They will. *Do you live in an atmosphere of encouragement and expectation-free support?*

81. **Create a nonstick surface.** When you used to bake cookies with your mother, what was the first step in the process? Right: Dust the counter with flour. Why? So the dough didn't stick. Same thing goes with self-accountability. If you want to avoid getting stuck in trap of self-employed sluggishness, you need to take measures to create a nonstick surface. My suggestion is to take short breaks every ninety minutes. This helps your body and mind refuel. Especially if, during your break, you go perpendicular to the task at hand. For example, to break from writing, I pick up my guitar. Why? Because after eighteen years of playing music, I don't have to think anymore. I just start jamming. And when your occupation is to think for a living, nothing could be healthier for keeping your schedule on task than to give your break a break. *Are you punctuating your day to unstick yourself?*

82. Create an original and unique experience. Don't tell me there's nothing new under the sun – it's 864,938 miles in diameter. If you can't say something new, you're not trying very hard. All you have to do is tell the truth – your truth. Not Benjamin Franklin's truth. Not Rumi's truth. Your truth. Stop being a vending machine of other people's quotations. Instead, start spouting the wisdom of your life. It's there, waiting to be excavated. The cool part is, honesty is so rare that it's become remarkable. And when you dip your pen in your own blood, it's always new – because it's your original and unique experience. Focus on crafting your messages with clients and coworkers from that space. You'll expel more fresh air than the Sears home appliance department. *Are you the origin or the echo?*

83. **Cut off all escape routes.** Ancient warriors used to burn their boats before storming the beach. That way, when they looked back to see the flames, victory was their only option. That's commitment. And if you want to practice the same in your own battles, you have to put yourself in a position where there's no turning back. You have to execute quick enough so there's no time to second-guess yourself. Otherwise procrastination and self-doubt will get the best of you. For example, when I got a nametag tattooed on my chest, my whole world shifted. New opportunities started coming my way out of nowhere. That's the best part: Once you throw yourself under the bus, doors that were never there open. The world doesn't just pay attention – it pays dividends. Don't commit to thinking about committing. Take the plunge and get into it up to your eyeballs. *What action could you take to paint yourself into a committed corner?*

84. **Dance on the perimeter of your boundaries.** I don't mean violate them – I mean test their elasticity. Huge difference. One is a gap in integrity; the other is an experiment in flexibility. But that's the nature of boundaries: You set them for yourself out of an inherent need to preserve your sense of control. The funny thing is, once you get there – and you realize that you didn't need to build the wall as high as you originally thought – the music starts to take over. And before you know it, your feet are moving. Your hips are gyrating. And your face hurts from smiling so much. Sure, your heart's beating three times faster than normal. But you sort of don't care. Because you look back at the excessive walls you spend your entire life building for yourself and think, "Well I'll be damned. Look at me, dancing night away. Guess those bricks weren't as necessary as I thought." Wow. Feeling out of control never felt so good. Bottom line: You've got to extend your arm. Otherwise you'll never grow into anything better. *When was the last time you stretched your boundaries without compromising your foundation?*

85. **Dare to be dumm.** You can't avoid the appearance of ignorance forever. But it takes tremendous courage and humility to stand up in the middle of a meeting and say, "Does anyone else smell that?" or "Am I the only one, or is this confusing to you guys too?" That's what the necessary do: *They speak truth to people's hearts.* And if you want to do so, keep your eye out for three patterns: First, ideas that are simply too convenient to be killed. Grab a pistol and be the one to speak up. Otherwise nothing will ever change. Second, problems that are so simple and familiar that they become hidden. Pull them out from behind the curtain and expose them to world. Third, people who are too comfortable to feel the weight of their own stupidity. Your job is to find evidence of burden wherever you can. Now, keep in mind: You're not here to be a downer – but you don't want to put lipstick and makeup on the truth. Ultimately, to be necessary is to become a delightful disturbance. To snap open people's eyes, strike at the very root and translate floating abstractions into concrete realities. And if you can make but a few people pause, you win. And so do they. *Are you ignoring the elephant in the room, talking about the elephant in the room, or jumping on its back and teaching it how to dance?*

86. Decide how impatient you can afford to be. Being impatient might be the smartest decision your company could ever make. So, my first suggestion is to write the following two words on a sticky note: Just Go. That's it. Just go. Be willing to look bad on the road to immortality. Plunge forward planless. And stop allowing the need for perfection to preventing you from doing, being and having what you want. Take action on your new idea swiftly. Find out what ONE step you could take NOW to start moving forward to your ideal future. *How much money is being (too) patient costing you?*

87. Decide what it will take to become a proven entity. That might mean a stronger web presence. That might mean a more robust networking plan. That might mean securing a spot as a regular contributor to an online publication read by your perfect clients. That might mean getting up an hour earlier every morning to write, accumulate enough content to blog five times a week and slowly expand your thought leadership platform. Just remember: Your strategy for sticking yourself out there needs to be as remarkable as **WHAT** you're sticking out there. *To whom do you need to become a proven entity to?*

88. **Decide what you're going to brand.** Branding is committing to being the best, highest version of yourself. So it's not just about your products. Smart companies brand their service, brand their honesty and brand their language. And here's why: Branding is no longer a novelty – it's a necessity – the price of admission for playing the game. Your challenge is to think about what you're committed to. The emotion that's under your fingernails. Brand that and people won't just pay attention – they'll pay dividends. *What has your organization branded that nobody else has?*

89. **Decide what your legend is.** Whether I'm attending a conference with colleagues, practicing yoga with friends, interacting online with readers or having dinner with family, people constantly tell me stories about telling my story. A few years ago I was on the bike at the gym. The guy next to me noticed my nametag. And after a few moments of awkward silence, he launched right into the rumor: *"You know, I once heard a story about some guy who wore a nametag everyday in college. I think it was a sociological experiment or something. But they made a documentary about him. And think he set a world record. Pretty crazy, huh?"* I didn't have the heart to tell him. The rumors were far too interesting to listen to. And I didn't want to ruin the image he had about the story. So I just kept asking questions. *"Did you ever meet him?" "What ever happened to that guy?" "Do you think he went crazy or something?"* I wonder if he knew I knew. The point is, your brand tells a story whether you like it or not. And while facts are misleading, rumors are always revealing – even if they're wrong. If you want to make your legend worth crossing the street for, if you want people to feel proud and eager to spread your myth, you have to manage your story like an asset. Because people don't just buy what you sell – they buy what you tell. *Are you spreading positive rumors about yourself?*

90. Decide who you're done listening to. During my last semester of college, the business school faculty urged us to attend the campus career fair. It was a joke: Scores of identical, suit-clad seniors overexerting themselves to prove their salt to a bunch of corporate recruiters who couldn't care less about their unique talents. *I'm pretty sure I threw up in my mouth a little.* So, instead of wasting my afternoon talking to bunch average companies that saw me as nothing more than a barcode, I took one lap around the gym, grabbed as much free candy as I possibly could, tossed my freshly printed stack of resumes in the trash and said, "Screw this – I've got a book to finish." Best decision I ever made. And as I look back, I now realize: Life's too short to waste time doing things just because other people say it's important. Deleting average means living according to *your* own experience, not according to the beliefs and dictates of society. It means peeling back the layers of expectation and conditioning that have encrusted your heart and mind. And it's not like I'm the first person to realize this. Even Jesus told people to do it: "Conform no longer to the pattern of this world," right? Whether or not you believe in him, that's still a powerful, relevant suggestion. You just have to be courageous enough to stand up and say, "I will take my potential elsewhere, thank you very much." *Will you allow your own visions to propel you on a quest for originality?*

91. **Decide whom you need to delete.** Some people will be threatened by your trajectory. Others intimidated by your success. Some will outlive their usefulness in your life. Others will distract you from giving your best. And it's not like they're being malicious. Just human. The challenge is training the ears of your heart to listen for who needs to be deleted. Because sometimes, just when you think someone is on the journey to the summit with you, you wake up and realize that the most they could ever do was get you to base camp. At which point it's time to pack up, move on – and never look back down the mountain. Otherwise you wind up hitching your self-esteem to the fickle whims of people whose voices shouldn't be heeded. And as a result, life becomes a series of compromises. A sad constellation of trying and proving. Which, last time I checked, is a sucky way to go about your day. Your mission is to mature out of your addiction to approval and melt into the tenderness of self-support. *Who are you subject to the whims of?*

92. Declare a moratorium on the unimportant. Have you ever worked for a boss who, on a daily basis, invaded your workspace unannounced and talked your ear off for three hours about absolute meaninglessness – when you could have been executing something that mattered – then later yelled at you for not being productive? The amount of time wasted on such stupidity could fill the Superdome. Your challenge, as the boss of yourself, is to assure that interruption doesn't dominate you. If what you're doing – right now – isn't consistent with your number one goal, politely walk away. If what you're doing – right now – doesn't matter, peace out. Next time you look up and realize that you've been purposely distracting yourself for the past twelve minutes, pause for a moment, then gently return to the work that counts. *What's your philosophy on personal productivity?*

93. Declare a moratorium on what doesn't matter. Suspension of activity. That's what the word moratorium means. And if you plan to take the road less traveled – and still arrive at your destination in one piece – you've got to start deleting useless activities that don't enrich your life. For example, a few years into my career, it occurred to me that going out four nights a week probably wasn't the best career move. So, I made a bargain with myself: While my friends were out at bars, getting wasted drinking beers; I was back at home, getting wealthy writing books. Now, it's not like I stopped having fun completely. I just chose to delete the word "bar" from my vocabulary. And my life, my health and my career were noticeably better for it as a result. Your challenge is to confront your own schedule and start deleting. I suggest asking five questions: "What consumes your time that isn't making you any money?" "Does this take up a disproportionate amount of time compared to the result?" "What are you doing that makes no sense at all?" "What are you doing that doesn't need to be done by anyone?" "Will I definitely use this information for something immediate and important?" Without all that noise, you'll be able to create a detailed image of your ideal life. Remember: Screw balance. *Do you have work/life happiness?*

94. Delete people who bring your score down. People either lift you up or drag you down. They're either debits or credits. And you can't let anyone's lack of passion cripple you. The challenge is to become more discerning – not snobby, but discerning – about the people you allow to participate in your life. That's how you deepen awesome: By finding cheerleaders. Dedicated supporters. People who will believe in you more than you believe in yourself. People who will adamantly refuse to let you stay where you are. And people who will call you on the carpet when you start to slide into the territory of average. To figure out who these people are, consider asking questions like: *Does this person add wood to my internal fire or sprinkle water on it? Is this person a chronic abuser of my time and attention? Is this person kindling my awesomeness or enabling my averageness?* Remember: Without this continual flow of relational support, you won't be able to sustain the inevitable blows delivered to those who choose the path of remarkability. What's sad is, most people don't realize how strong – or how weak – their support system is until the world collapses on top of them. *Will you wait to find out?*

95. **Delete the noise.** It's surprisingly easy to find focus when you enter through the back door. That's what I've learned as an entrepreneur: Deciding what to do through the process of elimination is way less threatening and intimidating. Try this: Make a list of every useless, inbound interruption that doesn't matter and diffuses your focus. Read the list out loud three times. Then, when you're sufficiently disgusted by how trapped you are in those trivialities; delete those distractions from your life forever. By embracing the essential and banishing the bullshit, you free yourself up to commit to a few things and win there. Without cancelling out that noise, you'll never discern between the necessary and the superfluous. And you'll fall victim to the erosion of your time, the decay of your focus and the meaninglessness of your work. *What can you eliminate so you're left with so few moving parts that important work actually gets done?*

96. **Deliberately alter your course.** Nashville rocks. Literally. Affectionately known as “The Music City,” it’s packed with millions of passionate songwriters who, at one point, stopped dragging their feet and jumped. My favorite part of the town is the energy. It’s as electric as the guitars. And I’ll never forget my first trip there. My client took me out on the town after my workshop. When we walked into one of the hundred honky tonk bars on the strip. And I noticed a bumper sticker on the bathroom stall that read: *“Screw it. I’m moving to Nashville!”* There’s no better way to personify the risk of jumping than those six words. Because if you put yourself in the shoes (er, boots) of somebody who once said that to himself, you understand what this is all about: Accumulating enough frustration, passion and fire that you simply can’t take it anymore. That moment when you notice a deficit in yourself because every waking minute of your life is an insult to the gifts you’ve been granted. That’s when you jump. Even if you’ve screwed up everything so far. You jump anyway. And if you haven’t reached that point yet, don’t worry: *You will.* You’ll know what to do when you get there. It might not be moving to Nashville, but it will involve altering your course. *Will you allow today’s possibilities to be shaded the failures of yesterday?*

97. Deliver small promises first. You need to build a timeline of credibility with your customers. Repeated, predictable action that they can count on. That's what encourages them to buy over and over again. And while it might seem like a minor thing, here's the equation: When you deliver small promises, you teach people to trust you in a big way. The key is to reinforce your delivery. I love using phrases like, "As per your request," or "As promised," right at the moment of delivery. This punches them in face with your reliability – in a friendly way. *Are your actions predictable and congruent with your promises?*

98. Design a plan to enable consistent promotion. That's what I tell my clients: You don't need a marketing plan – you need a visibility plan. After all, anonymity is bankruptcy. And if you're not staying in front of your top supporters consistently, all the initiative in the world won't do you a bit of good. You're still winking in the dark. Now, I'm sure you're smart enough to know how to maintain prime visibility with the people who matter. My suggestion is more of an attitudinal change. And that brings us to Allison. She's a fellow public speaker based out of Des Moines. During our last virtual lunch, I asked her about a recent gig she has in Sacramento. "It sucked," she said, "All I did was give my speech. Which went great and everything – but I never got to see the city." And that's when I reassured her, "Yeah, but the city got to see you." Lesson learned: Anytime you put yourself in a leadership position in front of the people who matter, you immediately become more yessable. What's more, everything you do is marketing. Everything. And you have an ongoing imperative to deliver value in a visible way. *Do you need a marketing plan or a visibility plan?*

99. **Design your ideal day.** If you don't impose some structure into your otherwise chaotic schedule, the entrepreneurial undertow will carry you out to the sharks. And when I say sharks, I'm referring to the chorus of meaningless distraction, seductive attention magnets and other ruthless villains of your time. Your challenge is to introduce enough structure to fight that undertow. After all: Routine is healthy. Routine prevents insanity. Routine curtails procrastination. What's more, ritualizing your days prevents you from saying, "Why the hell am I doing this?" Without such structure, you wind up artfully creating constant distraction that prevents you from seeing the pointlessness of your activity. On the other hand, I'm not a proponent of over scheduling. I've been guilty of this in the past. Ruthlessly regimenting every minute of your day might keep you accountable to yourself, but it also might cause an ulcer. Your challenge is learning balance structure with spontaneity. *What's a typical day like for you?*

100. Desire is not an occupation. The next word to delete from your success vocabulary is “aspiring.” Never aspire to anything. Aspiring is for amateurs. Aspiring is the hallmark of working small. Whatever you want to become, start by being that thing already. Like George Carlin used to say, “There are only two states an oven can possibly exist in: Heated or unheated. Preheated is a meaningless term.” Where are you still preheating yourself? Look: *You either are, or you aren’t.* Instead of waiting to be who you are, make the decision to raise your own bar. Go pro. Go full time. Go all in. Start playing for keeps. Because once you know what you believe, everything becomes a lot easier. Once you take a chance on yourself, people will start showing up ready to match your bet. And once you submit your resignation to the purgatory of wannabe, providence will move to orchestrate the ideal conditions to win. *Which of your fears are diminishing your commitment?*

101. Detect the collective conditioning inside yourself.

Ten years ago, I told my parents that I wanted to wear a nametag. Everyday. For the rest of my life. Sure enough, they responded with a four-letter word. But it wasn't the one I expected. Instead of saying, "What?" "Crap!" or "Putz," they just smiled and replied, "Cool." And I never looked back. I wonder what would happen if more people had bosses like that. I wonder how much positive change could be created in the world if people practiced healthier self-talk. Especially when it came to the issue of risk. Because in my experience, if you don't honor yourself for the bravery of taking risks, the paralyzing self-consciousness negates your developmental progress. And your annual performance review will be a joke. Except you won't be laughing. Because you'll be both the boss and the employee. Remember: The biggest risk is the one you don't give yourself permission to take. *Think about the last time you said, "Screw it – I'm doing it anyway," how did you feel afterward?*

102. Differentiate through your emphasis. During a recent trip to Australia, I had the pleasure of flying on Virgin Airlines. Let me paint a picture for you: Dance music blasting from the check-in area. Approachable service islands with brightly colored displays. Employees who were young, energetic and attractive – who, by the way, actually walked out from behind their desks to shake your hand, introduce themselves and welcome you to Virgin. Then, once we boarded the plane, the experience continued. More music. More fun. And more employees who were laughing, joking and overall, (actually) enjoying their jobs. Hell, even the safety demonstration video was kind of cute. Talk about a breath of fresh air. I said to the flight attendant, “Wow. Airline companies back in the states could learn a lot from your tea – you guys look like you’re legitimately having a good time!” And like clockwork, she replied, “At Virgin, it’s kind of hard not to.” Not surprisingly, Virgin won several airline industry awards in 2009: Best Premium Economy in the World, Best Transatlantic Airline, Best International Airline, Best International Airline for Inflight Entertainment and Best Frequent Flyer Program. Lesson learned: Provide an outlet to unconventional approaches. Not only will you become a breath of fresh air, you’ll become the best in the air. *What do you emphasize that your competitors overlook?*

103. Dig down through the many levels of why. Know how is educational – but feeling why is inspirational. If you want to create a go-to space for self-motivation, you’ve got to deepen your sense of why. Knowing why elevates the spirit. Knowing why offers a path of healing. Knowing why permits you to insert your passion everywhere. Knowing why helps you lean into joy. Knowing why reminds you what your currency is. And knowing why creates suitable sphere for action. My question is: When was the last time you made a list of a hundred reasons why you do what you do? Odds are, never. Because most people don’t do stuff like this. Fortunately, you’re not most people. And that’s exactly why you should try it. My guess is that your experience with this exercise will be nothing short of astonishing. Personally, I did it last month. And my cheerleading ability has never been stronger. That’s the best part about knowing why: It takes you to a place where truth and beauty wait for you. *When was the last time you were fuzzy about your why?*

104. Discern a definite pattern. Intelligence comes from pattern recognition, not information memorization. Here's an equation I used in my workshops that you can plug your unique value and your perfect customers into. It's called "The Ultimate Dream Statement," and it goes like this: "I wish there was a blank so I wouldn't have to blank." The first blank in the equation is dream focused, solution oriented and optimistic, i.e., "A portable music player with unlimited digital shelf space." Next, the second blank in the equation takes away pain by helping people save time, money, energy, paper or manpower, i.e., "Schlepping ten years of compact discs around my apartment." That's the secret: Figuring out what your customers are sick of doing, then positioning your value as the key to never doing that again. Remember: Life is easier, simpler – and ten time more profitable – when you get good at identifying patterns. *What profitable patterns are just waiting to be discovered?*

105. Dive into yourself. Permission comes from within. Not from your parents. Not from your peers. And not from some high-faluten industry putz who's convinced himself that he's found the only path to artistic success. From within. From you. All you have to do is search for what bids you to create. To harvest that which spreads out its roots in the deepest recesses of your heart. That's where you find your why. That's where you give yourself permission to try something – even if you're not that good. And don't get me wrong: You want to you remain open to input from the people who matter. But when it comes to executing an idea that's important to you, still have to get out of your head, get into your heart and deliver the ultimate verdict yourself. *What will it take to become your own authority figure?*

106. **Do this and nothing else.** Enough dabbling. Either go full time or go home. Go pro or go away. Be dedicated or be eliminated. That's what it takes to win. You have to throw yourself wholeheartedly into the game. Sadly, the number one reason people can't dive into what matters is because they insist on keeping one leg firmly planted in what doesn't matter. *Bad move.* And I've made it myself. When I first started my publishing company, I had a full-time job selling furniture. Writing books and giving speeches was just something I did at nights and on the weekends. But after a year, I scaled back to part time. And I started parking cars a few shifts a week to make ends meet. Which worked for about a year. But the problem was, sometimes I'd work eighteen hours a day. And while my business slowly grew, so did my ulcer. It was simply too much. And that's when I finally jumped. That's when I said, "Alright. This is it. I'm going to do this, and nothing else. Let's go." And I never looked back. That's the cool part about focus: It's the first step toward freedom. It's the fuel that drives the engine of wow. And it's the solitary suggestor of success. It's time to take your index finger, cover up the tip of the hose, and shoot out a frozen rope of concentrated effort. Otherwise you'll never shed your amateur status. *How much time are you spending on things that diffuse your focus and hamper your goals?*

107. **Do what you love.** In a recent daily cartoon, Hugh McLeod wrote, “Getting a lot of people to hate you is easy: All you have to do is become really successful at doing something you love.” Lesson learned: Do what you love and the hatred will follow – from jealous people who aren’t doing what they love, that is. And if you have a hard time being viewed that way, just remember that you’re nobody until somebody hates you anyway. May as well start now. *How many hours of your typical workday are spent doing things you love?*

108. Document as you develop. Writing makes everything you do easier and better. Not to mention, if you don't write it down, it never happened. Whether it's an idea, a process or a mind map for your next project, keeping records of your creative initiatives always serves you well. First, it enables you to repeat your process. Secondly, it helps you improve your process. *And lastly, it assists you in teaching your process, either to coworkers or customers.*

109. Don't abandon the process just because it gets tough.

Trusting the process doesn't mean being passive. The secret is to understand the principle of threshold level. That's the moment in the process where you're so close to completion, you can taste it. The moment when the entire the world is doing everything they can to prevent you from finishing. That's when you hit it hard. That's when you take every ounce of trust you have left and invest it in the process that brought you to the threshold. Because in the end, trusting the process is about doing the footwork. Even if you don't recognize the road before you. Even if it hurts like hell. Carry out the task to completion. And let growth unfold incrementally. The world will pay you back. *Are you willing to hustle while you wait?*

110. Don't back away from perceived negatives. My friend Julie owns a small town pharmacy. When she rented my brain, she expressed concern about a common customer complaint. "People want Wal-Mart. And they get upset when they find out we don't carry ten thousand items. But we're a small shop and only stock the essentials." For that reason, I suggested a new positioning strategy: *No food. No drinks. No shirts. Just the medicine that matters. Your needs, filled.* Now the weakness is strength. What about you? What negative perceptions are you underleveraging? For example, maybe you have a boring name. Fine. That means you can re-invent and become whatever you want. Terrible public speaker? No problem. Offer one-on-one, intimate coaching instead. Technologically illiterate? Cool. Keep your interface lean, simple and user-friendly. Remember: A true artist makes use of everything that she is. *How are you developing perceived weaknesses into defining strengths?*

111. Don't be so hard on yourself. In Leonard Cohen's documentary, *I'm Your Man*, he shares his philosophy on the writing process: "You gotta go to work everyday, but know that you're not going to get it everyday." Initially, that was a bitter pill for me to swallow. The idea of accepting a blank page as part of the process was devastating to my creative spirit. But over time, I learned to stop beating myself up when I didn't get it. That's part of trusting the process: Knowing when you've got it, knowing when you've lost it, knowing when there's no way in hell you're going to get it, and knowing when you're going to have to take measures to get it back. My current strategy is: When I sit down to write every morning, I give myself an hour. That's my cut off. And if the faucet never turns over to hot, and if I realize that I'm just not going to get it that day – I go back to bed. Simple as that. Then, an hour or two later when I wake up, I hit the page refreshed and renewed. Works every time. *What's your strategy for returning to the work that matters?*

112. Don't be stopped by not knowing how, continued. Most of your fear stems from a lack of know-how and a surplus of perfectionism. Unfortunately, that's a dangerous combination that creates inertia. Here's the reality: If you waited until you knew what you were doing, you'd never make it out of your basement and into the world. The trick is learning to be strategically impatient, tapping into your natural sense of urgency and developing a zero-tolerance policy for anything that causes delay. *How much money is being (too) patient costing you?*

113. Don't be stopped by not knowing how. How is overrated.

How is the enemy of progress. How is the barrier to trusting the process. And I'm not saying it hurts to know what you're doing once in a while. But if you always waited until you knew what you were doing, you'd never do anything. Because you're never really ready. Nobody is. Whether you're starting a business, starting a family or starting a new career, trusting the process means traversing the periphery of your competence. That's exactly what I did when I started my publishing and consulting company right out of college. Hell, I didn't know anything. I was twenty-two. But for some reason, I trusted the process anyway. And here's what I learned: Eventually, you're just going to have to jump into the pool with your clothes on and trust that you'll figure out how to swim before the water fills your lungs. Let's go. It's time to put down that margarita and make a splash that matters. Remember: You don't have to get good to get going; but you do need to get going to get good. *Whose permission are you waiting for?*

114. Don't beat yourself up when you fall short. Just because you're self-employed doesn't mean you're not human. (Except for a few of my robot friends, but they're probably not reading anyway. Lazy punks.) Anyway, in your quest to stay accountable to yourself, recognize that you will miss the mark from time to time. Learn to be okay with that. As my yoga instructor constantly reminds us, "Try not to pass judgment on yourself. When you interrupt stillness or fall out of posture, just notice it." Try this: Next time resistance gets the best of you – let's say you unexpectedly oversleep till ten on a Tuesday – use that moment as a bell of awareness to send vibrations of self-accountability through your bones. Instead of smashing your head into the maple bedpost telling yourself how much of a worthless, lazy excuse for an entrepreneur you are, brainstorm how you might be able to recoup that missed time later in the day or week. Could you have a working lunch? Could you read while you exercise? Could you catch up after dinner instead of watching the three-hour finale of "So You Think You Can Dance?" Look. Don't be so hard on yourself. It happens. *Will you be kind to yourself when you fall short?*

115. Don't dismiss or deny your native background. During a presentation last year, one of my audience members insisted on correcting the grammar on one of my slides. "I can't help it," she admitted to the group. "I'm an editor. It's in my blood." Then, from other side of the room, someone asked, "Have you considered a transfusion?" Now, the group got a good laugh out of it. But I can't help but wonder if the woman was a bit hurt by that man's comment. I know I would be. And I think that's something we need watch out for. Because it's a disservice to yourself to dismiss or deny your native background. On the other hand, making use of everything you are flows from a complete openness to yourself – even the parts you view as liabilities. And if you don't remain true to that basic nature, you'll render yourself a traitor. Try waking up with that taste in your mouth every morning. Blech. *What dormant parts of you await permission to be expressed?*

116. **Don't fight the contractions.** Pregnancy is a process. And according to a 2004 study from University of Hawaii, it's a process that's happened approximately ninety-six billion times since the dawn of time. Not bad. Maybe those mothers are doing something right. My guess is: Epidural. Just kidding. The real secret to trusting the process is to honoring the natural rhythms. Easing your judgmental tendencies and embracing the contractions no matter how much they hurt. As Quaker author Eileen Flanagan writes in *Listen With Your Heart*, "By speaking honestly, listening non-defensively and waiting patiently, we help create the space where love can reveal itself." The best part is: You don't have to be pregnant to practice this. Take writing, for example. Readers often ask me, "How do you know what you're going to write everyday?" And my answer is always the same: "I don't. That's not my job. Instead, I listen for what wants to be written." Lesson learned: Stop fighting the contractions. The baby will come when it's ready. Even if you're stuck in that godforsaken hospital bed for the next forty-seven hours. *What are you allowing yourself to give birth to?*

117. Don't just break the mold – shatter it. Make the mainstream to pee in their pleated pants and tremble in their penny loafers. How? By violating people's schemas. According to the bestselling book, *Made to Stick*, a schema is a collection of generic properties about an idea or category. Your challenge is to upset those patterns. To make your messages, conversations and ideas a radical departure from traditional labels. George Carlin was a master at this. Not only did his comedy entertain us – it challenged and provoked us to rethink and unlearn. So much so, that in 1972, his monologue “Seven Words You Can Never Say on Television” led to a Supreme Court decision that helped established the extent to which the FCC would regular speech on broadcast television. Nearly forty years later, Carlin's regular still carries weight today. Lesson learned: Sweep away the stifling odor of the multitude. Refuse to fall into the same clichés as – or satisfy the unquestioned conventions of – the mediocre masses. *What boundaries are you bending?*

118. **Don't let yourself work small.** If you want to watch steam come out of my ears, just tell me that you're an aspiring writer. Or an aspiring artist. Or an aspiring anything. God help you. *That's the kiss of death. That's the hallmark of working small.* Aspiring is for cowards. Aspiring is for riskless amateurs. Aspiring is what you say when you don't want to commit with both feet and accept the responsibility of going pro. Look: Life doesn't have a preheat setting. You're either on, or you're off. You either are, or you aren't. Stop waiting to be who you are. Stop waiting for permission. And just start being. Today. As Seth Godin wrote in *Poke the Box*, "Reject the tyranny of the picked. Pick yourself." The cool part is, once you gather the desire to move forward – most likely without a map – people will follow you. And they will stick with you as you promise not to let yourself work small. Remember: When you dream big and do small, you lose huge. *What are you still waiting for permission to become?*

119. Don't put yourself on sale for lower than your true value. Here's one of the most powerful self-esteem building exercises you will ever practice. Put on your best suit. Go into the bathroom. Then stare at yourself in the mirror and quote your fee/salary over and over again, without flinching, for twenty minutes. *First you'll feel silly. Then dumb. Then curious. Then confident. Then excited. And then, ready to go sell something.* And from that moment on, whenever fee-quoting time comes, you won't skip a beat. Because you're practiced it a thousand times. Remember: Deficiency of self-esteem underprices value. Blinking lose sales. Never feel guilty for demanding the value you represent. *How much money are you worth?*

120. Dumbing down is stepping up. A few books into my career as a writer, my editor informed me that most of material was written at a fifth or sixth grade level. And I asked her, “Is that good?” To which she replied, “Absolutely! Twelve years old the level most adults read at.” Now, admittedly, this attribute of my writing isn’t so much a strategy as it is representative that I never really matured past twelve years old. But I’ll take it. Either way, it works for my readers. And that’s what matters. Lesson learned: Stop cluttering your interface. Whether that’s in person, online or on the phone, remove whatever surrounding complexity you can from the way people experience you and your message. Slow things down from the usual hectic pace. Let your audience breathe. As a writer (and don’t act like you’re not a writer – everyone’s a writer), your best tool for accomplishing this is with the Flesch-Kincaid Tests. They’re easily found on most word processing grammar checks. And they’re designed to measure comprehension difficulty and readability when reading a passage of contemporary academic English. Remember: What’s the point of being fresh air if you don’t give people adequate pauses to inhale? It’s time to step it up by dumbing down. *What metrics will you use to simplify your message?*

121. **Embody the extinct.** Just out of curiosity, I recently googled the phrase, “What’s lacking is a sense of...” Across all industries, the most common item that came up was “urgency” or “immediacy.” Interesting. Perhaps the acceleration of technology combined with our hyperspeed culture is the wakeup call companies need to increase their average response time. Just one example. Either way, if you want to become a breath of fresh air, become a living example of what’s lacking in the rest of the world. Conduct research on your own – either online or person – to find out what’s extinct in your world. Then position yourself as the opposite. For example, few professional speakers post their fees publicly on their website. And that’s exactly why I post mine: To embody the transparency that’s sorely lacking in my industry. The best part is: My clients love it. *What obsolete value are you making obligatory?*

122. Embrace your outsidersness. Lesson learned: Being an outsider gives you an inside track. For three reasons. First, outsiders can be truly objective. They have little or no bias. They can recognize patterns immediately. They have no stake in the company or organization. They don't bring vested interests to an existing problem. They can explore the structure of an organization with fresh eyes. And they're not viewed as a threat, which diffuses defensiveness and increases willingness to listen. Secondly, outsiders don't face traditional barriers. They're unaware of common creative blocks. They're not subject internal politics of the organization. And they're able to explore assumptions the organization that were never considered or taken for granted. Finally, outsiders can deliver independent thought. Their thinking patterns are different. They're detached from the outcomes. They're not so close to the situation and therefore have limited agendas. And their wealth of diverse background experience applies cross-industrially. Ultimately, people are tired of listening to the same messages from the same people. Embrace your outsidersness today and move into a position of value tomorrow. Remember: It's a lot easier to break the limit when you don't know the limit exists. And sometimes it takes a person who knows nothing to change everything. *Are you willing to admit that you're not part of the club?*

123. **Enable reciprocity.** I was in a cupcake store in Australia. When the cashier rang me up, I clumsily grabbed all the coins in my pocket, took one look at the confusing shapes and colors – then took one look at the long line behind me – turned to cashier and said: *“Here. You do it.”* She smiled back; picked out the coins she needed and completed the transaction. That’s reciprocity. *If you want people to trust you, trust them first.* Even if you have no logical reason to do so. You always gain a greater interaction. The world is a mirror. What you put out, comes back. It’s not a cliché – it’s human nature. People have mindless, automatic reciprocity reflexes. And they perform certain actions when the world presents them with certain patterns of input. That’s why strangers will spontaneously introduce themselves to me: Not necessarily because they want to meet me, but because of my nametag, I’m willing to meet them. *What first step are you willing to take?*

124. **Enable the infection.** Not with a fatal disease, of course. The word “infect” comes from the Latin *infectere*, which means, “to put in.” That’s what approachable leaders do: They infect their followers. And the question you have to ask yourself is: *What are you putting into people?* Fire? Passion? Creativity? Excitement? Inspiration? Enthusiasm? Salmonella? What are you infecting them with? In fact, it might not even matter. With the exception of most diseases, what you infect people isn’t as important as how you infect them. And in my experience, the best way to infect people is simple: *Go out of your way to gush.* Just like you do with your best friend after a memorable first date. You know the drill: You call them up as soon as you get back to your car. Then, while your heart is still doing back flips, you yap their ears off for an hour about how great the girl is. That’s gushing. Letting the infection cascade out of your pores like a waterfall until other people have no choice but to believe you. It has nothing to do with being sick. It’s about transferring emotion. Putting something into people. Influencing them with your energy, mood, mindset and overall state of being. *Whom are you infecting?*

125. Enlist active and ongoing encouragement from your environment. In my office, you can't see the walls. They're covered ceiling to floor with items of motivation: Letters from inspired readers. Testimonials from audience members. Hatemail from people with too much time on their hands. Newspaper clippings from articles I've written or been featured in. Pictures of people I love. Quotations from songs that shook my soul. A map of the country with a thumbtack on every city I've spoken in. This is how I motivate myself each day. Of course, I'm a visual learner. This might not work for you. Your mission is to create atmosphere conducive to motivation based on your preferences and style. *How does your home turf subtly kick you in the ass?*

126. Enlist your rational faculty. “Sanity is highly overrated.”

I believe that with all my heart. The challenge is striking a healthy balance between being out of your mind and being out of money. And this happens a lot to people who go where there is no path. Because the bottom line is: You can’t remove the teeth from the cruel bite of reality. When you’re broke, you’re broke. A helpful mantra my family likes to say is, “You can’t eat like an elephant and shit like a bird.” The funny thing is, I’ve been saying that for years. But it wasn’t until my business got audited that I had to stop talking this philosophy and start living it. Damn it. I hate it when that whole integrity thing comes back to bite me in the ass. The point is: You have to use your brain – especially the left side of it. Especially if you make significant financial investments to your endeavors. As Amazon founder Jeff Bezos told FastCompany, “You can seduce yourself with your gifts if you’re not careful.” *How can you spend no money next year?*

127. **Ensure rapt interest.** I'll never forget reading the *Rolling Stone* interview with Dave Grohl. As the co-founder of the genre-defining group, Nirvana – and as the frontman of multi-Grammy award winning band, Foo Fighters, he's someone whose brain is worth listening to. In the article, he revealed his band's performance strategy: "Our goal is to make sure nobody in the audience looks at their watch." I never forgot that. And years later, when I became a professional speaker, I realized that there was another level to that powerful principle: Great speakers keep audience members from looking at their watches – but awesome speakers make audiences forget they're even wearing one. Lesson learned: Make it impossible (not) to pay attention. Whether you're delivering a speech, conducting a meeting, holding a conference call or giving a sales pitch, anyone can do this. You just need to deploy your genius. To give what you are. You know: Thing you don't have to talk about. The thing you don't have to do anything with. It's just there. And all you have to do is play it. That's what happens when you allow your highest self to guide you: You disappear. *What uniqueness can you enlist to assure that surrounding people can't help but watch with breathless interest and rapt attention?*

128. Environments either champion or choke focus. When I deliver training programs on employee engagement, here's my favorite statistic to share: Three hundred billion dollars. Within the U.S. workforce, Gallup estimates that this is the cost in lost productivity alone, according to their thirty-year Employee Engagement Index. And it just occurred to me: I wonder what percentage of that number is related to a lack of focus? Answer: Too much. After all, focus is a function of environment. And I don't mean *feng shui* – I mean *the emotional environment of your workspace*. For example: It's easy to focus when you don't feel edited. It's easy to focus when you don't feel policed. It's easy to focus when passion is embedded into the pavement. It's easy to focus when work is a gateway and not a grind. And it's easy to focus when you can count on the emotional release of consistent public recognition. Remember: If you're having trouble concentrating on the work that matters, maybe it's because you're not engaged in the first place. *What environmental energy keeps you from keeping focused?*

129. Err on the side of embodiment. Jesus didn't just tell stories – he *was* the story. That's what enabled his dream to endure. That's what made his dream eminently sellable to the masses. And that's what inspired his followers to leap out of their sandals and paint the earth with his dream for the next two thousand years. The cool part is: You don't need to be a Christian to be a follower of Christ. We can all learn from his example, religious beliefs notwithstanding. My suggestion: Stop being a storyteller and start being a storyliver. The proof is already there. All you have to do is figure out what questions you've been answering with your life since your dream started. Then, write them down. Next, support each question with at least three specific stories and experiences from your life. And finally, use that reservoir of embodiment as ammo to mount an evidence campaign. *How much evidence will you need to take the people who matter lightyears beyond reasonable doubt?*

130. Establish instant credibility in this moment. Mention a piece of work you did with a competitor. Ask a question about a recent press release your customer published. Or, bring in a laptop with video testimonials of past clients who look exactly like the person you're try to sell! Remember: Nobody wants to be the first person to trust you. Establishing credibility reinforces relevance, and relevance opens wallets. *How credible do your prospects perceive you to be?*

131. Establish metrics that matter. While facilitating a recent leadership retreat, one of my participants said – and I quote – “The other day I cut the grass just to feel like I did something.” Good lord. But, I guess good for him for executing that task. Too bad that task didn’t matter. That’s the rub with self-accountability: If you’re going to kick your own ass, you better wear a relevant shoe. Otherwise you wind up executing – exquisitely – something inconsequential. Consider this: First, establish weekly criticals. These are the five key tasks that absolutely need to be executed by the end of the week for that week to be considered a success. Otherwise you’ve just wasted seven days of your life. Second, develop daily essentials. These are the three highly valuable activities that absolutely need to be accomplished for that day to be considered a success. Ultimately, the effectiveness of this practice comes from the small-scale, non-threatening nature of the metrics. What’s more, if you focus on small wins, the larger victories will happen by themselves. I’ve been logging these two metrics daily for eight years. It works. *Are you winning a game that (actually) matters?*

132. Even when you say no, you're still marketing. Let's say someone approaches you with a problem. And you *know* you don't have the solution. No worries. Respond by saying, "I have no idea. This is outside of my scope of expertise. Fortunately, here are three people I trust who have answers for you." By doing so, you're still the answer. Maybe not the answer people were looking for. But you still pointed them in the right direction. You still positioned yourself as a resource. What's more, your willingness to divulge your ignorance demonstrates honesty, character and approachability. People will notice. *Are you willing to defer when you've surpassed the perimeter of your competence?*

133. Execution is a check you can cash. My mentor once told me that my biggest advantage is that nobody could keep up with me. And after some serious reflection, I realized he was right. I am dangerously prolific. I refuse to slow down long enough for anyone to catch up. And that means I will out execute everybody. For four reasons: First, nobody – who does what I do – can do what I do, as fast as I can do it. That's executional velocity: Take action quickly. Second, nobody – who does what I do – can do what I do – as much as I can do it. That's executional volume: Take action prodigiously. Third, nobody – who does what I do – can do what I do – as well as I can do it. That's executional value: Take action exquisitely. And finally, nobody – who does what I do – can do what I do – as long as I can do it. That's executional vitality: Take action consistently. I challenge you to think about your executional velocity, volume, value and vitality. *Are you talker or a doer?*

134. Execution is a process of elimination. The reason I was able to write a dozen books in nine years is not because I'm superhuman. It's not because I'm a genius. And it's not because I'm a better writer than anyone. I just know how to delete. Here's a quick overview of my publishing and consulting company: *No meetings. No busywork. No status reports. No television. No task requests. No putting out fires. No managing people. No micromanaging people. No committees to go in front of. No office politics. No office. No commute. No distractions. No paperwork.* And after deleting all of that noise, what are you left with? Work. That. Matters. I challenge you to make a list of twenty things you could easily delete from your day. You'll be amazed how easy it is to compress time. *What things are you doing – everyday – that make absolutely no sense at all?*

135. Execution is the bridge between creativity and innovation. Everybody is creative. My five-year-old nephew is creative. That's the easy part, since creativity is a state of being. Innovation, on the other hand, is a rare bird. It denotes consistent action. And not everyone can pull it off. Only those who impatiently transition from inertia to action. *Are you turning your ideas into money or into more ideas?*

136. Exercise proactivity in environments designed to mitigate it. Some people will try to force you comply with their preferences; often times without rational justification or without respectful permission. When this happens, the smartest thing you can do is to speak with a clear, sharp and committed voice. Let people know that you'll be thinking for yourself, thank you very much. And that if they try to pull that stunt again, you're gone. Instead, declare yourself a victor with your own voice. Otherwise you're nothing but a copy machine. Remember: Your true colors are very bright. Do not let people dull them. Within each of us there is a spirit ready to respond to the world. That's weapon that wasn't meant to be holstered. *Are you willing to stand up for what you believe at the cost of alienating people who don't matter?*

137. Expand self-efficacy. Speaking of goals. Famed psychologist Albert Bandura defines self-efficacy as a belief in our own ability to succeed, and our ability to achieve the goals we set for ourselves. According to his book *Self-Efficacy*, high levels of self-efficacy result in an ability to view difficult goals as a challenge, whereas people with low self-efficacy would likely view the same goals as being beyond their abilities, and might not even attempt to achieve them. Lesson learned: *Get in touch with your resistance.* Know what stops, deflates and derails you. That way, your high resolve will never melt under the heat lamp of temptation. *How efficacious are you?*

138. Expand your role repertoire, continued. When I first started my company, I had a book. *That was it.* A decade later, my business has evolved into a diverse, robust enterprise. Now, my clients can use me in eight different ways. And this not only diversifies my business and positions me as a valued resource, but educates my clients on the depth of my deliverables. That's why Brandtag was so exciting to me: It was a new role. A combination of artist, translator and consultant. Not just a guy who writes books. And if you want your business to accomplish the same, try this: Physically map out a chart of every possible way clients can give you money. By doing so, you'll be able to better articulate the diverse offerings that emphasize your expanded role repertoire. Remember: The goal is to transition from "Should we hire them?" to "How should we use them?" *Do your customers truly know all the different ways they can engage your services?*

139. **Expand your role repertoire.** I love the opening line of Henry Rollins' Wikipedia entry: *"Henry Rollins is an American singer, songwriter, raconteur, stand-up comedian, spoken word artist, writer, publisher, record label owner, actor, radio DJ, and activist."* Now that's how you make use of everything you are. I hope that by the time I'm fifty, I'm recognized in such a diverse way. What about you? How diverse dare you be? My suggestion is to expand your role repertoire. Here's how: Next time a new, risky or unexpected opportunity comes along, ask yourself: "Is this another chance to do more of the things I love?" If so, take it. Stay engaged with life's possibilities and stretch deep inside yourself for this new role. That's how you invite victory in every game you play. Not by winning all the time – but by having fun, playing new games, playing your heart out and learning from the process. Don't worry: You will be rewarded for the value you're able to create. As long as you remember that you need to renew to become great. Even if not everybody likes you. Screw those wankers. Better to be hated for what you are than loved for what you aren't. *Where do you want to grow next?*

140. Expect to leave people behind. Even if you love them. Even if you've been friends for years. Even if they didn't do anything to hurt you. Professionals surround themselves with other professionals who challenge and inspire them. That means: No amateurs. No hacks. No bloodsuckers. No wannabes. No nevergonnabes. And certainly, no losers who bring drama you don't need. These individuals need be deleted from your life. Instead, hang with people who are going somewhere – other than the back porch to smoke pot. Hang with people who are making money – not people who want to learn how you make money. I know it's a hard rope to cut. Personally, I once chose to divorce an entire group of close friends that I had loved since high school – because they were busy doing cocaine, and I was busy changing the world. Now, admittedly, I suffered a mild panic attack the next day. But I got over it. And what's interesting is that none of my old friends ever called to ask where I was. So instead, I found new, better, smarter friends who played in the same sandbox as me. It's all part of going full time. Your career is too important to allow your dreams to be realized at a significantly slower pace because you're too busy looking over your shoulder. Remember: You are the financial average of the five people you surround yourself with most. *Who do you love that you need to leave behind?*

141. Extend unrestricted mental hospitality to every achievement. Self-confidence comes from self-evidence. Here's my suggestion: With every victory – regardless of size – constantly remind yourself: *This is not a trivial accomplishment.* Personally, I keep a Victory Log. Been making entries every morning since 2002. From profitable business achievements like, “Landed a huge consulting contract!” to smaller personal triumphs like, “Didn’t pass out from massive dehydration in yoga class today.” Hey man, a win is a win. I’m reminded of what Seneca wrote in *Letters to a Stoic*: “Call to mind things that you have done that have been upright or courageous; run over in your mind the finest parts that you have played.” This provides you with a secure base – a context of sufficiency coupled with an attitude of self-confidence – from which to operate. That’s how you win, and keep winning. *What victories did you memorialize today?*

142. Fall in love with why. When you infuse your process with deep purpose, it's noticeably easier to trust it. That's why rituals are so critical. They carve a pathway. They create a sacred container around what you're about to engage in. And they prevent you from asking, "Why the hell am I even doing this?" This helps you fall in love with the process, not just what the process produces. Mihály Csíkszentmihályi's defined this dichotomy in hi book *Creativity*. "Exotelic means you do something not because you enjoy it but to accomplish a later goal. But autotelic means there is no reason for doing something except to feel the experience it provides." Lesson learned: Trusting the process is a spiritual discipline. An investment in the stability of the universe. *Why do you do what you do?*

143. Farming isn't for farmers anymore. As a writer, publisher and artist, I've learned that best way to bring home the bacon is to raise your own pigs. Think about it: No more traffic on the way to the store. No more inflated retail prices. And no more waiting in lines with the other carnivores. If you raise your own pigs, and you want some bacon – you just grab a knife and go outside. That's what impatient, persistent, heartstrong people do: They sing the song that is natural for them to sing, in the way that is natural for them to sing it, in front of the fans who most need to hear it. Then, they give their audience permission to be taken over by the performance. Even if they have to rent the theater themselves. If you are fortunate enough to find the work you were born to do, find ways to do that work no matter what. *No. Matter. What.* Because the only thing worse than not having a song to sing is having a song to sing, but not giving yourself permission to sing it. The show must go on. May as well hire yourself as the headliner. *When was the last time people watched you do what you do?*

144. Find adequate moral support. The hardest part about going your own way is going it alone. Sure, it's great for productivity – but where's the fun in celebrating your victories when nobody's around to watch you blow out the candles? I'm all for doing the work to please yourself – but I'm also tired of being lonely. And that's where your support system comes in handy: You need people who will be whatever gets you through. People who will gladly sit with you in companionable silence. And people who will enthusiastically carry you to the other side of the wall. The secret is: You can't force it. When the loneliness creeps in like a mist, sporadically calling everyone you know to compensate for the anxiety is like eating sugar, then crashing three hours later. My suggestion: Instead of digging your well when you're thirsty, set up your life up in a way that the water is always flowing. And like a human oasis, it will be there when you need it. Then, just remember to live your life as a thank you in perpetuity to the people who live there. Because if you forget who helped you on the way up, it's going to be a lonely fall on the way down. *Who's got your back?*

145. Find qualified check-writers. You've got your sales pitch ready. It's funny, interesting, value-driven and has a great story. But if you're sharing that with the wrong people, you may as well be winking in the dark. Here's the secret: Find the economic buyer or find yourself broke. You still want to be cordial and respectful. Don't use lower people just to get to somebody who can cut a check. The challenge is to create a filter so you know whom to approach that can get your paid. *Are you telling a terrific story to the wrong person?*

146. Finished is the new perfect. In a recent interview, Ira Glass made a brilliant comment on the creative process: “Your taste, the thing that got you into the game, is a killer. And your taste is why your work disappoints you.” That’s a tough pill to swallow: Knowing that not everything you make will feel like a masterpiece. In fact, I remember getting to that point with Brandtag. The obsessive-compulsive part of me wanted to keep editing, revising, updating and improving the final piece. But the impatient part of me said: *Just ship the damn thing.* Declare it done. The hay is in the barn. Because without this crucial moment, you trap yourself in the infinite regression of better. And it’s more convenient to be a victim of resistance than to risk executing what matters. My suggestion: Stop ironing out the wrinkles nobody is going to notice. By fixating on improvement, you’re missing what you already are. *When will you realize that you’re the only person waiting to get everything right?*

147. **Fire up your findability.** Marketing is simple: Create a product that customers can stumble upon, obsess over, fall in love with, become addicted to and tell their friends about. There. I just saved you \$80,000 in business school tuition. *You're welcome.* But the secret is: If you want customers to stumble upon you, you need to become more *findable*. One suggestion is to ask them. A helpful question I ask my readers every time they write in is, "What helped you find me this time?" You might be surprised by their answers. *How do you demonstrate to people that you're worth being found?*

148. **Flex the muscle of life.** A few years ago I read a study published by a California health club chain. Their research indicated that fifty-three percent of Americans could not touch their toes. Can you? If not, starting over might kill you. Because lack of flexibility isn't just a fitness problem – it's a life problem. In *The Power of Full Engagement*, Jim Loehr defines emotional flexibility as the capacity to move freely and appropriately along a wide spectrum of emotions rather than responding rigidly or defensively. And he defines mental and spiritual flexibility as “the capacity to move between the rational and the intuitive, to embrace multiple points of view and to tolerate values and beliefs that are different than your own.” That's what starting over is all about: Flexing the muscle of life. Seeking out ways to be stretched. And making yourself uncomfortable in situations that call for creativity and adaptability. From that space of elasticity, you'll enable the ideal starting point from which to grow. *Does the muscle of your life have a broad range of motion?*

149. **Focus activates progress.** Throughout your day, beware of the distraction of the next idea. Shiny object syndrome is executioner of execution and the preventer of progress. Marcus Aurelius addressed this issue a few thousand years ago in *Meditations*, “Give not the strongest foothold to anything else. Nothing will sooner prevent your true spirit from flourishing or be more difficult to root out than the distraction of divided loyalty.” Look: You don’t need more ideas. Pick a lane, crank up the Alpine and drop some led on the gas. Remember: Moving forward means invest time in things that matter – not burning time trivially persisting on inconsequential wastes of energy. *How much time are you wasting (not) focusing on your priorities?*

150. Focus groups are amateurs. Don't just learn about your customers' business – learn about their brain. Try their heads on. Learn to think like them and you'll be able to provide more customized service. Fortunately, social media provides you with an all-you-can-eat buffet of options for doing so. That's the biggest misconception: People assume social media is for selling. It's not – it's for solving. It's a perpetual listening platform that will give you more insight into people's brains than a hundred focus groups combined. The hard part is, using social media for that purpose forces you to face reality with an open mind and even more open heart. But that's the only way to hear with clean ears. Who knows? Maybe you'll learn that you're spending millions of dollars positioning yourself as the answer to a problem nobody's trying to solve. *Are you fulfilling a compelling need for your target market or projecting onto that market what you think they should want?*

151. Focus on income generating activities only. I once read a business book that said the typical entrepreneur spends 43 minutes a day on marketing. That's it? What the hell are they doing for the other 557 minutes? Playing on Farmville? I don't care what industry you work in, here's the naked truth: Everything you do is marketing. Everything. All day. Every day. From phone calls to client meetings to conversations to tweets to attending networking events. It's all marketing. And once you realize that, you find a way to leverage everything you do to get the word out about why you rock. *How much time do you spend on marketing each day?*

152. Focus on what's first – not what's next. Look: I'm an entrepreneur. And I'm all for thinking about the future. But sometimes that's a trap. Sometimes you get sucked into the vortex of passionately pondering the potential of your big idea that you forget to take the necessary *first* steps to execute it. And that's usually right around the time some snot nosed punk from Harvard steals the idea from under your nose. My suggestion: If you want to take initiative on an idea that's fair game to the world, don't let the movement value of that idea seduce your ego into believing it's the only thing that matters. Execution is a matter of focus. Either you're concentrating on the tide approaching shore, or the sand between your toes. Both are essential; but only one matters in the beginning. *Are you bowing to the door of next or kissing the feet of first?*

153. Follow your heart without losing your mind. Following your heart is more than just doing what you want. It's about working without a map. It's about giving the soul its bread. It's about penetrating the stuckness. It's about nourishing your compulsion. Also. It's about taking your dreams seriously. It's about honoring the constants in your life. It's about abandoning things whose time has passed. It's about stepping out and exposing your dream to the light. Settling is a silent epidemic. Stop telling yourself that this too shall pass. Stop being a guest star in other people's existence. Just go. Otherwise you really will lose your mind. *Would you rather follow your heart and fall on your face, or swallow your voice and watch freedom escape?*

154. Follow your unintentionals. One of the coolest books I've ever read is *Unintentional Music*, by Lane Arye. His philosophy is that the things we normally consider to be garbage can enrich us. And that when we choose to see disturbing or unwanted materials as potentially meaningful to our work, the final recordings of our life's music is that much more beautiful. "Rather than ignore or try to get rid of the things we don't like," Lane says, "we can transform them into things of beauty or shift our focus and realize that they are what we have been seeking all along." The best part is, this isn't just about music. This is about refusing to overlook the value of the unintentional notes in your life. Accidents, schmaccidents. As you make your mark on the world, listen for the music that wants to be played. Then, accept that whatever note is played, is reality. And embrace it. Even if it sounds off key. Then, as often as possible, let that baby blast through the speakers until the neighbors come knocking. I'm reminded of what my mentor told me last month: "The stuff you stumble into will be more of who you are than the stuff you carefully guided your footsteps for." Who knows? Maybe you'll end up making your mark on an unexpected canvas. *Are you allowing, embracing and using your accidents?*

155. Forego approval and start firing. One school of thought is to execute without permission. To just go. To say, “Screw it! I’m moving to Nashville.” If this applies to your situation, consider three counterintuitive suggestions made by friends of mine. First, Jamie, the owner of a local fitness club. He suggests to make your dreams so big and so out there that no one can touch them but you. “If someone can reach your dream or take it away,” he told me, “then it wasn’t big enough in first place.” Cool. Secondly, consider what my Facebook friend Alejandro advises: “Just keep insisting until they eventually get tired of trying to stop you.” Not a bad idea. Finally, you might attempt what my colleague Gil recommends: “Don’t even try. You have only so much energy to expend. Don’t burn it trying to blow away the black clouds in your life.” Sweet. Naturally, these suggestions aren’t the most practical. Especially when you’ve got bills to pay and mouths to feed. And while not everyone has the luxury of maintaining such a drastic mindset, it’s still a valid point to make: Approval is overrated. It all depends how on much permission you require. Who knows? Maybe convincing the people you love that your crazy idea isn’t a pipe dream IS the pipe dream it itself. And if that’s the case, screw ‘em. *Are you asking, “Who’s going to let me?” or wondering, “Who’s going to stop me?”*

156. Friendly costs nothing. My business card is a nametag. But it doesn't say *Scott* – it says *Scott's Friend*. I don't give people a choice. Everybody my friend, whether they like it or not. *Amigo del Mundo*. That's how I was raised. I want to be friends with everyone, all the time, everywhere. And I want to love everybody I meet forever and then some. Over the years, these friend cards have created a lot of special moments. I'll never forget the incident on the tarmac. I was waiting to board my plane when I felt someone's eyes upon me. Glancing up at the door, I noticed the groundsman holding up his laminated security badge with one of my business cards facing outward. "Hey look everybody – I'm Scott's Friend!" he laughed. "Wait a minute. Where did you get that? Have we met before?" "No, but you flew through here last week. And I think the zipper on your bag must have broke, because we found three hundred of your cards scattered across the runway!" *Great*. Not only am I a litterbug, but now my contact information is all over the trash. "Oh, don't worry about it Scott. Matter of fact, I made my entire staff on the runway wear your cards in their security badge holders." "Really? Why?" "Well, our airport just got a new general manager. His name is Scott, and he doesn't have any friends." It's not who you love – it's whose life is better because you love them. *How many friends did you make last week?*

157. Full time means full time. Discipline isn't something you have – it's something you continually pursue and consistently practice. As I learned from Steven Pressfield, author of *The War of Art*, "A professional shows up every day, shows up no matter what and exposes himself to the judgment of the real world." That's the difference maker that separates the professionals from the amateurs: The discipline to punch in, every morning. Even when you're hurt, tired, sick, annoyed, hung over or dehydrated. You clock in no matter what. *When was the last time resistance beat you?*

158. **Get good at getting lost.** I get lost almost every day of my life. Not just because I have a non-existent sense of direction – but also because I love it. I demand it. And while I’m sure it frustrates my friends and family to no end, that’s just who I am. People know: If you take a trip with me, you better bring your boots. Because there ain’t no map, there ain’t no plan and there ain’t no telling where we’ll end up. But, that’s all part of taking the road less traveled: Not knowing. And our brightest transformations usually occur in the moments when we’ve lost our way. The secret is making sure we haven’t lost our why. Because although it doesn’t always matter where we’re going – if we don’t *why* we’re going, whatever destination we reach will be stumbled upon with an empty, lifeless heart. It’s like Buckminster Fuller said, “Every perfect traveler always creates the country where he travels.” The question is: How directionless can you afford to be? You need to figure that out for yourself. Remember: A world in which you can’t get lost isn’t a world – it’s a cage. *Are you leaving room for the unexpected?*

159. **Get people to follow your thinking.** The world puts a premium on articulateness. And if you can express yourself creatively, concisely and compellingly, you win. The catch is, you have to clarify before you testify. And the best way to do is by thinking on paper. *Not emailing. Not texting.* Good old writing. Every single day. Even if you only hit the page for fifteen minutes, that's enough. Hell, I started with fifteen minutes a day and now I'm up to three hundred. The good news is, writing makes everything you do easier and better. What's more, writing helps you define the way you think about the world. And if you can get the people who agree with that definition to delegate certain chunks of their thinking to you, that world will be yours. Get it through your head: You're a thinker. Your brain is valuable. And your point of view matters. It's time to say what you believe and see who follows. As long as you remember: The secret to self-expression is to believe that you have something worth expressing. *Do you believe you're worth putting on paper?*

160. Getting stopped in your tracks helps you own the path. If you think taking the first step is hard, wait until you encounter your first obstacle. *Yikes*. Resistance will knock you on your ass so hard your teeth will hurt. Then again, just imagine the resilience you're developing. We should all be so lucky. Besides, as long as you view your obstacles as inconvenient – not insurmountable – you'll make it out alive. As my friend Rusty reminds me, "Attitude is the only difference between an ordeal and an experience." The key is to stop battling the resistance and start befriending it. Identify what lesson life is trying to teach you by asking the following question, "How can I use this situation as an opportunity to learn something about myself and change for the better?" Remember: If there's no resistance, you're doing something wrong. Accept the obstacles as part of the path and answer the invitation to evolve. *Are you willing to greet the resistance with a welcoming heart?*

161. Give your fear a voice. You think you're scared? You ain't seen nothing yet. Try looking into the eyes of the people who matter and honestly sharing why you're scared. That'll make you wish you wore a diaper to work. I tried this during a recent board meeting as the president of my local association. At the onset, I asked everyone to share what they were scared of and why. Now, as the leader, I went first. "Guys, I'm scared that our chapter has outlived its usefulness. I'm scared we're approaching irrelevancy quickly. And I'm scared this ship is going down on my watch. Who's next?" And for the next few minutes, everyone went around the table and voiced their fears too. It wasn't pretty, but we made it through the exercise. The cool part was, even though sharing our individual concerns was scary initially; the simple act of doing so assuaged much of our doubt. And after a healthy, honest discussion, it turned out there wasn't as much to be scared of as we thought. Huh. Maybe that's the secret. Maybe the best way to save yourself from your fears – personally or professionally – is to share them publicly. I wonder how many of your relationships could be saved by an honest exchange of mutual scared-shitlessness. *When was the last time you emptied your purse on the table?*

162. Give your story a trophy. It's not enough just to clarify your story – you also have to humanize, personify and memorialize it. Like my friend Chris, the founder of Simplifilm. Their specialty is creating digital videos for client websites. The cool part is: Chris doesn't market them as videos – but as trophies. "I wanted my people to feel honored, their creations to be treasured and their stories to be cherished. So we started creating limited edition posters for each client after the job was complete. We now ship them as gifts of gratitude. And when they eventually hang in the client's office, these social objects not only memorialize the work we've done together, but also stimulate conversation about their story." That's how you build story equity: By creating an artifact that extends the influence of your brand into the marketplace. *How are you making it easy for people to tell your story?*

163. Give yourself permission to be crazy. To have a crazy idea, you must become physically, mentally and spiritually crazy yourself. Nothing illegal. Nothing dangerous. Just the willingness to stick yourself out there, make yourself uncomfortable and violate the status quo aggressively and creatively – all the while, being made fun of by most of the world. That's not too much to ask, is it? Naturally, this is the biggest barrier for most people. Mostly because it involves massive uncertainty. Venturing down a less-defined path. And accepting the reality that along the journey, people are going to look at you like you've got green antennas growing out of your skull. Are you ok with that? Remember: Crazy ideas rarely come from sane people. *Is your straightjacket securely fastened?*

164. Give yourself permission to get lost. Inasmuch as focus is a virtue, you can't stay focused all the time. Nobody can. Humans aren't wired that way. Besides, if all you ever do is focus – you'll never have any fun. And nobody will want to be around you. The secret is to book blank time. I learned this from a classic study conducted at Kansas State University's Counseling Services Department. Their researchers found that because focusing can be such hard work, you should reward yourself when you hit the mark. Personally, I do this each morning: It's called a daily appointment with myself. It galvanizes my entire day, keeps me from going insane and instills a renewing and reenergizing spirit that helps me return with strength. My suggestion: You need this block of time in your life. Because it's impossible to gauge progress if you never come up for air. But, when you stay committed to your own personal reflection needs, you'll have no trouble staying focused when it's time to get back to work. *When was the last time you sat uninterrupted and quiet for at least fifteen minutes?*

165. Go back to the future. When I first started my publishing company, my mentor asked me a question I'll never forget: "If everybody did exactly what you said, what would the world look like?" Turns out, this is the critical question that every writer – and, for that matter, every leader – needs to ask. Here's why: First, it enables you to act as if the dream has already come true. Second, it helps you imagine what you need to become in order for the dream to manifest. Third, it empowers you to speak from the future, then look back to identify the steps that led there. And finally, it inspires you to paint a compelling, detailed picture of the desired future that you can meaningful strides toward. And the best part is: This question keeps you accountable to your dream as you sell it. Because all you have to do is make sure that what you're doing every day is both giving people the tools they need to build that world, plus showing them how to use those tools correctly. Remember: You can't sell anyone on your dream if you haven't sold it to yourself first. *If everybody did exactly what you said, what would the world look like?*

166. **Go full time.** You're tired of dabbling. You're sick of being an amateur. You're ready to go all in and play in the big leagues. That could only mean one thing: *It's time to go full time.* This is the single most important decision you could make as an artist, creative professional or entrepreneur. Going full time means no turning back. Which means you're in it for the long haul. Which means you'll need patience, stamina and stick-to-it-ive-ness. Going full time means publicly (and purposefully) choosing to play big. Which means you're accountable to others. Which means you're accountable to yourself. Going full time means committing with both feet. Which means don't screw around anymore. Which means this isn't a hobby, side interest or an extra-curricular activity. You want so badly to jump off the edge, but sometimes the best you can do is slide down the side of the mountain on your butt.

167. Go pro or go home. Going where there is no path requires commitment with both feet. And if you haven't reached that point yet, allow me to describe it: It's that moment when you notice a deficit in yourself. When every minute that goes by, you feel more and more robbed of your true talent. When your spirit kneels bare handed. And when it becomes so existentially agonizing that you can't take it anymore, you stop what you're doing one day and say, "What the hell am I doing here?" And that's when you jump. That's when you push all your chips to the middle of the table and say, "Screw it. I'm all in." Make no mistake: This will be the most liberating – and most terrifying – moment of your career. But it's all part of the path. You have to go pro. You have to start showing up every day, no matter what, and risk exposing yourself to the judgment of the world. Otherwise your amateurism will block your progress. You always sin when you deny yourself a purpose below your responsibilities. *What's preventing the world from taking you seriously?*

168. Go where the party is already happening. *How do you find the football field in a small town on an autumn weekend? Simple: You look for the lights.* The same rule applies to marketing. “You don’t create your own party and expect people to show up – you go where the whole town will be,” writes Robbin Phillips in *Brains on Fire*. In short: You look for the lights. And the best place to start is within. For example, the reason I started wearing a nametag everyday in college is because I was sick and tired of not being invited to parties because I didn’t drink. Simple as that. The nametag allowed people to get to know me as a person – not as choice. For you, consider asking yourself: What disturbs you the most? What pisses you off beyond belief? That’s the pain that has most to offer. That’s where the party is already happening. Focus on that, and you’ll accelerate your idea beyond belief. Otherwise your enterprise will remain a hopeless endeavor. A meaningless portal. A majestically useless and inconsequential occurrence. Remember: Never underestimate the monetizability of momentum. *What horse – that’s already winning the race – do you need to hitch a ride with?*

169. Go your own way. *“Remember to wear your dark suit!”*

That was the advice my roommate gave me two hours before the career fair. Unfortunately, I didn’t own one. Or any suit, for that matter. So I did what any smart senior would have done: *Drove to Goodwill and bought one for seven dollars.* Later that day, with a stack of resumes in my hand, I headed toward the auditorium. And as I walked across the threshold, amidst this sea of stale, corporate exhibits, piles of free notepads and hundreds of fellow students hopping from booth to booth trying to prove themselves to people they didn’t even like, one question entered my mind: *“What the hell am I doing here?”* So I went home and finished my book. Nine months later, I published it. And nine years later, I published twelve more. I know going your own way can feel like digging your way to hell with a plastic fork. But it sure beats going to the career fair. Instead of one-size fits all, try my-size fits me. Everything is waiting for you. Fall in love with your own blueprints. But sliding down the side of the mountain on your ass isn’t going to bring you closer to your dream. If you’re going to jump – jump with all of your might. *Are you trying to go back to the top of the cliff?*

170. Grow a thicker skin towards the naysayers. Believe it not, not everybody wants you to become successful. In fact, much of the world will do everything they can to prevent you from diving into what matters. Maybe because they're jealous. Maybe because they're scared they'll lose you. Or maybe because they know your success will expose their averageness. Either way, you have to accept this reality. You have to be okay with the fact that not everyone you encounter wants you to jump. But, your ability to withstand criticism without crumbling is a leading determinant of your success. And at the same time, don't ignore the naysayers. It depends on the source, the validity of the comment and the context in which the criticism was offered. My motto is: Criticism keeps you in check when it's right, and keeps you in chuckles when it's ridiculous. And as you prepare to jump, just remember: You're nobody until somebody hates you. Besides, if everybody loves what you're doing, you're probably doing something wrong. *Is your skin as thick as a reptile or as thin rice paper?*

171. **Grow bigger ears.** A few sad realities: The world is not waiting breathlessly to hear what you have to say. The blogosphere is not standing on the edge of their seats eagerly anticipating your next post. And your followers on Twitter – who, by the way, don’t care about your tweets as much as they care about their stats – are not waking up an hour earlier just to read the hilarious update about your Rottweiler’s latest genital licking adventure. Truth is: Social media isn’t a marketing tool – it’s a hearing aid. Stop using it as a selling tool and start leveraging it as a listening platform. For example, I contribute to around fifty different publications, both online and offline. And as a writer and speaker, doing so is essential element of my visibility plan and a crucial component to my listening platform. But I don’t just give people my email – I offer them an additional resource to supplement the piece of content they just read, watched or listened to. That’s how I’ve changed the interaction model. And the cool part is, growing bigger ears enables the following leverage question: What does expanding your listening platform earns you the right to do? Answer: Everything, that’s what. Everything. *Are you listening to the sound of your own voice or the music of your customer’s voice?*

172. **Grow even even smaller ears.** If other people are charting the course of your life, your life is no longer your own. And that's not only dumb – it's dangerous. For example, whenever first timers attend meetings of my professional association, I always tell them the same thing: "Don't listen to anybody. Not even me. *Listen to you.*" Not exactly the advice you'd expect to hear from the chapter president. But the last thing we want is another newbie getting sucked into the vortex of conflicted advice. What might be smarter – and what might keep those people on the path of their heart – is if they wrote down the things they kept saying to themselves. Even if the confrontation hurt. Even if they were afraid to have those opinions. And even if they liked their thoughts so much that they didn't want to let them go. That's how you keep a light on the truth. That's how you keep consistent with your core. It's slightly hurtful but enormously helpful. *Are you using up everything you've got trying to give everyone else what they want?*

173. **Grow smaller ears.** A few thousand years ago, stoic philosopher Epictetus wrote, “If you go your own way, prepare for reactions.” He was right: Whatever you commit to, there will always people waiting for you to fail. Maybe because they envy your path. Maybe because they feel disenfranchised by your success. Or maybe because they see you living your truth and it pisses them off because they’re not living their own. But the reality is: If people can’t respect you for going your own way, their respect isn’t worth having in the first place. Take Hugh Macleod’s suggestion: Ignore everybody. Don’t be oppressed by those who try to silence your individuality. Don’t be destroyed in response to someone’s invitation to stop living. And don’t be limited by the thoughts that other have set in motion for you. Give up your obsessive need for approval from anyone other than yourself. Learn to believe in the availability of your own answers. *Do you have the courage to follow your inner guide even if you look like an idiot and risk alienating those who don’t understand?*

174. **Guilt throttles thrust.** One of my readers recently posed a question that forced me into a revision of thinking: “How do you follow your heart when it breaks everyone else’s?” Tough call. On one hand, if you follow your heart without watching the wake you leave behind, somebody you love might choke. Then again, you don’t want to miss out on a life changing opportunity because you’re a prisoner of your own remorse. Here’s what I think: *The people you love aren’t keeping you here – the guilt of leaving them, is.* You have to trust that the people who matter most want you to be happy. You have to believe they want you to be successful. And you have to know that they want you to live where you can grow into the best, highest version of yourself. I remember when I first told my parents I was moving to Portland. They were shocked, scared and begged me to give it a second thought. But the decision was already made. The voice inside me had simply grown too urgent. The cool part is, that one leap opened doors I never would have had access to otherwise. And the treasure that lay beyond the threshold changed my world forever. *Are you struggling against your own energy?*

175. Help customers visualize the end result. The benefit of the benefit of the benefit. Not a rental car – getting the hell out of the airport. Not a Happy Meal – shutting the damn kids up. Not a deep tissue massage – an escape from your stressful world. And the secret behind this principle is to visually represent this end result to the customer. Take Pizza Hut, for example. Do you think their website is just a bunch of pictures of pies? No way. You see images of families at home, sitting around the dinner table, laughing, sharing and relaxing. The pizza is just a prop.

176. Hit them in the wallet quicker. One of my clients is a nurse practitioner. He consults with hospitals, healthcare organizations and other medical professionals on how to practice heart-centered care. During one of our email mentoring sessions, he enlightened me about the mindset of a typical hospital administrator: “If it doesn’t directly relate to patient care – they don’t care.” To them, that’s what matters. It’s a bottom-line focus. It’s a self-interest that pivots on the principle of profitability. Not just for hospitals – for all organizations. For all customers. And not that it’s always about money, but let’s not shit ourselves: *People think with their wallets*. And to move from nice to necessary, you have to hit them there quicker. One suggestion for doing so comes from a recent issue of FastCompany. *Made to Stick* authors Dan & Chip Heath suggest that you sell aspirin, not vitamins. “If you want to succeed, you’d better be selling aspirin rather than vitamins. Vitamins are nice; they’re healthy. But aspirin cures your pain; it’s not a nice-to-have, it’s a must-have.” That’s how you hit them in the wallet quicker. That’s how nice becomes necessary: When what you do unearths your customer’s deeply felt needs. *Is your organization selling a better mousetrap or a dead mouse?*

177. Hold your own feet to the fire. You can't beat self-employment. Working from home. Working in your pajamas. Working your own schedule. Working the way you want to. No commute. No office politics. No pointless meetings. No bosses breathing down your neck. Sounds like a dream job, right? Most of the time. Except, you're the only person who can hold yourself accountable. And if you don't hold your own feet to the fire – eventually they're going to freeze. And frozen feet don't make money. This is about discipline. This is about self-motivation. This is about commitment to consistent action. The long-term survivability of your business is dependent on your ability to kick your own ass. Yes, laziness becomes extremely attractive when you know the masses will never know the difference. But as an entrepreneur, holding your own feet to the fire is part of the job description. Stay committed to being committed. Because sometimes, you have to administer the medicine to yourself, no matter how bad it tastes. *Are you willing to open wide and swallow the syrup of self-accountability?*

178. **Honor your dominant architecture.** Remember what happened when the Green Bay Packers offered Brett Favre twenty million dollars to retire? Right: *He turned the money down.* To me, that was a great moment in sports history. Favre basically said, “Excuse me, but, do you know who the hell I am? I’m sorry, maybe you’ve heard of me before: I’m Brett Favre – the greatest quarterback in the history of ever. And you’re seriously asking me (not) to make use of everything I have? Peace out, cheese heads.” That’s what it sounds like to be in tune with your heart. That’s what it sounds like to honor the dominant architecture of your life. The cool part is, when you do this, the example of how you live your life will become a walking book for people to read. And those lucky enough to watch the chapters being written right in their midst will be changed for better and for always. *When you figure out what’s under your fingernails, will you design it into something that devastates the world?*

179. How do you talk to yourself when you fail? Imagine you just screwed up. Ate the big one. Totally bombed. Pulled a Homer. Instead of whining, “I suck!” start affirming, “Nexttime...” First, this helps you let go of the past and focus on the future. You can’t debate what was. Second, maintaining a nexttime attitude forces you to begin thinking about what you’ll do differently. Sure beats becoming paralyzed by your own mistakes and a prisoner of yesterday’s errors. Third, nexttime is about (not) overreacting emotionally or being too hard on yourself. Rather, navigating the entrepreneurial waters calmly, objectively and unapologetically. *Are you willing to increase your dosage of vitamin nexttime?*

180. **I know who you are.** You've chosen to follow an uncommon road. You've elected to pursue a perilous and uncertain course. You've decided to go where there is no path and leave a trail. Let me be the first person to say: *Hell to the yes*. You are going to grow geometrically. You are going to evolve exponentially. You are going to *learn* comprehensively. Pshht. *Paths*. Overrated. But you can't navigate what isn't there. And after your initial excitement dies down, the nagging question will become, "Oh crap. If I'm the only person who's ever gone this way before, how the hell will I get directions?" You won't. Fortunately, I've accumulated a body of experience in this area. And I have some ideas I'd like to share with you that will be useful to your journey. Emerson suggested we do not go where the *path* may lead, but instead go where there is no *path and leave a trail*. Which choice will you make?

181. If everything you've done up until now is just the beginning, what's next? Past is prologue. Past brought you here. Past made you who you are. When you start to align your thinking with this truth, a new world of possibilities opens up. Your challenge is to extend gratitude for – and embrace the value of – everything you've already accomplished. At the same time, don't overvalue prior successes. Arrogance of the past will come back to bite you in the ass. As John Mayer explained during a 2009 interview with *Esquire*, “To evolve, you have to dismantle. And that means accepting the idea that nothing you created in the past matters anymore other than it brought you here. You pick up your new marching orders and get to work.” *Will you view the past as a crutch or a fulcrum?*

182. If it's worth dreaming about – it's worth being attacked

for. The more successful you become, the more torpedoes will be shot at you. *I know.* It's silly. It's like the closer your dream comes to fruition, the more pissed off people become. But, while this is a risky, demanding and unglamorous part of dreaming – that's what difference makers do: If they're not polarizing, they're not monetizing. If they're not making people react, they're not making a difference. And if everybody loves what they're doing, they're doing something wrong. Your mission is jack up the danger level of your dream. Consider creating a filter for your own work that reinforces the importance of risk. You might ask, "Who will this idea piss off?" or "How much hate mail will this garner?" After all, there is an inverse relationship between your willingness to risk and the likelihood of criticism. The good news is: At least being ridiculed means being noticed. Sure beats being ignored. Your challenge is to interpret criticism as benchmark – not a barrier. After all: If your dream isn't being attacked, it isn't big enough. *How do you weather ridicule?*

183. Increase your digital equity. That comes from a variety of sources: Interviews. Blog posts. Tagged photos. Search engine optimization. Articles. Presentations. Status updates. Tweets. The list goes on and on. And the key element behind it is simple: The Internet is forever. Forever. Everything matters. Everybody's watching. And everything's a performance. Which isn't that hard to do if the character you're playing is you. And if you want to build real equity, start by building your platform. That's the entire marketing engine that does the heavy lifting when you're on vacation.

184. Independence is more important than improvement.

The best way to protect your dream is to ignore the people who try to improve it. With the exception of a chosen few – whose honest, helpful feedback matters most – make a conscious to ignore most people’s suggestions. Sure, they might make your dream ten percent better – but you’ll feel thirty percent less free. And in my opinion, that’s a tradeoff that isn’t worth it. Try this: Forget about getting things right and focus on getting things moving in the right direction. Because you don’t need more areas of improvement – you need more actions of execution. That’s why I have the following mantra written on the wall over my desk: “Finished is the new perfect.” Or, as Hugh MacLeod wrote in *Ignore Everybody*, “The more original your idea is, the less good advice people will be able to give you.” Look: You’re the only one waiting for you to get everything right. Trust your inner resources; believe that you’re the person who can do this – then execute with all your might. There is no stronger protection from the would-be defectors of your dream. *Who is trying to edit you?*

185. Infect people with your vision. Otherwise your dream will never make into their hearts. That's what most people don't know about Brandtag: It took fifteen months to execute. But not because I was procrastinating. Rather, because I was documenting every single phase of the creative process – then, privately sharing it in a twenty-minute slide show presentation – with people who matter to me. Partly to obtain their feedback, but also to infect them with my vision of what the world would look like when these art pieces finally shipped. And to my delight, when Brandtag set sail, those people were already on board and willing to help me paddle. Remember: If people can't see the passion in your face, they won't hear a word that comes out of your mouth. Don't just show them the way – show them the why. *How will you inspire people to see the world as you do?*

186. Inspire people to see the world as you do. In her book, *The Story Factor*, Annette Simmons reminds us that people don't want more information – they want faith in you, your goals, your success and the story you tell. “That’s why people pick up where you left off: Because they believe.” The hard part is getting them to drink the punch. For example, I recently launched Brandtag, my series of customized, limited edition art pieces. It’s by far the riskiest thing I’ve ever shipped. But what most people don’t know about this project, however, is that it took fifteen months to execute. *And not because I was procrastinating.* Rather, because I was documenting every single phase of the creative process – then, privately sharing it in a twenty-minute slide show presentation – with people who matter to me. Partly to obtain their feedback, but also to infect them with my vision of what the world would look like when these art pieces finally shipped. And to my delight, when Brandtag set sail, those people were already on board and willing to help me paddle. Remember: If people can’t see the passion in your face, they won’t hear a word that comes out of your mouth. *Will you do whatever it takes to get your dream into the hearts of the people who matter most?*

187. **Install a regiment.** How you spend your day – literally, hour by hour – will determine how much money you make, how happy you are, how healthy you are and how successful you become. Especially when you don't have a "real job." You almost have to force yourself to create a typical day. Otherwise you get cabin fever and your time ends up managing you. Now, I'm not suggesting you choreograph every waking hour of your life. The challenge is designing a typical day for you, which enforces (some) structure and predictability, while still leaving room for spontaneity and playfulness. As long as you constantly ask yourself if what you're doing – in this moment – is consistent with your number one goal. *Have you pictured your ideal day yet?*

188. Interaction trumps interruption. Remember phone books? Remember brochures and direct mail? Those aren't marketing tools – they're artifacts. And smart companies don't waste their money on them. Here's the reality: The only place your grandchildren will ever see paper marketing is in the history museum. Instead, stop interrupting and start interacting. Because every time a customer hears about you means less money spent making them hear from you. You don't need more direct mail – you need more friends. *How many trees are you killing just to be ignored by your customers?*

189. Invite people to have bigger conversations. Spending four hours arguing which contestant on *The Biggest Loser* deserves to win is not going to help you make a mark that matters. If truly want to create lasting change that matters, you have to get people talking about bigger things. Scott Adams recently wrote about this very topic on his widely read blog. “Arguably, the most important function of human language is to protect the smart from the strong,” says the Dilbert creator. “Humans use words to create sentences, and sentences to create concepts, such as our notions of duty and honor. Powerful concepts control behavior. And without our language and concepts, the strong would kill the smart, and humans wouldn’t evolve to be any smarter. I think you could say that human evolution is being guided at least partly by the power of ideas.” Lesson learned: Elevate the dialogue. Next time somebody asks you what your favorite reality show is; respectfully ask them if you can shift the conversation to a topic that counts before you club them in the head with a fire extinguisher. That way you’ll definitely make your mark. *Are your conversations laboratories?*

190. It's not the years – it's the mileage. We learn not from our experiences, but from intelligent reflection upon those experiences. As such, wisdom has nothing to do with how much time has past and everything to do with what you did with the past. In the words of the wise philosopher, Henry Rollins, “Wisdom without experience is bullshit.” If you want to compress time, get direct experience any way you can. Intentionally put yourself in situations that force you to grow up quickly. Write down everything that happens to you along with what you learned along the way. And then teach those lessons to others. You can gain five years of experience in six months. *Are you a master at to drawing wisdom from every experience?*

191. Joinability builds profitability. The greatest artists aren't icons people bow down to; they're ideas people can latch onto. For that reason, your customers – that is, your viewers, readers, patrons, fans and listeners – are buying more than just your product. They're also buying your person, your philosophy, your process and the problem you solve. That's why quality can't be your sole signature. People need to buy the story you're telling, too. After all, they respond to what you believe – not just what you create. And your challenge is to persuade people to make time in their busy schedules to visit the world you've created. Without that, your work will never endure. Remember: Good brands are bought – great brands are joined. Otherwise people are just giving you money. *What meaning do people create for themselves in response to your story?*

192. **Jump.** Twenty years ago, my dad jumped. He broke ties with his corporate owners and went out on his own. And for the first year, he was working from home, struggling to build inventory and scrambling to find customers. *Not exactly our family's finest hour.* But, he still cites that move as his best decision ever. And two decades later, his company still remains the best in the business. Now, of all the memories related to that transition, here's the one forever etched upon my heart: I was twelve years old, and my dad brought me to work to see his new warehouse. It was the single biggest thing I'd ever seen. About three hundred thousand square feet. But the building was empty. The place was a ghost town. And there was no merchandise. *Except for one palette.* One lonesome skid of inventory in the entire warehouse, shrink-wrapped to perfection –with a big white sign on it that read, “Sold.” Try to picture yourself standing in that warehouse. If that's not risk, I don't know what is. If that's not faith, I don't know what is. *What are you waiting for?*

193. **Just because you can doesn't mean you should.** In Larry Winget's book, *The Idiot Factor*, he makes a powerful point about being the answer: "Don't give me instructions on how to build a watch – just tell me what time it is." People screw this up all the time. They have no restraint when it comes to dispensing answers. And instead of cutting to the chase and solving the problem that was presented to them, they pontificate. The monologue. And they parade their storehouse of wisdom around the room like a trophy wife at ten-year reunion. Meanwhile, the poor sucker who asked them the question in the first place thinks, "Dude, I just needed one letter – not the whole alphabet." Lesson learned: Brevity is eloquence. No need to deploy every weapon you have. Like my mentor says, "Pastors need to learn how to preach one sermon at a time." *Are you vomiting when spitting would suffice?*

194. Keep the field of activity open. My company mantra is as follows: “Ideas are free, execution is priceless.” Therefore: It’s not just about knowing a good idea when you see it – it’s about executing that idea before anyone else sees it. This suggests two challenges: First, you have to strengthen your eye for opportunity. That means using your eyes as allies. Seeing into the life of things. And carefully observing the problems that fall through the cracks. The second challenge calls for a different sensibility. It’s about embracing the importance of sustained movement. It’s about solving problems quickly and publicly. And it’s about making sharp and decisive strokes without being sidetracked by secondary thought. Ultimately, you don’t have to be good to get going, but you have to get going to get good. That’s the thing: We don’t need more idea people – we need more execution people. *Which one are you?*

195. Keep the virtual loop open. Otherwise you'll never develop an ongoing relationship with your market, audience, customers and other people who matter. The secret is to combine outreach with attraction. To it easy for readers, subscribers and audience members to engage with you, every day. Whatever online tools you use to keep the loop open, here are the essentials: First, the speed of the response is the response. Even if you're not able to solve your people's problem right away, providing consistent assurance that you're on the case preserves their sense of control. Second, ask for their feedback. Take heed. Take notes. People will tell you how to serve them better. They will also tell you how to sell to them better. Third, communicate with meaningful concrete immediacy. Address only what's relevant to their experience, be concise in your messaging, and give people actionable ideas they can execute – today – to make their lives better. *Do you get back to customers quicker than your competitors?*

196. **Keep your dream portable.** Although you've chosen to keep your goals to yourself, it is important to keep your goals *on* yourself. Literally. In my wallet, for example, I carry a list of every goal I've set for the year – both personal and professional. I also carry a list of my Personal Constitution, along with one hundred answers to the following three questions: *Who am I? What do I do? Why do I do it?* These documents comprise my arsenal of self-reflection. It's how I remember who I am, and it's how I protect my dream. It's also how I've developed sciatica. *Which is fine.* If that's what it takes to protect my dream, so be it. I have health insurance. The point is: Protecting your dream means never leaving home without it. Your challenge is to create a method to carry your dream with you wherever you go. That way, you can ritually revisit it on a moment's notice. Which might be helpful during those inevitable times of doubt when the world tries to convince that your dream is stupid. *How quickly can you access a tangible version of your vision?*

197. **Keep your goals to yourself.** Derek Sivers, founder of CD Baby, discovered that telling someone your goal makes it less likely to happen. “That which is acknowledged by others feels real in the mind. When you tell someone your goal – and they acknowledge it – the social reality tricks you into believing it’s already done. Then, because you’ve felt that satisfaction, you’re less motivated to do the hard work that’s necessary to accomplish it.” This principle of psychology is called *substitution*. And the secret, according to Sivers, is to delay the gratification brought by social acknowledgement. Personally, whenever I’m working on a new project, I only tell a select number of colleagues about it. In my experience as an entrepreneur, there is an inverse relationship between how many people you tell about your dream and how quickly that dream becomes a reality. For example, last week I showed someone copy of my new book. And his response was typical: “I didn’t even know you were working on another book!” To which I smiled and replied, “Exactly. And that’s why I got it done: Because you never heard me talking about.” Look: I’m all for sharing your goals with the world. But I also think it’s easy to blow the lid off your dream by telling too many of the wrong people about them. *Is your lack of self-control slowly dissipating your dream?*

198. Kick your addiction to permission. Permission is a spiritual revolt. It's an inner imperative. A soulful drive for significance. And the bridge between mediocrity and remarkability. The problem is, permission is very real and pervasive in most of our lives. And as such, there are two kinds of people: Those who sit back and ask for permission, and those who step up and act without restriction. I wonder which one describes you. Truth is, it's not a question of who's going to let you, but rather, who's going to stop you? And the answer is: *Nobody. Except maybe you.* Because the only permission slip that matters is the one you sign for yourself. That's your first challenge: Greenlighting your own work. Becoming your own authority figure. And sticking your fingers in your ears so you can hear the sound of your own voice. Otherwise you get sucked into a life situation where mediocrity is exalted. *Are you listening to your voice or a program created by someone else?*

199. **Know what you aren't.** Recently, I began creating customized, limited edition art prints for my clients. They're extremely scarce, very expensive and highly unorthodox. But the product is worthwhile because it assures that my clients' mission is more than a statement. The problem was: I couldn't draw a straight line if I tried. I'm an artist of the verbal – not the visual. And as much as my ego wanted me to be responsible for every part of the process, I eventually made the decision to surrender. Thanks to the suggestion of my friend Matt, I hired out the artwork to a brilliant letterpress shop called Firecracker Press. And to my delight, their craftsmanship was a million times better than anything I could have ever attempted. Lesson learned: It's a beautiful moment when you realize what you can't do. After all, sometimes that's the only way to free yourself to focus on what's left. Like the boxer with a broken arm, you realize you have no choice but to develop your speed. Or, in my case, pay someone to punch for you. *What are you afraid to let go of?*

200. **Knowledge is a funny thing.** The tendency is to hoard knowledge is a seductive one. It makes us harder to replace, enables greater leverage, increases promotability and gives us a competitive advantage. *Plus chicks dig it.* But a lot of the time, in those moments when we operate from a scarcity mentality, we act selfish with our knowledge. We avoid telling people what we know for fear of losing power. And then everybody loses. Like pushing a rock up hill with one eye over our shoulder, it's not especially productive, it doesn't contribute to the greater good and it rarely proves to be a worthwhile investment of time and effort. But thanks to the connective beauty of the web – via blogs, social media, discussion boards, forums and other digital platforms – we've found a way to reverse the trajectory. With the click of button, we send the snowball down the hill, hoping it will grow a little bit more with each revolution, growing a little bit stronger with each person's individual contribution. Knowledge might be power, but sharing that knowledge with others priceless.

201. Leap and the net will appear. Lastly, it's impossible to make progress if your ego is too invested in trying to define what progress looks like. Just start moving. Let your feet do the talking. Progress will define itself for you. Otherwise you'll prematurely commit to a false definition of advancement. That assumption functions as an arrogant clamp that closes you off to potential growth opportunities. I'm reminded of like *Indiana Jones and The Last Crusade*. In the final scene, we see that only when Indy has courage (and faith!) does the path appear before his feet. The cool part is, when he looks back, the path was there the whole time. He just wasn't tuned into that frequency yet. *Are you willing to close your eyes, extend your leg and breathe deeply into the next terrifying step?*

202. Learn the art of volume. The first lesson I learned as an author was, if you've published a book, people think you're smart. Even if the book is a joke – it's still a book. Ink is credibility. Which led to the second lesson I learned as an author: If you want people to think you're really smart, write a dozen books. So I did. In eight years. Because it doesn't matter if you're right – it matters if you're everywhere. It doesn't matter if you know what you're doing – it matters if you're doing a ton of it. It doesn't matter if you're good – it matters if you're visible. It doesn't matter if you're put together – it matters if you're putting something down. It doesn't matter if you're persuasive – it matters if you're pervasive. It doesn't matter if you're in the right place at the right time – it matters if you're in a lot of places. *How will you use volume to make your voice matter?*

203. Learn to live out of your own center. Awesome is not something you create – it's something you uncover. It's something that already exists within you as part of your true identity. But you can only access it by taking a sledgehammer to the average. This goes for people, brands, companies and organizations alike. In short: Anyone or anything that's not currently running at full capacity. And the secret is to think of it as a process of elimination. A process of chiseling. That's what Michelangelo said: That the sculpture was already inside the stone. All we had to do was chip away. Seriously. How much longer can you conform to some external template? How many more years can your company do work that's unrecognizable to the people who matter most? Maybe it's time jettison accepted limits, leave familiar territory and override your defaults. Maybe it's opt out of what everyone around you insists is wonderful. I'd hate for you to deny yourself the privilege of becoming fully human. *When was the last time you recast your assumptions?*

204. Learn to love being hated. Being hated isn't something you do *intentionally* to make a name for yourself – it's something that happens *incidentally* when you make a name for yourself. And when I say, "being hated," I don't mean that people literally want to cause you bodily harm. It's more like resentment. Jealousy. Animosity. All of which stem from envy. But that's the harsh reality of following your heart: *Do what you love and the money will follow – but so will the resentment.* Typically from jealous people who aren't following their own. When this happens, when they try to push boulders into your path, here's what you have to remember: Being attacked is a sign that you are important enough to be a target. It's an indicator of success and a right of passage. And if you're not willing to piss a few people off, you risk never turning any of them on. The question worth asking yourself is: *Would you rather be hated by some or ignored by all?*

205. Learn to trust your voice. Feedback is useful when it comes from people who matter. But more often than not, feedback hinders performance. Feedback burdens your capacity to act. Feedback induces unnecessary self-doubt. And feedback forecloses your creativity's full expression. That's why your fingers belong in your ears: It protects you from being swallowed by everybody else's vision. It protects you from people who will try to dilute your core mission by injecting their views. And it helps you develop a chronic predisposition to persistence. You need to decide that you're on a mission and nobody is going to stop you. Otherwise the arena of feedback will be an exhausting and fragile place to be. *Who's stopping you from executing by offering irrelevant feedback you didn't ask for?*

206. Legacy isn't optional. In *The Little Book of Leadership*, Jeffrey Gitomer explains that the pieces of your legacy are created with your every action, your every achievement and your every victory. I completely agree. The challenge is that legacy is a neutral entity. Not unlike tofu, it takes on the flavor of whatever sauce it's immersed in. Which means it could taste fresh – but it could also taste like feet. It all depends on your behavior. The point is: Everyone leaves a wake. Everyone. The issue is whether the people you love will surf on it, or drown under it. Here's a question you might consider asking yourself every morning: "If everybody did exactly what I said, what would the world look like?" This question builds the blueprint for your legacy. And once you've fleshed out your answers, all you have to do is make sure that your every action gives people the tools they need to build that world. And maybe a few instructions on how to use them. Ultimately, at the end of life, you're not defined by the beads, but by the string that holds them all together. *Will you leave behind something that can justify your existence?*

207. Let the light shine on the obvious path. Comfortable people rarely take focused action. Their complacency is simply too convenient to be killed. On the other hand, the people who execute are the ones who disturb themselves into discomfort. They fan the flames of focus by creating unacceptable consequences of failing. In my experience, the most effective process for doing so is through repetitive self-questioning. Try asking yourself: Is what I'm doing – right now – consistent with my number one goal? Is what I'm doing – right now – reinforcing my why? And is what I'm doing – right now – supporting my empire? It's confrontational, it's creative and it's guaranteed to give you the kick in the ass you need to focus your face off. I ask these questions to myself all day, every day, and rarely ever have any problems staying focused. *How much of your life are you wasting by (not) focusing on your priorities?*

208. **Let the performance happen by itself.** As a public speaker, part of my job is to get out of my own way and let the speech give itself. Otherwise I end up micromanaging every outburst of emotion. And that's just not fair to my audience. Fortunately, after a few hundred presentations, you develop the confidence that when you open your mouth, something good will come out. Even if you occasionally spit some garbage. For example, think back to the last time you delivered a crucial message – one to one or one to many – in which you trusted your own voice. How did it feel? Were you content with the delivery? What did you say to yourself to build the trust that fueled your performance? By identifying these keys, you'll be able to recreate it in the future. Remember: When you allow yourself to trust your spontaneous instinctual abilities, you never make a false move or a wrong choice. *Are you giving your audience permission to be taken over by your performance?*

209. Leverage is the bridge between opportunity and profitability. It begins with the abundance mentality that opportunity knocks all day, everyday. Then, it continues with the leverage mentality that it's always possible to kill two stones with one bird. The only thing standing in your way is a narrow-minded vision of what's possible. *How big is your thinking?*

210. Limitations are the doorways to your deepest value.

In Hugh Macleod's bestselling book *Ignore Everybody*, he shares a fascinating theory about circumventing limitations: "Picasso was a terrible colorist. Saul Steinberg's formal drafting skills were appalling. Henry Miller was a wildly uneven writer. Bob Dylan couldn't sing or play guitar. But that didn't stop them, right? And why should it?" Lesson learned: Don't be stopped by not knowing how. In fact, not knowing how might be the best thing that ever happened to you. Think about it: If you don't know where you're going, nobody can stop you – not even you. Instead of berating yourself for limited proficiency, use the absence how to activate the excavation of why. Tap into the truest motives behind your work. How will come in time. Until then, just start. You don't need lessons. You don't need a degree. And you certainly don't need anybody's permission. Just start. Remember: As George Carlin once said, "It's not enough to play the right notes – you have to know why the notes need to be played." *What will sucking make available to you?*

211. Limited palettes make for stronger expressions. In Alan Fletcher's inspiring book, *The Art of Looking Sideways*, he explains that the first move in any creative process is to introduce constraints. Which sounds counterintuitive, as art is an expression of freedom. But having boundaries is what forces you to tap into – and trust – your inner resources in creative ways. What's more, limitation is inspiration. When you use it to fuel your creative fire, it enables you to create something that surprises yourself. And that's where genius lives. Take the recession, for example. I don't know about you, but the devastating economy was the best thing that ever happened to my business. Sure, profits aren't as high the used to be. But the pendulum will swing back eventually. Meanwhile, in light of shrinking client budgets, I've been forced to evolve my service line, expand my role repertoire and provide new value to accommodate my markets. Now, with multiple profit centers, my company has evolved into a more robust, more diverse and more equitable enterprise. And as a result, my client positioning shifted into that of a resource – not just a writer. And that's worth money. All by virtue of the economy sucking big time. *How could you put yourself in a position that would force your to renew your resourcefulness?*

212. Listen closely to the way you talk to yourself. Hearing voices isn't just for the insane – it's for the in-touch. That's where it self-esteem is activated: The inner dialogue you have with yourself. I credit Shad Helmstetter for teaching me this. He's the world's leading specialist in the field of self-talk. The first time I read *What You Say When You Talk to Yourself*, the architecture of my heart changed forever. "You are everything you choose to be," says Shad. "How successful you will be at anything is inexorably tied to the words and beliefs about yourself that you have stored in your subconscious mind. Your self-talk is the new blueprint of you." His books will challenge you (through affirmations) to activate and utilize the best aspects of yourself. And the cool part is: It works. All of it. I use what Shad taught me every day of life. Go read his stuff. Your self-esteem will thank me. *Are you ready to change the conversation you're having with yourself?*

213. Listen for the guilt. Being approachable means not afraid to be confident. It means dogged persistence in your own truth. It means you're not haunted by the fear of standing for something. And it means you're willing to stand up in front of the world and put yourself at risk. Even if people think you're crazy. The problem is, following your own heart might break everyone else's. And that's a hard reality to swallow. In fact, the guilt that lay within that reality is the culprit of a million dead dreams. But you can be a prisoner of your own remorse. Better to follow your heart and fall on your face than swallow your voice and watch freedom escape. Besides, the people who love you just want you to be happy. Give them what they want. *Is it worth making your idea ten percent better if you feel thirty percent less free?*

214. **Listen smarter.** The biggest secret to moving forward is closing your ears to people whose toxic noise is holding you back. Don't listen to people who nastily try to induce insecurity in you. Don't listen to people whose imagination can't encompass what it is that you want to do. Don't listen to people who put a damper on your natural versatility. And don't listen to people who did something once and think they know everything about it. People like this undermine your execution. Instead, learn to listen to people whose opinions matter. Surround yourself with a trusted team of life-enhancing high grade people. Spend your time with individuals who are examples of the way you want to live. Growing bigger ears, after all, means growing more mature ears. *Are you listening to people who mindlessly judge you or compassionately honor your perspective?*

215. Listen to unintentional music. About a month ago, my dad stopped by to help me hang the very first Brandtag in my library. Once the frame was straight, we stepped back to have a look. And that's when he said something that changed everything: "Scott, I think I found a typo." My stomach dropped to the floor. Because at first, I thought he was kidding. But upon closer inspection, we actually found a misspelled word in the lower right hand corner. If you look closely, you'll notice the word "values" was accidentally spelled "vaules." And I thought, *you sonuvabitch. I can't believe I missed that. Goddammit.* Almost in tears, I called my girlfriend immediately. And I told her about the typo. But instead of lamenting about the imperfection, she came up with an idea that saved the day: "Scott, you should leave the typo in there." *Yeah.* That's a great idea. After all, this entire Brandtag project is about approachability and humanity. And what's more imperfect than that? So we did. We left the typo in. And from now on, every Brandtag will have one. It's the snag in the Persian rug. The wabi-sabi. The crack that lets the light get through. And the reminder that success isn't perfection. *How imperfect are you willing to be?*

216. Listening is overrated. History has proved this time and time again. For example: Henry Ford. If he listened to his customers, they would have asked for faster horse. King David. If he listened to his family, he would have kept his job as a shepherd. Thomas Edison. If listened to his critics, we would still be going to bed at seven. John F. Kennedy. If he listened to his generals, Russia would've deployed warheads. Steve Jobs. If he listened to his pundits, we'd still be carrying cases of compact discs. When you're willing to stick your fingers in your ears, you can change the world forever. But if you're too busy listening to everybody, you'll never hear the sound of your own voice. Don't deny what is central to your makeup. Don't let one piece of information fill your entire identity screen. Don't let people's feedback define who you are or dictate how you see yourself. Believe in your dream. Believe in the availability of your own answers. Stick your fingers in your ears. *Who are you still demanding excessive reassurance from?*

217. Live by default – not design. I'm astounded at the percentage of people whose identity is inherited and not invented. But I guess it's not terribly surprising, considering the price you have to pay to be in charge of your own life. Default, after all, is easier, cheaper and safer. Unfortunately, that makes it ten times harder to put a dent in the world. My suggestion is: Stop bowing to other people's opinions. Stop submitting to the category. Invent your own. Take an active role in the ongoing creation of your identity. *Whose paint by number are you trying to draw yourself into?*

218. Look at yourself with unquestioning eyes. Focus is the fireplace. It's the point of convergence, the center of activity and energy. And if you want that flame to burn white hot, begin by fueling your fire with an inexorable sense of why. That's the epiphany I keep having: Whether it's discipline, execution, commitment or focus – knowing why changes everything. I don't care how distracted you are, if you educate yourself on why something matters to you, you'll focus on it. And if you keep visual reminders of that why in front of your face all day, you'll focus on it. Otherwise priority dilution will rob you blind. And you'll continue to whine about you can't ever seem to hunker down and make anything happen. Bottom line: Constancy of purpose cannot be penetrated by distraction. Ever. Filter your focus against your values and reap the rewards. *Are you justifying your existence by generating activity, or validating your existence by executing what matters?*

219. **Lower the threat level.** I was meeting my friends for sushi. They invited a girl named Sandra, a friend of a friend who was passing through town. When we met, she thanked me for wearing a nametag. “It’s just so non-threatening,” she said. Interesting. *How do you lower the threat level when you meet people?* Because with most strangers, you’re starting with negative balance. You’re operating from a deficit position. It’s just the posture of the masses. People have been sold, scammed, screwed, conned, played, hustled, manipulated and used too long – and they’re tired of it. *Once they’ve seen a ghost, they’re always afraid of the dark.* But a nametag takes a few bricks out of the wall. A nametag immediately and intentionally disqualifies me from people’s fears. *How do you lower the threat level when you meet people?*

220. Magnify your unhideables. With the exception of plastic surgery and cryogenic freezing, age isn't something you can hide. However, that can work to your advantage if you position yourself strategically. For example, let's say you just graduated college. And you're the youngest person in your office by twenty years. Instead of viewing your youth a sign of immaturity and lack of experience – consider it an asset that enables you to offer a continuous flow of vitality and perspective to your organization. If you're proactive and powerful – without coming off as arrogant and annoying – people will notice. Or, maybe you're the company veteran. And you've been around longer than most of the interns have been alive. Instead of seeing yourself as a dusty monument of irrelevance, position yourself as a reservoir of diverse experience and wisdom who can predict forthcoming industry trends. If you're inspiring and visionary – but without coming off as condescending and entitled – people will notice. Remember: A chicken ain't nothing but a bird, and age ain't nothing but a number. *Are you focusing on the years or the mileage?*

221. **Mainstream is lamestream.** Absolute unfreedom is allowing other people to chart the course of your life. But when you hire yourself, everything changes. Just ask Kevin Smith. After writing the screenplay for the movie *Red State*, the filmmaker promised that the rights to the film would be auctioned off to a distributor at the Sundance Film Festival. But last minute, Smith decided to purchase the rights to himself. He then self-distributed the picture under an independent banner. And through his persistent social media efforts, he created a sold out traveling show in select cities before officially releasing the movie. This process saved millions of dollars, reached millions of and elevated his online and offline platforms to stratospheric heights. Smith's relentlessness is a shining example of what happens when you stay on the path of your heart. He proved that if you're not making people react you're not making a difference. He proved that anything worth doing is worth being attacked for. *Are you willing to create something critics will criticize?*

222. Maintain your motivational equilibrium. As the boss of you, self-motivation is the lifeblood of your success. Without it, getting out of bed will become a chore rather than a celebration. The tricky part is: Nobody's ass is harder to kick than your own. Anyone who's ever gone out on their own or worked from home can attest to that. Fortunately, everybody has the capacity for self-motivation. The challenge is twofold: First, remembering that energy follows priority. Because if you're not doing it, it's not important to you. Period. But if you know what matters, you'll be able to motivate yourself anytime, anywhere. Second, becoming a master of your own disinclination. Allowing discipline to trump desire. And learning to love what's good for you and your career. *What would it take for you to wake up excited tomorrow?*

223. Make allowance for doubt. Doubt is healthy. Doubt reinforces humility. Doubt protects you. Doubt stretches you. And while you don't have to become best buds with doubt – you do need to make allowances for it. The challenge is honoring your doubts for the value they carry, and then letting go of those inner voices before they drown out the voice of trust. Every morning during my daily appointment with myself, I affirm the following: “If I notice any doubt, I will greet it with a welcoming heart. I will attend to it as a natural part of the life experience. And I will be thankful for it and the wisdom it brings.” That’s how you put unadulterated self-respect at the apex of your value system: By honoring whatever surfaces, by learning from what scares you, and by still believing that you can handle what life sends you. *When was the last time you followed your doubt down into the basement?*

224. Make creativity a conscious priority. Readers often ask me how I decide what to write about each day. And my answer is simple: “I don’t – I listen for what wants to be written.” That’s how creativity works: It’s a process of surrendering and active listening. And when you’re starting over, that’s the smartest attitude to maintain. After all, opportunity never stops knocking – you just stop listening. The secret is to lock into the right frame of mind to pursue opportunities as they arise. To maintain the emotional willingness to open yourself to new possibilities. Then, to leverage everything you’ve got. For example: Examine the smallest revenue centers of your business. Then ask yourself: *Now that I have this, what else does this make possible? With some reinvention, could this become a brand new business unit?* By giving your artistic voice another outlet, you might activate a market segment that just can’t wait for your arrival. Remember: Creativity isn’t an entitlement – it’s is nurtured by constant cultivation. *What potential opportunities are you forfeiting by rejecting or devaluing creativity?*

225. Make energy a conscious priority. If you can't put more hours in your life, you can always put more life in your hours. That's the big secret about time: Having more energy not only compresses it – it multiplies it. Think about it: When you're truly fueled, you take on more work, you solve bigger problems, you pursue bigger challenges, you contribute more value and have greater confidence in the process. The secret is, you have to become a master of your own energy patterns. That means knowing what makes the most energy available to you. That means identifying what your biggest energy drains are. And that means developing a personal system for replenishing your energy reserve whenever it's depleted. Soon, an hour of your time will be more just as meaningful – if not more – than an entire week of someone with poor energy management. *On a scale from one to ten, how effectively do you manage your energy?*

226. Make sure you don't lose your entrepreneurial edge.

Return to your roots. Uncover your beginnings. Ask yourself these questions: Why did you get into business in the first place? What would you do if you were starting your business all over again right now? What injustice did you set out to fight when you first started your business? If you can't answer those questions, either execute a plan for recovering your edge or be smart and quit. *How much of your entrepreneurial edge have you lost since you started?*

227. Make the decision not to walk away. My friend Vinny has been married for over thirty years. When I asked him what the secret was, the simplicity of his answer surprised me: “If there were problems, we dealt with it. If there were tough times, we dealt with it. But we never walked away.” That’s the beauty of throwing your heart over the fence: Once you’re emotionally committed to a course of action, you’ll always find a way to resolve whatever practical difficulties arise. Not because they’re easy. Not because there’s a formula. And not because you’re a genius. But because you won’t allow yourself to take no for an answer. You’ve committed, and that’s what committed people do: They deal with it. They never walk away. Even when it hurts. Even when challenges them down like a gunfighter. The question is whether you’re willing to create unacceptable consequences of failing. Whether you’re willing to paint yourself into an accountable corner. And whether you’re willing to commit to not walking away. Because if you’re not, you might end up quitting when it’s hard, not when it’s right. *What would your daily life feel like if you made turning back impossible?*

228. **Make the upgrade.** It's hard to start over after you've spent years building your whole life around someone. Or something. Especially if your sense of identity derived from that place. That's why picking up the pieces and moving on is such a pervasive and debilitating internal constraint: It feels like you're abandoning a part of yourself. Fortunately, starting over isn't impossible – it's just inconvenient. The question is: Are you prepared to let go of what you've always been? *I hope so.* Because that's the only way to upgrade to the next version of yourself. By surrendering to the next phase of your personal evolution and letting go of the person you were in order to grow into the person you needed to be, you win. Remember: Starting over isn't about being better than anyone – it's about being better than you used to be. *What are you still afraid to let go of?*

229. Make things happen. There's nothing more annoying than someone who executes exquisitely and consistently. Especially to the population of the world that spends all their time talking their ideas into the ground. Your mission is to keep asking, "What's the next action?" To not be stopped by not knowing how. And to keep your entrepreneurial eyes peeled for barriers to execution like hesitation, ambiguity and inertia. *What could you make happen by lunch today?*

230. Make use of everything you are. *"I am large. I contain multitudes."* Walt Whitman wrote that in the original edition of *Leaves of Grass*. His words challenge the reader to do two things: Recognize how much potential you actually have. Spend the rest of your life making use of everything you are. It's a spiritual imperative. This is the life that now calls you. This is the life you were created to have. You contain enough instruments of expression to staff a symphony. The question is whether or not you will write music for each one.

231. Make your brand deliberately mythological. Every brand needs a human story behind it. Something that gives your values a heartbeat. That's what earns the right to have your story told. Unfortunately, a good story doesn't happen by accident. You can't sit back and wait for people to talk about you – you have to prime the pump. Otherwise you run the risk of being ignored. In a recent blog post, Seth Godin discussed this very idea: “To invent a mythic brand, be sure that there's a story, not just a product or a pile of facts. The story should promise and deliver a heroic outcome. And there needs to be growth and mystery as well, so the users can fill in their own blanks.” If you're not creating a mythology around your brand, you're destined to a future of mediocrity. Find the story, the mythology, that's yours and yours alone, and shot it from the rooftops. And when the right people hear it, they'll recognize it as their own and join forces with you. *What is the creation myth behind your brand?*

232. Make yourself more efficacious. After a painful end to a four-year relationship, my friend Steve offered me a priceless piece of advice about starting over: “Don’t assume you can’t go on living without some girl’s arm around your shoulder.” He was right: It was time to learn how to fend for myself. Time to pursue wholeness independently – at least, for a while. That way, when the time came to begin a new relationship (which I eventually did) I could come to it with a greater sense of self-efficacy, thus strengthening the partnership. The point is: Starting over is an uncertain, terrifying journey. And it will call upon the full use of every faculty you have. But if you’re solely dependent on external sources to keep your equilibrium, your sense of balance will remain at the mercy of the masses. And you’ll never make it out in one piece. Efficacious people, on the other hand, are high on internal control. They’re capable of influencing situations and are not at the mercy of events. And they believe that outcomes are determined by their behavior. Your challenge is to trust your resources. To remain richly supported. And to believe that you’re equal to this challenge. *Are you keeping unadulterated self-belief at the apex of your value system?*

233. Manage the ratio between enthusiasm and empiricism.

People need to see the passion in your face. Every day. I learned this from my grandfather, who constantly reminds our family that the worst bankruptcy is the soul that has lost its enthusiasm. But that doesn't give you license to be all energy and no evidence. You have to manage the ratio. For example, let's say you plan to spend twenty minutes at tomorrow's family dinner gushing about your next big business idea. Cool. My suggestion is: Plan to spend at least seven minutes graphing out the specific actions you're going to take to execute that idea. That's a three-to-one ratio. And it's a preemptive measure to satisfy the inevitable skepticism that will arise. Remember: People aren't trying to pummel your dreams – they're trying to protect you from failure. *How will you build firm confidence in the efficacy of your efforts?*

234. **Manage to get out.** Of a toxic relationship. Of a crappy job. Of a sticky situation. Of a go-nowhere town. Of a downward spiral. Doesn't matter. Anytime you rise like a Phoenix from out of the flames – and do so with determination, poise and passion – the people who don't have the stones to cut their own dirty ropes will resent you to no end. Because while you managed to get out, they chose to remain stuck. *Are you quitting when it's hard or when it's right?*

235. Manage your story like an asset. When you wear a nametag everyday for a decade – then somehow make a successful career out of that – people are going to tell your story. I’ve tried to stop it, but failed miserably. Whether I’m attending a conference with colleagues, practicing yoga with friends, interacting online with readers or having dinner with family, people are constantly telling me stories about telling my story. Almost daily. And for this, I am eternally grateful. It’s how I’ve turned my badge into a brand. Still, every time this happens, I always listen closely for patterns, lessons, assumptions and emotions. Your challenge is to do the same. Any time people tell you they’re telling your story, don’t just thank them – probe them. Find out where the rock created the ripple so you can go back and throw more rocks. After all, the only thing worse than being talked about is not being talked about. *Who’s talking about you?*

236. Master the power of personalization. If your customers wore nametags, would you give them better service? Sure you would. *Names reduce the distance between people.* Today my flight attendant noticed my nametag and said, “Scott, I wish all my passengers wore nametags, that way I wouldn’t have to say sir!” Makes sense. With a nametag, it’s an unmasking. It assures you’re no longer just another face in the crowd. It humanizes you. And it makes it easier for people treat you with dignity, respect, and compassion. *It’s not a nametag – it’s an invitation for personalization.* Sadly, most organizations miss this. They obsess over offering better customer service, but fail to see the big picture about the actual relationship. Truth is, the purpose of a nametag isn’t to enable customers to tattle on someone who gives poor service. The purpose of nametag is to help you become better friends with customers, that way better service happens naturally. Familiarity doesn’t breed contempt – it brings people back. *How do you reduce the distance?*

237. Meet people where they are. When asked to describe the work of Leonardo Davinci, colleague and mentor Sandro Botticelli said, “His work will reward you from every angle.” That’s the next strategy to help you disappear. Now, in my experience as a public speaker, I’ve found a helpful way to foster that process. At the beginning of every presentation, here what I tell my audiences, “I’m here to do three things: Share my story and the lessons attached to it, make suggestions and ask questions. That’s it. Cool?” Interestingly, these three components enable the audience members to plug themselves into my equations, thus creating a unique experience for each individual. Your mission is to do the same: *To meet people where they are.* To accept everything, reject nothing and attend to people with deep democracy. *What generic formulas are you allowing people to plug their unique selves into?*

238. Mental torture isn't worth it. The reality is: No matter how successful you become, you'll always find ways to feel bad about yourself. *You need to be okay with that.* You need to not be so hard on yourself. Instead, change the way you attend to those feelings. Try greeting them with a welcoming, non-judgmental heart. And express gratitude for the opportunity to feel what you feel. It means you're human and alive, and that's a good thing. Ultimately, you'll find that if you experience these feelings without acting on them – and if you sit with these emotions and let yourself fully experience them – they can't hurt you. They have no power over you. And that will make your walk down the uncertain path significantly less stressful. Remember: When you go it alone, your mind is your basic means of survival. Attend to it compassionately and creatively. *How do you mentally handicap yourself?*

239. Mindset is the bridge between happenstance and happiness. If you have an attitude of leverage, everything that happens to you is positive. And profitable. And a growth opportunity. And a moment of instant education. It all depends on the way you talk to yourself. Instead of asking, “Why me?” you ask, “What’s next?” Instead of saying, “This sucks!” you wonder, “Now that I have this, what else does this make possible.” Talk like this, and you’ll kill two stones with one bird, every time. *Have you mastered the language of leverage?*

240. Money is the great mouth closer. I've never been a financially fueled entrepreneur. It's just not that important to me. *Making a name for myself, yes – making money for myself, not so much.* All I ever wanted to do was earn enough revenue to support my lifestyle, underwrite my addictions, sustain my enterprise and bankroll my capacity to contribute to the world. That's it. Everything else is just an indulgence. However, about two and a half years into my entrepreneurial endeavors, I noticed something: When I started making money, people stopped asking questions. Period. It was like I was instantly and unarguably legitimate in their eyes. Especially the people closest to me. So, whether you're driven by the dollar or not, the reality is: *The quickest way to shut people up is to show people zeroes.* Often times, that's the Queen of Diamonds. That's what closes cynical people's mouths. But don't worry: It doesn't make you greedy – it makes you genuine. As long as the money card isn't the only one you play, I say slap that baby down on the top of the pile and shoot the moon with every bullet you've got. *How will you use profitability to prove your legitimacy?*

241. Mount an evidence campaign. Few things are more existentially agonizing than the prospect of not mattering. And what sucks the most is that you're rarely the first one to find out. It's only through research and feedback and Google Alerts that you're able to uncover the evidence that validates the importance of what you do. My suggestion is: Don't just accumulate it – articulate it. Especially to the people who love you the most. For example, I recently received a wonderful piece of fan mail from an audience member. But it wasn't addressed to me – it was for my parents. Naturally, I called my folks as soon as I got back to the hotel room and read them the letter: *"Dear Mr. and Mrs. Ginsberg: From one parent to another, congratulations. You did an exceptional job giving your son all the tools and love to equip him to become what he is today. Thank you."* Lesson learned: Anytime you move the dial with what you do, memorialize your accomplishments to be seen by the people who love you're the most. Your evidence will take them miles beyond reasonable doubt. *How are you constantly reminding the people you love that what you're doing matters?*

242. **Myopia is underrated.** Lack of focus is the single greatest determinant of failure in any endeavor. I see it with clients, I see it with colleagues, and occasionally, I see it with myself. And it kills me every time. That's why I'm adamant about focus. But it's not about time management, getting things done or streamlining the quality of your process so you can maximize the efficiency of strategic productivity. Focus is about creating a filter for your life. Focus is about executing against your values. That's what I've learned in my experience as a writer, as an entrepreneur and as a leader: Total freedom comes by forcing yourself into a tight corner. To win, you have to focus on your core, pound it home and never lose sight of it. Otherwise you'll never hunker down to execute what that matters. Instead of swatting flies with sledgehammers and wasting time making shiny objects shinier, delete anything that isn't aligned with your vision. Otherwise the absurd reluctance to let go of what's worthless will keep you from reaching greatness. Believe it: Focus is function of sacrifice. *What are you willing to give up to stay on point?*

243. **Never break faith.** If you're ready to go all in, go full time and throw yourself under the bus, the first step is to believe you're worthy of your own dream. To believe that a benign power is supporting you at all time. And this has nothing to do with religion, and everything to do with your personal faith. In yourself, in your dream and in your ability to do something that matters. Because unless you begin by answering your call to adventure, you'll never build the momentum needed to carry your dream forward. Personally, I restock my reservoir of faith every morning. During my daily appointment with myself, I make a mental list of everything I have faith in. Everything. And a tremor of bliss never fails to take me over. Invest in yourself. Create a daily ritual to remind yourself that you believe in yourself. *Will you go on your soul's quest, or will you pursue the life that only gives you security?*

244. Never let them catch you acting. Michael Cane has appeared in over one hundred movies. He's been acting for over fifty years, earned several Academy Awards and was even knighted by the Queen of England. In a recent interview on public radio, Cane discussed the very concept of disappearing: "If someone in my audience watches my performance and thinks, 'Wow, that Michael Cane is such an amazing actor,' then I've failed." Lesson learned: *The art is hiding the art.* Not just in acting –but in business too. For example, most membership organizations don't get this. And they could exponentially increase their joinability if they just stopped hawking membership and started hailing community. Membership isn't a piece of paper you receive – it's a feeling you remember. That's the approach I take as the president of my local association. Instead of puking the benefits of joining all over perfect candidates, I just say, "Look, don't worry about joining – just come hang out with us. We like your brain." You'd be amazed how much more responsive, more willing to show up and more willing to come back people are who don't feel like they're being recruited. *How are you hiding the art of what your organization does?*

245. Never underestimate the cash value of cool. The word “cool” dates back to tenor saxophonist Lester Young, who popularized the term in jazz circles in the late 1920’s. “Cool tune baby. I dig it,” he’d say. And without explanation, people knew exactly what he meant. If someone described a song or a person or a club as “cool,” that was enough to communicate its value. Now, obviously, cool is a subjective term. It’s kind of like art or pornography: You know it when you see it. The secret is to embark on a consistent quest to learn about (and increase your present level of) coolness. My suggestion: Pay attention to instances in which you or the people around you comment on cool stuff. Listen attentively. Note the commonalities. Keep a Cool Journal if you want. The point is: Cool isn’t just unforgettable – it’s unconcealable. Even if you don’t know what your product is. Even if you don’t know what it will become. *If you’re cool, that’s a priceless asset. How would Lester Young describe your website?*

246. Never underestimate the scariness of self-questioning.

Questions aren't just questions – they're catapults. And when asked strategically, they get your hamster wheel moving at full speed to entertain dangerous thoughts. Also, questions aren't just questions – they're swords. And when asked honestly, they penetrate deeper and truer than any old affirmation. Three scary examples from my experience as a writer. First, instead of posting on a sticky note in my office saying, "Writing is the basis of all wealth," I ask, "What did you write today?" Secondly, instead of drawing on a whiteboard with, "Stay focused," I ask, "Is what you're doing right now consistent with your number one goal?" And finally, instead of writing above my desk, "If you don't write it down, it never happened," I ask, "Is everything you know written down somewhere." See the difference? It's about self-confrontation, self-accountability and self-motivation. Doesn't get much scarier than that. Your challenge is go back to your office and reconsider what's written on your wall. *What questions do you ask yourself every day?*

247. Never underestimate the weight of victory. The scariest part about taking a chance on yourself is not the prospect of failure, but the possibility of success. I don't know about you, but I can't imagine anything more terrifying than getting exactly what you want. Think about it: You might realize it's not enough. You might become a victim of your own success. You might discover it's not actually what you thought you wanted. You might mishandle the changes success brings into your life. You might stop taking the creative risks that made you successful in the first place. Or you might fail to live up to the expectations and reputation attached to your success. At least failure is predictable. At least failure you can read books on. Success is the great unknown. Success is what we're really afraid of. And that's why part of us thinks that sometimes; it's safer to just want things. *Which it is.* But safe is a very dangerous place to be. And if you truly want to take a chance on yourself, you have to be prepared for the possibility of victory. Otherwise you'll never take the time to enjoy it when it comes. *Are you emotionally ready for success?*

248. **No labels, no limits.** Putting things in the right category doesn't mean you control them – it just means you have more boxes. The reality is: If you have a plan for everything, unexpected turns will never take initiative toward you. If you have a plan for everything, you lose the psychological freedom to pivot into new directions. And if you have a plan for everything, you'll never be able to live larger than your labels. Don't close the door of opportunity on yourself. Instead of creating a false ceiling on what you can accomplish, keep your eye on the things you can't see. Always ask the question, "What am I afraid to see because it doesn't fit my nice little plan?" Then, just listen. Because opportunity doesn't knock – it whispers. And if you're not paying attention, it will sail right past you. Look: There's no shame in having no sense of direction. Try getting lost. Try not knowing. Try flying blind. Because if you don't know where you're going, nobody can stop you. *Are you leaving enough room for the unexpected?*

249. **Nothing beats raw experience.** If all you've done is read a few hundred books and morphed yourself into a walking vending machine of quotations from a bunch of dead white guys, you're not the answer – you're a parrot. A hack. A ditto. And the only thing you'll ever be the answer to is the occasional question during a drunken game of Trivial Pursuit. Which is great for parties but useless for profits. Instead, you need hit the streets. Walk the factory floors. Scour the company warehouse. Get into people's living rooms. Whatever displacement strategy will school you in the ways of the world. The point is: You can't solve people's problems sitting in your office all day. Poet John Lecarre was onto something when he said, "A desk is a dangerous place to rule the world." *Are you interactive, reactive and proactive – or just googling all day?*

250. Now that I have this, what else does this make possible?

If you want to kill two stones with one bird every time, all you have to do is consistently imagine what else can be made (or could come) from this. Therein lies the key to leverage: Looking at something you've created and then playing with its potential. This process is called Movement Value. You identify concepts that allow you to "breed" other ideas from those concepts. You expand, grow, cook, stretch and shift your idea, allowing it to spawn creative offspring. You look for spin-offs and related ideas. You go forth and multiply. You also exercise enough restraint to recognize LACK of potential. If an idea doesn't have much (or any) movement value, you need to save it, file it and move onto something else. *Is this idea a springboard or a straightjacket?*

251. **Objectivity is equity.** In the past eight years, I've delivered over five hundred presentations for corporations worldwide. And typically, I'm the outsider. The freak. The only person in the room who doesn't know the inner workings of the industry. Initially, I viewed this as threat to my credibility. A disconnect between the speaker and the audience. But then it occurred to be: *People need fresh air.* A new perspective from an unbiased source that has no stake in the organization. That's when I began leveraging my outsidership as a strength – not a limitation. If you find yourself in a similar position, ask yourself a few questions: What limitations enable you to be more objective than your competitors? What assumptions can you explore that most people never think of or take for granted? What thinking patterns can you deliver as a result of your ability to detach from the outcome? Remember: It's a lot easier to break the limit when you don't know the limit exists. And the less you know, the more likely you are to come up with an original idea. *Are you willing to tell people you know nothing in order to change everything?*

252. Obstacles are aphrodisiacs. A good cheerleader still cheers, even when the team is down by forty in the four quarter. Not just because she's sleeping with the quarterback, but also because she understands the difference between losing and getting beat. It's simply a matter of mindset. And the same rule applies to self-motivation: You can't abandon yourself during trying times. Gradually release yourself from the grip of self-torture by protecting your self-talk script. Try this: Instead of berating yourself with, "I suck!" try bolstering yourself with, "Next time!" It's not just optimistic; but it redirects the energy of your loss into more yessable territory. And while it's a challenging shift in meta-cognition, when you recognize how much damage this kind of language does to your spirit, you'll never tell yourself you suck again. *How do you talk to yourself when you fail?*

253. Offer a free estimate – don't sell new brakes. One is a product – one is education. One is a commodity – one is cool. And one is a superficial sale – the other is a value added service. Which one would you rather buy? That's what rockstar salespeople know: Customers have a hard time buying when they feel like they're being sold. A good salesperson disappears. He doesn't come off overly salesy because he's too focused on giving value, educating and having fun. *Does that describe your sales process?*

254. **Offer less.** Choice saturation paralyzes people into inaction. Even the simple act of choosing caused mental fatigue. What's more, the longer customers they take, the less they buy. Thus: Complexity generates contemplation, and contemplation kills sales. Because a confused mind never buys. *What if you gave people zero choice to eliminate customer frustration remove the threat of rejection?*

255. Open yourself to life. Stop winking in the dark. The world is way too beautiful to waste time hiding. Instead, stick yourself out there. Every damn day. Now, odds are good that when you do so, there will be a growing chorus of voices trying to sway you. And your paralyzing fear of criticism might prevent you from acting decisively. My suggestion is to stop listening and start choosing. Take your finger off your chin and press the buttons that activate the nitrous tanks. Otherwise the only mark you'll make is the perpetual ass print on your couch. Remember: It's impossible to make a mark without taking a step. Even if it's a step in the wrong direction, at least you're still stepping. Sure beats sitting on the couch all night, eating Triscuits and stalking your exes on Facebook. *Do you remember the last time you traveled without plans?*

256. Opportunity never stops knocking. Instead, you stop answering the door. Anyone who says there's a shortage of great ideas is either stupid or deaf. It's simple: All you have to do is listen. As Frank Warren said during a Post Secret event in St. Louis, "Great ideas are waiting for that one inspired person to take hold of them." Your challenge, whenever you come across these ideas, is to ask yourself, "Did this idea select me?" If so, great. If not, keep listening. There will be more. *Are you letting your closed ears commit idea homicide?*

257. Override the disbelief. Feeling like a fraud is, in many ways, a right of passage. It comes with the entrepreneurial territory. Thankfully, it's an effective form of self-pressure to help you get over – and stay over – yourself. But while the occasional undercurrent of doubt is healthy, too much of it will chew your guts and cause you unnecessary emotional suffering. The secret is to lay down a subtle bass line of self-belief. To remind yourself that you *are* enough, you *have* enough and you *do* enough. Otherwise your delusions of inadequacy will knock the cheer right out of you. Personally, I use affirmations. Everyday. Don't roll your eyes. Just because they're cheesy doesn't mean they're ineffective. What you say *to* yourself when you have doubts *about* yourself determines how, when and if you make a name *for* yourself. Remember: Self-belief doesn't guarantee success – but lack of self-believe does guarantee failure. *What would look like for you to believe in yourself down to your toes?*

258. Patience might be your only proof. “If I attempt to turn this crazy idea into a reality,” you think, “my family will disown me, my spouse will leave me and my children won’t want to be seen in public with me.” First of all, don’t be ridiculous: Your children never wanted to be seen in public with you in the first place. Secondly, your fear response is perfectly healthy and normal. Hey, it happens to the best of us – even me. After wearing a nametag twenty-four seven for ten years, I’ve finally come to terms with the fact that I’m a social liability. God, can you imagine how insane that’s going to drive my future children? Poor kids. But that’s part of the deal. Sometimes you have to allow patience to triumph on its own time. That’s what legendary author JK Rowling explained in her 2008 commencement speech to Harvard University: “My parents thought that my overactive imagination was an amusing personal quirk that could never pay a mortgage or obtain a pension.” A half billion books later – that’s billion with a “b” – she showed them. Harry Potter might have been fiction, but the irony wasn’t. Lesson learned: Sometimes the only way to get through to people is to become ridiculously successful despite their efforts to dissuade your dream. Just make sure you don’t become smug in the aftermath of your own achievements. Otherwise you’ll blow any chance you had of reaching the people who matter most. *How patient are you willing to be?*

259. People don't just buy what you sell. They buy the mythology you create around what you sell. They buy the story you tell that taps into their existing worldview. They buy the meaning they create for themselves in response to that story. It's not enough for people to simply understand your story. They need to believe it. They need to feel proud to be part of it. They need to become eager to share it with others. Otherwise you're just winking in the dark. Your brand tells a story whether you like it or not. If you want to make your legend worth crossing the street for, if you want people to feel proud and eager to spread your myth, manage your story like an asset. Because people don't just buy what you sell – they buy what you tell. *Are you a raconteur?*

260. Permission pummels creativity. I'm lucky. Permission has historically been a non-force in my life. Almost to the point that have no idea what it's like on the other side of the fence. For example, in my line of work as a writer, I can be creative without limitation. All day. Every day. It's pretty damn cool. Unfortunately, not everyone can relate to this freedom. Especially when permission is so real in their lives. Like my clients, Rachel and Tim. During a recent session they revealed, "Scott, the reason we rented your brain is because we get so caught up in the day-to-day, that we never have any time to think." This, I could not believe. No thinking? Ever? What kind of job is that? What kind of life is that? And that's when it occurred to me: Excessive permission reduces the size of your thinking. And that reduces the size of your bank account. Don't let this happen to you. Don't fall for permission's tricks. People who are perpetually bogged down by the tactical rob themselves of the opportunity to execute something great. And without conscious effort to eradicate it, they slowly allow it to become a cancer of the conscience. That's what pummels their creative potential into the ground. That's what prevents people from doing what they really want to do. *Will you be distracted by the red dress of permission?*

261. Perspective is priceless. My friend Marcus writes books and gives lectures to healthcare professionals. But, not because he's an expert on patient care. Or a doctor. Or a medical researcher. Rather, because after a tragic auto accident, Marcus spent two years of his life restricted to a hospital bed, a feeding tube and respirator. You can't teach perspective like that. And that's why, when Marcus delivers his message – from the page or the stage – the same breath of fresh air that re-inflated his once failing lungs now fills the hearts of the people in his audience. No wonder he gets invited back every year. Lesson learned: The keener your perspective, the fresher your breath. Your challenge is twofold: First, to wreck your car. Just kidding. Marcus made me put that joke in. Seriously: Figure out which of your unique experiences have afforded you with the deepest amount of perspective. Then, creatively deliver your message from that perspective. *How will your worldview add a new dimension to the overall picture?*

262. Pick the path of initiative. You don't need a map. You don't need to wait for instructions. You don't need permission to use someone else's machine. And you don't need to put your life on hold until someone more successful than you stamps your creative passport. Lean into your dream. Forgiveness is cheaper than permission. Personally, I'd rather take action and risk being scolded than stand by for approval to do something great. Besides, the last thing you need is more advice that will force you to work against your instinctive grain. You are the shaper of you. Don't destroy yourself in response to an invitation from others to stop living. Battle that which blocks your free expression with everything you've got. Because in the end, that's all you've got. *What do you need to give yourself permission to stop waiting for?*

263. Platform is the bridge between expertise and audience. It doesn't matter how smart you are – if you're selfish with your knowledge, you're just winking in the dark. Besides, ideas don't do you any good in your head. That's the difference between creativity and innovation: One is a noun, the other is a verb. *Which one are you?*

264. **Play for keeps.** Making the decision to go full time is stressful, confusing and difficult. Not just for you, but for your family as well. And, to compound the suckiness of the situation, you're terrified. My response to that fear is: *You're not alone.* Anybody who's ever gone full time experienced some kind of fear. Including me, the person writing this very article. *Think about what you're afraid of.* Failing miserably, or succeeding tremendously? Sometimes the scariest prospect is the one where all your dreams come true. *Think about the last time you crushed one of your fears.* My guess is: You got to a point where you couldn't take it anymore and just said, "Ah, screw it – let's go!" And I bet, once you got there, once you crossed that line into supposed fearful territory, you looked back at what you thought was a minefield only to realize it was nothing but a snap-n-pop.

265. Play the numbers. The best way to have a great idea is to have lots of ideas. The second best way to have a great idea is to have lots of bad ideas. And the third best way to have a great idea is to hang around people who practice the first two. Do that, and by sheer probability, your crazy idea that could change the world will naturally come along. It's an eventually of probability by transforming yourself into a human lightning rod of creativity. The question is whether or not you will take notice of the strike, and take massive action when the smoke clears. Most people fail at both. *How will you increase the probability of creative inspiration and execution?*

266. Positioning is everything. It's not about marketshare – it's about mindshare. Your goal is to walk into a room as a peer of the people, a trusted resource *to* the people and a problem solver *with* the people. Like Jack Trout's wrote in *Positioning*, "Don't create the product – build the position behind the product in the prospect's mind." Let's break down each of the three roles. First: *A peer*. A friend. Not someone who surreptitiously memorized the names of your family members to make it look like he cares. And not one of those lame-ass, social media pseudo friends that don't actually know anything about who you really are. I'm talking about a real friend. Someone who knows what you ache for. Someone who's well versed in your why. And someone who knows is how you think, how you live and whom you love. Do your clients, coworkers and superiors think of you that way? Second: *A trusted resource*. Which means even if you don't know the answer, you know the questions that will point people to the answer. And through the depth of what you deliver, you don't make people ask, "Should we hire this guy?" but rather, "How should we use this guy?" Third: *A problem solver*. Which means you're the answer to something that matters. You're don't just learn about your customers' businesses – you learn about their brain. You try their heads on. And when the time comes, you practice restraint when it comes to deliver answers. No need to deploy every weapon you have. No need to teach people how to build a watch – just tell them what time it is. Remember: The stronger your pre-sale position, the easier it is to get to yes. *How are you positioned prior to making the sale?*

267. Profit is an enabler. Emerson once said that in the end, all that matters is cash value. He was right. But he wasn't talking about the Benjamins. The word "profit" comes from the Latin *profectus*, which means, "progress." Therefore: Making your mark isn't about making money – it's about making meaningful change. And your challenge is twofold: To figure out which currencies are required to underwrite the fulfillment of your dreams, and to earn enough of that currency – money, attention, permission, whatever – to enable you to build what you need to build. Anything above that is just showing off. Remember: Earn a profit – enable a movement. *How do you define cash value?*

268. Profitability comes from revisitability. In the final scene of *Ratatouille*, the snobby food critic skeptically takes a bite of Chef Remy's special dish. He expects to be disgusted, but ends up pleasantly surprised. When the food hits his lips, he instantly flashes back fifty years: He sees his childhood as a French peasant. He pictures his mother, his home and his family. And he remembers his humble beginnings. When the flashback ends, a tear forms in his eye as he scarfs down the rest of dish with absolute delight. And in the next day's newspaper, he publishes the following review: "To say that both the meal and its maker have challenged my preconceptions about fine cooking is a gross understatement. They have rocked me to my core. And I will return to Chef Remy soon, hungry for more." What do you do that brings people back for more of you? Are you selling a product or are you offering an experience? That's what smart companies know: That what they sell isn't the same thing as what people buy. And if you miss out on that distinction, your customers will always feel like they're being sold. *What are you really in the business of?*

269. Promote radical ideas. See if you can identify what the following people have in common: Jesus, Martin Luther King, John F. Kennedy, Joan of Arc, Abraham Lincoln and John Lennon. Give up? Try this: They were all, at some point in time, hated or resented for their radical ideas. Sadly, the other commonality is that they were all, at some point in time, murdered for their radical ideas. No wonder people are scared to voice their opinion – they might be killed! I guess our society isn't ready for radical thinking yet. Maybe we'll give it another two thousand years. Anyway, I'm not suggesting you change you become a martyr. And I doubt you will be nailed to a cross or burned at the stake for voicing your opinion. I just thought you'd like to know history has proved. *What are you willing to suffer for?*

270. Provide an alternate platform. Hulu changed the television game twice. First, in 2007. Their website began offering ad-supported streaming video of shows and movies from NBC, Fox, ABC and later Disney. And viewers could watch their favorite shows, anytime, anywhere – for free. Lesson learned: Find out where the door is already revolving. Then let the wind carry you across the threshold. The second game-changer occurred three years later when they launched Hulu Plus, the first ad-supported subscription service to offer full current season runs of hit programs across multiple Web-connected devices. According to CEO Jason Kilar, “With Hulu Plus – your favorite TV shows love you back.” Lesson learned: Don’t fight the current. Match your deliverables with your people’s preferred channel. Ultimately, you have to remember that your customers are making music already. The question is: *When are you going to join their drum circle, and what type of instrument will you bring?*

271. Publicize your ability to recognize patterns. That's what makes you a recognized thought leader – not just a random expert. If you truly want to radiate usefulness, if you want be the answer, learn to recognize patterns before anyone else. Notice things and give them names. Create a new glossary of terms to be melded into your industry's lexicon. And then, sign your name to it and share it with the world. That's the missing piece for most people: They're too selfish with our knowledge. And if you want people to remember you as being the answer, you've got to give yourself away. Don't worry: The greatest things given away always multiply. And the more you give away for free, the wealthier you will be. *What patterns do you excel at recognizing?*

272. Pursue the path of wholehearted surrender. As a lifelong control freak, I've always found the idea of surrendering to be a terrifying proposition. I guess to me, it always seemed safer to choreograph everything. Not true. In fact, it's actually the opposite: *He who risks not, risks most.* That's my next suggestion: Surrendering what you are for what you could become. Not a bad trade. The secret is creating a daily practice to support your surrender. Personally, I recite the following incantation several times a day: "*I expect nothing ... I am richly supported ... I trust my resources ... I am equal to this challenge.*" I've found that the stillness created through this breathing exercise softens the blow of the fear. It doesn't eliminate it. But then again, that's not the point. Scaring yourself is about greeting your fear with a welcoming heart – then using its momentum against itself to breathe right through it. And if you can be brave enough to make yourself vulnerable to the process, you'll initiate a breakthrough. Either that, or you'll have a panic attack. Just remember: If you're not scared, you're not stretching enough. To change the world is to change your underwear. *What are you doing – right now – that requires faith?*

273. Pursue your dream persistently and authentically. Let's turn to the book *Do It! Let's Get Off Our Butts*, by Peter McWilliams. He wrote: "People don't like to see others pursuing their dreams – it reminds them how far from living their own dreams they are. In talking you out of your dreams, they are taking themselves back into their comfort zone." Lesson learned: Let your unflinching pursuit of your dreams be a mirror of other people's mediocrity. Sure, people might resent you. But know that your persistent and authentic quest will serve as a motivator for people's own journeys. *Is it worth being hated if it jolts people out of their drudgery?*

274. Put yourself in the way of success. Opportunity never stops knocking – you just stop listening. Or, you *do* hear the knocks, but because opportunity comes disguised as hints, whispers, clues, mistakes and discomforts, you choose to ignore them. If you want to turn embers of possibility into blazes of reality, you’ve got to take the initiative path. In the book *Poke the Box*, Seth Godin calls this *instigation capital*, or the desire to move forward combined with the ability and guts to say yes. “Many people and organizations have money, networking abilities, smarts, tools and a great reputation. But the key ingredient they are lacking to make it successful is the ability to move forward. And the market responds to the power that comes with this kind of capital.” My suggestion: Stop waiting for permission. Stop waiting until you’re ready. And stop waiting until you know what you’re doing. Say yes to everything. Keep the field of activity open. After all: Possibility hinges on the lever of proactivity. *Are you lingering on the balcony instead of dancing on the floor?*

275. Raise hell against redundancy. Recently, my friend Amy told me she'd rewritten her fifty-five page book proposal two-dozen times. *Two. Dozen. Times.* That's over than thirteen hundred pages. Of just the proposal – not the actual book. Seriously? *War & Peace* wasn't even that long. And the sad part is: She wasn't even done yet. "I'm still ironing out the wrinkles," she said. *Tragic.* With the time Amy invested in that project, she could have written and shipped six real books. If only she'd known that finished is the new perfect. If only she'd known that planning is the gateway drug to procrastination. You think her crime of redundancy would survive in a traditional boss situation? *Hell no.* Somebody would either get fired or quit. Lesson learned: Next time you find yourself stuck on the treadmill of the inconsequential, consider the possibility that what's consuming your time makes no sense, doesn't need to be done by anyone, and isn't making you any money. *How many built-in redundancies could you eliminate?*

276. Raise your hand for pain. In the movie *Fight Club*, Brad Pitt asks, “*How much can you really know about yourself if you’ve never been in a fight?*” Answer: Not enough. Especially if you’ve been surrounded by safety nets all your life. And if you’re one of those people, someone who comes from a trouble-free existence – but who is not willing to expose yourself to the world – you’re doomed. Not to suggest you hit the streets and start punching strangers. This isn’t about violence – this is about voluntary discomfort. It’s about allowing yourself to get hurt during practice so you can avoid injury during the game. That’s the cool part about pain: It’s an invitation to excel. It means your body is alive and talking to you. And it’s a natural and necessary part of achieving success. Volunteer for it. Live out what you already know to be true. Even if it stings like hell. *Do you invite pain in the short term to build your armor against injury in the long term?*

277. Reassurance matters. When privacy is at stake, reassurance is priceless. I once gave a workshop to a document destruction company. Their specialty was paper shredding and hardware demolition, mainly for large financial institutions. Stockbroking firms paid them big bucks to destroy old client records, annual reports and other sensitive materials. Naturally, prospective clients were skeptical. Outside of the standard disclosure agreements, and outside of whatever trust was established between the firm and the destruction company, there was really no way to guarantee that their information could be fully protected. So I asked the president how he handled the issue of client privacy. And said that most players in his industry struggled with it. To the point that it became a barrier to growth. *“But at our company, it’s easy,” he said, “Most of my employees can’t read.”* Wait. What? That’s right. The majority of his warehouse staff was blind, mentally retarded or cognitively impaired. *They didn’t steal the information because they couldn’t read it.* That’s reassurance. And don’t forget, this document destruction company staffed dozens of permanent and temporary workers each year, most of whom could never get a job anywhere else because of their preexisting conditions. That’s reassurance too. *I wonder what your company does to deliver it.*

278. Refuse to be a lukewarm person. I don't know about you, but I want my life to burn like a gas lamp. And I regret only the moments in which I chose not to be fully alive. That's the danger with permission: It prevents you from being the best, highest – and hottest – version of yourself. And if you find yourself slipping into the skin of average, here's how my suggestion: *Become unwaveringly vigilant about the company you keep.* Look: Life's too short to surround yourself with people that don't set you ablaze. Personally amputate anyone who doesn't believe in or support you. These are the people who will keep you average, keep you lukewarm and keep addicted to the need for permission. *What relationships (that you've outgrown) are keeping your core temperate dangerously low?*

279. Refuse to live a life of zero distinction. George Carlin said it best, “Schools are indoctrination centers where kids are sent to be stripped of their individuality and turned into obedient soul dead conformist members of the American consumer culture.” Lesson learned: If you want to break the mold, try breaking away from poisonous orbits. And not just schools. But whatever force, organization or corporate monolith attempts to crush your spirit – be conscious of their power. Be careful whom you listen to. And remember that there’s no point in being scared of the system. That’s nothing but a waste of energy. Instead, as the voice inside you grows more urgent, channel your ambition into an organized campaign of disquiet. Take what’s inside, push it out in an unrestrained manner and bring truth to power. That’s how you become an artist, says Nietzsche, who believed that art raises its hand where creeds relax. *Is yours ready to flail in the air?*

280. Refuse to stand for the idle moment. One of the reasons I do what I do is because I'm ugly when I don't. I don't know about you, but idleness absolutely kills me. I think life's far too interesting. There's just too much fun to be had. And I'm not saying you should always to be busy – I'm saying you should never be bored. Incessant bouts of boredom are the mark of a boring person. And being bored is an utter insult to your company, your community, your creator and your creativity. Look: Each of us has the habitual longing to make a mark that counts. And each of us needs to become thoroughly convinced that we're destined for great things. But the footsteps of the human experience were not meant to be caked with vanilla frosting. Enough half-measure living. Tap into your innate expressive capacity. Wage an ongoing war against boredom. Otherwise average will cling to you like a wet dishrag. *When was the last time you were bored?*

281. **Regularly audit your self-belief.** It is possible to be your own fan without believing your own in house press. As long as you digest proper doses of self-awareness and humility. To become your biggest fan – but also your sharpest fan – consider asking yourself a few questions: *What obsolete self-beliefs are trapping you?* Because certain values you've held close to your heart will eventually outlive their usefulness. What would it take for you to believe in yourself down to your toes? *Because the more you belittle your true self, the more your inner gifts atrophy.* Which beliefs should you abort? *Because some of those ideals may not be serving your goals any longer.* Remember: Being your own biggest fan is how you prepare the soil from which a harvest of meaningfulness grows. But only if you're radically honest with first. *Why do you believe in yourself?*

282. Remain a lifelong student of the game you're playing.

First, stay dedicated to mastering your craft – work at it every single day. Second, stay updated with the trends in your industry – research your brains out. Third, stay associated with fellow professionals in your line of work – network your ass off. Fourth, stay affiliated with your professional association – volunteer your face off. Fifth, stay fascinated with the art of what you do – even if you don't consider it an art. And sixth, stay satiated with the business of what you do – because if you don't plan to make it a business, don't bother. Your education doesn't end when you get your diploma. Lifelong learning is what full timers do. *What are you a student of?*

283. Remove what robs you. I attended college at Miami University. But not the fake Miami in Florida. The real Miami: In Ohio. Anyway, I went to school around the same time as Pittsburgh Steelers quarterback, Ben Roethlisberger. We actually had class together. Although, not surprisingly, Ben never came to class. And I'll never forget what my professor told me when I asked about Ben's academic status: "I pray I never see him in class," he said. "I hope he's at the gym. I hope he's studying plays. I hope he's watching game film. Let's be honest: Do you think Roethlisberger wants to make forty thousand dollars a year working in marketing; or make ten million a year playing in the NFL?" Sure enough, Ben was drafted two years later. And he led his team to the Superbowl. Bet he didn't lose much sleep over missing class. Lesson learned: Remove what robs you; embrace what optimizes you. Especially the moment when you realize that you're hardwired to become something bigger. Otherwise, if you choose not to cater to your deepest desires and strongest urges, the existential agony will eat away at you like one-celled bacteria. *What robs you of your true talent?*

284. Repetition is the bridge between average and awesome.

My friend Jim reminds me that amateurs practice until they get it right; while masters practice until they can't get it wrong. Which one are you? If you're a master, you most certainly have some kind of daily practice. It doesn't matter what you practice – only that you practice. And that you do so every single day, without fail. *What do you repeat every day?*

285. Respect the paradox of the journey. On one hand, your inner dreamer *believes* you should be more successful by now. On the other, your inner realist *knows* you have to pay your dues for longer than you'd like to. But like a good yoga student, you have to achieve balance between total relaxation and complete exertion. And a helpful way of doing so is to ask two questions. First: *Where can you afford to be patient?* Not idle, not passive, but patient. Because as long as you don't wait so long that it becomes too late to take action, and as long as you're not investing valuable time waiting for something that's never going to happen, it usually pays to wait it out. Second: *Where can you allow yourself to be impatient?* Not reckless, not irresponsible, but impatient. Because while patience is a virtue – impatience pays the mortgage. And sometimes you just have to trust yourself, trust the process and gather whatever momentum you can to start moving in the right direction. Otherwise you may never execute anything that matters. *How can you be patient and impatient simultaneously?*

286. Restore the equilibrium. The reason it's so hard to trust the process is because it's a form of surrendering; and for most people, that's a terrifying preposition. Human beings have an inherent need to preserve their sense of control. And any time they feel it being taken away from them, they freak out. I'm reminded of the Arabian proverb, "Trust God, but tie up your camel." That's the real secret: To restore the equilibrium. To balance letting go with preserving control. For example, when you enter into a new relationship, make a handshake agreement with your partner: "Look, I know we're both scared. I know we're both skeptical. So, let's agree that for every path we pave for our hearts to follow, we're going to make regular rest stops for our brains to reflect. That's where we'll check in with honest, open and clear updates on the process." When you ease into that exchange slowly, you hold yourself over until you're more comfortable tipping the scales. *How do you balance control with surrender?*

287. Revel in your remarkability. The easiest way to delete the average of the future is to appreciate the awesome of the present. For example, take romantic relationships. Ever see those disgustingly cute couples that actually show affection in public and enjoy each other's company? You know, the ones whose mere presence completely pisses off anyone who's been married for more than a year? Not so fast, Dr. Phil. Instead of averting your eyes, remember what it feels like to feel that way. Remember how good love tastes when it's fresh out of the box. Then, anchor the beauty of that beginning into your memory. That way, before your relationship degrades into the predictable, boring, undersexed and complacent stalemate that most couples slide into after six months, you can nip it in the bud. All you have to do is enlist your emotional memory and remind yourself what awesome feels like. The same goes for business, too: When the phones are ringing, when you're busy enough to say no and when you're profitable enough to reinvest, remember the aftertaste. It comes in handy during the times when all you can afford is rice and beans. *Do you really need to watch another episode of Law & Order, or do you need to take your significant other out on a date?*

288. Rewrite your definition of victory. When you start over, your currency changes. And winning starts to look different to you. But unless you give yourself permission to redefine your idea of success, you risk staying where you are. I'm reminded of the movie *Up In the Air*. Natalie, the recent college grad, explains how she thought she'd be married by twenty-three. "I was supposed to be driving a Grand Cherokee by now. Corner office by day, entertaining at night. And married to a guy with brown hair, kind eyes and a one-syllable named like John or Matt." Unfortunately, her older and wiser friend explains the reality: "You know, honestly, by the time you're thirty-four, all the physical requirements just go out the window. Like, you secretly pray that he'll be taller than you. But not an asshole would be enough. Someone who enjoys my company and comes from a good family would be enough. Or, maybe just a nice smile. That would be enough too." What about you? How has your definition of success change in the past ten years? I only ask because, as you navigate this transitional period of your life, you better believe it's going to change again. And how you define success, defines you. *What's your currency?*

289. Safeguard your artistic vision. I kept Brandtag a secret for fifteen months. *That was painful.* But as Julia Cameron taught me, “The first rule of magic is containment.” That’s why I only told a select number of colleagues about my art project. In my experience, there is a direct relationship between how many people you tell about your dream and how quickly that dream becomes a reality. And if you force your ideas to hatch before they’re ready, they’ll arrive to the world stillborn and lifeless. My suggestion: Don’t blow the lid off your idea by telling too many of the wrong people about them. Not everyone deserves a backstage pass to your dream. Just tell the few people who matter most and then get back to work. Protect your dream. Otherwise the vultures will destroy your seed before you have a chance to harvest it. *Are you gushing to people who are just going to belittle your ambitions?*

290. Safety and security are two different things. Living without permission means liberating yourself from rigid intellectual traditions, infusing yourself with earnest purpose, and, if necessary, exposing yourself to the hailstones. The secret is, you can't ease your way into it – you have to leap. And you have to remain undismayed in the face of odds. Because if you're constantly preoccupied with your own safety, you'll beat yourself before you begin. But, if you're willing to forego some of that safety for the opportunity to execute what matters – knowing that you're still secure on the inside – you win. For example, my yoga teacher constantly reminds us, "If you own your breath, nobody can steal your peace." This isn't yoga advice – this is life advice. Because no matter how unsafe the surrounding world is, when you thread your breath through every move you make, nobody can shatter the rock that is your foundation. *Prana*, as it were, finds the form to impose on the chaos of the world. And those are the moments that equip you. Your breath becomes your security. Even when the world around you feels unsafe. Lesson learned: When you get stuck waiting for permission to do what you really want to do, your lungs are your lifelines. I urge you to take a breath, even if you don't think you need one. *How's your breathing?*

291. Save feedback from the people who matter most. The number of positive stories that are circulating about you, your brand, your organization and your product is the measure of marketing success. So, a huge part of marketing is managing your impressions in the marketplace. Now, notice I said, “managing,” not controlling. You can participate in and keep track of your online reputation – but you can’t control it. That’s why you have to listen. Listening gives you the chance clarify misconceptions, stereotypes and false accusations. And it doesn’t matter how you do it; it only matters that you do it. *Are you listening to other people’s ideas about who you are?*

292. Self-belief dismantles insecurity. Writing is my occupation inasmuch as it occupies most of my time. My job, however, is to be a resource. A vendor of value. And one of the ways my clients use me is through a service called *Rent Scott's Brain*. Now, it's not really coaching. Not really consulting. Not really mentoring. More like a guided tour of my mind that disturbs people who are stuck into executing what matters. Now, the clients I work with – from entrepreneurs to writers to company leaders – pay for this service because it's completely organic. Just them and me, in a room, with minimal agendas, and a desire to get better. Nothing else in the marketplace quite like it. The interesting part is, because of the informal nature of the process, there's no preparation on my part. Outside of our initial discovery conversation, my mission is to show up as the best, highest version of myself, remain respectful of (and responsive to) the needs of the moment, and spend the next four hours adding value in the best way I can. Naturally, this approach requires heaps of self-trust. And admittedly, when I started offering this service five years ago, the first few sessions were pretty intimidating. But here's what I learned: Trusting yourself requires dismantling your insecurities. It means having faith in the wisdom that created you and knowing that you are the person who can do this. So, next time you sit across a table from people who demand that you deliver, keep replaying in your mind: "These people called me for a reason. They want me to succeed. And they're going to get their money's worth." Otherwise they'll smell your fear the minute you walk in the door. *When people rent your brain, what resources do you deliver?*

293. **Self-doubt is underrated.** Although there's a part of you that wants to believe your confidence is unthwartable, you're still human. And all humans doubt. The good news is: Doubt protects us. Doubt keeps us humble. Doubt helps us keep checks and balances on ourselves. And doubt forces us to examine what we think and why we think it. In fact, if you completely believed in yourself – all the time – do you really think you were stretching enough? On the other hand, perhaps it would serve you better to lean into your sense of scared-shitlessness. After all: Fear is the final compass for deciding what matters. Maybe try asking yourself, "What signal is my fear sending me?" Your answer might be the best thing you could have learned about yourself. Remember: There is no courage without the presence of fear. Fear is the prerequisite of bravery and bravery is the precursor to power. Throw your shoulder into it. *When was the last time you doubted yourself?*

294. Self-motivation stems from self-knowledge. It all depends on the way you talk to yourself before taking action. For example, the silent dialogue I have with myself often includes questions like: *Is this supporting my empire? Will this choice bring me closer to my highest vision for myself? Will this choice add to my life force or rob me of my energy? And, will this action move me closer to honoring my values or further away?* Your mission is to take some time exploring your personal decision making process. Here's a helpful guide for doing so. *Are you the world's expert on yourself?*

295. **Sell less – solve more.** That’s the biggest mistake made by businesses that use social media: They’re so busy trying to make money that they disregarded their duty to solve problems. I’m not saying making money is wrong. But if direct monetization is your primary modality, people will smell it quickly and walk away. Instead, I challenge you to position yourself as The Answer. To use social media as a listening platform to gain insight into what drives your customers up the wall. My friend Chris is a master of this. “Every person who comments on my blog gets a phone call from me,” he says. “And the best part is, nobody expects it. And that’s exactly what makes it a breath of fresh air. Because I’m offering myself as a resource – instead of hurling myself as a salesperson.” *What pervasive, expensive, real and urgent problem does your business solve – better, faster, smarter and cheaper than the other guys?*

296. Serve people as if they were already paying clients. You don't need to give away the farm – but by helping at a high level now, you help people find a way to pay you later. It's all in the mindset you maintain. For example, if you walk in the door thinking, "It's just a free gig. I can half ass it. I'll bring my b-game and save the good stuff for people who actually pay," your performance will suffer as a result. Not to the extent that the client will really notice the difference – but to the extent that the client will assume that's all you've got. On the other hand, if you walk in the door thinking, "I know they're not paying me, but I'm still going to rock their faces off. I'm going to make them laugh, make them understand and make them marvel. And I'm going to engage them emotionally with an unbroken series of value-driven actions, an extraordinarily pure heart and an indispensable presence," people will be so blown away that they'll have no choice but to start paying you. That's what happens when you throw your full attention to the world of the client: They throw their full budget to the world of your bank account. *How are you making it clear that your focus is on helping and not charging?*

297. Shake hands with yourself. Somewhere down the line, you've had manager, boss or supervisor – that you wanted to strangle with an orange extension cord. And my guess is: You weren't especially motivated by their words, right? People rarely remain accountable to people they hate. If you plan to be the person holding your own feet to the fire, the first key is simple: You better like yourself. Otherwise it's going to be extremely hard to listen. And if you think that sounds corny, you're right – it is. But corny doesn't mean ineffective. The second key is to establish expectational clarity with yourself. After all, the enemy of accountability is ambiguity. And a flawed assumption about yourself can set the whole process in misdirected motion.

298. **Shatter the limitations of size.** Shawn Fanning never made a billion dollars creating Napster. But do you think he cares? Doubtful. His game-changing program became the pivot that altered the landscape of music industry *for-better* and *for-always*. Screw making money – that guy made history. And he was just some dude in a dorm room. Who’s to say you couldn’t do the same? Sure, it’s not *probable* that you’ll disrupt an entire industry. But it *is* possible. More possible than ever before. And that’s the great part about the Web: All that fluff you were force-fed as a kid about how one person could change the world has actually become a glimmering reality. Advances in technology have (finally) made changing the game financially viable. I don’t know about you, but that’s the kind of thing that makes me get out – no, leap out – of bed in the morning. *Do you think it’s time to pursue your goal with a more modern vehicle?*

299. Shrink not from hardship. First, stop deluding yourself that you can outsmart getting hurt – you can’t. Stop believing that you can build immunity against life’s sorrows – you can’t. And stop thinking you’re superior to the wounds and upsets of life. I’ve tried all three, and none accomplished anything but exacerbating my misery. Secondly, remember that you can breathe through most pain, decapitations notwithstanding. Oxygen is the new Tylenol, and with a healthier relationship with your breath, you will be floored at how much of the impact your lungs can displace. Third, pain is an invitation to excel and a deliverer of wisdom. Consider making friends with it instead of trying to eradicate it. You’ll discover that pain is like that weird guy you went to college with. You know, the one who turned out to be a really cool, interesting, fun guy – but only after you set aside your judgments and gave his voice a chance to be heard. Finally, pain is a natural part of the human experience. It makes you feel alive. But if you’re the kind of person who lives a trouble-free life, you’re not actually living – you just exist. And it’s pretty hard to make a mark from such a dormant posture. Ultimately, Parker Palmer said it best in *A Hidden Wholeness*: “Don’t become alienated from your truth. Feel it, name it – but don’t numb it. The pain will crack the closed system open and force you out from behind the wall toward healing.” Remember: Pain is part of the equation. *Where have you gotten hurt this week?*

300. Shut up and trust yourself. When you do so, several other cool things happen: You earn new energy. You advance inner knowing. You recognize trust in others. You live within your own skin better. You move through whatever happens. You frame yourself in yessable attitudes. You develop a deeper sense of self-acceptance. You radiate trust into the hearts of the people you serve. You avoid putting all your eggs in other people's baskets. You eliminate anxiety that others are going to let you down. You gain a greater knowledge of your body, mind and spirit. You quit trying to control everything and let life make you happen. You stop killing yourself worrying about the judgments of people who don't matter. But trusting yourself isn't always easy. It involves accepting reality, surrendering control, dismantling insecurity and taking responsibility. Yikes.

301. **Simplicity is eloquence.** It happens all the time. Nametag companies send me their fancy, cluttered badges to wear instead of my own. *No thanks.* Not that I don't appreciate the gesture. In fact, I save all the nametags people send me. But my brand is a friend of simplicity. *Is yours?* Or, do you try to be too fancy, make things bigger than they need to be and create riddles that take too long for impatient customers to solve? Simple means instantly repeatable. Simple means easy enough for a kindergartner to understand. Simple means explainable in less than ten seconds with less than ten words. Simple means eliminating the extraneous, letting the necessary speak and disengaging the inessential. Unfortunately, simple is hard. It requires more energy, more brainpower and more courage than complexity. But simplicity, pursued relentlessly, can change the world. *Is your brand a friend of it?*

302. Slow footedness is the enemy. My biggest takeaway from *The Social Network* was when Facebook nemesis Divya Narendra exclaimed, “Zuckerberg knows that getting there first is everything!” Sure enough, he was right. And that’s exactly how Narendra’s company got beat: Because they finished second. Lesson learned: Those who are late to the game don’t just get bad seats – they don’t even make it past the gate. It all depends on what you’re willing to give up to cross the finish line before anyone else. Perfection? Quality? Security? Control? Ownership? How about it, lead foot? Will you master the simultaneity of surrender and initiative, or kill yourself trying to execute flawlessness in something that never finishes? That’s what smart entrepreneurs practice: Quick eyes and even quicker feet. *How nimble are yours?*

303. **Smash through self-doubt.** Like a sledgehammer through an Easter egg. Otherwise you short-circuit your momentum. And he who takes no action makes no money. My question is: Why take up unnecessary mental disk space questioning yourself? Limits are for calculus teachers. Yes, you are the detonator of your own destruction – but you’re also the conductor of your own self-belief. To free yourself from the fear of being found out, recite the following affirmation: *“I am the person who can do this ... I am the person who can do this.”* I use that one all the time. And it’s a great tool when I need help convincing myself that I actually know what the hell I’m doing. Otherwise self-doubt becomes the ultimate self-betrayal. Therefore: Your mission is to keep the faith. Like the diehard fan that refuses to leave the half-empty ballpark until the last pitch is thrown, stick with yourself. And if you throw a hanging curve that gets tattooed out of the stadium, so be it. Learn from it and move on. *How often do self-doubt and caution take hold of your decision making process?*

304. **Smile all the time.** It's weird: Some people don't think other people deserve to be happy. It's simply not fair how crappy their lives are, and their misery is itching for company. That's why smiling all the time drives people crazy. Especially those terminally negative chumps who convince themselves that it's easier to be miserable all the time. Your smile reminds them of how sad their lives really are. Almost like a reverse entitlement attitude and victim mentality combined. My suggestion is: Don't let this mixture infiltrate your life. It's more poisonous than cyanide. Instead, let your happiness – as expressed through your constant smile – contagiously infect those around you. *How many people went out of their way to avoid you yesterday?*

305. Smoke a peace with why you are. During a recent workshop with a group of student leaders, I was asked if I knew what I was doing when I started my business right out of college. “Hell no,” I told them, “In fact, I still don’t know what I’m doing – I just have a deeper sense of why I’m doing it.” Lesson learned: Making your mark means not being stopped by not knowing how. Instead, commit to a consistency of why. The how will come in time. Promise. After all, that’s what people really want to know about their leaders: Not just how they are, not just who they are – *but why they are*. That’s the verb that matters. That’s how you fulfill your function. That’s how you put a check mark next to your divine assignment. And if you betray the mission you were mandated to fulfill, you commit a form of spiritual suicide. Look: I know how hard it is to surrender to something larger. You feel vulnerable, uncertain and out of control. And while I don’t preach the predominance of any particular supernatural agency, there is always value in making peace with something that’s big enough to crush you like a walnut. It’s an essential step for building faith, instilling the proper humility and trusting your higher resources. Plus, chicks dig it. Remember: The best way to leave ineradicable imprints on the world is to live a life that makes an unmistakable statement about what you believe. *Have you subordinated yourself to something larger than yourself?*

306. Spy on yourself. When was the last time you took an honest glance at what you've accomplished in your career? Answer: Too long ago. Try this: Accumulate massive evidence. Chronologically depict your achievements in a Career Trajectory Map Illustrate how far you've come since the beginning. Next, step outside of yourself and view your achievements objectively. Then, ask these questions: Could an imposter (really) have accomplished all this? If you met you for the first time – and saw this map – what would you think of you? This exercise builds healthy amounts of self-confidence without overrating your abilities. *Are you willing to confront your success?*

307. Stable is for horses. According to the National Association of Colleges and Employers, only twenty-five percent of recent graduates who applied for a job had one waiting for them after graduation. It's no secret: Hiring yourself is no longer a renegade choice – it's a viable path. First of all, the tools are accessible, affordable and have rapid learning curves. Secondly, offices are a thing of the past and mobile workforces the thing of the present. Third, open-source software reduces or eliminate the need for consultants and tech support. And lastly, microfinancing, business incubators, peer councils and digital fundraising opportunities are abundant and available – as long as you know how to make a case for yourself. Yes, half of all new businesses fail within the first five years. And yes, the entrepreneur life is filled with risks, stresses and sacrifices. But it certainly beats working a job that eats away at you just a little more each day. So maybe you take fewer vacations. Big deal. *Isn't it worth it to set up a life you didn't need to escape from?*

308. Stamina is the bridge between amateur and master.

People often ask me, “As a author, how do you know when your book is done?” My answer is: “When I’ve read it so many times that I hate it.” That’s stamina. This reminds me of what my friend Jim Flowers likes to remind me, “Amateurs practice until they get it right – masters practice until they can’t get it wrong.” *Are you willing to go all night until right is second nature?*

309. Start positive rumors about yourself. A few years ago I was on the bike at the gym. In between sets, the guy next to me noticed my nametag. After a few moments of awkward silence, he launched right into the rumor: “You know, I once heard a story about some guy who wore a nametag everyday in college. I think it was a sociological experiment or something. But they made a documentary about him. And think he set a world record. Pretty crazy, huh?” I didn’t have the heart to tell him. The rumors were far too interesting to listen to. But that’s the whole point: Facts are misleading, but rumors are always revealing – even if they’re wrong. And if people aren’t currently spreading positive rumors about your brand, you might consider taking matters into your own hands. Certainly beats being ignored. When all else fails, start gossiping about yourself. That way at least someone is talking about you. *Are you a person worth spreading rumors about?*

310. **Stay alert to your good.** Jack Kerouac famously suggested, “You’re a genius all the time.” Not an easy thing to admit about yourself. And while I don’t want you to become a self-important egomaniac – if you don’t convince yourself of the brilliance that is you, nobody else will. If you don’t toot your own horn – nobody else will. And if you don’t accept the genius of your own work, nobody else will. Cast from your soul any belief that you’re not enough. Never give up on yourself. And keep victory in front of your eyes daily. For every moment of brave action, salute yourself. For every incident of risk taking, honor yourself. This will set ablaze your timid heart and remind you that you’re not a presumed part of the wallpaper. You’re not yesterday’s vegetables. You can turn a seed into a forest. You are music waiting to be heard by the world. *What do you say to yourself in moments of honest leadership reflection?*

311. Steel yourself against the thundering noise around you.

Don't let the validity of your talent hang in the balance of some wanker critic's opinion. Instead, give up your obsessive need for approval from anyone other than yourself. Develop personal standards for judging your own artistic talents. Visualize at the onset what a win looks like. That way, when the bedlam persists from the haters around you, the commotion dissolves from the groupie inside you. Remember: As long as you're your own biggest fan, you win every time. Unless you're a serial killer. That's totally different. I don't care how skilled you are at decapitating people. *How much of what you believe about yourself comes from what others believe about you?*

312. Stick around anyway. Even when it's late. Even when you're tired. Even when it's raining outside. Even when you're sitting in the nosebleed section because your friend who got the tickets is a total tight ass. That's what real fans do: They pull on their ponchos and wait the out the storm. Even when nobody notices. Because it's not about being noticed – it's about being dedicated. Fans like these came to see a performance and, damn it, that's exactly what they're going to get. And maybe some nachos. Your challenge is not to let the breaks break you. To relentlessly pursue an upward course, crappy conditions notwithstanding. For example: When you discover that not everybody cares about you, be your biggest fan anyway. When you learn that not everybody is invested in your success, be your biggest fan anyway. And when you realize that not everybody will notice when you fail, be your biggest fan anyway. Like Garrison Keilor reminded us in a 2008 episode of *Prairie Home Companion*, “Never, ever give up. Because when you do, most of the world probably won't notice anyway.” *How are you building your resiliency?*

313. **Stick your fingers in your ears.** It takes a prodigious act of courage to make something the burning point of your life. The hard part is discerning which voices to listen to along the way. My friend Mark once told me that you can't benchmark normal in the past. Couldn't agree more: *History yields to instinct*. And that's something each of us has to remember: If you don't maintain a healthy respect for your own opinions, you're finished. What's more, it's not enough to trust your instinct – you have to defend it, too. Otherwise you end up pursuing something that someone else convinced you that you should want. If you're going to be besieged by a relentless voice, it may as well be your own. May as well let your public actions speak your personal legend. Sure beats letting people bash your opinions out of you. *Who have you elected not to listen to anymore?*

314. **Stop assuming it is what it is.** Wrong. It isn't what it is. It is what you've chosen it to be. It is what you've given yourself permission to accept. It is what you've allowed to exist into your life. It is what you've assumed you're stuck with. Screw "it." I loathe the word it. "It" is a personal responsibility dodger. If you don't like it, change it. And remember what Tony Robbins says, "The only reason you don't have what you really want is because of the story you keep telling yourself about why you can't have it. *Is it really what it is?*"

315. Stop being a passenger. Amelia Earhart once said, “There’s more to life than just being a passenger.” But she wasn’t suggesting you try to control life. Rather: She teaches you to tackle life assertively, adventurously and ardently. She inspires you to avoid marching to the drum of other people’s demands. She challenges you to nominate yourself as the architect – not the victim – of your life’s course. The territory is yours to carve. You will not be a bystander. You will not be a spectator. You will not be a passenger. You will blaze a passageway.

316. Stop coveting other people's careers. Especially when we see them doing things we'd like to be doing. The reality is, we can't have another person's career any more than we can have another person's hair. Their history, their trajectory and their motivations are theirs and theirs alone. Even if we did try to copy their path and plug our variables into their equations, we'd still come out with a different result. Like taking Pemberton's recipe for Coke and mixing it ourselves, we'd always produce our own unique flavor of soda. Every time. But that's the beauty of the modern career: It's the river we can't step in twice. With global shifts in economics, technology, culture and population, there are as many career paths as there are people to take them. No two are exactly alike. And if we want to support each other in our mutual endeavors, we need to greet each other's careers with affirmation, not envy. We need to treat each other's careers as a source of inspiration, not frustration. That way, instead of bastardizing our life into a cover song of another person's music, we craft our careers into the limited editions that they were meant to be. *Whose career do you covet?*

317. Stop deflecting praise. Next time someone congratulates you on your success, try receiving it gracefully. Instead of justifying positive feedback with nonchalant, false-humility driven comments like, “I really lucked out,” “The planets must have been aligned,” or “You just have to sleep the with the right people,” simply say, “Thank you.” That’s it. Two words. I know – it’s unbelievably hard. If you really have to, you might try my standard line: “Thank you. I was really happy with the way that one turned out.” *How well do you receive?*

318. Stop hurting customer brains. There's a whole host of sloppy mistakes that make rejecting you easy. One of those is a lack of clarity, simplicity and directness of your messages. Customers are busy. They don't want to have to think. Or figure things out. Or do unnecessary math. Or make endless choices. Stop creating riddles that take too long for impatient customers to solve. Next time you send an email, shoot a text message, leave a voicemail or have lunch with a prospect, remember that a confused mind never buys. Ever. *How do you make it difficult for people to understand you?*

319. Stop justifying other people's success. The first scripture

I ever memorized comes from Galatians: "Let us not be weary in well-doing, for in due season we will reap a great harvest if we faint not." It's been enormously helpful over the years. Especially in my low moments when jealousy makes me want to murder anyone who's more successful than me. *Yeah, but he comes from money. Yeah, but he doesn't have a wife and kids. Yeah, but he started when he was really young. Yeah, but nothing.* Enough excuses and justifications about why other people don't deserve success as much as you. Instead of getting pissed off that you're not as successful as they are, use their accomplishments as a glowing source of inspiration. Build off their energy. Use it as fuel. After all, they must be doing something right. Try turning toward their triumphs with a hospitable heart and distribute your motive force accordingly. *What excuses do you make for other people's accomplishments?*

320. Stop saying it is what it is. Wrong. It isn't what it is. It is what you've chosen it to be. It is what you've given yourself permission to accept. It is what you've allowed to exist into your life. It is what you've assumed you're stuck with. Screw "it." I loathe the word it. "It" is a personal responsibility dodger. If you don't like it, change it. And remember what Tony Robbins says, "The only reason you don't have what you really want is because of the story you keep telling yourself about why you can't have it. *Is it really what it is?*"

321. Stop saying it's not about you. First of all, doing so invalidates your efforts, according to Ayn Rand in *The Virtue of Selfishness*. Secondly, refusing to admit that you're (at least a little) self-serving is a form of false humility. And people can smell from a mile away. For example, my readers and audience members often ask me why I write books. And my answer is simple, "For me. Because I want to read them. And because I need to learn this stuff." Now, I'm not trying to be a jerk. Obviously, I'm writing the books for them too. I mean, I'm nothing without my readers. But first and foremost, my work is for me. Period. Yes, I'm selfish – and I'm cool with that. Besides, anyone who tries to tell you that they're completely altruistic in all their efforts is either: Lying, from outer space, or high on paint thinner. Ultimately, making a mark means stepping into spotlight – even if only for a short while. You need to be willing to do so. Otherwise, if you refuse to take center stage and stand unprotected to the searing headwind of the masses, you'll never make it out alive. And the mark you're trying to make will melt like a sandcastle in the surf. *Who's your audience?*

322. Stop waiting for baptism. Seriously: What's the holdup? What lies are your excuses guarding? Just go. Just start. Just do stuff. Right now. I don't know about you, but I never waited to be appointed. Since I was seven, I was on a path. I was a writer who was going to write, no matter what. And there's nothing anybody could have done – or will ever do – to stop my pen and silence my voice. Lesson learned: Even in the midst of doubt and danger, even among the cacophony of voices delivering conflicting advice – remain true to your basic nature. Saw yes to your heart. And just go. Because the cool part is, when you grant permission to your authentic voice to sing as loud, as silly, as creative and as original as it wants, people don't just listen to you – they hear you. Being washed in the blood is not a pre-requisite for success. *What is the life cost of clinging to the comfort of permission?*

323. Stop waiting for permission. Which one of the following questions dominates your daily decision-making? *Who's going to let me? Who's going to stop me?* If it's the first, you're the type of person who asks for permission. If it's the second, you're the type of person who acts without restriction. People whose decisions are determined from the second question – that is, people not addicted to permission – are happier, healthier and more successful in business and life. Naturally, I have no scientific evidence to back this up. Just my own experience. Permission is a spiritual revolt. It's a soulful drive for significance. And it's part of how you sustain your quest for truth. And as you embark on a personal mission to seek less permission and start doing what you really want to do, I urge you to remember one final thought: The only permission slip that matters is the one you sign for yourself. *Signed it yet?*

324. Succeed in spite of yourself. Every game you play is you versus you. And the surest way to head down the path of self-destructiveness is to hang onto your neuroses like a holiday card. As legendary director James Cameron once said, “Don’t put limitations on yourself – other people will do that for you.” He’s right: Why constrict your usefulness? Why reject yourself? Instead, silence the old tape of can’t. Correct the distortions that stand in your way of victory. And keep a watchful eye on your self-sabotaging tendencies. After all, those are just your ego’s way of trying to control (not) getting something. Take success, for example. Can you imagine anything more terrifying than getting exactly what you want? *No way.* Think about it. If you achieve success: You might lose it, you might realize it’s not enough, you might discover it’s not actually what you (thought) you wanted, you might not be able to handle all the changes success brings into your life, and you might not live up to the expectations and reputation attached to your success. *Blech.* That’s usually when your ego chimes in with, “Oh well – maybe it’s safer to just want things. Maybe by expecting to fail and then not succeeding, I won’t miss my emotional goal of failure.” Remember: A good cheerleader doesn’t just push you beat your opponent – she also prevents you from beating yourself. *Who are you really up against?*

325. Success alone is not enough to anchor you. First, you have to embody the unshakable, unbending belief that you deserve success. That it's yours for the asking. Not that you're entitled to success – but that you're good enough to receive it. My suggestion: Cure the waves of whoami. Remind yourself that who you already are – is enough to get what you want. You are worthy of this dream, and this dream is worthy of you. Otherwise you'll never rein superior to the wounds and upsets of life. As Karen Salmonshon wrote in *Enough, Damn It!* “Lots of pessimism will only get you lots of opportunity to be right about your pessimism. Don't be a pessimist who succeeds at being right about being a pessimist.” *Are you shaping your world or being shaped by it?*

326. **Success never comes unassisted.** I'm not saying you need your hand held through life. But reaching out doesn't make you a weakling or a failure. Look: If your world comes crashing down and you need to fly to Denver for the weekend to have a good cry with your parents, do it. If you feel like an abject failure, and you need a friend to sit with you for two hours of venting, do it. Your peeps. Your crew. Your network of healing. Your expectation-free support structure. These are the people who help clear the trees along your untraveled path. Let them. That's why they're there. The people who love you most want nothing more than the opportunity to come through and show you so. Remember: Islands are for vacations. Ask for help early and often. *Who do you know that would help you take the first steps down your path?*

327. Suit your temper to any circumstance. Mood doesn't matter. Mood follows action. And situations don't create moods – moods create situations. Your challenge is to take control of the emotional climate. Here's how. First, *recognize* that you are the result of yourself, the dominant determiner of your own development and the agent of your own future. This awareness compels you to hold yourself accountable for feeling like crap. Second, *remember* that if you own your breath, nobody can steal your peace. It's amazing how quickly a bad mood can dissipate with a little belly breathing. As philosophy Lieh Tzu reminds us, "To the mind that is still the whole universe surrenders." And third, revise your attitude by shifting your language. Instead of letting your emotions own you by saying, "I'm so annoyed," try saying, "I'm noticing some frustration." And instead of consigning yourself to a state of inequity by saying, "This is the worst week of my life!" try saying, "Until now, this week has sucked." Remember: You can't afford to engage in negative thinking for more than about five minutes. The thing that causes you to overreact, owns you. *How are you taking ownership of the dissatisfying aspects of your life?*

328. Surround yourself with human mirrors. My support system is unheard of. From friends to family members to colleagues to mentors, the people who matter never fail to come through for me. And I feel incredibly fortunate to have them as an asset. Especially in those moments where I'm having a hard time trusting myself. They serve as human mirrors. Lesson learned: The best way to trust yourself is to keep the company people who reflect the best, highest version of yourself. That means: People who will make you feel heard. People who will reflect your reality. And most importantly, people who will tell you when you're off your tree. Think of these individuals as your source of sobriety, deriving from the French *sobriété*, which means, "steadiness." That's the sort of stillness required to help you listen to your own voice. Remember: Life's short to surround yourself with people that don't challenge and inspire you. *Are you still convinced that success comes unassisted?*

329. Surround yourself with mirrors. Although you don't need permission to dream, you do need protection to make that dream a reality. Otherwise the vultures will destroy your seed before you have a chance to harvest it. The secret is to remain vigilant about the company you keep. In the book *Ignore Everybody*, Hugh McLeod explains: "You don't know if your idea is any good the moment it's created. But neither does anybody else. The most you can hope for is a strong gut feeling that it is. And it's not that your friends deliberately want to be unhelpful. It's just that they don't know your world one millionth as well as you know your world, no matter how hard they try, no matter how hard you try to explain." Stop gushing to people who are going to belittle your ambitions. Surround yourself with mirrors that make you feel beautiful. *Are you listening to your voice or a program created by someone who doesn't get you?*

330. Surround yourself with other ass kickers. Self-motivation is contagious. If you hang with people whose footprints are plastered on their own assess, you will have no choice but to become motivated yourself. Therefore: Associate with the generous, gravitate to the cheerful, listen to the inspiring and court the challenging. Or, if you don't have friends like that, you can always use dead Italian guys. Take Davinci. He once said, "Rouse yourself from sleep because lying down will not bring thee fame." Post that quotation next to your alarm clock. Maybe that'll get your lazy butt out of bed. *Do masters of self-motivation surround you?*

331. Swim against the tide of what's expected. When I assumed the presidency of my local association, my first mold-breaking order of business was to excise as much fat from our process as possible. From removing redundant board procedures to axing inactive members that never attended meeting to deleting stupid expenses that drained organizational resources, the goal was to become lean and nimble. That way we could evolve as a chapter, as opposed to living a continued existence as an irrelevant integer. The cool part was, all we had to do was stop, tilt our heads to the left and ask, "Why do we have to do it that way?" And most of the time, there was rarely an answer other than, "to satisfy the conventions of people who don't matter." That's how we broke the mold. That's how we resurrected our chapter. And you have a similar choice in your own life, whether it's organizational or personal: *Will you yield gracefully to necessity or kneel obediently to mediocrity?*

332. Take a chance on yourself. Gambling is for fools. It wastes your time. It burns your money. It corrupts your thinking. As Robert DeNiro said in *Casino*, “The more they play, the more they lose. And in the end, the casino gets it all.” But some things are worth taking a chance on. Namely, you. You are a risk worth taking. If you are going to *take a chance* on something, it may as well be on yourself. Sure beats playing video poker.

333. Take people back in time. Have you ever watched a show that made you forget you were in the audience? It's a beautiful thing. And it happens for one reason: *The performers knew how to disappear from the stage.* They know how to let the music become bigger than the musicians. That's what transports the audience to another realm of experience. For example, every time I attend a Dave Matthews concert, I travel back in time. Because after listening to their music for almost twenty years, every song is attached to an emotional experience. Or an old girlfriend. Or a particular period of my life. Therefore: Every show is a time machine. And your challenge as a leader, businessperson or creative professional is to do the same. To take people back in time. My friend Ria suggests asking yourself one key question: *What is the emotion you are selling?* "When you know your emotion, you engage people with your brand because they have something to latch onto," she explained during a recent speech. "Then you can let the emotion do the heavy lifting for you." *What emotion will you use to disappear and take people back in time?*

334. **Take truth serum.** Want a surefire way to boil people's blood? Practice radical truth telling, challenge injustice and dispel pleasant myths. This type of honesty makes people nervous. Especially when they're so used to living in a world of lies. The reality is: When you walk your truth in a world of mostly (fiction), people notice. They might hate you, but they still notice. And because awareness is always the first step toward mastery, attention is a great first step. *How are you branding your honesty?*

335. Territory, not hierarchy. Resist the desire to constantly judge your success against the achievements of others. This is a hierarchical approach that creates an endless, destructive loop of not good enoughness. Approaching your work territorially, however, is what Steven Pressfield recommends in my favorite book, *The War of Art*. “Territorial creatives understand that the sustenance comes from the act itself, not from the impression it makes on others.” *Which way do you work?*

336. The detour is the path. It's amazing how easy it is to start over when you come to the realization that you're always in alignment. That everything happening during your transitional period is exactly what's supposed to happen – even if it's inconsistent with the great life plan you orchestrated. As John Lennon once sang, “Life is what happens when you're busy making plans.” Whether it's a new relationship, new job or new city, learn to celebrate wherever the detour takes you. Go where your unintentional music leads you. And be patient as new opportunities unfold. Because sometimes it takes a while to look back with objective eyes and realize how right your leap truly was. Even if you ended up somewhere unexpected. Remember: Leaving the old path is a choice – but so is embracing the detour. Give yourself the psychological freedom to move in a new direction. And trust yourself enough that wherever starting over takes you, you'll still be able to excel. *How does your current accident relate to your core life purpose?*

337. The problem with the Internet. When I went to my ten-year high school reunion, I had this romantic, cinematic vision that I'd walk in the door, tell everybody the story about how I made a career out of wearing nametag and watch as they listened in disbelief. One of those *how-do-you-like-me-now* moments. But it doesn't work that way. Not anymore. Instead of asking what I've been up to since graduation, former classmates I hadn't seen in a decade came up to me – didn't even say hello – poked my chest and asked to see my nametag tattoo. *I'm fine, how are you?* That's the downside of the Internet: We never have to wonder about anything anymore. No finding things out on accident. No learning things through trial and error. No imagining things by sitting around and pondering. The Internet just gives you a blank box and puts the entire world behind it. And personally, I think that's too easy. The secret is, we can never bury our sense of wonder. It's what makes us human, helps us feel alive and enables us to connect with each other. Einstein said imagination is more important than knowledge. I say imagination is more important than anything. *What does your brand say?*

338. **The road less traveled.** I never had a real job. Started my own company the day I graduated college and never looked back. There were a lot of things I did wrong. A lot of things I overlooked. And a lot of things I wish someone would have told me when I was twenty-two. Just because you take the road less traveled doesn't mean you can't arrive in one piece.

339. The speed of the response is the response. If you plan to position yourself as the answer, you need to get back to people quickly. Especially if their problem is expensive and urgent. And, even if you don't have the answer right away, ping people back anyway. Let them know you've taken ownership of the problem and they can relax. If possible, do this personally. Give people no choice but to deal directly with you. Either in person, over the phone or via email. But not with some bullshit autoresponder that lies to people, informing them that their call is very important to you, and that you'll get back to them in the order in which their call was received. Instead, use their first name and tell people you're personally on the case. Doing research, making calls, uncovering stones, kissing babies, licking toads – whatever it takes to find the answer. Then, once you strike gold, don't just reconnect – reinforce the fact that you kept your promise. This reminds people of your ability to deliver answers consistently. *How many unread emails are currently sitting in your inbox, collecting virtual dust?*

340. **The world is your mentor.** There's a phenomenally simple book by Mike Hernacki called, *The Ultimate Secret to Getting Absolutely Everything You Want*. It can be summarized in one sentence: You have to be willing to do whatever it takes. *Whatever. It. Takes.* The challenge, it will be different for everybody, depending on what you're diving into. My suggestion: Find twenty people who have jumped off the same cliff you have. Email them. Briefly introduce yourself. Tell them you're a fan of their work. Tell them you've decided to jump. And tell them you're willing to do whatever it takes to become the walking execution of your vision. Then, ask them if they'd be willing to offer themselves – in any capacity – as a resource for your success. Not everyone will respond. But the ones who do – the ones who see something in you that someone once saw in them – will be happy to oblige. *How many mentors do you have?*

341. **Think less.** Audience members and readers alike often ask me, “What were you thinking when you decided to wear a nametag every day for the rest of your life?” Well, that’s just the thing – I wasn’t thinking. *I was feeling. I was listening. I was trusting. I was testing. I was risking. I was reacting.* But I definitely wasn’t thinking. And, interestingly enough, that crazy idea turned out to be the single most important decision of my life. As David Mack, writer, illustrator and creator of *Daredevil*, once told me on an airplane to Cincinnati, “An idea is not any good unless it’s on the verge of being stupid.” Lesson learned: Think less. Instead, focus on noticing the things that resonate with your soul. *Those are the crazy ideas waiting to stand naked in front of the world. Are you a slave to the wrong body part?*

342. **Throw yourself under the bus.** Failure doesn't come from poor planning. *It comes from the timidity to proceed.* If commitment isn't the answer – rephrase the question. The problem is, commitment is hard. Maybe the hardest. What you need is a way to commit that makes it very hard to turn back. You have to throw yourself under the bus. But this isn't about self-sabotage. This isn't about self-mutilation. And this isn't about doing something stupid, reckless and expensive. This is about courageously confronting your own dream. *Even if it makes your stomach flip.* Not deciding is a decision, and it's a terrible one. Don't act like you're not tired of being one foot in. Put the strength of heart behind you. *Are you ready to commit?*

343. **Tip the balance of power.** My friends at *Brain on Fire* have been changing the customer engagement game for years. In their eponymous book, authors Gino Church, Robbin Phillips and Greg Cordell write, “Participate in people’s lives – not just the conversation about their lives. Because it’s not about you talking about your product. It’s about people celebrating how your product fits into their lives and how you enable them to use it.” That’s how you tip the balance of power: By asking your fans how they prefer to connect. By giving fans the ability to participate in your message. Otherwise you’re just in love with your own marketing. The door opens both ways. Like my mom once told me, “Always doing just what you want and making the decisions unilaterally is a sure fire path to destruction.” *How are you deeply engaged with your people?*

344. **Trust every purposeful action.** When something evolves on its own, it's almost impossible to fully understand its biology until you look back. That's the recipe for entrepreneurship success: Heaps of uncertainty and leaps of faith. And most of the time, it's a bloody painful reality to confront. The secret is maintaining deep belief that your initiative will be rewarded. One way to do so is to practice preemptive nostalgia. To look forward to looking back. For example, when I built NametagTV in 2006, I knew it would be expensive, I know it would require thousands of hours of work, and I know it wouldn't make any money for at least eighteen months. But I kept asking myself, "Now that I have this, what else does this make possible?" And the answers that slowly arrived were bigger than I ever imagined. Sure enough, four years later, NametagTV has opened more doors, taught me more lessons and earned me more profit than I ever expected. *Where are you afraid to trust yourself?*

345. Trust is a function of self-disclosure. The more you reveal about yourself, the more likely people are to trust you. That's a basic tenant of human communication, first researched by psychologists like Sidney Jourard and John Powell. But you don't need books to know how trust works. That's what the nametag proved: *Strangers trusted me more once they knew my name.* Not that much more. It's not like they gave me their passwords or anything. But there was enough additional trust to be noticeable. People recognized my willingness to stick myself out there – albeit in a small, simple way – and as a result, perceived me as being a more trustworthy person. But it was weird. I didn't really do anything. Just wore a nametag that said, "Scott." And yet, people would tell me things. Personal things. Things you would never normally tell someone you just met. I'll never forget the time I sat down next to this old guy at the train station. He noticed my nametag and said hello. I did the same. *He then proceeded to tell me every single detail about his wife's schizophrenia.* And I was happy to listen. But the whole time I kept thinking to myself, "Sir, why are you telling me all this?" Simple: He felt like he already knew me. Not well. But more than every other nameless face in the terminal. And that's how trust works: Sometimes just showing is a synonym for going out on a limb. People are lonely and want to be listened to. But they're not going to take that first step until they find someone to trust. *What if you were that person?*

346. Trust the process. To trust is to surrender. To surrender is to open yourself. To open yourself is to risk getting hurt. To risk getting hurt is to increase the probability of success. This might be the perfect time to let go. To achieve success and significance with your newest idea, project, initiative or relationship, you know what needs to be done. Employ your faith. Learn to trust the process. Surrender to your primal self. And allow it to do what it needs to do to lead you in the right direction. You'll be fine.

347. Trust your own inner authority. Beware of becoming overly dependent on outside voices to validate your truth. If you solely appoint other people as your decision-making cabinet, your intuitive voice will stay silenced. And your best self will remain repressed. In the book *Winners Always Quit*, author David Cottrell makes an important point on this issue, “People who choose to be passengers have to go where the driver is going. And they have little or no control over how fast they move ahead, and no say about whether rules are observed.” Ultimately, you have to believe in the availability of your own answers. You have to formulate and memorialize your own decision-making system, instead of blindingly accepting the yeses of people who don’t matter. *Are you open to ideas from everyone, but delivering the ultimate verdict yourself?*

348. **Trying jumping first.** Ever gone cliff diving? The same thing happens every time: You stand there, shaking in your Tevas, debating whether or not to take the plunge. Meanwhile, your friends cheer you on and/or call you a sissy. Eventually you can't take it anymore. You realize you're only delaying the inevitable. *So you jump. No thinking. No motivation needed. You just jump.* And as your body cuts into the icy water, your body exhilarates with excitement. It's the best rush you've had in years. So, what do you do? Quickly swim to shore, race back up the mountain and do it again. The only difference is, NOW you're motivated – because you've already jumped before. Lesson learned: The best motivation for doing something is having already done it once. *What cliff do you need to dive off of?*

349. Turn your career into a courtship. It recently occurred to me that I'm not really a writer – I'm a man having a love affair with writing. Huge difference. And I challenge you to rethink the relationship between you and your work. Because in my experience, loving what you do isn't enough. You have to elope with what you do. You have to be pathologically obsessed with what you do. You have to get a tattoo of what you do's name on your ass. Only then can you make the mark that matters. What's more, when you turn your career into a courtship, the work stays with you wherever you go. It gets under your fingernails. It becomes a part of your language, embeds into your actions and threads through your very being. And the separation between you and the work you do grows narrower and narrower with every passing microsecond. If that's not a chisel, I don't know what is. *Think your spouse is cool with polygamy?*

350. Uncertainty is an asset. Certainty is highly overrated. Personally, I love not knowing. It inspires the hell out of me. In my experience, when I attend to life wherever it moves, and when I leave room for the unexpected, everywhere I end up is beautiful. That's the key: You risk rejection by exploring new worlds. Otherwise you court acceptance by following explored paths. Blech. I suppose it all depends on how directionless you can afford to be. And I respect your life situation, as I'm sure it differs from my own. I think that's the biggest challenge of following the path of your heart: It's rarely well lit. And everybody is afraid of the dark – everybody. My suggestion: Instead of being stopped by not knowing how, try being sparked by knowing why. With purpose as your baseline, you'll be able to gather enough momentum to sustain your efforts until how comes your way. Look: Life is boring when you know all the answers. Ambiguity is an exhilarating dance. Take its hand and spin it like a prom date. *Are you willing to tear yourself away from the safe harbor of certainty?*

351. Uniquely define your curriculum. The most formative years of my childhood were first through sixth grade. That was when a handful of us were pulled out of class to spend a portion of our time in Gifted and Talented Education. The programs varied from critical thinking drills, creative exercises and other subjects typically not covered in the classroom. Interestingly, none of us knew why we were being pulled out class. We were just told that were part of a unique group. And when the gifted teacher, Mrs. Ray, visited our classroom, it was time to pack up and go get creative. It was the absolute highlight of elementary school: We learned how to think, we learned why to think and we were all given an irrevocable license to create. Lesson learned: If you want to make use of everything you are, locate your territory for expansion. Enter it with constructive ambition. Creatively engage whatever you have and empty yourself into adventure. That's how you leave room for genius to enter. *Where are you practicing creative deployment of self?*

352. Use life's circumstances. Look. I know this unscheduled catastrophic event was not part of your nice little plan. But tough shit. It's time to take control of your life and find alternative means. Here's how: First, the bravest way to face your problems is to make the decision that your problems are facing you. Tell 'em to take a number and get in line. Secondly, figure out what you need to become – not just what you need to do, but what you need to become – to overcome your current situation. I promise that the willingness to become what you need to become is more effective than any to-do list you could write. And finally, ask yourself two questions: Which part of this chaos can I tame? And what is the most trivial thing I can do that would represent a baby step toward my goal? That's how you take control of the process. That's how you take responsibility for your responsibilities. *When was the last time the economy stayed up all night worrying about you?*

353. Victory is the great vexation. I don't know about you, but I'm not scared of failure. Hell, I fail all the time. What petrifies me most is success. Here's why: First, you never learn as much about yourself when you're winning. It's only through biting the big one that you enter into the arena of self-understanding. Secondly, success is scary because there's nothing more terrifying than getting exactly what you want. Think about it: If you *do* get what you want, you might lose it. Or you might realize it's not enough. Or you might discover it's not actually what you (thought) you wanted. The point is, sometimes it's easier, safer and more fun to just want things. It's the getting part that terrifies us. Finally, the reason success is so scary is because with success comes power, and with power comes responsibility. As a writer, I deal with this on a daily basis. Especially since I've been publishing books and blogging for eight years now. People aren't just reading what I say – they're actually taking my advice. I even had a reader email recently to say that one of my blog posts gave her the much-needed final push to end her toxic marriage. Woops. *Um, you're welcome?* I thought. Jesus. I think I liked it better when the only person reading my blog was my mom. But I guess that's part of the deal. That's the price of success. Yikes. *Are you more scared of victory or defeat?*

354. Visualize the aftermath. During one of his thousands of spoken word concerts, Henry Rollins said, “I want to make life run for its life. I want to be a pain in life’s ass. I want life to celebrate the day I die. I want life to finally get a breather once I’m dead.” What about you? Once you’ve made use of everything you are, what do you want to happen? What do you want people to remember? Personally, when I die, I want life to give me a standing ovation. And I don’t want it to even think about sitting down until its ass is numb and its knees start buckling. For you, it’s worth asking two questions: *What will be the afterlife of what you do? What is the field on which you will leave everything you’ve got?* Remember: Your purpose isn’t a task – it’s the way you live your life. It’s what your life is committed to. Don’t die with unlived parts of within you. Welcome the dust of the daily battle. Unlock more of your hidden capacities and unutilized talents each day. Set yourself on fire and let the world sit back and watch you burn. *What is the result of you?*

355. Voluntarily opt out of the mainstream. Have you ever received a compliment for something you didn't realize you were doing? This happened to me a few weeks ago. An audience member commented, "You're just so *free* with what you say." And I thought, "Well, why wouldn't I be? Why wouldn't anybody be? Doesn't it make sense that, in a country whose first amendment explicitly grants all its citizens the right to free speech, that people would speak their minds?" Apparently not. Especially in the corporate world. Turns out we live in a litigious, oversensitive, out-of-touch-with-reality society where people would rather tiptoe around the issues that matter than man-up and put their balls on the table. Which means: Maybe the way we're working isn't working. Maybe a few fundamental redefinitions are required. Maybe to shed the shackles of permission, each individual needs to make a conscious choice to opt out of the very bullshit that's stinking up their halls. Because that's the thing about permission: If you can't grant it to yourself, who's going to do it for you? Nobody. And if you can't be free with your words (within the boundaries of respect), what do you have left? Nothing. *Are you an artist of life or an article of mediocrity?*

356. Wage a war against inertia. In *The Paradox of Choice*, we learned that the desire to avoid regret induces people not to act at all. Barry Schwartz dubbed this principle *inaction inertia*. So, your challenge is simple: Reduce your number of choices. If you want to move forward, stop killing yourself trying to pick the best of everything. Stop plaguing yourself with post-decision doubts. And stop exhausting yourself running ridiculous searches of every possibility. Choices cause stress, and stress stops you. According to Schwartz: “The more choices you have, the longer it takes to commit; the longer it takes to commit, the more you regret and reevaluate every decision after the fact; and the more you regret and reevaluate, the less satisfaction you ultimately receive from the choices you make.” Eventually, there comes a point of diminishing returns. Eventually, you need to stop choosing and start moving. Remember: When massive resistance is marshaled against you, you’ll never run out of reasons not to choose. Decide anyway. Even when it seems senseless to others. *Are you a great chooser?*

357. Waiting is the new working. I no longer mind waiting in line. I've accepted the following reality: Life is the line. There's nowhere to get to. There's no future. All you have is right now. And I don't know about you, but if I'm waiting, I'm writing. Even if only for twenty seconds at a time. You'd be amazed how easily a year of lines turns into a box of books. Instead of looking at your watch, huffing and puffing and trying to enlist the other people in line to join your pity party, make love to the present moment. Then take notes. Because if you don't write it down, it never happened. But if you build portable creative environments for yourself; you can leverage every micromoment that presents itself. And I guarantee you'll triple your output. *Are trying to find time, make time or steal time?*

358. Walk through a doorway and let it close behind you. If you stand at the threshold, keeping the door safely ajar, you'll never make any progress. But if you invite the unsettling echo of the creaking hinge to profoundly penetrate you, I guarantee you'll scare yourself into doing something worthwhile. That's the interesting thing about fear: It intensifies emotion; but it also solidifies commitment. Thus, scaring yourself is a healthy form of self-pressure. Even if it's as simple as changing your Facebook status from "single" to "in a relationship." It's amazing how many positive results can occur when you cross that threshold. Unless your ex-girlfriend starts leaving vicious comments on your wall about how you're a joke in the sack. Not cool. My suggestion: Let the door hit you on the way out. Hard. Right in the ass. Otherwise you'll never scare yourself into executing what matters. *How will communicating that you're fully committed disturb you into taking action?*

359. Walk with the wise. The road less traveled is rarely short of footprints. If you want pick up the clues to success, find the people who have gone where you want to go, make a mix tape of their greatest hits, and then play that record on repeat until you know it cold. Here's the process I've been practicing for years: *Google them. Introduce yourself. Get to know them. Ask lots of questions. Take copious notes. Learn from their mistakes. Thank them for the example they've set. And occasionally update them on the progress you've made.* That's it. Anything more is an annoyance. Wise people tend to be busy people. However, if you really want to double your learning, do whatever you can to get these people to look you straight in the eye and deliver the skinny on what it's going to take to make it. If you have to buy them lunch, fine. If you have to fly to Charlotte for the weekend, fine. If you have to split a cab to the airport with them, only to realize you've just gone to the wrong airport, fine. I've pulled all three of those moves, and never regretted a single minute. And neither will you. Remember: The road less traveled isn't just foggy – it's lonely. When you walk with the wise, don't just do it for the wisdom, do it for the company. Do it for someone to walk with. *How many mentors do you have?*

360. Where have all the original ideas gone? Everything that comes out seems to be a sequel, a prequel, a remake, a revisit, a reboot or a reinterpretation of another artist's work. Which is fine if we want to ship easy, predictable safe work that appeases our corporate masters and their incessant pressure to create fail proof work. *But there are no cover bands in the rock and roll hall of fame.* And if we want to walk with greatness, we need to walk a new path. Not an old path in a new way. And not a supposed new path that's really just a nicely packaged book report of a bunch of old paths. Something new. Something scary. Something people don't even have a name for. Tony LaRussa changed the face of baseball forever by leveraging bullpen statistics. Morphine created an entirely new genre of music by inventing the low rock sound. Kevin Smith shifted filmmaking by redefining the theatrical exhibition window. This stuff is possible because it's always been possible. As long as we're willing to cede permission, put our face in and step across the lines of artistic safety – at the risk of getting a few black eyes – originality can happen. We wage a war against mediocrity at our own peril. *Will you change your posture?*

361. **Work without a map.** The reason you're obsessed with planning is because it preserves the illusion of control. It underwrites the illusion that you know what you're doing. When the reality is: The more you plan, the harder it is to invite healthy derailments along the way. The more you plan, the more you miss unlabeled opportunities to grow. And the more you plan, the more you prematurely commit to an endeavor that might later prove to be unprofitable. In Seth Godin's bestselling book, *Linchpin*, he explains that people who need a map are going to get paid less and less and work harder and harder every day. "But, the decision that you will live without a map – that you will be less obedient and less compliant – will help you will do work that matters." My suggestion: Don't close yourself off by making gods out of your plans. Don't let the lust for what is familiar block the beauty of what is possible. Remember: It's always safer to work without a map than to follow a rigid plan that has no relationship with reality. *Are you a victim of your own topography?*

362. You are the result of yourself. That's the thorny, self-confrontational reality of self-employment: If you don't do what you told yourself you were going to do, the only person around to notice, is you. Which means there's nobody to blame. Which means the onus is, was, and always will be, on you. Because even if you work alone, even if you spend every day sitting in your living room wearing your pajamas, you're always in a relationship with yourself. You still have to sleep with who you are, every night. Don't create a reputation for unreliability. As Sir Josiah Stamp once wrote, "It is easy to dodge our responsibilities, but we cannot dodge the consequences of dodging our responsibilities." Ultimately, assuming success is somebody else's fault is the hallmark of an immature mind. And immaturity pollutes practically all behavior. Never forget that you are sole source of your own job security. *Have you allowed yourself to fully and confidently face your own responsibility for your career?*

363. You can't aim one arrow at two targets. Focus is the mobilizing force. *More than goals. More than plans. More than anything.* Almost every client in my mentoring program – most of which have gone where there is no path – have experienced some kind of focusing challenge. And I tell them all the same thing: “Focus is a function of punching yourself in the face.” It’s true. For almost a decade I’ve had a sticky note on my desk that asks, “Is what you’re doing right now consistent with your number one goal?” And if it’s not, I don’t do it. *Period.* End of story. It’s confrontational but constructive. And I urge you to try this exercise in your own workspace to reinforce focus. Also, keep one more thing in mind: Your focus will undoubtedly change over time. Especially since you’re traveling where there is no path. As such, what matters most is not the thing you’re focused on – but the unquestionable, laser-like focus you maintain on that thing until it’s time to pivot. Remember: The dog that chases two rabbits doesn’t just go hungry – he looks stupid while starving. *Are you a victim of your own lack of disorganization?*

364. You can't go through life in a straight line. Personally, I was never in the mold to begin with. Hell, I didn't even know there was a mold. I don't know about you, but I am under the highest obligations to defy conventional attitudes. *It's who I am. It's who I've always been. And it's probably who I'll always be.* What can I say? I was born to be a disturbance. And admittedly, my emotional predisposition for non-conformity has gotten me into some trouble over the years. Fortunately, nothing serious. Nothing that hurt anybody. And nothing I'll be ashamed to tell my grandchildren about. But I still chose to make waves, still rocked the boat and still shook people out of their petty preoccupations. Because in my experience, that's the only way anything gets upgraded. *Do you refuse to be satisfied with looking just once?*

365. You're defined by what you decline. About once a week, someone emails me with a potential business opportunity. Or a joint venture. Or some new project they want me to be involved in. *And I respectfully reject (nearly) every one of them.* Not to be rude. And not to suggest the ideas or the people behind them are flawed. But I'm a firm believer in saying no to the good to make room to say yes to the best. Interestingly, more distance I get from the opportunities I've said no to over the years, the more thankful I become that I held out. In a recent interview with *Fortune*, Steve Jobs made a similar distinction: "People think focus means saying yes to the thing you've focus on. But that's not what it means at all. It means saying no to the hundred other good ideas that there are. You have to pick carefully." Remember: Not close-minded. Not inflexible. Not stiff. Just focused. And when you focus yourself, you free yourself. *What doors will saying no open for you?*

366. You're never unpartnered. Although not everybody wants you to succeed, success in hiring yourself never comes unassisted. That's the cool thing about commitment: Once you stop dragging your feet and dive into what matters, the world begins to yes to you. That's what happens when you put yourself in the way of success and advance in the direction of your dreams: Eventually they will have no choice but to come true. Providence will move to orchestrate the ideal conditions for you to win. As Paula Coelho wrote in *The Alchemist*, "If you follow your dream – your personal legend – all the world will conspire to help you." When this happens, it's almost spooky. In fact, I remember spotting this trend when I first jumped. Help came out of nowhere. Opportunities presented themselves to me. And I was smart enough to leverage every opening the universe gave me. But, the door must be opened from the inside. And you have to be fueled from the heart – not for the wallet. Otherwise your misguided intention will fill the room like a garlic fart. Ultimately, if you want the world to say yes to you, you've got to sing the song that is natural for you to sing, in the way that is natural for you to sing it, and it in front of the audience that needs to hear it the most. *Are you paying homage to the voices that shaped you?*

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Scott Ginsberg is an author, speaker, consultant, mentor, publisher, award-winning blogger & one smoking hot piece of brain candy. He also wears a nametag 24-7. Even to bed.